



**CIVIC HEALTH & COMMON GROUND  
GRANT PROGRAM**

# WHAT IS THE WNY FORWARD FUND?

- Collaborative of 14 Western New York funders
- Multi-year commitment beginning in 2025 to support building additional resilience and the resources to adapt to the challenging environment we find ourselves in
- A total of \$2.6 million has been committed to the fund to date
- The fund serves the 8 counties of WNY: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming

## 3 PRIORITY AREAS



### Strategic Alliances & Nonprofit Resiliency

Supports grant proposals from local nonprofits as they explore and plan for strategic realignment and restructuring options to sustain their missions amid financial and regulatory shifts.



### Civic Health & Common Ground

**Support initiatives that protect access to justice, due process, and legal defense to reinforce community rights and protections.**

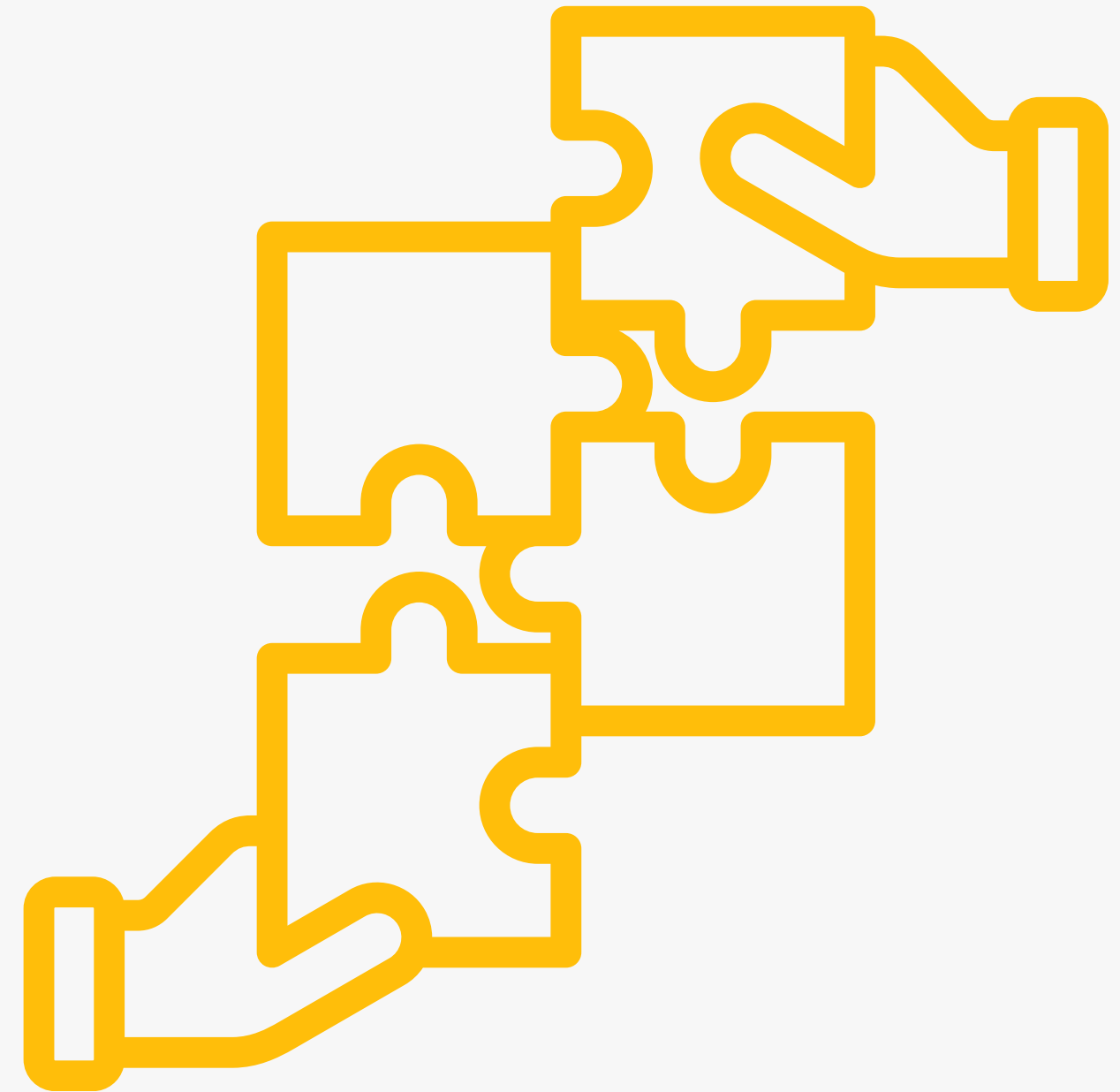


### Impact Data & Storytelling

Back efforts to collect stories and share critical data on how funding cuts affect organizations and the people they serve to help our community better understand, communicate, and respond to the region's evolving needs.

# PARTICIPATING FUNDERS

- Buffalo Bills Foundation
- The Celia Lipton & Victor W. Farris Foundation
- Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo (Fund Manager)
- Health Foundation for WNY & Central NY
- Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Blue Fund
- James H. Cummings Foundation
- John R. Oishei Foundation
- KeyBank Foundation
- Margaret L. Wendt Foundation
- M&T Bank
- Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation
- United Way of Buffalo & Erie County
- The Western New York Foundation



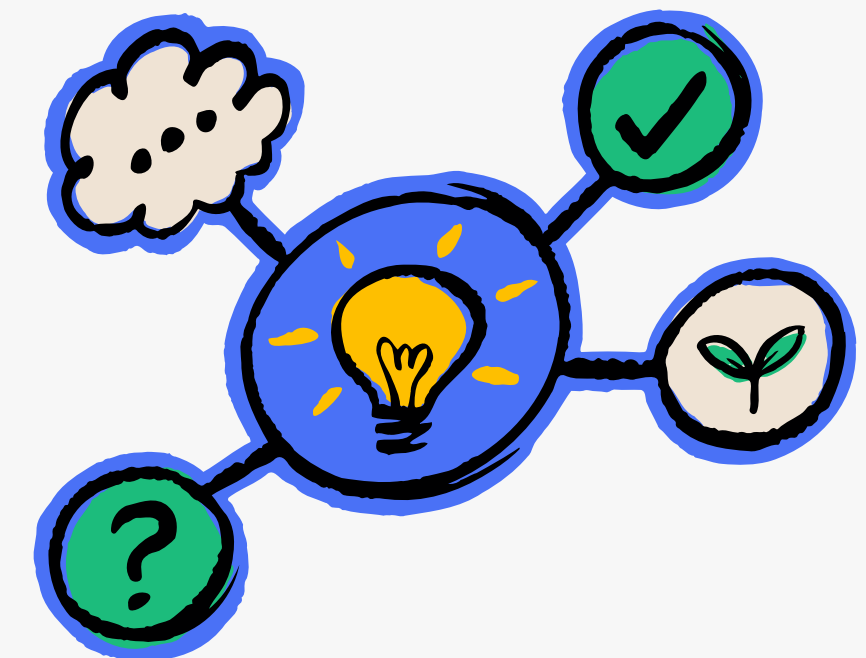
**CIVIC HEALTH &  
BUILDING COMMON GROUND**

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**GRANT OPPORTUNITY**

# HOW WE GOT HERE

- **October 2025:** Announced WNY Forward Fund and its priorities
- **November - December 2025:** Researched pooled fund best practices, developed and conducted survey of community to discuss needs, challenges, and opportunities for most impact
- **January 2026:** Completed analysis of survey responses to determine scope of this process
- **February 2026:** Conducted further interviews with groups engaged in civic action
- **March 2026:** Finalized open competitive process
- **April 2026:** Application process open now



# **CIVIC HEALTH & BUILDING COMMON GROUND GRANT OPPORTUNITY**

The WNY Forward Fund seeks to uphold democracy, civil rights, and representation and build a community-defined future grounded in freedom and justice for all.

Grants are available for activities to protect human rights and increase community voice by expanding access to democracy and decision makers in two priority areas.

# AWARD DETAILS

- General operating support, intended as 2-year
- \$1 million total available - \$500,000 each year – **one funding round,**  
**happening right now**
- Awards anticipated between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year
- 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofits and organizations using a 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor
- Simplified formal reporting requirements

# WHAT IS OUR FOCUS?

## Rapid Response to Protect Democracy and Civil Rights

Flexible funds to support community protection, engagement, and activation activities

Stop-gap funding for on-the-ground engagement, organizing, and activation (including outreach, training, skill building, and mobilization) that has seen a direct or indirect decline in funding related to recent federal shifts



# WHAT WILL BE FUNDED?

## Civic Infrastructure Building

Cross-organization/ cross-sector coordination and infrastructure building to plan for and implement strategies and activities to mobilize local residents – including residents who have not previously been civically engaged – for meaningful, sustained civic participation

Campaign planning and research focused on policy and practices changes that will increase protection of human rights and democracy within Western New York



# REPORTING AND LEARNING TOGETHER

Successful applicants will be requested to participate in co-learning spaces with additional grantees and WNY Forward Fund contributors in order to: 1) share successes, challenges, and insights from the work; 2) build meaningful and productive collaboration between philanthropy and direct civic engagement organizations that progress beyond grant funding.

# EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 1) Alignment with the fund's priority areas (protecting human rights and increasing community voice by expanding access to democracy and decision makers);
- 2) Capacity and experience for civic engagement and activation;
- 3) Being rooted in, or meaningfully working with, frontline and marginalized communities;
- 4) Outlining a path to tangible change in people's lives and/or policy.

# EVALUATION CRITERIA

The WNY Forward Fund anticipates a higher volume of requests than can be met with the funding available. The Fund will prioritize high impact grants that uphold civil rights and promote democracy throughout Western New York.

# IMPORTANT DATES

- **EOI deadline:** April 20, 2026, 4 p.m. **No exceptions.**
- **Organizations contacted for interview:** On or around May 4, 2026
- **Interviews:** May 11 - May 21, 2026
- **Notification of grant awards:** By May 31, 2026



## WHAT THIS FUND IS FOR ...

- Civic engagement and activation
- Increasing community participation in democracy and advocacy
- Protecting human rights

**Are these central to your mission?**

**Are these your primary activities?**

**Are you already doing this?**



## ... AND WHAT IT (ALMOST CERTAINLY) ISN'T FOR

- Academic achievement
- Animals
- Art projects or instruction
- Capital projects
- Financial education
- Field trips
- General youth enrichment
- Getting people together
- Higher education scholarships
- History education
- Historic preservation
- Medical research
- Murals
- One-time or short-term event sponsorship
- Providing healthcare
- Religious proselytizing
- Sports, including youth sports
- Supporting specific candidates or political parties
- Summer camps
- Trails
- Workforce development

# OTHER ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE CIVIC HEALTH

Two other key areas that strengthen our region's civic health are **legal defense for individuals and/or organizations** and **strengthening local news/journalism**.

While organizations may engage in this work and be eligible, organizations whose **sole activities** are these – and who otherwise *do not* work to increase civic engagement or activate communities – **are not eligible**.

The WNY Forward Fund has ongoing investments in these areas. We do not anticipate an additional open process related to civic health at this time, but may make further investments as our region's needs evolve.

# ELIGIBILITY SCENARIOS

Organization A's mission is to promote human rights for all local residents, advocating for policy change and organizing residents to spur change in their local community. **Organization A is eligible. Their mission and primary activities qualify.**

Organization B's mission is to exhibit art and provide arts instruction, but their values include support for universal human rights, a fairer society, and serving disadvantaged communities, so they want to apply. **Organization B is not eligible. Their primary activities are not civic activation or engagement.**

Organization C's mission is to support individuals and families experiencing poverty with connection to basic need supports they need in order to thrive. They want to apply for funds because they offer connection to legal services, a food pantry, and more. **Organization C is not eligible. Civic engagement is not part of their mission, and solely meeting needs like food or legal defense is not the goal of this opportunity.**

Organization D's mission is to advance economic justice by engaging local residents and organizing neighborhoods toward collective action that will result in healthier housing, a more equitable justice system, better jobs and investment in their communities. **Organization D is eligible. Their primary activities result in meaningful, sustained civic participation.**

Organization E's mission is to champion local artists by producing and performing plays, musicals, and other works. They want to partner with Organization F, whose mission is providing history education and programming, to apply to do a series of plays that will teach people about Buffalo's history of activism and their rights. **Neither Organization E or F are eligible. The work this fund describes is not intrinsic to either group's mission and the project isn't meaningful, sustained civic participation.**

Organization G is an independent media outlet that covers important stories on a hyperlocal level. They want to partner with Organization H, an arts and culture organization, and expand their scope to promote community events and bring people together. **Neither Organization G or H are eligible. Local media projects are not eligible without direct civic engagement and activation, and "bringing people together" in and of itself is not the goal.**

Organization I's mission is to support local youth through their workforce development and leadership development programs. They want to apply because “training and skill building” is an eligible activity. **Organization I is not eligible. General leadership development and/or workforce development are not civic engagement.**

Organization J's mission is promoting civic literacy for youth and their involvement in determining solutions for issues that affect them. They provide intensive, long-term training in advocacy so that they can achieve policy change. **Organization J is eligible. These activities are aligned with priorities like mobilizing local residents.**

# STRATEGIC ALLIANCES & NONPROFIT RESILIENCY

This funding opportunity is **not the same** as the previous opportunity offered by the WNY Forward Fund. Check back later in 2026 for updates on additional opportunities to receive support through that program.



## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

- Review additional information online
- Email Colin Perry, Senior Program Officer, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, [colinp@cfgb.org](mailto:colinp@cfgb.org)



**[WNYForwardFund.org](http://WNYForwardFund.org)**