

Lancaster Thrives Together (2026)

The [Lancaster County Racial Equity Profile](#) indicates that while many Lancaster County residents enjoy a sense of comfort and prosperity, the poverty rate here is 10%. According to [UnitedForAlice.org](#), an additional 27% of people have difficulty affording the increasing cost of living. With so many people affected by economic hardship, we are prioritizing upstream solutions that address these challenges.

Building on an impactful grant program introduced in 2025, Lancaster Thrives Together is a \$500,000 competitive grant opportunity for community benefit organizations (CBOs) serving Lancaster County residents. Organizational grants will range from \$10,000 - \$50,000, with a limit of one application per CBO.

In 2026, the program will focus on initiatives centered on **education, upskilling, and job training and placement**—specifically as strategies to move our most economically vulnerable neighbors to long-term self-sufficiency.

Lancaster County's Equity Profile highlights a persistent education gap as a key driver of the disproportionate challenges faced by underserved communities, which are more likely to experience unemployment and ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) conditions. To address these disparities, we seek career advancement projects demonstrating strong community leadership, systems-level change, and innovation. Our priority is funding solutions designed for lasting impact rather than short-term fixes.

Virtual Office Hours

Questions? Join the Programs Team for our Virtual Office Hours. You may drop in at any time during either 90-minute session.

March 18, 10:00 – 11:30 am → [Register Here](#)

April 16, 10:00 – 11:30 am → [Register Here](#)

Eligibility Requirements

Applicant organization must:

- Serve Lancaster County residents without discrimination.
- Have current 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS.
- Be registered with the Pennsylvania Bureau of Charitable Organizations unless otherwise exempt per the Institutions of Purely Public Charity Act.
- Complete IRS Form 990 annually.

- Have an annual audit or a financial review by an independent CPA within the last 12 months.
- Be in good standing with all existing awards and contracts with the Lancaster County Community Foundation.
- Provide organizational Non-Discrimination Policy meeting all federal requirements as it applies to your type of organization ([FAQs](#)).
- Be aware of the Community Foundation's [Anti-Hate Policy](#).

Visit our website for additional information about eligibility: [Eligibility Requirements](#)

Application Process

1. Submit an Eligibility Screen (formerly Letter of Intent) on our online [Grant Portal](#) by **11:59 pm on Wednesday, July 8**. You will be asked to provide basic organizational information and a brief description of your proposed project. If you would like to receive feedback on your application, please note the earlier deadlines listed below.
2. Within three (3) business days, Community Foundation staff will review your Eligibility Screen. Once your eligibility has been confirmed, you will be given access to the grant application.
3. Submit your application by the final deadline, **11:59 pm on Wednesday, July 15**.

Feedback & Important Dates

If you want to receive feedback from Foundation staff on your application, please observe these deadlines:

- June 10 – Submit Eligibility Screen
- June 17 – Submit draft application
- July 8 – Foundation staff will provide application feedback
- July 15 – Submit final application

If you do not want to receive feedback (or miss the deadlines above):

- July 8 – Submit Eligibility Screen
- July 15 – Submit application

Additional important dates:

- September 18 – Award notifications issued; Grant funding period begins
- September 18, 2026 – September 18, 2027 – Duration of grant funding period

- October 18, 2027 – Grant impact report due

Application Questions

- **Vision** – Describe your project idea centered on education, upskilling, or job training/placement, and what problem it addresses for Lancaster County’s unemployed or ALICE residents. Describe the intended transformation. (2,000 characters)
- **Leadership, Systems-Level Change, & Innovation** – How does your strategy go beyond doing business as usual in Lancaster County to create more impact for our neighbors? (2,000 characters)
- **Plan** – Describe how you will implement this project, including project timeline, key milestones, and who will be responsible for each phase. You may present this as a bulleted list or narrative. (2,000 characters)
- **Spending** – Instead of asking for a budget, we want to get a general sense of how you’d use the grant funds. Provide a short description of the kinds of things you would spend the requested grant funds on. (2,000 characters)
- **Goals & Achievements** - What are your project goals? How will you evaluate your results and/or achievements? Be as specific as possible. (2,000 characters)
- **Underserved Communities** – How are you creating a level playing field for our neighbors, lifting up those most in need? How does this project address issues identified in [Lancaster's Equity Profile](#)? (2,000 characters)
- **Additional Comments (Optional)** – What else would you like us to know about your project? (1,000 characters)

Evaluation Criteria

Community grant reviewers will use the following questions to evaluate and score applications:

- **Vision** – To what extent does the applicant demonstrate a vision for change as it relates to education, upskilling, or job training/placement for unemployed or ALICE residents?
- **Leadership, Systems-Level Change, & Innovation** – To what extent does the application demonstrate bold new thinking needed to be effective in the long-term?
- **Plan** – To what extent does the response outline an effective plan for project implementation?

- **Goals & Achievements** – To what extent does the response outline and evaluate attainable and impactful goals?
- **Underserved Communities** - To what extent is the organization committed to creating a level economic playing field for all residents, and have they considered the Lancaster Equity Profile?

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is ALICE?

ALICE is an acronym that stands for “Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed.” According to the United Way of Pennsylvania, it represents the 27% of Lancaster County residents who work but still struggle to survive. ALICE folks earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but not enough to comfortably afford basic essentials. For more information, visit <https://www.uwp.org/alice/about-alice/>.

What is the Lancaster Racial Equity Profile?

In 2021, many local funding and social service agencies sponsored the National Equity Atlas, a partnership between PolicyLink and USC Dornsife Equity Research Institute, to complete an equity profile of Lancaster County – the very first county-wide racial equity profile in Pennsylvania. The report contains a wealth of information about our demographics, and how segregation and unequal opportunities persist. Please read the report and consider how your organization might address some of the problems that have been identified at <https://ywcalan Lancaster.org/repgroup>.

Why is the Community Foundation focusing on “underserved communities?”

Recognizing that some of our neighbors have historically not been included and represented in many past projects, we are doing our part to ensure future projects create meaningful opportunities for all residents, particularly those who bear the brunt of disproportionate economic prosperity.

Does the proposed project need to be new, or can it be an existing project?

Our preference is to fund brand new ideas that will bring systems change for Lancaster County. We will accept concepts that have been tried in other regions and are being brought to Lancaster County for the first time. We will also accept applications for existing projects, if it can be demonstrated that the organization is adapting the project for long-term success in a meaningful way.

Are there specific start dates for projects?

By default, grants will have one year duration, beginning September 18. If your organization would need more time to complete the project, please contact us and we will be happy to work with you on a timeline that better suits your project.

How many awards do you anticipate making?

This initiative has a budget of \$500,000. It's likely that we will be able to make 15-20 grants.

Is funding renewable?

Funding is a one-time award and not renewable.

Will the Community Foundation be looking for letters of support from project partners?

No. Rather, we encourage you to describe partnerships in the application itself.

Can project partners be located outside of Lancaster County?

Yes. We don't require that any of the organizations (applicant or partners) be physically headquartered in Lancaster County. However, the proposed project activities must primarily benefit Lancaster County's residents.

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