AARP® **AMERICAN ASSOCIATION of CRITICAL-CARE NURSES**

2025 Nursing Innovations Fund
Nursing Workforce and Healthy Work Environments

Request for Proposals

SUMMARY

This request for proposals seeks innovative and replicable solutions to strengthen the nursing workforce by creating and sustaining healthy work environments and improving recruitment and retention rates of registered nurses. Awards of up to $20,000 each will be provided for selected projects that can be completed in one year. Proposals are due no later than 10 p.m. ET on Friday, April 4, 2025.

This program is designed and funded by the continued collaboration of AARP and the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN Critical Care).

BACKGROUND

The state of health care and the nursing profession require systemic and sustainable changes. At over 4 million strong, nurses are the largest and most trusted provider of health services, practicing in a variety of care settings such as health systems, homes, nursing homes, schools, workplaces and more. Nurses are uniquely positioned to help individuals and communities overcome barriers to health and well-being.

According to research from the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 100,000 nurses left the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2027, nearly 900,000, or almost one-fifth of 4.5 million total registered nurses, intend to leave the workforce.

Nurses experience immense stress in their work environments. Many are leaving the profession at alarming rates due to stressful working conditions and unhealthy work environments. The 2021 National Nurse Work Environment Status Report, conducted by AACN Critical Care, demonstrated a decline in the health of nurses' work environments. However, further analysis of these data offers a path forward. Nurses working in units that are actively implementing AACN Critical Care's *Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments* were also more likely to report higher job satisfaction, better quality of care, more shifts with appropriate staffing, and less intent to leave their current positions. The National Academy of Medicine's report, *The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity*, emphasizes the importance of creating and maintaining healthy work environments to support the well-being and effectiveness of nurses, ultimately enhancing patient care.

Creating healthy work environments is an essential strategy for recruiting and retaining a strong nursing workforce. Nurses cannot optimally contribute to care delivery across the continuum without healthy work environments. Healthy work environments promote a sense of belonging for patients, families, and health care team members, fostering respect for each person's unique perspectives and needs.

In a healthy work environment, "every team member contributes to the achievement of common goals by giving power and respect to each person's voice. They integrate individual differences, resolve competing interests, and safeguard the essential contribution each person makes in order to achieve optimal outcomes."[1] In a healthy work environment, "the health care organization establishes deliberate decision-making processes that ensure respect for the rights of every individual, incorporate all key perspectives, and designate clear accountability."[2]

Ongoing support is essential to ensure a strong nursing workforce and healthy work environments across all care settings where nurses practice. This RFP invites proposals from a broad range of settings and locations.

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to the more than 100 million Americans 50-plus and their families: health and financial security, and personal fulfillment.

American Association of Critical-Care Nurses is the world's largest specialty nursing organization, with more than 135,000 members and nearly 200 chapters in the United States. To achieve its vision of a health care system driven by the needs of patients and families, where nurses make their optimal contribution, AACN's advocacy priority is to establish and sustain healthy work environments that support nursing excellence.

1. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. (2016) Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments. Aliso Viejo CA: AACN. Page 18.
2. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. (2016) Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments. Aliso Viejo CA: AACN. Page 22.

DESCRIPTION

This program, funded by AARP and AACN Critical Care, seeks innovative and replicable solutions to create and sustain healthy work environments and improve recruitment and retention rates of registered nurses, through implementation of one or more AACN Critical Care's *Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments*.

Projects are required to use AACN Critical Care's Healthy Work Environment Assessment Tool (HWEAT-Teams) as a pre- and post-measure. The HWEAT-Teams helps assess and measure progress in establishing and sustaining a healthy work environment.

Collaboration across roles, and dedicated time for those whose primary role is clinical, increases the likelihood of project success. Projects in which nurses and other team members identify needed change, develop innovative solutions together, and executive leadership allocates time and resources for implementation, have been shown to be more effective.

Awards of up to $20,000 each will be given for selected projects that will be completed within a year. Funds may be used for personnel, meetings, supplies, project-related travel, contractors, and consultants. Funds may not be used to subsidize individuals for the costs of their health care, to support clinical trials of unapproved drugs or devices, to construct or renovate facilities, for lobbying, for political activities, or as a substitute for funds currently being used to support similar activities.

There are many resources available for strengthening nursing and creating healthy work environments in all care settings, including AACN Critical Care's *Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments,* AARP's Recruitment and Retention Toolkit for Registered Nurses in Acute Care Settings, and the National Academy of Medicine report, *The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity.* Resources can be found at the end of this request for proposals.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Proposals must:
- Offer innovative and replicable solutions to strengthen the nursing workforce by creating and sustaining healthy work environments and improving recruitment and retention rates of registered nurses. Proposals should describe and provide evidence of the problem, then describe the change solution(s) that will be implemented.
- Describe how the project will implement one or more of AACN Critical Care's *Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments.*
- Describe how the following required metrics, and any additional metrics to evaluate change, will be measured during the project's one-year timeframe:
  - number of registered nurses impacted by the project over the grant period;
  - retention of registered nurses as indicated by registered nurse vacancy and turnover rates in the care setting at the beginning and end of the project; and
  - change in HWEAT-Teams scores.
- Confirm the project team will:
  - complete the HWEAT-Teams pre-assessment by August 1, 2025; and
  - complete the HWEAT-Teams post-assessment and review results by August 1, 2026.
- Clearly explain the role of each stakeholder identified for this project.
- Demonstrate the support of dedicated time for this project by the Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) or another executive leader. A sample letter, found in the resources section of this RFP, can be adapted, signed and submitted with the proposal. Instead of or in addition to the letter, the application can list executive leaders as project partners and clearly describe their role and commitment of resources.
- Describe how the anticipated success of this project can be replicated and sustained over time.
- Describe how the project results will be disseminated and identify key audiences.
- Comply with application details and formatting requirements.

Preference will be given to applicants that:
- Include frontline staff as key partners.
- Demonstrate support with a signed letter from an executive leader.
- Are public entities or tax-exempt nonprofit organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.
- Demonstrate matching funds and/or in-kind support.

If awarded, grantees are expected to:
- Ensure timely processing of required agreements to launch projects on July 1, 2025.
- Participate in quarterly virtual collaborative meetings with AARP, AACN Critical Care and grantee cohort to foster learning and shared resources.

- Complete a final narrative report, including project outcomes.
- Collaborate with AARP and AACN Critical Care after the project ends to share learnings and results from the project.

HOW TO APPLY

Complete the application template and submit it with letters of support as one PDF via email to NursingInnovations@aarp.org by or before 10 p.m. ET on Friday, April 4, 2025. In fairness to all applicants, the program will not accept late submissions. All funding decisions will be made by a review team comprised of subject matter experts from AARP and AACN Critical Care leadership, staff, and advisors.

For more information on the Nursing Innovations Fund and proposal requirements, please contact:

AARP Public Policy Institute
601 E Street NW, B6-308
Washington, DC 20049
Phone: (202) 434-2148
Email: NursingInnovations@aarp.org
Website: www.campaignforaction.org/2025-nursing-innovations-fund

PROGRAM SUPPORT

AARP, in collaboration with AACN Critical Care, will provide technical assistance and direction for those who receive awards. An informational webinar will be held for interested applicants. The webinar will be recorded for those who cannot attend.

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

March 5, 2025 (time TBD)	Webinar for interested applicants
April 4, 2025 (10 p.m. ET)	Applicant submission deadline
May 2025	Finalists notified of funding recommendations
June 2025	Awards finalized
July 1, 2025	Projects initiated

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Application
Frequently asked questions
AACN Critical Care *Standards for Establishing and Sustaining Healthy Work Environments*
AACN Critical Care Healthy Work Environment Assessment Tool (HWEAT) Frequently Asked Questions
Video demonstration for setting up HWEAT-Teams survey
Sample executive letter of support
National Academy of Medicine report, *The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity*
Nursing Innovations Fund past awardees