



GRANT GUIDELINES: 2026 GRANT CYCLE EMPOWERING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

MISSION, VISION, & VALUES

We bring people and resources together to build a more equitable Tompkins County by inspiring diverse philanthropy, catalyzing collaborations, and championing inclusion and justice. Our values are community, Engagement, Integrity, Racial Equity, Relationships, and Social Justice.

“All 501(c)(3) organizations serving Tompkins County are welcome to apply. This grant cycle supports organizations whose mission is important to building resiliency in our communities”.

Grant Range: up to \$15,000

Application Due Date: May 4, 2026, 5:00pm

Funding Notifications: June 20

Final Report Due: March 31, 2027

This grant cycle provides flexible, unrestricted funding to support the real work organizations need to thrive—not just specific projects.

Our Approach to Grant-Making

We believe:

- **You are closest to the work and the solutions.**
- **Strong organizations create lasting community impact.**
- **Funding should be a partnership, not a barrier.**

Our role is not just to fund—but to **listen, learn, connect, and invest in community leadership.**

WHAT WE FUND:

We support organizations whose work strengthens the resilience, well-being, and equity of Tompkins County communities.

This includes efforts that:

- Advance **racial and social justice**
- Are rooted in **lived experience and community voice**
- Build **relationships, collaboration, and collective impact**
- Respond and adapt to **real community needs**
- Strengthen **organizational capacity and sustainability**

OUR GRANTS COME FROM:

- Tompkins Today & Tomorrow Fund, unrestricted discretionary grant funding.
- Field-of-interest funds reflect the specific topic for which the fund was created. They may also reflect the guidance of field of interest fund community volunteers and our Community Engagement Committee.
- Donor-advised funds reflect the charitable goals of individual donor advisors and represent donor advisor-initiated grants and their responses to grant cycle applications.

Important tips for a strong grant application

- 1.** Confirm that your application falls within **ALL** the grantmaking guidelines as outlined below.
- 2.** Complete the application as if the reader is **unfamiliar** with your organization... as if they know NOTHING.
- 3.** Have someone else read the final draft. Does this application appropriately communicate all the necessary information to the reader?
- 4.** Keep it simple. You don't need fancy language or a professional grant writer.
- 5.** Don't wait until the due date to complete the application as questions may arise and you want to have plenty of time for correspondence.

OUR PROMISE TO YOU:

We will:

- Respect your time and lived expertise
- Be clear, responsive, and accessible
- Offer support throughout the process
- Provide feedback whenever possible
- Uplift your work beyond this grant cycle

We are moving away from project-based funding and towards granting unrestricted dollars to help support mission-driven goals and objectives. We have adopted the best practice of [Trust-Based Philanthropy](#). Trust-based philanthropy alleviates power imbalances between funders and grantees while fostering more productive and informative relationships.

TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY IN PRACTICE

We are committed to shifting power and reducing barriers in our process. This means:

- **Unrestricted funding** to support your mission and operations
- **Streamlined applications** focused on what matters most
- **Transparent communication** at every stage
- **Learning partnerships**, not transactional relationships
- **Bias-aware review processes**, including reviewer training
- **Feedback and connection beyond funding decisions**

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

While we cannot provide funding to all organizations in this grant cycle, we do play a matchmaking role between organizations' needs and the resources of donors, funds, funders, our board, and best practices in the field. The Community Foundation holds many funds, reflecting a wide variety of interests. Some are specialized, and some are more general. Because we seek to match needs with donors, we will share a summary of your application with the advisors of our many donor-advised funds (over 150).

In addition to our less restrictive funds, we look for alignment between your work and special issue funds such as Aging, Animal Welfare, Arts and culture, Birth to 3, Children and youth, Community Planning and design, Food Security, and Men and Women.

[The Impacts of the Recent Executive Orders on Nonprofits](#)

ELIGIBILITY & GUIDELINES:

Eligibility

Applicants must:

- Be a **501(c)(3)** nonprofit, government entity, or eligible fiscal sponsor
- Serve **Tompkins County residents**
- Be in good standing with prior grant reporting (if applicable)



Take note

- Applications must be completed and submitted online by **May 4 at 5 pm. Late applications will not be accepted.** The link to the application can be found at www.cftompkins.org.
- The grant award must be used within 12 months of receiving the grant.
- Previous funding does not guarantee future funding.
- Applications meeting the requirements will be evaluated by a review team with final approval by the Community Foundation Board of Directors.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

- Access the application at <https://bit.ly/CFTCGrantApp>.
- **First time users:** Please click on "Create New Account" to complete the registration. Tutorials available.
- If you are neurodivergent, need help completing this application, or if English is not your native language, please email Gloria Coicou at gcoicou@cftompkins.org or call 607-272-9333 for application support.
- Contact Madeline Rosas, Administrative Manager, with technical questions, admin@cftompkins.org.

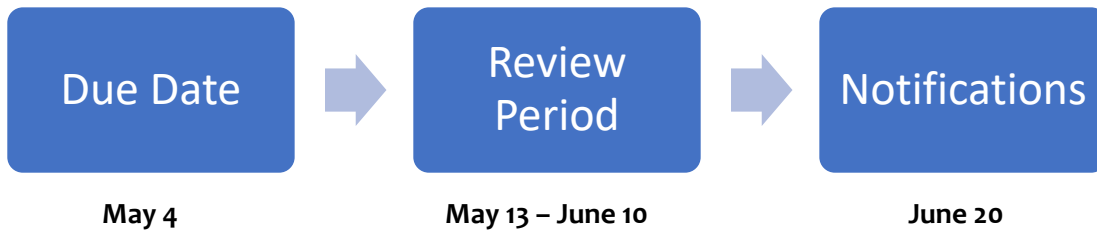
WHAT REVIEWERS ARE LOOKING FOR:

Reviewers will read and score applications as they go, focusing on:

- **Clarity and authenticity of your story**
- **Alignment with community need and impact**
- **Strength of relationships and collaboration**
- **Commitment to racial equity and justice**
- **Thoughtfulness of goals and learning**
- **How funding will meaningfully support your work**

We are not looking for perfection. We are looking for heart, connection, purpose, and possibility.

TIMELINE:



We acknowledge, honor, and appreciate the work you do every day. We see you; we feel you, and we are here to support you in any way we can. Please know that your work is part of the fabric and the breath of our community.

~The Community Foundation of Tompkins County

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

If I applied and was funded in a previous cycle, am I eligible to apply in this cycle?

Absolutely, yes! We encourage organizations to apply for every grant cycle.

Can I apply for general operating support?

Yes. We know how important flexible funding is.

What if I've never written a grant before?

That's okay! We welcome first-time applicants and offer support throughout the process.

If my program is part of a parent organization that houses several programs, can I apply separately, or does our parent organization have to apply for us?

Because of the intense process involved with grantmaking, organizations are **limited to two applications up to \$15,000 total**. It does not matter how programs split the grant.

I have a fiscal sponsor who sponsors many programs. Will that affect my application?

No, your application will not be affected by this. We know who our fiscal sponsors are and take the necessary steps to move applications along.

Where will the Q & A recording be located for future reference?

<https://www.cftompkins.org/granting/grant-opportunities/>.

How much can I apply for if I'm a first-time applicant?

Up to \$15,000

Do I have to submit last year's grant cycle report before applying for this grant cycle?

Yes, you must submit a report on your prior year's award to apply.

Is a grant report what you did with the last grant award?

Yes, if you applied for a grant last year and were funded, you received an email providing information on how to access your grant report form, when it is due, where to find additional info, etc.

Is there an average grant size per cycle or organization?

No, every organization's needs are different. Organizational needs are assessed along with many other factors involved in the grant review process. The maximum award is \$15,000.

Do you have any general advice for those who are new to applying?

- Ask questions, use resources available, use your team, use employees, and collaborate with others to get your applications in.
- Have someone who does not know your work to review your application.
- Talk about your impact, results, and outcomes. How do you know you've achieved your mission? It does not have to be perfect!

What applications are most likely to be funded and why?

There is no good answer to this. Funding recommendations are not about an issue or topic; they are about your application's merit, and content. We want to see that your organization is working on its mission in a collaborative way that advances social impact in our community to improve outcomes. It's more about the process and the methodology.

The Foundation has offered multi-year funding opportunity in previous cycles. Is this something that the CFTC intends to offer in a future cycle in addition to this unrestricted support?

We have done this before but do not yet know if we will do this again. It is not part of this cycle.

If an organization received an award from a donor-advised fund managed by the Community Foundation, is that considered a Community Foundation grant?

Yes, if the Community Foundation manages the fund, it is considered a Community Foundation grant but is not part of your grant cycle award.

If an organization serves multiple counties across the state, is that considered when making a funding decision?

If you provide some benefit to those who live in, work in, or go to school in Tompkins County, we invite you to apply. Please be specific and provide as much detail as possible.

Who do I contact for content-related questions?

Gloria Coicou, gcoicou@cftompkins.org

Who do I contact for technical questions?

Madeline Rosas, admin@cftompkins.org

APPLICATION FLOW: WHAT TO EXPECT

We've designed this application to be **clear, sequential, and reflective of how you already think about your work**. Each section builds on the one before it. As you complete the application, you are telling a **connected story**—not answering isolated questions.

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

What you'll be asked:

- Basic organizational information
- Mission and core purpose
- Populations served

How to approach it:

Start by grounding us in **who you are and who you serve**. This section sets the foundation for everything that follows.

👉 *Be clear and concise. This is your anchor.*

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY & READINESS

What you'll be asked:

- Leadership and structure
- Organizational strengths and challenges
- Readiness to carry out your work

How to approach it:

Be honest. This section helps us understand **how to support you**, not judge you.

👉 *Transparency builds trust.*

COMMUNITY NEED & CONTEXT

What you'll be asked:

- The need, challenge, or opportunity you are addressing
- Why this work matters right now
- Who is most impacted

How to approach it:

Help us understand the **why behind your work**. Center the lived realities of your community.

👉 *Focus on relevance, urgency, and community voice.*

YOUR WORK & APPROACH

What you'll be asked:

- What you do (programs, services, or strategies)
- How you deliver your work
- Who you collaborate with

How to approach it:

Describe **how your work shows up in practice**. This is about your approach—not just what you do, but how and with whom.

👉 *Highlight relationships, trust, and responsiveness.*

GOALS, IMPACT & LEARNING

What you'll be asked:

- Your goals for the next 12 months
- What success looks like
- How you will track progress or learn along the way

How to approach it:

Focus on **what you are working toward**, not perfection. We value thoughtful, realistic goals and a willingness to learn.

👉 *Clarity matters more than technical language.*

EQUITY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

What you'll be asked:

- How you engage the community you serve
- How community voice informs your work
- How your work advances racial equity and justice

How to approach it:

Show us how your work is **shaped by and accountable to community**.

👉 *Be specific about inclusion, representation, and equity in action—not just intention.*

FINANCIALS

What you'll be asked:

- Revenue/expenses
- Revenue sources
- Changes in funding

How to approach it:

Because this is **unrestricted funding**, tell us what flexibility allows you to do—stabilize, grow, adapt, or deepen your impact.

👉 *This is about what you need, not just what you can justify.*

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS & FINAL STEPS

What you'll be asked:

- Uploads (e.g., prior grant report if applicable)
- Final review before submission

How to approach it:

Double-check that everything is complete and submitted on time.

👉 *Completeness ensures eligibility.*

HOW TO MOVE THROUGH THE APPLICATION

As you complete each section, keep asking yourself:

- Does this connect to what I shared before?
- Am I clearly showing the impact of our work?
- Have I centered the community we serve?

Each section should **build on the last**, creating a clear and cohesive picture of your work.

A FINAL WORD

You do not need to have all the answers.

We are not looking for polished language—we are looking for:

- **Clarity**
- **Authenticity**
- **Connection to community**

Tell your story in a way that feels true to your work.