



FISA Foundation

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:

Improving Healthcare Access for
People with Disabilities in
Southwestern Pennsylvania

SECTION I: Background

Disability advocates have been organizing for decades to improve healthcare access for people with disabilities, yet significant barriers remain. Even with the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) approaching, medical facilities often lack basic accessibility features. Many healthcare providers still do not offer adjustable-height exam tables, accessible diagnostic equipment, patient materials in alternative formats, or even accessible offices, leaving people with disabilities without adequate care. Few healthcare providers ask about access needs in advance of an appointment or procedure; too many providers make biased assumptions about people with disabilities that affect the quality of their care. These issues are not new. Despite efforts from national organizations such as the National Council on Disability, Federation of the Blind, the ARC, and others, people with disabilities continue to face routine discrimination and physical and financial barriers that prevent them from receiving equitable, patient-centered health care.

Important progress has been made, including the expansion of Medicaid and the removal of preexisting condition exclusions under the Affordable Care Act. However, people with disabilities still report pervasive bias from healthcare providers, inaccessible environments, and a lack of understanding about their needs. To fully address these issues, it is critical to center the voices and lived experiences of people with disabilities in identifying and dismantling these barriers. Those most impacted are uniquely positioned to illuminate how accessibility challenges undermine health outcomes, independence, and overall well-being. Moreover, ensuring the leadership of people with disabilities in crafting solutions is essential to driving meaningful, lasting improvements in healthcare equity.

It is unclear what changes to healthcare policy may be enacted through legislation or court rulings in the coming years. Regardless, FISA remains committed to advancing access to quality, equitable care for people with disabilities.

To that end, **FISA Foundation announces a new initiative: Access to Healthcare for People with Disabilities**, focused on improving equitable care in southwestern PA. This initiative has several components:

- A report: *A Far Cry from Fair: Health-care Access for People with Disabilities*, which highlights the persistent barriers that people with disabilities experience in navigating the healthcare system, combining published research with local voices to call for systemic reforms that ensure equitable care for all.
- A video series: Individuals with disabilities share barriers they have encountered in the healthcare system, as well as their vision for what accessible care could look like.
- A series of fact sheets, including best practices in accessible healthcare.

These resources amplify the voices and stories of people with disabilities, point to the most urgent problems that are ripe for improvement, and are fundamental to this funding opportunity. Engagement with these materials is essential in crafting a successful proposal.

SECTION II: Request for Proposals

- A. **Definition:** Disability is defined as a physical or cognitive impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. *Note: Due to the availability of other philanthropic resources in this region that are specifically focused on mental health, proposals with the primary purpose of providing mental health services or substance use treatment will not be considered for this RFP.*
- B. **Eligible Applicants:** All applicants must be 501c3 nonprofit organizations located or doing business in Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, or Westmoreland counties, including:
1. **Disability-led or focused organizations**
 2. **Facilities where people receive health care**, including federally qualified health centers, clinics, hospitals, health systems, etc.
 3. **Healthcare provider training programs**, including universities and professional associations that offer continuing education
 4. **Or any other nonprofit organization working on these issues in SWPA**

It is acceptable for projects to be under the fiscal sponsorship of a nonprofit organization if the applicant does not have nonprofit status in Pennsylvania.

C. **Eligible Activities:** The following ideas for potential proposals are provided as examples and are not intended to be restrictive.

1. Increase knowledge about legal rights and obligations to accessible, patient-centered care

- Train healthcare administrators, providers, students, and/or office staff about their responsibilities and legal obligations to provide accessible care to people with a broad range of disabilities.
- Educate people with disabilities and their families about navigating the healthcare system and about their rights to accessible care, guidance about how to request accommodations, options for how to advocate when access needs are not met, and legal resources or guidance about filing formal complaints.
- Invest in professional development for the person charged with coordinating disability accessibility and non-discrimination efforts in a healthcare program or facility. *NOTE: One option to consider is the [ADA Coordinator Training Certification Program \(ACTCP\)](#), though applicants are free to identify other training programs. Note: This grant cannot pay for salary but will pay for direct costs associated with tuition and travel.*

2. Address or remove accessibility barriers in the built environment, in healthcare programs/services, or with communication.

- Conduct an accessibility audit of a program, facility, website or digital resource, etc. and produce a prioritized list of improvements and plan for implementation.
- Purchase accessible equipment, produce standard operating procedures for use, train staff how to operate it, and develop a plan for evaluating its use and effectiveness. *NOTE: This priority focuses on making resources available to clinics or nonprofit organizations; it is unlikely that FISA Foundation will approve funding for health systems or hospitals to purchase basic equipment.*
- Adapt frequently used patient-facing resources (like brochures about a program or standard care instructions) to be accessible to people with a variety of disabilities.

3. Reduce discrimination against people with disabilities through training and education of healthcare providers. Proposals that address the compounding discrimination for other underserved populations with disabilities are encouraged.

- Develop, test, and evaluate training for current or future healthcare providers that addresses specific [Core Competencies on Disability for Health Care Education](#).
- Develop specific protocols for non-clinical staff on appropriate interaction with patients or family members who have disabilities; implement and evaluate training.

4. Address social determinants of health that disproportionately affect people with disabilities.

- Develop projects that address issues or structural challenges such as transportation, childcare, food insecurity, and financial barriers, to increase the likelihood that people with disabilities can access or afford healthcare. Projects may pilot and evaluate an approach to addressing these issues.
- Develop projects that address the additional barriers faced by people with disabilities accessing healthcare in rural areas.

5. Advocate for Policy or Systemic Change

- Efforts to advance changes in policies or practices to improve healthcare access for people with disabilities.

6. Advance other creative ideas to improve access to healthcare for people with disabilities, addressing barriers identified in the report and video series.

SECTION III: Information Session

A virtual information session for prospective applicants will review the RFP and answer questions. This is completely optional.

Jan 29, 2025, 1:00-2:00 pm ET

[More information and register here.](#)

SECTION IV: Award Information

Awards for these grants will range from \$1,000 to \$20,000.

Budgets may include direct costs associated with the eligible activities; Overhead costs may be noted as an organizational match, but not as part of requested grant funding.

SECTION V: Time Frame

Proposals must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on Mar. 3, 2025. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions by June 1, 2025.

SECTION VI: Application Evaluation

Awards will be made through a competitive process by a panel comprised of people with disabilities and those with disability expertise. Criteria will include:

- A. Potential for the project to significantly increase healthcare access for people with disabilities
- B. Strength of the proposed plan
- C. Staff team charged with implementation
- D. Meaningful involvement of people with disabilities. *FISA strongly aligns its beliefs and work with the principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us" and recognizes people with disabilities as experts through their lived experience. Real and lasting change can only be achieved by actively listening to and involving people with disabilities in the design and implementation of proposed projects. Applicants are expected to demonstrate this commitment by clearly describing how people with disabilities will be meaningfully involved in their project. Examples of meaningful involvement include paid leadership roles for people with disabilities, compensated advisory group members, consultants, or other structured ways to incorporate the input and expertise of people with disabilities into the project.*
- E. Attention to advancing health equity for underrepresented populations and other equity issues for people with disabilities
- F. Clarity of short and long-term goals; plan for evaluation.
- G. Demonstrated organizational commitment to improving healthcare access, beyond the specific proposal, such as by describing other accessibility efforts, leveraging other funds, and/or securing the commitment of organizational leadership. *NOTE: Larger organizations are strongly encouraged to show an organizational match of cash or in-kind contributions to extend the impact of the requested funds.*
- H. Likelihood of sustained impact over time.

SECTION VII: Proposal Requirements

Submit the completed [FISA Foundation application form](#), an executive summary, and a narrative of no more than four pages that covers the bulleted items listed below. Please keep section VI in mind as you craft the narrative.

- **Brief overview of the organization:** Include a brief description of the organization and its connection to healthcare and/or people with disabilities.
- **Project Description:** Describe the proposed initiatives, including objectives, target audience, and expected outcomes.
- **Evaluation Plan:** Describe how the success of the initiative will be measured and reported.

The following attachments are also required:

- Brief bio of the executive director including the person's race, gender, and disability status. *Note: FISA Foundation tracks the diversity of the executive director of our grantee partners as part of our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This information is not shared publicly but is used to inform conversations about diverse leadership and accountability as we work together to advance racial, gender, and disability justice. Please note that we are not asking you to share anything that the executive director has not or would not publicly share or any specifics about a disability (if applicable).*
- Brief bios of the key staff responsible for implementation and oversight of proposed project/service
- Program/project budget
- Letters of support (optional)

Email the completed application form and narrative to info@fisafoundation.org by March 3, 2025.

SECTION IX: Conclusion

This initiative is intended to serve as a catalyst and a vital step toward ensuring equitable healthcare access for people with disabilities in southwestern Pennsylvania. FISA Foundation is committed to supporting projects that drive meaningful change, transform systems, and foster inclusive and accessible healthcare environments.

Questions?

Contact Shani Lasin, Senior Program Officer
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