



Funding Opportunity for Birth Justice Policy Lab Increasing Access to Birthworkers in Black or Indigenous Communities

The National Institute for Reproductive Health (NIRH) is requesting proposals from organizations interested in joining our Birth Justice Policy Lab. The Policy Lab's goal is to develop and advance a state- or local-level policy solution to increase access to birthworkers in Black or Indigenous communities and to support the establishment or strengthening of a state or regional cohort of organizations committed to birth justice

NIRH has funding of up to \$120,000 available to support a cohort of organizations in one shared state or locality. Completed applications are due on June 11, 2025. The Policy Lab will run from September 1, 2025 to August 31, 2026.

About NIRH

The National Institute for Reproductive Health (NIRH) drives state and local advocacy that defines the future of reproductive freedom. Through deep partnerships, strategic expertise, and values-based leadership, NIRH works to advance policies that protect and expand access to abortion, contraception, and birth justice in states and localities across the country. Working across geographies and political conditions, NIRH equips advocates and policymakers with the tools to lead—building lasting infrastructure, shifting culture, and translating public support into policy change. Our work has included building broad and inclusive coalitions, planning and launching campaigns, and creating opportunities to enact progressive policies that expand access to reproductive health care.

This work has never been more essential. Political attacks on reproductive freedom and bodily autonomy are unrelenting. Creating a pathway forward requires focus, resolve, and investment in leaders and campaigns that aren't just holding the line - but actively redrawing it.

NIRH's Partnership Strategy

For over 20 years, NIRH has worked hand-in-hand with partners in communities across the country to create a new future for reproductive rights and justice. This work is fueled by the development of bold policy solutions, including legislation, budgetary advocacy, regulatory change, and executive action. It requires wrap-around support through technical assistance; strategic guidance; and advocacy, policy, and communications



support. NIRH's approach contributes to the sustainability of our movement by building state and local capacity and creating opportunities for community learning and knowledge sharing amongst partners. Since 2008, NIRH has advanced our mission in 43 states, including more than 80 localities, by working side-by-side with more than 200 organizational partners.

NIRH is committed to centering and working with those who face disproportionate barriers to accessible reproductive health care and who are most impacted by systemic racism. This includes Black and Brown people, immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes. We prioritize partnering with organizations led by and deeply connected to these communities as we strive to build an equitable world where all people can determine their own futures and all families can thrive. We also recognize that reproductive freedom cannot be won in isolation. Across our partnerships, we encourage alignment with other movements—racial, economic, LGBTQ+, and democracy—recognizing that the same forces attacking reproductive autonomy are also threatening fundamental civil rights.

NIRH's Commitment to Racial Equity

NIRH staff have a deep commitment to racial equity, and have been engaged in an ongoing process to adopt and incorporate a racial equity lens across the organization. We are a reproductive health and rights organization that incorporates reproductive justice values into our work. We recognize the interconnectivity of identities, such as race, socio-economic status, immigration status, ability, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and how they interact with systems of oppressions to shape and impact a person's freedom and ability to control their reproductive and sexual lives. This understanding is foundational to our partnership approach.

About the Birth Justice Policy Lab

It is a fundamental human right to be able to choose if, when, with whom, and how to grow a family, supported by safe, accessible, and culturally appropriate reproductive health care. Systemic discrimination inside and outside the medical system regularly denies Black and Indigenous people these rights, which contributes to the ongoing perinatal health crisis; currently, Black people and Indigenous people nationally are respectively three and two times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white people. At the state and local levels, racial disparities can be even greater.

Community-based, culturally reflective doulas and midwives are a proven intervention—reducing poor health outcomes while advancing autonomy, cultural continuity, and birthing dignity. However, economic and structural barriers severely restrict provision of and access to this care in Black and Indigenous communities.

To address these challenges, NIRH is launching the Birth Justice Policy Lab to partner with organizations interested in working on the state or local level to draft and advocate for policies or initiatives that bolster the doula or midwifery workforce, contribute to the sustainability of birthworker practice, or alleviate economic barriers that stand in the way of equitable access to doulas and midwives for Black and Indigenous birthing people.

The cohort will consist of three to four organizations in a shared locality or state. The Policy Lab aims to help advocates build the foundation for transformative policy change, whether that be pursuing new legislation or smoothing out implementation challenges related to passed legislation.

Commitment to the Policy Lab

The goal of the Policy Lab is to help partners develop and/or advance a locally appropriate, community-rooted policy initiative. With NIRH’s support, members of the Policy Lab cohort will work together towards a concrete policy solution to expand access to community-based birthworkers, such as:

- Medicaid or insurance reimbursement reform
- State or municipal budget allocations
- Loan repayment or training subsidies
- Local licensing, certification, and/or fee waivers
- Creation of a reproductive justice fund

We believe that considerable groundwork, relationship building, and research are needed to identify and build a successful campaign around impactful state or local policies to increase access to Black and Indigenous birthworkers, and to establish a strong and effective coalition to advance these policies. To support this work, Policy Lab partners will be expected to participate in the following:

- Ongoing work outside of calls and convenings to advance the goals of the Policy Lab, including policy research, community engagement, training, advocacy with elected officials and government leaders, and more as collectively determined by the Policy Lab members with support from NIRH.
- At least two 1-hour calls a month, including:
 - 1:1 call with NIRH staff to check-in on organization-specific needs, progress, and other project-related topics.
 - Policy Lab call with all partner organizations to promote thought partnership, information and resource sharing, and project advancement.
- Quarterly 1-hour learning sessions with other movement advocates whose work overlaps with issues and strategies identified by the Policy Lab.
- An in-person convening, hosted by NIRH, to connect with cohort members, dream together, and celebrate our collective project.

NIRH will also work with the Policy Lab members to achieve:

- The growth of organizational policy capacity, particularly among birthworker-led groups
- The strengthening or formation of local coalitions that can sustain the work beyond this year-long initiative
- New or strengthened connections with abortion justice advocates that could yield intersectional strategies for advancing autonomy across the reproductive spectrum, especially given the overlap between states with high rates of Black and Indigenous pregnancy-related death and those with abortion bans.

Selection Criteria and Submission Process

NIRH is looking to support 3-4 organizations from the same locality or state for this pilot year of the Policy Lab. Organizations will work together collaboratively with other partners in the Policy Lab with a specific focus on their shared locality or state.

The Policy Lab cohort will primarily consist of organizations that meet the following criteria. *Organizations that do not meet all of the criteria, but are applying in partnership with organizations that do, are eligible to apply. If you have questions or aren't sure if you're eligible, please contact us at partnerships@nirhealth.org.*

- Black-led or Indigenous-led

- Provide perinatal health care, advocate for birth justice issues, or otherwise support the work of Black or Indigenous doulas or midwives. It is critical that birthworkers are active members in this project, so at least one organization should include birthworkers with the capacity to participate.
 - Either already engaged in policy and advocacy or eager to engage in policy and advocacy for the first time
 - Share a desire to work with other organizations in their locality or state.
- Organizations do not have to have already worked together, but should be aligned in their interest in participating in this year-long Policy Lab together.
- *If you are interested in this RFP but do not know of any organizations in your area to potentially apply with, please contact partnerships@nirhealth.org before drafting a proposal. Where possible, we will assist in connecting you with neighboring organizations.*

We welcome organizations with a specific policy already in mind, but that is not required to apply to be part of the Policy Lab. We also welcome applications from organizations that are already in partnership or from an existing coalition.

We are prioritizing projects based in the following states, which have the highest rates of Black or Indigenous pregnancy-related death rates and governments hostile to bodily autonomy: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, or Virginia.

Submission Process

Completed applications are due on June 11, 2025 by 11:59 pm PDT. All organizations who wish to participate in the Policy Lab must submit a separate application. Please note that you cannot save the application form and come back to it, so please make sure your proposal is complete before you begin this process. You can download a copy of the questions in each of the RFPs [here](#). Contact us at partnerships@nirhealth.org with any questions.

Important Dates

- **May 20** at 3 pm EDT: NIRH staff will host a webinar to review the RFPs and answer general questions. [Register here.](#)
- **May 27 – June 6:** Optional: Schedule a 1:1 call with NIRH staff to discuss proposal ideas or answer specific questions. Please note staff will not review written proposals.
 - [Abortion Coverage Policy Lab](#)
 - [Birth Justice Policy Lab](#)
 - [Repro and Data Privacy Policy Lab](#)
- **June 11:** Proposal Deadline. [Submit your proposal\(s\) here.](#)
- **July 21-25:** Interviews with final round applicants. If selected for an interview, applicants will be contacted with as much notice as possible to facilitate scheduling. Interviews will be no more than 30 minutes.
 - *We recognize that this falls during the summer and key staff may be more likely to be out of the office. Please do not feel the need to plan around this; if this week doesn't work, we will work with you and your team to develop an alternate plan that does work.*
- **August 15:** All applicants will be notified of final decisions – whether accepted or not – on a rolling basis, but no later than August 15.
- **September 1:** Partnerships will begin and run through August 31, 2026.

Strategic Guidance and Technical Assistance

NIRH is an advocacy organization, not a foundation. We are proud to offer a range of strategic guidance and technical assistance to our partners and prioritize partnerships with organizations who would benefit from this support as much as the funding we are able to offer.

- **Administrative:** Scheduling and planning meetings, note-taking, assistance with research and program planning, support with job descriptions and onboarding staff
- **Coalition building and management:** Coalition planning, formation, and governance; planning, facilitation, and follow-up for coalition meetings; navigating conflict and communication
- **Communication:** Creating messaging strategy and message development; support with digital strategy and content; support with media relations, including press strategy and support with earned media pitches.
- **Policy strategy:** Supporting the development of state and local-level policies, including drafting legislation, regulations, amendments, talking points, and testimony
- **Political organizing:** Supporting the creation of legislative and advocacy campaign strategy plans, execution of Lobby Days at the state or local level
- **Trainings & workshops:** Developing and hosting customized trainings on a range of topics for elected officials, community members, allies, and other stakeholders