Volunteer Toronto



Civic Spark Microgrant

Applicant Guide

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CIVIC SPARK OVERVIEW

Be a spark for community connection! Volunteer Toronto's Civic Spark Microgrant program provides $1,000 to resident-led groups, grassroots organizations, and informal collectives that are 100% volunteer-run towards projects that help build social connections and increase civic participation across the City of Toronto. The funded initiatives seek to create opportunities to activate neighbourhoods, animate public spaces, or bridge connections between people to increase a sense of belonging in our communities and address the growing challenge of social isolation.

In 2026, 35 microgrant recipients will receive $1,000 to deliver initiatives that build social connection, reduce social isolation and foster civic participation across the city of Toronto.

Why is this Important?

- **Canada's volunteering rate has declined 8%.** Specifically, between 2018 and 2023, there was a 19% drop in the number of people that directly contribute to their community. Source: Statistics Canada.
- **Toronto ranks as among the loneliest places in the country.** About 925,000 adults in Toronto (37%) felt lonely on at least three or four days in the last week in 2023—higher than the rest of the country (28%). Source: Toronto Foundation.
- **24% of people looking to volunteer in Toronto right now want to meet new people and make friends.** People use volunteering as an access point to find belonging and social connection. Source: Volunteer Toronto.

We believe that by increasing participation in group activities and resourcing volunteers to get involved in their own community we can curb the rising tide of social isolation. Engaging in your community with others can increase your wellbeing, expand your social support network, and have a positive impact on society as a whole.

Possible Initiative Ideas

In Volunteer Toronto's pilot microgrant program, some groups started clubs, community gardens or held block parties. Others ran healing circles, youth art exhibits and sustainability workshops. The projects were as diverse as the communities they engaged across Toronto. But one thing rang true—social isolation decreased. People met neighbours, made friends, and reported feeling less isolated. We invite Torontonians to dream up new and unique ways to connect people in their community! All ideas are welcome that meet the objectives of Civic Spark. Check out Civic Spark Zine for inspiration from 2024 recipients.

CONDITIONS & ELIGIBILITY

Who CAN apply

- Local community groups, grassroots and mutual aid collectives
- Individuals who apply must be associated with a group of at least three other individuals
- Newly formed groups (must have minimum 3 members)
- Groups that previously applied and were funded by a Volunteer Toronto microgrant can apply again
- The lead applicant must:
    - Be 18 years of age or older
    - Reside in the City of Toronto
    - Be able to accept grant funds by cheque or electronic funds transfer

Who CANNOT apply

- Businesses or for-profit entities
- Registered charitable organizations or incorporated non-profits

Eligible Initiatives

- Must take place within the City of Toronto (within one of Toronto's Wards)
- Must be completed by December 31, 2026
- Can be a one-time event or a series of activities within the delivery period
- Events must be free for participants and cannot generate revenue/raise funds
- Must demonstrate that the initiative has the potential to bring people together, foster social connection, reduce social isolation and increase civic participation in your identified Communities of Concern

Ineligible Initiatives

- Multiple applications for the same initiative
- Virtual-only initiatives. Hybrid projects with virtual and in-person elements are eligible.
- Revenue-generating events (e.g. paid participation or fundraising)
- Religious activities: faith groups are eligible to apply; however, activities must be open to all

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

- Your application will initially be screened by Volunteer Toronto staff to ensure it meets the eligibility requirements. Ineligible applicants will be notified by email.
- Eligible applications will then be reviewed by a Selection Committee comprised of previous microgrant recipients, community leaders and local journalists.
- Reviews will consider the following criteria in decision-making:

    - **Civic Spark Alignment:** reviewers will assess how well initiatives align with Civic Spark's focus on building community connection, reducing social isolation and fostering civic participation within Toronto neighbourhoods

    - **Location:** reviewers will consider the representation of initiatives across the city of Toronto

    - **Initiative Type:** reviewers will consider the diversity of initiative types, including single vs. multi-day events

    - **Community of Concern:** reviewers will consider the diversity of the communities that will be engaged in initiatives, including socio-demographic, cultural communities, and marginalized groups

    - **Community Alignment:** reviewers will assess how well applicants reflect or are aligned with the communities of concern in their initiative

    - **Activities:** reviewers will assess whether applicants have a reasonable plan for delivering their initiative

    - **Budget:** reviewers will assess how the intended use of funds are appropriate for the scale and scope of the initiative

SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

Successful applicants will be notified by Volunteer Toronto staff and receive microgrant funds in **March 2026**. Microgrant recipients will also be invited to a launch event on March 27, 2026. Recipients will be publicly announced during National Volunteer Week (April 19 – 25, 2026), and interested groups will be invited to participate in Volunteer Toronto's planned announcement activities.

Projects and initiatives must be completed by December 31, 2026. Following delivery, a 30–45-minute report call will be scheduled with recipients, based on the date they have indicated that their initiative will be completed. Stories and insights generated from these calls may become part of social media campaigns and news stories, including a feature in Volunteer Toronto's 2027 Civic Spark Zine (See our 2025 Civic Spark Zine here).

Applicants who are not successful in this cycle of microgrants will be notified in March 2026.

IMPORTANT DATES

- **December 5, 2025:** Applications open
- **December 11, 2025:** Applicant Information Session. CLICK HERE to Register
- Virtual Office Hours
    - **December 17, 2025** at 12:30pm: Join Here
    - **January 8, 2026** at 4pm: Join Here
    - **January 12, 2026** at 6pm: Join Here
- **January 18, 2026, at 11:59PM:** Applications close
- **March 2026:** Grant recipients are notified and funds distributed
- **Late March 2026:** In person event for funded micrograntees
- **April 2026:** Recipients publicly announced and initiatives can begin
- **December 2026:** All initiatives completed
- **October 2026 – January 2027:** Reporting period

ACCOMMODATIONS

Volunteer Toronto is committed to ensuring the application process is accessible to all interested residents.

- Review a Word version of the application form to help you prepare to complete the online application

- If you are unable to access or complete the online application form, we will provide support for oral submissions on December 13, 2025 and January 10, 2026. To complete an oral submission, applicants must:

    - Make an appointment to connect with a support person over Zoom
    - Review and answer the application questions (see word version here) ahead of the appointment for oral submission
        - A copy of oral submissions will be sent by email, and applicants will have **one** opportunity to make corrections

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about the application, review or selection process, please contact civicspark@volunteertoronto.ca

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Access a Word version of the application questions here.

Primary Eligibility

1. Choose your (group) status

    - Registered charity (ineligible)
    - Incorporated non-profit (ineligible)
    - Business or for-profit entity (ineligible)
    - Unincorporated non-profit
    - Residential group or collective
    - Grassroots group
    - Mutual aid collective
    - Individual (in partnership with 2 others)

2. Is the lead applicant for this initiative 18 years or older?
3. Will this initiative take place in the city of Toronto?

Applicant Details:

4. Group or Initiative name
5. How long has your group or initiative been around?
6. Did you previously apply for or receive a microgrant from Volunteer Toronto?
7. Group members information (3 members required): Full name, email address, home Ward (Lead applicant must also provide year of birth)
8. Please share any accommodations you may require
9. Brief description of your initiative (300 words)

Initiative Details:

10. How will your initiative bring community together (choose up to two types)
    - Sports or physical activity
    - Club
    - Community social
    - Skills sharing
    - Food or cooking
    - Festival or parade
    - Arts and crafts
    - Environment & sustainability
    - Learning and education
    - Mental health

11. Initiative format: one-time or series of events

12. Which Ward will your initiative take place in?

13. Select a Primary Community of Concern
    - Children
    - Youth
    - Newcomers
    - Seniors
    - 2SLGBTQ+ Persons
    - Urban Indigenous Communities
    - Black Communities
    - Women
    - Men
    - Racialized People
    - General Population/Neighbourhood
    - Physically Disabled Persons
    - Developmentally Disabled Persons
    - Faith Communities
    - Animals
    - Homeless Persons
    - Low Income Persons

14. Select up to two additional Communities of Concern

15. Describe how your group reflects or is aligned with the intended communities of concern (400 words)

Initiative Activities and Budget:

16. What month do you intend to begin this project?

17. What is your anticipated end date?

18. Do you plan to recruit volunteers to support your initiative?

19. Outline your project activities (500 words)

20. What will success look like for your initiative? (300 words)

21. What are your anticipated microgrant expenses – in dollars $
    - Food
    - Non-Food Supplies
    - Event or Convening Space
    - Transportation
    - Honorariums
    - Volunteer Recognition
    - Other

22. Describe how you plan to spend microgrant funds (300 words)

23. Do you anticipate that you'll receive or request additional support for your initiative?

24. Are there any other resources that could support the success of your initiative?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Applications

Can my group apply for multiple initiatives?

No. Your group can only apply to fund one project. If you submit multiple applications, only the first will be considered.

Can I submit an application for multiple initiatives?

Yes, however consideration will be given to geographic diversity, location type and communities of concern during the selection process (see Application Review Process)

Can I form a group with my friends/family and submit an application?

Yes, if there are at least three individuals carrying out the initiative.

I am under 18 years of age, can I apply?

Members of the group may be under the age restriction however the lead applicant must be at least 18 years old.

Are faith-based groups eligible to apply?

Yes, if the project is open to all and not intended for religious activities.

I'm a member of an online group, can I apply?

Yes, if the group can be identified and includes at least 3 individuals committed to working together towards the initiative. Initiatives cannot be entirely virtual, however hybrid events are acceptable.

Can I modify my application after submission?

No. All applications are final. You can fill out the application questions ahead of submitting using this Word document. You can however get a copy of your application emailed to you once you have completed it.

Can I get feedback about my application?

Staff are happy to answer questions about eligibility and the application process, as well as support technical challenges. We cannot comment on how 'good' your application is or provide feedback for improvement.

What if my group members change after I apply?

That's okay. However, you must demonstrate in your application that your initiative is meant to be delivered by a team

Initiatives

What types of initiatives is the program looking to fund?

Any initiative that is focused on bringing people together, building social connection, fostering community and increasing civic participation

Is there a deadline for completing initiatives?

Yes. All initiatives must begin April 2026 or later and must be completed by December 31, 2026.

Does it matter if we've run this initiative before?

No. Already established groups (and previous microgrant recipients) are welcome to participate

Funding

Does our group need to have an organizational bank account to receive funds?

No, funds can be transferred to an individual's bank account. One group member (ideally the lead applicant) must be able to accept funds on the group's behalf.

Are there any restrictions on how the funds can be spent?

No, funds will be given up front with no conditions and receipts will not be required. The budget submitted within the application should include reasonable expenses for the nature of the project.

When and how will we receive funds if we are selected?

Recipients will be informed and receive funds before April 2026. Funds will be disbursed by Electronic Funds Transfer or by cheque.

ABOUT US

Volunteer Toronto's mission is to increase the positive impact that volunteering has on the City of Toronto through innovative initiatives that inspire, inform, and connect volunteers and the organizations that need them.

SUPPORTERS

Civic Spark is generously supported by the following organizations:

TORONTO FOUNDATION

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