

## Request for Proposals: Risk Reduction Strategies to Prevent Overdose

<b>LOI Release Date:</b>	February 17, 2026
<b>Information Session:</b>	February 23, 2026, 10:00 AM
<b>LOI Submission Deadline:</b>	March 16, 2026, 5:00 PM
<b>RFP Invitations/Release Date:</b>	April 20, 2026
<b>Full Proposal Deadline:</b>	May 15, 2026, 5:00 PM
<b>Site Visits (via Zoom, as needed):</b>	Late May – Early June 2026
<b>Funding Decisions:</b>	August 7, 2026
<b>Public Announcements:</b>	Mid-August 2026

### Background

Polk Bros. Foundation’s new grantmaking strategy includes a focus on [closing the life expectancy gap](#) in Chicago. Life expectancy in Chicago differs dramatically between central and south- or west-side neighborhoods, its most stark difference—20 years—existing between the Loop and West Garfield Park. The drivers of the life expectancy gap in Chicago are well-studied and include known health, behavior, and environmental conditions as well as underlying factors, driven by race, geography, and systemic disinvestment. Among the top drivers of the death gap among Chicago communities is drug overdose. This Request for Proposals is an open, competitive process seeking risk reduction strategies to prevent overdoses.

The opioid epidemic is a byproduct of historic systemic injustices targeted at marginalized neighborhoods that have experienced disinvestment in Chicago. The urgency to combat the epidemic and existing disparities related to overdoses persists today. Abstinence-only and other mandated methods of recovery stigmatize individuals using opioids and fail to consider the multifaceted nature of recovery. Activities focused on reducing harm, however, reframe the opioid epidemic as a public health issue, promoting compassion and support for recovery. This life-saving work can extend to drug use and its related challenges more broadly. Outreach and engagement, distribution of safe supplies, and advocacy for more compassionate policies, alongside wraparound supports can save lives and make dramatic improvements in rates of early death due to overdoses.

Deficient social determinants of health and structural inequalities contribute to and exacerbate substance use, substance use disorder, and mental illness, and can and do have a profound impact on some populations. Most notably, people who have a history of trauma are particularly in need of compassionate services to support their pathways to improved health outcomes. By viewing substance use as a journey, incremental change can be made, allowing for risk reduction to better suit a person’s own individual goals and motivations.

The response to drug use must be compassionate and embrace the dignity of every human being. **This RFP seeks to reduce the harmful impacts of stigma, mistreatment, discrimination, and harsh punishment of people who use drugs, especially those who are from neighborhoods that have experienced historic disinvestment.** Building community partnerships can positively shape beliefs and attitudes, reduce stigma, and ensure the well-being of the community at large.

Polk Bros. Foundation aims to fund organizations that center intentional practices and public health policies designed to prevent overdoses and lessen the negative social and/or physical consequences associated with drug use.

## Need/Opportunity Statement

Despite overall reductions in overdose deaths since the peak in 2022, a deeper look at the data uncovers continued increases in overdose rates for some Chicago residents, with particular concentrations on the south and west sides of the city.

Reducing harm in drug use prioritizes safety and connection and promotes gradual reduction of risky behaviors by providing support that meets their basic needs without shame or fear of punishment. Harm mitigation approaches have a demonstrated track record of success.

In an effort to expand the demonstrated impact of risk reduction approaches in Chicago and build the evidence base for effective solutions, **this RFP will support programs, services, and non-lobbying advocacy efforts that address overdose prevention, drug use, and related challenges including incarceration and housing instability.** Grants will prioritize programs that are grounded in justice and human rights, focused on positive change, and work with people without judgment, coercion, or discrimination.

## Goals and Outcomes

PBF seeks to support efforts that reduce harm related to drug use in Chicago through activities that:

- Increase the capacity of harm-reduction organizations to expand their reach and service areas and embed strategies in program delivery
- Build inclusive and diversified coalitions that include people with lived experience, advocates, policy-makers, community leaders, and service providers to align policy and advocacy agendas and to collaborate across neighborhoods
- Develop cross-sector partnerships that reduce trauma related to drug use, including trauma resulting from experience with incarceration, exposure to violence, and housing instability
- Support widespread education and outreach about substance use, overdose, and pathways to recovery that promote risk-reducing behaviors in schools, parks, at community events, and other public spaces that foster community connection
- Equip agencies working with people who use drugs to offer prevention and wellness services, including housing, mental health, and reentry supports
- Pursue non-lobbying policy and advocacy strategies centering and resourcing overdose prevention that is at low or no cost, and is broadly accessible

Through this RFP, short-term outcomes may include:

- Increased assistance or support for people to navigate complicated public systems, including the criminal-legal, homelessness, education, and/or health systems
- Increased retention and uptake on referrals to treatment and other services, including counseling, disease management, and housing supports
- Greater capacity of existing underfunded community partners to help them remain in operation and continue to serve priority populations
- Creation, strengthening, and diversification of coalitions across neighborhoods and development of plans for working together

Grants awarded through this RFP will contribute to PBF's goal of closing the life-expectancy gap in Chicago's south and west side neighborhoods by addressing:

- Root causes of disparities in mortality (e.g., trauma, poverty, systemic disinvestment)
- Conditions holding disparities in place (e.g., inequitable policies and practices, stigma)
- Physical symptoms and conditions that lead to substance use challenges (e.g., incarceration, homelessness, sickness, hopelessness)

## Approaches and Priority Activities

The goals and outcomes listed above can be achieved through many approaches. This RFP seeks to provide support to organizations that take one or more of the following specific approaches in their work:

- Providing immediate intervention by offering direct-service interventions that contribute to the broader sector, including non-lobbying advocacy, participation in coalitions, and provision of wraparound and peer supports
- Strengthening community power and influence by building power in the community through the employment of people with lived experience and/or who live in the neighborhoods, and including them in coalition leadership and decision-making opportunities
- Building the ecosystem of social change by strengthening the overdose-prevention sector and ensuring that traditional treatment pathways are inclusive of strategies that mitigate harm
- Facilitating community innovation by expanding and innovating within the ecosystem to collaborate with other sectors to share resources, build partnerships, and expand programming

Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate depth and breadth in one or more of the approaches through their programs or initiatives. Through these grants, we intend to build greater understanding in the field about the value of integrating strategies that mitigate harm and center human dignity.

## Grantmaking Criteria

This funding opportunity seeks to support organizations or programs that provide services, build partnerships, and advance non-lobbying advocacy efforts that address overdose prevention, drug use, and related challenges including incarceration and housing instability. Proposals from organizations that hire staff with the skills and lived experience to best support the communities they serve, provide low-barrier services, and work in overdose prevention, treatment, and/or non-lobbying advocacy will be prioritized.

### Phase I: Open Call - Letters of Interest (LOI)

All qualifying organizations are eligible to submit a Letter of Interest (LOI) that includes the components below. The LOI for this funding opportunity will be evaluated based on the level of alignment with the priority activities listed above and Polk Bros. Foundation's strategic goals. **To capture the information needed to evaluate the submitted LOIs, please provide a short response that addresses all the components listed below.**

Phase I: Letters of Interest – Two pages maximum (use the fillable form provided below and on PBF sites)

- Organizational Overview:
  - Mission – include the organization’s overall mission statement
  - Organization Description – include a few sentences on the description of the organization’s history and core work
  - Staffing Structure – list key staff or positions with brief descriptions of relevant roles and responsibilities
- Programmatic/Core Work Information:
  - Description of Activities – detail the organization’s drug overdose prevention activities that prevent and reduce harm.
  - Neighborhoods Served – indicate the Chicago neighborhoods served with high rates of people disproportionately affected by death due to overdoses and people who use or have used drugs and/or are experiencing or have experienced homelessness or incarceration.
  - Focus Areas – describe the areas of focus which may include overdose prevention, peer-led programs and initiatives, healing, research to build the evidence base for this approach, and application of risk-reduction strategies.
- Additional Requested Documents (not counted toward two-page limit):
  - Organizational Budgets – include 1) last full year’s itemized revenue and expenses, as well as 2) current fiscal year’s budget with itemized revenue and expenses.
  - If a program or organization is fiscally sponsored, the fiscal sponsor must be the applicant submitting the LOI and provide required information. This will include a copy of the fiscal sponsorship agreement between the sponsor and the sponsored project.

Once reviewed and evaluated, organizations may be invited to submit a full proposal. Not all organizations will advance to Phase II. Those selected to submit a full proposal in Phase II will be based on qualifications of the organization and the programmatic/core work as proposed within this LOI.

## Phase II: Invitation to Apply - Full Proposals

Organizations invited to submit a full proposal will be notified on April 20, 2026. Full proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Organization Capacity – provide narrative that demonstrates how risk reduction is or will be used to address substance use; explain how the organization’s core work, history of partnerships, coalition building, community power-building, and engagement in non-lobbying advocacy and/or sector-strengthening activities are leveraged to reduce risk in substance use. Both new and established organizations will be considered. Priority will be given to organizations that:
  - Build the infrastructure of programs to be able to access and leverage additional resources and opportunities for growth

- Promote policies and practices that elevate non-punitive responses to substance use and related challenges, including housing, engagement with the criminal-legal system, and exposure to trauma and violence
- Conduct research and evaluation to demonstrate the efficacy of risk-reduction strategies to prevent overdoses
- Engage people with lived experience with decision making and leadership roles
- Proposed Activities – detail the proposed activities that align with reducing risk to prevent overdose and, more broadly, how the activities will help close the life expectancy gap
- Sector-Strengthening Partnerships and Collaborations – provide description of partnerships or coalitions built across neighborhoods and/or sector that increase safety, belonging, and peace
- Innovation – provide the strategies or approaches that will be used to make progress in solving long-term existing challenges or building the evidence base for the efficacy of programs
- Impact and outcomes – detail the expected effect(s) of risk reduction strategies on preventing overdoses by the end of the grant term
- Program Evaluation Plan – provide a short description of the organization’s plan to measure progress toward the overall goals
- Community Accountability & Representation – provide details on community engagement plan and shared decision-making process
- Sustainability and Stewardship Plan – describe the strategies to ensure that programs and initiatives continue beyond the initial grant including plans to scale or adapt over time

Additional Requested Documents:

- Itemized Project Budget (if applicable) – if the grant is supporting a specific project or initiative, please provide the project’s itemized budget.

Awarded grants will fund operations, programs, infrastructure support, coalition-building, and non-lobbying advocacy efforts. All grant awards will be selected on an objective and non-discriminatory basis.

### **Grant Amounts Available and Grant Term**

One-year (12-month) grants will support programs and operations and range from \$50,000 to \$150,000.

### **Eligible Applicants**

To be considered eligible for funding under this RFP, organizations must be:

- 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations that hold active, IRS-recognized tax-exempt status and operate exclusively for charitable/educational purposes\*
- Chicago-based and for the purpose of serving Chicago residents
- Engaged in programs and initiatives designed to help low-income individuals, families, and neighborhoods that demonstrate high need

- Organizations that:
  - Work in overdose prevention, treatment, or non-lobbying advocacy
  - Include people with lived experience of drug use in organizational decision-making, workforce, and/or leadership
  - Conduct activities related to overdose prevention including distribution of safe supplies and naloxone, education, and referrals to wraparound supports
  - Convene, collaborate, and partner within and outside of the substance use sector

\*For fiscally-sponsored organizations, submissions will only be accepted from the fiscal sponsor. Accordingly, fiscally-sponsored organizations without 501(c)(3) status must identify a fiscal sponsor as soon as possible and ask the sponsor to complete an organization profile in Polk Bros. Foundation's grants management system, Fluxx, in order to submit an LOI. Fiscal sponsors must log in to complete and certify their organization profile in Fluxx at [https://polkbrosfdn.fluxx.io/user\\_sessions/new](https://polkbrosfdn.fluxx.io/user_sessions/new). An agreement confirming the project's relationship with the fiscal sponsor is also required as part of the submitted proposal.

### **Ineligible Uses**

Funds available through this RFP may not be used for abstinence-only programs or programs with high barriers to entry, or to pay down existing project debt.

Additionally, awarded grants from Polk Bros. Foundation may not be used for any activities prohibited by laws governing the work and grants of private foundations, lobbying and electioneering activities, or activities that incite political violence. Proposed activities must be structured in a way to avoid private benefit or inurement.

Grant funds will be restricted to uses that are outlined in the awardee's grant application.

### **Evaluation and Learning**

Sharing successes or challenges in achieving measures of progress is critical to the field's collective learning, decision-making, and impact.

Awardees may report measures of progress including, but not limited to:

- Infrastructure development, including broader and diversified coalitions
- Embedded harm reduction strategies in overdose program delivery
- Creation, activation, and support of public spaces that complement existing prevention and treatment interventions and increase usage and community presence
- Non-lobbying policy and advocacy strategies that center and resource low-barrier overdose prevention
- Demonstration of reach through inputs that include numbers served, supplies distributed, engagement and retention, and referrals provided
- Building the evidence base for the efficacy of risk-reduction practices

## Application Process

Applicants must submit their application via Fluxx. This application is a two-phase process. In Phase I, organizations who meet the eligibility requirements may submit a letter of interest as the process is open and competitive. To submit an LOI through Fluxx, please follow these steps:

- First-time applicants to Polk Bros. Foundation will need to register their organization [here](#)
- Registered organizations should log into the [Grants Portal](#) and begin a new application (button on the bottom left of the Portal's landing page)
- Complete the application. Please be sure to:
  - Select the “Risk Reduction Strategies to Prevent Overdose” drop-down option for funding opportunity
  - Attach your completed LOI (fillable form available as a [PDF](#) or [Word document](#) and on the Grants Portal landing page and PBF website)
  - Attach your organization's budget
- Be sure to hit “save and close” when you are finished
- Applications must be submitted by also pressing the “submit” button (bottom right of the page once you have saved and closed out of your application)
- You can save your application and return to it at any time using the “save” and “save and close” buttons – applications will not be submitted until you press the submit button

If an organization advances to Phase II, Polk Bros. Foundation will invite the organization to submit a full proposal. A site visit (either virtual or in-person) will be conducted as part of the evaluation in Phase II. Polk Bros. Foundation staff will coordinate with applicants to schedule the site visit.

Late or incomplete applications will not be considered. In the interest of fairness to all applicants, the Polk Bros. Foundation staff cannot respond to unsolicited inquiries, emails, or phone calls individually. An information session, an online resource with frequently asked questions, and a recorded video with information, instructions, and questions and answers will be made available to all interested applicants.

## Submission Deadlines and Other Key Dates

- Open application is released on **February 17, 2026**.
- Phase I – Letters of Interest deadline is **5:00 p.m. on March 16, 2026**. Applications will be reviewed by the Polk Bros. Foundation Programs Team.
- Phase II – By **April 20, 2026**, selected applicants receive an invitation to complete a full proposal.
  - Site visits will be conducted between **late May and early June**. Phase II applicants will receive a separate email inviting them to register for a time for a site visit.
  - Full proposal deadline is **5:00 p.m. on May 15, 2026**. Applications will be reviewed by the Polk Bros. Foundation Programs Team.
- Funding decisions will be made **on August 5, 2026 and applicants will be notified by August 7, 2026**. All applicants, including both those receiving a grant award and those not, will be notified at this time.

## Information Session

In the interest of fairness to all applicants, we cannot respond to inquiries, emails, or calls individually. Group information sessions, FAQs, and recorded Q&As will be made available to all applicants to assist with applicants' questions.

Polk Bros. Foundation will host an information session via Zoom to provide an opportunity for Q&A regarding the LOI request for this funding opportunity and offer technical guidance on the Fluxx online portal on **Monday, February 23, 2026 at 10 a.m.**

Register [HERE](#)

Polk Bros. Foundation is committed to making the information session accessible for all attendees. If you require an accommodation to fully participate, please email [info@polkbrosfdn.org](mailto:info@polkbrosfdn.org). We will make our best effort to address any reasonable accommodation request.

## Contact Information

For technical questions regarding use of the Fluxx grants portal, email [grantsmanager@polkbrosfdn.org](mailto:grantsmanager@polkbrosfdn.org).

Direct all questions and inquiries regarding the funding opportunity by emailing [info@polkbrosfdn.org](mailto:info@polkbrosfdn.org) with **Subject Line: PBF Risk Reduction RFP.**