

Cummings \$30MILLION GRANT PROGRAM

2023 Final Grant Selection Committee Guide

Thank you for participating in Cummings Foundation’s 2023 grants cycle, through which a total of \$30 million will be awarded to 150 local nonprofits. As a member of the Final Grant Selection Committee, you will be making the most challenging decisions of the selection process. We have great confidence, however, that your varied backgrounds, experiences, and insights will enable you to choose the most promising nonprofits to receive this significant funding.

- Andrew Bishop, grants manager, 781-569-2337, aeb@cummings.com
(for general questions or further committee guidance)
- Katie Torrey, grants coordinator, 781-569-2335, kmt@cummings.com
(for technical questions related to Foundant)
- Joyce Vyriotes, executive director, 781-932-7072, jkv@cummings.com
(for general questions or further committee guidance)

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Timeline

- Tuesday, March 14** Committee Orientation and beginning of individual application reviews
- Week of April 3** Committees meet to discuss and select grant recipients
- By Friday, April 7** Committee chairs notify Foundation that selections are complete
- Monday, May 22** Foundation emails award packages and decline letters to applicants
- Thursday, June 15** Grant Winner Celebration



Our Approach to Nonprofits

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, equity-promoting, 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 respect the beliefs of diverse populations and the uniqueness of individuals, and we believe that all people deserve to live with dignity and to have the opportunity to improve their circumstances. We recognize that we all have biases, but we strive to be aware of them, set them aside, and eliminate them from our thinking, questions, and comments. We welcome candid reminders from others when we demonstrate an unconscious bias.

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

Our Guiding Principles

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 seek to promote and empower the social and economic inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or other status.

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

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

—*Bill and Joyce Cummings*



This “color wheel” is a photo of the actual pin presented to Bill Cummings when he spoke at the United Nations in June 2019. Many of the words and sentiments here were inspired by portions of the United Nations’ document “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” Cummings Foundation, Inc. supports the [SDGs](#).

About the Cummings \$30 Million Grant Program

This initiative awards a total of \$30 million every year to 150 nonprofits that are based in, and primarily serve, Middlesex, Essex, and Suffolk counties. You are one of about 80 generous, insightful volunteers who, together with Cummings Foundation, Inc. (CFI), will identify 150 organizations to receive three-year grants of \$30,000 - \$300,000 each. Among the winners will be first-time recipients as well as nonprofits that have previously received grants from Cummings Foundation. From among those winners who are repeat recipients, a separate committee will select 25 to be elevated to 10-year awards, ranging from a total of \$100,000 to \$1million each.



At least half of the 150 grant winners each year are decided completely by volunteers. Accordingly, you and other members of the Final Grant Selection Committee will collectively determine more than 75 award recipients. To accomplish this, each of the 10 committees will evaluate and score 12-15 applications. Between seven and 10 of the top-scoring nonprofits from each committee will be awarded grants. Other grants are decided internally by Foundation staff and are considered “Early Decision” winners. In the event there are extra Early Decision slots, the Foundation will typically look to the committees’ “runners up.”

All applications should have been written with three-year awards in mind, with annual installments ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000. Decisions about which *repeat* grant winners will have their three-year awards elevated to long-term grants will take place following this committee’s work by another group of volunteers.



Selection Guidelines

Each applicant has already undergone three prior evaluations (LOI, application, and financial health) by five different volunteers. Given the great diversity among grant recipients, we do 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 the grant winners.

Impact

Transformative. Game-changer. These are words grant winners often use to describe their Cummings grants. Please look for opportunities where grant funding would have the greatest impact, bearing in mind that impact can take many forms. One nonprofit may serve a large number of people, whereas another organization might serve a much smaller number, but in a long-term or in-depth manner. Both could provide enormous value.

Preferring that grant funds not be “drops in a bucket,” this program primarily supports small and medium-sized charities that do not enjoy the robust donor bases and endowments that generously support many larger institutions. The Foundation *is*, however, open to awarding grants to larger organizations when they have presented compelling cases as to why they need *this* funding.

History of Success

Cummings applauds the initiative of newly formed nonprofits that seek to meet community needs. Given the significant size of these grants, however, the Foundation gives priority to *established* nonprofits with a *proven history* of providing value to the community. Grants may be awarded to fund new programs of established nonprofits if the application successfully demonstrates the need for the program and the organization’s capacity to fill that need.

Population Served

The Foundation gives priority to nonprofits that serve people who have been disadvantaged or marginalized in some way. We greatly appreciate effective programs that work to prevent or counteract discrimination due to race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, citizenship status, age, physical disability, etc.

Other Considerations

Fiscal Sponsorship

Fiscal sponsorship is when a nonprofit extends its tax-exempt status to another group. The fiscal sponsor accepts tax deductible donations on behalf of the sponsored project/organization, and accepts responsibility for the use of those funds, ensuring their application toward the intended charitable purposes. Although CFI will consider requests from organizations that have fiscal sponsors, it is more likely to fund organizations that have their own 501(c)(3) statuses because of the transparency and IRS oversight that accompanies that designation.

Grant-makers

CFI changed its eligibility requirements a few years ago to allow requests from grant-makers, which are organizations that raise funds to then pass on to other organizations or to individuals, rather than providing their own services or programs. Grant-makers should demonstrate that they have systems and expertise in place to ensure due diligence when vetting funding requests.

Pre-meeting

- **Review your assigned applications** at any time by logging into Foundant, our online grants management system. See *Foundant Instructions* (page 6) for step-by-step instructions.
- Feel free to **contact applicants to request further information** or clarification if you wish. (Contact information is at the top of each application in Foundant.)
- **Complete your Individual Ranking Form** (Google Doc link was sent via email), providing a ranking (with 1 being the most worthy of a grant) in the Initial Rank column.
- On the same Google Doc, **provide brief feedback for every application**. This column is extremely important, as this is where CFI staff members look when nonprofits call seeking feedback. Because you are making the funding decision, CFI is relying on you to provide the insights behind these decisions. Although many foundations do not provide such feedback, we are dedicated to showing respect for the time and effort nonprofits invest in these applications and to helping them be more successful in their future grant-seeking efforts.



Committee Meeting (led by chairperson)

- The chair will **add the rankings** assigned to each applicant by the four committee members. For example, a nonprofit with rankings of 4, 10, 8, and 7 would have a combined total of 29. The totals will range, for example, from a potential low of 4 to a potential high of 56 for committees with 14 applications. The chair will enter these numbers in the Initial Rank column of the *Committee Ranking Form*.

The group totals will show where there is already consensus about applications that should be approved for grants (those with very low totals) as well as those that should be declined (those with very high totals).

- **Discuss the applications that fall in the middle.** All members are encouraged to share their thoughts on the relative merits of each proposal.
- Allow a few minutes for committee members to **individually rank the applications once again**, this time using the *Final Rank* columns on their Individual Ranking Forms. As a result of the discussion, members may opt to assign different rankings than they did originally (but please do not change their rankings from the Initial Ranking column).
- The chair will **calculate the new totals** for each applicant by adding the rankings assigned by the four committee members in their Final Rank columns. The chair will enter these totals in the Final Rank column of the *Committee Ranking Form*. At least seven of the applicants with the lowest totals (i.e., highest rankings) will receive grants.

Post-meeting

- Committee chairs are asked to **complete the Committee Ranking Form and alert Andrew that the committee has made and recorded its decisions**. The Foundation will then download all Individual and Committee Ranking Forms from Google Drive. The Committee Ranking Form should show the final totals (rather than a 1 through 14 ranking). Please also indicate the seven winners by checking the appropriate boxes.
- The 10 committees' selected applicants will be combined with the Early Decision list to create the complete list of this year's 150 grant winners.

Foundant Instructions

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.