

2026 Growing Green Spaces Grant Guidelines



Background

The Growing Green Spaces (GGS) program at San Diego Foundation (SDF) expands access to parks, green infrastructure and community gardens to support healthy neighborhoods and climate resilience.

Building on the foundation of the Outdoor Access, Climate, and Food Initiatives, GGS deepens San Diego Foundation's commitment to climate resilience by emphasizing the multiple co-benefits of green spaces, including outdoor education, sustainable food production, public health and social cohesion.

GGS supports community-driven climate solutions that protect, restore and reimagine shared spaces as essential infrastructure for climate resilience, public health and local economic vitality. GGS prioritizes projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen climate adaptation and deliver

co-benefits such as improved air quality and reduced urban heat. Emphasis is placed on initiatives led by or in deep partnership with communities impacted by climate change.

The program centers local leadership and long-term stewardship, recognizing that communities are best positioned to design and sustain green spaces that meet local needs and deliver lasting environmental and social benefits.

Pathways for Community Green Projects

Through GGS, SDF invests in climate-resilient communities and recognizes this work is critical though difficult to fully implement as it often requires reimagining policies and implementation pathways to flexibly accommodate community participation. Doing so requires additional time, funding and technical assistance for CBO and community partners to ensure there is alignment with community priorities and is sustainable.

The Growing Green Spaces Grant Program provides funding for community-led initiatives that support community health and climate resilience by growing green spaces. This includes trees, gardens, parks and green infrastructure. Funding will expand access to urban green spaces and promote climate resilience, public health and community well-being.

Core Objectives

- Expand and improve access to green spaces and infrastructure in communities furthest from opportunities
- Advance climate mitigation and adaptation through nature-based and community-scale solutions
- Build long-term local capacity for climate planning, implementation and stewardship

The Funding Opportunity

Grant selections will be based on alignment with the funding criteria described within these guidelines.

Implementation Grants

Implementation grants enable organizations to execute a well-defined plan, including scaling a proven approach for which the organization is operationally ready, and outcomes are clearly articulated. This grant opportunity prioritizes shovel-ready initiatives that deliver measurable climate benefits, strengthen community resilience and improve opportunities in neighborhoods affected by climate and environmental challenges. Examples of implementation grant projects include, but are not limited to:

- Tree planting and long-term tree stewardship
- Community gardens and urban farms using climate-smart practices
- Rain gardens, bioswales, and green stormwater infrastructure
- Native plant restoration and pollinator habitats
- Cooling corridors or shaded public spaces

Grants range from \$15,000 to \$40,000. Funds must be used within 12 months of their award date. Funds may be used for personnel, supplies, equipment, capital purchases, administrative or indirect costs, and any other program costs tied to effectively achieving the proposed project.

Funding Priorities

Funded projects must demonstrate clear climate benefits through community-driven greening efforts including, but not limited, to:

- Increase urban tree canopy, native vegetation, or green space
- Reduce urban heat island effects
- Improve stormwater management and reduce flooding
- Enhance carbon sequestration
- Improve air quality and local environmental health
- Support biodiversity and habitat restoration

Projects should align with local climate adaptation and mitigation goals where applicable.

Grant Eligibility

To be eligible to apply for grant funding, applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Applications must be led by a nonprofit with 501(c)(3) public charity status or an equivalent tax-exempt status, located in and serving San Diego County communities.
 - a. Entities eligible to receive a grant with equivalent tax-exempt status can include government entities such as State, County, tribal or municipal governmental units, churches providing charitable programs, and educational institutions such as public schools (districts), colleges and universities that are considered government.
 - b. A 501(c)(3) public charity may serve as a fiscal sponsor for another applicant to administer the grant.

3. Applicants must demonstrate how the community in which the application is proposed meets unique environmental justice community criteria (criteria sources found in [Attachment A](#)).
4. Applicants and/or their partners must have relevant experience serving the community identified in their application.

To be eligible to apply for the grant funding, proposals must meet the following criteria:

1. Proposals must aim to accelerate implementation of community-driven climate projects with a focus on growing green spaces that include trees, gardens, parks and green infrastructure in the San Diego region and advance **one or more** of the following focus areas:
 - **Community-Driven Leadership and Design:** Projects are developed and led by community members, community-based organizations, or trusted local partners, with residents meaningfully involved in shaping, guiding, and caring for green spaces that reflect community needs, culture, and priorities.
 - **Expansion or Enhancement of Urban Green Spaces:** Projects support the creation, expansion, or improvement of urban green spaces—such as trees, gardens, parks, or green infrastructure—and focus on delivering visible, on-the-ground results.
 - **Climate Resilience and Environmental Benefit:** Projects contribute to climate resilience through nature-based or green infrastructure approaches that help address challenges like extreme heat, flooding, air quality, or carbon reduction while providing environmental benefits.

Partnerships and Collaboration

We believe that intentional, strategic partnerships can be essential to maximizing the impact and value of this grant funding. As part of this commitment, we encourage applications with thoughtful collaborations and partnerships in place. Please be sure to demonstrate in your application how any partnerships and roles will be complementary and additive.

Application Process

Applicants must submit all application materials using SDF's grants management system—[Foundant](#). If this is your first time submitting an application through this system, you will need to create a user profile for your organization. For guidance on setting up your account and navigating your applicant profile, please follow this [tutorial](#).

Application Technical Assistance

SDF strives to support applications to be as strong and successful as possible. SDF staff will be available to provide technical assistance throughout the application period. If you would like to set up a time with SDF staff to discuss your application or the grant guidelines, please reach out to environment@sdfoundation.org. Once the application period closes, interested applicants may still reach out to SDF staff to discuss project concepts for future funding opportunities.

Application Deadline and Important Dates

All applications must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. PST on Thursday, April 30, 2026. If you encounter any issues, please reach out to environment@sdfoundation.org or call (619) 357-7998.

[Click here to apply.](#)

Dates	Descriptions
April 1, 2026	Application period opens
April 30, 2026	Proposals due via Foundant by 5:00 p.m. PST
Summer 2026	Grant notifications and public announcement

About the Review Process

All applications will be reviewed by representatives from SDF. Evaluators adhere to a strict conflict of interest policy and other internal controls to ensure that grant funding is distributed in an objective manner based on the merits of each proposal.

Expected Reporting

Grant recipients will be expected to provide a progress update halfway through the project, as well as a narrative and financial final report at the end of the project. These reports will serve to provide insight into project progress and an opportunity to uplift your stories of impact. Grantees will be expected to report on project progress, any adjustments to project, accomplishments, impact metrics and challenges experienced over the course of the project.

Evaluation Criteria

Each application will be evaluated upon the criteria below (out of 50 points).

Criteria	Description	Scoring
Funding Priority Alignment and Program Design	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Community Needs and Climate Action Identification: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a community-identified need for the project to address a local challenge/issue. The project clearly supports local and/or regional climate actions. Proposals must aim to accelerate implementation of community-driven climate projects with a focus on growing green spaces that include trees, gardens, parks and green infrastructure in the San Diego region and advance one or more of the following focus areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-Driven Leadership and Design: Projects are developed and led by community members, community-based organizations, or trusted local partners, with residents meaningfully involved in shaping, guiding, and caring for green spaces that reflect community needs, culture, and priorities. 	20 points

Criteria	Description	Scoring
Funding Priority Alignment and Program Design (Continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Expansion or Enhancement of Urban Green Spaces: Projects support the creation, expansion, or improvement of urban green spaces — such as trees, gardens, parks, or green infrastructure — and focus on delivering visible, on-the-ground results. ◦ Climate Resilience and Environmental Benefit: Projects contribute to climate resilience through nature-based or green infrastructure approaches that help address challenges like extreme heat, flooding, air quality, or carbon reduction while providing environmental benefits. 	
Feasibility and Readiness	<p>Application outlines well-defined goals and demonstrates having the staffing capability, timing, partnerships and applicable skills to successfully implement the project/ program.</p> <p>Application demonstrates support from community and other organizations (e.g., local governments, private sector) that would be involved in its implementation. Existing and/or potential collaborators have been identified with clear roles (funding, technical assistance, materials, and community coordination). The application addresses potential barriers to participation and outlines outreach strategies to engage its target audience.</p> <p>Application includes realistic timelines, and an implementation plan that accounts for all necessary permits, approvals, project requirements, as well as plans for addressing potential permitting or regulatory challenges. Budget is within the allowable grant range and is reasonable for the project/program’s scope.</p>	13 points
Communities Served	<p>Application demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the population to be served and the environmental concerns of the population.</p> <p>Grants will prioritize projects that advance climate resilience in Disadvantaged Communities otherwise known as Frontline Communities or Communities of Concern. Definitions and tools for identifying Disadvantaged Communities can be found in the appendix.</p>	12 points
Environmental Impact and Growth	<p>Project/program promotes the awareness and adoption of decarbonization solutions, has identified co-benefits of implementation (i.e., community benefits beyond decarbonization), and demonstrates the potential to be replicated and/or expanded to other communities in the San Diego region. Project/program contributes to regional climate goals.</p>	5 points

Attachment A – Definitions

Determination of grant eligibility requests the application to demonstrate how the community in which the application is proposed meets unique “priority community criteria.” This criterion can be met through multiple metrics and an application needs only to demonstrate alignment with one of the criteria listed below.

Metric	Alignment met if...
<u>CalEnviroScreen 4.0</u>	Community in which the application is proposed is within a census tract that is within the 70th percentile or greater of CalEnviroScreen 4.0.
<u>Healthy Places Index (HPI)</u>	Community in which the application is proposed is within a census tract designated within the 1st Quartile (i.e., 0 to 25th percentile) of HPI (v3.0).
<u>Senate Bill (SB) 535 Disadvantaged Communities</u>	Community in which the application is proposed is within a census tract identified as a Disadvantaged Community as defined by California SB 535.
Locally Specific Metrics	If the local public agencies with jurisdiction over the area in which the application is proposed, the applicant may use a locally specific metric generated by that public agency to meet this criterion. Examples of locally specific metrics that could be used for this metric include the <u>County of San Diego’s Environmental Justice Communities</u> or the <u>City of San Diego’s Climate Equity Index</u> .
Self-Defined Metric	<p>In cases where the community in which the application is proposed do not meet any of the metrics noted above, the application has the opportunity to self-define why the community would be considered a priority community. This self-definition should be based on community experiences and highlight a combination of common environmental, location-based, or demographic/socioeconomic metrics that help define community challenges. Examples of metrics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental and Location-Based <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Proximity to pollution sources (e.g., highways, factories, hazardous sites) ◦ Air quality (e.g., levels of PM 2.5 or ozone) ◦ Water quality ◦ Noise levels or environmental nuisances ◦ Access to safe housing and infrastructure condition ◦ Access to healthy food

**Self-Defined Metric
(Continued)**

- Access to transportation
 - Access to parks, open space, or recreation facilities
 - Climate vulnerability (e.g., exposure to high heat, urban heat island effects)
 - Demographic and Socioeconomic
 - Income levels (e.g., median income, % below poverty line)
 - Employment status (e.g., unemployment rate, job type)
 - Household size and composition (e.g., % of single-parent households)
 - Housing tenure (e.g., % of renters)
 - Primary language spoken or English proficiency
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