

CITY OF ASPEN

# GRANTS PROGRAM GUIDELINES



CITY OF **ASPEN**

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## Introduction

Since 1996, for almost 30 years, the City of Aspen's grant program has distributed more than **\$31 million** to local nonprofit organizations. The program supports organizations in three divisions: Arts & Culture, Community Nonprofit, and Health and Human Services. Grant proposals are accepted on an annual basis and are reviewed and scored first by a committee of citizen volunteers and then assessed by the Grants Steering Committee to determine funding amounts to recommend for city council approval.

Applicants to the City of Aspen competitive grant program should read through the guidelines and eligibility requirements carefully before beginning the application process to ensure they meet program requirements and eligibility. Applicants are required to be tax-exempt under the provision of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (or school-affiliated nonprofits).<sup>1</sup>

The City of Aspen grant program guidelines are adopted and periodically reviewed and updated by the Grants Steering Committee with approval by the city manager and Aspen City Council when appropriate.

	FY 2026 Total Available Funding
<b>Arts &amp; Culture Division</b>	\$1,114,585
<b>Community Nonprofit Division</b>	\$598,600
<b>Health &amp; Human Services Division</b>	\$237,000–\$308,000 <sup>2</sup>
<b>In-Kind Services Division</b>	\$174,684

Each division is funded by different revenue streams and increases on average, **2.5%** annually.

- **Arts & Culture Division:** Originally funded by a mix of the general fund and the Wheeler real estate transfer tax (RETT) which was first established through Ordinance 20, Series of 1979. In 2021, Ordinance 19 removed the overall funding cap on the fund itself. Now, these grants are exclusively funded through RETT. Refer to [Aspen Municipal Code §23.48.060, Wheeler Opera House real estate transfer tax](#).
- **Community Nonprofit Division:** Funded exclusively by the city's general fund.
- **Health & Human Services Division:** Primarily funded by the general fund, with occasional support from tobacco tax revenues, hence the range for available funding.
- **In-Kind Services Division:** Is not funded by a revenue source. It represents the city's contribution of facilities, services, or resources provided at no charge to the recipient.

<sup>1</sup> Organizations who received an award during the 2025 cycle may apply for a one-time exemption from this requirement.

<sup>2</sup> Funding range reflects projected FY 2026 tax revenue. The lower figure represents the amount without tobacco-tax funds, while the upper figure includes the portion expected to be allocated to grants.

# Program Updates At-a-Glance

Category	What's Changing	What It Means For Applicants
<b>Applications Simplified Requirements</b>	Simplified financial reporting and eliminated redundancies	Financial tables have been removed and questions have been consolidated.
<b>Arts &amp; Culture Funding Terms</b>	Shifting to two-year cycle	Awards will be given for two-year terms. Applications will be available every other year (next cycle: 2027)
<b>Arts &amp; Culture Tiered System</b>	Tiered request limit system (Aspen-org preference)	Aspen-based arts organizations will be able to request higher amounts
<b>Community Nonprofit Tiered System</b>	Tiered request limit system (Aspen-org preference)	Aspen-based community nonprofit organizations will be able to request higher amounts
<b>Community Nonprofit Mini Grant (Pilot)</b>	NEW \$5K mini grant with simplified application and process	Simpler process with minimal requirements, intended for quick support
<b>Criteria Aspen-based Definition</b>	NEW definition which clarifies what is considered 'Aspen-based'	Must maintain a public-facing physical space within the Aspen Urban Growth Boundary (AUGB) or conduct a majority of service delivery within this area
<b>Eligibility Service Area</b>	Requirement shifted from physical address to focus on residents and local workforce served	Regardless of an organization's physical location, applicants must now demonstrate how their proposal will impact the residents and workforce in this area
<b>Eligibility Tax-Exemption Status</b>	Must be 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit (or school-affiliated nonprofit)	Organizations funded last year without 501(c)(3) status may apply for a one-time exemption from this requirement
<b>Maximum Request</b>	Maximum award of 15% changed to maximum request of 20%	Previously, awards were capped at 15% of an organization's operating budget. Now requests themselves are capped at 20%.

Annual feedback surveys of applicants and reviewers—with guidance from **Aspen City Council** and approval by the **Grants Steering Committee**—inform updates to the program.

# Strategic Foundations

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While funding divisions have been a consistent element of the program's structure since its inception, the program philosophy and strategic focus areas were developed in 2019 to provide clarity and direction to aid in funding recommendations. At the conclusion of the 2025 grant cycle, feedback surveys were conducted for applicants and reviewers. Based on this feedback, with guidance from Aspen City Council, the Grants Steering Committee have approved the following changes to the program.

## Grants Program Philosophy

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The City of Aspen grant program supports nonprofit organizations that promote a mentally and physically healthy community, provide protection for our natural environment, and create opportunities for connections for all community members through partnerships, ease of access, stewardship, arts and cultural enrichment and innovation.

## Strategic Focus Areas

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### Arts & Culture

The City of Aspen supports artistically excellent nonprofit organizations which contribute to the cultural vibrancy of our community.

### Community Nonprofit

The City of Aspen supports and enhances nonprofit organizations which create and deliver high impact community programming.

### Health & Human Services

The City of Aspen strives to be a healthy and resilient community by supporting a comprehensive system of accessible mental and physical health care, human services, and community resources.

# Competitive Grant Guidelines

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All organizations who are applying to the competitive grant program must meet the following eligibility requirements and follow the guidelines as determined by the Grants Steering Committee.

## Eligibility Requirements

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Applicants must meet all requirements to be considered eligible:

- Classified as a tax-exempt nonprofit under the provision of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (or a school affiliated nonprofit).
- Directly provide services or programming within the Aspen to Glenwood corridor that benefit residents and workforce in this area.
- If the organization has received a grant from the City of Aspen previously, a completed impact and outcome report is required.
- Applicants who apply to the competitive grant program are not eligible to apply to the pilot mini grant.
- Organizations are eligible to apply for one cash grant and one in-kind grant per cycle

## Defining Aspen-Based

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**Aspen-based** organizations are nonprofits meeting all other grant program eligibility criteria that maintain a physical space, accessible to the public (e.g. not a home office or PO box), within the Aspen Urban Growth Boundary or conduct most of their service delivery within this area.

## Division Tiers and Funding Request Limits

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Within A&C and CNP divisions, funding request limits are determined by whether an organization is **Aspen-based** or **non-Aspen-based**, and in all divisions (A&C, CNP, and HHS) requests for \$10,000 or more **may not exceed 20% of an organization's annual operating budget**.

Arts & Culture Division	Community Nonprofit Division
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Aspen-based:</b> up to <b>\$100,000</b></li><li>• <b>Non-Aspen-based:</b> up to <b>\$75,000</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Aspen-based:</b> up to <b>\$50,000</b></li><li>• <b>Non-Aspen-based:</b> up to <b>\$37,500</b></li></ul>
<b>Health &amp; Human Services Division</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There are no tiers in the HHS division</li></ul>	

- All requests for \$10,000 or more are limited to 20% of an organization's operating budget, not to exceed **\$30,000**.

## Funding Terms & Timeline

Funding terms refer to the period that the grant award covers.

One-Year Funding Term	Two-Year Funding Term
Next Application: <b>2026</b>	Next Application: <b>2027</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Nonprofit</li> <li>• Health &amp; Human Services</li> <li>• In-Kind Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts &amp; Culture</li> </ul>

The **anticipated timeline** for the competitive grant cycle is as follows:

1. **Guidelines & Materials Posted:** approximately two weeks prior to the application opening, updated eligibility, criteria, and other program changes will be posted on the website.
  - a. **Anticipated Date:** Monday, September 22, 2025
2. **Application Window:** the application remains open for approximately two months during which informational and training sessions will be hosted both in-person and virtually.
  - a. **Anticipated Opening Date:** Monday, October 6, 2025 @12 NOON
  - b. **Anticipated Closing Date:** Wednesday, December 10, 2025 @4 PM
3. **Staff Verification:** after the application window closes, city staff will review the application for eligibility, completeness, and financial health and flag potential concerns for review by the Grants Steering Committee. Organizations deemed financially unsound by the Grants Steering Committee will not advance to the review committees and are not eligible for funding.
4. **Review Committee Scoring:** up to five volunteer community members will review and score applications using the Review & Scoring Framework (see Appendix B). Reviewer scores are first weighted based on review criteria, then aggregated to generate a singular score. This score is then applied to an objective funding formula to determine initial funding recommendations.
5. **Grants Steering Committee Evaluation:** initial funding recommendations are reviewed by the Grants Steering Committee who provide the final funding recommendation to Aspen City Council.
6. **Grantee Notification:** applicants are notified of their recommended award amount by email; however, all awards remain pending until they receive final approval from Aspen City Council.

7. **Aspen City Council Approval:** applicants are invited to the regular city council meeting where grant awards will be considered for approval through resolution.
8. **Contracting & Funds Disbursement:** contracts are sent to grantees via DocuSign. Once all parties have completed signatures, an electronic funds payment (EFT) will be issued with the award amount.<sup>3</sup>

## Required Reporting

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All organizations who receive a grant from the City of Aspen are required to complete an Impact & Outcome report detailing how grant funds were spent, and if intended outcomes were achieved—or not. This report is due mid-November annually.

## In-Kind Grant Policies

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All applicants interested in applying for in-kind grants must abide by the following policies:

- **Must** provide estimate of cash-value of the in-kind request (use [Aspen Municipal Code Chapter 2.12 MISCELLANEOUS FEE SCHEDULES](#) to make your estimates).
- Receiving an in-kind grant does **not** replace the event application process. All recipients must still complete and obtain approval of the required event application with the appropriate city department.
- **Wheeler Opera House:** please be aware that in-kind grants do not cover ticketing or credit card fees.

## Ineligible Requests

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The City of Aspen is unable to support the following types of requests:

- Political or lobbying activities
- Capital campaigns and fundraisers
- Ongoing personnel requests
- Deficits, retirement of debts, or endowments
- Pass-through grants

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<sup>3</sup> EFTs are the preferred method of payment by the City of Aspen. If you would prefer to receive your grant award in the form of a check, we ask that you pick up the check directly from our finance department in City Hall. If you have questions regarding this policy, please email us at [grants@aspen.gov](mailto:grants@aspen.gov).

# Required Documents

## Application Documents

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All organizations must include the following documents in their grant application:

- Board Approved Financial Statements**
  - LAST YEAR:** Income Statement
  - LAST YEAR:** Balance Sheet
  - CURRENT YEAR:** Operating Budget
  - Program/ Project Budget (only for programmatic/ project requests)
- Most recently filed **IRS Form 990**
- List of Board Members** including full names, titles, emails, and dates of expiry.

Organizations requesting **\$50,000 – \$100,000** must also include:

- LAST TWO YEARS:** Income Statements
- LAST TWO YEARS:** Balance Sheets
- Independent Financial Audit completed within the last three years

## Organization Documents

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Organization documents remain attached to the organization's profile and need only be provided should updates be made.

- IRS Letter of Determination**
- Web-ready **Logo** (.png or .jpg preferred)

## Mini Grant Pilot

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This pilot mini grant is designed to provide a quick and simple infusion of funds to support community organizations through general operating support. With a streamlined application and minimal requirements, this noncompetitive program is designed to reduce barriers and expedite the disbursement of funds.

- This grant is going to be piloted in the **Community Nonprofit** division.
- 25 awards of up to \$5,000 to be given in this pilot year.

## Eligibility Requirements

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Applicants must meet all the following criteria to be considered eligible:

- Classified as a tax-exempt nonprofit under the provision of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (or a school affiliated nonprofit).
- Open to Community Nonprofit division only
- Directly provide services or programming within the Aspen to Glenwood corridor that benefit residents and workforce in this area.
- If the organization has received a grant from the City of Aspen previously, a completed impact and outcome report is required.
- Applicants who apply to the mini grant are not eligible to apply to the competitive grant program.

## Financial Health Review

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Staff will review organizational financial documents to assess financial stability and flag potential concerns for the Grants Steering Committee. Organizations determined to be in poor financial health by the grants steering committee will not advance to the grants review committees and will not be eligible for funding.

## Funding Terms & Timeline

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The funding term for this pilot program is one-year with anticipated funds disbursement in early 2026.

1. Submit application
2. Eligibility & financial health check
3. Grants Steering Committee review & approval
4. Funds disbursed

## Required Reporting

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Within one year of receiving the award, the organization must provide a short one-page summary explaining how the funds were used. They should include any supporting evidence such as photos, news articles, or letters from the community expressing appreciation for the program or service.

## Ineligible Requests

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The City of Aspen is unable to support the following types of requests:

- Political or lobbying activities
- Capital campaigns and fundraisers
- Ongoing personnel requests
- Deficits, retirement of debts, or endowments

## Application Documents

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All organizations must include the following documents in their grant application:

- CURRENT YEAR:** Operating Budget
- List of Board Members** including full names, titles, emails, and dates of expiry.

## Organization Documents

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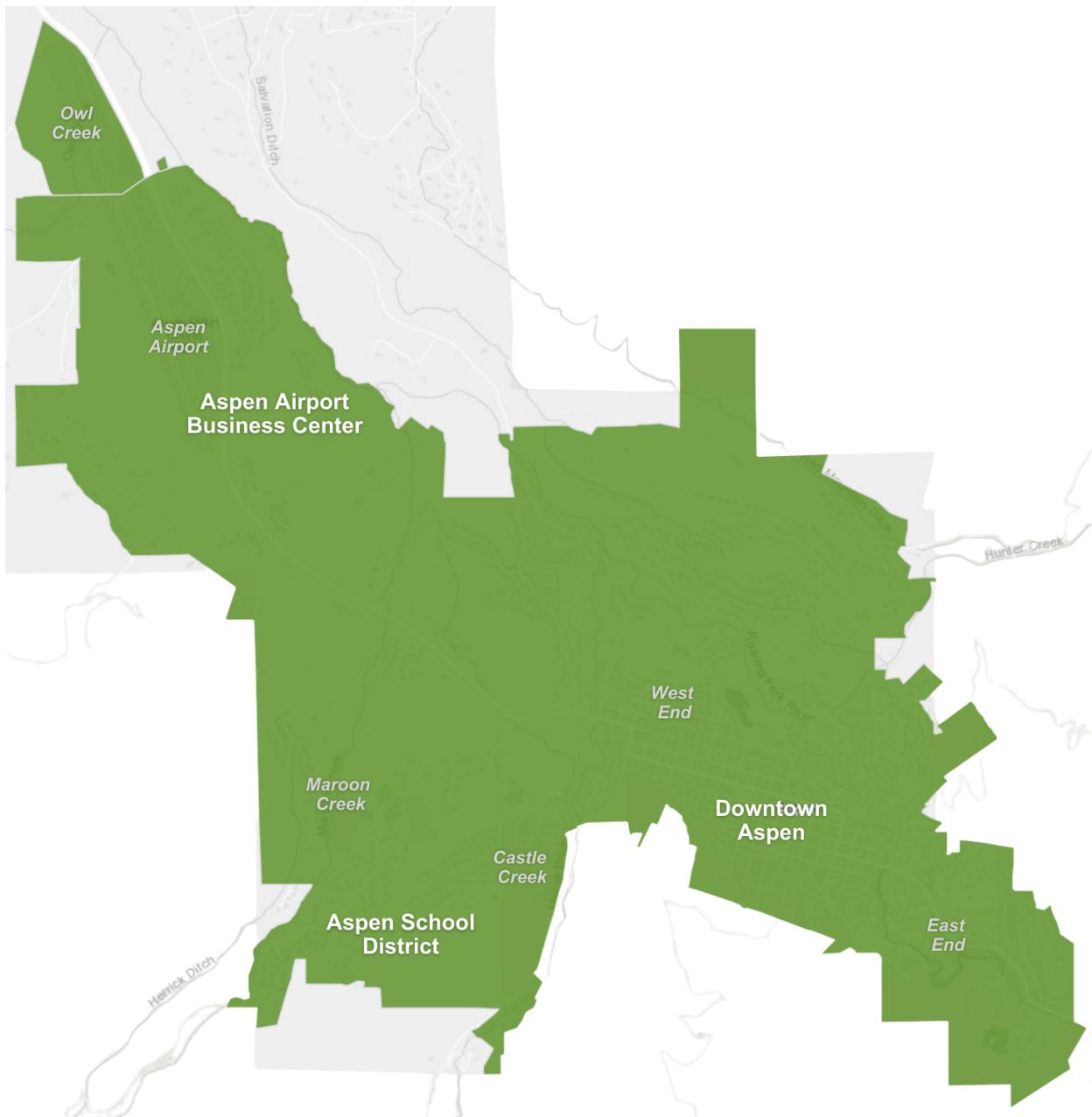
Organization documents remain attached to the organization's profile and need only be provided should updates be made.

- IRS Letter of Determination**
- Web-ready Logo** (png or .jpg preferred)

# Appendix

## Appendix—Aspen Urban Growth Boundary

Adopted by the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) in 2000, the UGB plays a role in growth management, the transfer of development rights, and the [Aspen Area Community Plan](#). It is updated periodically. The city recognizes that there are nonprofit organizations who operate just outside of city limits. To better reflect where services are delivered and accessed, the UGB is used as a geographic frame of reference as opposed to city limits.



## Appendix B—Review Criteria Descriptions & Weights

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Applications will be reviewed by the grant review committees on each of the following criteria. Scores from each criterion will be used to determine funding recommendations.

### Community Impact

40%

- To what extent will the proposal make a meaningful and durable positive impact in the lives of those it directly serves?
- To what extent will the proposal benefit the broader community beyond those it directly serves?
- For organizations who have previously received funding from the City of Aspen to what extent were the intended outcomes outlined in their application achieved, as reflected in their impact and outcome report?

### Alignment

20%

- To what extent is the proposal clearly and closely aligned with the applicable strategic focus area and overall program philosophy?

### Feasibility

20%

- How well does the application establish that the proposal is viable and sustainable?
- To what extent does the application demonstrate that sufficient organizational capacity exists to ensure funds are used as proposed?
- Is the proposal an effective and efficient use of public funds?

### Innovation

20%

- To what extent does the proposal creatively address persistent or systemic issues, or fill a need in the community?
- How well does the proposal provide an effective and compelling rationale for funding?
- How clearly does the organization explain its unique value and differentiation in relation to other organizations providing similar services in the community?

## Appendix C—Scoring Definitions

Score	Definition
5	<b>Exceptional:</b> Many strengths and no impactful weaknesses or flaws
4	<b>Great:</b> Many strengths and few impactful weaknesses or flaws
3	<b>Good:</b> Some strengths and some impactful weaknesses or flaws
2	<b>Average:</b> Few strengths and several impactful weaknesses or flaws
1	<b>Poor:</b> Minimal strengths and many impactful weaknesses or flaws
0	<b>Inadequate:</b> Is not suitable for funding of any kind

## Appendix D—Qualities of High-Scoring Applications

Criterion	Higher Scoring Applications Will
<b>Community Impact</b> <b>40%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Clearly articulate the meaningful and durable impacts in the lives of those directly served.</li><li>Provide a coherent explanation of the broader community benefit of their proposal.</li><li>Have a track record of success with previous City of Aspen grant cycles (if applicable).</li></ul>
<b>Alignment</b> <b>20%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Clearly articulate their alignment with each aspect of the program philosophy and strategic focus areas.</li></ul>
<b>Feasibility</b> <b>20%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Align with the best management practices and have practical timelines.</li><li>Have a higher probability of success.</li><li>Demonstrate, with sufficient detail, organizational capacity to implement proposal.</li></ul>
<b>Innovation</b> <b>20%</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Address an issue or need that is demonstrably unmet currently.</li><li>Address community issues or needs through innovation and creativity.</li><li>Provide an effective and compelling rationale for funding.</li></ul>

