

ALTMAN FOUNDATION

Guidance for Systems Change Application

While the Altman Foundation primarily supports direct service and capacity building, we occasionally support projects that seek to understand and/or change the institutional structures, underlying conditions, or policies and practices that influence the likelihood of improved outcomes in our areas of interest: Education, Health, Arts and Culture, and Strengthening Communities. We include in our definition of systems change:

Applied research to generate, analyze, and interpret data to identify problems, causality, and solutions;

Policy studies and projects that use research findings to define system changes needed to address problems more effectively;

Advocacy projects to educate critical stakeholders about the need to implement new policies or improve existing ones.

The narrative section of this application, parts A & B, should not be more than six pages in length. Feel free to use bullet points where appropriate.

Please note that for some questions we do not provide guidance because we believe they are self-explanatory.

A. Organizational Capability

1. What is your **mission and vision**?
2. Please briefly summarize the **programs and services** your organization provides.
3. What are your organization's **core competencies**? What does your organization do especially well?

Guidance:

Please describe the factors that make you particularly good at serving and creating value for the constituents you serve. Where relevant, you may include factors such as special skills, in-depth knowledge, access to specific resources or data, influence, staffing, cost structure, customer service strategy, geographic focus, scale, delivery models, performance management, key partnerships, evidence-based practice, etc. This is your chance to tell us how your organization is distinctive.

4. **List the top three results** your organization has achieved in the past three years. Please focus on the tangible human gains you have helped create for those you serve.

Guidance:

Please describe specific achievements in the systems change area, and the benefits they have brought to people or communities. You may also include in your list results you have achieved with direct service programs.

5. Please comment on your **organization's financial health**, including trends, challenges, or unusual developments, over the last three years.
6. How does your **Board of Directors** ensure the financial health and viability of the organization, set strategic direction in accordance with mission, and evaluate organizational effectiveness? Please also include the number of board meetings per year and the average attendance at board meetings.

B. Current Request

Please note: The following questions assume a request for a specific project or initiative. If you are requesting more general support to work across multiple issue areas (e.g., health plus education plus housing), please see questions under "For Work in Multiple Areas". After completing the section relevant to your request, all applicants should answer questions 12-14.

7. What is the **population or community** you want to help through the proposed applied research, advocacy, or policy project?

Guidance:

We want to begin with clarity on the persons or groups that have a problem that you think is not effectively addressed under current conditions or within existing systems. This may be a general group, or a "niche" of persons whose specific risks or issues are not covered or served adequately by existing systems.

8. What, specifically, is the **system, condition, or issue** that you want to influence or research?

Guidance:

By condition, we mean important problems or constraints that people face, such as not having health insurance. By systems, we mean funding streams, (e.g., Medicare), delivery mechanisms, (e.g., public hospitals), or other large factors or forces, such as regulatory practices, eligibility requirements, resource allocation policies, etc. As a local funder, we are interested in addressing local, state, or national systems that have significant impact on New York City residents.

FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS

9. A) What specific **research question(s)** do you seek to answer? What data sources will you draw upon? What research methods will you employ? *(Please summarize in no more than two paragraphs. Feel free to attach a more thorough discussion of the research design to your application.)*
9. B) Who are the **critical audiences** for your work?

9. C) What **specific results** do you hope to achieve by reaching these critical audiences?

Guidance:

Please be specific about how your work will change behavior or practice. Results often begin by noting what you want people to do differently with the information or other resources you provide, and end with what you reasonably can anticipate will be the outcome for a population or community. For example, “Our target is that at least five major umbrella or direct service organizations demonstrate that they are applying our research and that doing so is helping to increase utilization rates and/or produce better health outcomes for immigrant clients.”

9. D) If the result(s) cannot reasonably be achieved in the grant period, please define the **benchmarks you will achieve by the end of the grant** that predict accomplishing the stated result(s) over a longer period.

Guidance

In some cases you may see a partial result during the grant period, but in many others you will focus on interim results or benchmarks that predict later success. For example, “During the grant term, we will publish a report on barriers to health care for immigrants and present our research in-person to decision makers at a minimum of ten major umbrella or direct service organizations; five of those organizations will agree to implement service delivery changes based on our recommendations.”

FOR POLICY AND ADVOCACY INITIATIVES

10. A) What **improvement or change in the system** or condition identified in question #8 do you want to help bring about? Please be specific about what the improved system would look like and what specific changes are needed.

10. B) What is **your approach** to achieving this improvement or change? What overall strategy or method are you using?

10. C) What **specific results** do you anticipate achieving if your projected improvement or change is fully made? Please include all major points of success and indicate when you think they will be achieved with reference to the start of the grant.

Guidance

While you may not know the precise consequences of a systems change, we ask that you project the consequences—whether these are x more persons having a primary physician or y more students performing at grade level.

Start with the most direct result your change focuses upon achieving. For example, “If we are successful at reducing complicated enrollment procedures as a barrier to insurance access, we anticipate that an additional 200,000 local families will gain coverage over a three-year period.” Then consider other results or impacts that will also be achieved. For example, “As a result of this coverage, we project a minimum reduction of 5,000 unnecessary visits to hospital emergency departments.”

10. D) If the result(s) cannot reasonably be achieved in the grant period, please define the **benchmarks you will achieve by the end of the grant** that predict accomplishing the stated result(s) over a longer period.

Guidance

In some cases you may see a partial result during the grant period (e.g., enrolling half the target number of families in health insurance), but in many others you will focus on interim results or benchmarks that predict later success. For example, “During the grant term, we anticipate new policies within DOHMH and other city agencies to simplify enrollment procedures along with expanded outreach efforts in all five boroughs, including the launch of a media campaign in multiple languages and mobile units that can expedite enrollment.”

FOR WORK IN MULTIPLE AREAS

11. A) What are the **populations/communities** your organization serves?

11. B) What are your **top organizational and programmatic priorities** this year? Please do not list every area you are working in; we ask that you choose up to five priorities and provide a brief description of each.

11. C) What **specific results** do you hope to achieve with these projects/initiatives?

Guidance

While you may not know the precise consequences of a systems change, we ask that you project the consequences—whether these are x more persons having a primary physician or y more students performing at grade level.

Start with the most direct result your change focuses upon achieving. For example, “If we are successful at reducing complicated enrollment procedures as a barrier to insurance access, we anticipate that an additional 200,000 local families will gain coverage over a three-year period.” Then consider other results or impacts that will also be achieved. For example, “As a result of this coverage, we project a minimum reduction of 5,000 unnecessary visits to hospital emergency departments.”

11. D) If the results cannot reasonably be achieved in the grant period, please define the **benchmarks you will achieve by the end of the grant** that predict achieving the stated results over a longer period.

Guidance

In some cases you may see a partial result during the period of the grant, but in many others you will focus on achievements that will predict later success. For example, “During the grant term, we anticipate new policies within DOHMH and other city agencies to simplify enrollment procedures along with expanded outreach efforts in all five boroughs, including the launch of a media campaign in multiple languages and mobile units that can expedite enrollment.”

ALL APPLICANTS

12. Outline the **three to four critical steps** in your research/systems change initiative(s), tell us what has to be achieved at each step for you to be on the path to success, and provide a rough timeline.

Guidance:

While certainly different from the work plan of a direct service project, you presumably have a sequence of steps to get to your result. What will success look like at each stage of your project? The completion and start of various steps are likely to overlap in practice. Our intent is to get a rough estimate of the project's timing. If, for example, the focus is on getting persons or groups to change their behavior, the steps might be as follows:

- *Informing 100 administrators about the scale of a problem or opportunity and the consequences of a particular behavior through a citywide conference. (Months 1-3)
Achievement: 90 percent of conference attendees report increased knowledge of issue.*
- *Convincing 80 administrators of the feasibility, effectiveness or cost savings associated with new practices that address the issue through one-on-one briefings and group conference calls. (Months 2-5)
Achievement: 60 administrators agree to pilot new practices within their agencies.*
- *Supporting 60 of that group to gain the requisite skills, knowledge, resources or support of key stakeholders to implement the behavior change through customized, on-site technical assistance and monitoring their progress through monthly site visits and surveys. (Months 5-18) Achievement: 60 administrators have trained their staff in new practices by Month 8, 55 have fully implemented new practices at month 12, and 52 retain the practices at month 18.*

13. Please specify the names and qualifications of the **key people** who will be responsible for achieving the anticipated results. What special skills and/or Experience does each of them bring to the project?

14. Please list any **partners, intermediaries or advisors** important to your success and describe the role they will play and the evidence you have of their commitment. Please tell us if you have successfully collaborated with any of the listed people or groups in the past or if you are presently working with them on other projects.

Guidance:

An intermediary is a group or person (often a gatekeeper) whose behavior you do not control and who must do something (or allow you to do something) in order for you to succeed. Examples include but are not limited to: school districts, regulatory bodies, health care agencies, etc.

A partner is a group whose skills or talents augment or counterbalance your own as a part of program delivery.

An advisory board is a formal entity with expertise in your focal area of research or systems reform that provides guidance to help ensure the success of the project.