



Microsoft Catalyst Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Revised 11/4/2022

These are frequently asked questions related to the Catalyst Grant Program Request for Proposals (RFP). They will be periodically updated. To access the RFP and learn more about the Catalyst Grant Program, see the website at <https://catalystapplications.urban.org> or email catalystapplications@urban.org.

*Questions added or revised 11-4-2022

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Organizational Eligibility

If you have a question about your specific circumstances, please email catalystapplications@urban.org.

Q: My organization is currently in the process of applying for 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. Am I eligible to apply?

A: No, only organizations that already have been granted 501(c)(3) status by the IRS are eligible to apply. You are eligible to be a partner organization to another group that has 501(c)(3) status.

Q: We do not have 501(c)(3) status, but we have a fiscal agent that does. Are we eligible to apply?

A: No, organizations must have their own 501(c)(3) status. Organizations that have nonprofit fiscal agents and do not have their own 501(c)(3) status are not eligible as lead applicants, but they can be partner organizations to qualified lead applicants. Lead applicants must play a substantial role in proposed projects.

Q: My organization works with youth *and* young adults ages 18 and older. Am I eligible to apply?

A: Yes, as long as your proposed project pertains only to adults (people ages 18 and older), you are eligible to apply. We will not consider proposals focused on people younger than 18.

***Q: What do you mean by “locally embedded”?**

A: We are deliberately seeking out projects and proposals by people who best know their communities and their needs. This often describes community-based organizations, although a larger state or national nonprofit would be eligible if it has strong ties in the local community. We will be looking for an organization, and its partners if relevant, to have demonstrated and meaningful ties to the community of focus.

Q: Are organizations that work statewide eligible to apply?

A: Yes, a statewide organization can apply as a lead organization, provided the proposed project activities occur in one or more local areas and not at the state level.

Q: Is an organization that is receiving or has received funding from the Microsoft Justice Reform Initiative (JRI) eligible to apply as a lead organization to the 2023 Catalyst Grant Program?

A: Organizations currently receiving funding from the JRI outside of the Catalyst Grant Program are not eligible to apply as lead organizations, but past JRI grantees are eligible. More specifically:

- An organization whose JRI-funded project will be ongoing as of January 2, 2023, is not eligible to apply to the RFP.
- An organization whose JRI-funded project will be completed by January 2, 2023, and which meets all the other organizational eligibility criteria in the RFP is eligible to apply.

JRI grantees can confirm their project end dates with Pablo Castro (Castro.Pablo@microsoft.com).

If your JRI funding is through the Catalyst Grant Program, see the next question.

Any organization with current or past funding from Microsoft JRI can be a partner organization in a 2023 Catalyst Grant Program application, provided it meets the eligibility criteria for partner organizations.

Q: Is an organization that received a 2021 or 2022 Catalyst Grant Program grant as a lead organization eligible to apply for a 2023 grant as a lead organization?

A: The 2021 Catalyst grantees are eligible to apply as lead organizations, but 2022 grantees are not. All past and current Catalyst grantees can be partner organizations.

Q. Are programs at colleges and universities eligible to participate in the Catalyst Grant Program?

A: Colleges and universities can be partner organizations, and receive funding, but they cannot be lead organizations.

Partners

Q: Can I partner with another organization to submit an application?

A: Yes, we welcome partnerships for this program but ask that you only submit one joint application. Colleges and universities (private or public) are ineligible to apply as leads but can partner with an applicant that is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. All applications must request \$40,000 or less in funds, whether they are partnering with another organization or not.

Q: What activities that will be done by a partner individual or organization are considered “critical” and require a letter of support from the partner?

A: An activity is considered critical if the proposed deliverables could not go forward without that activity being completed. For example, if one of the activities is to use technology to collect, organize, or share data and requires analytic or technical expertise to do so, that activity would be considered critical and thus require a letter of support. Or, if a project involves a partnership with a government agency to provide services, that agency’s commitment would be considered critical and thus require a letter of support.

Q: What activities that will be done by a partner individual or organization would not require a letter of support from the partner?

A: A letter of support is not required if you are partnering with other organizations (e.g., government entities, churches, community-based organizations) on activities like sharing and disseminating information to various audiences. We also would not require letters of support from individuals or organizations that will be participants in engagement sessions or audiences for products, such as impacted people/families, town hall groups, affinity groups, or local grassroots organizers.

Q. Can an organization partner on more than one application?

A: Yes, any organization can partner with multiple lead applicants on different applications.

Q: Is an organization that is receiving or has received funding from the 2021 or 2022 Catalyst Grant Programs or other sources in the Microsoft Justice Reform Initiative eligible to participate as a partner organization in the 2023 Catalyst Grant Program?

An organization that has received current or past funding from the Catalyst Grant Program or other sources in the Microsoft Justice Reform Initiative can serve as a partner organization in a 2023 Catalyst Grant Program application, provided it meets the other eligibility criteria for partner organizations.

Q: Do we need to submit two letters if we have two partner organizations?

A: If you have multiple partner organizations (and/or partner individuals), they can provide separate letters or they can provide one letter together with multiple signatures. Either way, the letters should outline the organizations' (and/or individuals') roles.

Q: We are interviewing vendors to perform a service in our project but won't have one selected by the proposal deadline. Can we still apply?

A: Yes. Letters of support are only required from partners if they are going to complete activities critical to the project—that is, if their participation is needed for proposed deliverables to go forward.

Assuming the vendor will provide critical services, the application will be strongest if that vendor is identified. But if you won't know who that will be by the time you submit your application, you can just fill out your own information in the partner contact information section and enter "vendor selection in progress" for the partner organization's name. At the point in the application

where you are asked to upload a letter of support, please upload a document describing the interview process, listing the potential vendors, and giving a date you expect the vendor will be chosen.

Project Content and Topic Eligibility

If you have a question about your specific circumstances, please email catalystapplications@urban.org.

Q: To what extent does my proposal need to incorporate data and technology?

A: Your project must substantially incorporate data and/or technology, meaning data and/or technology must be a core part of your project. Examples include data acquisition, analysis, visualization and design, and technology development and implementation. Please refer to the example projects in the RFP's Project Requirements section. That list of examples is not conclusive or exhaustive and is meant to generate ideas. You can also read about the projects supported in previous rounds of the Catalyst Grant Program at <https://www.urban.org/projects/catalyst-grant-program>.

Q: What “prevention” activities are within the scope of this program?

A: The Catalyst Grant Program seeks project proposals that advance the focus areas of the Microsoft Justice Reform Initiative, which include supporting policies, programs, and practices that **prevent** unnecessary system involvement and decrease racial and ethnic disparities in **policing** and **prosecution**.

Prevention can include programs and activities that prevent law enforcement contact, divert people from incarceration, interrupt violence in communities, and enable alternative responders. Examples of potential projects might include informing programs with existing and new data to interrupt the cycles of gun-related violence in a local area, developing technology systems to help internal management and tracking of diversion program outcomes, or addressing the intersection of mental health and contact with the criminal legal system, such as by reducing unnecessary contact and criminalization of people experiencing mental health crises.

For this grant program, prevention must be grounded in the criminal legal system or use models shown to directly prevent criminal legal system contact or reduce violence in communities. We will not consider projects focused on areas outside of the criminal legal system, such as

employment, youth development, education, or health care, that indirectly make communities more equitable and safer, although we recognize their value to communities.

Q: Are projects that work with people who have been incarcerated within the scope of this program?

A: Yes, in certain circumstances. Projects focused on prevention, policing, and prosecution that include people with previous criminal legal system contact, including incarceration, are eligible. Projects focused on supporting reentry, reducing recidivism, and associated activities are not eligible. For instance, a project on housing placement and reducing homelessness specifically for people returning from incarceration (i.e., reentry) is not in scope, but a project on reducing law enforcement contact for people experiencing homelessness (which might include, but is not limited to, people who were formerly incarcerated) generally would be eligible.

Q: Are projects that work with people who are currently incarcerated in jail or prison within the scope of this program?

A: No, generally any projects that involve people who are currently incarcerated would not be in scope.

***Q. Are projects related to people who are incarcerated prior to sentencing eligible?**

A: Yes, a project related to policies, practices, and programs that affect people's situations after arrest but before sentencing would be eligible under the Prosecution topic of the Catalyst Program.

Q: Are projects that work with youth *and* young adults 18 and older eligible?

A: We will not consider proposals focused on people younger than 18, but project activities that focus on preventing unnecessary criminal legal system involvement and reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the adult criminal legal system will be considered even if some people younger than 18 are included in the project.

Q: We are interested in doing a project for our region. Does that count as local?

A: Yes, a project that has a focus area that is a region, metropolitan area, or contiguous counties qualifies as local.

Q: Are projects proposing qualitative data analysis acceptable?

A: Projects can include qualitative data as long as the data collection is structured so that the data can be analyzed and the project involves using technology to collect, analyze, visualize, or share the qualitative data. Please also review appendix C of the RFP (Expectations for Equitable and Ethical Data Use).

Q: What do you mean by “locally embedded”?

A: We are deliberately seeking out projects and proposals by and for people who best know their communities and their needs. We will be looking for an organization to have demonstrated and meaningful ties to its local community. (See also the question below on “connections and trust with the community of focus.”)

***Q. Are projects covering multiple neighborhoods or cities allowed?**

A. Yes, projects covering multiple locations are allowed. The lead applicant (and partner organization if relevant) would need to demonstrate that they have strong connections and trust with the communities of focus. As noted in an earlier question, proposed project activities should occur in one or more local areas and not broadly or at a state level. Also, the application would also need to show that the proposed project is feasible given the funding and length of grant.

***Q. Can the funding be used to support an existing project? Or do the activities have to be new?**

A. The proposed project does not need to include new activities. Applicants may propose projects that continue or expand existing activities, as long as other eligibility criteria (e.g., around topic and use of data and technology) are met.

Program Timing

Q: When will the grant period begin for selected proposals? How long will it last?

A: The full \$40,000 will be paid to each grantee in April 2023, after they complete engagement with the required Microsoft payment processes. Organizations will be encouraged to begin preparatory activities related to their projects, such as staff hiring, data agreements, and initial steps to access Microsoft in-kind technology benefits, as soon as funds are received. Ongoing technical assistance from Urban experts and cohort activities for grantees will run from July 1 to December 31, 2023. Final reports on the supported projects will be due February 1, 2024.

Application Questions

Q: What is meant by “connections and trust with the community of focus” in the narrative application question?

A. This will depend on the specific communities a proposed project will involve or affect. It might be examples of past/current partnerships with relevant individuals or other community organizations; inclusion of people with relevant lived experience in the project; having staff or board members from the community; or other illustrations of your connections with, understanding of, and respect for those impacted by the policies, programs, or practices that are the focus of your proposed project.

Q: Our organization has a shared leadership structure with codirectors. How should I answer the question about the race and ethnicity of my organization’s executive director?

A. Please respond to this question by focusing on one of your codirectors. If you feel the racial/ethnic identity of the other leader, staff members, or board members is relevant to how your organization develops and maintains connections and trust with the community of focus for the proposed work, you can include that information in the response to question 7.

Technology

Q: Am I required to use Microsoft technology?

A: Projects are not required to use Microsoft technology, but projects that do in ways integral to the proposed data and technology activities will be eligible for additional grant benefits and in-kind support, as described in appendix B of the RFP.

Q: If I am not using Microsoft technology, will Microsoft still provide me technology support?

A: No, unfortunately. While organizations are free to use non-Microsoft technology as part of the grant, the technology support team is only available to assist with implementing Microsoft technologies.

Q: Will Microsoft be giving my organization licenses and technology as part of the grant?

A: All eligible nonprofits with 501(c)(3) status (exceptions listed at <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/nonprofits/eligibility?activetab=pivot1:primaryr5>) can access granted and discounted Microsoft solutions. Please see appendix B in the RFP for background on Microsoft’s technology

offerings, as well as what types of in-kind coverage Microsoft is able to provide specifically to awarded projects. There will also be webinars on October 27 and November 2 where you can get additional information on Microsoft technology options for your project. A recording of these will be posted on the grant application website.

The standard technology offerings include a finite number of licenses and credits. If your organization exceeds the number of users beyond what is offered, you will need to pay the discounted nonprofit rate for each additional license. If you exceed the amount of Azure use covered by the standard annual credit amount, you will be charged for the overage until the credit resets for the next year. These costs may be included in your proposed budget; see appendix B of the RFP.

Q: Will the technology licenses expire when the grant ends?

A: No, the Catalyst Grant Program runs separately from the Microsoft offerings for nonprofits. As long as your nonprofit status remains active, you can continue to use the licenses and credits granted under that program.

Q: If my organization no longer has 501(c)(3) status, will I lose the technology licenses?

A: Yes, the granted licenses and Azure credits for nonprofits are contingent upon active 501(c)(3) status. If status is revoked or your organization's structure is altered such that it is no longer associated with an active 501(c)(3) status, your organization will no longer be eligible for granted and discounted licenses and credits.

Q: If my grant application includes a partner organization, can that organization access the technology licenses and in-kind support resources (instead of or in addition to the lead applicant organization)?

A: The partner organization may access licenses and credits to advance the goals of the project, but it must do so through the lead organization. For continuity, we strongly recommend creating or hosting all solutions in the lead organization's tenant and/or environment. This may require the lead organization to create guest accounts for contributing members from the partner organization(s), in order for them to access relevant licenses and solutions.

The in-kind support and assistance referenced in appendix B of the RFP will be focused on the execution of the technological activities described in the project proposal, and people from the lead and partner organizations can participate in those interactions consistent with their responsibilities for implementing the funded project.

If the partner organization would like to adopt Microsoft technology for its own internal purposes and it is a separate nonprofit with its own active 501(c)(3) status, it can access the standard granted and discounted Microsoft solutions that are made available to 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, as described in appendix B of the RFP. If it is not a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, it cannot access those offerings.

Q: Are we allowed to purchase hardware with the funding?

A: Yes, the purchase of hardware is an allowable expense. If your project involves the purchase of any hardware (e.g., laptops, tablets, physical devices), including Microsoft hardware, those costs must be reflected in your budget and budget narrative, as Microsoft cannot purchase any hardware products on behalf of a grantee. See appendix B of the RFP for more information.

Q: What does Microsoft do with our data when using your software?

A: You own your data. Full information on data management at Microsoft, and on protecting and managing your customer data, is available at <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/trust-center/privacy/data-management>. More broadly, Microsoft's official approach and policies regarding privacy are available at <https://privacy.microsoft.com/en-US/>.

Q: Do we need to know with certainty which tools and software we will use for the project? That is, can we identify those early in the grant period?

A: You do not need to know exactly which tools or software you will use, as long as the role of the tools or software in your proposed project is clear and you include the type and functionality of tools and software you would need. Also, you should build time into your schedule for identifying the tools and software.

Q: Can we include funding in the project for technology used for organization-wide business operations (like email use, software for donor management, or Power Point for presentations)?

A: The technology support is not intended for general business functions. A proposal should specify a distinct set of activities or a particular aspect of an organization's work that meets the project requirements and Catalyst Grant Program goals, specifically advancing racial equity and reform in the front end of the adult criminal legal system. (See the RFP for the full list of project requirements.) The request for technology support should relate to those specific activities. Proposals for technology support for organization-wide, general operations will not be competitive.

Application System

Q: Should I register as an organization or an individual?

A: You will be able to create and submit an application whether you apply as an organization or an individual. If you choose to register as an organization, you will be considered the primary organization administrator. You will be prompted to enter basic information about the organization and then be able to add additional members to create or manage applications on behalf of an organization. If you register as an individual, you can also invite others to collaborate on your application.

Q: I am having trouble accessing my Survey Monkey Apply account. What should I do?

A: SurveyMonkey Apply offers a set of frequently asked questions about accounts at <https://help.smapply.io/hc/en-us/articles/360032514674-General-Account-FAQ>. You can also contact SurveyMonkey Apply support for assistance with logging in at <https://help.smapply.io/hc/en-us/articles/360000921094-How-to-Request-Login-Assistance>.

Q: I am registered as an individual. Can I have a colleague work with me on the online application?

A: Yes, you can invite as many collaborators as you would like. When you are viewing your application overview, click “Add” next to the word “Collaborators” and the system will prompt you to enter an email address. You can choose whether the person can just view or edit the application. The person will receive an invitation to collaborate, which will prompt them to create their own account. They will then have access to the application.

Q: I marked a section as “complete” but now want to change it. How do I do that?

A: Click into the section that you want to reopen and click on the “...” in the top right corner of the section to access the menu and edit that section. Please be aware that selecting “Reset” from that menu will delete all of your responses for that section.

Q: How does SurveyMonkey Apply use my personal information?

A: You own the data in your account. SurveyMonkey controls very limited data about users—names, email address, and digital identifiers like cookie data or an IP address. The firm may use personal data like cookie data and IP addresses for specific purposes as described in its full privacy policy. SurveyMonkey provides opt-out options in all direct marketing emails. If you do not wish to see personalized marketing content on the web related to our service, you can clear

the cookies in your browser settings. See SurveyMonkey Help Center article on how to do this at <https://help.surveymonkey.com/en/site/enabling-cookies>.

Q: How will Microsoft or the Urban Institute use my personal information?

A: We will only use the contact information you enter through SurveyMonkey Apply to communicate with you about the Catalyst Grant Program and related opportunities, and to engage with you as a grantee should you be awarded.

After the grant end date, the Urban Institute retains the contact information of former grantees, which is stored and managed internally and not shared with any third parties. Urban may send direct nonsubscription emails and communications to current and former grantees on topics related to the Catalyst Grant Program. People can unsubscribe from these emails by following the “unsubscribe” button in each email or email us at catalystapplications@urban.org to remove your address completely from our internal databases.