



Request for Qualifications (RFQ) Building Capacity in the Colorado Education System

Purpose

The Colorado Health Foundation (CHF) seeks proposals from groups interested in partnering with the Foundation to facilitate and build capacity among a group of intermediaries who will be helping schools advance equity in youth resilience practices. This work is designed to strengthen the intermediaries in Colorado in their equity, experimentation and youth resilience knowledge and skills, while also providing them the support they need to be successful intervening with schools.

CHF is seeking a partner who can facilitate this group, including their planning process, and build their capacity to help schools use an experimental approach to strengthening equity in youth resilience practices. We recognize that organizations are likely to need to partner to bring strength in both of these areas (experimentation and equity) along with education expertise and experience building capacity.

This project has a non-negotiable start date of no later than February 2020 and will go until December 2020, with a potential of annual renewals for up to three more years. The total budget for the 2020 work shall not exceed \$250,000 including all fees and expenses.

Overview of the Need and Opportunity

Nationally and in Colorado, the prevalence of anxiety, depression, suicide and substance use have elevated the need for preventive efforts and a focus on supporting young people facing the greatest barriers to mental well-being. While mental and behavioral health needs are felt statewide, and by people of all socio-economic standing, stark inequities exist across some more than others, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) youth and youth of color, as well as youth living in rural and frontier communities. Inequities result from a variety of underlying issues including discrimination, harassment, stressors related to poverty or immigration status, cultural stigma and access to culturally and linguistically appropriate resources. The challenges young people experience can lead to increased substance use, onset of mental health concerns and increased acuity of needs.

Exploring what it takes to address the need

In response to these inequities, CHF had conversations with school partners throughout the state, including youth, families, teachers and organizations working with schools, to ask how it could help to tackle the complex array of behavioral health needs facing youth. Part of this conversation was specifically about universal and early prevention work – building resilience in all youth, including explicitly among those at greatest risk and facing inequities. Key insights were shared by partners, including:

- There are plenty of evidence-based programs, curriculum and even culture change models designed to advance youth resilience; yet
- Many of these programs were tested and refined on populations that don't align with the populations most in need in our schools. The practices lack an explicit equity lens and need to be adapted.
- In addition, while some schools are successful at implementing these programs that lead to improved outcomes, many others struggle to implement the practices comprehensively and meaningfully. And even where implementation is successful, the changes often don't sustain, interrupted by leadership shifts, the ending of grant funds, champions leaving or other disruptions typical in the school environment.

Further, stakeholders identified a set of five conditions that schools need to have in order to support youth resiliency, some of which are directly addressed by the evidence-based programs, but others that go beyond the programs:

- Schools have supportive adults connecting with youth experiencing inequities.
- Schools meet behavioral health needs for youth experiencing inequities.
- Schools connect with and are supportive of families who are experiencing inequities.
- Schools offer opportunities to build attitudes, behaviors and competencies for youth experiencing inequities.
- Schools support adults working with youth experiencing inequities.

The Overall Strategy

Beginning in 2018, CHF launched its new priority to advance Youth and Young Adult Resiliency. The initial strategy to support young people age 12-18 emphasized funding in community-based settings, outside of the school day. Investments and learning are ongoing, and will inform the CHF's emerging school-related work. Given lessons to date and feedback from a broad set of school stakeholders, CHF seeks to build the capacity of the education system at multiple levels to support youth resilience, rather than simply continue to resource implementation of evidence-based practices. These levels include:

- *Intermediaries:* The first level is change among the organizations who are already deeply integrated with schools in Colorado, steadily providing professional development, technical assistance and other supports. These organizations want support to strengthen their equity and youth/family/community engagement skills; deepen their understanding of youth resilience practices; and deploy more experimental and adaptive approaches that utilize data for learning and improved action.
- *Schools:* A second level is in schools themselves, recognizing schools can use help to deploy strong partnerships with youth and families (engagement), to act with a strong equity lens, and to help identifying which evidence-based practices may be a fit and how to experiment with and adapt them.
- *Youth:* The third level is the impact on youth, which will happen in targeted groups and later at the school-wide level as schools deploy their experiments to address youth resiliency.

Responding to the feedback from stakeholders that there is also a need for continued learning and experimentation, rather than prioritizing implementation of evidence-based practices without support to meaningfully adapt, the proposed approach not only focuses at all three levels, but also focuses on the idea of *experimentation, innovation and sustaining new practices specifically related to advancing equity* in youth resilience.

This work will begin by engaging with intermediaries who already work closely with over 60 schools in Colorado; then move into supporting the intermediaries to work with specific schools to implement experiments, and scale to have the intermediaries work with more schools in the future as the practices are refined. In doing this work with intermediaries, including helping them build capacity together, CHF hopes to also strengthen the network of intermediary organizations who work directly with the schools as capacity building providers.

The partners and the work

Three intermediaries have joined CHF in this effort: Colorado Education Initiative (CEI), Center for Rural School Health & Education (CRSHE) and Generation Schools Network (GSN). These organizations have made a joint commitment to build their skills and capacity to work with schools on youth resilience using an experimental approach, while centering equity in the work.

To do this work, they are committed to working together for four years including:

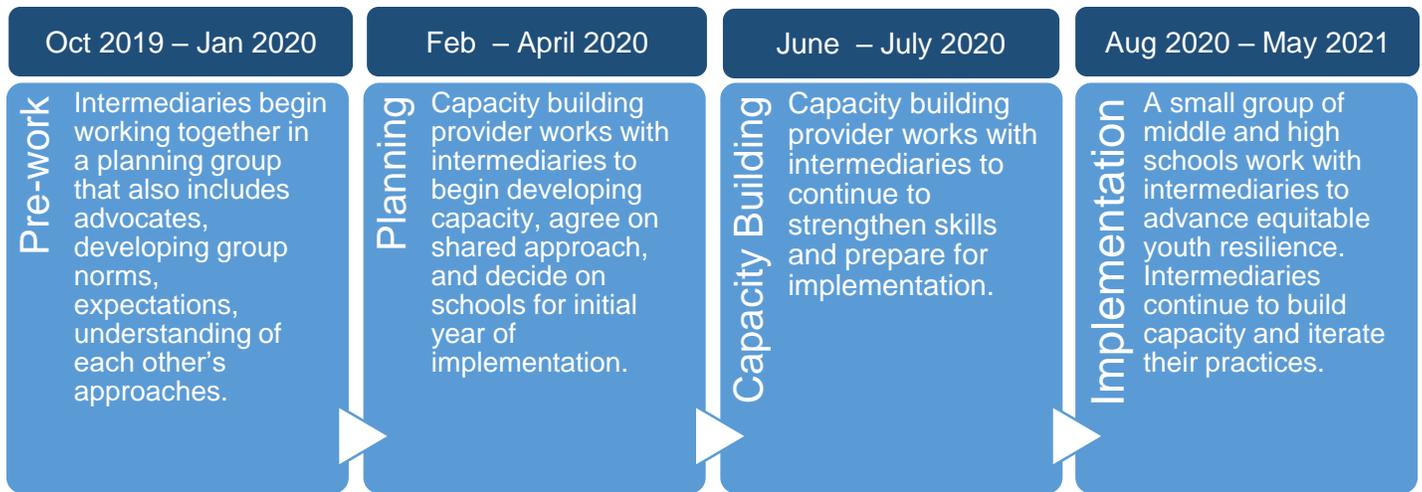
- Building their skills and knowledge in experimental approaches, equity, youth resilience and family/youth engagement practices, along with other capacity building needs that might emerge along the way.
- Developing an agreement about a shared approach to using these new skills with schools, including a core set of minimum practices or intended outcomes from the practice, that they can each experiment with in ways that build on and integrate into their existing organizational strengths and models.
- Developing each organization's plan for the schools they will be working with in the fall of 2020, including how they will help schools build capacity and engage in experimentation. A particular emphasis of these practices will be shifts that are able to sustain as the school environment changes.
- Supporting schools to consider how they include youth, families and staff in the experimental process, from design through implementation, feedback loops and adaptation.
- Learning from initial work with a small group of schools to refine the coaching approach with schools and expand to a larger cohort of schools over time.
- Designing, in partnership with schools, a funding pool in support of experimentation to advance equity in youth resiliency.

Each of the intermediary organizations already has some of the desired skills and capacities. For example, CEI has been utilizing an experimental, adaptive approach in their work with schools and multiple organizations are working intensively on their internal diversity, equity, and inclusiveness practices. The opportunity is to learn from each other while also engaging with outside expertise to strengthen across an array of new skills and approaches.

The intermediary organizations have already begun their work together, including helping with the design of this strategy and RFQ; identifying youth and family advocates and an educator to include in their newly formed leadership group that will be meeting monthly and leading this work; and beginning the work of developing their group norms, shared definitions and overall commitments for working together.

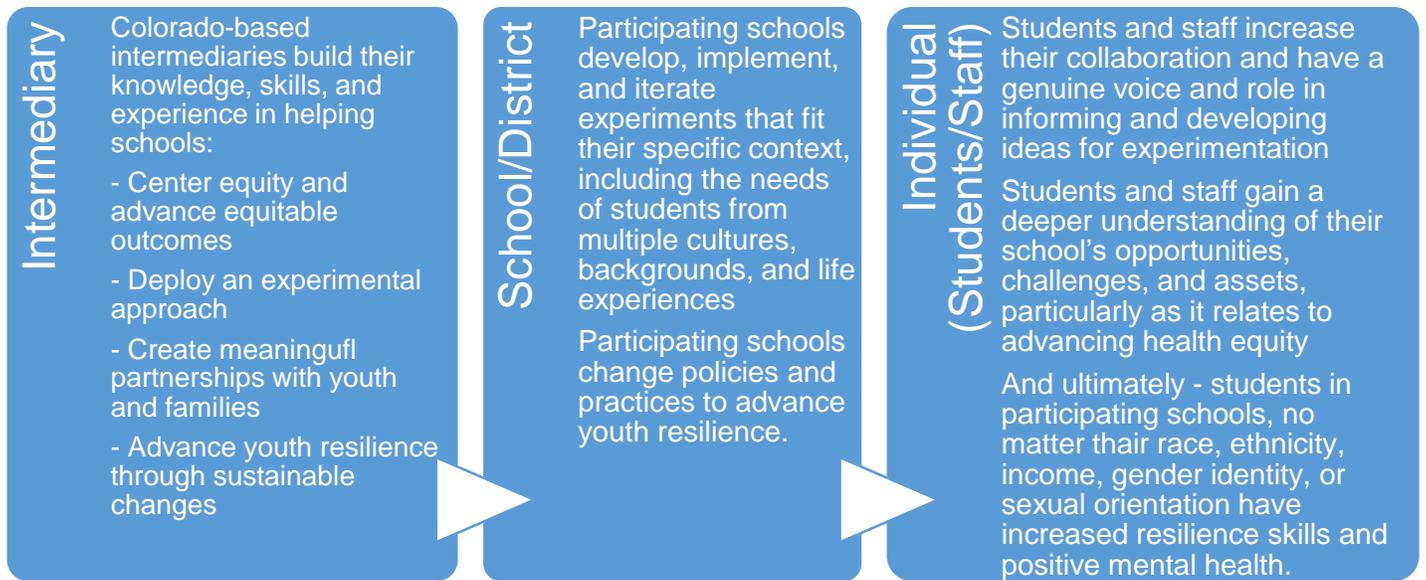
The strategy is planning to work within the following timeline (Figure 1) for the first round of work with schools, with the expectation that a second round of school engagement will occur the following year, building on the learning from 2020 and early 2021.

Figure 1. Timeline and approach for intermediaries: building capacity and beginning implementation



CHF hopes to see the following outcomes emerge from this work at the following levels, with the expectation that the capacity building provider is directly influencing the outcomes at the intermediary level; the intermediaries are directly influencing the outcomes at the school level; and the schools are influencing student outcomes.

Figure 2. Outcomes at the intermediary, school and individual level



The Role of the Capacity Building Provider

To respond to the articulated need and support the proposed strategy, CHF is looking to partner with a capacity building provider who will facilitate the intermediary group while also building their skills, knowledge and capacity related to:

- **Equity**, including how to center the voices and needs of those historically marginalized and experiencing the greatest inequity in youth resilience outcomes. This equity work must consider socio-economic status, race, ethnicity and LGBTQ status. This work must also go well beyond the “theory” of equity and into the practices of equity, including an explicit and deep understanding of the role structural barriers play in contributing to inequities. This is not about individual behavior and choices, but rather about how social, institutional and larger societal structures contribute to inequities.
- **Experimentation**, including understanding how to engage in decision-making in the face of uncertainty, and how to work with short cycles of intervention, robust feedback loops and iterative adaptation;
- **Family and youth engagement**, including understanding how to support and develop youth and family voice, engage instead of simply involve;
- **Youth resilience practices**, including building knowledge of the evidence-based practices to advance youth resilience in school settings and how to best adapt and implement these practices; and
- **Other topics** that may arise along the way, including some already signaled as important by youth and family advocates, including a deeper understanding of youth resilience, living in poverty, and the rural experience.

The team that makes up the capacity provider role must be able to directly deliver the first two capacities, as they need to be woven throughout the approach being developed by the intermediaries. There are excellent resources in Colorado that can help with the remaining capacity

needs and CHF hopes the selected capacity building provider will collaborate with the intermediaries to both tap their own knowledge as well as the knowledge of others in Colorado.

Approach

CHF assumes the work of the capacity building provider will include facilitating a monthly meeting of the key staff and leaders involved in implementing the strategy from each intermediary organization, beginning by late February 2020. The structure and length of the meeting can be determined by the provider in partnership with the intermediaries. The intermediaries will have already done work to develop their group norms and how they want to work together prior to the capacity building provider joining in February. For this reason, it will be important to include the intermediaries in planning the ongoing process.

CHF also assumes some level of one-on-one engagement will be needed with each intermediary organization, recognizing that the organizations are seeking to embed these new skills and capacities beyond just the leaders attending the collaborative meetings.

The approach is also expected to include ongoing support for the youth and family advocates and the educator who participate in the leadership group with the intermediaries. This includes between meeting supports as well as potentially recruiting and onboarding new advocates if/when needed. If staff from the intermediary organizations experience turnover, there may be onboarding needs for those new individuals as well.

Finally, the capacity building provider is expected to work closely with an evaluator who will be selected for their skill in working with adaptive and experimental approaches and understanding of equity. The evaluator will join mid-way through 2020.

Timeline and Key Deliverables

Key deliverables for this project are the following:

1. February 2020: Project plan based on initial discussions with the three intermediaries – Colorado Education Initiative (CEI), Center for Rural School Health & Education (CRSHE) and Generation Schools Network (GSN) – and CHF.
2. March – December 2020: Monthly meetings with the intermediaries that include a combination of capacity building, planning and learning during implementation.
3. April 2020: Shared agreements across intermediaries about what it looks like to implement effective experimental, equity-centered practices in schools. These agreements should leave room for each organization to implement in ways that maximize their strengths, while also having common, baseline standards about what it looks like to do this work.
4. May 2020: Plans completed for how each intermediary will engage with the first round of schools, including selection of schools and how funding will be made available to them. The content of this plan should come from the planning sessions with the intermediaries, both as a group and individually, and build on the shared agreements.
5. June 2020: Mid-term discussion with the intermediaries and CHF to identify progress on capacity building and next set of needs, including how the intermediaries will learn from their own work with schools and from each other once implementation begins in the fall.

6. December 2020: Recommendations for capacity building next steps/needs, informed by discussions with the intermediaries and CHF.

The selected contractor will be expected to work closely with a team that includes CHF staff, other contractors and the three intermediary organizations including soliciting feedback on the project approach, discussing the progress and offering at least one opportunity for substantive and design feedback before each deliverable is finalized.

Reporting Structure

The selected partner will report to the Senior Program Officer, Hillary Fulton, overseeing the CHF's youth resiliency work. The capacity building partner will also need to collaborate closely with other CHF staff, including the Learning and Evaluation team (Nick Stuber, Kelci Price), other internal staff serving cross-functional departments (Policy, Communications), the Youth Resilience implementation team and other external partners.

Budget and Contract

The budget for this work shall not exceed **\$250,000**. Budget requests should include clear rationale for the amounts requested. Cost effectiveness will be considered in reviewing applications, and partners are expected to revise the budget appropriately if the needs of the program designs are less than anticipated.

Responding to the RFQ

CHF believes that those who have historically had less power or privilege should be centered in the work we do. Hence, we strongly encourage applications from those who identify with or are members of underrepresented communities. Given the nature of this capacity building work, we are seeking a partner with some specific areas of expertise. ***We recognize most applicants will likely need to partner in order to meet the core requirements of this work and look forward to seeing joint applications.***

Interested firms, groups, or individuals must demonstrate expertise in the following areas:

- Centering equity in your work and building the capacity individuals and organizations to center equity in their work, including equity for those who have historically had less power or privilege, such as people of color, LGBTQ and those living on low income;
- Building the capacity of individuals and organizations to utilize experimental approaches, including iterative designs, data-driven feedback loops and learning from failure;
- Helping individuals infuse new skills and capacities into their organizations;
- Working in a school context and understanding a variety of types of school contexts, including understanding the unique institutional and cultural strengths and limitations of the school context in urban and rural areas;
- Facilitating/managing a capacity building and planning group, including experience with helping groups design experimental projects; and

- Expertise in delivering capacity building utilizing adult learning principles and practices, and empowering others to take the lead in their learning.

Additional areas of expertise that the intermediaries are interested in having capacity building support around (and could be secured through TBD contracts with Colorado experts), include:

- Knowledge of family, youth and parent engagement in the school context;
- Knowledge of youth resilience practices in schools, including evidence-based models; and
- Knowledge of the specific Colorado school context (not just schools in other settings), including needs and experiences in Colorado's rural and urban areas.

If you are interested in applying, please submit a proposal of **no more than 10 pages** by **Monday, Dec. 9, 2019, by 5 p.m. (MST)**. The proposal must be clearly structured to address the following questions:

- 1) **Why is this a compelling opportunity?** Tell us a little bit about why you want to respond to this RFQ. What sparked your interest? What makes this kind of work something you want to spend your time on? (one page maximum)
- 2) **Why do you think your team would be a good fit for this project?** Tell us a little bit about who would be coming to the table – who will be collaborating to complete this work? Why is this the team you want to involve, and why are they a good fit for this particular project? What experience would this team bring to the table that would help make them successful on this project? If this is a multi-organizational team, how will you navigate the complexities of working across organizations? We will assume that the people/organizations you propose will be available for the project if your proposal is selected. (no more than 5 pages)
- 3) **How would your team approach this work?** Provide us with a brief narrative (no more than five pages) that shares ideas of how you would approach this project. The goal is not to provide a project plan, but to help us understand how you would think about approaching this work and what you'd take into consideration. A few things we'd like to hear about are:
 - How does your organization define equity? How would you ensure you are centering equity in this work and helping the intermediaries to center equity in their work?
 - How would you approach building the capacity of the intermediaries? What types of learning activities would you use?
 - How would you help the intermediaries plan their work with the schools? What types of planning activities would you use?
 - How would you manage conflict or differences in models/approaches among the partners? What does it look like to help partners learn together, work in

alignment, but also have the freedom to bring their best knowledge and approaches to the work?

- When you look at what is needed for this work, what do you see as a major learning curve for your team? Tell us a little bit about what you'll need to wrestle with and learn, and how you'd think about doing that.
 - What are the risks associated with your proposed approach and how will you prevent and mitigate them?
- 4) **Budget:** Please provide some general ideas about how you would use your time and resources for this project. You do not need to provide a detailed or line-item budget, but please tell us about the types of fees and expenses you anticipate being a part of the project. Please indicate the hourly rate of the types of individuals you would staff on this project, and the total hours you would anticipate spending on the project. Please indicate the budget you would set aside for additional, Colorado-based contractors to help with this work (we assume at least \$25,000 will be needed, possibly more depending on what capacities your organization brings and which ones you want to secure locally). This is designed to be an estimate only, and subject to change based on contracting to complete specific work agreed upon with the Foundation. (Cost effectiveness will be considered in proposal review.)
- 5) **Legal Status:** Your organization's legal status (a 501(c)(3) or a for-profit organization).
- 6) **References:** Please provide three references who are knowledgeable about work you have done which would be relevant to this project (please include a description of working relationship and contact information).
- 7) **Primary Contact:** Include the name, title, phone number and email address for the primary point of contact for communication regarding this proposal.

The Foundation and its partners will keep confidential any materials submitted and will not use these in any way other than for this process. Please limit application length to no more than 10 pages excluding budget, references, writing samples and any resumes.

How to Apply

This RFQ includes the following phases.

Proposal Deadline:	Dec. 9, 2019
Interview of selected applicants (estimated):	December 16- 17
Award Announcement:	Jan. 15, 2020

Please send letter of interest, proposal and supporting documentation electronically in Microsoft Word or PDF format to Hillary Fulton at hfulton@coloradohealth.org. You may also send any questions to Hillary about the RFQ or process.

Terms and Conditions

Application Rejection

The Colorado Health Foundation reserves the right to reject any or all applications and to waive informalities and minor irregularities in applications received and to accept any portion of an application or all items proposed if deemed in the best interest of the Foundation.

Modification or Withdrawal of Applications

Applications may be modified or withdrawn prior to the established deadline.

Expenses

The Colorado Health Foundation is not liable for the costs incurred in the preparation of a response to this RFQ.

Review

The review will identify the applications that most effectively meet the requirements of this RFQ. The work will be offered to the contractor whose application conforming to the RFQ will be most advantageous to The Colorado Health Foundation, price and other factors considered.