

# CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST: Mutual Aid Stewards

**Website:** [birthequityalliance.com](http://birthequityalliance.com)

**Email:** [info@njbefa.org](mailto:info@njbefa.org)

**Grant Application:** <https://forms.gle/oiUHBb6FosxPTCYw7>

## Introduction to the Alliance

The [New Jersey Birth Equity Funders Alliance](#) is a funders collaborative established in 2021 to tackle birth inequities in support of Nurture NJ, a statewide maternal and infant health strategic plan. The Alliance's guiding principles include a focus on racial equity, collaboration, learning, mutual accountability and co-designing solutions with the community. Current members of the Alliance include The Burke Foundation, the Community Health Acceleration Partnership, The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Organon, Bristol Myers Squibb, and the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation.

## Background

New Jersey's maternal health outcomes and disparities are among the worst in the US. The state has the fourth highest maternal mortality rate out of the fifty states. When looking at the demographic breakdown of the rates in New Jersey, Black women in New Jersey experience seven times the rate of death from pregnancy-associated causes compared to their white counterparts.

Additionally, Black women in New Jersey experience a 3.5 times higher rate of infant death compared to white women (2017 data, courtesy of New Jersey State Health Assessment Data (NJ SHAD)) and Hispanic women in New Jersey experience twice the rate of infant mortality compared to white women (NJ SHAD 2016-2018, 3-year rates).

In the face of these persistent disparities, the birth equity workforce is making a difference. These professionals include community-based doulas, midwives, childbirth educators, lactation consultants and perinatal community health workers. The support offered by members of the perinatal workforce has been proven to improve the poor maternal and infant health outcomes.



However, in New Jersey, members of the perinatal workforce are often independent practitioners without the institutional support to sustain their businesses.

These workers often face long hours, low wages, little or no benefits, isolation, secondary trauma, and burnout. Additionally, workers are doing more than providing care – they are also social change agents, shouldering the effort to transform the health care system and protect pregnant individuals and families from potential harm. We know we must do more to support perinatal workers. Mutual aid is a powerful response.

Mutual aid is when people come together to meet each other's needs. It is a response to the failure of social, political, and economic systems to meet the basic needs of all people. Mutual aid is rooted in cooperation and solidarity, and creates new social relationships. By bypassing unjust power structures, mutual aid becomes a pathway to organize for new structures that truly serve us.

By fostering a sense of solidarity, such a fund could serve as a vital safety net during quieter periods, enabling birth workers to navigate financial uncertainties with greater confidence. Additionally, the fund could facilitate continuous professional development, ensuring that these practitioners remain updated with the latest techniques and information, ultimately enhancing the care they provide. Stewards are encouraged to continue their work in community care and building through advocacy, education and convening birth equity actors across the state after their tenure. Moreover, in times of personal or professional adversity, the mutual aid fund could offer a source of assistance, further solidifying the bonds of this interconnected community. Through this collaborative approach, birth workers can fortify their individual practices while collectively advancing the quality of care provided to expectant families.

### **Invitation to Join the Mutual Aid Stewards**

The Alliance is seeking 5-7 perinatal workers to design and steward the new Perinatal Wellness Mutual Aid Fund. The Mutual Aid Stewards will set the guiding principles, eligibility requirements, and priorities of the Fund, and also make decisions regarding disbursement of funds. In 2023 and beyond, the Alliance plans to maintain the administrative backing for the Stewards, and will work jointly with the Alliance to ensure continuation of mutual aid.

### **Activities:**

- Guide the design of the Mutual Aid Fund
- Help to manage the mutual aid recipient selection and engagement process
- Provide strategic counsel to the Alliance on opportunities to advance birth equity in New Jersey
- Activities include public-facing meetings, such as webinars, town halls, and community meetings, sharing the work of mutual aid in these settings
- Sharing opportunities and learnings with the greater community
- Attend Alliance and CAC meetings quarterly for input on strategic direction
- Attend professional and leadership development events and conferences, at personal discretion
- Helping to share the experiences, responsibilities and learnings with the community to increase Steward members, raise funds, etc.
- Provide stewardship and applicant review on a rotating basis

**Time commitment:** An average 6-8 hours a month with a higher time investment while processing requests for funds with some pre-reading materials and/or videos in between meetings to prepare for conversations.

This is an 18-month commitment. In this time there will be a three-month rotation of a group of stewards acting as administrators to review applications and make award decisions. In this way each person could have an opportunity to make decisions, rotating this critical leadership and fund development role. The decisions will be made by the stewards themselves.

We meet 10am – 12pm on the third Wednesday of each month (or at an agreed upon time more mutually beneficial to the stewards). Our upcoming meeting dates and tentative topics/foci are:

#### *Education and Planning Phase*

- January 2024
- February 2024
- March, 2024

#### *First Review period of Mutual Aid, Learnings, Education*

- April 2024
- May 2024
- June 2024

*Second Review period, Mutual Aid, Learnings Education*

- July 2024
- August 2024
- September, 2024

*Third Review period, Mutual Aid, Learnings Education*

- October 2024
- November 2024
- December 2024

*Fourth Review period, Mutual Aid, Learnings Education*

- January 2025
- February 2025
- March 2025

*Fifth Review period, Mutual Aid, future planning*

- April 2025
- May 2025
- June 2025

Please note: This is a general timeline. Stewards will be able to decide how the meetings and deadlines will align. For example if more planning is needed, that would be decided by the stewards. There also may be more meetings during the first phase to set up the fund, so bi-weekly instead of monthly.

**Deliverables:** NJBEFA will provide resources and tools to facilitate the discussions and creation of materials. If selected, members may develop various deliverables leading to the continuation of the program, including but not limited to:

- Perinatal Workforce Wellness Mutual Aid Plan, including:
  - Goals, Governance structure, decision making process, evaluation criteria
  - By-laws, rules and eligibility criteria
  - IT platform to support the administration of the funds

**Honorarium:** Each steward will receive a total of \$5000 disbursed quarterly over an 18-month commitment

### **Guidelines for Member Participation:**

- Actively participate in the work of the committee
- Attend 75% of required meetings (i.e if there are 10-12 meetings per year – must attend 8-10)
- If missed 2 meetings in a row, whether in person or by conference call, a check-in on whether the CAC still works for your schedule and ability, will be requested
- If circumstances prevent participation on the committee, notify NJBEFA Senior Manager or Assistant Project Manager
- Work as part of a team toward fulfilling the committee’s goals.
- Work in partnership with CBOs, the Alliance, CAC in fulfilling the work
- Be familiar with the aspects of the committee’s work
- Timely Follow-up on requests and tasks such as evaluations and feedback.

### **Eligibility**

- The potential Steward resides in New Jersey.
- The Member should have experience in birthing issues through lived experience, direct service, academia, government, advocacy, health care/administration and the like.
- The Member has available time to dedicate to the Stewardship role (please see meeting dates and time commitment above).
- The member is passionate to create change for birth equity in New Jersey and birth equity caregiver wellness
- We will prioritize individuals who represent New Jersey’s diverse language, ethnic, cultural and socio-economic disadvantages, especially in areas where Black and Latine mortality for birthing people is of critical concern

If interested, please click [here](#) to submit your application by Monday October 29, 2023 at 11:59 pm. Decisions will be made by late-November. Interested applicants can also sign up for our [Q&A session](#) scheduled for Friday October 13th at 4pm to learn more.

Any inquiries regarding the New Jersey Birth Equity Funders Alliance should be sent to [info@njbefa.org](mailto:info@njbefa.org).