



The Mission Sustainability Initiative (MSI) at Forefront is dedicated to helping nonprofits thrive by providing the resources for leaders to regularly and thoughtfully explore collaboration and partnership strategies. Grantmaking is one strategy leveraged to achieve the MSI's intended impact: *Nonprofit leaders in Illinois leveraging sustained collaboration to build robust business models, expand their organizations' impact, and preserve valuable programs that might otherwise be lost.* These grants are made possible by a collective of funders that support collaboration and provide guidance and oversight to the MSI.

The first step in exploring an MSI grant is a conversation with the MSI Director, who will confirm eligibility and fit with the MSI funding priorities and provide guidance and connections to other helpful resources.

Grant Amount & Use

- Standard MSI grants are made in the amount of \$5,000.
- In addition to grant funds, grantees receive a one-year complementary Forefront membership, an introduction to a nonprofit leader with partnership experience through Forefront's Peer Skill Share program, and ongoing access to confidential conversations and guidance from the MSI Director.
- Grants are flexible in nature, and funds may be used for any purpose that advances the exploration of strategic partnership development.
- Grants are available for Pre-Exploratory and Exploratory MSI Project Types (see Project Type descriptions below).

Eligibility

- The partners must be exploring a long-term/sustained administrative collaboration designed to build a more resilient business model and strengthen the applicants' effectiveness in fulfilling their missions.
- The primary applicant (and the resulting organization in the case of a merger or acquisition) must be an Illinois-based 501c3 nonprofit organization or be an Illinois-based organization that is fiscally sponsored by a 501c3 nonprofit organization. The partnering organization may be based elsewhere. For the Fall 2024 grant cycle, the primary applicant (and the resulting organization in the case of a merger or acquisition) must be based in one of the following counties: Cook, Lake, DuPage, Kane, Kendall.
- The partnering organizations must be aligned on the overarching goals of the partnership and must have board approval to explore or implement the partnership.
- The partnership project must have a goal and/or learning objective (or set of goals and/or learning objectives) that is appropriate for the project type for which funding is being requested and aligned with the overarching goals of the partnership.
- The project must be aligned with Forefront's values of diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice.
- The partners must have participated in at least one joint consultation with the MSI Director.
- The MSI will not fund short-term partnerships or program-only collaborations that do not involve a fundamental shift in the partners' business models.
- The MSI will not provide funds for ongoing programmatic, operational, or capital costs.
- Partnerships may receive multiple MSI Grants over time, but a partnership will only be considered for one MSI Grant per cycle. Multiple partnering organizations may not simultaneously apply for funds for the same partnership exploration project.

Priorities

- Priority is given to the following applicants:
 - Organizations with budgets of \$10 million or less
 - Organizations engaged in their first strategic partnership development process, or the first process under their current leadership
- Priority is given to the following partnership projects:
 - Projects where the grant will play a catalytic role in the exploration or design of a strategic partnership
 - Projects that display a high degree of innovation or creativity in their approach to collaboration and business model development
 - Projects that aim to advance racial equity

Application Process

The first step in any application is scheduling a meeting with the MSI Director, who will help to confirm eligibility and fit with the MSI funding priorities and provide guidance and connections to other helpful resources. In the case of exploratory projects, which involve more than one organization, at least one meeting with the MSI Director should include a representative from all partnering organizations.

An MSI Grant application may be submitted online or in conversation with the MSI Director. A sample of the online grant application is provided at the end of this document. Applications submitted by conversation will cover the same questions as those included in the online application. Applicants are encouraged to select whichever application method is easiest for them.

- To complete an online application, visit:
<https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=forefrontgrants>
Contact the MSI Director for more detailed instructions.
- To complete a conversation application, visit <https://calendly.com/msikate/msi-application>

Reporting & Learning

- At the conclusion of each funded partnership project, organizations are asked to report on how MSI funds were used to advance their goals, recognizing that MSI funds will likely be combined with other funding sources to cover a portion of the project costs.
- Organizations are asked to share the outcome of their partnership project, provide an update on the status of their partnership development process and goals, and share feedback or insight about the process.
- Grant reports may be submitted online or in conversation with the MSI Director.

MSI Project Types

- **Pre-Exploratory projects** are opportunities for single organizations to explore their partnership goals and readiness.
 - Cost drivers for pre-exploratory projects typically include assessments and meeting facilitation.
 - A possible outcome of a pre-exploratory project is a Letter of Intent to begin an exploratory process.

- The core goal for pre-exploratory projects is the articulation of an organization's priorities and capacity for strategic partnership, which may or may not include specific plans for developing a partnership in the near future.
- **Exploratory projects** are opportunities for two or more organizations to develop a strategic partnership strategy, build trust between organizations, conduct due diligence, determine mission/vision values alignment, negotiate a Partnership Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding, and build a plan for partnership implementation.
 - Cost drivers for exploratory projects typically include strategic partnership consulting, accounting, and legal support (if not available pro bono), and meeting facilitation. Exploratory projects generally require a significant time investment from organizational leadership and board members.
 - A possible outcome of an exploratory project is a Memorandum of Understanding or Partnership Agreement.
 - The core goal for exploratory projects is all partners gaining sufficient understanding and knowledge to move forward in the way that best serves the goals of the organization, which may or may not involve the specific partnership under consideration.
- **Implementation projects** are opportunities to build the infrastructure that a partnership needs to thrive. The nature of this infrastructure will vary significantly based on the type of partnership.
 - Cost drivers for implementation projects typically include accounting, HR, IT, and other integration specialties, cultural and other integration consulting, brand development, and other costs associated with implementing specific partnership types. Exploratory projects generally require significant staff and leadership time.
 - A successful outcome of an implementation project is the completion of the partnership implementation plan as developed during the exploratory phase.
 - The core goal for implementation projects is the development of the foundation needed for a sustained and unified partnership.
 - *During FY25, Implementation projects will not be eligible for MSI grants. Organizations engaging in implementation projects should contact the MSI Director to discuss additional resources.*

Mission Sustainability Initiative Grant Application: SAMPLE

Partnering Organizations

The Mission Sustainability Initiative (MSI) at Forefront is dedicated to helping nonprofits thrive by providing the resources for leaders to regularly and thoughtfully explore collaboration and partnership strategies.

MSI Grants ARE available in the amount of \$5,000.

In addition to grant funds, grantees receive a one-year complementary Forefront membership, an introduction to a nonprofit leader with partnership experience through Forefront's Peer Skill Share program, and ongoing access to confidential conversations and guidance from the MSI Director.

MSI Grant applications may be submitted using this form or in conversation with the MSI Director. To schedule an application conversation, please visit: <https://calendly.com/msikate/msi-application>
For any questions related to MSI or this application, please email msi@myforefront.org

Type of Mission Sustainability Initiative grant for which you are applying*

The MSI looks at partnership development in three phases: Pre-Exploratory, Exploratory, and Implementation.

- Pre-Exploratory projects are opportunities for single organizations to explore their partnership goals and readiness.
- Exploratory projects are opportunities for two or more organizations to develop a strategic partnership strategy, build trust between organizations, conduct due diligence, determine mission/vision values alignment, and build a plan for partnership implementation.
- Implementation projects are opportunities to build the infrastructure that a partnership needs to thrive. The nature of this infrastructure will vary significantly based on the type of partnership.

MSI Grant funds are currently only available for Pre-Exploratory and Exploratory projects. For guidance on funding implementation projects, please contact the MSI Director.

Please select the project type for which you are applying for funding.

Choices

Pre-Exploratory

Exploratory

Project Name*

Please provide a project name that briefly describes the nature of your partnership work.

Examples:

- Bright Futures Partnership Assessment
- Family Center Inc / Youth Services Inc Merger

Character Limit: 250

Organization and Contact Information

Please provide the following information about each partnering organization. Any columns that are not relevant to your application may be left blank.

Pre-exploratory projects: Only one organization is required.

Exploratory projects: At least two partnering organizations should be listed here. The organization listed as Partner #1 should be the organization that will receive any grant funds awarded.

If you have any questions about how to complete this section, please don't hesitate to ask! Contact us at msi@myforefront.org.

Partners	Applying Organization / Partner #1	Partner #2	Partner #3	Partner #4
Organization Name				
Primary Address				
CEO / Executive Director Name				
Primary Contact Person for this Application				

Primary Contact Person's Title				
Primary Contact Person's Email Address				
Current Fiscal Year Projected Revenue				
Current Fiscal Year Projected Expenses				
Mission Statement				
Full-Time Staff				
Part-Time Staff				
Board Members				

Additional Partners (Optional)

If your project includes more than four partners, please provide information about those organizations here.

If the mission statement of any partnering organization is longer than 250 characters and will not fit in the space above, you may include it here.

Character Limit: 2500

Financial Information (Optional)

No financial attachments are required for this application. The MSI may review the organization(s)' Candid/Guidestar profiles and publicly available 990s and may contact you with any questions. If there is any financial information you would like to provide (if one or more of the partners is fiscally sponsored, for example), you're welcome to do so here.

Character Limit: 1000

Service Area*

MSI Grants are available to organizations that serve the following Illinois counties. Please select all of the counties below that one or more of the partnering organizations serve.

Choices

Cook
DuPage
Kane
Kendall
Lake

Board Engagement*

For *each partnering organization*, please list any actions the Board of Directors has taken in support of the proposed strategic partnership exploration.

Actions may include discussing the partnership, forming a partnership committee, passing a resolution in support of the exploration process, determining that the partnership aligns with the organization's current strategic plan, and/or another indication that the board is a willing and engaged part of developing this partnership.

This information is important because research has shown that significant board engagement plays a key role in developing successful partnerships.

Character Limit: 500

Additional Organization Information*

Sharing demographic and other information about your organization helps Forefront to more fully understand the reach and impact of the Mission Sustainability Initiative. We ask each partnering organization to provide as much information as they feel comfortable sharing in the following survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3TKXXKQ>

The information collected in this survey will not be factored into MSI funding decisions but will help us to evaluate our overall outreach and grantmaking strategy.

Please affirm that each organization has submitted this survey.

Choices

All partnering organizations have responded to the MSI Impact Survey

Proposed Strategic Partnership - Pre-Exploratory

Partnership Exploration Goals*

Briefly describe the partnership you're considering your goal(s) for this exploration. What do you hope to learn? At the pre-exploratory phase, these goals may still in flux, and you may not yet know what you don't know. The following questions are provided to help you shape your response, but you're not required to answer any of them.

- *What format might your partnership take? (i.e. co-location, merger, shared staff, etc.)*
- *What prompted your organization to consider a strategic partnership at this time?*
- *How much progress, if any, has your organization already made in exploring this partnership?*
- *What essential questions must be answered or obstacles must be overcome before your organization can make the decision to move forward with a formal collaboration?*
- *What help or resources do you need to support your partnership exploration?*

Character Limit: 2500

Pre-Exploratory Costs (Optional)

Briefly describe or list the costs you expect to incur during your pre-exploratory work. This may include staff time, consulting fees, or other expenses.

This question is optional, and you may provide as much or little information as is helpful to give the MSI a sense of the scope of your project.

Character Limit: 1000

Proposed Strategic Partnership - Exploratory

Proposed Strategic Partnership Description*

Briefly describe the partnership you're considering your goal(s) for this exploration. What do you hope to learn? These goals may still in flux, and you may not yet know what you don't know. The following questions are provided to help you shape your response, but you're not required to answer any of them.

- *What format might your partnership take? (i.e. co-location, merger, shared staff, etc.)*
- *What prompted your organizations to consider this strategic partnership at this time?*
- *What do you hope will be different if this partnership comes to fruition?*
- *What is the expected impact of the partnership on the clients and communities served by your organizations?*
- *How much progress, if any, have you already made in exploring this partnership?*

- *What essential questions must be answered or obstacles must be overcome before your organizations can make the decision to move forward with a formal collaboration?*
- *What help or resources do you need to support your partnership exploration?*

Character Limit: 2500

Partnership Exploration Costs (Optional)

Briefly describe or list the costs you expect to incur during your partnership exploration. This may include staff time, consulting and legal fees, or other expenses. If relevant, you may also provide information about other sources of funding that you have secured to support this work.

This question is optional, and you may provide as much or little information as is helpful to give the MSI a sense of the scope of your project.

Character Limit: 2000

Optional Information & Attachments

Optional Information

The demand for MSI Grants often surpasses available funding, and the following priorities will guide the MSI's grantmaking decisions. If you would like to provide any information about your organization or partnership exploration project in the context of these priorities, you're welcome to do so here. If this information has been covered elsewhere in the application, you don't need to repeat it here.

- Priority will be given to the following applicants:
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Character Limit: 1000

No attachments are required for this application.

Should you choose to do so, you may provide any of the following if they might be helpful in explaining the scope and nature of your partnership plans and/or exploratory work. You do not need to develop any of these materials for the sake of this application, but if you already have

them available, you're welcome to share them.

- Partnership Exploration project budget
- Proposal(s) from consultant(s) or advisor(s) who will support your partnership exploration
- Board resolutions or strategic plans describing your intended partnership exploration
- Any other documentation you have created that describes your partnership exploration plans

Optional Attachment 1

File Size Limit: 2 MB

Optional Attachment 2

File Size Limit: 2 MB

Optional Attachment 3

File Size Limit: 2 MB