

2026 Neighborhood Improvement Grant Guidelines

Program Description

The City of Bloomington's Department of Housing and Neighborhood Development (HAND) offers annual Neighborhood Improvement Grants, expecting to award around \$30,000 in 2026. This program empowers neighborhood groups to address local concerns and needs through funding support. A successful application must demonstrate significant neighborhood support.

Eligibility Criteria

- **Who Can Apply:** Neighborhood-based groups within the city of Bloomington, with the majority residing or conducting business in a recognized neighborhood. Participation can include churches, schools, and businesses, though residents must administer projects.
- **Funding Scope:** Projects may include physical improvements, public art, leadership training, or organizational capacity building, with a funding range of \$1,000 to \$10,000. Design of the proposed project is also an eligible expense. Applicants must provide a 10% cash or in-kind match. Projects must be accessible to all neighborhood residents and must have explicit neighborhood benefit.

Application Process and Timeline

Step 1 - Required informational meeting: A neighborhood representative must attend ONE of these virtual meetings, on either Thursday, January 29, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. OR Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Step 2 - Letter of intent: Due by Monday, February 16, 2026. Email to angela.vanrooy@bloomington.in.gov

Step 3 - Technical assistance meeting: Applicants will meet 1:1 with HAND staff to discuss the need for City permissions or permits, and how to acquire them.

Step 4 - Application deadline: Monday, March 23, 2026

Step 5 - Applicants present projects to Grant Council (hybrid public meeting): Monday, April 13, 2026, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. Applicants will take questions from the council and the public.

Step 6 - Grant Council work session (virtual public meeting): Wednesday, April 15, 2026, 5:00 - 7:00 p.m. Applicants and the public may listen in on the council's deliberations and funding recommendations.

Step 7 - Grant awards announced: Early May.

Grant Terms and Requirements

- Projects should prioritize the use of recycled or sustainably-sourced materials. Landscaping should prioritize native plants. Invasive plants are prohibited. See [A Guide to the Regulated Terrestrial Plant Species of Indiana](#) and the [City of Bloomington Prohibited Plant Species](#) for lists of plants to avoid.
- Only one application per neighborhood will be accepted during a given grant cycle. Projects should be determined by consensus within the group.
- You may request \$1,000 - \$10,000 in HAND funding. Your group must provide a match of at least 10% of the amount of your request.
- Time spent preparing and planning this grant application may not be counted towards your match. However, costs incurred for notification of adjacent property owners, legal notices, or City permits are allowable and should be included in the project budget.
- The neighborhood will identify a Neighborhood Project Coordinator. This individual will act as the primary contact person with HAND for purposes of facilitating every step of the grant process. The Neighborhood Project Coordinator must record all volunteer hours throughout the course of the project, and will be responsible for collecting signed volunteer waivers.
- The neighborhood will enter into a Funding Agreement stating the amount of the award, along with specification of activities to be performed. No expenditures will be allowed before finalization of the Funding Agreement.
- Projects must be completed and all invoices submitted to HAND by November 16, 2026. If the grantee encounters a problem, and is unable to complete the project by November 16, 2026, the Neighborhood Project Coordinator must contact the HAND office for an extension of time.
- All promotional pieces which receive any funding through this grant program must include the following mandatory grant identification statement: "Funding provided in part through the City of Bloomington Neighborhood Improvement Grant Program."
- Certain projects may require HAND staff to be responsible for administering the project including a bidding process, contracting, and project management with neighborhood input. This will be determined at the Technical Assistance meeting.
- Projects shall be in conformance with all City codes, and must meet any and all regulations set forth by governing departments or agencies, including but not limited to, Public Works, Planning and Transportation, Engineering, Parks & Recreation, Economic and Sustainable Development, Housing and Neighborhood Development, historic district commissions, and State and Federal statutes.
- The City retains sole discretion in determining whether projects meet eligibility requirements.

Funding and Reimbursement

- The Neighborhood Improvement Grant works on a reimbursement basis. Grant recipients may purchase items or services and submit receipts to HAND for reimbursement. Alternatively, vendors may invoice the City directly.
- If a neighborhood chooses to make purchases and seek reimbursement, one individual should be designated to handle expenditures (e.g., the Neighborhood Project Coordinator, the

neighborhood association treasurer). This individual will make purchases (ensuring that no sales tax is charged) and submit receipts to HAND for reimbursement. If your neighborhood group has funds available, the organization may pay for goods and services rather than an individual doing so. In this case, HAND will reimburse the organization.

- Any entity that will request reimbursement (individual, organization, or third party vendor) must complete and submit City Vendor Documents, as required by the City Controller's Office. This step must be completed prior to the execution of the funding agreement between HAND and your neighborhood group. Upon approval of your grant application, HAND staff will provide guidance.
- If an individual or organization representative will be making grant-related purchases, they will be provided a grantee letter along with a copy of the City's tax exemption certificate. These should be used when making purchases, so as to avoid paying sales tax. As a tax exempt organization, the City will not reimburse you for any sales tax you may pay, so be sure to produce the certificate at checkout.
- All invoices and receipts for reimbursement must be sent to Angela Van Rooy at HAND, no later than November 16, 2026. These may be submitted electronically or in hardcopy form.
- Once received, there is an approximately three week timeframe for reimbursements. All payments from the City are made by electronic funds transfer (EFT) to the bank account specified on the vendor documents.

Reporting Requirements

- **Final Report:** After completion of the project, each grantee must prepare a project evaluation and submit it to HAND within one month of project completion, but not later than December 14, 2026. Electronic submissions are preferred. The final report must include:
 - Project summary: Explain why you undertook this project. What worked, what didn't? What did you learn? How did the neighborhood benefit?
 - Expense report: List all expenses. Provide final total of the neighborhood match.
- **Photographs:** Grantees must provide at least three digital photographs of project activities with the final report. Photos should be submitted as email attachments in jpg, png, or bmp format. Please try to include photos from various phases of the project -- we particularly love to see people working together! The City reserves the right to use these photos for future promotion or publications.
- **Volunteer Hours and Waivers:**
 - Completed Volunteer Hours Computation Sheet.
 - Digital copies of all Release, Hold-Harmless and Indemnification Agreements signed and dated by each volunteer. If the volunteer is under the age of 18, a parent/guardian must sign the Agreement.

Non-Eligible Expenses

- Routine maintenance, on-going operating expenses, replacement of existing items (unless it is a great enhancement over the existing item).

- Duplication of an existing public or private program.
- Enhancement or improvement of individual private property. Common spaces owned by HOAs are allowable.
- Projects in conflict with existing City policy.
- Direct grants, scholarships loans, or stipends.
- In-kind costs associated with preparing grant applications.
- At city staff discretion, proposals that include capacity building initiatives may qualify to use up to 50% of grant award for facility rental, entertainment, and supplies, including but not limited to music, comedy, and other types of performances; games, prizes, etc. Capacity building could include things such as organizational skills building workshops, leadership training, and efforts to increase membership

Notification of Adjacent Property Owners

- Proposals for physical improvements or art installations carry a requirement that the applicant organization notify all property owners within a 500-foot radius of the proposed project location.
- This procedure has been implemented to ensure proper notification of those whose property may be affected.
- This must be done as part of the application process. Failure to do so will result in an incomplete application.
- Upon request, HAND staff will provide a map and a list of property owners to be notified.
- The required Notice of Presentation shall be sent by regular first class mail, and must be mailed on or before March 23, 2026 (application submission deadline). If the project is approved, grant funds may be used to cover the costs of copying, envelopes, and postage. Be sure to keep your receipts and include this as a line item in your budget.
- Proof that notice has been mailed shall be sufficient proof of notice under these rules, regardless of actual receipt.
- Proof of notice shall consist of submittal of the following items to the HAND Department, as part of your grant application:
 - A copy of the completed Notice of Presentation that was mailed to adjacent property owners.
 - A completed Affidavit of Notice to Adjacent Property Owners, signed by the Neighborhood Project Coordinator.
- These rules and procedures are not meant to substitute for neighborhood involvement in the creation and implementation of neighborhood projects, but are in addition to and specifically for interested parties that may be most directly affected.

Application Scoring Criteria

Using the following scoring criteria, Neighborhood Improvement Grant Councilmembers will review and score applications (based upon 100 possible points). The Council will also preside over Neighborhood Presentations, after which they will come to a consensus and make funding

recommendations to the Redevelopment Commission, who will determine final funding decisions. The Neighborhood Improvement Grant Council is a group made up of two City staff members (outside of HAND), one member of the Redevelopment Commission, and two representatives from non-applicant Bloomington neighborhoods.

1. Feasibility/Longevity/Project Readiness (0-35 points)

High Score

- The project has a well-defined scope, timeline, goals, detailed steps and measurable outcomes, and it will be completed by November 17, 2026.
- The applicant has secured all necessary permissions/permits from relevant City departments/boards/commissions.
- Physical projects are highly visible and accessible to all neighborhood residents. There is a realistic plan and budget for on-going maintenance.
- The applicant has identified appropriate vendors/contractors to perform the necessary work.
- The request is from a first time applicant.
- The neighborhood association or other relevant group approves of the project and supporting documentation is provided.
- The budget is well thought out and realistic and there is evidence of contributions from a broad representation of the neighborhood residents, businesses, and others.
- The project or activity involves a one-time expenditure.
- There are property-owner letters of support which permit the project to occur on their land/premise (if applicable).
- The applicant has no previous grants currently in progress through this program.

Mid-Range Score

- The project has a well-defined scope, but the products may not be known at this point. Each step of the process is described.
- The applicant is in communication with relevant City departments/boards/commissions and understands the process, but has not yet secured the necessary permissions/permits.
- The proposal demonstrates a willingness to seek creative and workable solutions.
- Organizations from outside of the neighborhood provide a substantial portion of the contributions.
- The applicant has contacted the property owner, but has not yet secured permission for the project to occur on their property.

Low Score

- The scope of the project and the final products are not clear. There is no clearly defined process, or schedule for completion.
- The applicant has not contacted the City to determine whether permissions/permits are necessary.
- It is likely that additional funding will be required in the future to complete the project. 5

- The applicant has an incomplete project which was previously funded by this program.
- The property owner has not provided support for the project to occur on their land/premise.

2. Neighborhood Participation (0-25 points)

High Score

- There is a well thought out plan for significant neighborhood involvement in all project phases.
- Participants will actively include people from all walks of life, including a mix of homeowners and renters.
- Residents will have the opportunity to take on leadership roles, develop new skills, and new leaders will emerge.
- The project will strengthen and/or build new partnerships with public/private entities or other community groups.
- There are letters of support, pledges of money and/or services, or other evidence of broad neighborhood support.

Mid-Range Score

- There is a general plan for neighborhood involvement for the duration of the project.
- The project attempts to address neighborhood issues, but there is no clear, ongoing commitment to implementation.
- There is evidence of support from some within the community.
- There are plans for an inclusionary process, but the specifics may not be known at this time.

Low Score

- There is no clear plan for neighborhood involvement.
- There is little demonstration of neighborhood commitment or evidence of community support.

3. Neighborhood Benefit (0-25 points)

High Score

- The application is clear and specific on the issue(s) to be addressed and provides documentation of the problem(s).
- The proposal demonstrates a commitment to seek creative and workable solutions.
- The project will benefit a significant number of residents in the neighborhood.
- The project will improve the health, safety, or quality of life of residents; reduce potential property damage; provide a facility commonly found in other neighborhoods; develop leadership skills of neighborhood residents; or build neighborhood organizational capacity.

Mid-Range Score

- The application states the issue(s) to be addressed, but there is limited documentation as to the extent of the problem.

- The possible outcome will have benefit in localized portions of the neighborhood.

Low Score

- The application is not clear on the issue(s).
- There will be very limited benefit to the neighborhood.

4. Neighborhood Match (0-15 points)

High Score

- There are pledges of money, materials, and/or services from the neighborhood association/HOA, neighborhood residents, community partners, and/or local businesses.
- The total neighborhood match (cash, in-kind material donations, in-kind labor @ \$20/hour) exceeds the 10% minimum requirement.
- Neighborhood residents have pledged volunteer hours to fulfill specific roles/jobs directly related to the proposed project.
- Documentation of all pledges is provided (e.g., volunteer hours, commitment letters, bank statements, etc.).

Mid-Range Score

- Contributions from the neighborhood are proposed, but pledges are not secured at the time of application.
- Opportunities for in-kind volunteer labor are not directly related to the proposed project.

Low Score

- There is no documentation of neighborhood resources.

Application Instructions

Please use the Application Scoring Criteria to guide your responses as you prepare your application. Underlined items refer to specific documents that can be downloaded from the Neighborhood Improvement Grant website: bton.in/NIG26. Items A, B, C, D below are detailed instructions for the corresponding sections of the electronic application.

A) Project Proposal

- NARRATIVE -- Describe the project and the rationale for undertaking it, include timeline, tasks, outcomes or products, responsible parties, project completion date, and plans for ongoing maintenance. 500 words or less.
- ATTACHMENTS -- Upload these supporting documents, as applicable:
 - Letter of support from your neighborhood organization, signed by an elected officer who is not the grant coordinator.

- Letter(s) of support from partnering organizations, if any (e.g., schools, churches, businesses).
- Project Work Plan (list tasks, responsible parties, and timeline for completion).
- Permit or letter of approval from applicable City department, board, or commission OR evidence that these are being sought.
- Maps, site plans, design drawings, photo examples, as appropriate.
- Letter from property owner granting permission for project to occur on their land/premises.
- List of previous funding from HAND, including year, grant program, project description, dollar amount awarded, and project status.

B) Neighborhood Participation

- NARRATIVE -- Describe neighborhood involvement in all phases of the proposed project. Who is involved? What sectors of the community do they represent? How did you conduct outreach? How did your group come to a consensus on the proposed project?
- ATTACHMENTS -- Upload these supporting documents:
 - Volunteer Hours Computation Sheet
 - Notice of Presentation
 - Affidavit of Notice to Adjacent Property Owners

C) Neighborhood Benefit

- NARRATIVE -- Explain how the project solves a specific problem/issue or fulfills a neighborhood need and why your proposed project is the best solution. Describe how the project will benefit your residents, as well as members of the larger community (if applicable).

D) Budget and Neighborhood Match

- NARRATIVE -- Provide a summary and explanation of the figures provided in your Grant Budget Template, including how you arrived at your figures for materials and services to be purchased (sales tax should not be included). Please provide the name, address, phone, and email address/website for each vendor with whom you plan to do business. Explain how you arrived at your figures for in-kind labor (e.g., 10 volunteers working 10 hours each at an in-kind value of \$20 per hour = \$2,000. Maximum of 15 in-kind hours per individual volunteer).
- ATTACHMENTS -- Upload these supporting documents:
 - Neighborhood Improvement Grant Budget Template (download and complete this pre-formatted Excel spreadsheet)
 - Itemized quotes from businesses who will provide necessary products or services.
 - Letters from individuals or organizations (on letterhead) pledging specific donations. If donations are in-kind (e.g. donated materials or professional services), please include the donation's retail value.
 - Bank statements from your neighborhood group demonstrating cash on-hand (only needed if your group plans to use cash as a portion of your neighborhood match).
 - Signed Volunteer Commitment Form from each volunteer, indicating the number of hours pledged to the project (maximum of 15 hours/individual). Application preparation may NOT

be counted towards the neighborhood match portion of your budget.

Additional Resources

Links to these additional resources can be found on the Neighborhood Improvement Grant webpage: bton.in/NIG26.

- [Vendor documents](#) for submission to the Office of the Controller
- [Waiver, Release, and Hold-Harmless Agreement](#), to be signed by each volunteer
- [2026 Neighborhood Services Calendar](#)
- [A Guide to the Regulated Terrestrial Invasive Plant Species of Indiana](#)
- [City of Bloomington Prohibited Plant Species](#)
- [City of Bloomington Policy and Procedures for Private Art Installations in the Public Right of Way](#)

Application Submission

The online application form can be found at bton.in/NiApp. While electronic submission is preferred, please contact HAND if you require a paper application

Contact Information

For assistance, contact Angela Van Rooy at angela.vanrooy@bloomington.in.gov or 812-349-3505