Community Building Grant Program

Building Stronger, More Connected Neighborhoods

Program Guidelines

Purpose

The Community Building Grant Program provides financial support to eligible neighborhood groups and community-based organizations to support projects that strengthen community connections, increase civic participation, build organizational capacity, and advance locally identified priorities that benefit Oak Park residents.

The program promotes equitable access to community funding opportunities through a transparent and standardized process that supports community-led initiatives and establishes consistent expectations for implementation and accountability.

Funding Structure

Grant awards are available to eligible applicants on a reimbursement basis and are subject to available funding.

Projects will be evaluated based on community benefit, feasibility, organizational capacity, alignment with program goals, and subject to available funding.

Strong project proposals demonstrate meaningful community benefit, encourage resident participation and collaboration, and clearly describe how the proposed activity will strengthen community connection, engagement, or neighborhood identity.

Projects that create opportunities for broad participation, strengthen relationships among residents, expand access and inclusion, or activate community spaces are encouraged. Priority consideration will be given to neighborhood-based initiatives and projects demonstrating strong community participation and engagement.

Maximum Award Amounts:

- **Neighborhood Groups**: Up to $5,000 per Village fiscal year (Jan. 1 – Dec. 31)
- **Community Organizations**: Up to $5,000 once every two Village fiscal years

Eligibility

Eligible applicants include:

- Registered Canopy Connection neighborhood groups in good standing
- Nonprofit organizations serving Oak Park residents
- Other community organizations serving Oak Park residents

Applicants must demonstrate a clear public or community benefit associated with the proposed project or activity.

Neighborhood groups must:

- Operate within defined neighborhood boundaries
- Demonstrate resident participation and engagement
- Maintain active status within the Canopy Connection program, if registered

Registered neighborhood groups may apply once per Village fiscal year.

Nonprofit and community organizations must:

- Serve Oak Park residents or provide a direct benefit to the Oak Park community
- Demonstrate organizational capacity to complete the proposed project or activity

Community organizations may receive funding once every two Village fiscal years.

The Village will not issue grant funds to individuals. Neighborhood groups and community organizations without formal nonprofit or legal organizational status must obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), establish a bank account in the organization's name, and register as a vendor with the Village of Oak Park before grant funds can be issued. These requirements do not need to be completed prior to submitting a grant application, but are necessary for award fund distribution.

The following are <u>not</u> eligible to apply:

- Businesses or for-profit entities
- Political organizations or campaigns
- Taxing bodies or government agencies
- Individuals applying independently
- Organizations seeking funding for projects that primarily provide private benefit

Eligible Uses

Grant funds may be used for projects, programs, activities, or initiatives that provide clear public or community benefit and support community connection, engagement,

participation, or organizational capacity building, including:

- Organizational formation or administrative costs directly related to project implementation (e.g., incorporation or filing fees)
- Outreach and communications (mailers, printing, translation, marketing, digital engagement)
- Community events, gatherings, or neighborhood activation activities
- Beautification, placemaking, or community improvement initiatives
- Leadership development, facilitation, or volunteer engagement efforts
- Community surveys, outreach, or engagement activities
- Strategic planning, visioning, or capacity-building efforts
- Educational, cultural, or civic participation initiatives
- Materials and supplies directly related to the approved project or activity

Village staff may review additional proposed expenses for eligibility on a case-by-case basis.

Ineligible Uses

Grant funds may not be used for:

- Political activity, lobbying, or campaign-related expenses
- Individual household improvements or private property improvements not accessible to the broader community
- Projects or expenses that primarily provide private benefit
- Compensation, stipends, or direct payments to individual residents or organization members
- Alcohol purchases
- Religious worship activities or sectarian programming
- Expenses incurred prior to grant approval
- Debt repayment, fines, penalties, or legal settlements
- General operating expenses unrelated to the approved project or activity
- Projects that discriminate based on protected class status under applicable law

Reimbursement

All Community Building Grants are awarded on a reimbursement basis. Grant recipients are responsible for paying approved project expenses in full prior to requesting reimbursement from the Village of Oak Park.

To receive reimbursement for eligible expenses, applicants must:

- Submit a complete grant application
- Receive approval status on their application
- Complete the approved project, activity, or initiative

- Provide itemized invoices, receipts, and proof of payment for eligible expenses
- Submit photographs, materials, or other documentation demonstrating project completion, if requested
- Submit a summary describing project outcomes, participation, and community impact

Grant recipients must be registered as a Village vendor before reimbursement can be issued. Reimbursement payments will only be issued to the approved grant recipient and will not be issued to individual residents or personal bank accounts. Approval of a grant application does not obligate the Village to issue reimbursement if the grant recipient has not completed the requirements necessary to receive payment.

Reimbursement requests will be reviewed by Village staff for compliance with program guidelines and approved project scope prior to payment issuance.

Submission of reimbursement documentation does not guarantee full reimbursement. The Village of Oak Park reserves the right to deny or reduce reimbursement requests for expenses determined to be ineligible, inconsistent with the approved application, insufficiently documented, or noncompliant with program requirements.

Grant awards may be subject to applicable federal and state tax reporting requirements.

Review & Approval

Grant applications will be reviewed by Village staff and/or applicable review bodies designated by the Village and are subject to available funding.

Applications will be evaluated based on:

- Demonstrated community benefit and public impact
- Resident engagement and participation potential
- Alignment with program goals and community priorities
- Organizational readiness and project feasibility
- Budget clarity and reasonable use of funds
- Inclusivity, accessibility, and representation
- Potential to strengthen community connection and collaboration

Priority consideration may be given to neighborhood-based initiatives, projects that expand access, inclusion, and participation across the community.

The Village of Oak Park reserves the right to approve, deny, modify, partially fund, or place conditions on any grant request at its discretion.

Terms and Conditions

- Neighborhood groups may receive one Community Building Grant per Village fiscal year (Jan. 1 – Dec. 31).
- Community organizations may receive one Community Building Grant every two Village fiscal years.
- Grant applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis and are subject to available funding.
- Applicants are responsible for paying approved project expenses in full prior to requesting reimbursement.
- Grant awards may be subject to applicable federal and state tax reporting requirements. Grant recipients may be required to provide a taxpayer identification number and are responsible for any associated tax liability.
- Grant reimbursements will only be issued to the approved grant recipient through its registered Village vendor account and will not be issued to individual residents or personal bank accounts.
- The Grantee shall be solely responsible for distributing any reimbursement received from the Village to vendors, contractors, members, contributors, or other third parties, as applicable. The Village shall have no responsibility for determining how reimbursement is distributed among such parties or for resolving any claims or disputes arising from the Grantee's failure to make payment. The Village's reimbursement obligation shall be satisfied upon payment to the Grantee.
- Reimbursement will only be issued after:
    - The approved project, activity, or initiative has occurred;
    - All required documentation has been submitted, including invoices, receipts, proof of payment; and
    - Compliance with program guidelines has been verified by the Village.
- The Village of Oak Park reserves the right to approve, deny, modify, partially fund, suspend, or terminate any grant application or reimbursement request at its discretion.
- Failure to comply with program guidelines, reimbursement requirements, or reporting obligations may result in denial of reimbursement and/or ineligibility for future Community Building Grant funding.
- Grant recipients must use awarded funds solely for the purposes outlined in the approved application. Any substantive changes to the approved project scope, budget, or activity must receive prior written approval from Neighborhood Services staff.
    - Grant recipients remain responsible for obtaining any required permits, licenses, or insurance associated with funded activities.