

Building Bridges Learning Community

Overview

The Building Bridges Project (Building Bridges: Cultivating Meaningful Cross-sectoral and Community-Based Partnerships to Improve Health) is working to strengthen partnerships between governmental public health, nonprofit, cross-sector, and community-based organizations to promote health, well-being, and health equity.

We know that partnerships between public health and community are vital, especially now. Over the past year, APHA has engaged with more than 70 organizations to learn from and [share best practices](#) for establishing, building, and strengthening partnerships between governmental public health agencies and community-based organizations. From the listening sessions in Year 1, partners shared that trust takes time and care to build, and that real progress happens when power is built together through shared visioning. They also emphasized the need for ongoing support and connection. These insights informed the planning and development of the Learning Community.

Launching in January 2026, the **Building Bridges Learning Community** will support up to 8 teams to strengthen relationships between state, local, tribal, and territorial (STLT) health departments and community organizations.

Each team will be selected through an application process and will include individuals representing both STLT public health departments and community-based organizations. **Over a 7-month period, each team will receive a \$10,000 grant, along with peer, expert, and technical support to strengthen partnerships and shared work.**

What to Expect

Over seven months, partnership teams will actively design and carry out a joint work plan while participating in shared learning, technical assistance, and access to practical resources to strengthen collaboration and build lasting relationships between health departments and their community organization partners.

The Learning Community is designed to:

- Strengthen trust within existing partnerships
- Build connections among participating teams
- Support the development of a plan for sustaining partnerships beyond the project period

Participants can expect:

- **\$10,000 in funding** per team. Each team must include one STLT health department and one partner community-based organization), with two co-leads—one from each.
- **Monthly meetings:** Co-leads must attend meetings that will alternate between
 - Learning and professional development sessions
 - Peer-sharing and support sessions
- **Expert and peer guidance** to help strengthen existing partnerships and include new partners
- **Work Plan Development:** Each team will create a joint work plan during the first months of the Learning Community.
- **Evaluation:** Teams will complete an initial and final assessment based on the [characteristics of successful partnerships](#).

Timeline

- **Application launch:** November 13th
- **Informational webinar:** November 18th, 2025 2-3pm ET
- **Application office hours:** We are hosting office hours to answer any questions you may have. [Register for the office hours](#). They will be on:
 - November 21st 2-3pm ET
 - November 24th 3-4pm ET
- **Applications due:** December 16, 2025 at 11:59 pm
- **Award notifications:** Week of January 19, 2026
- **Kickoff meeting:** Week of February 19, 2026 at 1pm ET
- **Monthly meetings:** February through July, alternating between learning and peer-support sessions

Application Requirements

- This is a **joint application** between a STLT health department and a community-based organization
 - Only one person submits the application, but both partners must write the application and be listed as contacts (one from each organization)
 - The community organization must be a registered **501(c)(3)**. The 501(c)(3) partner will serve as the fiscal agent to receive the funds.
- We encourage applications from teams that have:
 - An interest and commitment to [power-sharing](#) and recognizing inequities and their root causes
 - A desire to grow and deepen trust-based partnership along the [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#)

How applications will be evaluated

Competitive applications will show the following characteristics:

Teams

- **Composition:** Each team includes one health department and one community-based organization, with two co-leads—one from each.
- **Capacity:** Teams demonstrate the capacity to attend monthly meetings and carry out their work plan.
- **Resources and Commitment:** Applications describe specific commitments, such as staff time, to support the partnership's goals.

Goals

- **Clarity:** Applications express a clear intention to strengthen, deepen, or build upon an existing partnership.
- **Measurable:** Each goal includes relevant metrics that can be measured within the 7-month timeframe.
- **Attainable:** Goals are realistic based on the team's capacity, resources, and timing.
- **Time-bound:** Goals include a clear and achievable timeline.

Partnership Approach

- Applications demonstrate a commitment to power-sharing, co-governance, and shared leadership between partners.
- Teams view this project as an opportunity to move along the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership.
- Applicants show an interest in sustaining the partnership beyond the 7-month funding period.