



Request for Proposal

**Boston Black Male Healing Circles Initiative**

Executive Office  
Center for Behavioral Health and Wellness

May 30, 2025

## Overview

The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) is the local public health department for the City of Boston. BPHC's mission envisions a thriving Boston where all residents live healthy, fulfilling lives free of racism, poverty, violence, and other systems of oppression.

In light of the alarming rise in behavioral health challenges among Boston's youth—particularly among young Black men—BPHC is issuing this Request for Proposals (RFP) to **identify a qualified vendor to co-design and support the implementation of a scalable, sustainable Black Male Healing Circles initiative. Our goal is to launch and sustain a network of culturally grounded Healing Circles for Black men and boys across Boston, led by trained community ambassadors and embedded in trusted, community-based settings.**

Healing Circles offer a trusted, culturally relevant approach that counters stigma, builds social connection, and empowers participants through shared experience. Facilitated by trained community ambassadors and held in familiar environments—like barbershops, churches, sports organizations, community-based organizations, health and/or mental focused organizations and fatherhood organizations—these circles represent a vital tool for advancing mental health equity and resilience among Black men in Boston.

Living Wage Compliance: all service contracts awarded by BPHC may be subject to the City of Boston's Living Wage Ordinance. This ordinance requires that all employees working on sizable city contracts earn an hourly wage that is sufficient for a family of four to live at or above the federal poverty level. This wage amount, called the living wage, is recalculated annually. For more information, visit <https://www.boston.gov/worker-empowerment/livingwage-division>

BPHC is committed to contracting with a diverse group of businesses, particularly those often underrepresented in government contracting. As part of your application, please indicate if your business is one of the following: Minority-owned (MBE), Women owned (WBE), Veteran-owned (VBE), Service-disabled Veteran-owned (SDVOBE), Disability-owned (DOBE), Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender owned (LGBTBE), or a Local business (within City of Boston). If your business is a Certified Under-represented Business Enterprise (CUBE) in any of these areas, please attach documentation of certification.

## RFP Timeline

May 30, 2025	RFP posted on The Boston Globe
May 30, 2025	RFP available online at <a href="https://www.boston.gov/rfp">boston.gov/rfp</a>
June 13, 2025	RFP questions due via email by 5:00pm EST  Send questions via email to: <a href="mailto:cbhwquestions@bphc.org">cbhwquestions@bphc.org</a>  Subject: <b>Boston Black Male Healing Circles Initiative</b>
June 20, 2025	Responses to questions available for viewing at <a href="https://www.boston.gov/rfp">boston.gov/rfp</a> by 5:00pm EST

June 30, 2025	<p><b>Proposals due via email by 5:00 PM EST</b></p> <p>Send proposals via email to: <a href="mailto:RFR@bphc.org">RFR@bphc.org</a> <b>and</b> <a href="mailto:cbhwquestions@bphc.org">cbhwquestions@bphc.org</a> and <a href="mailto:naman.mcdaniels@boston.gov">naman.mcdaniels@boston.gov</a></p> <p>Subject: <b>Boston Black Male Healing Circles Initiative</b></p> <p><b>NO EXCEPTIONS TO THIS DEADLINE</b></p>
July 28- August 8, 2025	<p>Interviews with applicants as needed.</p> <p><i>Subject to change</i></p>
August 15, 2025	<p>Notification of Decision: Selected candidate/s will be notified of award by 5:00pm EST</p> <p>The desired date for notification of award to the vendor. This date may be extended without notice. The contract resulting from this RFP shall be in effect when all necessary documentation is fully executed by both parties.</p> <p><i>Subject to change</i></p>
September 15, 2025	<p>Anticipated start of contract</p> <p><i>Subject to change</i></p>

### Background

Black male adults in Boston face a disproportionate burden of behavioral health challenges driven by systemic inequities such as structural racism (Bailey et al., 2021), economic marginalization (Assari, 2020), community violence (Kajeept, 2021), incarceration (Alang et al., 2020), and limited access to culturally responsive mental health care (Williams et al., 2021). These cumulative stressors lead to profound mental health disparities, including higher rates of trauma, depression, and untreated mental illness (Boston Public Health Commission, 2024a).

Recent Boston-based data highlights the need for urgent, targeted intervention:

According to the *Health of Boston: Mental Health 2024 Report*, Black men in Boston are less likely to access outpatient mental health services and more likely to rely on emergency departments for crisis care, suggesting limited access to preventive or ongoing mental health support (Boston Public Health Commission, 2024b). Black adults in Boston report lower levels of perceived mental well-being and higher levels of psychological distress, with Black men facing intersecting stigma related to both mental health and masculinity norms (Boston Public Health Commission, 2024b).

The *Boston Live Long and Well Agenda* identifies Black men as a population disproportionately impacted by community violence and trauma, both of which are key drivers of long-term mental health issues (Boston Public Health Commission, 2024c).

Feedback from community engagement conducted by the Boston Public Health Commission indicates that many Black men prefer informal, peer-supported spaces for emotional expression rather than traditional

clinical settings, citing distrust of institutions and a lack of culturally affirming services (Boston Public Health Commission, 2024d).

Based on this data, this RFP aims to establish a sustainable and community-embedded model for Black Male Healing Circles—peer-led, culturally grounded spaces that promote mental wellness, emotional expression, and collective healing for Black men ages 18 and older.

## Scope of Service

### Introduction

The Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) prioritizes the promotion of racial justice and health equity, consistent with its vision of a thriving Boston where all residents live healthy, fulfilling lives free of racism, poverty, violence, and other systems of oppression. This Request for Proposals (RFP) supports that mission by addressing the behavioral health crisis among Black male adults in Boston through the development and delivery of culturally responsive, community-based healing services.

### Objective

This RFP seeks qualified organizations or vendors to partner with BPHC to develop and implement a sustainable model of **Black Male Healing Circles** in Boston. These peer-led spaces will foster emotional expression, resilience, and healing among Black men aged 18 and older, who are disproportionately impacted by racism, violence, trauma, and behavioral health disparities.

### Proposal Aims

- Establish trusted, culturally grounded peer support spaces that promote the mental and emotional well-being of Black male adults.
- Train and equip community Healing Circle ambassadors (e.g., barbers, pastors, coaches, fathers, organizers and more) to facilitate Healing Circles using trauma-informed and culturally grounded practices.
- Embed Healing Circles in diverse, familiar, and accessible community settings such as barbershops, churches, community centers, libraries, sports and fitness centers, fatherhood organizations.
- Create a replicable and scalable model using sustainable models for programming such as train the trainer models.
- Promote mental health awareness and reduce stigma through culturally resonant outreach strategies in collaboration with the Office of Black Male Advancement and other City partners.

### Required Services

The selected vendor will be expected to provide:

#### 1. Program Design & Technical Assistance

- Develop or adapt a Healing Circle curriculum tailored to the needs of Boston's Black male adults.
- Provide technical assistance to community partners throughout the project period.
- Ensure the model incorporates trauma-informed care, cultural humility, and mental health literacy, in alignment with best practices and with the [Behavioral Health Roadmap](#).

#### 2. Ambassador Training

- Identify, recruit, and train 10–15 ambassadors from trusted community spaces in Boston.
- Deliver a structured "Train-the-Trainer" program, equipping ambassadors to lead peer Healing Circles and train others in how to set up and run peer Healing Circles.
- Provide toolkits, facilitation guides, and ongoing mentorship to ambassadors.

- Train a small cohort of City staff on the materials as presented to the Healing Circle Ambassadors.

### 3. Implementation of Healing Circles

- Launch Healing Circles in 5–8 diverse community locations (e.g., Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, Hyde Park), with a focus on spaces familiar and safe spaces for Black men (e.g., barbershops, faith-based institutions, recreation centers).
- Ensure each site hosts circles on a regular cadence (e.g., weekly, biweekly or monthly).
- Supply basic materials (e.g., journals, refreshments, seating) and support site logistics.

### 4. Community Engagement & Outreach

- Collaborate with City partners to develop outreach materials and promotional strategies.
- Leverage word-of-mouth, social media, and local events to reach Black men across neighborhoods.
- Co-host launch events or open houses at Healing Circle sites to build community trust and visibility.

### 5. Monitoring, Evaluation & Sustainability

- Track participation, engagement, and basic impact metrics (e.g., pre/post self-assessments, ambassador feedback).  
Collect demographics from participants and Ambassadors (zip code, neighborhood, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, potentially income bracket information to ensure equity focus).
- Offer a plan for continuous improvement and adaptation based on community feedback.
- Propose additional strategies beyond the Train the Trainer model for sustaining Healing Circles beyond ARPA funding through integration with existing services or partnerships (e.g., Fathers' Uplift, Family Nurturing Center, local churches, mosques and congregations).

Anticipated Time Period	Anticipated Activities
September 15, 2025 – November 30, 2025	Program planning and design; develop or adapt culturally responsive Healing Circle curriculum; begin identifying and recruiting 10–15 Boston community ambassadors; initiate outreach to identified partner sites (e.g., barbershops, churches, community centers).
December 1, 2025 – February 28, 2026	Conduct “Train-the-Trainer” sessions for ambassadors and City staff; distribute toolkits and facilitation guides; finalize community site selection and prepare for Healing Circle launch.
March 1, 2026 – May 31, 2026	Launch Healing Circles at 5–8 sites; begin regular Circle meetings (weekly, biweekly, or monthly); support site logistics; conduct community engagement activities and launch events.
June 1, 2026 – August 31, 2026	Continue Healing Circles; provide mentorship and technical assistance; track participation and collect demographic and feedback data; adjust programming as needed based on feedback.
September 1, 2026 – November 30, 2026	Evaluate program outcomes; report on engagement and impact; propose and begin implementing sustainability strategies based on Train the Trainer program; integrate within existing community services.

## Minimum Qualifications

Qualified Applicants must meet the following requirements:

### Minimum Qualifications

#### Experience

Applicants must have demonstrated experience designing, implementing, and evaluating community-based healing circle initiatives, particularly those focused on Black men or other historically marginalized populations. Preference will be given to organizations with a track record of successful partnerships with community-based institutions such as barbershops, faith organizations, fatherhood programs, or culturally specific support networks. Applicants must also be able to demonstrate on the ground knowledge of Boston and Boston presence to as full an extent as possible.

#### Expertise

Applicants should demonstrate subject matter expertise in trauma-informed care, peer-led facilitation models, and culturally responsive healing circle strategies. The applicant's team must include individuals with relevant training or lived experience in supporting the emotional and mental well-being of Black men, as well as the ability to provide technical assistance, curriculum development, and capacity-building for community leaders.

### Vendor Framework Requirements

The vendor's approach must be:

- **Evidence-informed** and aligned with current best practices in community healing and behavioral health.
- **Behaviorally appropriate** and tailored to the lived experiences of Black men in Boston.
- **Racially just, trauma-informed, and culturally informed and [culturally humble](#)**, reflecting the importance of identity, history, and community in the healing process.
- **Effective in building rapport and trust** among Black men, with attention to institutional distrust, masculinity norms, and mental health stigma.
- Rooted in a **thorough understanding of Boston's landscape**, including the social dynamics that affect Black communities.

### Understanding of Health Contexts

Vendors must demonstrate:

- Knowledge of the **social determinants of health**, including how housing, employment, violence, racism, and economic inequities impact behavioral health.
- Familiarity with **health disparities and equity concepts**, including community-level strategies to reduce barriers to care and improve population-level well-being.

- A nuanced understanding of the **socio-political realities of marginalized communities in Boston**, including the historical and present-day forces that shape community trust and access to services.

### **Sustainable Model Implementation**

The vendor must:

- Propose a **sustainable and inclusive Healing Circle model** that is designed to persist beyond the initial ARPA funding.
- Include clear strategies for **internal oversight and quality assurance**, such as regular supervision, coaching for community ambassadors, and mechanisms for feedback and adaptation.
- Articulate a plan for **capacity building** among local stakeholders to support institutionalization of Healing Circles within existing community infrastructures.

## **Proposal Requirements**

### **Proposal sections (scored) should include (in this order):**

Applicants must submit a complete proposal with the following scored sections, attachments, and unscored supplemental materials in the order listed below.

#### **1. Cover Page with Abstract (1 paragraph max)**

Provide the following:

- Name and contact information for the lead project contact (name, title, agency, email).
- Title of the project.
- Names of participating organization(s), if applicable.
- Total budget request.
- A concise abstract (maximum one paragraph) summarizing the key activities, primary objectives, and proposed model of Healing Circles. Include brief mention of implementation sites and intended community impact.

#### **2. Organizational Experience (2 pages max)**

Describe your organization's preparedness to lead and implement this initiative. This section should include:

- Relevant experience designing, launching, or supporting culturally responsive healing circles — especially for Black men or historically marginalized communities.
- Past success working with trusted community-based institutions (e.g., barbershops, churches, fatherhood programs).
- Demonstrated capacity to implement trauma-informed, racially just, and community-embedded models.
- Alignment with the qualifications outlined in the Minimum Qualifications section, including staff expertise and experience in providing technical assistance, curriculum development, and ambassador training.

### **3. Understanding of the Need** (1 page max)

Provide a description of the population to be served: Black male adults (ages 18 and older) residing in Boston. Include:

- Demographic and community context, including systemic and structural barriers to mental health care.
- Justification of the need for equitable, culturally grounded programming for Black men.
- Use of Boston-specific behavioral health data to support the rationale for Healing Circles.

### **4. Description of Services** (2 pages max)

Present your proposed model, which must include:

- A “Train-the-Trainer” approach for recruiting and supporting 10–15 community ambassadors to facilitate Healing Circles.
- A high-level workplan for launching Healing Circles across at least five culturally relevant sites (e.g., barbershops, faith-based institutions, libraries, fatherhood centers).
- Rationale behind your approach, including cultural humility, trauma-informed practices, and community trust-building.
- Anticipated reach, frequency of Healing Circles, and intended outcomes related to peer support, emotional wellness, and stigma reduction.

### **5. Equity in Selection** (2 pages max, if applicable)

If applicable, describe how equity is incorporated into your internal operations and partner selection processes. This includes:

- Vendor organization commitment to equity in mission, vision and hiring practices.
- How Healing Circle ambassadors are recruited and supported equitably.
- Commitment to Black leadership in the program.

### **6. Evaluation Approach** (2 pages max)

Outline your strategy for ongoing program monitoring and evaluation. This should include:

- Methods for collecting demographic and engagement data across Healing Circle sites. This should include a description of ability to collect and track and report on demographic data related to all who are involved, enrolled, or otherwise engaged in Healing Circles (ambassadors and participants).

This should include, to the best of the vendor and ambassador ability: zip code, neighborhood, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, potentially income bracket information to ensure equity focus.

- Metrics to assess ambassador competence and skills in leading Healing Circles, participant experience and satisfaction, and emotional wellness impact over time involved in Healing Circles.
- A plan for monthly reviews with BPHC, using feedback loops for continuous quality improvement.
- Use of qualitative and quantitative data to inform future scale and sustainability.



## **7. Challenges and Solutions (1 page max)**

Identify potential challenges to program implementation, such as ambassador turnover, participant engagement, or logistical issues. Describe:

- Mitigation strategies and contingency plans.
- Commitment to regular meetings with BPHC for technical assistance and problem-solving.

### **Attachments (Required)**

#### **1. Certified Underrepresented Business Enterprise (CUBE) Certification (if applicable)**

- If your organization is a certified CUBE vendor, submit documentation of verification.

#### **2. Workplan**

Submit a detailed workplan that includes:

- Project activities, responsible personnel, timelines, and measurable outcomes.
- Period: September 15, 2025 – November 30, 2026
- Include key milestones such as ambassador recruitment/training, Healing Circle launch dates, evaluation check-ins, and closeout reporting.

The workplan should clearly reflect:

- Stipends and supports for ambassadors.
- Timeline for space/material procurement.
- Coordination with community sites and city partners.
- Communication and outreach activities.

#### **3. Budget and Budget Justification**

Submit a detailed, itemized budget aligned with your workplan. The justification should explain each line item, including:

- Personnel/staffing
- Ambassador stipends
- Curriculum development and training
- Materials and supplies
- Food and beverages
- Space rental (if needed)
- Community outreach and promotional efforts
- Indirect costs (capped at 10% of allowable costs per ARPA guidelines)

### **Unscored Additional Requirements**

#### **1. CV of Key Staff**

Include résumés or CVs only for staff who will oversee curriculum development, training, and implementation support.

2. **Work Sample**

Provide at least one work sample that reflects your organization's previous work relevant to healing circle implementation, including an explicit commitment to racial equity, and/or culturally responsive healing. This may include reports, curricula, facilitation tools, or campaign materials.

3. **Business References**

Provide three professional references including only: name, organization, title, email, and phone number. References should be able to speak on previous partnerships on similar projects or programs.

### Period of Performance

Period of Performance: The anticipated period of performance for this program is **September 15, 2025 – November 30, 2026**.

Services will be required on an as-needed basis. BPHC does not guarantee the amount of services to be performed. BPHC may extend the period of performance prior to the end of **December 31, 2026** - this is subject to funds available and additional work as required.

Total Budget: Up to **\$100,000** of [Federal ARPA](#) funding is available through the Center for Behavioral Health and Wellness of the BPHC.

Proposal Page Limit: Proposal narrative not to exceed 11 pages (including abstract cover page), single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman, one-inch margins. This page limit does not include cover page and requested attachments (i.e., workplan table, budget sheet and budget justification, CUBE information, CV of key staff, work sample/s, reference listing).

Selected vendor will be required to enter into the BPHC's standard contract and complete required forms (this includes a CORI) prior to the start day of the contract.

### Proposal Scoring

Proposal Section	Points
Organizational Experience	15
Understanding of the Need	15
Description of Services	10
Workplan	15
Challenges and Solutions	10
CUBE Vendor or equivalent out of state certification	10
Evaluation Methodology	10
Budget and Budget Justification	15
<b>Total Points</b>	<b>100</b>

*Proposal scoring informs interview selection.*

### Submission Instructions

Proposals must be received no later than **June 30, 2025, by 5pm EST.**

Qualified applicants to submit by email all required documents in **one** PDF file to: [RFR@bphc.org](mailto:RFR@bphc.org) and [cbhwquestions@bphc.org](mailto:cbhwquestions@bphc.org) and [naman.mcdaniels@boston.gov](mailto:naman.mcdaniels@boston.gov)

Subject of the email must contain: **Boston Black Male Healing Circles Initiative**

*Note: Any risks associated with the electronic transmission of responses to this RFP are assumed by the vendor.*

## References

**Bailey, Z. D., Feldman, J. M., & Bassett, M. T. (2021).** How structural racism works—Racist policies as a root cause of U.S. racial health inequities. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 384(8), 768–773. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMms2025396>

**Assari, S. (2020).** Unequal gain of equal resources across racial groups. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 9(3), 99–101. [https://www.ijhpm.com/article\\_3398.html](https://www.ijhpm.com/article_3398.html)

**Kajeepeta, S., Bruzelius, E., Ho, J. Z., & Prins, S. J. (2021).** Policing the pandemic: Estimating spatial and racialized inequities in New York City police enforcement of COVID-19 mandates. *Critical Public Health*, 32(1), 56–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2021.1987387>

**Alang, S., McAlpine, D., McCreedy, E., & Hardeman, R. (2020).** Police brutality and Black health: Setting the agenda for public health scholars. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110(5), 662–665. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.303691>

**Williams, M. T., Printz, D., Ching, T. H. W., & Wetterneck, C. T. (2021).** Assessing racial trauma within a DSM–5 framework: The UConn Racial/Ethnic Stress & Trauma Survey. *Practice Innovations*, 6(1), 42–58. <https://awspntest.apa.org/record/2018-37737-001>

**Boston Public Health Commission. (2024a).** *Boston Public Health Commission: Health Data*. Retrieved from <https://www.boston.gov/government/cabinets/boston-public-health-commission/health-data#health-of-boston>

**Boston Public Health Commission. (2024b).** *Health of Boston: Mental Health 2024 Report*. Retrieved from [https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2024/03/HOB\\_MentalHealth\\_2024.pdf](https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2024/03/HOB_MentalHealth_2024.pdf)

**Boston Public Health Commission. (2024c).** *Boston’s Live Long and Well Agenda*. Retrieved from <https://www.boston.gov/departments/bostonpublichealthcommission/bostonslivelongandwellagenda#data>

**Boston Public Health Commission. (2024d).** *Boston 2022 CHNA Report*. Retrieved from [https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2023/03/BCCC-CHNA-Report\\_062922.pdf](https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2023/03/BCCC-CHNA-Report_062922.pdf)