



# 2026 Grant Guidance

## Introduction

Welcome to our 2026 Grant Guidance document. This resource is designed to help you understand our impact areas, values, and the steps involved in partnering with us through our grantmaking process. Our approach is rooted in trust-based philanthropy, which means we strive to build relationships grounded in transparency, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for impact. We believe that those closest to the work know best what their communities need, and our role is to support—not prescribe—solutions.

Our vision is clear: **to close opportunity gaps for those who need it most.** We know this work cannot be done alone, and we are looking for partners who share our commitment to creating meaningful, lasting change. By working together, we can amplify impact and ensure that resources reach the people and places where they will make the greatest difference.

Trust-based philanthropy is more than a philosophy; it's a commitment to reducing unnecessary barriers, listening deeply, and sharing power. We aim to simplify processes, provide clear information, and create space for authentic dialogue. This document is an important first step in that process. It outlines:

- **Our Impact Areas** – The issues and communities we prioritize.
- **Our Values and Approach** – How trust and collaboration guide our decisions.
- **Navigating the Process** – Practical guidance on eligibility, application steps, and timelines.
- **What You Can Expect from Us** – Our commitment to responsiveness and reducing burdens.

**We strongly encourage you to review this guidance before applying.** Doing so will help you determine alignment with our priorities and ensure that your time and effort are well spent. Our goal is to make this process as clear and supportive as possible, and this document is here to answer questions and set expectations.

We invite you to engage with us openly, share your vision, and join us in closing opportunity gaps for those who need it most. Together, we can create impact that lasts.

## Our Values and Approach

Our work is guided by principles that reflect our commitment to **closing opportunity gaps for those who need it most** and building strong, lasting partnerships.

### Our Core Values

- **Excellence** – We invest in continuous learning and personal development. We exceed expectations in service to others. We do our best. We do it right. We do it now.
- **Passion** – We work with humility, energy, and joy. We explore and embrace new ideas. We value and celebrate one another.
- **Integrity** – We are honest, trustworthy, and transparent. We honor our donor's wishes. We are accountable for everything we do.
- **Community** – We collaborate to serve and build community. We invest to create positive change. We practice inclusion and diversity.

### Our Grantmaking Approach

We believe strong relationships and mutual respect are the foundation of meaningful impact. As a trust-based funder, we center transparency, inclusivity, and collaboration in all aspects of our work. This approach guides how we engage with partners, make decisions, and steward resources—ensuring our grantmaking is rooted in fairness and focused on what matters most: creating opportunities and strengthening communities.

#### Transparency and Clarity

We share priorities and processes openly so partners can make informed decisions.

#### Streamlined Grantmaking

We reduce unnecessary burdens, offer general operating and multi-year support, and honor the expertise of nonprofit leaders.

#### Collaboration

We view grantmaking as a partnership, engaging community voices and working together toward shared goals.

#### Responsiveness

We listen, adapt, and provide resources beyond funding—such as training and capacity-building—to strengthen nonprofits.

#### Stewardship

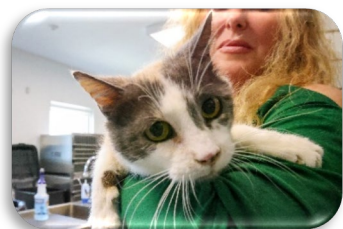
We manage resources responsibly to maximize impact for those who need it most.

By embracing these values and approaches, we aim to create a grantmaking experience that is fair, respectful, and focused on what matters most—closing opportunity gaps across our region.



## Our Impact Areas

Our vision is to close opportunity gaps for those who need it most, and we focus our resources on areas where we believe we can make the greatest difference. These impact areas reflect our commitment to building a stronger, more vibrant community for everyone.



### Animal Services

Supports organizations and programs that enhance the quality of life for all animals, educate the community regarding responsible pet care, and enhance spay/neuter and adoption services.



### Cultural Vibrancy

A thriving community celebrates its culture. We invest in initiatives that preserve heritage, foster creativity, and make arts and cultural experiences accessible to all. By supporting cultural vibrancy, we help create spaces where diversity and expression strengthen community bonds.



### Livable and Resilient Communities

We believe every person deserves a safe, healthy, and sustainable environment. We fund projects that enhance neighborhood livability, improve infrastructure, and strengthen access to health resources and civic engagement – creating communities where everyone can participate and thrive.



### Successful Aging

As our population ages, we aim to ensure older adults can live with dignity, independence, and purpose. We support programs that provide access to healthcare, social engagement, and resources that help older adults thrive in every stage of life.



### Youth Success

Young people are the foundation of our future. We invest in organizations that expand educational access, promote healing through mental and physical well-being, and prepare all youth for success in school, work, and life.

## **Our Commitment to Collective Impact**

At the San Antonio Area Foundation, we believe lasting change happens when we work together. Collective impact is more than collaboration—it's a shared commitment to align efforts, leverage resources, and create solutions that address complex community challenges. We partner with nonprofits, funders, and community leaders to move the needle on issues that matter most.

Our strategic initiatives reflect this commitment:

### **Future Ready Bexar County**

Through our Youth Success focus, we support [Future Ready Bexar County](#), a cradle-to-career plan that unites partners around a shared vision for young people. This initiative aligns countywide priorities to improve educational and workforce outcomes, ensuring every child has the opportunity to thrive.

### **Successfully Aging and Living in San Antonio (SALSA)**

We champion [SALSA](#), a collective impact effort dedicated to creating an age-friendly community where older adults can live, age, and thrive with dignity. By bringing together organizations and advocates, SALSA works to strengthen systems that support health, housing, and social connection for older adults.

### **Press Forward San Antonio**

As part of the national [Press Forward](#) movement, we invest in strengthening local journalism and media ecosystems in San Antonio and rural Texas counties through our local [Press Forward San Antonio](#) chapter. This initiative fosters collaboration among funders and community partners to ensure access to trusted information, amplify diverse voices, and build a more informed and engaged community.

Together, these initiatives embody our belief that systemic change requires shared vision, coordinated action, and trust-based partnerships.

## Responsive Grant Structure and Funding Details

### General Operating Support

Responsive Grants provide unrestricted funding that can be used for any organizational expense (except those listed under “What We Do Not Fund”). This flexibility allows nonprofits to allocate resources where they are needed most and respond to evolving priorities. We believe nonprofits know best how to advance their mission and create impact.

### Multi-Year Funding

Each Responsive Grant is a **two-year commitment**, contingent on the availability of funds and fulfillment of grant requirements, including annual reporting. Multi-year funding provides stability and helps organizations plan confidently for the future.

### Grant Amounts

Award amounts are based on the organization’s total annual budget:

Total Organizational Budget	Award Amount
Under \$40,000	\$4,000
\$40,000 - \$74,999	\$8,000
\$75,000 - \$249,999	\$15,000
\$250,000 - \$999,999	\$25,000
\$1,000,000+	\$50,000

## Navigating the Responsive Grant Process

Our Responsive Grant process is designed to be clear and supportive, helping you determine alignment before investing time in an application. Here's what you need to know:

### Access the Application Online

To apply for a grant, all applicants must create an account in our online Grants Center. Click [here](#) to access or create your account. You will receive an email once it's complete.

Applications must be submitted through the Grants Center. Once the application is available, it can be previewed online. Click [here](#) to preview the application before you begin.

If you need help creating your account or accessing the application, please contact Catherine Garcia at [cgarcia@saafdn.org](mailto:cgarcia@saafdn.org).

### Eligibility

Organizations eligible for funding must:

- Operate in one of these counties: Bexar, Atascosa, Bandera, Comal, Guadalupe, Kendall, Medina, or Wilson.
- Be exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or be a school, church, or governmental body for at least one year prior to the application deadline.
- Organizations applying under a fiscal sponsor must have prior approval. Contact your program officer for details.
- Align with the fund's purpose and the outcomes we aim to achieve together.

### Important Dates

To ensure focused support across our impact areas, the Responsive Grant process is divided into two application cycles. Each cycle has its own timeline for applications and notifications, allowing us to provide dedicated attention to organizations working in these areas.

<b>Cycle 1: Cultural Vibrancy and Youth Success</b>	<b>Cycle 2: Livable and Resilient Communities and Successful Aging</b>
<b>Application Opens:</b> January 20, 2026 <b>Application Closes:</b> February 20, 2026 at 11:59 pm <b>Outcome notification and grant disbursement:</b> June 2026	<b>Application Opens:</b> April 27, 2026 <b>Application Closes:</b> May 29, 2026 at 11:59 pm <b>Outcome notification and grant disbursement:</b> September 2026

Please note some dates may change.

Stay informed on our grants and programs by subscribing to our newsletter. You can sign up by scrolling to the bottom of this page: <https://saafdn.org/>

The Animal Services Responsive Grant process currently operates on a separate timeline than the other impact areas. The next Responsive Grant process for Animal Services will open in **2027**.

### What We Fund

Responsive grants provide **two-year, general operating support** to organizations whose services align with our vision to close opportunity gaps for those who need it most and at least one of our five impact areas. Priority is given to organizations serving underrepresented and underserved communities.

We value collaboration and prefer to partner with organizations engaged in our strategic initiatives described on page 4. These partnerships help advance shared goals and strengthen community-wide impact.

We fund by the impact areas listed below.

#### Cultural Vibrancy

We support organizations and initiatives that strengthen cultural life and ensure arts and culture are accessible to all. Examples include:

- Programs that increase access to arts and cultural experiences for underrepresented and underserved communities.
- Initiatives that reflect and celebrate the diverse cultures of the San Antonio area.
- Efforts that promote the value of arts and culture through education, advocacy, and innovative collaborations.
- Projects that build partnerships between artists, cultural organizations, and community groups to expand impact.

#### Youth Success

This impact area prioritizes services for children and youth ages 0-24. Our approach is grounded in three core principles: **Healing, Access, and Voice**.

- **Healing:** Promote programs that support mental health, resilience, and well-being for youth who have experienced trauma or systemic barriers
- **Access:** Expand opportunities for education, enrichment, and resources so every young person can thrive from cradle to career – especially for students with disabilities, justice-impacted youth, foster youth, and opportunity youth – while reducing disparities in educational and life outcomes
- **Voice:** Elevate youth leadership and creative expression, ensuring young people have a meaningful role in shaping their futures and their communities.

Organizations **do not need to be formal Future Ready partners** to be eligible for Responsive funding. However, the Future Ready Bexar County plan helps guide our Youth Success investments by clarifying the outcomes we are collectively working toward. We are interested in supporting organizations whose work contributes to these broader goals, whether through direct service, systems change, collaboration, or innovation.



## Livable and Resilient Communities

This impact area prioritizes programs and services for individuals ages 25–59 that enhance neighborhood livability, improve access to essential resources, and create sustainable opportunities for all. Examples include:

- **Safe and Secure Living Supports:** Initiatives that help individuals and families maintain safe and stable living conditions through financial counseling, workforce development, or access to supportive services
- **Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Programs that encourage business development and innovation in liberal arts, science, and technology
- **Health and Wellness:** Programs that provide mental health services expand access to healthcare including prevention and treatment of blindness, sensory impairments, cancer, and other illnesses.
- **Family and Safety:** Efforts focused on child abuse prevention and mitigation
- **Community Resources:** Support for entities such as libraries as hubs for learning and connection
- **Public Spaces and Media:** Projects that strengthen public parks, public radio, and public television as vital community assets

## Successful Aging

This impact area prioritizes programs and services for individuals age 60 and older. Funding priorities are guided by the SALSA initiative and include:

- Expand access to affordable, accessible housing and home modifications that enable older adults to age in place safely and comfortably.
- Strengthen transportation options that connect older adults to healthcare, social activities, and community life.
- Build meaningful social connections through intergenerational programming, friendship-building initiatives, and community engagement opportunities that combat isolation.
- Provide caregiver support and resources that honor and sustain the vital work of family caregivers and care partners.
- Create community systems that value the contributions and wisdom of older adults while supporting their continued participation and growth.

Organizations do not need to be formal SALSA partners to be eligible for Responsive funding. However, we encourage agencies to align with SALSA priorities and consider joining the network to strengthen collaboration and community impact.

## What We Do Not Fund

Responsive grants do not support:

- Endowments
- Capital campaigns
- Programs and services focused on religious worship or instruction
- Scholarships to individuals for colleges, universities, or trade schools
- Political activities or lobbying efforts intended to influence legislation

## Responsive Grant Application Support and Technical Assistance

We offer several ways to access support during the application process.

### Accommodations:

We strive to host inclusive and accessible meetings and events that enable all individuals to engage fully. To request an accommodation or for inquiries about accessibility, please contact Gavin Nichols at [gnichols@saafdn.org](mailto:gnichols@saafdn.org) or 210.279.7830.

### Information Sessions:

Information Sessions are held to help grantseekers understand the Area Foundation's approach to grantmaking and gain information to assist them with their application. The following information sessions will be held:

#### Cycle 1 (Cultural Vibrancy and Youth Success)



**In-person:** January 21, 2026 at 1:30 p.m.

The meeting location will be shared closer to the meeting date.

**Virtual:** January 23, 2026 at 9:00 a.m.

A link to the recording will be shared with those who registered for this information session.

Scan the QR code above to RSVP for one or both of the Cycle 1 information sessions and receive up-to-date information on these meetings.

#### Cycle 2 (Livable and Resilient Communities and Successful Aging)



**In-person:** April 29, 2026 at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting location will be shared closer to the meeting date.

**Virtual:** May 1, 2026 at 10:30 a.m.

A link to the recording will be shared with those who registered for this information session.

Scan the QR code above to RSVP for one or both of the Cycle 2 information sessions and receive up-to-date information on these meetings.

The next Responsive Grant process for Animal Services will open in **2027**. Information sessions for this grant process will be posted at a later date.

### Meet With a Program Officer:

Our Program Officers are available to support nonprofits interested in applying for a Responsive Grant. They can walk you through our process, answer your questions, and explore how the Area Foundation can partner with you to advance your mission.

To schedule a meeting with lead Program Officer for your impact area, contact them directly. If you're unsure which impact area best fits your organization, reach out to any of the Program Officers listed on the following page. We're here to help you find the best fit.

- **Animal Services:** Gavin Nichols, [gnichols@saafdn.org](mailto:gnichols@saafdn.org), 210.279.7830
- **Cultural Vibrancy:** Jesus Garcia-Gonzalez, [jggonzalez@saafdn.org](mailto:jggonzalez@saafdn.org), 210.724.2485
- **Livable and Resilient Communities:** Jesus Garcia-Gonzalez, [jggonzalez@saafdn.org](mailto:jggonzalez@saafdn.org), 210.724.2485
- **Successful Aging:** Gavin Nichols, [gnichols@saafdn.org](mailto:gnichols@saafdn.org), 210.279.7830
- **Youth Success:** Julio Lopez, [jlopez@saafdn.org](mailto:jlopez@saafdn.org), 210.228.3768

### Grant Writing Support:

Organizations with Total Annual Organizational Budgets under \$75,000 may request grant writing support through the Area Foundation. Grant writing support includes review and feedback of application materials and is provided by an independent grant writing professional contracted by the Area Foundation. To learn more and request an appointment, contact Gavin Nichols at [gnichols@saafdn.org](mailto:gnichols@saafdn.org) or 210.279.7830.

Organizations seeking grant writing support are required to attend an information session or view the recorded information session prior to meeting with the consultant.

### Technical Support:

Issues with the grant portal, attachments, or other technical questions can be directed to Catherine Garcia at [cgarcia@saafdn.org](mailto:cgarcia@saafdn.org) or 210.228.3757.

Please note, technical support is not available after 4:00pm on the Friday before the deadline of a grant process.

### Budget and Financial Guidance

We know that preparing budgets and financial information can feel overwhelming, and we want this process to be as clear and supportive as possible. Our staff is available to talk through these sections and answer questions to ensure your application reflects your organization's needs and goals. To receive guidance and get your budget questions answered on this section of your application, contact Andrea Figueroa at [afigueroa@saafdn.org](mailto:afigueroa@saafdn.org) or 210.776.8630.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Can I apply for a project or event?**

Yes, funds may support a project or event, but your application must describe your organization's overall mission, programming, and impact—not just the project.

### **What are the reporting requirements?**

Grantees submit annual reports through the online portal and may meet annually with a program officer to share updates, successes, and challenges.

### **Does the Area Foundation award partial grants?**

No. Grants are awarded at the full amount based on your organization's total budget.

### **I don't have a 501(c)(3). Can I still apply?**

Yes, if you apply under an approved fiscal sponsor. Contact the Program Officer for your Impact Area for details.

### **Can I apply for a project or an event?**

The funds can be used to support a specific project or event, but the application must describe the overall mission, programming and impact of the organization.

### **What is general operating support?**

General operating support, also known as an unrestricted grant, can be used to cover any of a non-profit's expenses, with a few exceptions (see "What we do not fund"). The grant funds are not restricted to a specific program, project or event.

### **Which financial documents are required?**

- Financial Summary for FY24, FY25, and FY26 (using your fiscal years)
- Audited Financial Statements

If audited statements are not available, submit a Balance Sheet and Statement of Revenues/Expenses for the most recent fiscal year.

### **Why do you require financial documents?**

As stewards of donor funds, we review financials to ensure organizational stability and sound investments.

### **What if we don't have audited statements or three years of financial history?**

Submit all available financial history. If audited statements are unavailable, provide a Balance Sheet and Statement of Revenues/Expenses.

### **Can we apply to more than one impact area or cycle?**

No. Organizations may submit only one application per Responsive Grant cycle and cannot apply in both cycles—even if not awarded.

### **Can we apply for other Area Foundation grants?**

Yes. Applying for or receiving a Responsive Grant does not exclude you from other funding opportunities.

## Other Funding Opportunities

### Collaborative Grants

Collaborative Grants are intended to promote innovation and support deep partnerships between multiple organizations working toward collective impact at program, neighborhood, or policy levels.

**Starting in 2026, Collaborative Grants are invite only.** Contact Jane Paccione at [jpaccione@saafdn.org](mailto:jpaccione@saafdn.org) or 210.725.5263 for more information.

### Capital Grants

Capital grants provide funding for nonprofit infrastructure development projects at critical stages of completion. Grants will be available in **2027**. Contact Jesus Garcia-Gonzalez at [jggonzalez@saafdn.org](mailto:jggonzalez@saafdn.org) or 210.724.2485 for more information on our Capital Grants process.

### Special and Urgent Needs

Special and Urgent Needs provide rapid-response funding for nonprofits facing unexpected challenges that threaten service delivery or unexpected opportunities to expand services.

**Maximum Grant:** Up to \$10,000 per organization.

#### Eligible Categories:

- Community crises (e.g., extreme weather, vandalism, theft)
- Operational emergencies (e.g., facility damage, executive crises)
- Unplanned opportunities (e.g., unexpected financial and property gifts that require unplanned and unbudgeted expenditures to effectively leverage them)

#### Ineligible Categories:

- Routine operating or program costs
- Start-up costs
- Endowments, capital campaigns, debt reduction
- Planned transitions, executive searches, strategic planning
- Loss of funding support (government or other foundations)
- Lobbying expenses

#### Timeline and Process:

- Applications accepted on a rolling basis throughout the year and reviewed monthly by our CEI Grants Review Team.
- Organizations are eligible to apply for Special and Urgent Needs Funding once per calendar year.

Contact Gavin Nichols at [gnichols@saafdn.org](mailto:gnichols@saafdn.org) or 210.279.7830 for more information about our Special and Urgent Needs Fund.



## Strengthening Nonprofits through Capacity Building

### Why We Invest in Capacity Building

We believe nonprofits know their communities best. Our role is to be a trusted partner—providing resources and support that strengthen organizations so they can do what they do best: serve. When individuals have the tools and support they need, organizations—and the entire nonprofit sector—become stronger and more resilient. Capacity building is not just about funding; it's about equipping nonprofits to deliver lasting impact for the communities they serve.

Capacity building means strengthening the structures, cultures, and capabilities that enable nonprofits to fulfill their mission effectively. It is an investment in both organizational effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

### Our Approach

We take a holistic approach to capacity building. Our preferred model is to pair financial support with resources that go beyond the check—because we know the greatest impact happens when nonprofits have both funding and the tools to strengthen their capacity. However, we also recognize that sometimes the most meaningful support is non-financial, also known as support “beyond the check”. In those cases, we provide access to resources that meet organizations where they are and help them thrive.

We offer support at three levels:



**Individual:** Opportunities for training and professional development, access to coaching and technical assistance, board development, and programs such as our [Confluence Fellowship](#) that support personal growth and healing.



**Organizational:** Organizational assessments using the [iCAT](#), capacity building grants, technical assistance, thought partnership, and resource connections—including the Foundation Directory Online to support grant research and access to [Catchafire](#), which connects nonprofits with skilled volunteers for projects like marketing, technology, and strategy.



**Sector:** Community convenings, cohort learning, collaborative grants, and support for systems change and collective impact initiatives.

By investing in capacity building, we help nonprofits thrive today and sustain impact for the future—on their terms, in ways that honor their expertise and leadership.

For more information about our Capacity Building services, contact Jennifer Cook at [jcook@saafdn.org](mailto:jcook@saafdn.org) or 210.724.8645.