



North Dakota Health and Human Services | Rural Health Transformation Program

Competitive Funding Opportunity Application Guidance

Funding Opportunity Name: Zero-Hour Physical Education Initiative

Funding Opportunity Solicitation Number: 210-112

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Funding Overview:

1) Background

As part of Public Law 119-21, Congress established the \$50 billion [Rural Health Transformation Program \(RHTP\)](#) to help rural communities reimagine their health care delivery systems and improve health outcomes. This program administered by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), aims to address longstanding health-care challenges facing rural and Tribal communities.

North Dakota is taking bold, practical steps to restore health, stability, and prosperity to America's heartland. The North Dakota Health and Human Services (ND HHS) developed its RHTP to focus on creating new access points, modernizing care delivery and empowering local providers to meet the needs of their communities through sustainable investments. North Dakota's plan, as indicated in the [RHTP application and supporting documents](#), includes four initiatives:

- Initiative 1: Make North Dakota Healthy Again
- Initiative 2: Strengthen and Stabilize Rural Health Workforce
- Initiative 3: Bring High-Quality Health Care Closer to Home
- Initiative 4: Connect Tech, Data, and Providers for a Stronger North Dakota

Following approval from CMS, ND HHS is launching multiple funding opportunities as part of North Dakota's five-year RHTP effort. These opportunities are designed to support practical, locally driven solutions that help rural and tribal communities stay healthy and strong. Funding opportunities will be released in phases, with individual applications announced over time. Eligible applicants may apply for more than one funding opportunity; there is no limit to the number of applications that can be submitted.

2) Funding Opportunity

This funding opportunity is positioned under Initiative 1: Make North Dakota Healthy Again and is specifically targeted toward providing leaders of North Dakota's rural and tribal, public and private schools, regional education associations and/or school consortiums with the opportunity to develop and deliver a Zero-Hour Physical Education (PE) Initiative.

Although North Dakota's children are only 25% of the state's population, they are 100% of our future.

Because of this, it's imperative that we provide every one of our children under the age of 18 with a best-in-class education. This includes not only making sure they are

intellectually prepared to successfully navigate an increasingly complex world, but also fit and strong enough to take advantage of every opportunity that comes their way.

For far too long, these two things—academics and good health—have been seen as competing priorities.

By definition, a “Zero-Hour” PE initiative is a before-school fitness program designed to improve not only student’s strength and endurance, but their academic performance and brain functioning as well.

Here’s how a Zero-Hour PE initiative works. Zero-Hour PE initiatives are structured fitness programs that take place in the morning before a student’s first class and they are typically 30-45 minutes in length. During their time together, students participate in vigorous, heart-rate-monitored exercise—targeting 70–90% of max heart rate and the focus is on personal fitness not on competition.

And the results of such initiatives are remarkable.

In fact, widely published research findings indicate that not only do these Zero-Hour sessions improve students’ overall fitness, but they also optimize cognitive function, enhance learning and boost alertness. For example, in a groundbreaking Zero-Hour PE program taking place in Naperville, IL, students who exercised before school not only significantly improved their fitness, but they also performed better in demanding academic subjects—ultimately achieving top-tier international scores in both science and math.

In the years following the results of the Naperville Zero-Hour initiative, numerous schools across the U.S. have implemented Zero-Hour PE.

Because of this, we are making RHTP funding available for the leaders of rural public schools to develop and deliver a Zero-Hour PE initiatives for their students.

To be maximally effective, science reveals that best-in-class Zero-Hour PE initiatives must contain the following seven components in order to improve student fitness and academic performance.

Success Component #1: Early Morning Scheduling Led by a Highly Motivated Teacher, Coach or Consultant. Specifically, the PE class is held before the first academic period of the school day. To maintain energy and student engagement, these initiatives are led by highly motivated teacher, coach or consultant.

Success Component #2: 30–45-minute sessions two to three times per week. Each session typically lasts anywhere from 30-45 minutes and is convened two to three times per week.

Success Component #3: High Intensity. Each session is centered around high-intensity exercise that raises heart rates to 70–90% of maximum capacity.

Success Component #4: Heart Rate Monitoring & Data Tracking. For Zero-Hour PE sessions, students wear heart rate monitors to track their intensity in real-time, receiving instant feedback to ensure they are in the target zone. Weekly progress is captured and tracked.

Success Component #5: Fitness-Focused Not Sports-Focused. Zero-Hour PE offerings prioritize individual fitness activities over competitive team sports and “winning.” These programs are, most often, focused on those students who are not athletes--although it is not unusual for athletes to participate. Activities typically include running/jogging, circuit training, HIIT, kickboxing, Pilates and various cardio games.

Success Component #6: The Goal is Personal, Self-Improvement. Zero-Hour PE initiatives focus on competing against oneself (rather than others) and encourages self-tracking of fitness metrics (e.g., strength, body fat, blood pressure, running times, etc.).

Success Component #7: Everyone is Welcome, Not Just Athletes. Because of their power, Zero-Hour PE initiatives should be offered to students from all walks of life, not just athletes. It is imperative that they are led by dynamic instructors.

To deliver this game changing Zero-Hour PE initiatives, we are looking to partner with a bold group of believing difference makers. Educators, coaches, consultants and leaders who are driven by a burning desire to systematically enhance the health, well-being and academic performance of our state’s middle and high school students.

Energized by the shared vision of healthier, smarter kids, we will work together to implement the Zero-Hour PE prescriptive blueprint at the grass roots level.

Together, we will learn, we will grow and we will succeed. But most importantly, through our combined efforts over the next few years, we will change the health and well-being of kids for decades to come.

Because of the proven impact of these seven components, all eligible funding submissions must include how these seven components will be incorporated into their school’s overall Zero-Hour PE initiative.

Additionally, this funding opportunity aims to support improvement in the metrics identified for Initiative 1: Make North Dakota Healthy Again found on pages 19-26 of the [project narrative](#) and pages 11-15 of the [project appendices](#). Please note, not all metrics apply to the Make North Dakota Health Again funding opportunity.

Specifically, these improvements and outcomes include but are not limited to:

- Increases in individual participation in wellness activities
- Increases in preventive health and wellness screening
- Increases in physical activity
- Improvements in dietary practices
- Enhanced mental well-being
- Enhanced relationships and social connection
- Improvements in policies, systems, and environments that help to make the healthy choice, the easy choice.

3) Eligibility

Funding eligibility is restricted to North Dakota's rural and tribal, public and private schools, regional education associations and/or school consortiums.

4) Funding

This is a competitive funding opportunity for the development and delivery of a Zero-Hour PE initiative. All funds must be solely directed toward improving the health and well-being of the school's students. No funds may be directed toward teacher health enhancement as these opportunities will be available through other grants and funding opportunities.

Approximately \$700,000 in federal funding is available in year one. An estimated 10 awards of approximately \$70,000 each are expected to be made. With successful progress and contingent upon continued federal funding, these projects may be renewed each year, for up to five years.

Again, eligibility is restricted to North Dakota's rural and tribal, public and private schools, regional education associations and/or school consortiums

If you are the recipient of one of these awards, the operating period will begin once the agreement has been fully executed, following all required approvals and signatures. The funding period will end on September 30, 2027, and all funds must be fully expended by that date.

ND HHS reserves the right to negotiate the applicant's budget based on the number of applications received, the content of the proposed project work plan, and total budget requested by the school for this Make North Dakota Healthy Again funding opportunity, prior to issuing the notice of award.

Refer to the Budget section for details on allowable and unallowable costs.

Again, this funding opportunity is for the development and delivery of a rural school Zero-Hour PE initiative only. Additional funding opportunities will be available for other RHTP activities and initiatives. When it comes to these other funding opportunities, eligible applicants may apply for more than one funding opportunity – there is no limit to the number of applications that can be submitted.

For a full list of opportunities, go to hhs.nd.gov/rural-health-transformation/funding.

5) Reporting Requirements

The successful applicant(s) will be required to submit reimbursement requests or supporting information, progress reports and impact stories to HHS. Templates will be provided for reporting requirements. Due dates and additional information will be provided in the agreement.

In addition, successful applicants will also be required to take part in additional training and participate in quarterly meetings and updates.

Finally, successful applicants may be required to report for up to five years or as otherwise required by CMS.

Additional reporting requirements may be required based upon updated federal guidance.

6) Application Submission

Applications for this funding opportunity are due by May 22, 2026, at 5 p.m. CT. Applications must be submitted to ND HHS through [Qualtrics](#).

Applications not received by the submission date and time will be considered non-responsive and not reviewed.

7) Technical Assistance

A technical assistance conference call has been scheduled for the following date and time:

- May 4, 2026, 3:30 p.m. CT.
- [Register to attend](#)

The link to register for the technical assistance call will be posted on the RHTP webpage under Funding Opportunities – Making North Dakota Healthy Again.

The technical assistance call will be recorded and posted on the RHTP webpage for later viewing. Additional resources related to this funding announcement, including

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will also be published on the RHTP webpage after the call.

We strongly encourage you to submit questions for this funding opportunity to [RHTP FAQ Survey](#) prior to seven days of the submission deadline. As time allows, questions submitted prior to the technical assistance call will be addressed during the session and added to a FAQ resource. Questions submitted following the call will be answered and added to the published FAQ resource on the webpage. Questions submitted within seven days of the submission deadline may not be addressed due to the volume of questions and staff members working on other RHTP funding opportunities.

Application Requirements

Interested entities are required to submit an application to be considered for this Make North Dakota Healthy Again funding opportunity. Do not include any proprietary or confidential information in application materials as the application will become an open record.

All application components must be submitted through [Qualtrics](#).

Below is the outline that specifies how your application must be structured. Specifically, each application must include the following sections:

- 1.) Background Information
- 2.) Project Narrative
 - a. Identified Need and Proposed Goals
 - b. Strategies, Activities, and Measurable Outcomes
 - c. Sustainability
- 3.) Action Plan
 - a. Timeline and Milestones
 - b. Metrics
 - c. Key Personnel
- 4.) Budget

1) Background Information

Provide the following background information:

- Organization Name and Background – Provide a brief introduction to your school, noting its location and the number of middle/junior high and high school students.
- Project Lead and Contact Information – Identify the project lead who will serve as the primary point of contact to receive communications about your application. Provide first and last name, title, phone number and email.

- Project Title and Reason – Please provide a title/name for your proposed Zero-Hour PE initiative and a brief description of why you are applying.

2) Project Narrative

The Project Narrative portion of your application is a detailed description of your proposed project's need, goals, strategies, activities and anticipated outcomes.

Addressing the questions in this section, we encourage you to be as specific and concise as possible and to keep your narrative focused on how your proposed project will improve the health and well-being of your students.

a. Identified Need and Proposed Goals

In this section:

- Discuss the specific well-being challenges your school's target population is experiencing (e.g., stress, physical inactivity, poor diet/obesity, mental health, etc.) and the impact that it is having on your school (e.g., low energy, absenteeism, poor academic performance, etc.).

Please include any organizational data that supports the urgency of your proposed initiative.

- Identify which segments of your student population (high school, junior high, students with special needs, male, female, etc.) you are most concerned about.
- Outline the specific overarching goals of your proposed Zero-Hour PE initiative (e.g., increase fitness levels, improve academic performance, change attitudes regarding high-intensity exercise, equip students with important life skills, etc.).

Here is an example of how your core initiative goals should be presented in your application.

EXAMPLE: Through the implementation of a Zero-Hour PE initiative in our school, we will increase participating students' fitness level by 50%.

- Having successfully articulated your proposed goals, please take a few minutes to identify any similar wellness projects, undertakings and/or initiatives already in place within your school.

What is the source of their wellness funding? Explain how your proposed wellness project will enhance, rather than duplicate existing efforts.

****Important Note:** RHTP funds cannot be used to duplicate or replace existing funding, known as “supplanting.” However, RHTP funds may be used to expand or enhance an existing project. See the Budget section for additional details.

Having successfully completed the first section of your project’s narrative, it’s now time to turn your attention to the next major section which addresses your target population, strategies, activities and measurable outcomes.

b. Strategies, Activities, and Measurable Outcomes

Building on the seven components in order to improve student fitness and academic performance, please address:

The Target Population(s)

- What specific student population(s) will be targeted within your proposal (e.g., entire population, high school, middle school, female, etc.)? Are there specific student segments within your school’s population that you anticipate will receive more intensive attention? If so, which ones?
- How many students do you anticipate will participate in this initiative? What percentage of these students participate on your school’s athletic teams?

Leadership Support

- In what specific ways will school leadership (the superintendent, principal, school board, coaches, consultants etc.) support these undertakings (e.g., communication, recognition, cheerleading, etc.)?

The Program Champion and Team

- Who will lead the day-to-day activities of this initiative? Is this person a high energy, highly motivated, well-respected individual? Is this person already in place or will they need to receive training? What are their credentials (or what credentials will the new person have?) Are there other school personnel and/or community partners who will participate in this initiative?

Communication

- How will the Zero-Hour PE opportunity be communicated to your target population? How will students formally register? What information will they be given about the program?

Baseline Data Collection

- What specific baseline data will be collected during the kick-off phase of the Zero-Hour PE initiative to capture the current fitness status of all participants? (e.g., strength, endurance, flexibility, current academic performance, mental health, etc.).

The Zero-Hour PE Initiative

- Where will the Zero-Hour PE initiative take place? (e.g., weight room, gym, private classroom, etc.) Will the initiative be offered two or three times per week? What times will this course be offered? If this initiative will be offered at a time other than before school, provide a brief rationale why.
- What routines, activities and exercises do you envision your students performing? What equipment and technology will you need? (e.g., heart rate monitors, fitness trackers, pedometers, etc.) How will students record their weekly progress? What strategies will be employed to maximize engagement and keep the course exciting, fun and effective?

***Important Note:** While you can choose which student pre and post-performance data you are going to collect (e.g., strength, flexibility, endurance, mental well-being, academic, resilience, etc.) the collection of this data is non-negotiable. You must gather it. The tracking of student's progress during the initiative must also be meticulously recorded. For grant reporting purposes all data must be deidentified.

*In rare instances, the Zero-Hour PE initiative can be offered during the course of the school day. However, priority will be given to those applications that offer this initiative before school hours.

Targeted Coaching

- Do you have plans to provide coaching opportunities to those students who need more intensive support? Who will deliver these services? How will they be delivered?

Policies and Environmental Support

- What policies will be modified and/or developed to create a healthier school culture and/or sustain long-term behavior change? What consent forms and liability waivers will need to be put into place? How will parents be engaged and kept informed?

Transportation

- How will participants get to the initiative? Will transportation need to be provided to those students who live in rural areas? What do you anticipate transportation expenses to be?

*In the event that you will need to provide transportation for participating students, it is allowable to allocate a certain portion of your grant funding to transport students for this specific program.

Recognition and Celebration

- How will you recognize and celebrate your student's successes? What are your plans to communicate these successes school-wide?

Outcomes

- What specific outcomes are you hoping to achieve? How will you evaluate and capture these outcomes (e.g., surveys, biometrics, pre and post-strength testing, interviews, testimonials, etc.)

*Applicants must propose strategies, activities and measurable outcomes that align with the RHTP evaluation plan and metrics for the Make North Dakota Healthy Again found on pages 19-26 of the [project narrative](#) and pages 11-15 of the [project appendices](#). Please note, not all metrics apply to the Make North Dakota Health Again funding opportunity.

Specifically, these improvements and outcomes include but are not limited to:

- Increases in individual participation in wellness activities
- Increases in preventive health and wellness screening
- Increases in physical activity
- Improvements in dietary practices
- Enhanced mental well-being
- Enhanced relationships and social connection
- Improvements in policies, systems and environments that help to make the healthy choice, the easy choice.

c. Sustainability

Please answer the following questions:

- How will the applicant continue supporting the well-being activities that prove most effective?
- Are there opportunities to integrate these strategies into existing operational budgets or workforce support efforts?
- Will any of the proposed wellness interventions/strategies reduce costs associated with lost productivity, medical care costs, staff turnover, burnout or vacancy, and can those savings be used to sustain the program?
- If the proposed project includes the purchase of equipment or technology, outline the plan for maintaining and continuing to use these tools beyond the funding period.

3) Action Plan

With the first two sections of your narrative now complete, it's time to format your Action Plan.

To do this, address the sections below.

Remember, the operating period will start upon execution of the agreement, with all required approvals and signatures. If your submission is funded, you can assume a project start date of August 1, 2026.

Importantly, the funding period will end on September 30, 2027, and all funds must be expended by this date.

a. Timeline and Milestones:

Milestone #1: Leadership Support

- By what date do you plan to have the support of the school's senior leadership secured?
- How do you plan to document this support?

Milestone #2: The Program's Champion and Wellness Team

- By what date do you plan to have your Zero-Hour PE initiative's instructor(s) in place?

Milestone #3: Communication

- By what date do you plan to begin communicating your Zero-Hour PE initiative to your target population?

Milestone #4: Program Initiation and Baseline Data Collection

- What date will your program officially begin? If you are planning to use technology and devices, by what date will these devices be purchased? By what date do you plan to have your baseline data collected?

Milestone #5: Targeted Coaching

- If you are planning to offer additional coaching to students in need, what dates will you begin making it available?

Milestone #6: Recognition and Celebration

- When do you plan to recognize and celebrate the achievements of your participants?

Milestone #7: Outcomes

- When will your post-program data be collected? What specific outcomes are you hoping to achieve? How will you capture and document them? (e.g., surveys, pre-post testing, biometrics, interviews, testimonials, etc.) By what date will these metrics be captured?
- Evaluate and capture these outcomes. *Applicants must propose strategies, activities and measurable outcomes that align with the RHTP evaluation plan and metrics for Initiative 1: Make North Dakota Healthy Again found on pages 19-26 of the [project narrative](#) and pages 11-15 of the [project appendices](#). Note: Not all metrics apply to Make North Dakota Health Again funding opportunity.

b. Metrics:

For each health improvement priority, you are targeting (e.g., strength, flexibility, endurance, mental well-being, resilience, etc.), identify the specific methods that you will use to capture this data. How will this data be stored and tracked for reporting purposes?

Note: If your project is selected for funding, templates will be provided for reporting requirements. Due dates and additional information will be provided in the agreement.

c. Key Personnel:

Identify key personnel, including your project lead. Describe the type of work each person will perform in carrying out the project. Include their relevant credentials. If the applicant plans to use external sources, such as consultants, this must be explained in the project narrative and budget.

4) Budget

Using the [ND HHS provided template](#), provide an itemized budget with appropriate justification for each cost category (personnel, fringe, travel, supplies, etc.). If

applicable, include any indirect cost paid under the subrecipient and the indirect cost rate used. **Apply the corresponding priority numbers from the project narrative to the related budget items.**

When developing your budget, consider that your program lead will be required to take part in an onboarding exercise. In addition, your program lead will also be required to take part in a one-day conference to share the status and progress of your initiative, budget accordingly.

RHTP funds are governed by applicable provisions of [2 CFR Part 200](#) and [2 CFR Part 300](#), with guidance from the federal RHTP [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) and CMS's [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document. The limits and unallowable costs detailed in this section come from federal guidance and are non-negotiable.

RHTP funding is designed to support expansion and scale to better serve rural communities, not to replace or duplicate existing funding sources. When using funds to expand an existing pilot program or initiative or to develop a new training program with existing partners, the funds may only be applied to the costs associated with the new population, new activities, new program milestones, etc.

5) Application Review and Selection

Applications will be reviewed and scored solely on what is presented within the application materials. The review committee will score applications based on criteria in the [Scoring Tool](#).

ND HHS aims to notify applicants about their award in a timely manner. ND HHS reserves the right to support applicants with changes to their project proposals to ensure HHS's RHTP commitments are upheld; additionally, ND HHS may require applicants to supplement responses. HHS is in a cooperative agreement with CMS for RHTP and is subject to substantial CMS project involvement. This may impact funding timelines.

The awarded applicant(s) will be sent an agreement to sign and return to ND HHS. The awarded applicant(s) shall comply with the agreement provisions set out in the sample documents. Due to the limited timeframe associated with the funding source for this funding opportunity, ND HHS will not entertain any changes to the agreement Terms and Conditions.

Questions

Information may change based on upon updated federal guidance or upon further consideration by HHS.

Learn More: [Rural Health Transformation Program webpage](#).

Contact: rhtp@nd.gov

This RHTP funding opportunity is supported by CMS of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$198,936,969.55 with 100 percent funded by CMS/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The contents are those of ND HHS and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, or the U.S. Government.

*The following is language required by CMS and ND HHS. It may be useful to you as you complete your application.

Capital Expenditures and Remodeling

Capital expenditures are expenditures to acquire capital assets or expenditures to make additions, improvements, modifications, replacements, rearrangements, reinstallations, renovations or alterations to capital assets that materially increase their value or useful life. Capital expenditures are limited by the federal guidance identified above.

Unallowable capital expenditures include:

- New construction
- Building expansion
- Purchasing of buildings
- Supplanting funding for in-process or planned construction projects
- Significant retrofitting of buildings
- Cosmetic updates
- Any other cost that materially (significantly or substantially) increases the value of the capital

Allowable capital expenditures include investing in existing rural health care facility buildings and infrastructure, such as minor building alterations or renovations and equipment upgrades. Minor renovations or alterations must be clearly linked to RHTP and funding opportunity outcomes. Minor renovations or alterations cannot exceed 20% of total funding in a budget period. *

Davis-Bacon and Related Acts Compliance

This project may be subject to the [Davis-Bacon and Related Acts](#) (40 U.S.C. § 3141 et seq.). If applicable, the applicant must comply fully with all federal and state prevailing wage requirements. This includes incorporation of the federal contract clause at [FAR 52.222-6](#), Davis-Bacon Act, into all capital improvement expenditures contracts and subcontracts in excess of \$2,000, as required by [48 CFR § 22.403-1](#).

The applicant must ensure that all laborers and mechanics employed by contractors or subcontractors on covered work are paid wages at rates not less than those determined by the U.S. Department of Labor for the corresponding classes of laborers and mechanics. The [Wage Determination page](#) from the General Services Administration can be used to support this. If awarded, the applicant will require submission and retention of certified payroll records and will ensure compliance with all applicable reporting, recordkeeping and enforcement requirements. [Online tools for simplifying Davis-Bacon certified payroll reporting](#) are offered from the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division.

Vehicle Purchases

RHTP funds under this funding opportunity may not be used to purchase a new or used vehicle to fulfill objectives of the funding opportunity.

Additional Unallowable and Limited Costs

- Pre-award costs.
- Meeting matching requirements for any other federal funds or for local entities.
- Services, equipment or supports that are the legal responsibility of another party under federal, state, tribal or civil rights law.
- Supplanting existing state, local, tribal or private funding of infrastructure or services (ex. staff salaries).
- The cost of independent research and development.
- Funds related to any activity designed to influence the enactment of legislation, appropriations, regulation, administrative action or executive order.
- Meals, unless in limited circumstances such as:
 - Subjects and patients under study.
 - Where specifically approved as part of the project or program activity, such as in programs providing children's services.
 - As part of a per diem or subsistence allowance provided in conjunction with allowable travel in accordance with the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) established rates.
- Replacing payment(s) for clinical services that could be reimbursed by insurance.
 - Direct health care services may be funded if not currently reimbursable, will fill a gap in care coverage and/or may transform current care delivery model.
 - Provider payments cannot exceed 15% of total funding in a budget period.*
- Funding toward projects similar to the "Rural Tech Catalyst Fund Initiative" cannot exceed the lesser of 10% of total funding or \$20 million of total funding awarded in a budget period. *

- Clinician salaries/wages for facilities that subject clinicians to non-compete clauses.
- Demolition of aged buildings.

*Limits apply to ND HHS's spending of RHTP funds. Individual agreements may be considered for costs exceeding the budget limitations.