

# Request for Proposals

# School-Based and School-Linked Initiatives to Improve Oral Health

## Background

At CareQuest Institute for Oral Health®, we work together to create a system that is accessible, equitable, and integrated by bringing forth ideas and solutions.

We do this through our work in grantmaking, research, health improvement programs, policy and advocacy, and education, as well as our leadership in dental benefits and innovation advancements. But we don't do it alone. Collaboration and partnership are key to achieving our mission — to improve the oral health of all.

Our grantmaking team has a history of partnering with grassroots and community-based organizations that represent and/or engage those most directly impacted by oral health inequities. These populations include racial and ethnic minorities, rural communities, and older adults. Since our Grassroots Engagement Initiative in 2015–2020, we've continued to elevate new partner voices to reshape, disrupt, and transform our oral health system. Taking what we've learned, we are seeking new voices representing historically marginalized communities to advance oral health.

## Purpose

As part of CareQuest Institute's philanthropic strategy, we are actively seeking grantmaking opportunities that strengthen communities and improve the overall system to create better oral health for all. School-based and school-linked oral health programs are designed to address access barriers for high-risk children to prevent dental decay and improve overall health and academic success. Through the School-Based and School-Linked Initiatives to Improve Oral Health Request for Proposals (RFP), CareQuest Institute is seeking to fund projects that are **engaging schools to address systemic barriers to oral health, inclusive of access, for children and their families.**

According to the National Institutes of Health's [Oral Health in America: Advances and Challenges](#) report, approximately half of all children in the United States are not receiving needed oral health care due to social, economic, and geographic barriers. Schools present an underused opportunity to open doors to children's oral health. According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), about 60 million children

### Key Dates and Deadlines

- **March 13**  
Request for Proposals Open
- **March 27, April 10, April 24**  
Click a date below to register for Office Hours with CareQuest Institute staff
  - [March 27, 3–4 pm ET](#)
  - [April 10, 10–11 am ET](#)
  - [April 22, 12–1 pm ET](#)
- **May 1**  
Deadline for Request for Proposals
- **Mid August**  
Decision Notification

### Contact

**CareQuest Institute  
Philanthropy Team**  
[grants@carequest.org](mailto:grants@carequest.org)

in the United States attend public or private school, which makes oral health education, screening, assisted referrals, and preventive services on school grounds or linked to schools excellent opportunities to expand access to care and well-being. Schools can become the center for multiple opportunities to improve the oral health and overall health of the students, increasing their chances to stay in school and achieve in life. Additionally, school-based and school-linked oral health programs have potential to improve health for children, reducing racial, ethnic, and economic disparities.

Successful school-based and school-linked oral health programs benefit from thorough planning, community collaboration, and partnerships between schools and health providers to ensure the program meets the needs of students and their families. Services may be provided in school buildings through school nurses or school-based health centers. Drop-in services, such as mobile vans operating on school grounds, may also provide oral health services. Finally, school-linked programs may provide services through community outreach opportunities.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Issue Brief [Engaging Schools to Support Better Oral Health for Low-Income Children](#), dental services at school-based oral health programs are delivered, billed, and funded in the same way they would be in a provider's office or mobile site. Programs providing such services are often situated within school-based health centers or can stand on their own to serve a student population. School-based oral health programs may provide:

- Oral health screening
- Dental sealants, often by dental hygienists or dental therapists
- Fluoride treatments
- Oral prophylaxis
- Dental treatment services
- Oral health education for students, either one-on-one in tandem with oral health care delivery, or in a group setting such as a classroom or assembly
- Education for parents, such as during back-to-school night, at other school-based events, or via email, mail, or newsletters

School-linked oral health programs are key examples of oral health-related community-clinical linkages. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), community-clinical linkages are collaborations between health care practitioners in clinical settings and programs in the community — both working to improve the health of people and the communities in which they live. Developing strong community-clinical linkages connects health care providers,

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community organizations, and public health agencies so they can collectively improve access to preventive and treatment services. Children are linked to a source of dental care where they can receive ongoing clinical services. School-linked oral health programs may include:

- Oral health screening
- Oral health counseling
- Dental sealants, often by dental hygienists or dental therapists
- Fluoride treatments
- Referrals to community-based oral health providers
- Oral health follow-up in the school setting

CareQuest Institute's philanthropic approach is centered on the belief that oral health care solutions are not as effective without the individuals and communities that have been most negatively impacted by oral health disparities driving their design, development, and implementation. That said, CareQuest Institute prioritizes proposals that reflect the applicant's authentic commitment to meaningfully and consistently engaging members of the community throughout their proposed project. This definition of engagement goes beyond treatment to nurture environments ripe for community empowerment and justice. Ultimately, compelling and aligned projects should be driven by, or at least executed in collaboration with, individuals and/or organization partners representative of rather than "on behalf of" local education agencies, including their students, staff, and families.

*What could this look like? Proposals may include but are not limited to:*

- **Workforce considerations.** Exploring effective student-facing roles (e.g., school nurses) and strategies individuals in these roles use to support the expansion of oral health prevention, messaging, and access to care for students.

- **Community Engagement.** Advocacy by community members to support policy to implement or expand school-based or school-linked oral health programs.
- **Policy solutions to improve oral health.** Local education agency, state, or national policies to support school-based or school-linked oral health programs.
- **Expansion of the capacity of Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs).** School-based oral health programs may either be operated by or partner with FQHCs to refer students and their family members, so that everyone eventually secures a dental home.
- **School-based technology and tools.** Teledentistry can enable children to receive diagnostic, preventive, and early intervention dental care at their school.
- **Alternative payment models.** A clinical organization piloting innovative clinical, workforce, and workflow solutions to inform and/or validate creative payment models that support school-based or school-linked oral health.

- Strengthens capacity and infrastructure through partnerships and collaboration
- Seeks to advance local, state, or federal policy or systems change

*Proposals will be reviewed, and grantees selected, based on the following criteria:*

- A demonstrated commitment to, or willingness to deepen, engagement of families, local education agencies, and community organizations representing families in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of organizational work
- Clear identification of the systemic barrier(s) to oral health care for children that the proposed work will address (organization-wide systems, local systems/policy, state-based systems/policy, national systems/federal policy)
- Clarity and practicality of the proposed activities, including intended/anticipated outcomes and impact on children and families, as well as the broader oral health system
- Experience in effective data collection and analysis as well as project reporting/communications
- Willingness to seek and engage other funders in supporting and/or sustaining this work
- Willingness to partner with existing networks (such as the Oral Health Progress and Equity Network, other CareQuest Institute grantees, etc.) to spread project learnings, opportunities for engagement, and thought leadership to strengthen school-based or school-linked oral health across the broader oral health field

## Eligibility

Applicants must be based and operating in the United States or its territories and may be either a public entity or nonprofit organization that is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code.

## Selection Criteria

The School-Based and School-Linked Initiatives to Improve Oral Health Request for Proposals seeks to fund creative, innovative projects that drive systemic change in oral health that promote school-based or school-linked oral health programs. The parameters for selection of proposals are intentionally broad, recognizing that innovative work aligned with this strategy may employ a variety of tactics and partnerships, and that systemic barriers may vary depending on geographic region of focus. Still, organizations with proposals that are aligned with CareQuest Institute’s philanthropic and strategic approaches, as mentioned above, will be prioritized.

*CareQuest Institute’s Philanthropy Team prioritizes work that:*

- Demonstrates the use of a health and racial equity approach
- Intentionally engages communities in the design and implementation of the work, with a particular focus on historically marginalized populations

## Use of Grant Funds

Grant funds may be used for project staff salaries; subgrants to project partners/community organizations that clearly align with the mission, goals, and budget of the proposal; consultant fees; data collection and analysis; meetings; supplies; activities related to fundraising and development; project-related travel; and other direct project expenses.

Grant funds, including subgrants, **may not** be used for direct services (e.g., restorations, screenings, dental supplies, lost revenue, etc.), capital expenditures, lobbying, endowments, or scholarships, or as a substitute for funds currently being used to support similar activities.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Is there a dedicated grant amount for proposed projects?

CareQuest Institute will fund 10 projects at \$125,000 each through the School-Based and School-Linked Initiatives to Improve Oral Health Request for Proposals.

## How long is the funding period for grants through this RFP?

At this time, CareQuest Institute can provide one year of funding to accepted applicants. Following satisfactory completion of this one-year grant period, organizations funded through this RFP may apply for future CareQuest Institute grant opportunities.

## Are organizations that have not previously received funding from CareQuest Institute eligible to apply?

Yes. CareQuest Institute welcomes new prospective partners to apply through this RFP.

## Are organizations that have previously received grant funding from CareQuest Institute eligible to apply?

Yes. CareQuest Institute is interested in deepening relationships with existing partners through this RFP.

## Are organizations that are in an active grant period with CareQuest Institute eligible to apply?

Organizations may not have two concurrent grants from CareQuest Institute. However, existing grantees may apply through funding within this RFP if the intended grant “start date” is equal to or following the “end date” of the current grant from CareQuest Institute.

## Is there a geographic focus or scope for this RFP?

CareQuest Institute is open to applications focused on national, state, and local contexts. However, there is particular interest in projects serving geographic areas and/or specific demographic populations that have been historically underserved.

## How does CareQuest Institute define a “school-based” and “school-linked” oral health program as it relates to this RFP?

For this RFP, a school-based oral health program is an oral health program conducted entirely on-site at a school, while a school-linked oral health program is an oral health program conducted both on-site at a school and in a community setting. If you are unsure about the eligibility of your project due to concerns about where proposed services are offered, please [contact grants@carequest.org](mailto:grants@carequest.org).

## How does CareQuest Institute define community engagement as it relates to this RFP?

CareQuest Institute, in partnership with Community Science, has developed a robust measurement framework for community engagement within oral health systems-change work. The [Continuum of Community Engagement](#) provides detailed examples of community engagement on a progressive scale. CareQuest Institute’s intent is to encourage progression along the continuum within funded projects and within the field of oral health overall.

## What support beyond funding is provided by CareQuest Institute?

Organizations funded within this initiative will have access to, and ongoing communication with, a network of community-driven partners doing similar work through a facilitated learning community. These partners will also have opportunities to collaborate on earned-media strategies and promotion of work via CareQuest Institute dissemination channels, including newsletters and social media. CareQuest Institute’s philanthropy staff will provide technical assistance to build organizational and project capacity. Lastly, partners will have opportunities to learn from CareQuest Institute and other subject-matter experts around topics such as evaluation, communication, and sustainability.

## Who can I contact with further questions?

For questions not answered above, please send your inquiries to the Philanthropy team at CareQuest Institute: [grants@carequest.org](mailto:grants@carequest.org). Please reference this RFP in your subject line. A team member will contact you with additional assistance.

*Please contact CareQuest Institute at [grants@carequest.org](mailto:grants@carequest.org) or 857-295-0203 if you require accessibility accommodations related to applying through this RFP. This may include:*

- Alternative methods of proposal submission
- Alternative methods of communication with the CareQuest Institute Grants Team
- Other



[Take the eligibility quiz](#)  
[Start your application](#)