



## 2023-24 Grant Cycle – Frequently Asked Questions

### What does the process look like?

Below is the approximate timeline for this year's grant cycle – exact dates will be included at each stage.

- **September 18:** Letter of Inquiry (LOI) application opens.
- **October 15:** LOIs are due.
- **Mid-December:** Full proposals will be invited, if necessary. Some smaller dollar grant requests will not need to provide additional information, beyond what was provided in the LOI. Some requests may be declined, based on fit. All applicants will receive an email update on their application status.
- **Mid-January:** Proposals and Updated LOIs due, if applicable.
- **February – March:** Site visits, if applicable.
- **May:** Grant decisions
- **June 2024 – May 2025:** Typical grant period

### Are there geographic restrictions for the Foundation's funding?

The New Canaan Community Foundation funds nonprofit organizations in Lower Fairfield County. We prioritize funding organizations broadly serving New Canaan in a wide variety of quality-of-life initiatives, and funding organizations in lower Fairfield County that are responding to issues of greatest need, with a current emphasis on neighboring communities. Currently, about 50% of our funding focuses on New Canaan, and 50% focuses on nearby towns.

Due to the availability of funding, our New Canaan-focused grantmaking prioritizes organizations with more substantive New Canaan ties, serving a significant number of community members. While we love to see New Canaanites serving as your volunteers, donors, and Board members, we will still be looking for a significant tie to New Canaan through the work of your programs. For funding in nearby towns, we look to support critical local and regional issues.

### Are there priority areas for the Foundation's funding?

The Foundation provides funding that helps strengthen and enrich the New Canaan community. We define these broad areas and their goals as:

- *Arts, Culture & Community Resources* – Community members benefit from New Canaan's cultural, recreational, and other community resources.
- *Health* – Community members have the information and access to services they need to stay healthy.
- *Human Services* – Community members are able to meet their basic needs.
- *Seniors & Special Needs* – Older adults & individuals with disabilities achieve and maintain a high quality of life.
- *Youth & Education* – Youth have the academic, social, and financial support they need to succeed.

### **Critical Community Issues**

Inclusive of these areas, we look to annually address one or more critical community issues. Five years ago, we formed a Behavioral Health committee whose work is on-going. Nonprofits working in the area of behavioral health (broadly mental health and substance misuse issues) should still apply through the same grants process as all applicants.

**Is there a set amount of funding set aside for each category?**

The Foundation is committed to being a responsive grantmaker. There is not a set amount of funding for each category. Our grants are dependent on our fundraising efforts and what proposals are submitted via the LOI application.

**Are there other guidelines or restrictions for the Foundation's funding?**

The Foundation's funding is on a one-year term, generally June 1 – May 31, and all grant dollars should be expended in that time. Multi-year grants are unusual, and by invitation only. We do not fund endowments or expenses that have already been incurred.

**What are grant size guidelines?**

There is a large range in our grant sizes.

- The average award in our 2023 grant cycle was \$7,500.
- The Foundation awards some smaller dollar grants each year between \$1,000 and \$5,000. These start out (like all other applications) with an LOI. Unlike larger dollar grant applications, these smaller grants are generally not required to submit a full proposal. This is a direct result of us hearing from organizations that desired a more streamlined application process that would save time and resources while still securing the support of the Foundation and growing their visibility.
- Larger dollar grants are generally between \$5,000 and \$25,000. In some instances, grant requests above \$25,000 will be considered, but for planning purposes are more unusual. These start out (like all other applications) as an LOI, but then applicants will be invited to address more detail in a full proposal, and host a team of NCCF volunteers for a site visit.

**What kinds of grants does the Foundation support?**

Our grant investments support general operating, programs and projects, capital projects, and organizational capacity building.

**What is a capacity building grant?**

Capacity building refers to an effort that helps an organization operate more effectively or grow their impact. Some examples: Purchasing a new donor software system, to more effectively use staff time and to grow resources of the organization; Staff training in advocacy, so that an organization can amplify their impact in their area of expertise; Board development or succession planning to ensure strong leadership of an organization; and many more. If you have questions about whether a funding need is considered capacity building, talk to staff. Capacity building grants will only be considered for organizations based in New Canaan, or with a significant presence/impact in New Canaan.

**Will I have a site visit?**

Site visits are helpful for staff, Board, and volunteers reviewing your grant application to better understand your work, ask questions, and see your program in action. In years past, we have site visited every applicant. We now site visit most but not all organizations, depending upon the request and other factors. A site visit (or lack thereof) is not an indication of funding.

**Do you fund new organizations?**

The Foundation is proud to provide seed funding for new projects and organizations. There is not a requirement that an organization must be established for a specific number of years before applying. Additionally, projects/organizations can be an independent 501c3 or they may have fiscal sponsorship from another organization.

**Can I submit more than one LOI?**

If you are considering several projects at your organizations for funding, talk to staff to get advice.

For the annual grant cycle's LOI, you should ask for what you need but prioritize as much as possible. If you do have more than one project or funding need, you can outline more than one in your LOI – but should only submit one LOI application for the annual grant cycle.

An exception: if you are working in partnership or collaboration with one or more other nonprofits, you can submit an LOI as a joint project – in addition to a grant you may submit separately for just your organization. In that case, one organization can be identified as the lead applicant for purposes of submitting the LOI.

**What’s the long-term outlook? Can I apply every year?**

The Foundation currently does not have a rule about the number of years that an organization can apply and receive funding.

**If I receive a grant, what are my reporting requirements?**

Grant periods generally run June (2024) – May (2025). Following the close of the grant period, we will ask that you submit our online Grant Follow-Up Report, including narrative and financial information on your completed grant.

**How do I connect with the Foundation’s individual donors, or donor-advised fundholders?**

As a community foundation, part of our work is to connect people with causes and organizations they care about. We hope that by involving volunteers in our grant review process and site visits, we help expose people to your mission. We also publish information on our grantee organizations and hope that even smaller dollar grants can help connect donors with your work by being on our grant award list.

The Foundation also helps families achieve their charitable goals through donor-advised funds. We regularly share information on your work and funding needs, to help coordinate complementary funding. If you receive an additional grant from any of our donor-advised funds, any communication or thank you letters can be mailed to the Foundation.

**Who do I talk with to get advice on my grant application?**

The Foundation staff are available to answer your questions and talk through options you may be considering for your grant application. Please call the office at 203-966-0231 or email Meg Soffen at [msoffen@newcanaanfc.org](mailto:msoffen@newcanaanfc.org).