

KEY SHIFT TO COMMUNITY GRANTMAKING

Competitive Grantmaking has been ACF's perennial program since its founding in 1980. Over the years, the priorities and processes for this program have changed, but one thing has remained consistent: funding has been made possible by annual contributions from donors who wish to support pooled grantmaking funds. Funds are typically raised through ACF's end-of-year fundraising efforts; however, from time to time, monies from events, specific donors, or other circumstances have been available. In recent years, donors have moved away from supporting this pooled grantmaking process in favor of independently exploring and engaging with issues they care about.

ACF continues to evolve in response to what we hear from our community, our donors, and our nonprofit partners. As part of this evolution, we want to share an important change on the horizon: 2026 will be the final year ACF hosts competitive grant programs in Early Childhood and Youth Empowerment. **Beginning in 2027, we will move away from competitive grantmaking in these areas** and focus more on what we've seen make the biggest difference: bringing people together, encouraging collaboration, and building more personal relationships between donors and our nonprofit community. We are also leaning more fully into our role as a connector, helping link nonprofits, donors, public partners, and statewide resources to address community challenges.

2026 GRANTMAKING PROCESS

In 2026, ACF is offering two competitive grant programs for nonprofit organizations in the Aspen to Parachute region: Early Childhood and Youth Empowerment. Eligible nonprofit organizations are invited to apply to ONE of these programs. A total of \$600,000 will be awarded through ACF's 2026 Focus Area Grants, \$300,000 for Early Childhood and \$300,000 for Youth Empowerment. Grant awards will range between \$10,000 and \$35,000.

Applications are reviewed in accordance with the following priorities, criteria, and limitations. Past ACF funding does not guarantee funding through this process.

FOCUS AREA PRIORITIES

Aspen Community Foundation's vision is for the Aspen to Parachute region to be a diverse and culturally rich place where all people have equitable opportunities to thrive. When we review grant requests, we do so through the lens of our equity value. This means ensuring our Early Childhood and Youth Empowerment funding supports underserved and under-resourced people and geographies.

Early Childhood – This competitive grant program prioritizes nonprofits that serve children from birth to age five in early care and education. Specifically:

1. Strengthening the skills of caregivers – parents, childcare staff, FFN providers – so they can support the healthy development of children in their care. This includes:
 - a. Services that improve the health, safety, and quality of childcare
 - b. Parent support and education with active participation over a longer time period
2. Providing tuition assistance to increase families' access to quality care, especially for those who are low-income.

Youth Empowerment - This competitive grant program prioritizes nonprofits providing equitable access to youth empowerment opportunities. Specifically:

1. Opportunities that support physical, social-emotional, and mental health needs in a culturally responsive and youth-centered way.
2. Opportunities for youth to learn, explore, and discover new interests and activities outside the classroom setting, and those that intentionally serve disengaged youth.

CRITERIA

- Commitment to serving disengaged and **under-resourced children/youth and geographies**
- Responsiveness and adaptability to community and client needs
- Demonstrated **impact and positive outcomes** for those served
- **Financial solvency** and overall operational stability

ELIGIBILITY

Organizations are eligible to apply if:

- They are classified as tax-exempt under the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or are using a fiscal sponsor with a 501(c)(3). Or they are a government entity, such as a school district.
- They serve and provide opportunities for those living in the Aspen to Parachute region.
 - Children ages birth to five
 - Youth ages six to 24 years old

LIMITATIONS

1. Support is limited to nonprofit organizations located in, and whose work primarily serves the residents of Pitkin and Garfield counties and the Roaring Fork Valley portion of Eagle County.
2. Requests are not considered for:
 - Organizations outside of ACF's Aspen to Parachute service area
 - Organizations, pilot projects, or programs in operation for less than one year or are less than one year from receipt of 501(c)(3) approval
 - Projects that have been completed prior to allocation decisions
 - Deficits, retirement of debt, or endowments
 - Religious purposes
 - Political campaigns
 - Medical research or hospital equipment
 - Program design, product development, or marketing and promotion
 - Conduit organizations (organizations or events that pass funds to other organizations)
 - Individual schools/classrooms, departments/programs of universities or colleges, or education foundations/organizations that have not coordinated the request with their central school district/university administration or fundraising arm
 - Organizations primarily supported by tax-derived funding unless funding supports a program that is outside of the organization's operating budget
3. Aspen Community Foundation does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, physical circumstances, or national origin. Applicants must hold and demonstrate similar standards.

VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS – Recurring Zoom meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84739468951>

ACF is offering three virtual office hours to learn more about the Early Childhood and Youth Empowerment grant processes and to ask questions. These sessions are duplicative and optional.
Dates: April 14, 16, 21, all from 10:00 to 11:30 AM Mountain Time

APPLICATION PROCESS

Early Childhood and Youth Empowerment grant proposals and supporting documents must be submitted via ACF's online grants management platform. Specific deadlines are on ACF's [website](#).

Each organization seeking funding should first review these guidelines and determine whether its proposal meets ACF's criteria and priorities.

FOUNDANT GRANT PORTAL ACCESS

If the organization meets the guidelines, begin the application process by navigating to the [grant application platform](#).

Returning applicants will log in using their username and password. Click “Forgot your Password?” if you need to reset your password access.

If you are a **new applicant**, you will need to create an account in ACF's grant management system. Click “Create New Account” and follow the instructions to setup your profile.

System tips:

- Your account's landing page is your grants dashboard showing in progress and historical applications.
- Click “See Opportunities” or “Apply” to see ACF's current open grant opportunities.
- You must first take the Eligibility Quiz
- To apply for this grant process, select “**ACF Focus Area Grant 2026**”
- Your application does not autosave. Use the save button located at the bottom of your screen while you're completing the form. Questions with an asterisk require a response.
- Click “Submit” when you have completed your application.

NEED SUPPORT?

- Contact Scott Kenner, Program Officer at Aspen Community Foundation if you need assistance with account creation or have questions about the application or your eligibility: Scott@AspenCommunityFoundation.org or 970-925-9300 x214.
- This [Foundant Applicant Tutorial](#) article provides a step-by-step guide to account creation and application processes.

2026 APPLICATION ELEMENTS

Eligibility Quiz

Organizations will be asked to affirm that they:

- Serve children ages birth to five or youth ages six to 24 in the Aspen to Parachute region
- Are a 501(c)(3) organization, have a fiscal sponsor that is, or are a qualified government entity

Application

In the application, you will be asked to provide the following information:

1. Request Information

- a. Select one Focus Area: Early Childhood or Youth Empowerment
- b. Project name: general operating or name of program or project
- c. Requested amount (\$10,000 to \$35,000 range recommended)
- d. Upload documents:
 - i. IRS Letter of Determination
 - ii. Organization logo

2. Organization Overview

- a. Mission statement
- b. Organization summary - *This should include a brief history of the organization and key programs and services offered.*
- c. Executive director's name
- d. Annual salary of executive director - *This information will be kept confidential and used for regional analysis purposes only.*
- e. Number of years executive director has been in their current position
- f. Number of years executive director has been with the organization
- g. Name of current board chairperson
- h. Email of current board chairperson - *If your organization is awarded a grant, we will require an electronic signature on the grant agreement from your board chair. This will be requested via DocuSign.*
- i. Number of current board members

3. Financial Overview

- a. Current operating budget
- b. Narrative Question: How has your organization's financial position or outlook changed in the past year?
- c. Upload documents:
 - i. Current FY Budget vs. Actual
 - ii. Current YTD Balance Sheet
 - iii. Last FY Income and Expenses
 - iv. Last FY Balance Sheet

4. Numbers Served and Narrative

- a. Number of children/youth served
- b. Question 1: Tell us about the children/youth you serve
 - i. Include how you are serving children/youth who are disadvantaged and/or, underserved as well as under-resourced geographies.
- c. Question 2: Describe your accomplishments and impact from the previous year
- d. Question 3: What are your priorities for the year ahead?
 - i. Include how these priorities are informed by community needs and those you serve.
- e. Question 4: What challenges or barriers are most likely to prevent you from accomplishing your goals this year?

Review your application and submit. You will receive an autogenerated email confirmation once your grant has been submitted.

ACF FOCUS AREA GRANTMAKING TIMELINE

April 7 Application Opens	April 14, 16, 21 10-11:30 AM Virtual Office Hours	May 15 Application Closes	June - August Staff Review	September ACF Board Approves Grant Awards	September-October Grantee Notifications, Declinations, & Grant Agreements	October Awards Distributed
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Virtual Office Hours' Recurring Zoom meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84739468951>

Dates: April 14, 16, 21, 2026. Time: 10:00 to 11:30 AM Mountain Time

GRANTMAKING REVIEW AND ADMINISTRATION

- This is a competitive process, and not all requests will be funded. Past ACF funding does not guarantee future funding.
- Each application is assessed on its own merit against the scoring criteria.
 - A total score of 100 is possible.
 - A typical cutoff score for funding is 75. However, all applications undergo further discussion prior to final recommendation.
 - Higher-scoring applications may only receive a percentage of the total request. This will vary depending on the funds available for this grant program.
- ACF staff may elect to schedule a call or site visit with the organization's executive director and/or board chair to discuss the proposal or request clarifying information.
- If the grant's contact person becomes unavailable after application submission, please notify ACF's Program Officer of a new contact. Applications will not be considered if ACF staff cannot reach the contact person.
- Grant recommendations are reviewed by ACF's Board of Directors. Final grant approval is the sole responsibility of ACF's Board of Directors. The Board requests that its members not be lobbied about grant proposals.
- Organizations receiving funding will be required to sign an agreement that includes the grant's terms and conditions, including marketing and reporting requirements, limitations on grant funds, disposition of unused funds, and other conditions.

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT	ABOVE AVERAGE	AVERAGE	BELOW AVERAGE	POOR
Under-Resourced Children and/or Youth	Demonstrates exceptional commitment to serving under-resourced children and/or youth	Demonstrates strong commitment to serving under-resourced children and/or youth	Demonstrates moderate commitment to serving under-resourced children and/or youth	Demonstrates some commitment to serving under-resourced children and/or youth	Does not demonstrate commitment to serving under-resourced children and/or youth
Community and/or Client Responsiveness	Demonstrates exceptional community and/or client responsiveness in its program design and engagement	Demonstrates meaningful community and/or client responsiveness in its program design and engagement	Demonstrates moderate community and/or client responsiveness in its program design and engagement	Demonstrates some community and/or client responsiveness in its program design and engagement	Does not demonstrate community and/or client responsiveness in its program design and engagement
Demonstration of Impact	Demonstrates exceptional community and/or client impact	Demonstrates effective community and/or client impact	Demonstrates moderate community and/or client impact	Demonstrates some community and/or client impact	Does not demonstrate community and/or client impact. Or the impact on the community and/or client is unclear
Financial and Operational Stability	Demonstrates exceptional financial and operational stability	Demonstrates strong financial and operational stability	Demonstrates moderate financial and operational stability	Demonstrates some financial and operational stability	Financial and operational stability is deficient or unclear

Criteria	Higher Scoring Organizations Will:
Under-Resourced Children and/or Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate that they serve economically disadvantaged children and/or youth
Community and/or Client Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a responsive program design -or- • Demonstrate responsive interactions with children and/or youth
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate how/in what ways the organization is impacting children and/or youth
Financial and Operational Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate the organization's financial health