

Madison Community Foundation 2026 Community Impact Grant - Letter Of Inquiry (LOI)



Madison Community Foundation - Community Fund Grantmaking Overview, Process, and Guidelines (please read carefully, before completing the LOI)

Community Impact Fund - Grantmaking Overview

The Community Impact (CI) Fund strengthens initiatives that advance a more vibrant and equitable Dane County community. Grants from the Community Impact Fund are designed to have an impact by providing strategic support to organizations through an annual application process, with funding decisions made each fall. Grants from the Community Impact Fund tend to be larger investments – averaging \$50,000 per grant – and can be allocated over multiple years.

Funding Source

The Community Impact Fund is an endowed fund at MCF, built through generous donor contributions to support the communities they care about in Dane County. Together, the Community Impact Fund grants provide about \$1.4 million of support annually, generated from a combination of 30 unrestricted endowment funds.

CI Fund Grant - Focus Areas/Funding Priorities

Community Impact Fund - Grant Focus Areas/Funding Priorities

MCF awards Community Impact Fund grants to nonprofits working in five focus areas:

- **ARTS & CULTURE** grants build and support Dane County's vibrant arts scene.
- **CAPACITY BUILDING** grants strengthen the infrastructure and long-term impact of Dane County nonprofits.
- **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT** grants enhance the quality of life by strengthening Dane County's unique natural and cultural assets, investing in neighborhoods, enhancing equity and building bonds among residents.

- **ENVIRONMENT** grants preserve Dane County's natural spaces by supporting conservation, restoration, education and policymaking.
- **LEARNING** grants support academic achievement and learning at public K-12 schools, out-of-school- time programs, GED-equivalence and transition-to-adult programs.

Types of Community Impact Fund Grants

- **Program Grants** support new programs or the expansion of existing programs that have a record of success.
- **Capital Grants** support the construction, purchase and renovation of facilities, land acquisition, and occasionally the purchase of vehicles or equipment.

Community Impact Fund Application Process

The Community Impact grant process begins in spring each year, when interested Dane County, nonprofit organizations with 501(c)(3) designations submit a Letter of Inquiry through MCF's GoApply Grant Portal. MCF staff review these Letters of Inquiry to ensure projects are eligible and aligned with MCF's mission and Community Impact Fund focus. MCF will invite organizations with an approved Letter of Inquiry to submit a full grant proposal. MCF's Community Impact Committee review the full proposals, and MCF's Board of Governors makes the final grant decisions in October each year.

CI Fund Grantmaking Timeline

June LOIs reviewed

July Full Proposal invitations sent to organizations by MCF Staff

August Full Proposal due via GoApply

September MCF Staff Full Proposal follow ups/questions

October MCF's Community Impact Committee reviews grant applications and forwards grant recommendations to the Board of Governors. Applicants are notified by October 30 each year.

November Grant Agreements signed and funds distributed; Final CI Fund grantee award list released to public

Grant Funding Ratio & Amounts

MCF looks for evidence of strong community support and encourages organizations to seek multiple funders (individual donors, foundations, government) for projects.

1. We encourage Community Impact grant applicants to have at least one-third of their proposed project funding raised before applying.
2. MCF funds approximately 20% of the grant applications received at some level each year.
3. Not all proposals are funded at the full amount requested.

Community Impact Fund Applicant Eligibility Requirements

- Eligible nonprofits can submit one application per grant cycle.
- Organizations must be a nonprofit, exempt from federal income taxes under section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code or a governmental body, including schools and municipalities.
- Organizations cannot discriminate on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, age, sex, national origin, disability, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, or arrest or conviction record, or any other discriminatory basis prohibited by applicable local, state and federal law (AntiDiscrimination Status).
 - (See MCF's Grantmaking Due Diligence & Expenditure Responsibility Policy).
- Organizations must be located in Dane County OR have a major presence providing services in Dane County.

Community Impact Fund Project Eligibility Criteria

The proposed project should focus on improving the lives of residents or the physical environment in Dane County.

- The project should use proven, practical approaches to address community issues and be designed to have a lasting impact.
- When possible, projects should include partnerships that build on and strengthen existing community assets, such as a neighborhood's people, organizations, schools, businesses, cultural traditions and natural resources.
- You should be able to demonstrate how the project can grow and remain strong over time.
- Short-term goals can include projects like arts education, tutoring programs, transportation services, technology upgrades, or staff and volunteer training.
- Long-term goals may include efforts such as capital campaigns, economic development, bike trails or land preservation.
- The project should include a clear plan for tracking and learning from results, using meaningful and measurable outcomes to support ongoing improvement.

What MCF's Community Impact Fund Grantmaking Program Does Not Fund:

- Individuals
- Endowments not held by MCF
- Debt retirement
- Film production
- Annual fundraising appeals
- Ongoing programs and/or operations
- Scholarships

Religious organizations for religious purposes

Substance abuse treatment

Health care services (dental, mental health, capital campaigns for health)

Sports and recreation

Multiple project requests from the same organization simultaneously

The University of Wisconsin, although we will consider projects sponsored by other nonprofits in which the University of Wisconsin is a partner agency.

Evaluation and Reporting

- Grantees must submit an Evaluation Report at the end of the grant cycle. Grantees who were awarded a grant that spans multiple years must submit an interim and final Evaluation Report. If a final report is not submitted, grantees are not eligible for future grants.
- MCF provides an Evaluation Form in GoApply for grantees to use to document the funded project's proposed outcomes and its impact on the community. These evaluation reports help MCF analyze its own investments and impact. If a grantee is challenged to complete their project or Evaluation Report, contact MCF's Director of Grantmaking for support. Project success is just as important as lessons learned from project challenges.

Letter of Inquiry Application begins on the next page

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2026 Community Impact LOI Application

1. Nonprofit Organization

2. Organization Mailing Address

3. Organization Mission

4. Nonprofit Organization (Constituent panel)

Tax ID*

Address 1: Primary Contact Name

Primary Contact Email Address

5. Executive Director (Contact panel)

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

Project Information Section

6. Project Information

7. Title

8. Type of Project (select box)

- Capital Campaign
- Program
- Endowment Challenge

9. Project Description: Describe the purpose of the proposed project, the issue your project will address, and who will benefit (estimate the number). (15-20 sentences max) *

10. Proposed Outcomes (List at least 3)*

Project Budget

11. Total Project Expenses*

12. LOI Requested Amount*

Please upload your Project Budget (below as a PDF or excel file)

MCF's Community Impact Budget Template can be downloaded and filled in (see website for a copy)

13. Upload Budget here (PDF or Excel File) *

No file selected

Other (describe)

14. Sign Here

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