



**Action Guide for Building Socially Connected Communities:
Planning and Technical Assistance Program**

BACKGROUND

The [Foundation for Social Connection \(F4SC\)](#) and [Healthy Places by Design \(HPbD\)](#), with support from [Einhorn Collaborative](#), are leading a program in 2024 to support solutions for social isolation, loneliness and disconnection through community¹ utilization of the [Action Guide for Building Socially Connected Communities](#).² This six month program will launch in May 2024, and is designed for local leaders and change makers. The guide features a six-step process to engage partners and community members in implementing strategies to foster social connection. With this interactive toolkit, organizers are invited to bring together stakeholders within their communities to co-create effective and sustainable social connection action plans.

F4SC and HPbD will provide technical assistance and stipends (up to \$7,500) for community partnerships to implement the [Action Guide](#). The Action Guides' goal is to support local leaders, community-based organizations, and residents in coming together across sectors to create a community plan of action to advance social connection. In addition to the stipend and technical assistance, F4SC and HPbD will provide training, peer learning opportunities, and will also develop case stories of the local planning processes.

U.S.-based local governments and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply as leads, although the Action Guide planning should be a collaborative multi-sector effort engaging community residents, local government, nonprofit and business organizations in the process. Applications are due April 5th, and you can access the application [here](#). See below for details about eligibility and community partnership expectations.

An equity approach is critical for healthy social connection. Many historical wrongs such as systemic racism, disinvestment, and disenfranchisement of communities have led many communities to become fractured and traumatized. We aim to embed an equity perspective in our approach by focusing on the following central questions: who has not been in the conversation, who is most at risk, and what are the root causes that have contributed to our current condition of social connection? Any community partnerships that apply should have a

¹ When we say community, we are referencing a specific geographic area in which you could reasonably implement an initiative (ie county, municipality, township, town, village, ward, portion of a city, etc).

² In light of the growing crisis of connection, F4SC, Harvard University's Human Flourishing Program, and HPbD, with support from Einhorn Collaborative have developed the Action Guide for Building Socially Connected Communities.

focus on planning with, serving, and supporting people most at-risk of social isolation and loneliness (this could include LGBTQ+ individuals, older adults, young people, veterans, BIPOC, etc).

WHY SOCIAL CONNECTION?

Social connection is important because social isolation and loneliness—the objective state of having few social relationships, social roles, group memberships, and infrequent social interaction—is a public health crisis. People of all ages, demographics, and identities experience isolation. The poor health outcomes from isolation are well documented. Conversely, socially connected communities are healthy and inclusive communities:

- Stronger social connections and networks can boost a person’s likelihood of survival by 50%.³
- High quality social connection protects against heart disease, dementia, and Alzheimer’s and reduces levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.⁴
- Community members that feel a strong sense of belonging are 2.6 times more likely to report being in excellent health than people without this sense of belonging.⁵

Socially connected communities are more likely to thrive because a virtuous cycle is created when social connections are strengthened—civic engagement and a sense of belonging increases, which further strengthens social networks.

THE ACTION GUIDE + STEPS

The Action Guide was launched at the end of September 2023. The launch webinar recording is available [here](#) for an overview of the guide.

The Action Guide helps local change makers and leaders develop community solutions for social connection. It includes a stepwise process to engage partners and community members, identify priorities, create a plan of action, and measure results. We recognize that change is not linear, and communities should visit and revisit steps in the ways that will be most helpful to them. We will be structuring our content support following the steps. The guide also includes promising strategies for advancing community connection. The six steps in the Action Guide are:

- 1 - Reflect on the current condition of your community’s connectedness
- 2 - Review community drivers of disconnection and why social connection is vital for our collective health and well-being
- 3 - Assess social connection using the partnership mapping exercise, county-level connection data dashboard, and community listening session toolkit

³ Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLoS medicine*, 7(7), e1000316.

⁴ Office of the Surgeon General. (2023). *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The US Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*.

⁵ Ibid.

- 4 - Conduct a social connection workshop to create an effective and sustainable social connection plan with local partners and residents
- 5 - Track and measure the progress of the community social connection plan
- 6 - Evaluate and share findings to build a coalition and increase community impact.

EXPECTATIONS OF COMMUNITIES

This program aims to facilitate cross-sector collaboration among local leaders, community-based groups, and citizens in developing a community action plan to promote social connectedness. Selected community partnerships will be supported via a stipend of up to \$7,500 and technical assistance. Awarded communities will be expected to:

- Convene a “partnership” of leaders from a diverse array of organizations in your community to translate ideas on how to improve social connection in your community into action.
- Participate in a series of virtual learning opportunities with other communities, about two hours a month.
- Create a plan for improving community social connectedness using the Action Guide.
- Engage in 1:1 technical assistance/coaching to support the planning and tailoring process.
- Participate in evaluation activities to document meaningful processes, outcomes, and impacts of the project, which will include a group interview following the program period.
- Commit to spend ~10 hours a month in peer learning sessions and content. Please note, there might be additional hours for implementation within your community or planning time.

SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The Action Guide Planning and Technical Assistance program provides a one-time stipend to support 4 community partnerships to conduct community listening session(s) and community workshops, create a local plan for social connection, and provide feedback on the process. Community partnerships will be provided with the following supports:

- Stipend - Up to \$7,500 for partnerships to conduct a planning process utilizing the Action Guide.
- Technical assistance - Community partnerships will receive support from our staff through training and 1:1 coaching related to the Action Guide and creation of a plan of action.
- Peer learning and cohort-based support - Virtual learning and exchange between selected communities.

TIMELINE

The Action Guide Planning and Technical Assistance Program is a six-month engagement that will begin in May 2024. All sessions highlighted in green will be virtual⁶.

March	Mid March: Application launch
April	April 5th: Application deadline
May	May 1st: Offers extended to selected community partnerships Kickoff orientation meeting (virtual)
June	Peer learning session (virtual) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Action Guide Step 1: Community Social Connection Reflection- Action Guide Step 2: Review: Community Social Connection & Why It Matters- Action Guide Step 3: Social Connection Community Assessment Community Listening Session (between June and July)
July	Peer learning session (virtual) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Action Guide Step 4: Conduct a Social Connection Workshop
August	Social Connection Workshop (between July and August)
September	Peer learning session (virtual) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Action Guide Step 5: Create a Track and Measure Plan Finalize Community Social Connection Plan Cohort Celebration and Peer Reflections Session (virtual)
October	October 1st: Community Social Connection Plans are ready to be shared Reflection focus groups (virtual)

ELIGIBILITY

Successful applicants must:

- Be a government agency or nonprofit 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization coordinating the planning process on behalf of a community partnership (i.e., a coalition).
- Be committed to building a more socially connected community.

⁶ We are committed to supporting the success of your community and will fine tune support as identified in real time, in the form of office hours and/or 1:1 meetings.

- Have the capacity (~10 hours a month) to meaningfully engage and lead a collaborative Action Guide process in your community.
- Coordinate a community partnership:
 - Either you have already identified or organized a multi-disciplinary group of partners and organizations OR you are committed to creating a multi-disciplinary group.
 - Group must include a local government organization in the planning process.
 - Group must engage community members.
 - This partnership should include community members most at risk for isolation, and organizations that serve those most at risk or who have been historically marginalized.
- Be committed to co-design within your community and partners.

POTENTIAL USE OF STIPEND:

- Staffing/personnel time
- Incentives for participation in events and project activities
- Language services
- Meeting/event expenses, (e.g., space, food)
- Communication expenses
- Materials and expenses related to the social connection initiative your group launches
- Other expenses may be allowable with approval

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Applicant/Community Information
 - a. Organization Name
 - b. Street Address, City, State, Zip (if applicable)
 - c. Organization's Website (if applicable)
 - d. Organization's Social Media Handles (Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter, other)(if applicable)
 - e. What type of organization (will be leading this work)?
 - i. Non-profit
 - ii. Government
 - iii. Academic
 - f. Point of Contact
 - i. First and Last Name
 - ii. Role and organizational affiliation
 - iii. Email Address and Phone
 - g. Nonprofit Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN) or that of your fiscal sponsor
 - h. Name/title of your organization's finance contact (who will manage the stipend)
 - i. Email address and Phone of finance contact
2. What is the name of the community you serve/are you applying for?
3. Describe your community's context and character. (Up to 400 words)
 - a. Be sure to include:
 - i. Population, key demographics - help us understand the makeup of your community.
 - ii. What makes your community unique?
 - iii. What challenges to social connection exist in your community?
 - iv. What are some assets and opportunities for social connectedness in your community?
4. Why is your organization a good fit for this program? (Up to 300 words) Be sure to include:
 - a. Who will lead this work?
 - b. Mission of organization and existing community partnership, if applicable
 - c. Relevant background and experience convening a diverse group of partners and with resident input.
5. How will your approach advance equity? (Up to 300 words) For example:
 - a. How will you ensure the voices of those most at-risk will be part of your planning?
 - b. How will you take into account root causes that contribute to social disconnection?
6. How might this project be integrated into the current and future work of your organization and partners? (Up to 250 words)

7. Budget – Please provide a narrative description of how you will use the \$7500 stipend. Detail what expenses you would use it for and how those will support your planning process. (Up to 200 words)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How many communities will be selected?

In this first phase, we will support up to four organizations or community partnerships with stipends and technical assistance. If your group is not selected in this round, we will offer some additional resources and training on the Action Guide and hope to offer this opportunity in the future for more communities.

2. What is the expected time commitment for participating in this program's peer learning sessions?

Selected community partnerships can expect to commit approximately 10 hours each month for six months (May 2024 - October 2024). The date and times of peer learning sessions will be set once communities are selected.

3. Who qualifies for this program, and what kind of community partnerships will be selected?

U.S.-based government agencies and non-profit organizations with a 501(c)(3) status are eligible for this program. Community partnerships may be fiscally sponsored by a 501(c)(3) organization. We invite interested communities to reach out if there are any questions about eligibility.

4. Are there any restrictions on the use of the stipend?

Selected communities cannot use funds for lobbying or political activities as described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

5. How do I apply?

You can view and submit your application [here](#). We encourage you to work in a word or Google document and transfer your application to the Google form for submission. Please note only applications submitted through the Google form will be reviewed. The application will be available beginning March 15th and will close April 5th at 8pm ET/5pm PT.

6. Can communities submit multiple applications?

We are not likely to select more than one application from a community. We encourage groups within the same geography to work together.

7. How and when will stipends be awarded?

A review committee will assess all eligible applications using criteria outlined in this Request for Applications. All applicants can expect to be notified of funding decisions by May 1st.

For questions contact:

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