
2026 Letter of Inquiry Process

Please feel free to make copies and pass along or post this document.

Three Rivers Community Foundation (TRCF) advances social change through grantmaking, advocacy, and capacity development for grassroots organizations. TRCF embraces and practices **Change, not charity™** by empowering grantee organizations to ensure social, economic, and environmental justice in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Since 1989, the Foundation has awarded more than 500 grants totaling over \$1,500,000 to groups challenging attitudes, policies or institutions as they work to promote social, economic, or environmental justice (i.e., social change) throughout the region.

TRCF offers **Annual Grants** for projects or operating support that usually range from **\$500 to \$5,000**.

Please read the enclosed **2026 Letter of Inquiry Criteria and Timetable** carefully and familiarize yourself with TRCF's requirements. If, after reviewing the funding criteria you would like to apply for a grant, submit your Letter of Inquiry and the signed statements on page 4, by the deadline listed below. Submit all materials to alynch@threeriverscommunity.org.

If your letter of inquiry is eligible, you will be invited to submit a full proposal. Those requirements will be sent to you when you receive notification of your LOI's success in late February or early March.

If you are seeking sponsorship of an event that falls outside the grantmaking calendar, please contact the TRCF cell phone at 412-552-9720 or alynch@threeriverscommunity.org.

We look forward to reviewing your letter of inquiry.

Sincerely,

The Three Rivers Community Foundation Grantmaking Committee

Three Rivers Community Foundation does not discriminate in its hiring and promotion, Board and Committee recruitment, and grant award process on the basis of race, color, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, religion, disability, gender, ancestry, or national origin.

<p><u>Letter of Inquiry Deadline: Friday, January 23, 2026, by 6:00 PM</u></p>

<p>Notification of LOI result: late February/early March 2026</p>

<p>Full Grant Proposal Deadline (if invited to submit): late March/early April 2026</p>

<p>Funding Decision: Mid-June 2026</p>
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<p>Grants Awarded: Late June 2026</p>

<p>Please <u>do NOT call or email</u> the TRCF office to inquire about the status of your LOI or grant application. You will receive an email with our decision either way.</p>
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2026 GRANT APPLICATION FUNDING CRITERIA AND TIMETABLE

Applicants must have tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service **OR** must establish that their activities are consistent with those of a 501(c)(3) organization. IRS regulations allow a limited percentage of our grants to be allocated to 501(c)(4) organizations, or those involved with lobbying.

TRCF strongly prefers:

- Grassroots organizations with budgets under \$250,000;
- New organizations or projects that have not been previously funded by TRCF;
- Projects that take place or have a strong focus on creating change in Southwestern PA (Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland counties);
- Projects addressing persistent divisions in society based on race, color, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, religion, disability, gender, ancestry, or national origin;
- Projects developing new, grassroots leadership, with strong components of community organizing, community education, problem identification and solving, and community building;
- Youth-led projects and those promoting youth activism;
- Projects addressing emerging or cutting-edge issues and using new approaches to problem solving;
- Organizations or projects that take affirmative steps to assure that their workplaces, programs, and services are accessible to people with disabilities; and/or
- Collaborations and coalitions that emphasize joint strategies and projects.

TRCF does not consider:

- Organizations with annual operating budgets in excess of **\$1.5 million**;
- Social service projects;
- Individuals;
- Social enterprises;
- Activities that benefit private interest, business, or profit-making groups;
- Funding of capital expenses that are not tied to a specific project (i.e., general building maintenance or upgrades). However, building improvements may be funded if demonstrated to be essential to planned project activities or goals;
- Funds being used for underwriting annual fundraisers or matching grants;
- Any expenses related to a project, or operating costs, that are incurred before July 1, 2026;
- Organizations whose primary events, work, or programs are held in locations either completely or partially inaccessible to people with disabilities;
- Direct purchase of office equipment (computers, fax machines, copiers, phones, etc.) solely for office administrative activities. However, the purchase of equipment may be funded if demonstrated to be essential to planned project activities or goals;
- Projects that proselytize for any specific religion (i.e., passing out religious literature to participants in the program for which funding is being requested); or
- Arts programs that do not include a means for the audience to discuss the social change related issue(s) the work presents, or some other form of action beyond just the exhibit/performance.

Letters of Inquiry emailed after 6:00 PM or postmarked after Friday, January 23, 2026 will not be reviewed!

*The TRCF office will **NOT** disclose whether an applicant will or will not be invited to submit a full proposal by phone; applicants must wait for an email or letter.*

Three Rivers Community Foundation

7371 Thomas Blvd., Ste. 241, Pittsburgh, PA 15208

412-552-9720

alynch@threeriverscommunity.org

www.trcfwpa.org

Change, not charity™

2026 GRANT LETTER OF INQUIRY

DUE: Friday, January 23, 2026

Part I: Cover Sheet

Date: _____

1. Organization: _____
2. Mailing Address (required): _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
3. Contact Person: _____
4. Honorific: ___ Ms. ___ Mr. ___ Mrs. ___ Mx. ___ Dr. ___ Hon. ___ Rev. ___ Other: _____
5. Telephone (contact person) [day] _____ [evening] _____
6. Email: _____ Website: _____
6. Total amount of money you are requesting (up to \$5,000): \$ _____ For: ___ Operating ___ Project (please choose only one)
7. Focus of the organization's work or purpose of the project:

___ Disability Rights	___ LGBTQIA+ Rights	___ Voter Empowerment
___ Economic Justice	___ Media Justice	___ Women's Rights/Gender Justice
___ Environmental Justice	___ Peace & Human Rights	___ Youth
___ Food Justice	___ Racial Justice	
___ Other (please specify): _____		

Part II: Letter of Inquiry Requirements

Your letter of inquiry should be a maximum of two pages, single-spaced, in no smaller than 12-point font.

The Letter of Inquiry must include the following:

- A brief description of the organization, including the organization's operating budget size.
- The problem the organization is addressing, either through its general work (if applying for operating support) or the specific project.
- The project description, goals and objectives, and timeline. If applying for operational support, please give some examples of your work and what the funds might go towards.
- The impact the project (or work of the organization, if requesting operational support) will have on the community and how it **will promote and sustain social change** (read pages 5 and 6 carefully).
- An estimate of how much the organization will need in funding for the entire project. If the organization is applying for operational support, please indicate the organization's operating budget size (annual income and expenses). Please note that all expenses that the grant covers must be incurred after July 1, 2026.

Part III: Signatures

Please have a Board officer or individual responsible for entering contracts sign and date the statements on the next page (page 4). Electronic signatures are accepted.

STATEMENT OF NON-DISCRIMINATION

In the process of carrying out the activities of the proposed project for which funding is requested from Three Rivers Community Foundation, we will not discriminate against individuals and groups which are currently or historically excluded from full participation in society on the basis of race, color, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socio-economic situation, criminal history, education, religion, disability, gender, ancestry, or national origin. Furthermore, we will take affirmative steps to include and provide reasonable accommodations to said people and groups.

Signature of Applicant (Board officer or individual responsible for signing contracts)

Print name and title

STATEMENT OF ACCESSIBILITY

We certify that any and all activities related to the project under consideration will be held in locations that are fully accessible to people with disabilities. If the funds being used are for operating support, we certify that our office is fully accessible to people with disabilities.

Signature of Applicant (Board officer or individual responsible for signing contracts)

Print name and title

STATEMENT FOR NON-501(c)(3) ORGANIZATIONS (only sign if applicable)

If you are **not** a 501(c)(3) organization, your activities must be consistent with IRS non-profit purposes. Please have a Board officer or individual responsible for entering contracts sign the following statement:

We certify that our activities are consistent with IRS non-profit 501(c)(3) purposes (e.g. charitable, religious, educational, etc.).

Signature of Applicant (Board officer or individual responsible for signing contracts)

Print name and title

Social Change and Community-Based Philanthropy

What is progressive social change?

While traditional charities generally respond to the symptoms of entrenched social problems, Three Rivers Community Foundation supports those who identify underlying causes and work to change these conditions. This is a core value of progressive social change as reflected in the phrase, *Change, not charity*™. Social change organizing has a number of components, including:

- Building community-based responses.
- Changing attitudes, behaviors, laws, policies, and institutions to better reflect the values of inclusion, fairness, diversity, and opportunity.
- Insisting on accountability and responsiveness among institutions, including the government, large corporations, universities, and other entities whose policies and actions profoundly affect the living conditions of individuals and communities.

Progressive social change expands the meaning and practice of "democracy" by involving those closest to social problems in determining their solutions. At its best, people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, abilities, and ages join together in developing and implementing solutions to problems.

Because progressive social change involves making significant changes on a systemic level, conflict with those who hold power is often inevitable. The value that social change organizations bring to the table is their ability to organize, to educate, and to mobilize.

Money alone does not bring about change; nor do individuals. But when people band together and form organizations to focus their collective vision, social change can happen. When a large number of organizations work together toward a common goal, that's a movement. And movements create change.

On the surface, social change movements appear to be spontaneous bursts of energy, a sweep of people, outraged and energized, rising forth to demand some form of change. But in truth, social change movements flow from careful organizing, massive public education, sustained agitation, and, at times, inspired collaboration across the divides of race, gender, and class. These movements are driven by human energy, intelligence, and courage - as well as money.

What is community-based philanthropy?

In 1989, Three Rivers Community Foundation was founded to support the progressive movement in Southwestern Pennsylvania. TRCF pioneered the idea of community-based philanthropy based on two primary characteristics: the work we support and the people involved.

The work we support. TRCF supports progressive community-based organizations that address the root causes of social problems. We reach beyond direct services (valuable as they are) to directly address the underlying conditions that foster inequity, lack of opportunity, discrimination, and economic exploitation.

The people who are involved. In keeping a vision based on democratic values, our decision-making bodies are representative of the communities served by our programs. Community activists participate in governance and grantmaking, along with donors, many of whom are themselves activists.

Statements in this section draw upon Change, not Charity, Chapter 2 of Robin Hood Was Right, and studies by the National Network of Grantmakers and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. Original text from the McKenzie River Gathering Foundation.*

**Collins, C., Rogers, P., and Garner, J.P. (2000). Robin Hood Was Right: A guide to giving your money for social change. W.W. Norton and Company: New York, NY and London, England.*

Examples of Change vs. Charity

More Change

Youth create and manage a project to meet their needs.

Educate the public about an issue, and engage those interested in ways they can help.

Establish a coalition to ensure affordable housing for all.

Host a film festival with opportunities for the audience to discuss and act on the social change issues seen in the films.

Organize a group to clean up toxins in our environment and to pressure policy-makers to stop polluters.

Help students organize to ensure that higher education is affordable for everyone.

Partner with a group of people with disabilities pushing for elected officials to make public buildings accessible.

Organize for a livable wage so parents can afford food and toys for their children.

Mobilize artists to protest state-level arts funding cuts.

Campaigning to end cash bail and other unjust policies imposed on incarcerated individuals.

Advocate for accessible, affordable mental health resources for all.

Work to create change at the institutional and policy level.

More Charity

Adults create a project to meet the perceived needs of youth, with little to no youth input.

Pass out leaflets about an issue, with no follow-up.

Build a shelter for people experiencing homelessness.

Host a film festival with opportunities for the audience to learn about filmmaking.

Donate to cancer research.

Create a scholarship program for students.

Assist one child to get a needed wheelchair.

Collect food or toys for charity drives.

Patronize a fine arts museum.

Providing bail money for persons one at a time.

Provide access to counselors / therapists.

Focus on meeting individual needs.

Charity is not a bad thing. But social change can ultimately eradicate the need for most charity.

Inspired by: Robin Hood Was Right: A Guide to Giving Your Money for Social Change, by Chuck Collins, Pam Rogers, and Joan Garner (2000, W W Norton), pps. 35-37.