CONNECTING to the community

2026 Connecting to the Community Grant Winners

NourishMKE -$2,500
NourishMKE is Milwaukee's largest network of free community food centers, operating four locations that serve distinct neighborhoods while promoting dignity, connection, and access to healthy food. The Rotary Club of Milwaukee's $2,500 grant will support NourishMKE's 2026 home delivery program, which delivers free groceries directly to residents facing mobility or access barriers. The program helps reduce the economic burden of accessing food while enabling participants to age in place and maintain a higher quality of life at home. Research over the past two decades shows that seniors and individuals living with disabilities often have limited access to essential nutrients, increasing the risk and severity of chronic conditions such as hypertension, asthma, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

WUWM 89.7 - Milwaukee's NPR - $2,500
WUWM is Milwaukee's NPR station, dedicated to delivering trusted, community-centered journalism that informs and connects the region. This $2,500 grant from our club will support the Eric Von Broadcast Fellowship, which provides paid, hands-on training and mentorship for emerging journalists from underrepresented backgrounds, helping amplify diverse voices and strengthen equitable storytelling in Milwaukee. Through this support, fellows are able to develop impactful, locally focused reporting that reflects the lived experiences and perspectives of the communities they serve.

BizStarts - $5,000
For more than a decade, BizStarts has empowered entrepreneurs from all backgrounds by providing the education, mentorship, and resources needed to navigate the challenges of building and growing successful businesses, while fostering a more inclusive and equitable business community across Milwaukee.
This $5,000 grant from our club will help sustain BizStarts' year-round business education programs, including workshops, business institutes, individualized coaching, and multilingual resources that equip underserved entrepreneurs with the skills, confidence, and support needed to launch and expand their ventures.
By investing in this work, the grant will help strengthen economic opportunity, support small business development, and create a more vibrant and equitable local economy.

Art Intersection MKE - $5,000
Art Intersection MKE Community Partners is a Milwaukee-based nonprofit that transforms underutilized spaces into vibrant community hubs through public art, environmental sustainability, and neighborhood engagement. Its Outdoor Gallery in the Washington Park neighborhood combines large-scale murals and sculptures with green infrastructure, free public programming, and educational opportunities centered on art, science, and community connection. This $5,000 grant will support a free intergenerational program that combines community gardening, environmental education, and creative arts activities for Washington Park residents. Funding will help provide accessible raised garden beds, horticulture workshops, stormwater and air quality education, rain barrels, and artist-led creative programming designed to improve food access, environmental stewardship, and neighborhood connection.

The Ability Center - $5,000
The Ability Center is dedicated to ensuring people impacted by disabilities have equal opportunities to be active, healthy, and engaged through inclusive recreation and wellness programs in Milwaukee.

Through its nationally recognized RampUp program, the organization works to remove physical barriers in public spaces by providing accessible infrastructure and adaptive recreational equipment at no cost to users. This $5,000 grant will support critical repairs and upgrades to the accessible pathways at Bradford Beach, helping preserve safe, barrier-free access to Lake Michigan for people of all abilities.

Walker's Point Youth & Family Center - $5,000
Walker's Point Youth & Family Center provides emergency shelter, counseling, case management, and supportive housing services for runaway and homeless youth across Milwaukee. This $5,000 grant will support Shelter and Transitional Case Management services for youth ages 17–24, helping them transition from crisis shelter into stable housing, adult support systems, and long-term self-sufficiency.

2025 Connecting to the Community Grant Winners

Wisconsin Bike Federation - $5,000
Wisconsin Bike Fed Offers Free Cycling Without Age Trishaw Pilot Training in Milwaukee County » Urban Milwaukee. The Bike Fed champions transportation justice and ensures equitable access to safe means of transportation for all residents of our state. They cultivate, motivate and unite a strong community to move bicycling forward through education, legislation and involvement, and aim to make Wisconsin one of the best places in the world to ride a bike. This grant will support their High School Active Transportation Academy, which is intended to introduce high school students to transit alternatives to driving, including bicycling, walking and taking public transportation, as well as the planning, policies and infrastructure that support these options. Students will be empowered to make informed transit options, help advocate for them and role model these activities to friends and family.

Community Center for Immigrants - $5,000
Community Center for Immigrants (CCI) facilitates integration and fosters self-sufficiency in the immigrant community by providing English and Citizenship education programs and immigration legal services. CCI's English and Citizenship education program focuses on adult education as an essential component of the integration process. Our courses build linguistic confidence, encourage the use of English outside the classroom, and prepare students for the naturalization exam. This grant will allow CCI to expand education programs that have demonstrated measurable success. With additional funding, CCI will reduce class waitlists by 75 percent and provide English and Citizenship preparation classes to 50 additional participants within the grant period.

Radio Milwaukee - $5,000
Radio Milwaukee's Urban Alternative station, HYFIN, utilizes airwaves, digital stream, and its ever-increasing social media reach to amplify the music and stories of Milwaukee's Black community. Launched on Juneteenth in 2022, HYFIN is Milwaukee's only Black-centric public radio station. More than just a media outlet, HYFIN is an economic and cultural force—spotlighting Black-owned businesses, celebrating creative excellence, and empowering entrepreneurs. HYFIN's economic empowerment work goes hand-in-hand with its dedication to music and the arts.

"I Have a Dream" Foundation - Milwaukee - $5,000
"I Have a Dream" Foundation-Milwaukee (IHDF-MKE) empowers youth to thrive at school, at home, and in the community by providing individualized social, emotional, academic, and family support from first grade to first job, along with guaranteed post-secondary tuition assistance. Our vision is a world where every child has equal access to the educational, enrichment, and career opportunities that will ignite their innate potential. This grant will help to implement a comprehensive, integrated school-based mental health services program for 100

third grade Dreamers and their families including mental health assessments, individual and family therapy, parent education workshops, and summer programming.

Bernie's Book Bank - Greater Milwaukee - $2,500
Bernie's Book Bank creates pathways to success through book ownership among children ages birth through sixth grade in Greater Milwaukee, ensuring that under-resourced children have equitable access to high-quality books in their home, a fundamental tool for academic success. More than 61% of low-income households in America have zero children's books, and for many children, a Bernie's Book Bank delivery is the first time they've ever owned a book of their own. Book ownership is one of the strongest predictors of academic achievement, and yet systemic inequities continue to limit access to this critical resource for Milwaukee's most vulnerable students. This grant will be used to procure bilingual books and books that feature characters of color.

Grand Avenue Club - $2,500
The mission of Grand Avenue Club is to provide Milwaukee-area adults who experience mental illness with employment, educational, and enrichment programming. We are a welcoming, non-clinical community that focuses on providing meaningful opportunities for our members. We are a "Community that Works". This grant will support the Culinary Unit which plays a vital role in delivering healthy, nutritious meals to adults living with mental illness, aligning directly with GAC's mission to foster community, enrichment, and recovery. Funds will help secure essential food items—such as eggs, fresh produce, oils, and spices—that are regularly unavailable through donations from generous partners. Nutrition is especially important for individuals with mental illness, as healthy food contributes to better mood stability, cognitive function, and overall well-being.

2024 Connecting to the Community Grant Winners

First Stage - $2,500
First Stage touches hearts, engages minds, and transforms lives by creating extraordinary theater experiences for young people and families. Aiming to overcome the financial and transportation barriers that often prevent low-to-moderate income families from attending theater performances and enrolling in arts programs, First Stage will bring theater to them with IN MY GRANNY'S GARDEN—an interactive touring production suited for children (ages 0-5) and their caregivers. Based on the book by Pearl Cleage, IN MY GRANNY'S GARDEN helps young audiences understand that food doesn't just come from the grocery store: it's grown in the ground. This grant will help First Stage bring theater and its benefits directly to children and families historically excluded from professional arts experiences due to economic disparities and hardship.

America's Black Holocaust Museum (ABHM) - $5,000
A*merica's Black Holocaust Museum (ABHM) is an integrated virtual and physical museum experience which serves as a catalyst to educate visitors around our collective history, promotes healing, and empowers us all to be agents for change. This grant will support exhibit rotations by using archival best practices to properly handle, clean, move, and catalog artifacts currently stored in three different storage facilities to one newly acquired storage facility near the museum. Suitably caring for and preparing collections will allow ABHM to share even more history and perspectives with in-person and virtual visitors*.

Forward Scholars (FS) - $5,000
Forward Scholars (FS) helps Kindergarten through 3rd grade Milwaukee Public School (MPS) students reach grade level in reading. Trained community volunteers provide one-to-one, research-based tutoring to over 200 students twice each week during school hours in seven schools. Students are provided individualized lesson plans which utilize high quality, culturally relevant, leveled, and decodable texts for practice. This grant will be

used to purchase student supplies such as culturally relevant books/texts, certificates, school supplies, sticker charts, book bags and celebration treats.

Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Initiative (MHVI) - $2,500
MHVI is dedicated to serving homeless and at-risk veterans throughout Wisconsin, with the majority served in the greater Milwaukee area. This grant will fund emergency transportation expenses. Transportation is one of the most common barriers veterans face so MHVI provides bus tickets or gas cards for veterans to remove those barriers.

Charles Allis Art Museum and Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum - $5,000
This grant will help convert the Great Hall at the Charles Allis Art Museum, a nationally recognized historical space, to "The Hall," an open-to-the-public, free art gallery for Milwaukee Public School middle and high school students.

2023 Connecting to the Community Grant Winners

Walnut Way Conservation Corp – $5,000
Walnut Way Conservation Corp. is a resident-led neighborhood organization located in Milwaukee's north side Lindsay Heights neighborhood. The Equity Program (AEP) provides affordable computers and digital literacy to Lindsay Heights residents through an exciting new partnership with PCs for People, Microsoft AirBand, and EveryoneOn. This project allows Walnut Way to create a platform for increasing the digital literacy and competency of residents over time and is an essential component to the overall vision of racial equity and access, as it impacts education, employment, healthcare, civic participation, and access to goods and services.

Kinship Community Food Center – $5,000
Kinship Community Food Center is a community food center that engages volunteers and neighborhood residents to end hunger, isolation, and poverty. Research shows that shoppers care deeply about the nutritional quality of food options in pantries and are supportive of strategies to help them make healthier choices. As such, Kinship is a choice market where shoppers select from an assortment of fresh breads, fruits and vegetables, quality meats, and other staple foods. Beyond the fresh food market, Kinship integrates health education, cooking demonstrations, a breakfast/dinner bar, and connections to community resources. Through frequent visits to the fresh food market, people build community, improve their health, and address other areas of instability.

Sojourner Family Peace Center – $2,500
Sojourner strives to ensure the safety of survivors of domestic violence and provide a pathway out of violence through opportunities to make positive and lasting changes for survivors and their children. Often survivors become homeless when leaving their abuser. Sojourner offers assistance with security deposits and first month's rent to help survivors cover the costs associated with gaining their independence. For many domestic violence survivors, securing basic necessities while navigating violence is a challenge faced daily. Without access to safety, shelter, and reliable sources of food, a survivor's physical and mental health remain at risk. Sojourner connects survivors to resources and education that can redirect the course of their lives. Living without fear, gaining confidence, obtaining a place to live and food to nourish their bodies and minds are attainable goals and something every person deserves.

Pathfinders – $5,000
Without a safe place to sleep each night, every homeless young person in Milwaukee faces enormous barriers to well-being. Housing instability takes a massive toll on young people – research shows that experiencing

homelessness early in life is one of the strongest predictors of a lifetime of housing instability, trauma, poor health, and poverty. Though largely invisible, estimates indicate that about 15,000 Milwaukeeans under age 26 (more than 5,000 of whom are MPS students) experience homelessness each year. Pathfinders knows that safe and stable housing is essential to end youth homelessness in Milwaukee. This grant will support Pathfinder's Supported Housing program, a critical component of in the spectrum of services, investing in safe and stable housing for young adults ages 16-25 using the evidence-based Housing First approach.

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin – $10,000
In honor of the Rotary Club of Milwaukee's 110th anniversary, a special grant was awarded to Feeding American Eastern Wisconsin, a legacy project of the Club. Founded as Second Harvest of Wisconsin, Feeding America now works collaboratively with their network of pantries and meal sites, volunteers, community leaders, and other partners to ensure people not only have enough healthy, nutritious food to eat, but also have the resources to build a pathway to stability. 1 in 8 people—and 1 in 5 children—do not know where their next meal is coming from in Wisconsin. With this grant, Feeding America will eliminate their Shared Maintenance Fee, which will help pay for the costs of transporting, handling and storing donated food. This will remove barriers to distributing food at local pantries throughout the state.

Nearby Nature Milwaukee – $2,500
Nearby Nature Milwaukee promotes environmental equity by focusing on education and engagement in the African American community. A history of systemic racism has left the Lincoln Creek Greenway neighborhoods lacking access and amenities that are abundant on greenways in white communities. Specifically focusing on "Hopkins Hollow", Nearby Nature is working on a half-acre urban prairie restoration, the maintenance of a volunteer-built demonstration trail and wildlife surveys, developing the space into a living laboratory and educational nature preserve.

Sharp Literacy – $5,000
Established in 2014, SHARP's Summer Learning Program (SLP) partners with Community Learning Centers and MPS, providing innovative hands-on programming to combat students loss of academic progress over the summer due to lack of educational opportunities or "summer slide". The eight-week art and technology-based program serves 1,000 K-5th graders, keeping children engaged and learning – developing skills, exploring new interests and building relationships – positively impacting academic and personal growth. SLP helps address educational disparities, giving students from low-income families opportunities. To mitigate ongoing pandemic-related learning loss, we focus on narrowing academic gaps, providing activities that address social/emotional learning (SEL), providing a purposeful and joyful summer experience.

River Revitalization Foundation (RRF) – $10,000 (2023 and 2024)
In honor of the Rotary Club of Milwaukee's 110th anniversary, a special grant was awarded to the River Revitalization Foundation (RRF), a legacy project of the Club. The RRF was co-founded by the Rotary Club of Milwaukee and Kiwanis in 1994 to revitalize the neighborhoods surrounding Milwaukee's three rivers and to improve water quality. A signature initiative of RRF is the Summer Internship Program which offers employment opportunities for high school students, specifically targeting students of color. The program provides environmentally focused work experience such as restoring wildlife habitat, improving public access and promoting recreation in our urban greenspaces. The interns also lead groups of volunteers assisting with projects in the field and lead hikes along the trails in the river valley to build a sense of community and engagement. Participation in the program works toward dismantling racism within the conservation field, a sector with the current majority white, by building a conservation ethic in young folks that will be the future leaders in the field. In 2022, interns enhanced 7 acres of urban wildlife habitat, maintained 1-mile of trail and led 16 volunteer work days, among other accomplishments.

2022 Connecting to the Community Grant Winners

Milwaukee Academy of Science - $10,000
Students and families at Milwaukee Academy of Science have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. This school year, academic leaders noticed a significant drop in elementary literacy scores due to extended virtual learning during formative years and inconsistent attendance. This grant will fund an early literacy intervention program called Next Level Novas. This program allows for one-on-one tutoring that meets the specific needs identified by teachers and administrators of K4-2nd grade students.

YWCA of Southeastern WI - $5,000
YWCA SEW's has #OneMission: to eliminate racism and empower women. Its Economic Empowerment Program serves this work with three current pillars: Adult Education, Personal Financial Literacy, and the Opportunity Advancement Center. This grant will support the creation of a new mentoring program. This expanded mentoring model will be designed with the input of the program participants themselves beginning this summer and is supported by a collaboration of funders (including Milwaukee Rotary) through 2024.

Acts Housing - $5,000
Families who purchase homes with the support of Acts programs create stability, financial security, and generational wealth by exiting the rental market and reducing monthly housing expenses. These extra funds can be used to purchase food, repair a vehicle, or invest in the home. Acts Housing provides financial education, lending support, real estate services and home rehab coaching all under one roof. This improves the likelihood of success because families receive a more comprehensive experience and Acts team members are in constant communication bringing additional expertise and resources to the table.

Money Coach, SecureFutures - $5,000
Studies show a lack of financial literacy among Wisconsin residents - many living paycheck to paycheck with a lack of emergency savings. Money Coach, a one-of-a-kind financial mentoring program provided through SecureFutures, provides teens from under-resourced Milwaukee communities with the coaching and guidance needed to develop strong money management habits and long-term financial capability. Teens are matched with volunteer mentors from the business community who teach financial literacy and provide one-on-one guidance. Students have the opportunity to earn a college/career scholarship giving them the opportunity to practice managing money while working alongside a trusted, caring coach.

Milwaukee Habitat for Humanity Women Build -- $5,000
Milwaukee is in the midst of an affordable housing crisis. The most common barriers to homeownership include large down payments, rising housing costs, and denial of affordable loans. Milwaukee Habitat helps families become first-time homebuyers. Habitat homeowners help build their own homes alongside volunteers and pay an affordable mortgage. The Milwaukee Habitat Women Build will bring together women from across the area August 3rd - 6th to build homes and break down barriers alongside future homeowners.