



Request for Proposals: Vision Services Integration and Collaboration Initiative

Introduction

In response to an anticipated increase in demand for vision rehabilitation and therapeutic services for individuals who are blind and visually impaired, the Lavelle Fund for the Blind (the Fund) and The New York Community Trust (The Trust) jointly issue this request for proposals. This joint grant initiative seeks proposals for planning the development of innovative collaborations that enable vision service providers to diversify their funding to help ensure that services in New York State are accessible, high-quality, and financially sustainable.

Grants will be made in two phases. In Phase 1, the Fund and The Trust will make up to three planning grants of up to \$75,000 for 12 to 18 months each toward the development of collaborations that are consistent with the Fund and The Trust funding guidelines.¹

Upon completion of Phase 1 and identification of promising collaborations, the Fund and The Trust may elect to continue the initiative with Phase 2 funding for the implementation and short-term operation of collaborations. Grantees who successfully complete Phase 1 may be invited to apply for a Phase 2 implementation grant. Phase 2 implementation grant awards are expected to be up to \$500,000 per year, for a three-year period.

About the Vision Services Integration and Collaboration Initiative

Background

Healthcare delivery systems often fail to meet the needs of people who are blind or visually impaired. This failure is typically blamed on the low incidence of the conditions, and the population's unique service needs.

Yet, the number of people who are blind or visually impaired is expected to double by 2050,² driven in part by the anticipated growth in the older adult population over the next twenty years. As the population ages, rates of chronic-disease and age-related blindness and visual impairment are likely to increase, due to conditions such as diabetic retinopathy, macular degeneration, cataracts, and glaucoma.

¹ The Lavelle Fund for the Blind funding guidelines: <https://lavellefund.org/what-we-fund/> ; The New York Community Trust funding guidelines: <https://www.nycommunitytrust.org/information-for-for-nonprofits/what-the-trust-funds/>.

² Flaxman AD, Wittenborn JS, Robalik T, et al. Prevalence of Visual Acuity Loss or Blindness in the US: A Bayesian Meta-analysis. JAMA Ophthalmol. Published online May 13, 2021. doi:10.1001/jamaophthalmol.2021.0527

The vision service delivery system will need to develop and implement a service delivery and financing model that will help organizations sustain and expand services to meet the demands of a growing population of people who are blind or visually impaired.

Vision rehabilitative services for adults have historically focused on education, job placement, employment, and low vision rehabilitation. These services, which are critical for the maintenance of independence and quality of life for people who are blind or visually impaired, are typically offered as specialized, standalone services separate from the broader healthcare delivery system.

At the same time, health insurance plans do not typically reimburse providers of vision services because they are not provided by licensed clinicians. Providers remain unable to meet the needs of individuals who are unable to pay out of pocket. A reimbursable service model may help ease these constraints and make services more accessible to people who need them.

Opportunity

With these challenges in mind, the Fund and The Trust intend to make up to three grants to encourage vision service providers serving New York State to partner with others to support the sustainable delivery of ongoing rehabilitative, habilitative, and adaptive services for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, and expand referrals, connections, and access to therapeutic services for individuals experiencing low vision and visual impairment.

Collaborations must meet the following requirements:

- 1) Enable vision service providers to retain clinicians who can bill health insurance, to provide vision services to populations who are not eligible for New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB) support, and/or services that are not eligible for NYSCB support. Examples include but are not limited to Occupational Therapists (OT) and/or Physical Therapists (PT), Occupational Therapy Assistants (OTA), Physical Therapy Assistants (PTA).
 - a. The services offered through the collaboration must enhance and/or expand, but not replace, the vision service provider's existing service offerings.
 - b. The collaboration must enable the vision service provider to access the infrastructure (billing, reimbursement, credentialing, supervision, etc.) necessary to generate payment from public and private healthcare payors.
- 2) Not interfere with the vision service provider's ability to offer services funded by the NYSCB.
- 3) Be sustainable through revenue generation and/or public funds by the time the two grant phases are completed.

Potential Collaboration Structures

The Trust and the Fund have conducted both qualitative and quantitative research to identify several potential structures that will enable vision service providers to achieve these goals. They are:

- 1) **Provider Collaboration:** One (or more) vision service organization collaborates with a health care organization that can provide access to the infrastructure necessary to generate revenue from healthcare payors for medically necessary services. Examples of potential collaborators include but are not limited to Article 28 Health Care facilities and Article 31 Mental Health facilities.
- 2) **Lead Organization (Backbone) Network:** A single vision service organization is responsible for developing the necessary infrastructure and then makes it available to other vision service providers with which it collaborates to develop sustainable service delivery pathways. This requires the collaboration of at least three vision service providers.
- 3) **Network Administrative Organization:** A group of vision service providers come together to establish a jointly controlled entity that provides the necessary infrastructure. Examples of these types of organizations include but are not limited to Independent Practice Associations and Management Service Organizations. This also requires the collaboration of at least three vision service providers.
- 4) **Other Collaboration:** The Fund and The Trust recognize that the vision service provider community in New York State is robust, sophisticated, and creative. As such, we are willing to consider collaborative service delivery models that do not fit into any of the above models, if they adhere to the collaboration requirements.

Grant Funded Activities

Each of the three selected collaborations will be awarded up to \$75,000 to support staff time and/or consultants to complete the following activities:

- Environmental scan, including:
 - Organizational capacity assessment for all collaborators
 - Services offered compared to services needed
 - Technology assessment, including capacity for data exchange and secure, HIPAA compliant communication channels
- Development of the collaboration, including legal agreements and/or memoranda of understanding development of bylaws, operating agreement and/or protocols, etc., as needed
- Goal development, including identification of target population
- Operations planning, including:
 - Identification of revenue streams and development of budgets and other financial documents needed to ensure sustainability of the collaboration
 - Development of collaboration workflows
 - Network development, including bi-directional communication and referral capabilities
 - Staff support and training (and recruitment, if needed)
 - Technology implementation/adaptation
- Evaluation Plan
 - The expected results, including a discussion of how to evaluate the success of the model development process, with an appropriate a timeline for assessment of project milestones.
- Final Report/Collaboration Model Documentation

- Documentation of the collaboration, business plan, and protocol for sustainability
- An implementation and evaluation plan for the collaboration (these materials will constitute a proposal for Phase 2)

Proposal Guidelines

The Fund and The Trust provide funding to organizations with U.S. 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. This Request for Proposals is limited to organizations located in and/or serving New York State.

Proposals are due no later than March 7, 2022 by 5 pm ET.

A complete grant application should include the following components:

1. A Proposal Cover Sheet for the [Vision Services Integration and Collaboration Initiative RFP](#). For purposes of the staff and board ethnicity breakdown, please provide information for the entire lead organization. These fields cannot be left blank. Applications without this information will not be considered.
2. A Cover Letter on the lead organization's letterhead, signed by the executive director or paid staff head. The letter should include a one-paragraph summary of the request, including its amount and purpose. It should also indicate the name, phone number and email of the contact person for this proposal, if other than the executive director/CEO/president.
3. Narrative Questions:
 - Describe the work of your agency as well as collaborating agencies, addressing each of the following:
 - A brief description of your organization's history and mission.
 - The need or problem that your organization works to address and the population that your agency serves, including the population's visual and other impairments, geographic location, age-range and, if known, socio-economic status, race, and gender.
 - Number of paid full-time staff; number of paid part-time staff; and number of volunteers. How many are blind or visually impaired?
 - Please describe the project for which you seek funding, including:
 - A summary of the collaboration model.
 - The project's goal(s) and objectives and expected impact, including market opportunity assessment. In the market opportunity assessment, please indicate the anticipated numbers to be served in your target population, in the event your project reaches Phase 2 implementation.
 - The population that you plan to serve and how this population will benefit from the project. Please indicate the total number of people to be served, their age range, the nature of their visual impairment (and non-visual impairments, if any), and the geographic area from which they will be drawn.
 - Strategies that you will employ to implement your collaboration.
 - The names and qualifications of the key people who will be responsible for developing the partnership plan and evaluating progress of the project. Key personnel must include at least one staff member with significant strategic planning, business development, or business process improvement expertise.

- Potential risks to the success of the project, if any.
 - Anticipated timeline for the project.
4. Project Budget:
- Line item project budget:³ please include a completed budget and a complete budget narrative – a line-by-line description of each expense line in the proposed budget. Please list each staff line separately and include the percentage of time to be spent on the project.
 - Expected income sources for the project³ (actual and prospective, including the applying organization’s own in-kind or cash contributions to the project). Please note that while no organizational match is required, proposals that include in-kind support and other funding sources are welcomed.
5. Organizational Financial Information:
- Current-year operating budgets from all parties
6. Additional Information:
- Letter(s) of commitment from executive leadership of your collaborating organization(s).
 - List of Board of Directors (with their professional affiliations) and demographics for all parties in the collaboration

Submission Directions

1. Assemble and merge items **2 to 6** from the Submission Materials section into a single PDF file no more than 25 MB in size, name it in the following format: “*Applicant Organization Name.pdf*”.
2. Complete a Proposal Cover Sheet for the [*Vision Services Integration and Collaboration Initiative RFP*](#).
3. Because you will need to submit the proposal and the Proposal Cover Sheet together, we recommend making sure your proposal (items 2 to 6 in the Submission Materials section) are in a single PDF prior to starting the Proposal Cover Sheet. You will know you have been successful in submitting both when after uploading the document you see “You have successfully uploaded your PDF” on your screen.
4. Once uploaded, check the certification box at the end and click submit. You will get an email confirming the proposal has been received. This email will include—as a PDF attachment—the Proposal Cover Sheet you just completed. The email will be sent to the email address entered in the “Information about Person Completing this Form” field on the Proposal Cover Sheet.

³ Clearly indicate the dates of the financial period(s) covered in each document.

5. Please note The Trust's communications about the result of your submission will be by email, whether notification of a decline or grant. Please add noreply@nycommunitytrust.org to your address book so important communications do not get caught in spam filters.

Information Session on RFP

The Fund and The Trust will convene an information session to answer applicant questions regarding this RFP on Thursday, January 27, 2022 from 12 pm to 1:30 pm ET. Please note, registration is required to attend the session, but attendance is not a requirement to respond to the RFP and will not affect the Fund's or The Trust's grantmaking decisions. Participation is also not a guarantee of funding. To register for the information session, please [click here](#).

Questions about this RFP?

If you are applying from an organization located in and/or serving the 5 boroughs of New York City, Westchester, Nassau, and/or Suffolk County, please direct RFP content questions to Rachel Pardoe, Program Officer, The New York Community Trust, at rdp@nyct-cfi.org.

If you are applying from an organization located in and/or serving anywhere else in New York State, please direct RFP content questions to Susan Olivo, Executive Director and CEO, Lavelle Fund for the Blind, at solivo@lavellefund.org.

For assistance completing the proposal coversheet, uploading the proposal, or navigating The Trust's grants portal, contact Melanie DeLorenzo, Grants Manager, at mdl@nyct-cfi.org.