

## Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo Granting 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 (aka the Community Foundation)?**

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 nonprofit organizations that work hard to make our community a better place. We appreciate the passion and vision of nonprofit 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) nonprofit registrations in Western New York during the past decade. It's gone from 6K nonprofits, 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, nonprofits 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 nonprofit organizations?**

We look for nonprofit organizations that understand the basics of good governance and planning. We want to make sure our nonprofit 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 nonprofit 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 nonprofit 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](http://www.nycon.org)) or The Nonprofit Support Group ([www.thensg.org](http://www.thensg.org))? These organizations,

among others, offer workshops and other educational opportunities to help build an effective, healthy, vibrant nonprofit.

### **What is a community foundation?**

A community foundation is a community-funded, grantmaking nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of people in a defined geographic area. Community foundations exist to help individuals, families, foundations and organizations support the causes that are most important to them now and forever. They also play a unique role as a connector and convener in problem-solving community challenges to create meaningful, lasting change.

The Cleveland Foundation was the world's first community foundation established in 1914. The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo was founded in 1919 making it one of the ten oldest community foundations in the world.

Currently there are over 1,700 community foundations world-wide. Over 700 of those are in the United States.

When it comes to grant opportunities at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, there will be times where multiple competitive grant processes will be listed online. Each grant process needs to be reviewed in detail to determine the alignment with your funding needs. Each one will have unique, specific terms that need to be followed. Some of the grant processes will be administered by the staff and board of directors of the Community Foundation. Some will be overseen by staff and reviewed by clients, families, and trustees of the fund.

### **What are the general qualifications to apply to the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo for funding?**

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. There are *very limited exceptions* with some of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation funding opportunities at the Community Foundation where Monroe County could be included.

Specific geographic stipulations are listed on each process webpage and should be reviewed and taken into consideration before any application is submitted.

### **What does the Community Foundation fund?**

As a community foundation, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo has multiple processes, one of which might align with your needs. All processes open for 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 if I don't have my 501(c)(3) nonprofit status yet?**

We will only process applications from 501(c)(3) nonprofits 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 will allow passthroughs, it's not encouraged for most processes. 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.

The exception to this is the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation Arts and Culture Initiative. Passthroughs are allowed with some stipulations.

### **How do I apply for funding from the Community Foundation?**

You must apply through the Foundation's Foundant Grant Lifecycle Manager (GLM) system. Access links are available on the Community Foundation process webpage when a process is open and taking applications.

### **I see a grant process that I'm interested in. Who can I talk to?**

Every single process will list a contact along with their email. Feel free to reach out to the respective contact with questions.

Know that each process is different, so it's important to speak to the specific staff person assigned to a particular process.

Community Foundation staff are happy to meet with you but know that each staff member has multiple duties and a full calendar. As you can imagine, lots of people want to meet with us. So, the sooner you reach out to reserve time on the calendar, the better. We sincerely appreciate your patience.

### **Can I apply for a grant from a client of the Community Foundation?**

Applications are not accepted for client advised funds beyond those publicly listed on the website. Otherwise, clients work with the Community Foundation Giving Strategies Team to direct grants based on clients' areas of interest.

### **I'm a for-profit business. Can I apply for a grant?**

No. The Internal Revenue Service only allows us to support charitable 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. For-profit businesses that register an account in GLM will be deactivated.

### **Are individuals eligible for grant funding?**

Except for scholarship awards for students attending college/university, grants are only awarded to 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations.

For scholarship information, please see our website: <https://www.cfgb.org/receive-funding-or-support/scholarships/>

### **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 nonprofit gets endorsement from competing nonprofit 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.

**I looked at a specific process, but it doesn't fit my program. Are there exceptions to what's outlined? Should I try anyway?**

No, there aren't exceptions. While we understand the need for funding, the perimeters of a grant process are not negotiable and, in many cases, legally binding.

What's listed on our website is meant to provide transparency. We want applicants to be successful and not spend valuable time and resources when it's not going to be beneficial. Please take the information provided at face value.

**There are so many processes at the Community Foundation. My work aligns with a few. Can I apply to all of them?**

Yes. That's the beauty of a community foundation. Having grants from other funds or funding sources within the Community Foundation does not affect your eligibility to apply to other processes.

**Can you explain the Community Foundation's relationship with the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation (aka Wilson Foundation)?**

The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo is very pleased to collaborate with the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation in many ways and values the partnership we've built. Over the years, the Wilson Foundation has established several funding opportunities available through the Community Foundation. You'll find those grant processes listed on our website and invite you to review them and apply when the Wilson Foundation funding opportunity aligns with your work.

At the same time, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is also working independently from the Community Foundation and offering grants. They support communities in Western New York including Monroe County and in Southeast Michigan. If you're interested in the Wilson Foundation's work, please review their website at [www.ralphwilsonjrfoundation.org](http://www.ralphwilsonjrfoundation.org) and, should your work align with their priorities, reach out to their staff located in Detroit, Michigan.

**What are the most common issues you see with applications?**

Organizations don't answer questions. Answers to questions on applications must be clear, focused, and concise. Applications are not creative writing opportunities. While it sounds strange, unclear responses are a very common issue.

Inconsistent information. It's likely Community Foundation staff will be reviewing applications for several processes throughout the year. Staff notes that information for some organizations, such as mission statements and financial figures, change on each application. Inconsistency does not build confidence in a nonprofit's capacity.

Organizations create programs that they can't sustain, or worse, don't align with their mission so they can get funding. We empathize with the challenges nonprofits face with funding. As outlined above, there's a lack of philanthropic funding in the region. On top of that, there's a perception within the nonprofit community that foundations are looking for new and better programs all the time. In the end, the Community Foundation is not looking for nonprofits to create new programs. Rather, we want to fund successful, proven programs that have solid impact within the community served.

If an organization designs a new program, as outlined above, the program can't be duplicative of other existing programs, and it must be sustainable beyond the Community Foundation's limited funding.

Need help? As stated above, please access capacity building resources such as New York Council on Nonprofits ([www.nycon.org](http://www.nycon.org)) or The Nonprofit Support Group ([www.thensg.org](http://www.thensg.org)) These organizations, among others, offer workshops and other educational opportunities to help build an effective, healthy, vibrant nonprofit.

**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. Application processes are open, on average, a month, sometimes more. 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.