

The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan was established in 1984 for the betterment of the residents of Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe, Washtenaw, St. Clair and Livingston counties.

To us, southeast Michigan is more than a geographic region — it's the place we call home. And because of that, we have worked hard to build a strong understanding of how it can be improved. Over the years, the Community Foundation has helped to create and fund numerous projects that improve the lives of those who live here. Our interest areas span from arts and culture, to the environment, to health and human services.

We seek to make strategic investments in the community, and look to partner with nonprofit organizations to help create enduring solutions to complex problems. Effecting change requires both passion and measured thought, and we work hard to find proposals that encompass both.

As we do our grantmaking, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan is also committed to honoring the intentions of our many donors and creating solutions that make everlasting positive impacts.

And above all else, we are keenly interested in what inspires you. We look forward to hearing your ideas for transforming our vision for a healthy and prosperous region into reality.

How to Apply

Our grants support a wide range of projects and organizations. As our potential partner, you simply need to read these guidelines and then, if you think there is a potential fit, **please call and talk to us**. We value your time and do not want you to spend unnecessary hours and resources preparing a proposal unless there is a clear possibility of working together.

If, after you speak to a Program staff member, you decide to pursue an application, simply follow the steps in the application checklist at the end of this document.

When you call us, we will also advise you of any targeted grantmaking opportunities that have special application requirements. In most cases, we will advise you to simply apply to the Foundation.

Our Priorities

While the Community Foundation has a large footprint in terms of the types of organizations we fund, there are common priorities that we look for in any application, no matter how large or small, and no matter what topic area.

While we do not expect that all of these priorities will be addressed in every application to the Community Foundation, we want to give you a sense of what kinds of lenses we look through when reviewing applications.

Our current priorities include the following:

SUSTAINABILITY

We view sustainability in two ways. First, we want to support projects and ideas tied to a longer term vision for an organization. We do not want to make grants for projects that end the moment the grant is over. We will look closely at the overall financial health of your organization, as well as your programmatic and fundraising visions. We will want to support you at key moments in time along your path as a growing organization — helping to put new strategies in place, or building out existing strategies in more comprehensive ways.

To that end, please note that while the amount of our grants is within a certain range, we are very flexible about the period of time over which that grant is paid. So, if it would help your organization to apply for a project that will last over 24 months or 36 months as you raise revenue from other sources to sustain it, that is something we are happy to consider.

Second, we look to see that organizations are thinking about sustainability in a more global sense, meaning that programs, policies and practices produce efforts that are sustainable for our environment, our economy and residents. By this we mean that efforts help meet the needs of the present, but keep in mind the needs of the future by being socially equitable and mindful of environmental impacts.

REGIONAL IMPACT

We actively serve a seven-county area and think about issues from a regional perspective. While we know that every grant we make will not touch all seven counties, we are particularly interested in projects that serve a large portion of the region, build relationships across communities in the region, and/or serve to test a new model in a specific geography that could later be adopted by other nonprofit organizations in the region.

As such, we would encourage you to highlight in your proposal the geographies that you serve and any active partnerships you have with other organizations in southeast Michigan that are related to the project you are applying for.

LEVERAGE

We want our funds to help you leverage other dollars into your organization and for the region. As such, we look closely at proposals to understand what kind of leverage will occur. With some organizations, that might mean utilizing a grant from the Community Foundation to serve as a private match to federal funds. For others, it might mean utilizing a grant to rally individual donors around a project. Whatever your approach, it is important for us to understand your strategic thinking about how you would leverage grant funds to ultimately build your fundraising capacity in other ways.

COLLABORATION

Beyond leveraging dollars, we like to see good models, ideas and human resources leveraged as well. Proposals that include meaningful collaborations between nonprofit and/or government entities (when it makes sense) can take many different forms. We have funded some collaborative projects for organizations with similar missions but located in different geographies. We have funded other projects for organizations with very different missions, but whose collaborative project is of interest to them both.

Specifics of What We Fund

Beyond these priorities, we consider a very wide range of requests. Here are a few key points to keep in mind:

- In general, we provide support to a specific project of an organization. While we want to understand the entire organizational picture and why this project is the priority, we also want to understand the details of where the Community Foundation's funds will be utilized.
- In terms of line-items that can be included in the request, please discuss this with a Program staff member when you call. Most often, we support specific direct costs of various projects and programs. We will consider funding staff as a portion of requests, but will need to understand how it is tied to the project, and the long-term sustainability plan for maintaining that staff.
- Low priority is given to requests for ongoing operational costs, capital projects or campaigns, annual fund drives, conferences or other one-time events.

Grant Amounts

While our grants can range from \$5,000 to \$1 million depending on funds available, the majority of our competitive grants range from \$30,000 to \$75,000. The amount of a request should be in scale with the size of your organization. In other words, you should consider the size of the proposed project budget relative to the size of the organization's overall budget. More importantly, you should request an amount that you can justify sustaining the outcomes of in the years ahead. You should discuss an appropriate amount for your request when you call us.

Proposal Deadlines

You can apply to the Community Foundation at any time. However, as a guideline, we ask that you submit your proposal on or shortly prior to **February 15, May 15, August 15** and **November 15**. This gives us time to thoughtfully review each request in time for our quarterly Board meeting. Typically, grant decisions are made within 3–4 months. Upon submission, Foundation staff will let you know if notification of a decision is likely to take longer.

Please keep this response time under consideration when crafting your proposal—assume that if a grant is awarded, you would not receive funds until four months after the proposal is submitted and the timeline of the project should reflect that.

Basic Eligibility

There are some specific eligibility rules to keep in mind before you consider applying:

- The Foundation will only make grants to federal 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations, government entities, school districts and universities.

- Please note that for all of our competitive grant programs, we require that your organization have a certified financial audit. Under some circumstances, we will accept a financial review, conducted by a CPA or other external financial professional. Click [here](#) to see a comparison of an audit vs. a financial review.
- While grants to religious organizations are considered, sectarian religious programs are not eligible. By this we mean that if we are to consider funding a program offered by a religious organization, we would only consider a program that is open to the wider community.
- We do not make grants to individuals, or grants to cover deficits or other previously incurred obligations.
- We will only grant to entities that have submitted all final reports that are due to the Foundation on previous grants they have received from us. In general, we will not consider a new grant to an organization when they have an open competitive grant.
- Finally, your organization must be headquartered in one of the seven counties that we serve, and must serve residents of our region. Occasionally, grants to statewide or national organizations will be considered for activities in the region and particularly if a local partner is actively involved in the project.

Proposal Format

The Community Foundation does not require a specific proposal format. However, the Grant Application Checklist at the end of this document outlines the items you should include in a proposal. Once you have assembled those items identified in the checklist, please submit them to the foundation electronically on the link found at cfsem.org/apply.

Most importantly, the proposal narrative should provide the rationale for the proposed project, why the project is important, and how the project will be sustained in the long-run.

Budget

Applicant organizations are required to submit both a budget for the project they are proposing as well as their organization's current annual budget. The budget for the entire project should be submitted, noting which line-items Community Foundations funds would support, and where other funds are expected to come from. A budget sheet template is provided in the online application portal, outlining examples of line-items to include. It is important to discuss the need for the project as a whole, and to follow this discussion with specific line items that correspond with what the organization is proposing to do.

Grant Decisions

Numerous factors are taken into account when considering the many requests we receive; the quality of the proposed program, its potential impact and its sustainability are among them. The questions below provide additional valuable insight into the grant decision process. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list, nor is it intended to be prescriptive. Nonetheless, these questions may serve as guidance for developing a strong proposal.

QUALITY

- Does the project reflect best practices?
- Is it consistent with the latest knowledge of what works?
- Is the project well-conceived and clearly described?
- Is the project feasible?

SCOPE

- Does the project promote regional or community vitality?
- Will the proposed activities reach a broad segment of the southeast Michigan community?
- Is the project replicable?
- Does the project promote collaboration across the region?

IMPACT

- Does the proposed project address a critical unmet need?
- Does the project have a high probability of leading to new solutions to community challenges?
- Does the project have the potential for long-term community impact?
- Is the project proactively addressing some of the diversity, inclusion and equity challenges that face our region?

SUSTAINABILITY

- Will the proposed project leverage additional funds from a variety of sources?
- Is the project of interest to and supported by other funders?
- Is the applicant investing some of its own money into the project?

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

- Does the project enhance the quality of the applicant organization?
- Does the applicant organization have the capacity to successfully complete the project?
- Does the project provide an opportunity for learning by other nonprofit organizations?
- Is the applicant reaching out for expertise in areas where the organization does not have needed expertise on staff?

Reporting Requirements

If a grant is awarded, the grantee organization will be required to submit a report at the end of the grant period to share the results of the project and to show that all funds were spent as intended. If the grant period is more than 12 months, interim reports may be required before grant payment installments are made.

Thank you for considering submitting a proposal to the Community Foundation. We value our community partners and grantees, and we want to work with you to improve the quality of life in our region.

Grant Application Checklist

To begin the submission of an application, login to the online portal at cfsem.org/apply. Once inside that portal, you will be asked to submit the following items.

Note that you may begin a draft application in the portal, return to that draft as often as needed, and wait to submit the application to the Foundation until it is completed to your satisfaction:

1. COVER LETTER OUTLINING:

- a. Legal name of the organization
- b. Dollar amount requested
- c. Purpose of the proposed project
- d. Description of the population being served
- e. Length of time for which Community Foundation support is requested

The CEO/executive director of the organization should sign the cover letter and the application should include some evidence of approval of the request by the organization's board of trustees.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

- Name, address and telephone number of the applicant organization and main contact person for the proposal
- Mission and brief background of the applicant organization
- Information about current programming of the organization and number of people served

3. PROJECT NARRATIVE

- Definition of the issue the proposal is addressing
- Description of the need for the scope of proposed project or target population
- Indication as to whether the proposed activity is new, expanded or an ongoing part of the organization's programming
- Basic objectives of the proposed project
- Detailed work plan and the time frame for accomplishing the project's objectives
- Evaluation plan, including the criteria that will be used for judging the effectiveness of the proposed project, the expected outcome(s), and the impact of the proposed
- Relevant qualifications and experience of the project's principal staff. If a new position is included in the proposal, please include a job description that will be used to hire that staff

- An outline of the geographies (i.e. neighborhoods, cities, or counties) that will be served by the proposed project
- Description of any partnerships that are occurring as a part of the proposed project, including an outline of the roles and responsibilities of each partner. We prefer this to be in a Memorandum of Understanding format, with the partners signing off on what/how they will contribute to the project
- Description of how the project is proactively addressing some of the diversity, inclusion and equity challenges that face our region, and/or a perspective on how the project will impact a specific population within our community, if applicable
- If you are requesting funds for a pilot project, please indicate how the results of the project will be shared with others

4. REQUIRED FINANCIAL INFORMATION

- Copy of the most recent certified financial audit or financial review. Click [here](#) to see a comparison.
- Dollar amount of grant support requested and the proposed time period for use of these funds
- Detailed budget for the project, using the template provided, including the proposed use of Community Foundation grant funds and any additional support anticipated or secured from other sources. Click [here](#) for our budget worksheet.
- Provisions for future project funding beyond the Community Foundation's grant period
- Organization's operating budget for the current fiscal year

5. SUPPORTING MATERIALS

- Copy of the most recent Internal Revenue Service 501(c)(3) federal tax-exemption letter, if applicable
- List of current board of directors, trustees or governing board, with individuals' affiliations
- Letters of support or memoranda of understanding from project partners
- Resumes of principal staff for proposed project, if applicable
- Information on the organization's commitment to its own diversity with regard to staff, board, and constituents
- Copy of the most recent annual report, if available

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at 313.961.6675.

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