

# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1) What is the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County?

The mission of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County is to improve the quality of life for the people of St. Joseph County and their succeeding generations. We receive contributions from individuals, corporations, foundations, and other charities. We invest these contributions and use the investment earnings to support a wide range of charitable endeavors. We connect people who care with causes that matter.

Technically, a community foundation is a collection of distinct endowed funds established by individuals, organizations, and corporations to enhance the quality of life in a defined geographic area. These funds are pooled for investment purposes, but accounted for separately. The investment income from these funds is distributed as grants to carefully selected nonprofit organizations.

A community foundation is a public charity governed by a diverse board of local citizens chosen for their knowledge of the community and expertise in the many areas of management necessary to carry out the stewardship functions of the foundation.

The first community foundation was established in 1914 by a Cleveland banker. Community foundations have become the fastest growing form of philanthropy in America. There are nearly 700 community foundations in the United States with 92 located in Indiana alone. The community foundation model has spread throughout the world. There are at least 470 community foundations in 41 countries outside the United States, with at least another 140 in development around the world.

## 2) What geographical area does the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County serve?

As our name implies, we serve not-for-profit agencies (through grants) and individuals (through scholarships) residing within the geographic confines of St. Joseph County. Donor advisors who have established funds within the Community Foundation can make recommendations for grant distributions to qualifying charitable organizations outside of St. Joseph County.

## 3) In what ways does the Community Foundation distribute funding?

The Community Foundation distributes, or grants, monies in a number of different ways. They include:

**Competitive Grants:** Agencies apply to the Foundation during specified grant cycles and compete with other proposals for a finite amount of funding.

**Donor Advised Grants:** Families or individuals establish funds for which they provide advice or recommendations for how they would like funds distributed.

**Agency Endowed Grants:** Funds established typically by nonprofit agencies which distribute annually to support their operations.

**Designated Funds:** A donor names a specific charitable agency as recipient and grants are distributed annually to this agency.

**Scholarships:** Various scholarship programs have been established by corporations and individual donors that benefit local students.

**Special Initiatives:** These grants focus on particular community issues and usually involve pass-through funds which are not derived from the Foundation's endowment.

**4) Does the Community Foundation have funding priorities?**

The Community Foundation intentionally has not established funding priorities so that all local nonprofit organizations have the opportunity to compete for funding based on the merits of their cause, program, and competency. Although specific priorities are not identified, the Foundation does identify five broad areas of interest. They include:

- 1) Arts & culture
- 2) Community development & urban affairs
- 3) Health & human services
- 4) Parks, recreation, & environment
- 5) Youth & education

**5) How do I know which grant program to apply to?**

Below is a list of competitive grant programs. Please visit our *Grants and Scholarships* page on our website for more specific information and guidelines.

**Special Project Challenge Grant:** This is the general grant category open to most proposals. Because it is a challenge grant, applicants can only request up to 50% of program budget.

**African American Community Fund:** This fund awards grants to programs serving predominantly African Americans.

**Milton Fund for Senior Housing:** This fund focuses on grants specifically for senior housing issues.

**Arts Everywhere:** Guidelines and application process are being developed for this fund focusing on the arts.

**Leighton Award for Nonprofit Excellence:** This grant is intended to celebrate, reward and encourage achievement in the charitable sector. Each year, this \$100,000 endowment challenge grant is awarded competitively to a St. Joseph County nonprofit demonstrating superior leadership, management, and programming.

**IAC Regional Arts Partnership:** The Community Foundation is one of 12 regional partners with the Indiana Arts Commission (IAC), dedicated to advancing arts and culture throughout Indiana with technical assistance, grantmaking, cultural planning, and resource and referral. Organizations with arts programming from Elkhart, Fulton, Kosciusko, Marshall, Starke, and St. Joseph counties can apply for these state and federal government funds redistributed through the Community Foundation.

**6) Why does the Community Foundation award challenge grants, requiring grant recipients to raise matching contributions?**

The use of challenge grants is a proven method for leveraging additional monies. Donors are more willing to give and often willing to give more if their contributions are matched by other funds. Used wisely, not-for-profit agencies will find challenge grants an excellent tool to raise the funds necessary to complete projects.

**7) If awarded a challenge grant, when do I receive funding?**

The Community Foundation will release awarded funds once the agency has raised the matching funds and has provided the Foundation with appropriate documentation. Organizations have one year from the date the grant is awarded to raise the matching funds.

**8) What is the process of reviewing/approving grants?**

Only grants submitted by the grant deadline are eligible. These grants are reviewed by staff to make sure they meet the guidelines. The next step is to copy and mail out the grants to committee members. An initial meeting is held with the committee which is comprised of local citizens that may or may not also be Community Foundation board members (staff is present but does not vote on grants). In this first meeting, grants are reviewed and narrowed down to potential candidates. Committee members determine one of the following courses of action for each remaining application: conduct a site visit; request additional information via phone; or simply hold for further discussion at the next meeting. Committee members reconvene in order to discuss site visits and determine funding. Receiving a site visit, although encouraging, does not ensure funding. Once the committee makes its final recommendation, it is forwarded to the Board of Directors for review and approval.

**9) What criteria are used in evaluating grants?**

- The compelling and credible nature of the need or opportunity identified and the strategies proposed to address that need or opportunity.
- Track-record of agency to implement such a program.
- How the program will be evaluated to ensure effectiveness.
- Ability of agency to raise the required matching funds (*if applicable*).
- Ability of agency to sustain the project once grant funding is expended.

Typically, the grant applications deemed worthy of funding total an amount greater than the funds available. The committee then must assess the relative merits of the needs and programs presented and determine, in their best judgment, which programs and projects to fund. The pool of applications varies from one cycle to the next.

Unsuccessful applicants may resubmit their proposal for the next funding cycle.

**10) Does the Community Foundation fund ongoing operating expenses?**

Generally, no. On occasion, operating support may be awarded due to special circumstances and a credible plan for how grant resources will be replaced with other funding sources once the grant period expires. The Community Foundation's primary focus is on new initiatives, expansion of existing programs, and capital needs. Grant funding is not awarded on a renewable or ongoing basis. For this reason, one of our

criteria for evaluation is an organization's ability to sustain the program once Foundation resources are expended.

**11) Can a religious organization apply for funding?**

While donors may recommend or designate religious organizations to receive grants from their own separate endowed funds, the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County does not fund religious organizations for religious purposes through our normal competitive application processes. However, religious organizations are eligible to apply for funding to provide services in a nondiscriminatory and ecumenical manner to community citizens.

**12) Can an entity without 501(c)(3) status apply for a grant?**

Competitive grants are traditionally awarded to 501(c)(3) organizations or public agencies. If an organization is not incorporated, it can still apply so long as it obtains fiscal sponsorship through a registered 501(c)(3). In this case, funds would be awarded to the fiscal agent which, in turn, would distribute the funds to the applicant. The Community Foundation may also award grants to non-charitable organizations as long as the purpose for which the funds will be used qualify as charitable in nature.

**13) Is the Community Foundation open to funding newly established or small organizations?**

Yes. However it should be noted that in evaluating proposals, the committee seeks to discern the capacity of the entity to implement and sustain the project or program presented. Factors such as a proven track record, demonstrated fiscal viability, an established donor base, adequate organizational capacity, and the scale of the proposed effort can favor larger or more established applicants.

**14) Why doesn't the Community Foundation give out more money or larger grants?**

While the Community Foundation does award millions of dollars each year, most of this money is subject to donor restrictions or advice. As we mature, a larger percentage of the Foundation's assets will be less restricted, and the grants we can award through competitive processes will grow in size and number.

**15) What if I apply outside the grant cycles?**

Funding requests are only considered through our established grants processes. Proposals received outside of grant cycles will be held for consideration in the next grant cycle, providing the request would not be obsolete by the time board approval could be received.

**16) What type of reporting is required for an approved grant?**

Upon completion of the proposed project, a brief written analysis addressing the outcomes identified in the original grant and a final project budget are due to the Community Foundation. Other types of reporting and dialogue may be requested at the discretion of the Foundation's staff.

**17) How frequently can an organization apply for a grant?**

There is no restriction as to the number of times an organization can apply for funding.

**18) Can I resubmit a proposal that has been denied in a later round?**

Yes, an organization may resubmit a previously denied proposal. Each proposal will be evaluated on its merit and in comparison to the larger pool of applicants.

**19) What will the Community Foundation Generally Not Fund?**

While the Community Foundation remains flexible in trying to meet community needs, in general, grants are not made to fund:

- Operational phases of established programs
- Endowment campaigns
- Religious organizations for religious purposes
- Individuals directly
- Development or public relations activities (e.g. literature, videos, etc.)
- Retirement of debts
- Camperships
- Annual appeals or membership contributions
- Travel for bands, sports teams, classes, etc.
- Computers (unless presented as a necessary component of larger program or objective)
- Post-event or after-the-fact situations

**22) Can we contact the Community Foundation to learn why our request was declined?**

Generally, if the staff has any information it can share that would prove helpful, it will be included in the letter informing you that your grant was declined. Specific feedback can be difficult due to the number of proposals considered and the complex nature of the committee's debate, not only weighing the merits of individual proposals but also in the context of the total pool of applications and available resources. Grant cycles vary significantly in terms of the strength of competition and the ratio of funds requested to funds available. Applicants who believe in the strength and quality of their proposal are encouraged to resubmit.

**23) How many times can we apply for funding?**

There is no limit to the number of times or frequency with which an organization can apply.

**24) Can we apply for additional funding if we have an active grant?**

Yes. However, if an organization has an open challenge grant where the match has not been met by the time it applies for another challenge grant, the committee will take this into consideration.

*For more information and grant guidelines visit the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County's website at [www.cfsjc.org](http://www.cfsjc.org).*