

# Application for funding to help address health disparities

Health disparities are preventable differences in burden of disease, injury, violence, or the opportunity to achieve optimal health<sup>1</sup> and adversely affect populations that have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health based on their racial and ethnic background, socioeconomic status, age, geographic location, language, gender, disability status, sexual orientation, or gender identity.<sup>2</sup> While the causes of health disparities are complex, it is possible to make meaningful strides toward achieving health equity.



More than one-third of US adults have limited health literacy skills, which impacts their ability to find and access care, and understand and act on health information.<sup>3</sup> Many communities also face significant barriers in accessing and utilizing care.<sup>4</sup> Both of these circumstances disproportionately affect members of marginalized populations and often lead to poorer health outcomes compared to other groups.<sup>4,5</sup>

To help address health disparities impacting people managing a range of conditions\*, the STEP Program™ will recognize and fund up to five proposals that demonstrate innovation in the following areas:



**Improving health literacy and patient education**



**Increasing access to health services**

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## Application

Please note the review committee is in the process of identifying funding recipients of the STEP Program™ focused on addressing health disparities. Applicants will be notified of the review committee's decision on or before January 2022.

## FAQs

Please refer to the following information to help you prepare your submission materials.

### About the STEP Program™ and Proposal Submission Process

- **What is the STEP Program™?**

Novartis launched the STEP Program™ in 2017 to fund projects from US-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit patient advocacy organizations that help to address gaps in care or unmet patient needs. In this funding cycle, the STEP Program™ will recognize and fund up to five innovative proposals from US-based patient advocacy organizations that will develop programs, resources, tools or services that help address health disparities impacting people managing a range of conditions\*. These programs must aim to improve health literacy, patient education and/or increase access to health services.

- **Who is eligible to submit a proposal?**

US-based 501(c)(3) national patient advocacy organizations that comply with applicable laws, regulations, codes and guidelines that support cancer, sickle cell disease (SCD), immune thrombocytopenia (ITP), heart failure, atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), psoriatic disease, chronic spontaneous urticaria (CSU), spondyloarthritis, asthma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and/or dry eye are eligible to apply, though local chapters of national organizations are ineligible.

- **Are past recipients of STEP Program™ funding eligible to apply?**

Patient advocacy organizations that were recipients of funding from the STEP Program™ focused on

caregivers of people with cancer or certain blood disorders and AMD are ineligible.

- **What proposals will be considered?**

The STEP Program<sup>TM</sup> calls for proposals for programs, resources, tools or services that will help address health disparities impacting people managing a range of conditions\* by improving health literacy, patient education and/or increasing access to health services.

- **Improving health literacy and patient education:** Low health literacy can make it difficult for a person to access, understand and use information to inform health-related decisions and actions.<sup>4</sup> Novartis will accept proposals that improve health literacy and patient education among marginalized populations by developing and disseminating programs, resources, tools or services that are linguistically and culturally appropriate, leverage research and/or are co-developed with priority populations and community partners.
- **Increasing access to health services:** Many patient communities face significant gaps in access to, and utilization of, care.<sup>4</sup> Novartis will accept proposals that will support greater access to health care and services among marginalized populations through community health models (e.g., home health visits, peer-to-peer educators) and/or increased use of digital technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence, virtual reality, telehealth).
- **Can my organization's proposal focus on marginalized patient communities in general?**  
No. To be eligible for funding consideration, proposed projects must address the unmet needs of patients from marginalized populations affected by one or more of the following conditions: cancer, sickle cell disease (SCD), immune thrombocytopenia (ITP), heart failure, atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), psoriatic disease, chronic spontaneous urticaria (CSU), spondyloarthritis, asthma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and/or dry eye specifically.
- **Can my organization submit a proposal to expand or improve an existing program?**  
Yes, you may submit a proposal that seeks to expand or improve upon an existing program.
- **How much money can be requested to fund the proposal?**  
The maximum funding amount per organization is USD 75 000.
- **What cannot be covered as part of the funding?**  
Funding provided through the STEP Program<sup>TM</sup> cannot directly support the below items, should they be a part of your project:
  - Personal travel and housing (i.e., hotel stays)
  - Entertainment aspects of events or promotional exhibit and display fees
  - Activities held in lavish venues/resort locations or requests that include spa or resort activities
  - Capital campaigns, building funds and fundraising
  - Branded treatment-specific education

**Please note:** Standard operating expenses, personnel time, and costs directly related to the program MAY be covered.

- **Can my organization submit multiple proposals?**

We are only accepting one proposal per organization.

- **What if my organization's proposal doesn't fit into one of the three specific categories?**

The STEP Program<sup>TM</sup> calls for proposals for innovative programs, resources, tools or services that will help address health disparities in marginalized populations by improving health literacy, patient education and/or increasing access to health services. However, you are welcome to submit other proposals that may not fit within these categories to Novartis for consideration through the [Novartis Grant Central Station](#) portal.

- **How long must the proposed project last?**

Your proposed project does not need to last for any specific amount of time. However, you must begin

work on the project in the 2022 calendar year.

- **When are the proposals due?**

All proposals are due by 11:59 PM on September 24, 2021.

- **How does my organization submit a proposal for consideration?**

Please complete the [submission form](#) and upload all supporting materials.

## **Submission Materials Package**

- **What must be included in the submission materials package?**

- Completed submission form
- Project timeline
- Detailed budget
- Annual operating budget
- IRS determination letter (verification of 501(c)(3) status)
- W-9 form dated 2021
- Organizational letter of intent that is no more than 1 page in length
- Letter(s) of support from each partner organization named in your proposal that is core to your project's development and execution
- Any additional materials (i.e., imagery, videos, recommendations) to support your proposal may be included as well, though they are not mandatory

The project timeline, detailed budget, IRS determination letter, W-9 form, organizational letter of intent and partner letter(s) of support (if applicable) must be combined into a **single PDF file** and uploaded to your completed submission form.

For additional information regarding the submission form and specific supporting materials, please see questions below.

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## **Submission Form**

- **Does my organization need to use the provided submission form to offer a proposal?**

Yes, you must use the STEP Program™ submission form when submitting a proposal for funding consideration.

- **Will my organization be able to save our draft responses as we work to complete the submission form?**

Yes, the STEP Program™ submission form has a Save and Continue feature that will allow you to save your answers as you go. While using this feature, you will also have the option to complete the remaining questions at a later time.

The Save and Continue button will appear at the top right corner of the submission form after you click "Next" on the title page. Once you click the button and provide your email address, you will receive a unique link that will allow you to return to your application as needed.

- **What is considered "doing business with" Novartis?**

An organization is considered to be conducting or have conducted business with Novartis if it has engaged in consulting activities with Novartis, Novartis has provided it with grants or sponsorships to support educational programs over the past 12 months or has committed to doing so over the next 12 months. Please include any relevant details surrounding these circumstances in your answer.

- **What is the preferred font or font size for supportive materials shared as part of my organization's STEP Program™ proposal?**

There is no preferred font required, though Times New Roman and Arial are easy to read. Please ensure

you use an 11-point font size or higher in all materials.

- **How many characters or words may be used in each response field?**

Some response fields do have word limits. Please see the submission form for word limits on specific responses.

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## **Project Timeline**

- **What information should be included in my organization's project timeline?**

Your timeline should outline your project from development to implementation/execution, along with estimated timing for when each activity is expected to occur. If your organization is submitting a proposal for an already existing program that has no specific start or end date, please outline the specific phases of the program and approximately how long each phase takes in lieu of a traditional timeline.

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## **Detailed Budget**

- **Will you provide a preferred budget template?**

No, you may use your own budget template, but please ensure to provide detailed information.

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## **Letters of Intent and Support**

- **What is the letter of intent? What should my organization plan to include in it?**

The letter of intent for your STEP Program<sup>TM</sup> submission is a formal request for funding and should include an intent statement that your organization will carry out the project should it be selected to receive funding. The letter should be no more than 1 page and include a brief overview of your proposed project and the unmet need(s) it will address.

- **What is a partner organization?**

A partner organization is any organization that is core to the development and/or execution of your proposed programs, resources, tools or services.

- **Does my organization need to submit a letter of support from our partner organization(s)?**

Yes, you are required to submit letters of support from each partner organization listed in your proposal.

- **Can my organization submit a proposal and be listed as a partner organization in another organization's proposal?**

Yes, your organization may also provide letters of support to any other organizations that are applying for STEP Program<sup>TM</sup> funding. The submission of your partner organization's own letter of intent and/or letter of support will not have a negative impact on the proposal review process.

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## **Additional Submission Package Questions**

- **Can my organization provide supplemental information about our proposal such as screen shots, videos, or case studies?**

Yes, you may provide supplemental information with your proposal. Please include any additional information along with the other required materials in a single PDF attachment.

- **Can my organization submit references for consideration?**

Yes, please include any references you'd like to share along with all of your other required materials in a single PDF attachment.

- **What if my organization's singular PDF is too large to be uploaded with my completed submission form?**

For reference, the maximum size for this accompanying file is 50 MB. We recommend trying to compress each individual attachment and then combining each of these compressed files into 1 PDF to ensure it is within this size limit. You may also compress the combined PDF further as an extra precaution.

## Recipient Selection and Notification Process

- **How will the funding decision be made?**

Submissions will first be reviewed by Novartis to ensure compliance with all relevant rules and regulations, as well as STEP Program™ requirements. All compliant submissions will then be reviewed and considered by the independent external review committee, who will collectively evaluate each proposal for innovation, feasibility, potential to fill unmet needs, impact and sustainability.

- **Who is on the external review committee?**

A panel of experts outside of Novartis in fields including health literacy, digital health, community health and health disparities, will review the submissions and collectively evaluate and identify up to five of the most innovative proposals that have the greatest potential to make a positive impact on the community.

- **How many recipients will there be this year?**

There will be a maximum of five recipients.

- **When will we be notified about the funding decision?**

All organizations will be notified of the review committee's decision by or before January 2022.

- **If my organization is identified as a funding recipient, when should we expect to receive the funds?**

Funding will be provided in January 2022 to execute proposals that begin in the 2022 calendar year.

- **Will my organization hear from Novartis if our proposal is not chosen for funding through the STEP Program™?**

Yes, we will inform all organizations as to our funding decisions, though we are unable to provide specific feedback regarding decisions made by the independent external review committee.

## Additional Questions

- **If my organization is unable to participate in the STEP Program™ this year, can we submit a proposal next year?**

Our goal is to continue a sustainable, multiyear program. At this time, Novartis is only able to confirm funding for this iteration of the STEP Program™ focused on addressing health disparities. We are assessing the potential to extend the STEP Program™ in 2022.

- **Can my organization submit the same proposal for consideration of a Novartis grant at the same time we submit for the STEP Program™?**

No, you cannot submit the same proposal for a Novartis grant or sponsorship if you submit it for the STEP Program™ this year. However, if your project is not selected for STEP Program™ funding, you can submit the same project through the Novartis grants portal at a later date, as long as it is not submitted in the same calendar year.

- **Is this STEP Program™ the same as the STEP International Development Program?**

No, the STEP International Development Program is a different, unrelated international career program for recent university graduates seeking employment opportunities with Novartis.

- **Who do I contact if I have any additional questions?**

Please feel free to email any additional questions to [STEP.Program@Novartis.com](mailto:STEP.Program@Novartis.com).

## References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, November 24). Health Disparities Among Youth.

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/disparities/index.htm>.

2. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2021, June 9). Disparities. | Healthy People 2020. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/about/foundation-health-measures/Disp>.
3. Hasnain-Wynia R, Wolf MS. Promoting health care equity: is health literacy a missing link? Health Services Research. 2010 Aug; 45(4): 897–903. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6773.2010.01134.x. Accessed August 11, 2021.
4. Ndugga N, Artiga S. Disparities in Health and Health Care: 5 Key Questions and Answers. Kaiser Family Foundation. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/disparities-in-health-and-health-care-5-key-question-and-answers/>. Published May 11, 2021. Accessed August 11, 2021.
5. Levy H, Janke A. Health Literacy and Access to Care. Journal of Health Communication. 2016; 21(Suppl): 43–50. doi:10.1080/10810730.2015.1131776. Accessed August 11, 2021.
6. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2021, June 9). Health Literacy. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/health-literacy>

\*Proposals must focus on one or more of the following conditions: cancer, sickle cell disease (SCD), immune thrombocytopenia (ITP), heart failure, atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), psoriatic disease, chronic spontaneous urticaria (CSU), spondyloarthritis, asthma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and/or dry eye

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