

# Vibrant Spaces Grant



## APPLICATION CHECKLIST AND INSTRUCTIONS

### Network Wisconsin

Applicants will be required to submit applications through Network Wisconsin. Contact your Regional Economic Development Director to receive a grant application and instructions on how to use Network Wisconsin. WEDC Regional Director map and contact info.: [wedc.org/regional](http://wedc.org/regional)

### Project Deliverables

All project contracts will require:

- Start the project in WEDC's FY26. End the project and final performance report within two (2) years.
- Photos of the completed project
- WEDC logo on project signage
- Narrative identifying project impact including: the increase in the number and type of audiences using the space, impact on nearby businesses, number of events held

### Application Checklist

- 1) Municipal resolution to apply.
- 2) Relevant community plan, records/minutes indicating previous project identification/discussion and/or letters of support that identify the project as a positive community investment.
- 3) Completed budget and cost estimates.
- 4) Photos and plans for the space (pictures of the amenities to be installed or project renderings).

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Project Selection

#### **Project elements:**

- 1) My space is specifically designed for one use, but will be open to others to use, is it eligible? **Answer:** No, projects must accommodate multiple uses.
- 2) Is a project to build new pickle ball courts eligible? **Answer:** No, because projects must accommodate multiple user groups and activities.
- 3) Is my boat ramp and fishing pier eligible? **Answer:** If the ramp and pier are elements of a projects improving a space accessible and visible from a commercial corridor and are part of a broader project, they are eligible, but standalone waterfront projects or those not adjacent to commercial uses would not be.
- 4) Are streetscaping elements eligible? **Answer:** Landscaping and public amenities within a defined space are eligible. Streetscaping or amenities for an entire corridor are not.
- 5) Are alley improvements eligible? **Answer:** Yes, but the alley should be a defined space that can be programmed for use. Alley improvements over multiple blocks and/or alleys that do not cater to pedestrians are not eligible.
- 6) Can the grant be used to renovate the inside and outside of a building in the space? **Answer:** The only interior renovations allowed inside of buildings are the construction (and renovation) of restrooms. Other renovations to the structure are not eligible (Those elements in the space - e.g. concessions - could be done separately from the grant).
- 7) Can the space be fenced and have operating hours for public use? Can the space be used for private events? **Answer:** Yes, provided that the space is generally accessible to the public, it may be fully/partially fenced to accommodate certain activities. Operating hours (such as nighttime closures of restrooms) are permissible. Private events may also be permitted – as often seen in other municipal public spaces.
- 8) Is fencing an eligible expense? **Answer:** Yes, if it is associated with the space.
- 9) Would relocation of a memorial be an allowable expense as part of the overall project? **Answer:** Site preparation is eligible as a match, so the grading work associated with the relocation would be a match. The relocation itself would be outside of the grant and not eligible as a match expense.
- 10) Would a PA system be eligible? **Answer:** Yes, as long as its use is related to the space.

#### **Project location:**

- 11) Can the project be located on privately-owned property? **Answer:** Yes, but the site/property does need to be publicly accessible. If privately-owned, then a multi-year lease agreement or formal Memorandum of Understanding will be needed as well as property owner permission to carry out activities on the site.
  - a. How long does the lease term need to be? **Answer:** Suggestion of two years or more.
- 12) Can the grant be used in a neighborhood park that isn't necessarily in a downtown space? **Answer:** Yes, but only if you can show the impact to neighborhood businesses.

### Project Logistics and Funding

#### **Applicants:**

- 1) Can previous Vibrant Spaces grant recipients apply? **Answer:** Applicants may receive one award every two fiscal years, except for the City of Milwaukee, in which different commercial corridors may apply for and receive a VS award annually.
- 2) How do you define a community? **Answer:** Municipal boundaries define a community. One (1) application per community is allowed due to limited funds.

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS, CONT.

- 3) Does the municipality have to be the entity carrying out the project? **Answer:** No, the municipality has to be the applicant and pass a resolution in support of the project, but the space can be built out/managed/programmed by community partners including but not limited to Business Improvement Districts, Chambers, Downtown Associations, Arts Districts, Libraries, etc.
- 4) Can the County or Redevelopment Authority (RDA) apply on behalf of a project in a municipality in the region? **Answer:** Yes, a County or RDA may be the applicant for a project, but only one application per municipal boundary will be accepted regardless of the applicant.
- 5) Can contiguous municipalities submit coordinated applications relating to projects such as a bicycle/pedestrian trail that would connect multiple communities? **Answer:** Trail extension is not eligible, but trail head and gathering spaces along trails that would benefit commercial district businesses, and that will be used for multiple audiences, are eligible. If a space spans municipalities, is recommended that one or both municipalities submit grants for their portion of the project, as contracts will be with a single entity.
- 6) How do we find out who to contact at our local municipality? **Answer:** Contact your WEDC Regional Director and they will provide you with the appropriate community contact information.

### Funding:

- 7) Do I have to have all 'match sources' secured at the time of application? **Answer:** At the time of application, WEDC will look to have 80% of total project funding secured, the remaining should have a strong plan in place to get funding commitments secured.
- 8) WEDC will allow a total of two (2) draw requests for the project. Grant funds will be disbursed on a pro-rata basis to match the amount of matching funds identified with the draw(s).
- 9) Is ongoing maintenance of the site eligible? **Answer:** No, but we encourage applicants to have a plan to maintain their project/installation and to address that plan in their application.
- 10) What are eligible grant and match activities? **Answer:** Eligible activities include the following:
  - a. Public Space Enhancements (projects activating alleys, programmable park spaces, vacant parcels, and underutilized parking lots including elements such as public art, landscaping, benches, bike racks, etc.)
  - b. Public Signage (wayfinding, interpretive signage, kiosks and other signage located in and associated with the space)
  - c. Public Infrastructure (restrooms, water features, electrical, lighting, site preparation)
  - d. Seasonal Equipment with the intent to use annually (tables, chairs, umbrellas, heaters)
  - e. Site preparation such as grading, stormwater, etc. (Both grant and match eligible in FY23.)
- 11) What are ineligible grant and match activities? **Answer:** Ineligible activities include the following:
  - a. Building improvements (other than restrooms for public space use) – no interior renovations
  - b. District- or community-wide improvement projects
  - c. Events, staffing, programming, ongoing maintenance
  - d. Private spaces not open and accessible to the public
  - e. Site acquisition costs and lease costs
  - f. Activities otherwise eligible to be funded through other WEDC programs
  - g. In-kind contributions of materials or labor
  - h. Demolition
- 12) Can donated goods or services be used as match for the grant? **Answer:** No, but the value/impact of the donations should be summarized in the narrative.

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS, CONT.

### Grant Application and Process

- 1) How long do we have to complete the project? **Answer:** Project must start after the application is accepted into WEDC's Underwriting. Contracts will be for two (2) years.
- 2) Is the space design expected to be final by the time of application? **Answer:** No, but a close representation of the future space needs to be provided with the application to have an accurate budget, and stakeholder/partner consensus regarding the project and process must be very well defined within the application.
- 3) If we are planning to start some of the project before we submit a VS application, can we still apply? **Answer:** Yes, once a completed application is received (and accepted as complete into WEDC's Underwriting), costs incurred on and after the acceptance date may be considered eligible as match, assuming the grant is awarded. Project elements completed prior to that date will not be eligible for match or reimbursement, but prior progress does not impact the eligibility for funding of the space. Provided sufficient costs remain after the acceptance date to support both match and funding, projects may still apply.
- 4) Can your project be out to bid, but just not have started yet? **Answer:** Yes.
- 5) Is a project eligible to apply that already has site work started? **Answer:** Yes, but the date the application is accepted into WEDC's Underwriting is the "start date" for the project. Only after the "start date" will expenses be considered grant and match eligible.
- 6) If I don't have a community plan that identifies the project, what other documentation would be acceptable to provide? **Answer:** Meeting minutes, news articles, community meeting announcements, and/or documentation of the conversations/meetings that have been had to date with partners/stakeholders regarding the project.
- 7) Are there any requirements or advantages for rural or low-income areas? **Answer:** Yes. Match requirement has been reduced from 50% to 25% for CDI-VS grants in which:
  - o The project is in an Economically Distressed Community.
  - o The project is in a community under 5,000 people.
    - Twenty percent of annual CDI-VS funding will be intended to finance projects in communities under 5,000 in population.
- 8) Deadline for Regional Directors to submit applications into Underwriting for FY26 funding is February 1, 2026.