Overview

The Birth Equity Leadership Academy (BELA) aims to develop effective and authentic leadership within communities that are often marginalized, and to amplify the voices of these leaders. The community projects component of this initiative provides mini grants and technical support in order to increase capacity for serving vulnerable and marginalized communities around maternal and child health.

Background

HealthConnect One is supporting community demonstration projects from BELA leaders across the country in the form of $80,000 in mini grants. The overarching goals of the community project mini grants are to foster collaboration, share learnings and support new or current work taking place in underserved communities and communities of color.

Here, we discuss lessons learned from the launch of this mini grant funding strategy.

Announcing the recipients of our
BELA Community Project Awards
supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

bit.ly/BELAprojects
Methodology

HealthConnect One engaged with BELA members to identify community needs and develop an equity focused funding process. Criteria for successful implementation of each community project, given the short time frame (1 year), was a large consideration. Recipients are expected to participate in webinars and convenings to share learnings.

Eligible Applicants:

- BELA leaders working in underserved communities and communities of color
- Leaders able to provide a high level of commitment and investment to a one-year project
- Demonstrated track record of working collaboratively and co-creating with communities
- Documented history of trusting relationships with underserved communities and communities of color
- Demonstrated commitment to and established work in addressing birth equity
- Demonstrated leadership and organizing in support of underserved communities
- Located in regions and communities with high inequities and in underserved communities

Eligible Projects:

- Projects that support current Birth Equity Leadership Academy participants in advancing and expanding collective birth equity work in underserved communities and communities of color
- New projects with innovative and creative activities and movement building/organizing
- Existing projects which address birth equity within a region and in communities of color
- Projects developing or enhancing leadership skills in underserved communities and communities of color
Projects implementing collaboration and co-creating ideas
Organizing to address birth equity within a region and in communities of color

A community projects committee that consisted of HC One staff and BELA members was developed to review all application materials and determine which projects would be selected. Projects were reviewed based on the following criteria:

- Demonstrates track record of working collaboratively
- Demonstrates commitment to addressing birth equity in communities of color
- Demonstrates leadership in grassroots organizing
- Demonstrates track record in serving underserved communities and communities of color
- Creativity incorporated into project
- Webinar PowerPoint presentation
- 3 minute video submission
- Project Budget is clear and related to project activities

Submitted Projects included:

- **Direct Service**: Doula Support, Breastfeeding Support (classes and support groups), Home Visits, Childbirth Classes
- **Celebration**: Breastfeeding photo shoot, Black Breastfeeding Week 2019
- **Network Activation**: Organizing, Collective Action, Developing Coalition/Membership
- **Community Leadership Development**: Mentoring, training and building leadership for Doulas and Lactation Support Providers
- **Data Collection and Reporting**: Gathering Quantitative Data of POC experiences and Birth workers’ experiences, Publishing in a Journal, Reporting and/or Assessing Data
- **Training**: Developing Curriculum, Training HealthCare Providers
- **Healing & Arts**

**Forty-three project applications were submitted, for a total request of $546,772.42.**
Implementation Activities included:

- Project goals, objectives and activities were developed and reviewed with HC One staff
- Monthly virtual meetings were offered, to provide technical assistance to awardees based on need and to support peer learning
- Support was offered for evaluation plan development by evaluation consultant
- Reports were submitted monthly by awardees to share progress, successes and challenges
What They Say...

“My commitment to birth equity began five years ago when I returned to my previous newsroom after giving birth to my first child. I got a rude awakening when my previous employer refused to provide breastfeeding accommodations and harassed me for pumping at work. That was when I realized that I didn’t want to choose between my career and my baby.”

~ To-wen Tseng, BELA Leader and Independent Journalist

“What We Discovered...

The process and framework used for the community projects was key to its success. Extensive and intensive support was provided by HC One staff and by fellow BELA members. This level of support was necessary because applicants’ expertise is in serving their communities and many were not part of a 501c3 or did not have a fiscal agent, which meant that they did not have the support of a development department. An extended deadline along with verbal and face to face encouragement increased the number of applicants. The application and selection process was co-created with BELA faculty and leaders. Technical assistance was provided to support refining project goals and objectives and developing work plans. This took time, varied based on the needs of each BELA leader, and provided opportunities for collaboration at many levels.

For many of the applicants, this was the first time engaging in the process of grant writing and fund management. This experience provided an opportunity for all applicants to practice fulfilling requirements to obtain funding. We offered the opportunity for projects not selected to reach out for feedback and recommendations. Even those that were not selected for funding now have a thorough proposal developed that can be used to apply for financial support from other sources. We learned about community-based leaders’ needs for managing funds by using a fiscal agent and how receiving funding could potentially have an impact on individuals’ taxes, and we learned about qualification for necessary programs based on income.

BELA leaders who engaged in this process, even with a minimal amount of funding, have been able to make a significant impact in their communities. With this funding strategy, we are supporting, expanding and building on the current strengths and capacity of BELA leaders who are not provided these opportunities due to systemic barriers. There has been a plethora of media attention given to the projects implemented. Great strides have already been made in leadership capacity in underserved communities in a short period of time, which is evident in the following media stories and BELA member reflections.

Recognition and Reflection:

- BELA Participants Esperanza Dodge and Carrie Murphy were spotlighted in an article in the Santa Fe, New Mexico newspaper for their role in creating the New Mexico Doula Association. Also quoted in the article is Steph McCreary, a project coordinator for the organization’s Yiya Vi Kagingdi doula program and a member of the New Mexico Doula Association’s steering committee.

  “Murphy and Dodge, along with other women’s health advocates across Northern New Mexico, launched the New Mexico Doula Association last month. The goal, they said, is to raise awareness of the practitioners in the state, to encourage more women to become doulas and to help improve maternal health.”

  See: Article / Association Website / Association Facebook Page

- These women of color tackle lactation disparities one belly bump at a time — The Philadelphia Inquirer profiled BELA member Ileana Berrios and her community project, Breastfeeding Latinas.

- ROBE: Teaching Fathers To Support Breastfeeding In Their Families
BELA Leader Wesley Bugg, founder of Reaching Our Brothers Everywhere (ROBE), and Financial and Legal Operations Coordinator for Reaching Our Sisters Everywhere (ROSE) shared about his work with fathers.

- Birth Detroit and Detroit Pop-Up Midwifery Clinic - BELA Leader Nicole White is a recipient of HC One's BELA Community Project Award, supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, published a video for this project. View video.

- Normalizing Breastfeeding in Our Community, by BELA Leader To-wen Tseng — "Last week, in collaboration with Asian Breastfeeding Task Force of SoCal, Breastfeed LA, and PHFE WIC, the project was finally happening. With a small stipend from HC One we were able to recruit 20 mother-baby pairs to participate in this community based project. Also with a reasonable price we were able to hire a great photographer and videographer. A team member and a friend generously opened her beautiful house for the photo shooting. I looked at the mothers and babies (and some fathers) pose in front of the camera and have their breastfeeding photo taken. I watched the mothers (and some fathers) share their breastfeeding experience, good or bad, in on-camera interviews..." Read more...

This post originally appeared on San Diego County Breastfeeding Coalition's Newsletter on May 9, 2019.

Recommendations

Based on the current success of the community projects, small investments in innovative concepts can leverage impactful results. It is essential to create opportunities in which community leaders are able to identify projects that are important for improving health equity.

Applicants applied for a total of half a million dollars, which clearly shows that there is substantial need for community-based, community-focused initiatives and there are plenty of community leaders that are willing, ready and committed to serving their communities.

Creating systems that provide financial support to emerging leaders working in their communities is necessary, given that current funding options are not within reach.

Learn More:

Community-Based Care to Improve Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health ~ Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health: Disease Control Priorities, Third Edition (Volume 2)

Community-Based Maternal Health Care: Meeting Women Where They Are ~ Maternal Health Task Force

Creating New Strategies to Enhance Postpartum Health and Wellness ~ Maternal and Child Health Journal

Addressing Health Disparities Is a Place-Based Issue ~ American Journal of Public Health