

2026
Community
GRANTS PROGRAM

**Grant Review
Instructions and
Scoring Rubric**





Fall 2026 Community Grants Grant Review Instructions and Scoring Rubric

Thank you for serving on our Community Grants Review Committee! Your time and expertise are invaluable in helping us support programs that strengthen our community.

To organize the review process, we've established four subcommittees, each aligned with one of our pillars.

Your subcommittee will focus on reviewing grant applications. *As a member of the subcommittee, your role is to review and evaluate grant applications and provide a score based on the clarity, alignment, and impact of the proposals.*

Please note: All grant applications and committee discussions are strictly **confidential**. Information should not be shared outside of your assigned subcommittee.

Scoring System:

Every subcommittee member will review each application in your packets and give them a score of **1, 2, 3, or 4**. The applications you are reviewing have been cleared for review, which means that each proponent's eligibility for a grant from the Endowment has been verified, and all their supportive documentation has been uploaded. Below are the guidelines for each score:

1. Score of 4: Strongly recommend

Criteria:

- **Alignment:** The proposal strongly aligns with one or more of our pillars (Social and Health Equity, Education, Community Development, Community Safety).
- **Clear Project Summary:** The proposal includes a clear project summary that identifies the community need, intended activities, outcomes, and how grant funding will increase the organization's impact.
- **Clear Need:** The project clearly addresses an identifiable need in New Hanover County.
- **Defined Population:** The proposal serves a clearly defined population in New Hanover County.

- **Clear Budget:** The project has a clear, logical, and realistic budget that is aligned with the proposed activities.
- **Urgency and Impact:** Priority should be given to proposals for summer programming or those that address urgent needs within the community.
- **Action:** Assign a score of **4** to proposals that meet these criteria, without concern.
- **Additional Notes:**
 - Proposals that you deem strong, well-structured, and meet all these criteria should receive a **4**. These are the applications that you consider to be highly deserving of funding.

2. **Score of 3: Moderately recommend**

- **Criteria:**
 - **Alignment:** The proposal aligns with one or more of our pillars but is not as strong or comprehensive as a Score of 4.
 - **Project Summary:** The proposal describes the project, including the community need, activities, and intended outcomes, but the summary may be unclear, incomplete, or lacking specific details on how grant funding will be used or increase the organization's impact.
 - **Population and Need:** The project serves a population in New Hanover County, but that population is not clearly defined; or the need may not be as urgent.
 - **Budget:** The budget is generally clear and aligned with the proposed activities.
- **Action:** Assign a score of **3** to proposals that meet these criteria, or when you're unsure of their full impact.
- **Additional Notes:** Proposals that demonstrate merit and potential benefit but do not fully meet the strength, clarity, or level or alignment required for a score of 4. These proposals could be considered for funding under broader or less resource-constrained circumstances but should not be prioritized over proposals that demonstrate stronger alignment, clarity, or impact.

3. **Score of 2: Do not recommend**

- **Criteria:**
 - **Alignment:** The proposal does not align with our pillars.
 - **Lack of Clarity:** The proposal provides little or no information about the project, community need, activities, or intended outcomes.
 - **Population and Need:** The target population is not in New Hanover County or is vague or not clearly identified; or the need is not clear.
 - **Unclear Budget:** The budget is incomplete, unclear, or doesn't align with the proposed activities.

- **Incomplete Documentation:** Required application materials or supporting documentation are missing, incomplete, or insufficient.
- **Action:** Assign a score of **2** to proposals that fall into one of the four categories above, fail to meet basic criteria or where key information is missing or unclear.

4. Score of 1: Not to be considered

- Criteria:
 - **Application Duplication:** Organizations may submit only one application per cycle. If multiple applications are submitted, the organization will be disqualified and none of the proposals will be considered.
 - **Arts & Culture Specific Projects:** The Community Grants Program is not designed to fund projects whose primary focus is arts and culture.
 1. Applications centered on arts/culture activities (i.e. performances, exhibitions, festivals, art facilities, or staffing for these activities) should receive a score of 1.
- **Additional Notes:**
 - Some arts or culture organizations provide broader community or educational programming (i.e. a museum offering a summer camp or after-school learning). These proposals are eligible under the Community Grants Program and should be evaluated based on the proposed activity in accordance with the guidance above.

General Guidelines:

- **Exercise Good Judgment:** While the rubric is relatively simple, you are encouraged to apply your judgment based on the overall strength of the proposal.
- **Concurrent or Existing Funding Considerations:** Applicants who have a current grant or an existing Common grant application under review may be subject to additional consideration during evaluation. Applicants and reviewers should be aware that submitting a Community Grant application while an organization has active or pending funding may influence overall application strength and scoring, particularly in relation to need, duplication of funding, and demonstrated impact. Community Grant requests must not duplicate activities, programs, or expenses already supported through an existing grant. If duplication is evident, the application is ineligible and is not to be considered. Applicants in this situation are encouraged to consult with a Network Officer prior to submission; however, reviewers should evaluate applications based solely on the materials provided and in accordance with this rubric.
- **Review Every Application:** Each committee member is responsible for reviewing every application submitted.

- **Provide Justification for Your Score:** In addition to assigning a score, please provide a brief rationale for your decision by referring to this rubric. This will help the committee discuss and decide on final funding recommendations. As set forth below, your rationale will be treated as confidential information (not for sharing outside with the community or the organization).
- **Fairness and Objectivity:** While some proposals may resonate more with you personally, it's important to remain objective and evaluate each application against the criteria provided.
- **Confidentiality:** All applications, discussions, and decisions are confidential and should be treated as such.
- **Arts & Culture Clarification for Reviewers:** Focus on the purpose and outcomes of the proposed project and do not penalize the organization simply because it is an arts-focused entity. Assign a 1 only when the project's primary purpose is arts/culture specific and not aligned with the Community Grants Program. Assign appropriate scores (2-4) when programming is educational, community-serving, or otherwise aligned in accordance with the instructions above.

Confidentiality: All grant applications and subcommittee discussions are strictly confidential. Information should not be shared outside of your assigned subcommittee. By serving on the Community Grants Review Committee, volunteers agree to maintain the confidentiality of this process. No grant decisions may be announced until the Endowment's Board of Directors have approved them. Grant decisions will be announced by the Endowment.

Final Tabulation and Committee Discussion Process

The Committee is comprised of the subcommittee chairs, who are the respective Endowment pillar grant officers.

1. Score Compilation: The scores from all reviewers for each application will be combined. Applications will receive a total score (sum of individual reviewer scores). For example, if an application is reviewed by 3 people, and it receives scores of 3, 4, and 3, its total score would be 10. The applications will be ranked based on their total score, from highest to lowest. The highest possible score for applications would be 12. Total scores of 3 are not to be considered.

2. Budget limitations: Based on the total available funds, grants will be recommended for the highest-ranked applications. Applications with the highest scores will be considered for funding first. In situations where multiple applications have similarly high scores and the budget does not allow for funding all of them, the Committee will have discretion to determine how to recommend grant funds among these applications. This may include

prioritizing projects expected to have the greatest measurable impact, considering proration of grant amounts, or other strategies to maximize participation and effectiveness. Any such decisions will be presented to the Vice President of Programs and Grants for final approval.

3. Final Decisions: The Committee will make recommendations for funding to the Vice President of Programs and Grants, ensuring the most deserving proposals are recommended for approval first.

4. Board Approval Process: As with all grants, the recommendation approved by the Vice President of Programs and Grants will be presented first to the Endowment Board's Grant Committee for approval and consideration by the full Board of Directors at its next scheduled meeting.