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## **You Decide Denver (YDD): Nothing About Us *Without Us***

### **Participatory Funding for Creative Expression and/or Harm Reduction Request for Proposals (RFP)**

#### **OVERVIEW**

**GOAL:** To fund new non-clinical, substance use prevention, community-driven projects related to Harm Reduction and/or Creative Expression serving Denver-metro communities. This includes efforts that provide supplies, education, or outreach to keep people safe and reduce overdose risk, and/or projects that use art, music, or storytelling to promote healing, connection, and recovery.

**ELIGIBILITY:** 501(c)(3) nonprofits, fiscally sponsored groups, and coalitions or partnerships with a 501(c)(3). Projects must focus on new Harm Reduction and/or Creative Expression efforts and serve Denver-metro communities. For-profits may be considered on a limited basis.

**TOTAL FUNDING AVAILABLE:** \$100,000 (projects may request up to \$100,000; 1–2 awards anticipated).

**PROPOSAL DEADLINE:** April 3, 2026, at 5:00 pm MST.

*See below for more details.*

#### **BACKGROUND**

Over 1,600 people died from an overdose in Colorado in 2024 (Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Vital Statistics Program). Substance misuse in the Denver community impacts all of us. We believe the people closest to the challenges are the people closest to the solutions.

Facilitated by Denver Health's Center for Addiction Medicine (CAM), You Decide Denver (YDD) is a participatory budgeting initiative that seeks to fund innovative community-driven, non-clinical projects related to substance use support, recovery, and harm reduction. Co-led by community members with living and lived expertise. You Decide Denver is centered on the following:

#### **COMMUNITY-CREATED CORE VALUES:**

**COMPASSION**

Understanding community members' struggles and challenges and actively working to address their needs with empathy and sensitivity.

**HONESTY**

Upholding transparency and integrity in all communications with community members, stakeholders, and partners.

**HOPE**

Inspiring hope and resilience in the community, celebrating past achievements, and envisioning a future filled with possibility and progress.

**TRUST**

Cultivating solid relationships and networks built on mutual respect, dependability, and transparency, fostering collaboration and unity within the community.

**HONESTY**

Upholding transparency and integrity in all communications with community members, stakeholders, and partners.

**INCLUSION**

Creating inclusive spaces and platforms where every voice is welcomed and valued, irrespective of background or identity, actively championing the representation of marginalized perspectives to ensure diversity in decision-making processes.

**EQUITY**

Championing fairness and impartiality in allocating resources and opportunities, dismantling systemic barriers, and addressing disparities to ensure that all community members have access to resources and support for their growth and well-being.

In Summer 2025, YDD collected more than 40 project ideas from people with living and lived expertise, community members, organizations, and partners. From those 40 ideas, we created a public ballot featuring six program categories that reflected the community's needs, priorities, and recurring themes. For six weeks, from Monday, December 8th, 2025, to Friday, January 16th, 2026, everyone in our Denver community, including organizations, service providers, and people with living and lived expertise, was invited to vote on the program categories they wanted to support with YDD funding.

The purpose of this Request for Proposals (RFP) is to obtain bid proposals from eligible organizations to implement new projects that align with the program categories that received the highest number of votes.

**COMMUNITY-SELECTED PROJECT CATEGORIES:**

**Harm Reduction**

*Efforts that provide supplies, education, or outreach to keep people safe and reduce overdose risk.*

**Creative Expression**

*Projects that use art, music, or storytelling to promote healing and recovery.*

**ELIGIBILITY**

Applicants can include 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, fiscally sponsored groups, and coalitions or partnerships that have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for pass-through funding with a 501(c)(3) organization.

*For-profit organizations may be considered on a limited basis, depending on the project's merit and community value.*

**PROJECT CATEGORIES:**

YDD will only consider new non-clinical projects that align with one or both of the following community-selected project categories:

**Harm Reduction**

*Efforts that provide supplies, education, or outreach to keep people safe and reduce overdose risk.*

**Creative Expression**

*Projects that use art, music, or storytelling to promote healing and recovery.*

Applicants must clearly indicate which category (or categories) their proposal applies to.

**GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS:**

Proposed projects must be located in or primarily serve Denver-metro communities. For the purposes of this RFP, *Denver-metro* is defined as the City and County of Denver and the surrounding metro-area communities.

Organizations based anywhere in Colorado are eligible to apply, provided the proposed project serves Denver-metro communities.

Applicants should demonstrate a connection to Denver communities and a commitment to elevating community-driven initiatives grounded in living and lived expertise.

**INELIGIBLE APPLICANTS:**

*As the funder, Denver Health is not eligible to submit proposals.*

**BUDGET**

YDD funding for the Center for Addiction Medicine was provided by a private donor. The total funding available is \$100,000.

Applicants may request up to \$100,000 to support the implementation of a new project for up to one year. This includes all new project implementation costs, such as staff time, supplies, and operations. The number of funded projects will depend on the proposals received; we anticipate funding 1-2 projects, each receiving a share of the total \$100,000.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE & OPERATIONAL COST**

Administrative and operational expenses are eligible uses of YDD funding. Applicants may include practical administrative costs necessary to support the implementation of the new project and related organizational operations.

YDD does not set a specific percentage cap for administrative costs. Applicants are encouraged to include a **brief narrative** justification for each budget line item explaining how it supports the proposed project.

*“Brief” generally means a few sentences per line item.*

## **KEY DATES & TIMELINE**

### **RFP Released**

Monday, February 16, 2026

### **Deadline to Submit Written Questions**

Friday, February 27, 2026, by 5:00 p.m. MT

Submit questions here: [YDD\\_Questions](#)

### **Virtual Community Information Sessions**

Monday, March 9, 2026 *(No registration required)*

9:00–10:00 a.m. MT

Join via Zoom: [YDD\\_Morning](#)

3:00–4:00 p.m. MT

Join via Zoom: [YDD\\_Afternoon](#)

### **Proposals Due**

Friday, April 3, 2026, by 5:00 p.m. MT

### **Learning Conversations with Finalists (if needed)**

April 20–24, 2026

### **Notification of Award**

Friday, May 1, 2026

## **Contracting Period**

May 2–May 31, 2026

## **Implementation Period**

June 1, 2026–May 31, 2027

## **PROPOSAL PROCEDURES**

### **VIRTUAL COMMUNITY INFORMATION SESSIONS & WRITTEN INQUIRIES**

YDD will host two optional virtual Community Information Sessions on March 9, 2026, from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. These sessions are an opportunity for prospective applicants to learn more about the RFP, ask questions, and receive clarification about eligibility, categories, and the proposal process.

#### **Virtual Community Information Sessions**

Monday, March 9, 2026 *(No registration required)*

9:00–10:00 a.m. MT

*Join via Zoom:* [YDD\\_Morning](#)

3:00–4:00 p.m. MT

*Join via Zoom:* [YDD\\_Afternoon](#)

#### **Deadline to Submit Written Questions**

Friday, February 27, 2026, by 5:00 p.m. MT

**Submit questions here:** [YDD\\_Questions](#)

*Responses to all submitted questions will be compiled and shared publicly on [www.denverhealth.org/YouDecideDenver](http://www.denverhealth.org/YouDecideDenver) to ensure equal access to information.*

*Participation in a Community Information Session is not required to apply.*

### **GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS**

Proposals must be submitted electronically by **Friday, April 3rd, 2026, at 5:00 pm.**

Applicants must submit their proposal by email to [YouDecideDenver@dhha.org](mailto:YouDecideDenver@dhha.org).

Proposals may be submitted in Word, PDF, or other accessible formats. Applicants who need to submit materials in an alternative format are welcome to do so.

There are no strict page or word limits. Applicants may use whatever length they find best to fully answer the questions. As a general recommendation, we anticipate that most proposals will be **approximately 5–7 pages total**. Shorter responses are welcome and will not be disadvantaged, provided all proposal content is addressed.

Storytelling is encouraged. Applicants may also submit responses in alternative formats, such as a short video or audio recording (or a link to one), if that format is more accessible.

Clear, legible formatting is encouraged; however, formatting, font choice, and layout will not be considered during evaluation.

Applicants can expect an email confirmation within 48 hours confirming receipt of their proposal.

Applicants must submit their proposal by email to [YouDecideDenver@dhha.org](mailto:YouDecideDenver@dhha.org)

## REQUIRED PROPOSAL CONTENT

Proposals should be organized as outlined below.

### 1. BASIC INFORMATION

Please Include:

- Organization and EIN tax ID number
- Primary contact name, title, phone number, and email
- Project Title
- Category(ies) the new project will address (one or both):

#### **Harm Reduction**

*Efforts that provide supplies, education, or outreach to keep people safe and reduce overdose risk.*

#### **Creative Expression**

*Projects that use art, music, or storytelling to promote healing and recovery.*

### 2. NARRATIVE RESPONSES

#### **Shared Values and Community Investment**

1. Describe your project and how it aligns with You Decide Denver's core values (compassion, honesty, hope, trust, inclusion, equity).
2. How does your organization, group, coalition, or collective reflect a commitment to equity, belonging, autonomy, and minimizing stigma, particularly related to substance use?
3. Tell us about your organization's relationship with the community you intend to serve. How are community members or people with living and lived expertise involved in shaping this work?
4. How are the people served by this project represented in leadership or decision-making roles?

#### **Program / Project Design**

5. What community need does your project address in the Denver-metro, and how did you identify it?

6. What makes this project new, creative, or meaningfully different from what already exists? What gap(s) does it fill?
7. How is this project informed by living and lived expertise and an understanding of structural barriers or inequities?
8. Please describe how the project will be carried out, including the timeline, key activities, and who will be involved.
9. What will success look like for this project? Please be as specific as possible within the context of your work.
10. What challenges do you anticipate, and how would you adapt if needed?
11. What longer-term impact(s) do you hope this project will have in addressing the identified community need?
12. How do you plan to share what you learn or create with the community?

### **Capacity & Work Experience**

13. Who is leading this project, and what living and lived expertise do they bring?
14. Share examples of work that represent your capacity to carry out the proposed new project. Indicate where additional support might be needed.

### **Budget / Cost Effectiveness**

15. Briefly describe how your proposed budget supports the activities described above, including any administrative or operational costs needed to support project implementation.

### **3. LINE ITEM BUDGET**

Identify all items needed to implement the new project. Please include the following:

1. The cost of each item and
2. A brief written justification for all costs, including administrative or operational expenses.

*Budgets will be agreed upon and finalized upon contract award.*

### **4. ATTACHMENTS (OPTIONAL BUT ENCOURAGED)**

Applicants may include:

Letters of reference (1–3 total)

- Letters may be from community members with living or lived expertise, including individuals who have been positively impacted by, or share relevant lived experience with, the applying organization or proposed project.
- At least one letter is encouraged from someone who can speak to the applicant's relationship with the community and/or the impact of their work from a lived or living experience perspective.
- Additional letters may be from collaborators, partners, or colleagues.
- Letters do not need to be formal and may be brief, conversational, and written in plain language.

## 5. OPTIONAL

Anything else you'd like us to know? (1–2 sentences)

## APPLICANT INQUIRIES

Applicants may submit written questions regarding this RFP through the YDD RFP Questions Form by **Friday, February 27, 2026, at 5:00 pm MST**.

### Deadline to Submit Written Questions

Friday, February 27, 2026, by 5:00 p.m. MT

Submit questions here: [YDD\\_Questions](#)

Responses to all submitted questions will be compiled and shared publicly on [www.denverhealth.org/YouDecideDenver](http://www.denverhealth.org/YouDecideDenver) by March 9, 2026, to ensure equal access to information for all prospective applicants. Participation in a Community Information Session is not required to apply.

### Virtual Community Information Sessions

Monday, March 9, 2026 (*No registration required*)

9:00–10:00 a.m. MT

Join via Zoom: [YDD\\_Morning](#)

3:00–4:00 p.m. MT

Join via Zoom: [YDD\\_Afternoon](#)

## EVALUATION PROCEDURES

### PROPOSAL REVIEW & SCORING

All submitted proposals will receive confirmation when their submission has been received.

Eligible and complete proposals will be reviewed and scored by a diverse review panel using the YDD evaluation criteria outlined in **Appendix A: Evaluation Criteria**. The panel will include community budget delegates, individuals with lived and living expertise, and Denver Health administrators to ensure proposals are evaluated through multiple perspectives grounded in community expertise and organizational collaboration.

All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their submission, regardless of selection status. Applicants whose proposals are considered incomplete or ineligible will be informed of their status and offered the limited opportunity to connect with a YDD team member for guidance, technical assistance, or support in preparing for future proposals or opportunities, upon request.

Proposals will be scored out of **100 points total**. The highest-scoring proposals will move forward to the next phase of the YDD process, which may include finalist learning conversations.

Formatting, writing style, and presentation polish will **not** be considered in scoring.

### **FINALIST LEARNING CONVERSATIONS**

A small number of applicants may be invited to participate in a brief, informal conversation with members of the YDD team as part of the final selection process.

### **FINAL SELECTION**

Following scoring and, if applicable, learning conversations.

### **REPORTING & ACCOUNTABILITY**

Following scoring and, if applicable, learning conversations.

- Awardees will be asked to complete brief financial, narrative, and outcome reporting, which will be determined upon contract creation.
- Grantees will be expected to remain in regular, learning-focused communication with YDD staff as needed throughout the project.

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES:**

Innovation and creativity are encouraged and considered alongside traditional “evidence-based” approaches and existing programs.

Lived or living experience is considered relevant subject matter expertise.

### **APPENDIX A: EVALUATION CRITERIA**

See the Glossary for YDD's definitions of terms such as equity, belonging, autonomy, minimizing stigma, lived and living expertise, marginalized, and community-led leadership.

<b>EVALUATION CRITERIA</b>	<b>POINTS</b>
<p><b>Shared Values and Community Investment</b></p> <p><i>What we're looking for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <i>Alignment with YDD core values (compassion, honesty, hope, trust, inclusion, transparency, and equity)</i></li><li>● <i>Commitment to equity, belonging, autonomy, and minimizing stigma (see Glossary)</i></li><li>● <i>Demonstrated relationship with and investment in the community</i></li><li>● <i>Centering lived and living expertise and elevating marginalized voices</i></li><li>● <i>Leadership reflects the community served. (see Glossary)</i></li></ul> <p><i>Guiding questions (for reviewers):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <i>Does the proposal clearly align with YDD's core values and mission?</i></li></ul>	25

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Is there supporting material (examples, stories, relationships) that the applicant listens to and engages with the community?</i></li> <li>• <i>Are the people the project serves represented in leadership or decision-making? If yes, please describe how?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does the proposal elevate the voices of those often excluded from funding processes?</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Program / Project Design</b></p> <p><i>What we're looking for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Innovation and creativity (new ideas vs. "what already happens")</i></li> <li>• <i>Responsiveness to the community-determined category needs and priorities</i></li> <li>• <i>Building upon living or lived expertise</i></li> <li>• <i>Understanding of the structural barriers and inequities that exist</i></li> <li>• <i>Feasibility with a clear plan, timeline, and staffing</i></li> <li>• <i>Identified methods/metrics to show program impact/outcomes</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Guiding questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Is the idea innovative, creative, and meaningfully different than what currently exists?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does it address an unmet community need in a new way?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is the project based on living or lived expertise?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is there a realistic project plan that includes a timeline, key players, and staffing?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does the applicant understand the potential barriers and demonstrate the ability to adapt?</i></li> <li>• <i>How might the project kick-start long-term change after the grant period ends? (piloting a new program, etc.)</i></li> <li>• <i>What will success look like for this project? Consider both process and impact outcomes.</i></li> </ul>	25
<p><b>Capacity and Work Experience</b></p> <p><i>What we're looking for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Living or lived expertise is valued as relevant experience</i></li> <li>• <i>Ability to carry out the project and meet basic funding requirements</i></li> <li>• <i>Clear leadership and accountability</i></li> <li>• <i>Capacity building without unnecessary administrative burden</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Guiding questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Who is leading the work, and what living or lived expertise do they bring?</i></li> <li>• <i>How does the applicant leverage living or lived expertise to connect</i></li> </ul>	25

<p><i>with the community?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Does the applicant have the capacity to carry out the project, and where are the support needs?</i></li> <li>• <i>Are there reasonable accountability structures without excessive reporting? i.e., learning calls, conversational, 3-page reports, etc.</i></li> <li>• <i>Has the applicant provided letters of reference from someone they have positively impacted?</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Budget / Cost Effectiveness</b></p> <p><i>What we're looking for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Budget aligned with scope and capacity</i></li> <li>• <i>Realistic use of limited funds</i></li> <li>• <i>Awareness of infrastructure and resource constraints</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Guiding questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Is the budget reasonable and aligned with the proposed work?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does the applicant have (or need) infrastructure to manage funds responsibly?</i></li> </ul>	25
Final Score	100 Points Possible

## APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY

### HOW TO USE THIS GLOSSARY

This glossary is intended to support the YDD RFP and scoring process. Definitions are written to reflect how these terms are used in all aspects of YDD and are shared here for reference for this funding opportunity.

Applicants are encouraged to use their own words and examples; alignment matters more than specific language.

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

#### AUTONOMY

Respecting individuals' and communities' right to make informed decisions about their own lives, bodies, and pathways to support or recovery. In YDD, autonomy means that projects do not impose a single "right" outcome; instead, they honor choice, autonomy, self-determination, and consent.

#### BELONGING

Creating conditions where people feel welcomed, valued, and respected, not just included. Belonging means community members see themselves reflected in leadership, decision-making, and program design, and feel safe to participate authentically without fear of judgment or exclusion.

### **COMMUNITY-LED LEADERSHIP**

Leadership guided by people directly impacted by the issue the project seeks to address. Community-led does not require a specific organizational structure, but it does require meaningful power-sharing, decision-making authority, and accountability to the community served.

### **EQUITY**

Fairness in process and outcomes, recognizing that different people and communities face various barriers. In the YDD context, equity means allocating resources and opportunities in ways that actively address historical and structural inequities rather than treating everyone the same.

### **LIVED & LIVING EXPERTISE**

Direct, personal experience with substance use, recovery, harm reduction, overdose, criminalization, housing instability, or related systems. “Living expertise” acknowledges that people may currently be navigating these realities, while “lived expertise” recognizes past experiences that continue to shape perspective, expertise, and solutions.

### **MARGINALIZED**

Individuals or communities that have been pushed to the edges of systems, decision-making, or access to resources due to stigma, discrimination, criminalization, or structural inequities (e.g., racism, poverty, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status). Marginalization is caused by systems, not by individual identity.

### **MINIMIZING STIGMA**

Actively reducing shame, judgment, and harm associated with substance use and related experiences. This includes using respectful language, avoiding punitive or demoralizing approaches, and designing programs that affirm dignity, autonomy, safety, and humanity.

## **APPENDIX C: WORDS MATTER LANGUAGE GUIDANCE**

You Decide Denver (YDD) recognizes that language plays a critical role in shaping how people experiencing substance use, recovery, and harm reduction are treated and understood. Applicants are encouraged to use person-centered, non-stigmatizing language when describing their work, communities, and project approaches.

For additional guidance, applicants may refer to the Center for Addiction Medicine (CAM) “Words Matter” Language Guide, which offers practical examples of respectful, inclusive language related to substance use and recovery: [CAM Words Matter Language Guide](#). This is not a requirement and will not be included in the scoring of proposals, but is something that CAM recommends to de-stigmatize substance use, harm reduction, and recovery.