



Youth Organizing RFP

GENERAL INFORMATION

Background

Good mental health is a platform for a full, healthy, productive life – and it matters at every stage of life. In the early years – even in infancy – children develop social and emotional capacities that last a lifetime. In adulthood, emotional well-being allows us to connect with family and friends, meet the challenges that life sends our way, and contribute to our workplaces, civic spaces, and communities. In adolescence – the period between 10 and 25 – young people’s sense of belonging, connection, and emotional well-being allows youth to learn, thrive, and grow into their identities and their place in our communities.

Nationally, one in five people experience mental illness, and 1 in 6 among youth aged 6-17 (1). Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-14 (1). One in 6 adults in the Greater Cincinnati region report that their mental health is not good on at least half of the days in the last month, which is slightly higher than the national average. (2) (3). People who identify as LGBTQ+, people living in poverty, young adults, and people living in rural communities are more likely to experience frequent mental distress due to a variety of factors such as discrimination, lack of access to appropriate services, or environmental stress (2).

As highlighted in the [U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health](#), one of the key actions funders can take is to elevate and amplify the voices of youth and families at every stage of the funding and evaluation process. As we have embarked on this journey, now is the time to take it to the next level, deepening our commitment to truly integrating youth perspectives into strategies and decision-making. This shift also requires systems-level changes to ensure that youth and families are not only heard, but also empowered to shape the structures that impact their lives.

Youth organizing is a powerful approach to empowering young people, giving them the skills and platform to lead social change and system change efforts¹. It not only cultivates leadership and advocacy but also creates spaces where youth feel valued and heard². This empowerment is particularly crucial when addressing challenges like mental health, which deeply impacts many young people today.

When youth are actively involved in organizing, they develop critical thinking, communication, and emotional regulation skills that are beneficial for their mental health³. Youth-led initiatives can foster peer support networks, reduce feelings of isolation, and increase access to mental health resources in communities⁴. Equipping young people with civic skills and opportunities for action not only prepares young people to actively shape their communities but it also supports their growth, well-being,



and long-term sense of purpose, especially in marginalized and communities of color^{5,6,7}. When young people have opportunities to experience a true sense of contribution, they also further develop the agency and resilience necessary to pursue and achieve a purposeful and fulfilling life and livelihood⁸.⁹ By giving young people agency, we're helping them build resilience and creating a support system that nurtures their well-being. [OBJ]

This approach emphasizes collective action, where youth organize around their shared experiences to create broader, lasting change. Whether through policy advocacy, direct action, or community-based initiatives, youth organizing provides the momentum needed to shift systems that historically overlook or marginalize young people.

This RFP is focused on supporting nonprofit organizations to strengthen their organizational culture, mindsets, and practices to support **youth organizing**.

RFP Goal

To build youth organizing in Greater Cincinnati by supporting nonprofits to create sustainable, youth-led programs empowering young leaders to advocate for community change on issues that matter to them.

RFP Overview

This RFP seeks nonprofits committed to long-term, transformative youth organizing in Greater Cincinnati. It begins with a 12-month Learning & Co-Design Phase focused on collaboration, capacity-building, and developing governance and organizing practices. The phase aims to produce strategies, initiatives, or models eligible for future funding; however, continued funding is not guaranteed. Grantees are expected to commit to work beyond the initial year. Those demonstrating readiness and alignment with community priorities may apply for follow-up implementation funding, with selection based on progress, interest, and available resources.

Interact for Health is investing \$250,000 in the Youth Organizing RFP in 2025. **Five organizations will be awarded capacity building grants for \$50,000 for 12 months** to support participation in the cohort learning experience.

In partnership with the [Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions](#), learning sessions will be co-designed and facilitated, and technical assistance will be provided to support grantee development. Grantees will also engage in a national peer learning network to share best practices and insights with peers around the country.

We are seeking organizations that are:

- **Committed to co-creating a shared vision and strategy** for what youth organizing can look like in our region.



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- **Willing to share power with young people**, centering youth leadership in decision-making and strategy.
- **Invested in building sustainable structures** that support youth-led organizing.
- **Open to learning and unlearning**, with a focus on equity, intergenerational collaboration, and community-rooted change.
- **Excited to collaborate with peers**, contribute to a regional learning community, and shape the future of youth organizing together.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must:

- Be a public nonprofit or governmental organization*.
- Provide services in at least one county of Interact for Health's 20-county [service area](#).

Organizations that are not nonprofits or governmental entities may still seek funding through fiscal sponsorship. A fiscal sponsorship is a relationship between a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization (the sponsor organization) and charitable project that does not have a tax-exempt status (the sponsored organization).

*Private nonprofits interested in applying should contact the Program Manager directly.

Grantee Requirements

Depending on the project, awarded grantees will be expected to:

- Commit to having at least two staff members participate fully in all individual and group sessions, including coaching and strategy meetings, as part of the 12-month cohort.
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- Attend Aspen Institute's Belonging Meaning Well-being Purpose annual convenings; expenses will be covered for up to two representatives per organization.
- Have direct access to a youth constituency to support authentic engagement and leadership development.
- Participate in [evaluation and learning activities](#) for the grant and part of the overall initiative.



PROPOSAL SELECTION CRITERIA

The most competitive applications will:

- Demonstrate alignment with youth organizing values, leadership support, operational readiness, equity practices, and movement-building capacity.
- Focus on people and communities who are:
 - Black
 - Hispanic
 - Children in families with low incomes (200% or less of federal poverty level)
 - Identify as LGBTQ+
 - Rural
- Demonstrate that the organization can achieve the goals outlined in the proposal with the budget, timeline, and staff capacity indicated.

Timeline

Proposal Webinar	Thursday, September 11, 1-2 p.m.
Application deadline	Tuesday, September 30, 5 p.m.
Site visits	Monday, October 20-Friday, November 7th
Notification of grant award	Wednesday, November 12

Proposal Webinar

A proposal webinar will be held to answer questions about the RFP concept and application process on **Thursday, September 11th, 1 p.m.** Attendance is optional and not required in order to submit a proposal. Learn more and register [here](#).

Community Information Sessions

Program staff will be available during the times below to answer any questions about the RFP or your proposed project. For the in-person session, please join us for coffee and conversation at the location listed below. For the virtual session, please register [here](#).



Interact for Health (8230 Montgomery Road., Suite 300, Cincinnati, Ohio 45236)	Tuesday, September 16, 1-3 p.m.
Virtual	Thursday, September 25, 10-12 p.m.

Proposal Submissions

Completed applications must be submitted no later than **Tuesday, September 30th, 5 p.m** via Interact for Health's online grants management system. To begin the application process or to access a PDF of the required application questions, please visit the [Open Funding page of our website](#). If you have an open grant or have received a grant from Interact for Health in the past two years, your email address may already be registered in the system. For assistance with the application process, please contact Senior Grants Manager Kristine Niergarth at kniergarth@interactforhealth.org.

Site Visits

Before selecting projects for funding, Interact for Health staff will conduct a site visit, either virtual or in person, with the potential grantee. Representatives from collaborating organizations are required to attend the site visit. This meeting allows Interact for Health staff to hear more about the proposed project and ask any clarifying questions. **To lead by example in centering youth voice, youth leaders will participate in the final grantee selection process, including attending site visits. Site visits will be scheduled with flexibility to accommodate youth availability and ensure meaningful participation.** Site visits will be conducted **Monday, Monday, October 20 through Friday, November 7th** . Applicants will indicate their preferred timeslot during the application process. Site visit topics will include:

- General discussion of your proposed project and budget.
- Population of focus for the project.
- Any disparities that exist and how this project plans to address them.
- Community engagement tactics.
- Collaborating partners and organizations or those you plan to engage.
- Your organization's journey around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Questions

For any questions regarding the process, please contact Senior Program Manager, Deanna Hillard at dhillard@interactforhealth.org or 513-458-6615.



Definitions

Youth Organizing: The [Fundamental Collaborative on Youth Organizing](#) defines youth organizing as a process rooted in racial, gender, and economic justice that engages young people in building power for systemic change while supporting their individual and collective development. While youth organizing can take many forms, the field is guided by four key imperatives:

- **Engage youth most impacted by injustice and systemic oppression**
- **Support the leadership and holistic development of young people**
- **Strengthen intergenerational and intersectional movements**
- **Shift power dynamics to create systemic change**

Mental health: Good mental health is a platform for a full, healthy, productive life – and it matters at every stage of life.

Belonging: More than just being seen or feeling included, belonging entails having a voice and the opportunity to use it to make demands upon society and political institutions. Belonging is more than having access; it is the power to co-create the structures that shape a community.

Mattering: The general belief that you are important to others.

Meaning: The ways in which people make sense of themselves, others, and social situations.

Purpose: A generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self.

Connection: Connection is when two or more people interact with each other, and each person feels valued, seen, and heard. There's no judgment, and you feel stronger and nourished after engaging with them.

Youth: Interact for Health defines youth as anyone between the ages of 0 and 24 years old.