APPLICATION GUIDE

Community Investment Grants are made from the unrestricted pool of resources at the Community Foundation of Elkhart County. Grant decisions are intended to support the mission of the Community Foundation — to improve the quality of life by inspiring generosity. Donations from the community to a project are one factor we consider in support of this mission.

Effective July 2020, the following areas of emphasis are selected for investments to improve the quality of life in Elkhart County.

KIDS AND FAMILIES

To improve the living experience for Elkhart County citizens through safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments, with a focus on impacting children birth – age 8.

Area of Emphasis
- Early Childhood Development & Education

Additionally
- Parents
- Vulnerable Populations
- Youth & Mentoring

CAREER PATHWAYS

To improve the quality of life for Elkhart County residents by generating, developing and supporting career advancement and educational opportunities.

Area of Emphasis
- K-12 Career Awareness & Exploration
- K-12 Internships & Apprenticeships

Additionally
- Post-Secondary Access
- Talent Development, Attraction & Retention

PLACEMAKING

To create open communities in Elkhart County which inspire, attract, engage, and connect people, to enrich their living experience.

Area of Emphasis
- Vibrant Downtowns
- Trails & Parks

Additionally
- Events (Arts, Culture, Entertainment)
- Public Art

WHO MAY APPLY?

Organizations classified as nonprofit tax-exempt public charities by the Internal Revenue Service serving residents of Elkhart County. Most will be identified as a 501(c)(3) under the IRS Tax Code, however, a few other institutions such as public entities, Schools*, Municipalities*, Libraries, and Chambers of Commerce may also qualify. Religious organizations are eligible to apply for programs that are non-proselytizing and to do not promote religious doctrine or instruction.

(*) Due to the number of departments, schools, and clubs within each school corporation and our municipalities; the community foundation requires all applications be approved by the highest ranking official within your governing body (i.e. superintendent's or mayoral office) before an application may be submitted.

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BASICS

- Submit a grant application
- Application online and available 24/7
- Requests of all sizes
- Single year, multi-year, or challenge/matching requests
- Projects, programs, sponsorships, capacity building, professional development, etc.
- Preference given for applications related to areas of emphasis
- Applicants are encouraged to speak with a Program Officer prior to submitting application
- Follow-up within 7 to 10 days by your Program Officer
- Requests up to $25,000 evaluated by staff with 2-6 week response time
- Requests greater than $25,000 evaluated by committee with 2-6 month response time
- Committees meet for funding decisions in the months of October and April
- Each committee has a $1-2 million dollar budget for the year
- Our Fiscal year is July 1 – June 30
- We strongly encourage a lead time of 60 to 90 days on all requests for events

TIMELINE

- Application online 24/7
- Follow-up within 7 to 10 days by your Program Officer
- Committees meet in October and April (Requests > $25,000)
- Committees also meet in December and June for Time Sensitive Projects

WHO REVIEWS AND MAKES DECISIONS ON GRANTS?

The Community Foundation would not exist without "community." We believe it is our responsibility to maintain a process which preserves community volunteers as decision makers in the grant making process with support from foundation staff. Therefore, the Community Foundation has developed a structure consisting of three committees, each made up of a broad spectrum of volunteers within our community. After committee recommendations are made a summary is then forwarded to our Board of Trustees for approval.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The Community Foundation has a set of criteria by which staff and grant committee members review and evaluate grant applications. These criteria include Impact, Project Goals, Organizational Capacity, Stakeholder Support, and Partners. An Evaluation Rubric establishes criteria and standards for different levels of performance and describes what performance looks like at each level.

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The Evaluation Rubric provides a guide for organizations to prepare applications, and for reviews to be done with consistency and thoroughness. An organization or project is not required to be strong in all areas to receive funding, and funding decisions are not made strictly on a numeric basis. Responding to needs and opportunities in the community in ways to achieve the greatest impact over time is the guiding purpose of the grants process.

What is involved in the review process?

A Program Officer is assigned to manage each application; and the team of Program Officers makes funding decisions for grants under $25,000. Larger requests include a committee review process. The Program Officer reviews the application, using the Evaluation Rubric as a guide. The Program Officer's role is to partner with the grant writer to prepare a strong application, and to anticipate questions from the grant committee, so additional information can be provided by the organization. If the organization is new to the Community Foundation, additional information about the governing board, history of programs, and financial performance may be explored. If the organization is newly formed, additional questions about the plan for ongoing operating support, and plans for measuring impact may be explored.

For requests over $25,000 the committee members may submit questions which will be shared by the Program Officer so the organization can prepare responses. In most cases a time will be arranged for the organization to present (in person or via video) their project to the committee. This presentation is typically 10 – 15 minutes long, and includes an overview of the project, followed by questions and answers. The final decision about funding is usually given within 14 business days of the committee meeting.

Are most grant requests funded?

While the dollars invested in the community through this process is significant, because of the many requests received, the Community Foundation is usually only able to fund 25% of the requested dollars. The Community Foundation is not typically the first funder, nor the largest funder of a project. Grant decisions are intended to support the mission of the Community Foundation – to improve the quality of life by inspiring generosity. Donations from the community to a project are one factor we consider in support of this mission.

WHAT WE DO NOT FUND

- Direct assistance to individuals or scholarships for tuition
- For-profit organization
- Nonprofit without a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS
- Projects aimed at promoting a religion or construction projects for religious institutions without community access
- Political campaigns or direct lobbying efforts
- Projects that do not serve residents of Elkhart County
- Reduction of debt, including payment for expenses incurred prior to grant approval
- Travel for bands, sports teams, classes, and similar groups
- Food requests from food pantries
- Medical, scientific, or academic research
- Deficits resulting from an organization's failure to adequately plan. Such as:
    a. Relying on a small number of donors for support without developing a plan to sustain programming
    b. Running operating deficits over multiple years
    c. Not anticipating construction contingency costs
    d. Not planning for maintenance costs and/or replacement costs of existing equipment

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REPORTS AND SITE VISITS

Most recipients will complete a report and (may) complete a site visit on or before the one-year anniversary of their grant date. Some projects may take longer, so progress reports are scheduled. Due dates are provided to the organization, with re-minders sent in advance. Recipients of a multi-year grant should expect an annual progress report and possibly a site visit before the payment of their next year's grant. Also, depending on the nature and size of the grant, an additional compre-hensive report may be required following the end of the grant (typically applied to multi-year or long-term programs). Site visits, when requested, typically fall in the month after the report is due to allow Program Staff time to review the informa-tion before the visit. However, site visits are flexible and are arranged at a mutually agreeable time.

PUBLICITY

The Community Foundation loves to share in our partners' success and in telling your story. We encourage our grant recipients to download our logo and samples of our press-related materials. In addition, we also encourage you to reach out to our Advancement Team to discuss additional marketing or promotions you would like to consider in support of your project and how we may be of help.

10 HELPFUL TIPS FOR COMPLETING THE APPLICATION

1. Carefully read through the Community Foundation's Application Guide
2. Be clear about the population you serve
3. Be clear about WHY this project is needed and HOW it will improve the quality of life in Elkhart County
4. Know what "similar" organizations are in the community and the work they do
5. When appropriate, collaborate with other similar nonprofits
6. Make sure you have a project budget, including revenue and expenses
7. When reporting financial support from others, in-kind support can be included (such as free space for an event.
8. Be specific on how grant monies will be spent
9. Be clear about your goals
    a. How do you define success?
    b. How do you measure success?
    c. What is your target goal (measure/#) for this project?
10. Have a plan on how you will fund this project ongoing, if applicable
11. BONUS! Be concise (we encourage brevity); check your spelling and punctuation (twice!)

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