

Health Anchors Learning Network: Test and Learn Grant Funding

Call for applications and funding guidance

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1. Summary

The Health Foundation and NHS England and NHS Improvement are working together to improve the social determinants of health and tackle health inequalities through supporting the NHS in its role as an 'anchor institution'. This work includes the **Health Anchors Learning Network (HALN)**, which launched in March 2021 for participants to share ideas, knowledge and skills, helping them to implement anchor strategies in practice.

The Health Foundation and NHS England and NHS Improvement are providing Test and Learn grant funding for NHS anchor institutions, who are participants of the HALN, to make progress on their anchors work, test approaches and generate new and valuable learning for both HALN participants and the wider health and care system.

There are four grants of up to £25,000 available for activities within England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The grants will be selected by December 2021 for six- to nine-month projects, starting from early 2022.

This document provides information on the HALN Test and Learn grant including;

- Context
- Aims of the funding
- Funding criteria and requirements
- Application process

The first stage of the process is to submit **short expression of interest by 16.00 on 27 September 2021 via [Salesforce-Grants](#)**.

2. Context

2.1. What is an anchor?

Anchor institutions are large, often public sector organisations that are 'anchored' in their surrounding community – they are unlikely to relocate and are rooted in and connected to their local populations. This provides an opportunity to maximise their economic, social and environmental impact by adapting the way they employ people, purchase goods and services, use buildings and spaces, consider their environmental footprint and work in partnership. There is an increasing recognition of the role of systems and regions, working with anchor institutions, to further enhance anchor impact and outcomes.

2.2. The NHS an anchor institution

The Health Foundation's 2019 report *Building healthier communities: The role of the NHS as an anchor institution* argues that NHS organisations could make a far greater contribution to improve health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities, by enhancing their role as anchor institutions.

In the *NHS Long Term Plan*, NHS England and NHS Improvement and the Health Foundation committed to work in partnership to support the NHS in its role as an anchor institution and as a result have co-funded the design and delivery of the UK-wide HALN. NHS England and NHS Improvement's commitment to this agenda has also been

referenced in the *Phase three COVID-19 recovery letter (8 Urgent Actions for Health Inequalities)*, the *NHS People Plan 2020/2021* and in the recent *Integrated Care System design framework*. NHS England and NHS Improvement recognise the role of the NHS as an anchor as one of the *three distinct ways the NHS contributes to tackling inequalities in health*.

For further information on anchor institutions, the Health Foundation and NHS England and NHS Improvement's partnership and the policy context, please see the [appendix](#).

2.3. The Health Anchors Learning Network

The HALN launched in March 2021. It is a UK-wide network for people responsible for, or interested in, the role of anchor institutions and anchor approaches to improve the social determinants of health and help reduce health inequalities. The Network is open to colleagues from health organisations, like trusts, hospitals and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs); Integrated Care Systems (ICS); primary care networks, regional bodies; and partners, like local authorities or other public agencies, voluntary and community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector or educational or housing organisations. The Network is delivered by the Innovation Unit.

The purpose of the HALN is to: support NHS anchors within local partnerships to develop their capacity and capability to maximise the economic, social and environmental impact; contribute to the evidence base about the role and impact of anchors; scale the work of anchors across the UK; and support innovation and inform policy change on anchor practice.

The HALN does this through a number of activities: **bringing together experts** to discuss key anchor topics and approaches; providing an online platform and sharing materials and best practice **on FutureNHS**; synthesising learning and sharing best practice **via the HALN blog**; **producing resources**; and bringing anchors and partners to learn together through **facilitated learning sets**.

Visit www.haln.org.uk for the latest information and to join the network.

3. Funding Aims

The Health Foundation and NHS England and NHS Improvement are providing Test and Learn grant funding for UK NHS anchor institutions to undertake projects that boost their strategic anchor work, test approaches and contribute new and valuable learning to support the wider uptake of anchor practice.

The aims of the funding are to test anchor practice, through which we hope to:

- Support NHS anchor institutions to deliver projects that enable them to help make progress on their broader anchor ambitions and that will contribute to tackling health inequalities.
- Create new and valuable anchor learning for HALN participants, and others working on anchor activities across health and care, to use and apply in their own contexts.

This funding supports the Health Foundation and NHS England and NHS Improvement's broader aims of building capacity and capability of NHS anchor institutions to improve the social determinants of health and reduce health inequalities for local communities.

4. Funding Criteria and Requirements

Successful applicants must be able to demonstrate how their proposal supports the aims of the grant funding and meets all the funding criteria and requirements.

4.1. Eligibility

Funding is open to applicants across England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

To be eligible for funding, projects must:

- Name an NHS anchor institution as the lead applicant i.e., NHS trusts (England), Health and Social Care Trusts (Northern Ireland), NHS Boards (Scotland) and Local Health Boards (Wales). Organisations are welcome to apply in partnership with local partners, non-health anchor institutions, health systems, local authorities, charities, social enterprises, regional bodies and networks.
- Start from early 2022 (January-March), taking place over a six- to nine-month period.
- Name a member of the project delivery team who is a HALN participant (have signed up to the newsletter via the HALN website). This should ideally be the project lead. There is no minimum time requirement for being a participant prior to applying for funding.
- Focus on anchor activities i.e., NHS organisations maximising the economic, social and/or environmental impact for their local populations.

Applicants will be expected to contribute to any related programme evaluation commissioned by the Health Foundation or NHS England and NHS Improvement.

4.2. Requirements

Expressions of interest and full applications will be assessed against the following criteria. Further information on the expression of interest form [is available here](#).

1. Improve health through addressing wider determinants and tackling health inequalities

One of the ways the NHS can improve health outcomes, address the wider determinants of health and tackle health inequalities is through its role as an anchor institution.

We are realistic about what we expect projects to achieve and the impact they can have within the allocated grant resource and timeframe. However, we do expect applicants to demonstrate how the project will intentionally aim to benefit:

- their most deprived communities; and/or
- other local population groups that experience health inequalities and are a priority for your place/system.

These benefits can be either in the short term as a direct result of the project or in the longer term as part of the organisation's broader anchor ambition. Applicants must describe how the anchor action or activity will deliver or enable the expected outcomes.

2. Develop or contribute to a broader anchors ambition

We understand that NHS organisations are at different stages with their anchor work: many are in the early phases of thinking about what it means to be an anchor, while others are more advanced.

We want to see evidence of how this project will:

- contribute to or catalyse a strategic anchor ambition for an NHS anchor institution and/or its partners, even if your organisation and local place are at the beginning of your anchor journey; and
- be sustainable in the future so that the project's legacy will be continued.

We are not looking to fund one-off anchor projects that neither connect to, nor intend to catalyse, broader and/or longer-term anchor work.

The project can be focused on one or more of the anchor pillars¹, whole organisation anchor strategy or can address cross-cutting themes or enablers, such as measurement or community and stakeholder engagement (see *Anchors in Storm* for further examples). We are particularly interested in projects addressing more than one anchor pillar or that generate learning that can be applied across multiple pillars or cross-cutting themes.

3. Generate and share new and valuable learning

Applicants must demonstrate how the project will contribute valuable future learning that can be shared and adopted by HALN participants and wider audiences leading or delivering anchor work.

The HALN's learning to-date can be found via the [YouTube channel](#), on [its website](#) and [blog](#), and via [FutureNHS](#). The network has only been established since March 2021, but we would encourage applicants to look at the current HALN learning and consider how this might apply to their project, whether this project builds on current HALN learning and / or how it fills any learning gaps not yet covered by the HALN or by other networks / organisations.

Proposed projects can:

- test a new anchor activity or idea where the learning will support broader uptake by HALN participants; or
- implement existing or known anchor initiatives in a new context; or
- test and use a unique approach to an existing or known anchor activity where the practical 'how to' learning will benefit others.

¹ These are employment, procurement, sustainability, estates and partnerships:
<https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/charts-and-infographics/the-nhs-as-an-anchor-institution>

We expect applicants to demonstrate how the learning from projects will be shared so that it is applicable and valuable to others in their contexts, either throughout the project and / or through final learning outputs (e.g., case study, a tool etc). Applicants may want to also consider how to use and draw on the network throughout the project.

Successful applicants will be expected to share learning with the HALN team, the Health Foundation, NHS England and NHS Improvement and the HALN's evaluators, SQW.

4. Engage and collaborate with local communities and partners

We expect projects to have a collaborative approach, whether this is with VCSE, education or housing organisations, local authorities or other public agencies, or the local community in planning, production and delivery. We are particularly interested in projects that demonstrate how you will connect with your Integrated Care System (ICS – England) / Integrated Care Partnership (Northern Ireland) / Integration Joint Board (Scotland) / Regional Partnership Boards (Wales).

Applicants must outline how they intend to work with partners, their local community and / or their local health system.

5. Examples of projects we are seeking to fund

We are seeking innovative ideas and projects and we know that anchor institutions themselves are best placed to identify these. However, to give some guidance, types of projects that may be funded include, but are not limited to:

- Exploring innovative methods for building local anchor partnerships or collaboration networks to, for example, develop or tackle shared priorities through anchor activities, focus activity on one of the anchor pillars or a specific population group.
- Development of a baseline or metrics for anchor activity to understand the local population and to use in an anchor framework or dashboard.
- Development of modules for anchors and health inequalities training.
- New ways of embedding anchor work as a culture change within an organisation.
- Adoption of a new framework for mapping anchor activity or application of maturity frameworks to understand local needs.
- Application of improvement methods to anchor activity, e.g., convening anchor collaborations locally or to improve anchor action.
- Collaboration and engagement with community organisations to identify and design anchor action to address local priorities.

Funding may be used for engagement, research, developing a strategy, funding a specific role (e.g., project manager), developing a project or a tool, expert skills or services.

5.1. Projects we won't fund

- Activity that does not demonstrate how it is or intends to be part of a broader anchor ambition, how it contributes to improving health and reducing health inequalities or how it generates new and valuable learning.
- Activity focused purely on partnership working.
- Activity focused purely on dissemination activities.

- Projects on health care delivery / service provision / clinical interventions.
- Projects where the learning already exists elsewhere / has been developed already by the HALN.

6. Funding, Support and Reporting

6.1. Available funding

The Health Foundation and NHS England and NHS Improvement will provide up to £25,000 per project. This may fall across financial years 2021-22 and 2022-23. The grant will be awarded and administered by The Health Foundation.

Match funding is welcomed but is not essential. During project delivery, please inform us of any funding or other resources that have been levered as a result of this funding. If match funding is secured, we would still want a form of learning to be shared with the HALN in 2022, by early 2023 the latest, even if the broader project continues.

6.2. Support offer

The Health Foundation, NHS England and NHS Improvement and the HALN team will provide support to the project through meetings, advice or connecting the delivery team with organisations or networks where appropriate and possible. This may include connecting with other successful award holders and links to other Health Foundation or NHS England or NHS Improvement projects and areas of work where appropriate. We encourage successful applicants to use and draw on the HALN network.

6.3. Reporting

Successful applicants will be supported to share their learning with HALN participants, the Health Foundation, NHS England and NHS Improvement and the HALN team. We expect submission of a final report, including financial reporting.

7. Application timeline and process

The Test and Learn Grant Funding will follow a two-stage application process.

7.1. Timetable

Activity	Date
Expression of interest stage opens	3 September
Applicant information call	15 September, 10.00-10.45
Expression of interest stage closes and review starts	27 September, 16.00
Longlisted applicants invited to submit full applications (note: we will be asking around 10 expression of interest applicants to submit full applications)	29 October
Applications close and review starts including Shortlisting	22 November
Short interviews (note: we intend to conduct short interviews with around six applicants)	w/c 6 December
Final decisions made and four successful applicants informed	13 December

Timetable may be subject to slight changes depending on levels of interest and number of applications.

7.2. Expressions of interest

The programme opens for expressions of interest on Friday 3 September and closes at **16.00 on Monday 27 September 2021**.

Expressions of interest must be submitted through our online portal [Salesforce-Grants](#) by the deadline. Expressions of interest submitted via alternative means will not be considered, and late submissions will not be accepted. We will not consider projects that do not submit an expression of interest.

A single organisation must lead the application process. The lead organisation must submit the expression of interest form. We will only accept one expression of interest per organisation.

When completing your application, please refer to the guidance in section 8 on responding to each question.

A team will review expressions of interest against the [funding requirements](#). We will then invite around 10 applicants to submit full applications.

We expect to receive a large number of expressions of interest; therefore, we may not be able to offer individual feedback to unsuccessful applicants at this stage.

7.3. Information call: Wednesday 15 September 2021

The Health Foundation will run an informal information call on **Wednesday 15 September at 10.00 - 10.45**. This will be an opportunity to hear the Health Foundation and NHS England and NHS Improvement discuss the grant funding programme and ask questions.

All questions and answers will be published on the Health Foundation website.

If interested in attending, please email anchors@health.org.uk by Tuesday 14 September at 16.00 for a joining link and submit any questions in advance, if possible.

7.4. Full application

Longlisted applicants will be invited to submit a full application via [Salesforce-Grants](#) on 29 October. The deadline for submitting full applications is **22 November**.

The full application must be submitted by the same applicant that submitted the expression of interest.

In the full applications, applicants will be asked to expand on their expressions of interest. These will be assessed against the programme requirements outlined above.

Following review of the full application, shortlisted applicants may be invited to take part in short, informal interviews over week commencing 6 December.

The Health Foundation will notify teams of the final decisions by Friday 13 December. All applicants will be offered feedback at this stage.

7.5. Assessors

Please note that expressions of interest and full applications will be reviewed by a team from the Health Foundation, NHS England and NHS Improvement and other external assessors.

Information on the projects from expressions of interest and full applications may be shared with the Innovation Unit, the delivery partner for the HALN, to inform the direction and learning of the network. Please note confidential organisational information will not be shared. You may be contacted by the Innovation Unit about your application for further information or to offer support via the Network.

8. Guidance on completing the expression of interest form

Please complete the expression of interest form on [Salesforce-Grants](#). Expressions submitted by alternative means will not be considered. Whilst completing the form, please refer to the guidance on the questions below.

8.1. Eligibility

Please respond to the eligibility questions. If you do not meet the eligibility criteria, you will not be able to access the full form.

8.2. Expression of interest questions

1. Please provide the names of the organisations that you will be working with on this project.

If applicable, please list of organisations you will work with on your proposed project.

2. How will other groups of stakeholders be involved in your work?

We recommend keeping the word count for this question to **300 words**.

Please outline the role of other groups of stakeholders in your project or how they will be involved. In particular, please refer to [the fourth funding requirement](#).

3. Please describe your idea and what you hope to achieve with our funding.

We recommend keeping the word count for this question to **300 words**.

What will your anchor project do, why do you want to do this work and what do you want to achieve? Please also include details of how long your anchor project will be and where the work will take place.

In this section, please name the member of your team who is a HALN participant.

**4. How does this idea meet all of the requirements of this funding programme?
Please refer to the guidance.**

We recommend not exceeding **500 words** for this question.

Ensure you address clearly how your project will meet the overall aim of the programme to test new learning and each of the four funding requirements. Please refer to the further information requested under **each criteria** to ensure you capture all of the relevant information.

The requirements are for projects to:

- Improve health through addressing wider determinants and tackling health inequalities.
- Develop or contribute to a broader anchors ambition.
- Generate and share new and valuable learning.
- Engage and collaborate with local communities and/or partners.

5. How much funding are you requesting from the Health Foundation? How do you plan to use this money?

We recommend keeping the word count for this question to **300 words**.

Share the amount you are requesting from the Health Foundation. Please outline how your project will be delivered and how the funds will be used, for example, funding a specific role or expertise.

6. Please describe how your project considers diversity and inclusion.

We recommend keeping the word count for this question to **300 words**.

The Health Foundation is committed to embracing values of equality, diversity and inclusion by promoting and sustaining an open, inclusive and supportive environment which affirms the rights of individuals to be treated fairly, equitably and with respect. We are keen to see how applicants are considering diversity and inclusion into the design and delivery of the project, and how these principles will be embedded in how you work.

9. Contact details

If you have any questions, please contact us by email at anchors@health.org.uk.

10. Appendix 1: Context and further information

10.1. Anchors and health inequalities

Anchor institutions are large public sector organisations which are rooted in place and connected to their communities, such as universities, local authorities, and hospitals. Anchors have significant assets and spending power and can consciously use these resources to benefit communities, which is further outlined in the Health Foundation's 2019 report *Building healthier communities: the role of the NHS as an anchor institution*.

As well as providing health services, the NHS can use its resources and influence to maximise its social, economic and environmental impacts (social value) to improve the social determinants of health, health outcomes and reduce health inequalities. Working in partnership with communities, other anchors and organisations at a local, system and regional level is essential to achieving these ambitions.

COVID-19 has shone a stark light on the inequalities in our society, has disproportionately affected some communities and exacerbated some of the inequalities they face. As an anchor institution and partner in place, the role of the NHS and health and care systems in addressing underlying economic, social and environmental causes of inequality and poor health is **more important than ever**.

Any anchors approach should be strategic: an intentional change programme and integrated into central and local systems and organisational strategies. By adopting an intentional 'anchor strategy' we believe NHS institutions, working with systems, regional bodies, partners and communities, can help tackle the underlying drivers of poor health and health inequalities to amplify their contribution to inclusive and sustainable growth.

10.2. Our joint anchors programme

The Health Foundation and NHS England and NHS Improvement are working in partnership to deliver a joint programme to explore and enhance the role of the NHS as an anchor institution. The partnership has three core aims;

- Increase **awareness** of the NHS' 'anchor' role and build **capability** to develop and deliver anchor strategies.
- Grow the **evidence** base for the impact of NHS-led anchor strategies on socio-economic wellbeing, health outcomes and health inequalities.
- Identify and **influence** changes to national guidance and policy and wider sector support to enable NHS organisations maximise their impact as anchors.

The programme includes:

- The Health Anchors Learning Network (HALN), a UK-wide learning network to bring together colleagues with diverse experiences and the common challenge of leading social, economic and environmental change in communities to impact on the social determinants of health and health inequalities.
- The Test and Learn Grant funding to allow network participants to apply HALN learning locally to develop their anchors work and feed their learning back into the network.

10.3. Health Anchors Learning Network

Health Anchors Learning Network (HALN) was launched in 2021 and is delivered by the **Innovation Unit**, supported by the Health Foundation and NHS England and NHS Improvement.

HALN is a UK-wide network for people who are interested in, or responsible for, anchor approaches to share ideas, knowledge and skills. Through individual and collective learning, participants will become better equipped to implement anchor strategies in practice. This will help maximise the health and care system's social, economic and environmental impact, improve the social determinants of health and help reduce inequalities.

Colleagues from health organisations, like trusts, hospitals and CCGs; integrated care systems; primary care networks, regional bodies; and partners, like local authorities or other public agencies, voluntary and community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector or educational or housing organisations are welcome to join.

10.4. About the Health Foundation

The Health Foundation is an independent charity committed to bringing about better health and health care for people in the UK. Our aim is a healthier population, supported by high quality health care that can be equitably accessed. We learn what works to make people's lives healthier and improve the health care system. From giving grants to those working at the front line to carrying out research and policy analysis, we shine a light on how to make successful change happen.

We make links between the knowledge we gain from working with those delivering health and health care and our research and analysis. Our aspiration is to create a virtuous circle, using what we know works on the ground to inform effective policymaking and vice versa.

We believe good health and health care are key to a flourishing society. Through sharing what we learn, collaborating with others and building people's skills and knowledge, we aim to make a difference and contribute to a healthier population.

10.5. About NHS England and NHS Improvement

NHS England and NHS Improvement leads the National Health Service (NHS) in England. Our new single operating model has been designed to support delivery of the NHS Long Term Plan.

Local health systems are supported by our seven integrated regional teams who play a major leadership role in the geographies they manage. They make decisions about how best to support and assure performance in their region, as well as supporting system transformation and the development of Integrated Care Systems (ICS).

The NHS Long Term Plan sets out an ambitious 10-year vision for healthcare in England. It sets out a new service model: where we take more action on prevention and health inequalities, where we improve quality of care and health outcomes across all major health conditions, where the NHS harnesses technology to transform services, and where we get the most out of taxpayers' investment.

The Long Term Plan placed tackling health inequalities at the heart of NHS goals and the newly established Health Inequalities Improvement Programme's vision is 'exceptional quality healthcare for all through equitable access, excellent experience and optimal outcomes'. The pandemic shone a stark light on inequalities in health, healthcare and wider society. The role of the NHS as an anchor institution can contribute to tackling the wider determinants of inequalities, support social and economic recovery and enable ICS to deliver their role in supporting social and economic development.