



Request for Proposal County Public Benefit Innovation Cohort

Proposals are due by midnight MST, Friday, February 28th, 2025.

Background

Gary Community Ventures (Gary) is a social change organization that uses philanthropy, policy, start-up ventures, and mission-driven investment to reshape the arc of opportunity for Colorado families. Building on the momentum of recent policy and product breakthroughs, this Request for Proposals (RFP) continues Gary's commitment to improve family access to public benefits in Colorado.

The County Public Benefits Innovation Cohort is an opportunity for Colorado county human service departments to test innovative, breakthrough strategies that increase the number of families able to successfully utilize public benefits in their communities.

Today, more than \$500M in public benefits go unclaimed in Colorado each year. These are taxpayer dollars, allocated by policymakers, that never reach the families who need them most. National research further suggests that only about two-thirds of those eligible for major benefit programs participate, (HHS 2008; Leftin 2010; GAO 2005), which if improved, could dramatically reduce poverty for those facing the greatest barriers to economic stability.

So why is so much money left on the table? This is the question Gary, in partnership with county agencies, seeks to better understand. Building on the work of prior initiatives, Gary invites counties committed to improving family benefit utilization to join a cohort of aligned peers, each setting individual goals, in a combined effort to unlock millions in stranded resources.

Request for Proposal

The overarching goal of the County Public Benefits Innovation Cohort is to maximize utilization of public benefits programs among Colorado families with children. Acknowledging that federal, state, and local assistance programs offer an array of supports spanning nutrition assistance, subsidies and vouchers for housing or child care, cash for general living expenses, health care and prescription drug access, etc., Gary is looking to counties to determine which benefit program(s) have greatest potential for utilization improvement and therefore, hold the greatest promise of improving financial stability and quality of life.

Ideally, county human services departments will design and test innovative strategies to measurably increase benefits utilization over a 24-month period that could be scalable, driving policy and practice recommendations that change the lives of thousands of deserving families struggling to make it in Colorado.

What Gary is looking for in applications

County applicants should demonstrate an interest in better understanding key access and use challenges related to a particular public benefit (or set of benefits), and suggest early ideas to improve utilization among families, whether those families are new to the benefit or already participating.

An ideal application will demonstrate how the county intends to:

- ☐ Identify pain points and learn about the challenges residents experience when trying to access and use benefits,
- ☐ Involve frontline staff and user insights in co-designing and testing responsive strategies, and
- ☐ Articulate what success looks like for the participating county in the short- and long-term, including anticipated increases in benefits utilization rates.

What Gary encourages & discourages in applications

Encourages	Discourages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plans to assess current benefits utilization rates and dig deeper into challenges to better understand unclaimed balances and barriers to access ● Plans to engage benefits recipients and community organizations to gather insights on the customer experience and identify improvements ● Early ideas on potential solutions to the challenges your county is experiencing related to benefits utilization rates (<i>Note: (At this stage in the application process we do not expect fully formed solutions. Successful applicants will receive time and resources to develop and test solutions.)</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Little or no engagement of frontline staff or benefit-eligible community members ● Plans that require significant financial investments beyond this grant ● Plans to use this funding for full-time equivalent positions, computers, or cars ● Hyper-customized solutions that other communities are unlikely to find relevant ● Plans that require significant policy changes before county could begin the proposed project (<i>Note: Gary does, however, expect projects to inform future policy changes and directions.</i>)

Grant Awards:

Gary anticipates awarding (4) selected county applicants \$100,000 each, disbursed over a 24-month term (\$50K /yr for 2 years). Applicant budgets should be commensurate with the scope of work proposed and should not exceed the amount noted above. Please note that these are one-time grant funds.

Services/Support from Gary to Grant Recipients:

Project teams will have access to a cohort of fellow county innovators. Mathematica - the initiative’s learning and strategy partner - will facilitate community sessions with all four counties on a regular basis

for teams to share progress on designing, piloting, and learning from their projects. Mathematica will also facilitate individualized monthly coaching sessions with county teams. Mathematica coaches will use these sessions to facilitate and encourage counties' progress on individual goals and plans and use the *Learn, Innovate, Improve* process to help strategically guide counties' efforts.

Through participation in the innovation cohort, county teams will:

- **Assess key drivers of public benefits use.** Counties will work to deeply understand the factors that help and hinder local benefits utilization, use data analysis to further examine county-specific challenges, and who these challenges most affect.
- **Co-create human-centered strategies to improve benefits access and use.** County teams will work through a process of fully developing their proposed strategies and rapid-cycle implementation.
- **Pilot, refine, and scale.** County teams will engage in an iterative testing approach, beginning with small-scale pilots that lay the foundation for downstream measurement of short- and long-term outcomes. For example, counties might work with 10 families to get feedback on their strategy before scaling up. Gary's goal is to equip and empower teams to use data to generate new insights and make informed decisions.

There will be three in-person convenings to facilitate peer connection, learning, and innovation at the beginning, middle, and end of the grant period.

Expectations of Grant Recipients:

Applicants that receive this grant will be expected to fully participate in the learning cohort and iterative testing approach described above.

Application Components:

The proposed work/project should include the following components, to be submitted [at this application link](#). While there are no word limits, we value clarity and brevity, and encourage total submittals (excluding attachments & budgets) no longer than 6-7 pages.

All innovation proposals should focus on *at least* one benefit program that counties intend to focus on for purposes of increasing enrollment and utilization among eligible families. Benefits programs might include: TANF, SNAP, SNAP E&T, Medicaid, CHP+, WIC, LEAP, EITC, CTC, FATC, housing assistance programs, and child care assistance programs, among others.

Grant narrative questions:

1. **Program of interest & target population:**
 - a. Describe which benefit program(s) you intend to focus on for purposes of measurably increasing access and utilization, and describe the population (demographics and population size) most impacted.

- b. Does the proposed project improve utilization among new families, already participating families, or both?
2. **Motivation & Need** Explain the challenges and barriers your county is currently experiencing with respect to the benefits program(s) you've selected.
 - a. Why is this program focus important to your organization, project team, and community?
 - b. What work has already been done to understand key challenges? Who was involved and how did their perspective inform the process?
 - c. What data / analysis / key metrics do you have suggesting the benefit program you've selected could be better utilized, and that it would have significant impact on families in your county?
3. **Proposed approach:** Describe your project.
 - a. Given the benefit program identified, what is/are the pain point(s) you wish to address?
 - b. What is your proposed approach to digging deeper into the problem? Whose insight and perspective need to be included? (*We encourage inclusion of frontline staff and insights from eligible families.*)
 - c. What questions are most important to you as you investigate possible solutions?
(*Example questions: At which point in the application process do we lose the most customers and what strategies could improve uptake? What work-arounds have front line workers implemented that could be streamlined? Are there silos in our teams administering related benefit programs that if addressed could unlock efficiencies?*)
 - d. What early ideas would you like to test to increase access and utilization? (*Remember: we do not expect fully formed solutions.*)
4. **Organizational capacity:**
 - a. What is your organization's current capacity to focus on this project? How might you create additional capacity, if necessary?
 - b. Are there key partners (external to your agency) you propose to include in this project to augment capacity and / or bring expertise, perspective, etc.? Have you partnered before, and how is this work important to them?
 - c. What are the anticipated barriers and challenges to engaging in this project?
 - d. Beyond funding, what else do you need to be successful?
5. **Success:** Describe how you will know if your project is successful.
 - a. How will you accurately measure improved benefit utilization during and after the 24-month project?
 - b. In addition to increased utilization, what other indicators / measures of success are important to you during and after the 24 month project?
 - c. Are there ways in which a successful innovation would bring internal value to you as a county benefits administrator, such as alleviation of staff workload / burnout, improved processing time/ efficiency, stronger performance on state / federal reporting requirements, etc?
6. **Strategic Alignment & Champions:**
 - a. How does this project relate to other strategic priorities currently underway in your county or community?

- b. How do you plan to make this project visible to county leadership?
- c. How do you plan to build internal and external champions for this work?

7. Leadership & Equity:

- a. Who are the primary staff that will lead this effort? Why? Pls provide brief bios of key organizational leaders as well as those with a primary role in this project. (*Note: We encourage having a frontline staff person in a leadership role on this project.*)
- b. What is the racial and gender identity of the ED?
- c. How many members of your leadership team do you have and what percent identify as BIPOC?
- d. Please include a short narrative to help us understand your organization's journey to advance DEI internally (e.g., through organizational practices, policies, hiring practices, staffing, board representation, etc.).
- e. How does your organization's racial equity work inform your external facing programs or services?

8. Financials:

- a. Project budget
- b. Current year operating budget

RFP Process:

Applications are due by midnight mountain time, Friday, February 28th, 2025 [at this application link](#). Finalists will be notified no later than March 14th and may be asked for an interview or additional information the week of March 17th. All applicants will be notified of final decisions by April 2, 2025. An optional post proposal webinar will be provided where we will share learnings and feedback from the RFP process.

RFP Application & Timeline

KEY DATES	ACTIVITY
1/23/2025	RFP released
1/28/2025	Webinar (optional): 12-1 MST; Registration link here
2/3/2025 – 2/14/2025	Ongoing optional office hours available: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office Hr #1: Feb 6th, 2-3pm MST, Log In Here • Office Hr #2: Feb 7th, 10-11am MST, Log In Here • Office Hr #3: Feb 13th, 2-3 MST, Log In Here • Office Hr #4: Feb 14th, 10-11am MST, Log In Here
2/28/2025	RFPs are due to this link by midnight on Friday, Feb 28, 2025
3/10/2025-3/14/2025	Finalist Interviews

4/11/2025	Grants announced (anticipated)
Week of 4/28/2025 or 5/5/2025	In-person kickoff (estimated date)

RFP Contact:

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About Gary:

Gary Community Ventures is committed to reshaping the arc of opportunity for Colorado kids and families. We believe that business, policy and philanthropy can—and—should work together to solve the toughest problems facing our community. Gary uses its resources to make impact investments, fund policy change, provide philanthropic grants, and incubate social change solutions through its venture studio, all for the purpose of breaking down systemic barriers and improving life outcomes for generations of Coloradans. Lead Gary teammates on this project include:

- [Steff Clothier](#), Director, School Readiness
- [Jill Hawley](#), Chief Impact Officer
- [Elise Henson](#), Executive Director, MyFriendBen
- [Brian Hiatt](#), VP, Technology
- [Julie Stone](#), Director, Family Economic Mobility

About Mathematica:

[Mathematica](#) is an innovative, nonpartisan research and consulting firm driven by a mission to improve public well-being. For decades, Mathematica has excelled at designing and executing projects that are partnership-based and human-centered, data-driven, and iterative.

Mathematica’s approach to partnering with selected counties will be collaborative, person-centered, evidence-driven, adaptive, and flexible. Through in-person convenings, regular individualized coaching, and virtual peer learning opportunities, Mathematica will create an environment that supports counties in achieving their goals. Lead Mathematica teammates on this project include:

- [Mark Ezzo](#), Managing Consultant / Coach
- [Ella Gifford-Hawkins](#), Managing Consultant / Coach
- [Jonathan McCay](#), Senior Advisor
- [Josh Stewart](#), Learning and Measurement Lead