



## Request For Proposals to Early Milestones Colorado's Impact on Equity Initiative

If you need a copy of this document in another language besides English or Spanish, please contact [ioe@earlymilestones.org](mailto:ioe@earlymilestones.org)

### Introduction

Early Milestones Colorado (Milestones) advances practice, research, and policy to help make Colorado the best place to be a child. Milestones has launched the Impact on Equity Initiative (IOE). The IOE will invest in innovative community efforts and will accelerate systemic change based on what works. **In 2024 – 26, the IOE will focus on supporting local collaborations to reduce inequities for families with children prenatal - three years old.**

In the past 10 years, Milestones has partnered closely with communities across the state, providing data and technical assistance to support change. Milestones has also distributed more than \$35 million in grants to more than 230 partners. The launch of the Impact on Equity Initiative follows a \$2.5 million donation to Milestones from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott. Milestones is paying it forward by seeding the Impact on Equity Initiative. IOE will allow Milestones to invest in and support solutions generated by those who know communities best.

Equity is the fair treatment of all people so that everyone has access to the opportunities and resources needed to enjoy full and healthy lives. Milestones is committed to partnering with people and places furthest from opportunity. By this we mean communities and areas in the state that have struggled to access resources fairly and are still being held back by unfair systems. This could involve factors like:

- Ability
- Race
- Place
- Income
- Language
- Culture
- Immigration status
- Gender
- Sexual-/gender-identification

Ensuring equity requires the elimination of barriers that prevent the full participation and advancement of groups of people who have been historically underserved and underrepresented. By working closely with communities and focusing on equity, the initiative will help make sure every child in Colorado has a chance to succeed.

Milestones seeks to partner with organizations that have an active collaboration ready to move beyond an idea into action. We are looking for projects that are ready to advocate in support of lasting solutions at a community level. In the first phase of the initiative, Milestones seeks to support up to 10 awards of up to \$100,000 each for a grant period of 18 months.

### Powering Collaborations To Reduce Prenatal – Three Inequities Through System and Policy Change: Grant Overview, Key Components, and Criteria

The first phase of this project will support collaborative efforts aimed at addressing inequities. IOE will fund a cohort of partners working on solutions that will reduce inequities for families with children prenatal to three. Through the work of the initiative, we seek to support solutions that will lead to sustainable change for families and children in Colorado. We know this is a gradual process, but we want to support projects that show progress toward this goal.



## What the initiative is looking for

We know families don't exist in silos, but our systems and the people working within them do. Too often, the voices of families and providers are missing from critical conversations. Collaborations of partners in community systems will identify and address the disconnects and inequities families face. When we say collaboration, we mean the cooperative efforts among different organizations, groups, or individuals within a specific community to achieve a common goal in support of children and families. Partners within a collaboration could include:

- Families
- Direct service providers
- Program administrators
- Others in the community that care about the issue (e.g. businesses, law enforcement, county commissioners)

## Why prenatal to three?

The first few years of life are a window of opportunity for a strong start. Families with children aged prenatal to three years old need many things to thrive. This is why the [early childhood system in Colorado](#) spans multiple areas:

- Health and well-being
- Learning and development
- Family support and education
- Economic mobility

Currently this early childhood system generates a host of barriers for families that can prevent a strong start. For example:

- Maternal mortality in Colorado is on the rise and the rate is double for Black and Native American women.
- Colorado is 34th in the nation in vaccinations. 1 in 5 toddlers don't get vaccinations.
- Infant-toddler child care challenges are costing our state \$2.7B annually in lost work.

And these are just a few examples. Communities across Colorado face unique combinations of challenges. We know that those closest to the challenge also know what solutions may work to address them. This is your opportunity to advance a solution that will reduce inequities for families prenatal to three in your community.

## Why system and policy change?

The Early Childhood Colorado Framework defines a strong early childhood system as “one that offers a wide range of programs, supported by a solid foundation, and with all pieces working toward the same goal.” The early childhood system is the network of resources, supports and services for family needs in early learning, health, housing, and economic development. For these facets to work and support families and children, the system also needs core components like good governance, usable data and adequate funding.”<sup>1</sup>

Factors within the system can result in inequities for families. Services may not be adequate to address needs, or may have access barriers for certain groups. How programs are made or put into action might have unplanned effects that impact how many people use them or how much they help.

Policies may help break down or create additional barriers within a system. When we say policy, we mean the rules, regulations and plans made by governments and organizations to provide services and support for young children and their families.

With this opportunity, we seek to support projects that are addressing challenges at a system or policy level. This does not mean only policy-focused organizations can apply! Community-based organizations have a critical role to play in policy change. Milestones will help identify ways to engage at a system or policy level. We believe making changes at this level has the best chance for sustainable, long-term change for families with children.

## What the initiative is looking for

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<sup>1</sup> Early Childhood Colorado Framework, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CaXQi\\_U5PHom2IE5BXhQIEh77n1oE9KI/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CaXQi_U5PHom2IE5BXhQIEh77n1oE9KI/view)



Applicants should demonstrate a strong commitment to equity, prioritizing underrepresented people and places in Colorado. The work should be ready to go, with a collaboration that has found a problem and a potential fix, and a commitment to push ahead for lasting improvements for kids and families. Communities know what their biggest challenges are.

In an ideal project:

- Applicants have identified a critical problem facing families with children prenatal – three, and a potential solution to that problem. The problem addresses a specific existing inequity in their community. Applicants have an active collaboration convened to solve that problem and are ready for investment to move towards policy change and implementation.
- Collaborations should include the voices of those closest to the challenge, including families and practitioners.
- System or policy change is likely to result from the proposed work. For example, decision makers could have what they need to move toward the passage of sound policies to solve the identified problem. This could include relevant data, family experiences, and proposed solutions.
- Example projects could include, but are not limited to:
  - Increasing childhood vaccination rates in specific counties through expanded services and messaging
  - Identifying barriers to expand access to supports and programs that already exist; i.e. increasing the local uptake of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
  - Removing transportation, costs or other access barriers that prevent dual-language early learning professionals from becoming teacher qualified

Projects will be evaluated based on these criteria:

- Potential to create change that reduces inequities for families with children prenatal to age three
- Potential for sustainability and scalability
- Ability to implement within an 18-month period
- Strength and diversity of partnerships within collaboration
- Demonstrated commitment to equity and including the voices of those most impacted

The initiative will not fund projects like:

- Direct service costs – for example, adding additional slots for child care, hiring additional teachers, or general operations support
- Capital support, like purchasing vehicles, buildings, renovations
- Support for classroom or training materials or other efforts to increase quality in a specific classroom or program

Support from Milestones - What awarded projects can expect

Milestones is not a traditional grantmaker or funder; Milestones is an intermediary and partner. While we will provide resources for grantees, our primary goal is to support grantee partnerships to help achieve systems change. Grantees will still be the driver of their own work. Milestones will serve as a partner to help achieve goals. As a partner, Milestones will work with awarded projects to determine the supports that could be helpful. These supports could include technical assistance, joint trainings, connection to expert partners, and more.

Awarded applicants will partner with Milestones to learn and create impact together. Participation in a learning community will be required. The cohort of grantees will help decide the time commitment for the learning community. Milestones will boost cohort efforts through communications and connections to state level policy and practice activities and leaders. Awarded applicants may be asked to participate in data collection related to learning and research. Milestones is committed to making the process supportive, useful for grantees' projects, and focused on creating positive change for young children and their families.

Grant Awards and Timeline



We anticipate making up to 10 awards of up to \$100,000 per award over 18 months. You may request up to \$100,000, but awards may not be awarded at the amount of the request. Applicants may be asked to revise budgets and scope of requests. Awarded applicants will receive a partial payment in fall 2024 and the rest of the grant award in 2025. This is not a reimbursable grant.

#### Timeline

June 20, 2024 – Letter of Intent (LOI) and Request for Proposals Released, Online Portal Open

July 19, 2024 – Due date for online submission of LOIs

August 6, 2024 – Applicants informed of declination or invitation to submit proposals

August 27, 2024 – Due date for invited applications

September 6, 2024 – Final applicants informed of decisions

September 2024 – Start of 18 month grant period

## How to Apply

### Letter of Intent (LOI)

You must submit a brief online LOI. Please fill out the form via our online system by July 19, 2024. Once you have submitted your LOI, you will receive an email confirmation that it has been received.

Milestones and a team of community-based reviewers will make decisions about LOI applications that move forward to the full proposal stage. Applicants will know their status by August 6, 2024.

### Optional Informational Webinars

Milestones will host two informational webinars, one in the day and one in the evening, on June 25 or 28. See the [website](#) to sign up.

### Optional Office Hours

You may sign up to speak to someone about your idea and application. Please see the [website](#) for more information. Interpretation will be provided for office hours if needed. Don't be afraid to schedule time with us for any questions you might have!

### Application Submission

A subset of those submitting an LOI will be asked to submit a proposal. Office hours will again be available.

Full proposals must be submitted to Milestones via our online system by August 27, 2024. Once you have submitted your grant application, you will receive an email confirmation that your application has been received.

Grant decisions will be made by September 6, 2024.

Eligible applicants for this opportunity may include:

- 501(c)3 organizations/nonprofits
- School districts
- Colleges and universities
- Local government, including departments of health and/or human services, education, community development, town councils, etc.

### Ineligible Entities

For-profit businesses are not eligible to apply as the primary applicant; however, they may partner with one of the entities listed above.

*Please see Office Hours and Webinar information above for questions and more information. Thank you for your interest!*

