



**CDFA**  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FINANCE AUTHORITY

# IDEAS TO INNOVATION ACTIVATION GRANT

## APPLICATION AND PROGRAM GUIDE

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## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FINANCE AUTHORITY

The Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA) is a statewide nonprofit public authority focused on maximizing the value and impact of community development, economic development and clean energy initiatives throughout New Hampshire. The organization leverages a variety of financial and technical resources, including the competitive deployment of grants, loans, and Tax Credit programs.

### VISION & MISSION

CDFA envisions New Hampshire's future with economically and socially resilient communities that reflect and respect their natural surroundings and represent places where people want to live and work. In working towards this vision, CDFA invests in the people of New Hampshire by:

- Enabling its partners to make transformational and sustainable changes;
- Meeting the evolving needs of New Hampshire communities;
- Deploying a well-tuned, effective investment system which directly impacts local communities; and
- Taking an innovative and collaborative approach to development finance.

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

CDFA's Ideas to Innovation "i2i" Activation Grant program provides financial support for projects and programs in the early stages of development – when a small amount of investment has the potential to yield big results in the community. The program is designed to provide resources that will enable innovative approaches to community development efforts that deliver actionable results, benefit New Hampshire communities and serve as a replicable model.

The Ideas to Innovation "i2i" Activation Grant opportunity is designed to help spur new ideas and encourage creative thinking and innovation in community development efforts throughout New Hampshire. More specifically, CDFA seeks to provide resources for initiatives, public events and partnerships that:

1. Recognize the value of mutual relationships (e.g. interconnectedness) of various community systems (e.g. economic, social, environmental, public health, employment, and livability); and
2. Generate actionable ideas and innovative thinking that can potentially lead to new and replicable policies, incentives, or financing models that advance and/or compliment multiple systems in New Hampshire communities.

The focus of the i2i Activation Grant shifts each year based on community needs, evolving trends and feedback from partners. This year's objective is social infrastructure as described below in the Program Objectives section.

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

In spring 2026, CDFA hosted an i2i (Ideas to Innovation) symposium focused on strengthening social infrastructure in New Hampshire communities. Social infrastructure refers to the places, relationships, organizations, and services that create opportunities for people to connect, belong, and participate in community life. When these connections are strong, communities are more resilient and better positioned to support economic vitality, civic engagement, and sustainable community development.

As part of this convening, CDFA is soliciting proposals that advance social infrastructure and connectivity within New Hampshire's communities. Proposed ideas may span a wide range of topics and community contexts but should be grounded in creating inclusive, accessible spaces and experiences that foster connection, shared identity, and a strong sense of place. The proposals could also help spark or expand community engagement efforts showcased through the i2i event.

Selected proposals will be awarded i2i Activation Grants of up to \$3,500, to be announced on Tuesday, June 16, 2026.

## **BACKGROUND ON SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Over the past decade, researchers and community observers have documented a steady erosion of social infrastructure—seen in declining participation in civic and social institutions, fewer informal gathering places, and a reduction in the amount of time people spend in relationships with one another. These trends remain deeply relevant today. As New York Times columnist David Brooks observed:

“These different kinds of pain share a common thread: our lack of healthy connection to each other, our inability to see the full dignity of each other, and the resulting culture of fear, distrust, tribalism, shaming and strife.”

Social infrastructure—the places, spaces, and institutions that enable people to gather, build trust, and feel a sense of belonging, plays a critical role in reversing this pattern. When communities invest in inclusive, accessible places where people can interact across generations, cultures, and life experiences, they create the conditions for stronger civic life and greater resilience.

CDFA’s i2i symposium, *ReWeaving the Social Fabric of New Hampshire’s Communities*, centered on this idea. By highlighting community centers, public spaces, and grassroots efforts that foster connection, the event explored how decentralized networks of people can come together in physical places for solidarity, support, and shared purpose. These spaces not only respond to isolation but help reshape community norms by strengthening trust, encouraging participation, and reinforcing the social bonds that underpin healthy towns and cities.

### **Examples of Social Infrastructure**

Social infrastructure comes to life in spaces that are open, welcoming, and intentionally designed to bring people together. Across New Hampshire, a wide range of public and community-based spaces serve as anchors for connection, belonging, and civic life.

#### **Libraries and Community Centers**

Libraries and community centers are cornerstone examples of social infrastructure. As trusted, accessible public spaces, they welcome people across ages, cultures, and backgrounds. These spaces host everything from informal gatherings and creative programs to public meetings, youth and senior activities, workforce programs, and cultural events. Because they are already embedded in daily community life, libraries and community centers are especially well positioned for activation, creating new opportunities for connection by reimagining how space is used and who it brings together.

#### **Other Public and Community Spaces**

Social infrastructure also includes a broad range of shared spaces such as parks, downtown venues, cultural centers, faith adjacent halls, arts spaces, and town owned facilities. When activated with intentional programming or community led design, these spaces can become powerful platforms for strengthening relationships, fostering local identity, and encouraging participation in civic life.

#### **Schools, Childcare Centers, and Family Resource Centers**

Schools, childcare centers, and family resource centers also play an important role in social infrastructure, particularly when they are used as community hubs beyond their primary function. When school buildings host community activities outside the school day, or when childcare and family resource centers create opportunities for families to connect with one another and with local services, they extend their impact from service delivery to community building.

## General Stores

In many rural communities, the general store functions as both an economic and social hub. Often also housing essential services, these stores are natural gathering places where residents regularly interact. More than retail spaces, general stores contribute to a sense of belonging by offering a familiar, welcoming environment where people exchange information, share news, and feel connected to the life of their town. Their informal, everyday nature makes them powerful, but often overlooked, elements of social infrastructure.

## Makerspaces

Makerspaces are collaborative environments designed for making, learning, and sharing across ages and skill levels. Equipped with a mix of high-tech and low-tech tools, makerspaces bring together students, artists, entrepreneurs, and community members who might not otherwise interact. By emphasizing collaboration, experimentation, and shared problem-solving, makerspaces foster networks of creativity and mutual support, strengthening social infrastructure through collective learning and cross sector connection.

## ELIGIBILITY

Eligible applicants include:

- New Hampshire-based nonprofit organizations; or
- New Hampshire-based individuals or groups with a nonprofit fiscal agent.

New Hampshire-based individuals or groups not currently registered as a nonprofit organization or associated with a nonprofit fiscal agent should reach out to CDFA before applying: [fwinters@nhcdfa.org](mailto:fwinters@nhcdfa.org) or 603-717-9122.

**Nonprofit organizations** must be good standing with the State of NH. To ensure eligibility, applicants will be required to submit the following documents:

- Articles of Incorporation;
- IRS Determination Letter; and
- Proof of Good Standing – New Hampshire Secretary of State.

If the applicant has a nonprofit fiscal agent, the documentation listed should be submitted on behalf of the fiscal agent.

## PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Applicants may apply for funding to support activities related to the ideas presented at CDFA's Ideas to Innovation "i2i" symposium and within the following program development support areas, consistent with CDFA's funding infrastructure.

- **Capacity building:** Funds used to strengthen organizational infrastructure to deliver increased value and impact to the communities they serve.
- **Planning and development:** Funds used to develop a business plan, implementation strategy and/or enhance outreach to further develop programming and/or partnerships.
- **Implementation:** Funds used to implement programming.
- **Support and optimization:** Funds used to evaluate, improve, and sustain programming and services.

## AVAILABLE FUNDING

CDFA will designate up to \$3,500 for at least five i2i Activation Grant recipients. Awards will be based upon the merits of the idea, goals, measurable objectives, activities of the proposal, and organizational need. Funds are intended to support time-limited, catalytic activities and must be expended by December 31, 2026.

## FUNDING CRITERIA

The Review Committee will consider the following criteria during the evaluation process:

- Degree of innovation and anticipated outcomes;
- Level of impact on broader community and target audience/population;
- Capacity to carry out proposed idea; and
- Potential for learning, adaptability, or informing future community-based efforts

## ACCEPTABLE USE OF FUNDS

Applicants should consider the following examples of acceptable uses of funds. Please note this is not an exhaustive list of activities but meant to provide guidance to potential applicants.

Eligible costs include:

- Planning, feasibility or other exploratory studies;
- Consultants or facilitation support;
- Technical assistance;
- Educational or publicity programs;
- Program or event-related expenses, including materials, supplies, and equipment rentals;
- Stipends for artists, facilitators, cultural leaders, or community contributors;
- Temporary space activation or engagement-related costs that foster community connection

All eligible activities should be focused on serving the needs of New Hampshire communities or individuals residing within the state.

This funding is intended to support short-term activation efforts rather than ongoing operational or long-term capital projects.

## HOW TO APPLY

Interested applicants will engage with CDFA in an application and evaluation process to be considered for at least one of five grants of up to \$3,500. If at any stage of the application process you have questions, please contact [fwinters@nhcdfa.org](mailto:fwinters@nhcdfa.org) / 603-717-9122.

Interested applicants should complete the application via CDFA's Grants Management System no later than 4:00 PM on Friday, May 22. Late submissions and incomplete applications will not be accepted.

All applications must be completed and submitted on CDFA'S Grants Management System ([www.nhcdfagrants.org](http://www.nhcdfagrants.org)). Information on using CDFA's Grants Management System can be found here: [Grants Management System – Resources from NHCDFA](#)

Final funding decisions will be made by Friday, June 12, 2026.

## KEY DATES

Applicants should note the following dates and deadlines as they relate to the funding.

Application available on CDFA's Grants Management System	Tuesday, April 21, 2026
Application deadline	Friday, May 22, 2026, 4:00 PM
Final award decisions	Friday, June 12, 2026
Awards	Tuesday, June 16, 2026
Project Completion	Thursday, December 31, 2026

Final reporting deadline Friday, January 15, 2027

\*Awarded applicants may be asked to present the results of their project at a future CDFA event.

## APPLICATION OUTLINE

Below you will find an outline of the application for the Ideas to Innovation Grant Program. Applications must be submitted by 4:00 PM on Friday, May 22, 2026, through our online Grants Management System ('GMS') ([www.nhcdfragrants.org](http://www.nhcdfragrants.org)).

### I. Project Information

- Project Name
- Project Address
- Authorized Official
- Primary Contact
- Grant Writer
- Fiscally Sponsored Entity

### II. Eligibility

- Eligible Applicant Type
- Articles of Incorporation
- IRS Determination Letter
- Proof of Good Standing

### III. Executive Summary

### IV. Project Overview

- Describe the needs you have identified within the community.
- Describe your idea. How is it innovative, creative, or responsive to community needs? How will your idea help address the needs identified?
- Describe the audience your idea is targeting. How do you plan to engage that audience?
- Has your organization identified partners to help facilitate your idea? What is their current or anticipated engagement with your organization and proposed activity?

- What are your goals and measurable outcomes? How will you learn from or evaluate success of this effort?
- How will this one-time infusion of resources help launch, test, or strengthen your idea?
- Describe how this idea could inform future efforts, be adapted over time, or offer lessons that may be useful to other communities.
- Describe your project timeline, including key activities to be completed by December 31, 2026.

**V. Project Budget**

- Provide a current year's organizational budget
- Provide a specific project budget with line items for the use of the i2i Activation Grant funds.

**VI. Certification**

- Full Name of Authorized Official
- Title of Authorized official