

## ABOUT THIS INITIATIVE

Akron Community Foundation (ACF) is committed to addressing the critical needs of our community through a reimagined proactive grantmaking approach. Evidence from community needs assessments and a community-wide Appreciative Inquiry Summit highlighted key opportunity areas for growth. Based on these findings, ACF is currently seeking proposals for innovative and sustainable projects that will focus on building deep-rooted community prosperity.

The purpose of this initiative is to leverage the power of the community and authentic collaborations to create lasting change. Funding will be considered for both immediate and long-term initiatives that address urgent needs and/or foster innovative solutions for the future. Up to \$1 million will be available to support the first two to three years of this initiative, at which point ACF will start the process for another proactive grantmaking round. **Proposals for 2025 are due by Dec. 1, 2024. Details for the application process are available below.**

## SCOPE OF WORK

Proactive grantmaking is a funding strategy meant to target specific issues over time by meeting key impact outcomes. Through larger grants distributed over one to three years, ACF's Proactive Grantmaking will target solutions for challenges affecting our Summit County community. Successful applications will address all the following:

1. **Funding Priorities:** Make a significant impact through at least one community-identified need
2. **Proposal Themes:** Meet at least one community-identified outcome
3. **Project Outcome:** Propose solutions to significantly improve and/or change current systems
4. **Partnerships:** Show nonprofit collaboration to provide solutions and meet community needs

### 1. FUNDING PRIORITIES

A community needs assessment and other evaluation methods allowed ACF to hear directly from people who live and work in Summit County, and together, we identified major areas for community-wide improvement. Grant funding will support projects that can make a significant impact in the following areas:

- **Housing**
- **Mental Health**
- **Public Safety**

Along with these priorities, we will remain committed to our previous proactive funding priorities by maintaining an overarching focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, the aging adult population, and addiction recovery.

### 2. PROPOSAL THEMES

Proposals should show a well-rounded understanding of existing systems/resources and demonstrate how they will leverage community collaboration, diversity, and authentic support systems to address and/or augment solutions for at least one of the following themes, which were generated during a day-long community-wide Appreciative Inquiry Summit:

- **Trusted connections:** Projects that promote opportunities for the community to build reliable and knowledgeable support systems through accessible and welcoming spaces that prioritize voices with lived experiences and include community members and nontraditional partners.

*Example: programs that involve community members, individuals with lived experience, and safety forces (fire, police) to promote meaningful neighborhood connections.*

- **Youth engagement:** High-quality, engaging, and tailored youth programs and/or spaces that provide program participants with access to strong mentorship networks out of school hours.  
*Example: collaborative hubs for comprehensive youth development located within walking distance and at familiar community spaces.*
- **Affordable housing:** Programs that help evaluate, create and/or support housing needs, as well as advance dialogue and increase awareness of housing options and renters' rights.  
*Example: partnerships between groups that can strengthen overall community knowledge of housing options, needs, and rights; projects that address gaps in home safety (i.e., inspections) and accessibility (i.e., landlord incentives for individuals/families transitioning out of homelessness).*
- **Community stewardship:** Educational programs, community events/gatherings, and action plans to strengthen the community's sense of neighborhood pride, responsibility, and belonging.  
*Example: projects to help increase, cultivate, and/or maintain our sense of community and safety through neighborhood meetings, community gardens, or clean-up days.*

### 3. PROJECT OUTCOME

Successful proposals will address one or more of the funding priorities and themes listed above and demonstrate opportunities for significant community transformation through a Systems Capacity or Systems Change lens:

#### *Systems Capacity*

- Projects should prioritize enhancing the internal capacities of organizations and systems to ensure they can sustain and implement changes over time.
- Examples include backing advocacy organizations and local collaboratives, fostering systems thinking and planning, establishing working groups for coordinated efforts, leveraging technologies for information sharing, providing media support, and expanding resources.
- Expected outcomes include creating organizations that are more resilient and adaptable, capable of thriving despite political changes. Programs should be able to withstand political shifts, and there should be a strengthened civic society that fosters enduring solutions.
- **Systems capacity is essential for achieving and sustaining broader goals.**

#### *Systems Change*

- Initiatives that focus on transforming the underlying structures, policies, and practices within a system to achieve long-term, transformative change.
- Examples include implementing new policies, changing regulations, shifting cultural norms, reconfiguring power dynamics, and addressing fundamental causes rather than symptoms.
- Expected outcomes include achieving fundamental changes in system operations, leading to significant and lasting improvements in outcomes. This includes creating systems that are more equitable, sustainable, and adaptable to new challenges.
- **Systems change requires embedding solutions deeply enough that they can self-perpetuate and adapt to new challenges.**

**Important Note:** Organizations seeking support for *existing*, recurring annual operations needs and programming are encouraged to learn more about [ACF's Competitive Grantmaking](#) instead.

#### 4. PARTNERSHIPS

ACF recognizes that complex problems may be best addressed through joint efforts. We strongly encourage organizations and community groups to consider their existing partnerships and initiatives that can be more impactful through a collaborative application. Organizations that choose to apply individually will still be asked to explain how they will collaborate with other organizations during the project's duration.

#### GRANT AMOUNTS & PAYMENT

- **Systems Capacity** projects will be eligible for grants up to **\$50,000**
  - Up to five (5) applications selected (up to \$250,000 distributed)
  - Payments are distributed as a single installment.
- **Systems Change** projects will be eligible for grants up to **\$150,000**
  - Up to five (5) applications selected (up to \$750,000 distributed)
  - Payments will be distributed **in two or up to three annual installments**. After the initial installment and completion of the first year of programming, a second or third application will be required before the remaining disbursement(s). The second and third applications will assess the progress made and success achieved, and the program's continued viability and improvement plans.

#### ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- 501(c)(3) public charitable organizations.
- Organizations with a strong history of commitment to the Summit County community.
- Organizations/projects that demonstrate a commitment to equity, transparency, and community engagement.
- Projects must focus on impacting the Summit County community.
- Projects must align with one or more of the key initiatives/priorities described above.

**Note:** ACF's Proactive Grantmaking is open to all eligible organizations that wish to apply, including those who have applied for and/or received proactive funding in the past or are current ACF grantees.

#### **What we will not fund**

- Endowments or Scholarships
- Capital campaigns or major capital improvements (e.g., new roof, new HVAC system, building renovations or improvements, new computers)
- Direct financial support to individuals
- Direct financial support for lobbying
- Religious organizations for religious purposes
- Private non-operating foundations
- Organizations in operation for less than a year, and/or working independently, without local partnerships

- Curriculum for schools
- Disease-specific programs
- Programs at parochial, charter or private schools that benefit only their students

## REQUIRED MATERIALS & HOW TO APPLY

- Interested organizations can complete an application through ACF's online portal, [linked here](#).
- Required documents include organization budget, project budget, list of key staff and board members, and financial audit.
- Up-to-date [Candid](#) profile and completed [Demographics via Candid](#) prior to the application due date. (We will consider grace periods for Board Member's Demographics. However, grants will not be awarded without completion of both Board and Staff demographics).
- Organizations proposing a collaborative project must include a multi-organization partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU).
- Applicants partnering with a fiscal sponsor must include a fiscal sponsor letter of support.
  - **Proposals are due Dec. 1, 2024, and will not be accepted after the deadline.**

[A sample application can be viewed here.](#)

## REFERENCE MATERIALS

- [Community Needs Assessment: Summit & Medina Counties 2023](#)
- [Appreciative Inquiry Summit Summary](#)
- [Investing in Systems Change Capacity](#)

## TIMELINE

- **Oct. 30, 2024:** [RFP webinar](#) (virtual with recording available)
- **Nov. 1, 2024:** Applications open
- **Dec. 1, 2024:** Application deadline
- **Dec. 16, 2024 – Jan. 8, 2025:** Application review period
  - Applicants should expect an invitation to a virtual video meeting to discuss the project; in-person meetings may be requested.
- **Jan. 15, 2024:** Semi-finalists notified
- **Jan. 29, 2025:** Semi-finalists interviews
  - Interviews will be in person at Akron Community Foundation. Applicants will have a conversation regarding the proposal with members of the Community Investment Committee, Donor-Advised Fundholders, and staff. **Please put a hold for the entire day on your calendar to ensure your availability.**
- **Feb. 5, 2025:** Community Investment Committee proposes finalists and grant awards
- **March 7, 2025:** ACF Board of Directors approves grants and award notifications are emailed
- **March 10, 2025:** Public grant awards announcement (press release, website, and social media announcements distributed the week of March 10, and inclusion in Foundations e-news and magazine to follow in late March and early June, respectively)

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Questions or unsure if you should apply for ACF's Proactive Grantmaking Initiative? Contact our Community Investment staff:

- **John Garofalo, Vice President, Community Investment:** 330-436-5624 or [jgarofalo@akroncf.org](mailto:jgarofalo@akroncf.org)
- **Cristina González Alcalá, Ph.D., Director of Community Investment:** 330-436-5626 or [cgonzalezalcala@akroncf.org](mailto:cgonzalezalcala@akroncf.org)

## ABOUT AKRON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

For 69 years, Akron Community Foundation has been our community's champion and generator of enduring philanthropy. In 1955, a \$1 million bequest from the estate of Edwin Shaw established the community foundation. It is a philanthropic endowment of \$300 million with a growing family of more than 880 funds established by charitable people and organizations from all walks of life. The community foundation and its funds welcome gifts of all kinds, including cash, bequests, stock, real estate, life insurance and retirement assets, just to name a few. To date, the community foundation's funds have awarded nearly \$250 million in grants to qualified nonprofit organizations.