

2025 Mental Health Service Expansion & Workforce Development Grant



About

San Diego Foundation (SDF) is committed to supporting thriving children and families in our region. Through the Healthy Children & Families and the Early Childhood Initiative, SDF invests in community-focused efforts that advance wellness and access to opportunity. While these initiatives have each supported mental/behavioral health and early relational health service expansion through independent grantmaking in the past, they will align to support nonprofit service providers and workforce development pathways through this grant.

- Early Childhood Initiative supports expanded access to early childhood education and care for young children ages 0 - 5 throughout San Diego County.
- Healthy Children & Families Initiative focuses on increasing the quality of life for children and families through expanded access to critical services that support the health and well-being of our communities.

Background

Cognitive and social-emotional skills are critical aspects of development that help to shape a child's worldview, relationships with others, and emerging sense of self. Through interactions with trusted adults, children learn critical skills that guide them as they navigate the world around them, including self-regulation and awareness, empathy towards others, interpersonal communication, and healthy decision-making. As children grow, these skills serve as the foundation for positive mental health across the lifespan. However, children and families who are furthest from opportunity encounter disproportionate levels of adversity that can threaten healthy social-emotional functioning during childhood and beyond.

Exposure to high levels of chronic stress early in life is [found to contribute to](#) a range of challenges, including learning difficulties at school, interpersonal and behavioral concerns, and mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. Between 2013-2023, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [found](#) that nearly all indicators of poor mental health and suicidal thoughts have worsened in youth. In California, [mental health issues](#) are the No. 1 reason for youth hospitalization and the state ranked last (out of 50 states and Washington DC) in access to youth mental health care based on parent self-report.

Locally, there are challenges to meet the growing demand for more behavioral health support, with an estimated need to train, attract, employ and retain 18,500 professionals by 2027. Prospective students interested in joining the mental and behavioral health workforce also experience barriers to completing their training and entering jobs that support the well-being of our region. According to the San Diego Workforce Partnership's [San Diego Behavioral Health Workforce Report](#), living stipends for students can support with transportation, childcare, and other critical needs to help individuals facing economic hardship, allowing students to enter and complete training and education programs.

Furthermore, the lack of diversity among mental and behavioral health professionals remains an issue. In 2021, the [American Psychological Association \(APA\) found](#) that over 80% of the country's workforce are comprised of White professionals compared to the 5% of Black and African American professionals. Individuals of color seeking support from a professional who shares cultural experiences have a far more difficult time securing services. Lack of diversity in the mental and behavioral workforce is not solely due to low interest in the field, but rather in barriers such as financial burdens, high cost of graduate-level training, and limited prospects for gainful employment relative to other sectors of the economy.

As we continue efforts to strengthen the San Diego region, greater investment is needed for not only children and youth, but their families who play a critical role in shaping their development, and the behavioral health workforce who provide critical services to support their lifelong well-being.

The Funding Opportunity

The total award amount for this grant cycle is expected to total \$1.5 million. Of the total award amount, \$1 million will be made available for mental/behavioral and early relational health services and \$500,000 for mental/behavioral health workforce development. Eligible 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations are invited to apply through **5:00 p.m. PDT, March 28, 2025**.

Goal

This grant supports programs that advance access to mental/behavioral and early relational health services for families and kids of all ages. The grant will focus on two primary categories:

- Nonprofit service providers providing mental/behavioral and early relational health services, promoting and destigmatizing access to care through culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices for children and youth of all ages and their families.
- Strengthening a diverse local workforce by supporting organizations that provide paid stipends to individuals pursuing careers in mental and behavioral health professions.

Strategies

The following strategies support the goal of the SDF Mental Health Service Expansion & Workforce Grant and will be eligible for funding for the 2025 grant cycle. It is recommended that proposals center the needs of young children, youth, parents, caregivers and/or the providers who support them. Organizations will be asked to identify the primary strategy they plan to employ in their application. All applicants are encouraged to embed culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices within their services and supports for low-to-moderate-income families, populations that are historically underrepresented, and those negatively impacted by harmful social determinants of health.

**Applicants providing both early relational/mental health services AND internships/stipend-supported mental health career pathways are eligible to apply to both categories.*

Mental/Behavioral and Early Relational Health Services

- **Preventive programs (up to \$50,000 per proposal):** Ensure that children, youth and their parents/guardians have access to knowledge, education, and resources that promote social and emotional wellness. Proposals can include, but are not limited to, incorporating psychosocial activities for young children, programs that support healthy child and youth development, parent support/education, and/or other programs that prevent mental and behavioral health challenges.
- **Supportive interventions (up to \$50,000 per proposal):** Provide trauma-informed interventions for young children, youth, parents, caregivers and/or providers/teachers that support mental and behavioral wellness. Proposals can include, but are not limited to, family-centered interventions (e.g., home visits), provider/teacher support and training, coaching and mentoring, peer-to-peer support (e.g., group interventions), or other programs promoting wellness and resiliency for at-risk youth or families.
- **Mental/behavioral health support and treatment (up to \$50,000 per proposal):** Increase access to programs with mental health professionals that address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or other mental/behavioral health challenges for children, parents and/or caregivers, including those in crisis or requiring higher levels of care.

Mental/Behavioral Health Workforce Development

- **Mental/behavioral health workforce stipends (up to \$75,000 per proposal):** Increase opportunities for historically underrepresented, low-income young adults by facilitating internships and stipends for individuals pursuing careers in the mental/behavioral health field, including those in high school; associate's, bachelor's, master's, doctorate, or other professional training programs. Eighty percent of each grant award must be given to individuals in the form of stipends that are paid directly to the program participants. These funds are not intended to cover the cost of classes, tuition, scholarships or other fees paid to the program or institution. The remaining 20% of the grant award can be utilized by the organization for program operational costs and/or supplies (e.g., materials and books). Proposals are encouraged to support Black, Indigenous, people of color, LGBTQ+ and/or other historically underrepresented students/professionals.

Grant Criteria & Eligibility

Each proposal must be led by a nonprofit with 501(c)3 public charity status, located in and serving San Diego County. A 501(c)3 public charity may serve as a fiscal sponsor for another applicant to administer the grant and provide regular financial reporting to San Diego Foundation.

Eligibility

- Each proposal must be led by a nonprofit with 501(c)3 public charity status, operating in and serving San Diego County.
- A 501(c)3 public charity may serve as a fiscal sponsor for another applicant to administer the grant and provide regular financial reporting to SDF.
- Projects must be completed within a 12-month timeline.
- Previous applicants or recipients of Healthy Children & Families and/or Early Childhood Initiative funding are eligible to apply.

- San Diego Foundation will not fund endowments, existing obligations/debt, scholarships, or projects that promote religious or political doctrines.
- Projects must work to expand care for low-to-moderate-income communities and/or populations experiencing health disparities or negative social determinants of health.
- Projects supporting the mental/behavioral health workforce stipends strategy must utilize at least 80% or more of the grant award for individual stipends and have the ability to process and distribute stipends according to California labor laws.

Recommendations

- Articulate a strategy for project success
- Show potential for positive outcomes and impact
- Exhibit organizational strength, past performance and strong community partnerships
- Describe how you'll connect authentically with the community you serve

How To Apply

All applications must be submitted using the SDF grant portal. For additional guidance regarding creating a new user account, view the [GLM Applicant Tutorial \(Legacy Dashboard\)](#).

[Register/Apply Today.](#)

Application Deadline: Friday, March 28, 2025, at 5:00 p.m. PDT

Application: To review the application questions in advance of creating an account in the grant application portal, you may view a PDF of the application. Please note we will only accept applications submitted through the grant application portal linked above.

Application Process

A timeline for the grant cycle with important dates is outlined below. San Diego Foundation reserves the right to modify these dates, or any other terms or conditions set forth in these grant guidelines. Proposals are due by **5:00 p.m. PDT on March 28, 2025**, through the online system linked below.

If you encounter any issues with applying online, please reach out to communityimpact@sdfoundation.org for accommodation.

[Register/Apply Today.](#)

Timeline

- **March 3, 2025:** Grant Guidelines released
- **March 28, 2025, at 5:00 p.m. PDT:** Application period closes
- **May 2025 (tentative):** Applicants will be notified

Application Submission Deadline: Friday, March 28, 2025, 5:00 p.m. PDT