

EVANSTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Catalyst Grants (2026)

At the Evanston Community Foundation (ECF), we work to support a just and resilient network that strengthens our community. Our grant opportunities reflect this commitment. These grants allow the Evanston Community Foundation to be responsive to evolving community needs. Our grant processes:

Are grounded by our organizational mission and strategic plan	Align with our ongoing commitment to advancing racial equity	Prioritize supportive partnerships
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We invite applicants to visit our website to learn more about the Evanston Community Foundations [mission](#) and [strategic plan](#).

About this Funding Opportunity

The purpose of Catalyst Grants is to provide funding that catalyzes or creates the conditions for one of the following purposes:

- Professional Development or learning opportunities,
- Innovative or new initiatives and projects
- Projects or initiatives of businesses with a charitable purpose

Catalyst Grants are designed to provide one-time grants for restricted purposes for a grant-term of 12 months. Catalyst grants are not eligible for renewal as they are strategically designed to provide a one-time infusion of resources. If it is the intention that the request activities will extend beyond the 12-month grant term, it is the expectation that the applicant will demonstrate a vision or plan for sustainability beyond the 12-month grant term.

For this grant, we encourage applications from nonprofit organizations that:

- Prioritize community voice and choice
- Show a strong commitment to racial equity in mission, vision, values, and work
- Significantly serve and prioritize resources for the Evanston community

ECF encourages applications from organizations that are led by, for, and with Black, Brown Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and intersecting systemically marginalized identities.

We understand that preparing and submitting an application is an investment of your time and resources. **Please note that we are not able to fund all requests through this grant opportunity and cannot guarantee funding to any applicant.**

In the case that funding is not approved, please refer to our website at evanstonforever.org for updated information. ECF staff will not be offering post-decision feedback meetings as part of this process.

While this grant opportunity is intended to provide support as outlined in this Request for Proposal (RFP), under unique circumstances ECF may restrict grants to maintain compliance with internal policies and commitment to stewarding funds for charitable purposes. Should this situation arise for your organization or group at any time during the application process, an ECF staff member will reach out to you for more information.

Please note, this RFP is designed to be responsive to evolving community needs. The eligibility requirements and parameters for this grant opportunity are subject to change.

Thank you for your interest in this ECF grant opportunity.

Application Process

Catalyst Grants are available by invitation only. No unsolicited applications will be accepted or reviewed.

*Perspective applicants can complete an eligibility quiz and Letter of Intent (LOI) to express interest. An ECF staff member will contact you if your organization is invited to submit a full application. This grant opportunity considers funding requests **up to \$15,000.***

**Please note: We are not able to fund all requests received through this grant opportunity and cannot guarantee funding to any applicant. In some cases, applicants may be awarded partial funding.*

Eligibility quizzes and Letters of Intent (LOI) will be accepted on a rolling basis through the calendar year until all available funds are expended. Perspective applicants should expect a response with a decision on their request within 6-8 weeks.

Eligibility

This checklist will help you evaluate if you are eligible for this grant opportunity. All interested applicants will complete an eligibility quiz and Letter of Intent (LOI) prior to completing the full application. Please review the following information carefully before applying.

Part 1 – Organization Type

Interested applicants must fit in one of the following categories:

<p>Nonprofit or Fiscally Sponsored Organizations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nonprofit Organization: 501c3 nonprofit organization</i> • <i>Fiscally Sponsored Organization: Community organizations fiscally sponsored by a 501c3 nonprofit organization.</i> 	<p>Grassroots Community Groups: <i>Any group of community members working together to address a community need. These groups have no 501c3 or fiscal sponsorship.</i></p>	<p>Businesses with a Charitable Purpose <i>A business with a dedicated department or initiative that operates solely for charitable purposes. These businesses hold an LLC and meet one or more of the following criteria:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Meet a basic human need</i> • <i>Provide a service not offered by local nonprofit sector (or has a demand that exceeds availability)</i> • <i>Broaden workforce development pathways to living wage careers including for BIPOC-identifying community members</i>
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Part II – Grant Purpose

Interested applicants will articulate the intended purpose of the grant and additional request details at the Letter of Intent (LOI) stage to determine if a full application is invited. All Catalyst Grant requests must align with one of the following purposes:

<p>Professional Development or learning opportunities, <i>including for BIPOC-leaders and community members. This could include but is not limited to funding expenses related to attendance at conferences or convenings.</i></p>	<p>Innovative or new initiatives and projects <i>in their first 1-3 years of existence that are addressing an emerging community need and require an infusion of funds to begin implementation.</i></p>	<p>Projects or initiatives of businesses with a charitable purpose. <i>A project or initiative of a business with a dedicated department or initiative that operates solely for charitable purposes. These businesses hold an LLC and meet one or more of the following criteria:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Meet a basic human need</i> • <i>Provide a service not offered by local nonprofit sector (or has a demand that exceeds availability)</i> • <i>Broaden workforce development pathways to living wage careers including for BIPOC-identifying community members</i>
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If you need support assessing if your request aligns with these grant purpose categories, please reach out to Senior Director of Programs - Grantmaking, Jenna Beltrano beltrano@evanstonforever.org

Part III – Additional Requirements

All interested applicants must have an Evanston address and serve the Evanston community through their work and mission.

Please review the following chart for additional eligibility requirements specific to applicant type and request purpose:

For nonprofit or fiscally sponsored organizations only	For professional development or learning opportunity requests only	For Innovative or new initiatives and project requests only	For projects or initiatives of a businesses with a charitable purpose requests only
<p>These entities must have an active status and maintain compliance with all 501c3 IRS Tax Code requirements throughout the application process.</p>	<p>Applicants may not apply for funds to support attendance at ECF hosted professional development or learning opportunities through the Ubuntu Leadership Institute.</p> <p>If you have questions related to financial support for attendance at these specific ECF hosted programs, please contact Program Manager – Leadership, Lauren Davis, davis@evanstonforever.org</p>	<p>Organizations or groups must be in their first 1-3 years of existence.</p>	<p>Please note the following additional funding restrictions. This grant opportunity will not fund:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salaries or paid positions (does not include participant stipends) • Any activities that facilitate attaining equity in the business • Any activities that draw income or profit to the business • Contracts or vendor agreements with an ECF conflicted person

If you need support assessing if your organization or group meets these additional requirements, please reach out to Senior Director of Programs - Grantmaking, Jenna Beltrano beltrano@evanstonforever.org

The Catalyst Grant opportunity will not fund the following:

- [Endowments](#)
- Fundraising or sponsorship of one-time events
- Scholarships
- Requests that only benefit a person and is not part of a larger group effort that benefits the Evanston community
- Religious or faith-based activities or proselytizing

Funding Guidelines

Awarded applicants are required to submit a report at the conclusion of each 12-month period during their grant term.

Catalyst Grant applications are available by invitation only. *Interested applicants may complete an Eligibility Quiz and LOI but will only be contacted by ECF staff if a full application is invited for submission.*

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis until all funds are allocated. All application materials must be submitted through ECF's online grant system.

If an invitation to apply for a Catalyst Grant is extended to your organization, you will be contacted by an ECF staff member to receive instructions to submit application materials through the online Grants Management System.

General Assistance

If you would need a computer to use or assistance at any point throughout the application process, please reach out to Senior Director of Programs - Grantmaking, Jenna Beltrano beltrano@evanstonforever.org