

Northwest Minnesota Foundation's Building Better Lives Grant Initiatives

As a force and resource for Northwest Minnesota, we champion ideas that stabilize and strengthen our communities.

Through our Building Better Lives grant opportunities, we empower our neighbors and local leaders to build a stronger, more resilient region. By focusing on engagement, collaboration, equity, and sustainability, we invest in innovative community-led solutions that address complex problems and enhance regional wellbeing.

Our funding aims to ensure that our region's communities and people – especially those who have faced barriers to opportunity – have the support they need to succeed. We invest in efforts that strengthen local economies, expand access to resources, create opportunities for meaningful civic engagement and pathways to stability and growth. By working alongside partners and honoring the diverse voices of our region, we aim to build an inclusive future where all can thrive.

Eligibility Criteria

Typical award period: One-year

Average grant amounts: \$5,000 up to \$15,000

Current available funding: \$80,000

Funding cycle: Applications accepted 3 times per fiscal year

Eligible applicants:

- 501c3 nonprofits
- Tribal organizations
- Local government entities and public agencies
- Other tax-exempt entities (must be able to verify tax-exempt status)
- Must have a physical location in and/or serve NMF's region which includes
 - Red Lake Nation and White Earth Nation
 - Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Kittson, Lake of the Woods, Mahnomen, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, and Roseau counties.
- Fiscal hosts may be considered (signed fiscal host agreement required)

Funding Guidelines

- No more than 10% of grant funds may be used for indirect costs or administrative expenses
- Funds **may not** be used for sponsorships
- Proposals for annual and/or one-time events will be considered. Maximum award amount for annual and/or one-time events is \$5,000
- No subgranting

Funding Priorities

- **Strengthening families:** Organizations and programs supporting the wellbeing of families by providing direct services and basic needs including housing assistance, food, transportation, elder care, and child care.
- **Mental and/or physical health and wellness:** Organizations and programs that provide accessible and responsive mental or physical health services, especially for populations that face barriers to service.
- **Cultivating welcoming communities:** Organizations and programs that bring people together to bridge across differences, provide education, encourage meaningful participation, and strengthen social cohesion, especially for Indigenous and immigrant populations.
- **Economic mobility and workforce development:** Organizations and programs that help people move toward living wages, create pathways to build generational wealth, and provide entrepreneurship support.
- **Nonprofit capacity building:** Organizations and programs working to build their internal capacity to serve the community more effectively through staff and board training, leadership development, technology improvements, and other activities that strengthen long-term sustainability.

Eligible Expenses

- Salaries and wages
- Fringe benefits
- Equipment
- Travel expenses
- Supplies (facility rental fees, stipends, printing, publication costs, etc.)
- Technical assistance and/or consultant fees
- Staff and board training
- Efforts that strengthen organizational capacity to engage and serve the community
- Fundraising planning

- Feasibility studies
- One-time community event funding (maximum award amount \$5,000)
- Indirect costs (cannot exceed 10% of award amount)

Ineligible Expenses

- Capital campaigns
- Capital expenses
- Political activities or programs
- Religious activities or programs
- Discriminatory practices
- Past operating debts
- Legal fees
- Financial audits
- Previously incurred expenses

Evaluation Criteria

Grant applications will be evaluated using the following criteria. While not every project will meet all categories, strong proposals will demonstrate a clear alignment with the goals of the **Building Better Lives** initiatives.

Purpose Statement (5 points)

Criteria for Review:

- The purpose statement is clear and concise.
- The request is directly connected to the proposed project or program.

Community Context (15 points)

Criteria for Review:

- The applicant explains why the project is needed.
- The description shows an understanding of local conditions, needs, and service gaps.
- Information is provided on how the need was identified (e.g., data, feedback, assessment).

Activities + Partnerships (25 points)

Criteria for Review:

- Partnerships are clearly identified and documented (e.g., MOUs, agreements).
- Collaboration roles and responsibilities are defined.
- The project timeline is realistic and aligned with the proposed activities and budget.
- Activities are directly connected to the identified need.

Participation + Access (25 points)

Criteria for Review:

- The project includes input from the people it is designed to serve.
- Plans encourage meaningful involvement and participation.
- Services are accessible (e.g., transportation, affordability, language).
- Efforts are made to reduce barriers that may prevent participation.

Outcomes + Impact (15 points)

Criteria for Review:

- Outcomes align with the stated activities and context.
- The proposal describes how the work will contribute to long-term community benefits or capacity.
- The approach is practical and results-focused, with clear and realistic outcomes.
- The model has potential to be expanded or repeated in other settings if successful.

Budget (15 points)

Criteria for Review:

- Line items are clearly connected to the proposed project activities
- Other funding, in-kind support, or resources are identified where applicable.
- Right-sized to the scope of the project and the Building Better Lives grant program. Shows how these funds would meaningfully support progress for community-based work.

Reporting

A final grant report will be due within one year of receiving funds.

Timelines and Key Dates

We accept applications for the Building Better Lives grants three times per year. Organizations may apply during any open cycle that aligns with their project timeline and readiness. Applications that are not selected will need to reapply.

Application Window

June 29th – July 27th

November 2nd – November 30th

March 2nd – March 30th

Decision Notification

By August 31st

By December 31st

By April 30th

Payment Disbursed

September 2026

January 2027

May 2027

Steps to Apply

- **Review Funding Priorities:** Make sure your proposed work, program, or project aligns with one or more of our funding areas.

- **Utilize the Applicant Resource Folder:** Check out the [Applicant Resource Folder](#) and bookmark this link as it will not change. If you have trouble accessing the link, send an email to grants@nwmf.org or visit the [NMF website](#) to view or download any of the tools and resources that are available on the grants page.
- **Prepare Your Application:** Use the guidelines and evaluation criteria to strengthen your proposal. These materials and more can be found in the Applicant Resource Folder.
- **Submit Online:** Complete and submit the online application via the [NMF Web Portal](#) by **11:59 PM on the final day of the application window**. Please note that first-time users of the web portal may need to be manually approved; this can take up to 24 hours or 1 business day. Web portal instructions are included in the Applicant Resource Folder and on the NMF website. If you experience technical difficulties, send an email to grants@nwmf.org.
- **Review Process:** All applications are reviewed by a committee of staff and community advisors using the scoring considerations stated above.
- **Award Notification:** Applicants will be notified of decisions by the dates listed above.

Need Help?

We encourage applicants to reach out with questions or request support at any time throughout the application period. Language assistance and accessibility accommodations are available upon request. We will also offer an opportunity to attend an informational webinar prior to each application window where you can ask questions and speak live with NMF staff about the Building Better Lives grant initiatives.

Informational Webinars with NMF Program Staff

These one-hour webinars are offered three times per year and scheduled for two weeks before each application cycle opens. You're welcome to drop in at any point during the hour. Together, we'll walk through the Building Better Lives grant guidelines, share resources, and answer your questions. Just as importantly, these sessions give us a chance to listen and learn from you—your ideas, your goals, and what other types of support might be most helpful. If you find you need more time for specific questions, we're glad to connect you with a Program Officer for a one-on-one conversation.



[Fill out this form](#) and be added to the list to receive the meeting invite to attend webinars.

Contact

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