



COLLABORATION FUND

The Collaboration Fund

Backing partnerships that look to solve problems — not just serve them.

A guide for nonprofit partners

Herb Kohl Philanthropies • info@herbkohlphilanthropies.org



Overview

Herb Kohl Philanthropies believes that many of today's most significant community challenges require collaborative solutions. Effective collaboration can reduce duplication, fill gaps in services, connect programs operating separately, and allow organizations to accomplish together what they cannot do alone.

The Collaboration Fund is designed to encourage organizations to think outside of the box and beyond their station in ways that work across sectors, align resources, share expertise, create new approaches and pursue measurable outcomes.

This fund will support partnerships that improve educational opportunity, strengthen civic engagement, and create healthier, more vibrant communities in Greater Milwaukee.



Our philosophy

Collaboration is not simply cooperation — it is a commitment to solving problems together.

Challenge boundaries

We invest in partnerships that reach across traditional lines and leverage diverse expertise.

Measure what changes

We look for measurable improvements in the lives of Milwaukee area residents.

Build lasting solutions

We hope this work attracts additional investment and scales across the community.

What the Fund supports

The Collaboration Fund invests in initiatives that demonstrate authentic collaboration among two or more organizations working toward a shared goal.

Priority is given to proposals that address complex challenges through coordinated strategies involving multiple sectors.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE

Early childhood education + health care

Literacy + families

Schools + community organizations + health care

Housing + workforce development + civic engagement

Employers + education + workforce organizations

Business + nonprofit partnerships

Higher education + K–12 education

Local government + community organizations

Funding priorities

Competitive proposals should demonstrate one or more of the following.

Education

- Early childhood development
- Kindergarten readiness
- Third-grade reading proficiency
- Student success
- Postsecondary and workforce readiness

Civic engagement

- Community participation
- Civil dialogue
- Volunteerism
- Youth leadership
- Public trust
- Community problem-solving

Community collaboration

Think of shared problems in our community. Is there a common outcome? Does the infrastructure exist? Now think outside of the box and beyond your organization. From food access to housing stability, to violence prevention, and more, we hope non-profits and others will look for ways to work differently TOGETHER.

Eligibility

Applicants must:

01

Be a qualified 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization or public entity.

02

Identify one lead applicant responsible for grant administration.

03

Include at least one additional committed partner.

04

Demonstrate meaningful participation from all collaborating organizations. Not all partners need to be a 501c3 entity.

Grant size and structure

Amounts and duration vary with project scope and impact. Grants may cover collaboration costs. Multi-year requests considered for exceptional proposals. Applicants may request one of the following to start with the potential of progressing to another level of funding:

01

Planning grants: \$25,000–\$75,000 over 6–12 months to develop promising collaborations that aren't implementation-ready.

02

Implementation grants: \$250,000–\$750,000 over 2–3 years to support direct execution of an existing plan.

03

Transformational grants: up to \$1 million+ over 3 years for collaborations capable of significant systems-level change.

How to apply

Our process has three steps.

STEP 1

Send us a short email

Send us a short email — no more than 300 words — defining your intended impact and outlining your request for an invitation to this opportunity. Upon evaluation, an invitation may be extended with instructions for advancing to next step.

STEP 2

Concept proposal

Send us a 3–5 page concept proposal. Describe the problem, partners, proposed solution, shared outcome, why collaboration is necessary, approximate budget and what measurable success would look like.

STEP 3

Full proposal

If the concept proposal advances, finalists will meet with HKP staff, refine their approach and be invited to submit a full proposal.

What we mean by collaboration

Successful collaborations typically include:

Shared planning

Clearly defined partner roles

Joint decision-making

Shared accountability

Shared measurement

Coordinated implementation

Long-term commitment beyond the grant period

Applications consisting only of letters of support or referral relationships will generally not be considered collaborative projects.

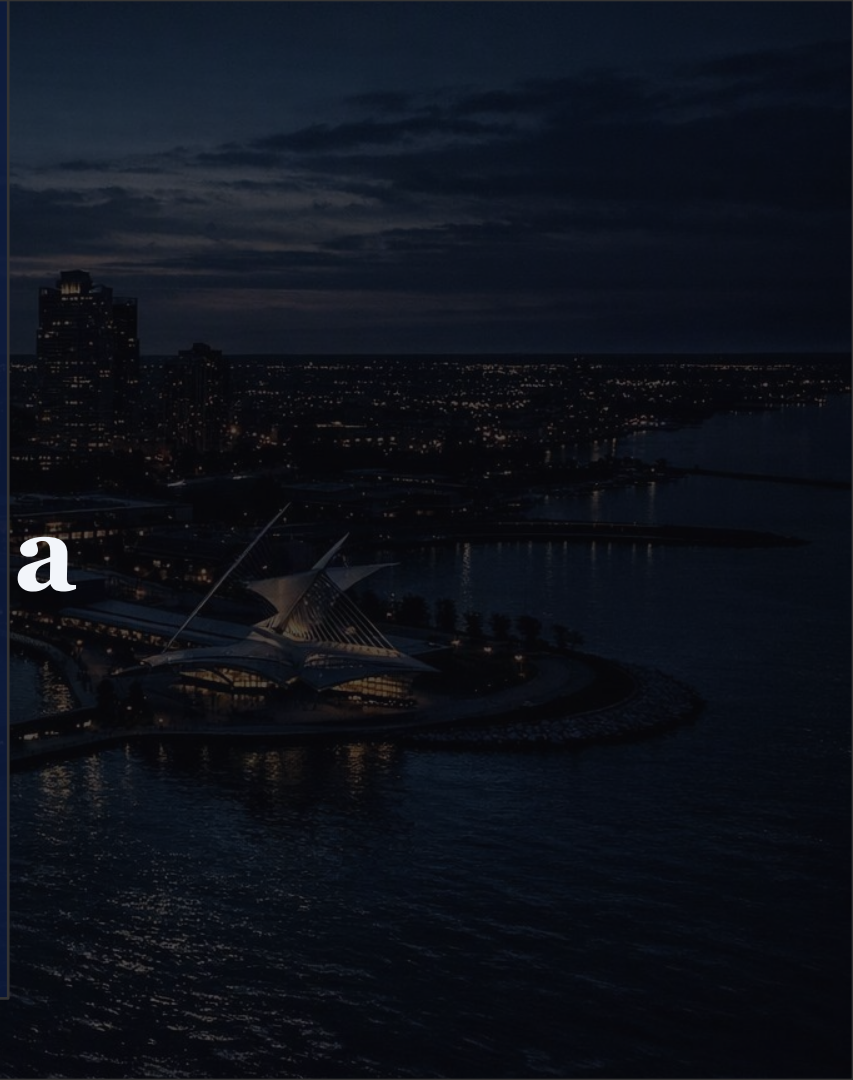


LEARN MORE

Ready to explore a collaboration?

Find detailed instructions and deadlines at:

herbkohlphilanthropies.org/engaging-collaboration/



Frequently asked questions

Quick answers before you reach out.

01 Who can apply?

A qualified 501(c)(3) nonprofit or public entity may serve as the lead applicant.

02 Must every partner be a nonprofit?

No. At least one additional committed partner is required; not every partner must be a 501(c)(3).

03 Is this only for new collaborations? Must everyone start with a planning grant request?

Existing collaborations are eligible to apply. New collaborations do not have to start with a planning grant application but will need to explain their planning/preparedness.

Frequently asked questions

Additional questions

04 **What is the timeline or deadline?**

Opportunity to submit initial email inquiry will be open through (due by) September 25, 2026. Concept proposals are due 30 days from the date you are invited to submit. From there, future deadlines will be personalized to invited applicants.

05 **Any exclusions or requirements such as budget size, reporting requirements, capital, new vs existing collaboration?**

We encourage interested parties to think in terms of collaboration, innovation and possibility vs pre-determined factors.

Frequently asked questions

Additional questions

06

Can I speak to someone at Herb Kohl Philanthropies before I submit my email?

We request that you submit questions in writing.

07

Can I submit more than one collaborative idea?

While there is no restriction on submitting more than one idea, we encourage applicants to focus on putting forward their best idea and supporting efforts.