Grant Proposal Guidelines

About the Proposal Submission Process

Prospective grantees should follow the guidelines described below when preparing proposals for the Commonwealth Fund. Please note that unless you have been invited to do so by a Commonwealth Fund program staff member, do not prepare a full proposal; instead, first submit a letter of inquiry (LOI).

Fund program officers have discretion to tailor proposal guidelines to meet the needs of the prospective grantee and the proposed scope of work. If you have questions about the guidelines, please reach out to your program officer. We review and fund a wide range of projects, including, *but not limited to:*

- research proposals: surveys, evaluations, focus groups
- communications grants: media outlets, video projects, print/television
- policy projects: convenings, analyses of policy barriers, development of policy options
- pilot studies or technical assistance efforts: testing a new model or providing guidance to stakeholders to assist with implementation.

These guidelines are meant to be general parameters to help you present your project. If an element seems irrelevant, or something important is missing, please adjust your submission accordingly. Ultimately, your proposal should tell the story of what you want to do and why, who will benefit, how you plan to get the work done, and how you think it will make a difference.

Each proposal is reviewed by a diverse group of Fund team members whose knowledge of the topic might vary. When writing your proposal, please do not assume all reviewers will be knowledgeable about the topic or your organization.

All proposals for Board-level, Intermediate, and Small Grants[1] should include the components outlined below. Brevity is encouraged; refer to the guidelines for maximum length. Note that proposals for Small Grants (up to and including $50,000) should not exceed five pages.

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[1] Small grants (up to $50,000) are reviewed every two weeks and can be approved by the Commonwealth Fund President. Intermediate grants ($51,000–$200,000) are reviewed every month and require approval from the Chair of the Fund's Board of Directors. Board-level grants (over $200,000) are reviewed three times per year (April, July, and November) and must be approved by the entire Board.

I. **Proposal Components** (1.5 line spacing, 12-point font):

A. **Cover page** with project title, name of project directors(s), grantee organization, and date submitted.

B. **Project summary** (up to 200 words).

C. **Background** (one paragraph to two pages). The background section is your opportunity to provide the rationale for your proposal. Describe the nature of the problem that needs to be addressed, referencing any relevant information that supports your argument. Think of the background as your pitch to the Fund — the problem to be solved, the gap in the field, and how new information is needed to help fill that gap. Indicate related work that may be underway by you or others, being sure to reference published and completed work; indicate evidence of policymaker interest in the information; and/or indicate missing or needed information to help advance the larger goal (e.g., universal coverage, combatting racism in health care). Indicate how the proposed project aligns with the particular Fund program from which you seek support.

D. **The Project (5–10 pages).** Please include:

1. *Objectives.* Briefly state the specific objectives or aims. This can be a bulleted list or written as questions. Please indicate the immediate target audience for the project results (e.g., delivery system leaders, media, federal or state policymakers).

2. *Major Activities.* Explain the key steps you will take to carry out the work. Again, if you have any questions about the relevance of any section of these guidelines, reach out to your program officer.

   For all projects, describe the major tasks and key steps you plan to take to accomplish your objectives. Describe your approach for project execution. Please include potential limitations, measures of success, and other pertinent details.

   a. If your project entails **research,** consider including the following details, *where applicable:* proposed design and conceptual framework; data procurement and collection methods; identification and recruitment of intervention group and comparison group; and description of analytic plan, sampling frame methodology, target completes, statistical power, and target response rates. Please discuss limitations and your plan to mitigate bias.

   b. If your project entails **stakeholder engagement, education, and support** (e.g., advisory boards and committees or roundtable convenings), consider including information on topics to be covered, stakeholder perspectives to be represented, potential participants, high-level agenda items, and potential meeting output.

   c. If you are a **media outlet,** include details on proposed work, including focus of reporting; components (written stories, audio/video/photographic elements); anticipated number and types of reporting products (can be a range); anticipated reach; and fit with goals of the Fund's program. In addition, please describe how you plan to work with the Fund staff, and how Fund support will be recognized.

3. *Dissemination Plan*

    a. *Products.* List project deliverables (e.g., media articles, op-eds, peer-reviewed papers, organizational reports, Fund blog posts or issue briefs) and potential topics (we understand they may change). Include where you expect the deliverable to appear — on the Fund's website, in a media outlet, as a peer-reviewed publication, on the grantee organization's website, or another venue.

    b. *Outreach.* In light of your identified target audience, how will you disseminate your products to reach that audience? What is the proposed plan (e.g., webinar, social media toolkit, explainers, personal outreach to policymakers, outreach to media, congressional testimony)? Feel free to work with your program officer, the Fund's Communications team, and our Federal and State Health Policy team to identify ways of reaching your target audience.

4. **Timeline.** The anticipated dates for major products should be included in this work schedule.

5. **Expected Outcomes** (one paragraph). Briefly describe how the project will contribute to knowledge or evidence in the area, raise public or professional awareness, meet an articulated need, advance the Fund's goals, or set the stage for future work.

E. **Project Management** (up to one page). Describe key project team members, providing their titles, qualifications, and roles on the proposed project.

F. **Grantee Organization** (one paragraph). Include information on mission, size, years in existence, assets, board of directors, major sources of support, and unique qualifications for carrying out the project.

G. **Budget and Budget Justification.** All applicants must submit a line-item budget that shows total project costs. The Fund's Budget Guidelines and Indirect Policy provide specific requirements. The Commonwealth Fund has a budget template. If you choose to use a different template, please ensure it includes committed or anticipated cofunding and/or in-kind support. Also submit a narrative budget justification explaining each line item.

II. **Letters of Support, Commitment, and Subcontracts.** If applicable, provide letter(s) of support from key partners (e.g., relevant community organizations, data providers, other project partners).

If applicable, provide letter(s) of commitment from consultants and/or subcontractors to be paid more than $10,000 during the grant period. If available, for each consultant or subcontractor please include scope of work, consultant rates, or subcontract budgets.

III. **Resumes.** Provide resumes or CVs for the project director/principal investigator and key project staff. Provide CVs for consultants or subcontractors who have a leadership role in the project.

IV. **Disclosures of Other Support.** A separate Disclosure of Other Support Form should be completed for personnel to be funded through the proposed grant, including:

- Principal investigator/project director
- Co-principal investigator/co-project director
- Those devoting 10 percent effort or more per the project budget
- Other key people on the grant who contribute substantively to the project's execution (i.e., any researcher, consultant, or contractor).

V. **Organizational and Tax Documentation.** For grantee organizations that have not received prior support from the Commonwealth Fund, provide documentation that demonstrates the grantee institution is exempt from federal taxation under IRS Code 501(c)(3) and is not a private foundation under IRS Code 509(a) — typically, an IRS Letter of Determination.

If the organization is a governmental unit, you may provide documentation attesting to that status in lieu of an IRS Letter of Determination.

If the grantee organization is *not* exempt from federal taxation under IRS Code 501(c)(3), see the Fund's Expenditure Responsibility Guidelines. If you are uncertain of your organization's status, contact grants@cmwf.org.

VI. **Applicant Information Form.** Please attach a completed Applicant Information Form with the proposal.