

2026 Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo Competitive Process Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What should I know about the eight-county region of Western New York served by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo?

We're glad we've caught your attention. Our region has remarkable history, great assets, and unique challenges. We are blessed with many great well-run non-profit organizations that work hard to make our community a better place. We appreciate the passion and vision of non-profit leaders like you. We're always excited to hear about unique new programs that complement what exists in Western New York, but we encourage you to do your due diligence before you proceed further:

Here are some facts about our eight-county region that may help:

- According to one of our local partner foundations, there's been an over 25% increase in 501(c)(3) non-profit registrations in Western New York during the past decade. It's gone from 6K non-profits, to over 8K.
- The local foundation community is very small compared with other similar Rust Belt cities. There are no billion-dollar private foundations here like there are in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, or Detroit. Comparing Western New York directly to the Southeast Michigan region where Detroit is, when you add up all the foundation assets, there's \$10B in philanthropic capital. In Western New York, there's just over \$2B in philanthropic capital.
- Despite our amazing history, the region has a lack of large public corporations. There are no Fortune 500 company headquarters in Buffalo. The large companies that are here are family owned and operated. Connections will be necessary to gain their attention.
- Due to the lack of regional philanthropic capital, non-profits look toward the government or national foundations to diversify their funding. Examples of this include Say Yes Buffalo and the Racial Equity Roundtable.

What does the Community Foundation generally look for when it comes to non-profits organizations?

We look for non-profit organizations that understand the basics of good governance and planning. We want to make sure our non-profit partners understand best practices. We'll look for some of the following:

- What's your capacity to carry out your mission? How long have you been in existence? What's your annual operating budget?
- A strategic analysis that shows that your program doesn't exist in Western New York or complements existing programs. You should get buy-in from the existing local non-profit community that shows they see a need for your program, it doesn't replicate what is already here and won't compete for limited funding.
- With the size of our average grant, you should have funding on the table that we can leverage. That can include funding you've allocated to support your entrance into the region, funding from outside the region from the government or national foundations, funding from some of our local foundations, or from non-profit partners you're collaborating with.
- Local board members or a presence that allows you to get funding from the various sources you will need to be successful here, like the business community, churches, or privately held funding. Revisiting the capacity requirements, your board members should represent the community you serve and be able to bring their personal and professional expertise to the table. They should not be family members and friends.
- Your grant writing history. It's important to have the skill set to write a clear, focused, concise grant application.
- Have you accessed capacity building resources such as New York Council on Nonprofits (www.nycon.org) or The Nonprofit Support Group (thensg.org) These organizations, among

others, offer workshops and other educational opportunities to help build an effective, healthy, vibrant non-profit.

What are the qualifications to apply to the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo's Competitive Process?

Organizations must be 501(c)(3) not-for-profits located in or serving one of the eight counties of Western New York: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming.

What if I don't have my 501(c)(3) non-profit status yet?

We will only process applications from 501(c)(3) non-profits that have received official approval from the Internal Revenue Service by our submission deadline. We will require proof from those that don't come up as valid through the national database.

Can I use a passthrough (aka fiscal sponsor)?

While the Community Foundation Competitive Process will allow passthroughs, it's not encouraged. Sponsoring 501(c)(3) organizations are 100% responsible for any requests they submit acting as passthrough including submitting the actual application, follow-up, and reporting.

How do I apply for funding from the Community Foundation's Competitive Process?

You must apply through the Foundation's Foundant Grant Lifecycle Manager (GLM) system. An access link is available on the Community Foundation Competitive Process webpage:
<https://www.cfgb.org/nonprofits/grants/community-foundation/>

Applications are accepted from February 6, 2026 until March 6, 2026 at 4 PM. Only requests submitted through GLM will be processed.

What does the Community Foundation fund?

For 2026, the Community Foundation is looking to support requests that align with one of the Solutions listed under our four Community Goals as outlined on the Competitive Process webpage:
<https://www.cfgb.org/nonprofits/grants/community-foundation/>

The Community Foundation has funded variations of these four Community Goals for almost 20 years and has committed to supporting these goals through 2028.

How did the Community Foundation decide to only fund within these four Community Goals?

Research! Since 2006, every five years the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo has done a strategic plan to determine its funding priorities. The current plan is the result of publicly available data and trends, along with interviews with community leaders, a sector survey, focus groups, and input from 950 residents experiencing financial hardship. This plan will guide the Community Foundation's work through 2028.

I looked at your website and I see you fund FILL IN THE BLANK. I think it would be a great idea to start up a new program so I can apply for funding from you!

We appreciate your ambition, but if we list something as a priority, be assured there's no lack of existing programs to address it. Therefore, you'll have a lot of competition for funding.

In light of governmental funding cuts, we want to discourage duplicative programming. If you decide to start up a new program, we strongly suggest a strategic analysis to show the need for your program or to identify the existing gaps in a specific service. You need to prove your approach is unique and necessary. Ideally, a non-profit gets endorsement from competing non-profit partners in

the region saying that the program is needed, unique, and won't create an unnecessary competitor for funding.

We also encourage you to check with other funders for their interest in your new program. With our limited sized grants, you will need other foundations, other donors or patrons, a good fundraising board, unique fundraising events, or a sustainability component that will ensure the program moves forward yearly.

Why do we ask you to do all this? Because the Western New York region has very limited resources available to fund existing programs and services, let alone new ones. Creating new programs without a viable plan in place for sustaining the program beyond the Community Foundation's funding will be challenging. We want you to be successful. We wish we could fund every great program on a yearly basis, but our limited grant support prevents that ideal situation.

What kind of funding does the Community Foundation offer?

We offer unrestricted programmatic support. Funding can be used toward any expenses related to programmatic work aligned with one of the Solutions under the four Community Goals. That could include program staff and fringe, program supplies, management of staff implementing programming, rent for programming space, etc.

What won't the Community Foundation fund through the competitive process?

- Any basic human needs requests for food, clothing, shelter, hygiene products, furniture, etc.
- Healthcare or medical research
- Historic preservation of structures not on an official registry
- Sports
- Playgrounds
- Financial education
- ESL lessons

Applications for any of the above will not be reviewed.

Does the Community Foundation award multiyear grants?

We welcome multiyear requests from organizations who have an established history with us and strongly align with one of the Solutions. To be considered for a multiyear grant, please contact Director, Community Impact Darren Penoyer at 716-852-2857, x206 or darrenp@cfgb.org

What is the maximum amount I can request?

The average grant from the Community Foundation through this process is \$18,000 to \$20,000. The maximum is \$50,000, however, it's rare we award grants of that size. We appreciate optimism, but state our average grant size to assist you in being realistic and strategic with your request.

How many applications does the Community Foundation get?

We expect more than 100 applications for this process.

In the end, how many grants are made?

The Community Foundation makes about 30 to 35 grants through this process each year.

Can I meet with Staff to pitch my idea and get feedback in advance of submitting a request?

No. Due to the Community Foundation's position in the region, the tight timeline, and the sheer volume and unpredictability of the requests, we are not able to meet with non-profits submitting to this process.

We have created a fair, even process for non-profits. We have taken non-profit community feedback into account to try and accommodate organizations of various sizes and capacity. In turn, the application questions are more targeted and are easier to complete.

I received a grant from the Community Foundation's Competitive Process in 2025. Can I apply in 2026?

No. Given our limited resources, we will not allow a non-profit to apply to the 2026 Community Foundation Competitive Process if they received a 2025 Community Foundation Competitive Grant.

I received a grant from another grant process at the Community Foundation, such as Garman, Wilson, Bauman, Niagara Area Foundation, etc. in 2025. Can I apply to the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo Competitive Process?

As long as you did not receive a grant from the 2025 Community Foundation Competitive Process, you can apply to the Community Foundation Competitive Process this year.

Having grants from other funds or funding sources within the Community Foundation does not affect your eligibility to apply to the Community Foundation Competitive Process.

What if my program doesn't align with one of the Solutions listed under the Community Goals?

As a community foundation, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo has multiple processes, one of which might align with your needs. All processes open to public application are listed at: <https://www.cfgb.org/nonprofits/grants/>

Note that timelines between the different processes vary greatly.

Additionally, there are many different regional funders beyond the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo who might provide funding. A suggested resource is the NY Funders Alliance interactive member directory: <https://www.nyfunders.org/members>

What does the Community Foundation look for when reviewing requests?

There are many variables but some general guidelines for staff and board reviewing programming requests:

- Longer term, more frequent programming is of interest. Week-long, month-long, or even summer-time programming will be less competitive.
- Number served.
- Measurable change is always preferable.
- Experience/capacity
- Importance to the community
- Community served

I missed the deadline to submit an application. Are there exceptions?

No. It is a hard deadline. We work to create a fair, even process and cannot allow exceptions. Non-profits have one month to submit an application. We understand that everyone is very busy, but please submit early and do not wait until the last minute knowing even the best laid plans can go awry.

I was denied! Can I get feedback?

Absolutely! A contact will be listed on the correspondence you received. Please know, our funding is limited and sometimes we sincerely just can't support all the great requests we receive. But if there was a material issue, we will share that information so improvements can be made when you apply next year.