

Neighborhood Improvement Grant 2026 Program Guidelines



Program Guidelines

The [Neighborhood Improvement Grant](#) program is intended to give residents an opportunity to have direct input and influence into the improvement of Valparaiso's neighborhoods. The funds provide for small neighborhood-based projects with community-wide benefit. The goal is to bring neighborhoods together and to increase partnerships between neighborhoods and the city through positive improvement projects.

Improvement projects may include ([view our project guide for examples by budget](#)):

- Tree Plantings
- Public Art
- Playground or Park Equipment
- Special Features (benches, shelters, little library)
- Gathering Spaces
- Signage
- Landscaping
- *Other Creative Ideas!*

In 2026, grants of up to \$20,000 are available to neighborhood groups. Eligible projects must improve or enhance public spaces in neighborhoods and offer a benefit to the community. Projects must not conflict with existing city plans or policy and must be discussed with city staff prior to approval. If you wish to improve private, HOA-owned common spaces, a 51% match may be required. Neighborhoods that received funding in the past are encouraged to propose a project that is different than the project previously funded. This grant program no longer accepts sidewalk maintenance projects and may not be the best funding source for other maintenance projects that do not visibly enhance neighborhoods. If your neighborhood has a specific sidewalk concern, please report it at [valpo.us](#) under "Voice a Concern" on the homepage. If two or more neighborhoods work together on an application and project planning efforts, they can apply for up to \$40,000. [View a catalog](#) of all grant projects awarded to date.

Neighborhood-based groups are encouraged to apply. Eligible neighborhood groups must [sign-up](#) to be included in the City's Neighborhood Directory prior to applying. To learn more about organizing your neighborhood, [view our Neighborhood Toolkit](#).

Application Process

The grant application deadline is March 1, 2026. The application form asks nine questions to gain a better understanding of your project in terms of the evaluating criteria. Applications will be reviewed by a committee of city staff.

The following criteria highlight what the review committee will be prioritizing when evaluating applications. Additionally, neighborhoods who have not received a grant in the past may be given priority over those that have received multiple neighborhood grants.

Grant Evaluating Criteria	
Neighborhood Engagement	• How did the applicant involve neighborhood residents in the planning and implementation of the project? What efforts did the neighborhood group take to engage neighbors and get input on the project? • Does this project support or create more opportunities for engagement?
Community Benefit	• Do residents beyond the neighborhood boundaries benefit from this project? Is it accessible to the public? • Does the project improve the sense of community for residents?

For questions or comments about the Neighborhood Improvement Grant program and guidelines contact Maggie Clifton, Community Engagement Director, at mclifton@valpo.us or 219-462-1161.

<i>Feasibility & Longevity</i>	• How does the project align with current city projects and standards? • Is this a seasonal improvement or one that will last several years? • Is this a low maintenance improvement that can be sustained over time? • Does the application include detailed plans and estimates?
<i>Neighborhood Investment</i>	• Is the neighborhood group leveraging additional funds or volunteer labor and/or time towards the project?

While the grant criteria help the review committee evaluate the applications that are submitted, the committee has also prioritized the following TYPES of projects based on the criteria. This becomes a greater factor when there is more demand for projects than available funding.

Community Benefit >>> Neighborhood Investment

Engagement >>> Beautification

Community Benefit + Engagement • Tree Planting • Park Enhancement • Little Library • Benches	Neighborhood Investment + Engagement* • Gathering Spaces, Pavilions, Gazebo, etc. • Private Playground
Community Benefit + Beautification • Public Art • Entry Signage and Landscaping	Neighborhood Investment + Beautification* • Pathway Illumination • Common Area Landscaping • Pond Fountain

**51% match required*

It is required to schedule a planning meeting with the Community Engagement Department prior to applying. The Community Engagement Department will help connect you with necessary city departments, provide information for your budget and provide guidance on your application materials. We recommend scheduling this meeting at least one month before the application deadline.

Neighborhood Improvement Grant Timeline 2026

Notice to Public	No later than August 18, 2025.
Neighborhood Improvement Grant Information Session (Virtual)	• Monday, September 8 at 5:00 pm via Zoom • Webinar Recording Available by September 15
Planning Meeting with Community Engagement Department *Required!	August - February scheduled individually
2025 Applications Due	March 1, 2026
Notice of Grant Awards	No later than March 13, 2026
Grant Projects Completed	No later than January 1, 2027

All application materials are available on our [website](#).

Contact us for more information – we are here to help!

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Neighborhood Improvement Grant Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. I live in a neighborhood without an HOA or association – how can I participate in the program?** Start out by reviewing our [Neighborhood Toolkit](#) that offers tips for neighborhood groups looking to form. The Community Engagement Department can also be a great resource to you! We can support you by printing materials to promote a neighborhood meeting, facilitating a conversation with your neighbors to determine the best improvement project, supporting your efforts to host a kick-off block party and more! There are a variety of projects you can consider that don't require a matching component.
- 2. Can one neighborhood apply for multiple projects?** Neighborhoods that apply can only request up to \$20,000 total. Neighborhood groups are highly encouraged to reach consensus on a single project. If you apply for multiple projects, note that the review committee may choose to fund one project while denying funding to another, so prioritizing them in your application is very important.
- 3. If two or more neighborhoods apply for a project together, does the cap remain \$20,000?** Grants could be awarded up to \$40,000 if multiple neighborhoods are working together on the application and its planning efforts.
- 4. If the neighborhood contributes funds toward the project, will those dollars be considered part of the \$20,000 cap or would it be able to expand the project beyond \$20,000?** Donated dollars would allow the total project cost to go beyond \$20,000. Proof of your donations or pledges should be submitted with your application.
- 5. If we received funding previously through this program, can we apply again?** Yes, all neighborhoods are eligible to apply again in 2026. However, priority will be given to neighborhoods that have not yet received a grant. Neighborhoods that received funding in the past are encouraged to propose a project that is different than the project previously funded. For example, if you did a park project in 2025, we would encourage you to apply for something other than a park improvement.
- 6. Will the funds go towards completing full projects only or could partial funding be awarded?** The review committee will determine this based on the demand and size of projects that are submitted. If there is a need to do partial funding, the review committee will contact the applicant(s) before the final recommendation is submitted to the Redevelopment Commission for approval. We want as many high-quality applications to succeed as the budget allows.
- 7. Can projects be done on HOA owned, private or vacant spaces within the city?** A goal of the program is to fund neighborhood-based projects that provide community-wide benefit. While we prefer to see projects completed in public, city-owned spaces, we are open to exploring projects on HOA-owned or private property on a case-by-case basis. Any project completed on HOA-owned or private property may require the neighborhood to pay 51% of the total project costs as well as manage the ongoing maintenance of the project. The match may be waived if the project is adjacent to a public amenity, feature or is accessible to the public. Additionally, a detailed maintenance plan will need to be submitted with your application to ensure that the neighborhood can manage any upkeep successfully.
- 8. Where can we find plans and/or codes to make sure we are staying compliant with the city?** Helpful resources may include [Unified Development Ordinance](#), [Building Codes](#), [City Ordinances](#), [Valpo Parks Plans](#) or simply give us a call to discuss at 462-1161!