



## 2025 Final Grant Selection Committee Guide

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### Timeline

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<b>Wed., Mar. 26</b>	Committee Orientation and beginning of individual application reviews
<b>Week of April 14</b>	Committees meet to discuss and select grant recipients
<b>By Fri., April 18</b>	Committee chairs notify Foundation that selections are complete
<b>Mon., June 2</b>	Foundation emails award packages and decline letters to applicants
<b>Thu., June 26</b>	Grant Winner Celebration

### Questions?

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- Andrew Bishop, deputy director, 781-569-2337, [aeb@cummings.com](mailto:aeb@cummings.com)
- Joyce Vyriotes, executive director, 781-932-7072, [jkv@cummings.com](mailto:jkv@cummings.com)



1. **Connect with your three fellow sub-committee volunteers** to determine a day, time, and location to meet during the week of April 14. (See Andrew's email for their contact information.) In-person meetings are encouraged whenever possible, as they allow for richer conversations.
2. **Read this Committee Guide.**
3. **Read the 15 applications assigned to you.** See the email from Andrew for a link to your Individual Ranking Form (a Google Doc) with your list of applicants, and see page 10 for instructions to view the applications online.
4. **Provide a rank** for each application on your Individual Ranking Form. See page 6 for selection criteria.
5. **Provide feedback** for each application on your Individual Ranking Form. See page 9 for examples.
6. **Meet with your subcommittee.**
7. **Feel great** knowing that your decisions will make a meaningful difference to local nonprofits and the people they serve.

*Out of respect for applicants, and to preserve their trust, we ask volunteers not to share any information learned through this role that is not readily available through public sources. In addition, volunteers should forego their self-interests and never leverage applicant information for personal or professional gain (e.g., soliciting the business of an applicant).*



## *Our Approach to Nonprofits*

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They are the heroes: the nonprofit executive directors who also serve as HR managers, development officers, and marketing managers; the program staff who work diligently and passionately, often for low pay and even less recognition; the volunteers who devote precious free time in service to others. They are the heroes—not us.

We are privileged to be in a position to support their life-changing, barrier-breaking, purpose-igniting work. We are not seeking to judge, eliminate, or vote out. Rather we endeavor to learn and discover synergies so Cummings Foundation can invest in organizations and efforts that match its values and priorities and that have the most meaningful, positive, and sustainable impact on local communities.

Foundation staff and volunteers possess valuable expertise gained through varied professional and personal experiences; however, we recognize and respect the intimate knowledge that nonprofit representatives have of the causes and the people to which they have dedicated their careers. The grant candidates are the true boots-on-the-ground experts, and they deserve not just a seat at the table, but the seat at the head.

***We are most grateful for the participation of our volunteers  
and for the respect they show to all grant candidates.***



## *Our Guiding Principles*

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Having embarked on our collective journey of philanthropy, we pledge to work to help ensure that no one is ever left behind.

Recognizing that the dignity of every human person is fundamental, Cummings Foundation's primary goal is to help meet the most basic needs of all people in all segments of our society.

We will work to improve the lives of those within our priority funding regions by directly supporting the work of effective nonprofit organizations.

And we will endeavor through our local outreach to aid the furthest behind first.

*—Joyce and Bill Cummings*





## About the Cummings \$30 Million Grant Program

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**Amount awarded:** \$30 million

**Number of grantees:** 150

**Geographic eligibility:** Must be headquartered in and primarily serve Middlesex, Essex, and Suffolk counties, plus six communities in Norfolk County: Brookline, Dedham, Milton, Needham, Quincy, and Wellesley.

**Grant terms:** 3 years (125 grants) and 10 years (25 grants)\*

**Annual installments:** \$10,000 - \$100,000



*\*NOTE: This committee should read all applications with a three-year grant in mind. After the 150 grant winners are selected, the next committee will determine which will be elevated to 10-year awards. These longer-term grants are available only to organizations that have received a prior Cummings grant.*

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**Selection process:** Cummings Foundation received 703 letters of inquiry last fall. A volunteer committee selected about half to be invited to submit a full application. A subsequent committee narrowed the applicants to the finalists. Your committee will determine the ultimate grant winners. A fuller description of the review process, including the various committees, is on [the Foundation's website](#).

**Democratized philanthropy:** At least 100 of the 150 grant winners each year are decided completely by volunteers, without input from the Foundation.

**Early Decision grant winners:** Approximately one-third of the 150 grants are determined by Cummings through an internal process. Early Decision grantees may have a longstanding positive relationship with the Cummings organization or be previous grant winners that have been identified as outstanding performers

**Application overview:** A grant application preview is available [online](#). Applicants may choose from two different proposals depending on their desired installment amount.

Requests for installments of \$25,000 or less	Requests for installments of more than \$25,000
Complete the short-form application.	Complete the comprehensive application.
Will be for general operating support.	May be for any type of support.
Do not submit a budget.	Must submit a budget.
Will be evaluated alongside other requests for \$25,000 or less.	Will be evaluated alongside other requests for more than \$25,000.

### WHERE'S THE RUBRIC?

Given the great diversity among grant recipients, Cummings does not have a standard scoring rubric to aid in decision making. Instead, we ask committee members to rely on the key principles below, plus their own valuable experience and good judgment, to determine which applicants should advance in the process.



#### **Impact:**

Please seek opportunities where funding will have the greatest impact, recognizing that impact varies. A nonprofit may serve many people with a light touch or serve a small number of people deeply—both could have significant value.

This program prioritizes small to mid-sized nonprofits without large donor bases or endowments. However, Compelling cases from larger organizations, however, are considered.

### **History of Success:**

Cummings Foundation values the initiative of new nonprofits but prioritizes established organizations with proven community impact and support. Grants may be awarded to newer programs if the nonprofit demonstrates both the need and its ability to deliver.



#### **Population Served:**

Cummings Foundation gives priority to nonprofits that serve people who have been disadvantaged in some way. We greatly appreciate effective programs that work to prevent or counteract intolerance.

### **Substance Over Form:**

Recognizing that applicants have varied expertise with grant writing and the English language, reviewers should prioritize a proposal's mission, need, and effectiveness over grammar or writing style.

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### **ALLOWABLE ACTIVITIES**

*(The items below should **not** negatively affect an applicant.)*



**Requests for a high installment:** CFI prefers that its funding not represent an outsized percentage of an organization's budget. A guideline (more than a rule) is that the installment should not exceed 20 percent of an organization's average annual revenue over the past

three years. If an applicant requests more than 20 percent, however, it should not be disqualified. Rather, make a note of your recommended installment so we can take it into consideration when determining award amounts. The Foundation is open to exceeding this guideline for organizations with strong leadership, a diverse donor base, and early success in expansion efforts.

**Requests for general operating expenses or salaries:** Although a specific program/project may appear more enticing, applicants should not be penalized for requesting general operating or salary support, as these are vital to service delivery. We welcome such requests if the applicant demonstrates a strong mission and impact. Because general operating funds are flexible, applicants need not specify spending details in their narrative or budget.

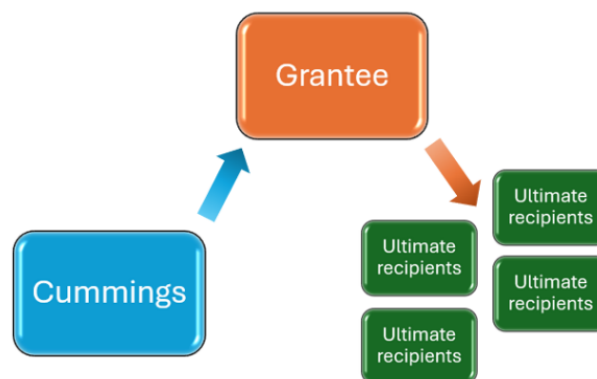
As regards salaries, Cummings Foundation believes nonprofit professionals should receive fair compensation. While passion for social change is important, undervaluing employees can lead to leadership shortages and high turnover. Competitive pay improves retention and strengthens the sector. Compensation should align with employees' expertise and responsibilities, as well as the organization's budget and mission.



**Recycled proposal language:** Recognizing that nonprofits have limited fundraising capacity, we encourage the reuse of content from previous proposals, where appropriate. We view this as “working smarter, not harder.” Proposals should be updated as needed to reflect current activities and circumstances.

**Lack of a stated plan for after the grant term:** You may wonder, “How will the organization continue the program after the grant funding ends?” Nonprofits continuously fundraise to sustain programs beyond grant funding. We trust organizations to develop long-term strategies and do not require detailed sustainability plans.

**Raising funds to re-grant:** CFI supports intermediary grant-makers that distribute funds to other organizations or individuals, recognizing their deep expertise in specific causes or populations. These organizations should demonstrate strong systems for vetting funding requests and ensuring due diligence.



**Proposals from previously declined applicants:** Many organizations apply multiple times before receiving a grant, often improving proposals based on feedback. Factors like proposal volume in certain categories and organizational growth can also impact funding decisions. Reviewers should assess the current proposal on its merits, not past applications.



**Requests from fiscally sponsored organizations:** Fiscal sponsorship allows a nonprofit to extend its tax-exempt status to another group, handling donations and ensuring funds are used appropriately. While CFI considers requests from fiscally sponsored organizations, it prioritizes those with their own 501(c)(3) status due to greater transparency and IRS oversight.

### PRE-MEETING

- **Review your assigned applications** at any time by logging into Foundant. See page 10 for step-by-step instructions.
- **Contact applicants to additional information** if necessary. (Contact details are at the top of each application.)
- **Rank each application** in the Initial Rank column of your Individual Ranking Form (Google Doc link in email from Andrew) Use each number only once; 1 = most worthy.
- **Provide brief feedback for every application** in your Individual Ranking Form. This is essential, as Foundation staff use it when nonprofits request feedback. Please provide a few sentences or phrases that describe the thinking behind your decision (rather than general facts about the proposal). Because *you* are making the funding decision, CFI is relying on you to provide the insights behind these decisions. See page 9 for sample feedback.



### COMMITTEE MEETING (led by chairperson)

- Add each applicant's rankings from all four committee members (e.g., rankings of 4, 10, 8, and 7 = 29). Totals will range from 4 to 60. Record these numbers in the Initial Rank column of the *Committee* Ranking Form. The group totals will indicate clear grant winners (lowest numbers) and clear declines (highest numbers).
- **Discuss the applications in the middle.** All members are encouraged to share their thoughts on the relative merits of each proposal.
- **Re-rank applications individually** in the Final Rank column of the Individual Ranking Forms. Rankings may change based on discussion, but Initial Rank entries shouldn't change.
- **Calculate the new totals** using the Final Rank numbers, and record them in the Final Rank column of the *Committee* Ranking Form. The nine applicants with the highest rankings (i.e., lowest totals) will receive grants.
- **Recommend alternative installments**, where appropriate. Although the application asks for applicants' preference, the Foundation determines actual installment amounts. If you feel that a different amount than the one requested would be more appropriate, please note it in the Feedback column on the *Committee* Ranking Form.

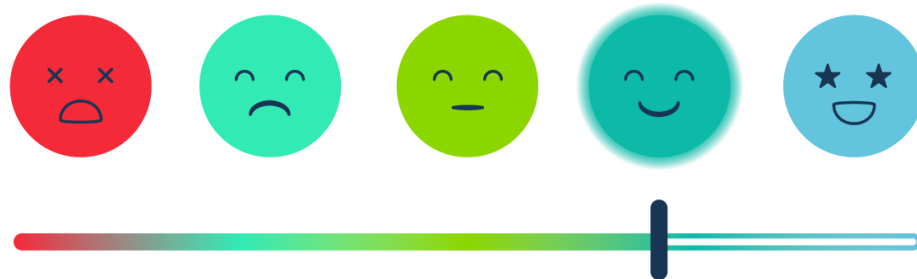
### POST-MEETING (chairs)

- **Complete the Committee Ranking Form and alert Andrew**, who will download all the forms from Google Drive. The Committee Ranking Form should show the final totals (rather than a 1 through 15 ranking). Please also indicate the winners by checking the appropriate boxes.

## SAMPLE FEEDBACK

### Positive:

- Extremely compelling case statement with specific goals and strong impact on the lives of their students. While perhaps not affecting the large numbers of people as other proposals, it will make a huge difference in the lives of students they help.
- Impactful program filling a critical need. The need will only increase going forward.
- Relatively small but comprehensive program offering essential support to life's most struggling populations. They seem to do a lot with a large volunteer and small paid staff who are dedicated to their important mission.
- Provide valuable service. Very heavily volunteer oriented. Grant would have a meaningful impact on the organization.
- Not life and death but the program provides an important service at a critical time in the lives of those it serves. Very targeted use of the grant money.



### Negative:

- The request does not appear to be targeted toward a Cummings geographic priority area. There is not convincing information on how this playground will enhance science and arts learning.
- A good program but the situation of the population served is not as dire as some with some other social justice programs.
- This proposal is quite confusing and not clear about what they hope to accomplish. The language is difficult to understand, and looking at their web site did not clarify either. I wonder how effective it can be if they are not able to communicate clearly their goals and method of operation.



## **Foundant Instructions**

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*For data privacy and to protect the information of applicants/grantees, the Foundation does not make its grants management system user guide publicly available. Volunteers on grant selection and site visits committees are provided with access to applicant/grantee materials (e.g., letters of inquiry, applications, impact reports, site visit reports, contact records) to be well informed and adequately carry out relevant activities while representing Cummings Foundation.*