



GREEN CINCINNATI PLAN

Seeds of Change

Grant Program

SPRING OPEN CALL 2026 – Grant Guidelines

Overview

The City of Cincinnati, alongside over 3,000 participating residents, made a plan called the [2023 Green Cincinnati Plan \(GCP\)](#) that provides a roadmap to make the city more sustainable, equitable, and resilient in the face of climate change. The aim is to achieve zero carbon emissions by 2050 and to do that, there are 30 goals, 40 strategies, and 130 priority actions. The Plan also recognizes that the impact of climate change is not the same for everyone. Certain neighborhoods face more problems like heat waves, floods, and air quality issues than others. The city and its partners think that solutions to these problems should come from the residents who live in the most impacted neighborhoods. So far, through the GCP Seeds of Change Grant Program Open Call, the city and private funders have granted over \$350,000 since mid-2024.

The Office of Environment and Sustainability in the City of Cincinnati announces the availability of at least \$150,000 this round. Proposed projects should involve and benefit the neighborhoods and residents most affected by climate change. If your project idea fits well with the Purpose below, is a priority of many in your neighborhood, and is ready for action, you are encouraged to apply. The confirmed funding for this program comes from the City of Cincinnati, but the plan is to raise additional dollars from other sources to grow the pool of funds available.

Purpose

The [GCP Seeds of Change Grant Program](#) aims to help communities take steps toward a more sustainable and equitable future. The program encourages residents and partners to initiate projects that prioritize the environment and resilience in Cincinnati. The focus is on supporting resident-driven solutions that help those most affected by climate change in the city and to bring the GCP to life. *With this spring Open Call, there will be an emphasis on activating unrepresented focus areas of the GCP – Buildings & Energy, Mobility, Resilience & Climate Adaptation, and Zero Waste.*

Funding Overview

The city is accepting applications for projects that range from \$1,000 to \$20,000. The project must support the environment and resilience of one or more Cincinnati neighborhoods based on the interests and needs of residents. Ideally, the proposed project aligns with at least one of the strategies and priority actions of the [GCP](#). Applicants who request funding near or up to the maximum of \$20,000 will have a stronger application if their proposed project impacts more than

one neighborhood. [The deadline to apply for the 2026 round of funding is 5/1/26 at 11:59PM.](#) The proposed projects should be able to be launched and completed within the one-year grant period, demonstrate measurable impact, and involve collaboration with others.

The **use of the funds** must be on program expenses (supplies and materials) or services (events, outreach, etc.), not operating support (such as personnel or rent). This funding aims to directly support the community members who are most in need. Compensation in the form of stipends for community members who volunteer their time and expertise is an acceptable use of funds, but it should not exceed 20% of the total budget. If necessary, up to a maximum of 15% of requested funds can be spent on grant administration for the applying organization or fiscal sponsor.

The **types of projects** that could be funded include but are not limited to: trees, native plants, soil, community gardens, fresh food access points, food waste diversion, home energy efficiency kits, green space improvements, greening parking lots, reflective asphalt sealants, rain gardens, bioswales, green roofs, non-car transportation options, air quality monitors, landslide prevention, flood mitigation, cooling solutions, recycling or compost containers, and outreach and education materials.

Ineligible work includes general operating support (such as personnel salary and benefits, office rent, or utilities), political campaigns or partisan work, lobbying, completed work occurring before the grant period, work outside of the city limits or funding focus, or entertainment.

Eligibility Criteria

To qualify for the grant, interested groups must meet the following eligibility criteria. If all four requirements are met, then the applicant is encouraged to proceed with an application. All applications must be received by 5/1/26 at 11:59PM to be considered.

1. Impact Cincinnati - The efforts must have a clear impact on one or more neighborhoods within the city limits.
2. Nonprofit Status – Applicants must prove their nonprofit status or apply with the support of a nonprofit fiscal sponsor. See Resources for more information.
3. Grassroots/Community-based – The applicant's annual budget must be less than \$500,000 unless they are applying with the help of a fiscal sponsor.
4. Actionable – The efforts must be feasible to be enacted within the one year grant period.

If your organization has received a grant from the GCP Seeds of Change Open Call in the past, your prior funded project must be completed satisfactorily with all final reporting and documentation submitted and accepted as complete in order to be eligible for this upcoming round. Keep in mind that GCP SOC cannot serve as ongoing operating support, so different projects from the same organization are welcome, but not the same project year over year.

Before Applying

The city and its partners know that some people have experience applying for grant funding, while others do not. To help everyone submit solid applications, there is a plan in place. You don't have to

attend one of the meetings below, but it would be helpful. If you have questions while preparing your application, you can email oes@cincinnati-oh.gov and a city team member will reply.

There will be a presentation on April 2nd to explain everything about the grant program. The session will be recorded, there will be time for questions, and the recording will be posted on the OES website. Due to present capacity, it will be difficult to offer standing office hours as we have in the past, but individual guidance can be sought via email (oes@cincinnati-oh.gov) and our staff will do our best to respond in a timely fashion.

Date	Step
Pre-Application Workshop	Thursday, April 2 nd 5-6PM Virtual Register to attend and access link here!

Fiscal Sponsorship

To receive grant funds for your project, your organization needs to have a specific tax-exempt status called nonprofit status (501c3). If your group does not have this, you can still receive grants by partnering with a nonprofit that will act as your “fiscal sponsor”. This means that the nonprofit will handle the funds for your project and make sure they are used in alignment with the project application. If you already have a connection with a nonprofit, you can ask them to be your fiscal sponsor. If not, you can contact OES at oes@cincinnati-oh.gov for more information on how to find a fiscal sponsor. All entities applying using a fiscal sponsor must have a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two groups that is submitted with the application. You can find a template MOU with more details about fiscal sponsorship in the Appendix of this document and on the [GCP Seeds of Change website](#).

Applying

To be eligible for funding, you must submit a full application by May 1st. Incomplete or late applications cannot be considered. A complete application includes: 1) **application form** ([online](#), [paper](#)) – *online submission preferred*, 2) **project budget** – must be uploaded to [this folder](#) or emailed to oes@cincinnati-oh.gov, and 3) **signed MOU** (if applicable) – [fiscal sponsor](#) and/or [partner](#) - must be uploaded to [this folder](#) or emailed to oes@cincinnati-oh.gov.

The City is trying to make it easy to apply by creating an [online application form](#). It's best to submit your application online. All attachments must be uploaded to [this folder](#) or emailed to oes@cincinnati-oh.gov since the online application cannot accept uploads. If you need to submit a [paper application](#), please email it to oes@cincinnati-oh.gov or mail it or drop it off at the following address. If mailed, it must be received by OES by 5/1/2026 by 5:00PM. All parts of the application need to be submitted together by May 1st for your request to be eligible for funding.

Office of Environment and Sustainability
Attn: Seeds of Change Grant Program
801 Plum Street, Room 130
Cincinnati, OH 45202

The paper application is best to use to prepare your proposal offline. This is important because the online submission tool is not equipped to save your work. It is best to complete in Word and then copy and paste into the online application once your draft is finalized.

Timeline

Step	Date
Application DUE	May 1, 2026 by 11:59PM
Award/Decline Notification	June 17, 2026
Implementation Timeframe	June 18, 2026 – June 17, 2027
Mid-term Report Due	November 30, 2026
Final Reports Due	July 30, 2027

Decision Making

The City estimates that it will award 8-12 grants from \$1,000 to \$20,000 each for a total of \$150,000. The City will attempt to grow the funds available for this round through partnership before announcing final awards. Projects that match the following priorities will be strongest:

- The project will benefit communities most impacted by climate change and their residents
- Residents from priority communities are leading the project or have at least informed the project's design
- The project is designed to address or solve a specific issue prioritized in the GCP – especially in an under-activated focus areas including Buildings & Energy, Mobility, Climate Resilience & Adaptation, and Zero Waste.
- The group applying for the grant is likely to be able to carry out the project
- There aren't many other funding options available for the project

A group of 6-12 community members, including experts in sustainability, equity, and resilience, as well as priority community residents, will review the applications and make recommendations based on these priorities. At least 40% of the members will be from priority communities. Finally, the Green Cincinnati Fund Advisory Committee will review and approve funding recommendations.

Awards

Awards will be communicated via email with further instructions on or around June 17, 2026. As part of the application submission process, each applicant is asked to agree to certain stipulations including but not limited to: how to handle changes to the funded project timeline or budget, extension requests, and return of unused funds. The grant funds will be sent to the non-profit organization within two weeks of notification of award. The non-profit organization must keep proof of payments, track spending, and save receipts ongoing for final reporting.

Reporting

Awardees are asked to document the impact of funded efforts by photos, stories, numbers, and any other means desired. A simple mid-term report is required by November 30, 2026. A final grant

report is due no later than July 30, 2027. Templates for each report will be provided to awardees. If the effort is completed earlier than one year, final reports and proof of expenditures can be submitted ahead of time and the grant can be closed.

Questions

Contact OES staff at oes@cincinnati-oh.gov or (513) 352-6995.

Resources

- [Storymap of Successful Grant Projects](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Fiscal Sponsorship Overview and MOU Template](#)
- [Partnership MOU Template](#)
- [City of Cincinnati map link](#)
- [Green Cincinnati Plan Strategies](#)
- [Climate Equity Indicators Report](#)
- [Climate Safe Neighborhoods Resilience Plans](#)
- [GCP Equity Framework](#)
- Other related funding:
 - [City Competitive Grant Programs List](#)
 - [GCF Boots on the Ground](#)
 - [City Leveraged Fund Grant Requests](#)
 - [City Community Budget Request](#)
 - [Keep Cincinnati Beautiful Safe & Clean Neighborhood Fund](#)
 - [Hamilton County Resource grants](#)