

# *Grant Guidelines*

CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH PURPOSE



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# Who We Are

As a community foundation, GCF exists to invest in a more vibrant and equitable region through community leadership, capacity building and grantmaking to eligible, tax-exempt agencies. We connect generous people and their passion with impactful community change efforts. We use the tools at our disposal to drive equitable change in our community, but we cannot do it without partners. GCF works strategically to establish partnerships throughout our region focused on ensuring everyone can thrive.

Partnership comes in many forms at GCF. Our standing, formal partners, found within GCF, include Women's Fund of Greater Cincinnati Foundation, HealthPath Foundation of Ohio and a handful of private family foundations. To learn more about each of these partners and their unique partnership and funding opportunities, please follow the links below:

- [\*Women's Fund\*](#) leads our community in ensuring the economic self-sufficiency of women in our region and ignites a shared desire to drive improvements in related outcomes.
- [\*HealthPath Foundation of Ohio\*](#) works towards creating a system where all Ohioans, regardless of status, wealth or circumstances will have the ongoing opportunity to achieve their fullest health potential.
- [\*GCF's Private Foundation Partners\*](#) each have unique charitable visions which GCF helps to carry out.

The grant guidelines contained in this document pertain exclusively to GCF's community grantmaking. Guidelines are available for each of our partners at the links above.

# Our Focus

GCF's partnerships in community change efforts are designed to make a profound difference in our region. As a steward of donor generosity past and present, GCF partners with qualified nonprofit organizations in eight counties in the Tristate area: Boone, Butler, Campbell, Clermont, Dearborn, Hamilton, Kenton, and Warren.

**We're leading the charge for greater equity in our region. GCF understands equity to be fair and just inclusion that allows all to reach their full potential.**

We strive to impact the inequities in our community through concentrated investments in key partners that focus on Women's Upward Mobility, targeted Requests for Proposals and capacity building efforts within the nonprofit community.

Through at least 2022, GCF commits to deeply and proactively investing in key equity-focused partners in the following spaces:

- Housing Stability
- Economic Mobility
- Community Organizing and Advocacy

Additionally, GCF remains invested in responding to pressing community needs and innovative efforts in the following sectors, as resources and partnerships allow:

- Animal Welfare
- Arts and Culture
- Educational Success
- Emergency Needs
- Environmental Sustainability
- Inclusive Communities
- Learning Links
- Medical Research
- Safety Net
- Summertime Kids

These areas of focus allow us to connect our donors' passions to the needs of the community.



# How We Make Grants

In general, our Community Leadership grants are concentrated investments in housing stability and economic mobility. These will be proactive efforts in which we seek out key community partners and work with them to determine how best to impact our region. These opportunities arise in various ways, ranging from a conversation between staff members at a community event to GCF reaching out to key players in the region and asking about work they're doing and planning.

Investments made in the remaining focus areas are typically funded responsively by the publication of a Request for Proposals and submissions by organizations. These RFPs are published and shared broadly with the community, and all tax-exempt organizations doing work in our eight-county region are welcome to apply. The RFP will outline its purpose and the intended results GCF seeks to fund. Specifics about each of our targeted RFPs, as well as the schedule of release, can be found on page 8 of this document in the **Funding Opportunities** section.

Regardless of what your organization is responding to, all requests are required to be submitted through our online Grants Management System, Foundant. [Foundant](#) houses applications for all of GCF, Women's Fund, HealthPath and private foundation grantmaking. Your organization will need an account set-up in GCF's Foundant system; users will each need their own contact account. If you need help setting up a profile in Foundant, either for yourself or your organization, please refer to the [Foundant Applicant Tutorial](#) or contact GCF's Grants Associate or Grants Manager at 513-241-2880.



As a general practice, Community Strategies staff conduct an initial review and a committee of community experts is formed to review, score and discuss the strongest proposals received. In responsive grantmaking processes, site visits and follow-up calls will not be always required but may be utilized before decisions are finalized. Decisions are made based on consensus when possible. GCF strives to offer streamlined grant cycles and is committed to making timely decisions. When possible, RFP processes will begin and end within a given quarter.

Each grantee will be required to submit a follow-up evaluation 12 months post-award to demonstrate the impact of the funding. The reporting of outcomes allows GCF to learn from the investments, share stories with donors and the community and adjust our investment strategy ongoing to drive greater impact. Collaboration on how best to affect change is paramount, and we believe that while accountability is important, so are lessons from mistakes and unforeseen challenges. We encourage honesty in self-evaluation and hold those challenges in confidence.





# Before You Apply

GCF has determined a philosophy that helps guide our grantmaking decisions. When evaluating funding requests and potential partnership opportunities, here are some points that reflect that philosophy:

- Clear fit with GCF’s mission to build a community where everyone can thrive
- Commitment to equity, inclusion, and reducing disparities
- Collaboration and coordination with partners within and across sectors
- Established and fiscally sound organization
- Strong staff and board governance practices
- Demonstrated organizational capacity and track record
- Solid demonstration of impact
- Sound short-term and long-term plans
- Leverage of other financial and in-kind resources
- Supporting best practices and innovation
- Demonstrated commitment to continuous improvement
- Realistic organizational sustainability plan

This list is intended to help identify the potential for strong partnership, not to prohibit organizations from approaching GCF with ideas.

As a way to help organizations understand how their work may align to GCF’s many different sources of support, including the Women’s Fund, HealthPath and our private foundation partners, we have developed an [\*inquiry portal\*](#). This simple form is intended to provide nonprofits an outlet for clear and comprehensive guidance from GCF staff on potential support—monetary and non-monetary—with GCF and beyond. As your community foundation, we are committed to connecting people with purpose, supporting our community and encouraging collaboration and innovation. We value nonprofits, local leaders, donors and other stakeholders as vital partners in our work and have a deep commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

**GCF accepts proposals from tax-exempt organizations, typically 501(c)(3) classification, located in or primarily serving at least a portion of our eight-county region.**

As a community foundation, GCF is restricted from funding:

- Individuals, including scholarships
- 501(c)(3) nonprofits other than charities unless it can be clearly demonstrated that funds will be used towards public good
- Political campaigns for individual candidates

## GCF does not typically provide funding for the following purposes, entities or activities:

- Nonprofits based in our eight counties, but efforts taking place outside of our service area
- Event or conference sponsorship or underwriting
- Production of books, films or videos. However, consideration may be given when they fall within a promising project
- Efforts with the sole purpose of re-granting the funds
- Units of government or government agencies
- Lobbying efforts
- Religious organizations that require religious activity for participation
- Playgrounds, sports teams or sports activities
- Routine operating expenses or capital projects for:
  - Individual schools or universities, including organizations working on behalf of an individual schools (ex. booster or student clubs, PTAs, etc.) outside of our small grants programs (Learning Links and Summertime Kids)
- Hospitals
- Nursing or retirement homes
- Routine computer software/hardware updates
- Vehicles
- Endowment, capital or annual campaigns
- Leasehold improvements
- Debt retirement or funding of an activity after completion
- Loans
- Travel or fees for staff development
- “Emergencies” that don’t affect vulnerable peoples’ basic human needs

GCF typically funds organizations one year at a time through our responsive grantmaking (Targeted RFPs). Please refer to the specific Request for Proposal for which you are applying for more detail or discuss with GCF’s Community Strategies staff.

GCF is more about to consider multi-year requests on a case-by-case basis as part of our Community Leadership grantmaking.

**Organizations are not prohibited from applying to a funding opportunity, regardless of current funding status with GCF or our partners, unless they are past due on any follow-up reports associated with those grants.**

However, GCF sees a value in supporting a broad range of organizations throughout the region doing a variety of important work. Therefore, in some cases, preference may be given to organizations that have not been awarded funding via another GCF RFP within the past 12 months.

Limitations regarding Women’s Fund, HealthPath, and GCF’s partner private foundations are available on their respective websites.



# Funding Opportunities with GCF

As stated above, Community Leadership investments made in the areas of housing stability and economic mobility will be awarded primarily on a proactive basis and not necessarily within a defined cycle. If your organization is doing work in this space and would like your idea to be considered, please submit an [\*inquiry\*](#).

Our support of work related to organizing and advocacy will, at least for the foreseeable future, be treated as a targeted Request for Proposal. This RFP will be offered every year with the purpose of investing in community-led efforts that recognize the wisdom and creativity inherent within every neighborhood of our region. Grants will be awarded ranging in size from \$10,000 to \$25,000 for either planning or implementation efforts.

GCF will offer a variety of RFP processes annually, primarily utilizing restricted funds left by generous donors. RFPs will be released on a quarterly basis via email, social media and our website. The RFPs themselves will be the best guide to determine alignment ahead of applying for funding. They will also provide clarity on the maximum amount to be requested, as well as deadlines and other specifics.





GCF's targeted Requests for Proposals will be released with specific purposes and goals on the following schedule:

SECTOR	FREQUENCY	PURPOSE	TYPICAL GRANT SIZE
Animal Welfare	Every 3 years	Focus on low-income pet owners and reduction of euthanasia	\$15,000
Vibrant Arts and Culture	Every other year (odd years)	To support increased access to arts and cultural programming to educate and/or enhance the quality of life for individuals of all ages, abilities and income levels in our region	\$10,000 - \$15,000
Supporting Educational Success	Every year	To support the educational success of children, youth and young adults across our region both in and out of school	\$25,000-\$35,000
Ensuring Environmental Sustainability	Every other year (even years)	Focus on conservation, restoration, and beautification of our region	\$25,000
Creating an Inclusive Community	Every other year (odd years)	To drive inclusion of people living with physical and developmental disabilities in our region	\$15,000-\$20,000
Learning Links	Every year	Focus on creative and interesting programs or events for classrooms	\$1,000
Medical Research	Every 6 years	Focus on seeding initial stage research relative to health inequities	\$50,000 - \$100,000
Providing a Safety Net for Individuals and Families	Every year	To ensure vulnerable residents of our region have access to food and shelter and increase access to well-integrated and/or trauma-informed behavioral health services	\$35,000
Strengthening Communities Through Organizing and Advocacy	Every year	To invest in community-led efforts that recognize the wisdom and creativity that is inherent within every neighborhood of our region	\$10,000-\$25,000
Summertime Kids	Every year	To provide support for programs that are enriching and fun for children during the summer months	\$1,000



**Please note that these RFP purposes are flexible and likely to change slightly from release to release due to partnerships and shifting community needs.** For the most up-to-date schedule and purpose statements, please refer to the [Respond to a Request for Proposal](#) page of our website.

For more information about opportunities with Women's Fund, HealthPath Foundation of Ohio and our Private Foundation partners, please visit their respective websites, linked above.

Occasionally, GCF will accommodate urgent requests for funding outside of a formal RFP cycle in an effort to be as responsive as possible to the most urgent of community needs. **We define a funding emergency as an immediate need for funding to avoid total stoppage of services of basic needs to vulnerable people.** Please contact GCF Community Strategies Manager directly if this type of need arises.

# How to Apply

- 1** To submit a funding request in response to a targeted Request for Proposal, please log in to your Foundant account.
- 2** Go to the Application page by clicking the “Apply” link at the top of your Dashboard and select “GCF Responsive Application.”
- 3** Once in the application, select the radio button corresponding to the RFP to which you are responding.
- 4** Each RFP itself will define specific attachments required with your application. These are typically a list of board members, project budget, most recent 990 form or audit information and income and balance statements over two years.

If you need help setting up a profile in Foundant, either for yourself or your organization, please refer to the [Foundant Applicant Tutorial](#) or contact GCF’s Grants Associate or Grants Manager at 513-241-2880.

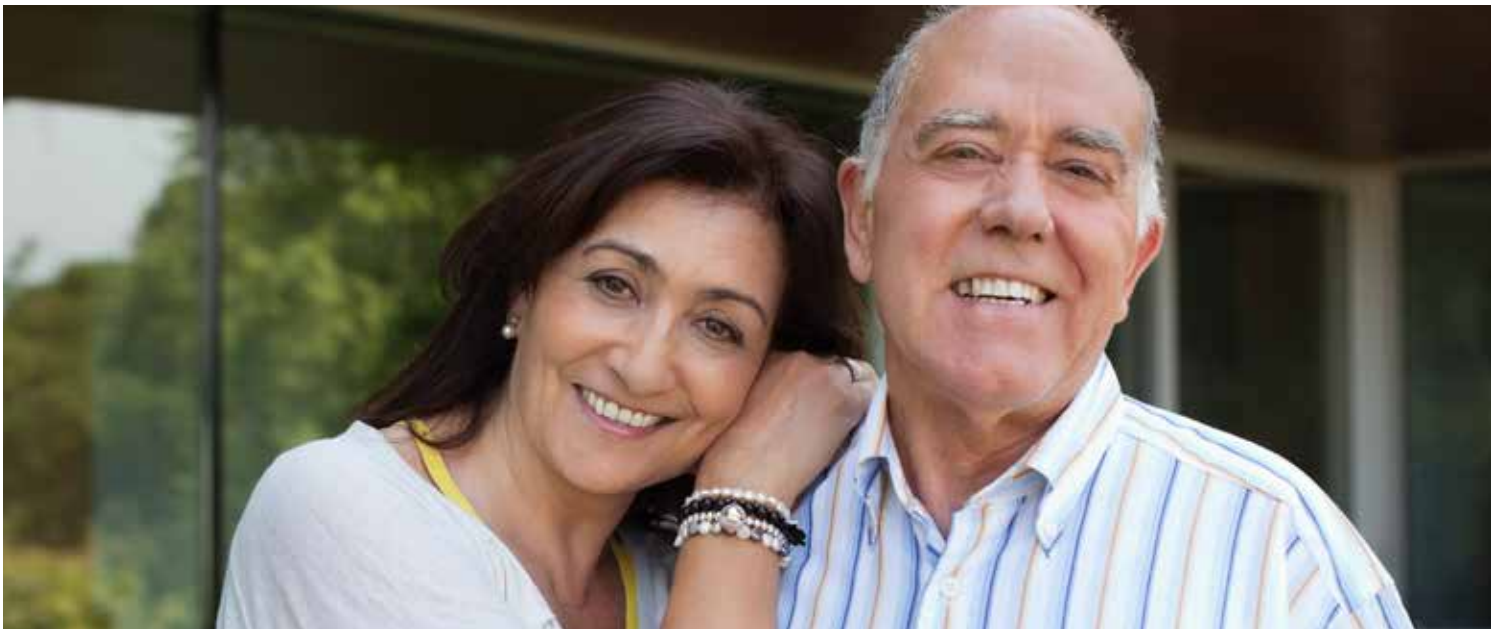
Please make sure to carefully read the RFP to ensure alignment to the stated purposes and results. Strength of alignment to the RFP is one of the highest priorities when reviewing applications and is the most frequent reason for declination of a proposal.

Use of provided templates for attachments is strongly encouraged but not required. Templates are provided to standardize the format of the information being presented with the goal of reducing potential confusion by the review committee. If your organization has a standard way of submitting required documentation and find it overly cumbersome to conform to the GCF template(s), submission of the information in organization specific formatting is acceptable in most cases.

Emergency requests should be sent by email to the Community Strategies Manager or Program Officer and include a clear depiction of the need, the amount of funding required, and context related to the urgency of request. It is likely that once a need has been determined to be an emergency, GCF staff will require the submission of a brief application. Typically, emergency grants are made to organizations with some history of partnership with GCF.

Concentrated investment proposals will be accepted via a restricted application in the Foundant system. After discussing the opportunity with a Program Officer and partnership is initially agreed upon, detailed application instructions will be provided.





# Frequently Asked Questions

In hopes of clarity surrounding grantmaking through the Greater Cincinnati Foundation and our partners, we have answered some frequently asked questions about what we fund, how we partner and what we care about. [Find out more about Grants at GCF.](#)

GCF's [Community Impact Strategy](#) has been developed to streamline the process for awarding grants and deepen our focus on creating greater equity in our region. This strategy applies to grants directly managed by GCF, including our targeted [Requests for Proposals](#). The grant process for [donor advised funds](#), [private foundations](#), the [Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation](#), and the [HealthPath Foundation of Ohio](#) remain unique to those processes.

As the community foundation of the Greater Cincinnati region, we award grants to qualified nonprofit organizations doing work in eight counties:

- Ohio: Butler, Clermont, Hamilton and Warren
- Kentucky: Boone, Campbell and Kenton
- Indiana: Dearborn

## 20 Frequently Asked Questions About GCF Grantmaking:

- [Is my organization eligible to apply for a grant from GCF?](#)
- [How do I know if my organization's work is aligned to any funding sources? Can I meet with program staff to discuss my funding needs?](#)
- [My organization cares about housing stability and economic mobility too. How can I start a conversation with GCF about partnership?](#)
- [Can my organization receive more than one grant per year from GCF?](#)
- [Your RFP schedule refers to quarters of the year. What is your fiscal year?](#)
- [How can I stay in the loop regarding publication of RFPs and other changes to GCF grantmaking?](#)
- [Are grants funded over multiple years?](#)
- [What is the typical size of grants awarded?](#)
- [Can I apply for a grant from GCF for a personal need?](#)
- [Can my school apply for a grant?](#)
- [Can anyone at GCF help me write a proposal?](#)
- [Are there limits to what type of activities you will fund?](#)
- [What if my organization has an emergency?](#)
- [What do you look for in an organization submitting a grant proposal?](#)
- [What do you look for in a grant proposal?](#)
- [How do I apply for a grant from a donor advised fund? What about Private Foundations, the Women's Fund and HealthPath?](#)
- [Can you refer me to anyone else for funding?](#)
- [Can I get help with your online grants management system?](#)
- [I have a sponsorship opportunity GCF might be interested in. How do I submit that opportunity?](#)

## Is my organization eligible to apply for a grant from GCF?

We make grants to tax-exempt agencies classified as 501(c)(3) organizations, which are public charities as defined by the Internal Revenue Service. The projects we consider for support are located in or serve one or more of the eight counties listed above.

## How do I know if my organization's work is aligned to any funding sources? Can I meet with program staff to discuss my funding needs?

GCF offers a centralized entry point to help organizations determine their alignment to our resources called the Inquiry Form. This simple form is intended to provide nonprofits an outlet for clear and comprehensive guidance from GCF staff on potential support—monetary and non-monetary—within GCF and beyond.

Program Officers are available to meet one on one to further discuss submissions through the Funding Inquiry resource or grant applications.

## My organization cares about housing stability and economic mobility too. How can I start a conversation with GCF about partnership?

Generally, we proactively seek out key partners for our concentrated investments in housing stability and economic mobility, working with them to determine the best impact for the community. If you would like to have your work considered, please submit your idea through our [Inquiry form](#).

## Can my organization receive more than one grant per year from GCF?

In short, yes. However, to diversify our pool of grantees and ensure that resources are shared across the region, priority will be given via our RFP cycles to organizations who have not received funding through another RFP in the past 12 months. Additionally, RFPs may specify other limitations.

## Your RFP schedule refers to quarters of the year. What is your fiscal year?

GCF is on a calendar year schedule: Quarter 1 is January – March, Quarter 2 is April – June, Quarter 3 is July – September and Quarter 4 is October – December.



## How can I stay in the loop regarding publication of RFPs and other changes to GCF grantmaking?

If you'd like to join our email list for updates on our grantmaking, please email [werisetgether@gcfdn.org](mailto:werisetgether@gcfdn.org) with your contact information. You are also encouraged to monitor our [website and social media platforms](#), as all will be updated regularly with ongoing work and opportunities.

## Are grants funded over multiple years?

GCF typically funds organizations one year at a time through our responsive grantmaking. In our community leadership grantmaking, GCF will consider requests for multi-year investments when the community impact is dramatically increased with continued support. Please refer to the specific RFP for which you are applying for more detail.

## What is the typical size of grants awarded?

Grant size varies greatly based on the funding opportunity. Our mini-grant programs, Summertime Kids and Learning Links, offer \$1,000 grants. Regular RFP cycle grants range from \$10,000 to \$40,000. Concentrated investment grants are typically larger.

For information regarding grant size as it relates to specific RFPs, please refer to the published RFP documents as they are released.

### **Can I apply for a grant from GCF for a personal need?**

As a community foundation, GCF is legally restricted from funding individuals, including restrictions on scholarships and political campaigns for individual candidates. [Find out more about our available scholarships here.](#)

### **Can my school apply for a grant?**

Individual schools are invited to apply to specific RFP processes designed specifically for the engagement of kids in and out of school: Summertime Kids and Learning Links. GCF does not make grants to individual schools for regular operating costs or capital projects.

### **Can anyone at GCF help me write a proposal?**

GCF does not provide help in writing grant proposals. However, there are several groups that offer in-depth grant writing workshops and training for nonprofits, including the [The Grants Resource Center at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County](#), [The Cincinnati Area Foundation Directory](#), [The Foundation Center](#) and [Ohio Association of Nonprofit Organizations \(OANO\)](#).



### **Are there limits to what type of activities you will fund?**

As a community foundation, GCF is legally restricted from funding:

- Individuals, including scholarships
- Nonprofits (501(c)-) other than charities (501(c)3) unless it can be clearly demonstrated that funds will be used towards public good
- Political campaigns for individual candidates

### **GCF does not typically provide funding for the following purposes, entities or activities:**

- Nonprofits based in our eight counties, but efforts taking place outside of our service area
- Event or conference sponsorship or underwriting
- Production of books, films or videos
- Programs with the sole purpose of re-granting the funds
- Units of government or government agencies
- Lobbying efforts
- Religious organizations that require religious activity for participation
- Playgrounds, sports teams or sports activities
- Regular operating or capital projects for:
  - Individual public, private or parochial schools or universities (including student clubs, school bands, booster clubs, PTAs, etc.) outside of our small grants programs (Learning Links and Summertime Kids)
  - Hospitals
  - Nursing or retirement homes
- Routine computer software/hardware updates
- Vehicles
- Endowment, capital or annual campaigns
- Leasehold improvements
- Debt retirement or funding of an activity after completion
- Loans
- Travel or fees for staff development
- “Emergencies” that don’t affect vulnerable people’s basic human needs

### **What if my organization has an emergency?**

GCF defines a funding emergency as an immediate need for funding to avoid total stop of services of basic needs to vulnerable people. Emergency requests should be sent via email to the Community Strategies Manager or Program Officer and include a clear depiction of the need, the amount of funding required and context related to the urgency of request. Typically, emergency grants are made to standing GCF partners.

## What do you look for in an organization submitting a grant proposal?

Four main characteristics that GCF looks for in an organization submitting a grant proposal are:

- Established and fiscally sound organization. To a limited extent, GCF may consider requests for start-up funding. Groups requesting funding for a new organization must clearly define the need for a new organization and must present a sound business plan that explains how the organization will sustain itself
- Strong governance
- Demonstrated organizational capacity and track record
- Sound short-term and long-range plans

## What do you look for in a grant proposal?

The main things that GCF looks for in a successful grant proposal are:

- Clear alignment to GCF's Community Impact Strategy and/or specified RFP
- Clear demonstration of community need
- Organizational health and readiness, including leadership and finances
- Clear, feasible and sustainable project plan
- Collaboration, coordination and alignment within and across nonprofit sectors
- Support of best practices, innovation and data-driven decision making
- Commitment to inclusion and reducing racial and ethnic disparities
- Continuous improvement; measuring and demonstrating results and learnings

## How do I apply for a grant from a donor advised fund? What about Private Foundations, the Women's Fund and HealthPath?

Donors that have set up donor advised funds at GCF make grants to nonprofit organizations based on their own areas of interest and typically do not accept requests from nonprofit organizations. GCF is committed to connecting the nonprofit community with our donors and are currently working on how to best support both sides of our work.

Application detail for our [private foundation partners](#) as well as the [Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation](#) and the [HealthPath Foundation of Ohio](#) can be found on their respective websites.

## Can you refer me to anyone else for funding?

A good resource for both individuals and nonprofit organizations in the Greater Cincinnati area is the [Grants Resource Center of The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County](#). The Grants Resource Center does not provide funding, but has directories, guides and other resources to help grantseekers identify appropriate funders and develop targeted proposals.

Additionally, referral to other community funders is sometimes made in response to an [Inquiry](#) submission if we know of resources in the community that are aligned to the proposed work.

## Can I get help with your online grants management system?

If you need help setting up a profile on Foundant, our [online grants management system](#), we suggest reviewing these "help" documents:

- [Applicant Tutorial](#) - Please note you also can download this as a Microsoft Word document from this website by clicking on the blue "Download Button" at the top right side of the page.
- [Video Tutorial viewable on YouTube](#)

If you need a contact added to an already established organization account, please [email the GCF Grants Associate](#).

## I have a sponsorship opportunity that GCF might be interested in. How do I submit that opportunity?

Typically, GCF does not sponsor events through our grantmaking process. Sponsorship opportunities can be submitted through our [inquiry](#) tool, as a means to present the idea to GCF staff, or sent to our marketing department at [info@gcfdn.org](mailto:info@gcfdn.org).