



A.C.E.
Matching Grant
Program Policy

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A.C.E. Matching Grant Program Policy

I. ALLIANCE FOR COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT (A.C.E.) PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The City of Gastonia implemented the neighborhood program, Alliance for Community Enrichment (A.C.E.), in 2021 to build relationships with the City's existing neighborhoods, while encouraging and assisting new community groups, in an effort to enhance the quality of life in the City and stimulate activity within neighborhoods and in City events. The Neighborhood Program is designed to foster greater communication between neighborhood groups and the City of Gastonia.

II. A.C.E. MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM PURPOSE

North Carolina General Statute 160D-1311 authorizes a local government to “engage in, to accept federal and state grants and loans for, and to appropriate and expend funds for community development programs and activities”. Among the activities that a local government may appropriate funds for are programs “concerned with employment, economic development, crime prevention, child care, health, drug abuse, education, and welfare needs of persons of low and moderate income.

Pursuant to the authority granted in N.C.G.S. 160D-1311, the City of Gastonia has established the A.C.E. Matching Grant Program. The A.C.E. Matching Grant Program provides eligible Recognized Communities with access to funds to implement projects that will improve the development, health, safety and quality of life in City of Gastonia neighborhoods. Up to \$1,500* is available for qualified projects. All projects are planned and implemented by neighborhood residents in partnership with the City.

The goal of the grant program is to facilitate neighborhood self-improvement. The program gives Recognized Communities an incentive to raise funds, build partnerships, cultivate volunteer and community support to complete projects that improves the neighborhood physically or addresses a need through active involvement of the neighborhood residents themselves. Community building is core to the project success. The value of the neighborhood's contribution (cash, volunteer labor, donated materials, or donated services) must be equal to or greater than the City's grant. The program is administered through the Housing and Community Engagement Department.

III. ELIGIBILITY

Matching Grant funds are available to City of Gastonia's Recognized Communities that have been formally recognized by the City of Gastonia's Alliance for Community Enrichment (A.C.E.) Program for at least six (6) months. Recognized Communities must have a checking account or request the vendor(s) working on the project to contact Tyler Davis (Tyler.Davis@gastonianc.gov) for direction on the City of Gastonia's Purchase Order (P.O) process for payment.

*Recognized Communities that do not have an established Tax Identification Number (TIN) or Employer Identification Number (EIN) for their organization/association/group through the IRS may only apply for funding up to \$599.99, annually (calendar year).

A Recognized Community is a residential community group with distinct geographic boundaries that has met a set of parameters, and has been formally recognized by Gastonia City Council. Recognized Communities can include Neighborhood Associations, Property Associations, Homeowner Associations, Crime Watch Groups, and other residential community groups with distinct, identifiable geographic boundaries. For more information on how to become a Recognized Community, visit the City of Gastonia's website at: <https://gastonianc.gov/ace.html>.

Matching Grant awards are not made to individual persons, or applicants who have failed to successfully carry out Matching Grant projects funded in the preceding year. Eligible Applicants may apply for grant once per year.

What types of projects are eligible for funding?

Single Projects that address a neighborhood issue or need in one of five categories are eligible for funding:

1. **Physical Improvement Projects:** landscaping or beautification of a subdivision entrance, planting trees, retention pond rehab, adding playground or recreation equipment, community gardens, street light installation, and neighborhood clean-ups.
2. **Neighborhood Identity Projects:** entrance signage, street sign toppers, markers, banners, and public art.
3. **Community building events** -- neighborhood-based events and celebrations such as July 4th parade, national night out festival, outdoor health/recreation (walking, biking, running) events, and emergency preparedness training and fairs.
4. **Environmental projects** -- such as storm water detention, bank stabilization, and creek clean-up relating to larger public storm water systems (projects must protect and enhance the greater public storm water systems and facilities.)
5. **Public Safety** -- National Night Out Event activities, Neighborhood Watch Resources, Youth Crime Prevention projects or programs, disaster planning or emergency preparedness fairs, Graffiti removal on public or common property or structures owned by the Recognized Community as a whole, Family safety training and activities, security cameras, traffic calming and signage.

Eligible projects must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Provide a public, neighborhood benefit and be open to all members of the community.
- Be completed in twelve (12) months or less
- Occur within the boundaries of the Recognized Community on public property (such as the City’s Right-of-Way or public parks, greenways and open space) or on common property owned by a neighborhood organization and must comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws. Projects that occur on privately owned real or personal property and not open to use by the general public or all persons residing in the Recognized Community are not eligible for funding.
- Be endorsed by the Recognized Community. The endorsement should be a “go or no go” decision and must be documented by an officer or community leader of the neighborhood organization.
- Projects in the public right of way must obtain an encroachment agreement from the City of Gastonia.
- Qualifying projects on privately owned or community organization owned property must obtain written permission and/or written easements from the property owner.
- Qualifying project sponsors/applicants must sign a contract with the City of Gastonia for the proper use of grant funds.

Note: This category list is not exhaustive and is provided for informational purposes. The City supports imaginative projects. No expenditure of funds under this program shall be made for any purpose other than a public purpose for which municipalities in North Carolina are authorized to provide funding.

IV. LIMITATIONS ON USE OF GRANT FUNDS

Grant funds are public dollars that must be prudently expended. Although not exhaustive, the following is a list of disallowed uses of Matching Grant funding:

- Expenses incurred prior to the grant award date (grant award date is the date that the contract between the City and Recognized Community has been fully approved with the grant amount.)
- Support ongoing, regularly occurring programs, services, events or activities
- Pay for an organization’s operating expenses
- Annual plants, flowers or shrubbery

- Salaries or stipends
- Food and Beverages
- Maintenance or repair projects that are the regular responsibility of the Homeowners, Property Owners, or Neighborhood Associations
- Raffles/Giveaways or personal use items
- Projects that may be open and available to some, but not all, residents of the Recognized Community

V. MATCH REQUIREMENTS

Recognized Communities must provide proof of 100% match (\$1.00 in matching funds for each \$1.00 requested in funding). The match must be directly related to the project. Match resources may include the following:

Component	Definition	Limit
Cash	Cash contributions or donations, proceeds from neighborhood fundraisers, etc.	No limit
Volunteer labor	Volunteer labor from neighborhood residents, valued at \$25.00 per hour.	Not to exceed 50% of the matching amount
In-kind donations of goods and services	Products, goods or professional services donated. Must include documentation from the vendor or company substantiating the value of the donation.	No Limit

Volunteer labor will be documented by using the Volunteer Hour Worksheet, which will need to be properly documented by the Recognized Community Leader and submitted upon completion of work to properly represent the volunteered labor match amount. For the purpose of this grant, volunteer labor is defined as manual labor directly tied to the proposed project, including but not limited to planting, picking up litter, site clearing/preparation, constructing, etc. Volunteer labor does not include time invested in planning, preparation, administrative tasks, etc.

VI. THE APPLICATION & REVIEW PROCESS

A.C.E. Matching Grant Applications are accepted by the City of Gastonia once per year or as budgeted funds are available. All eligible Recognized Communities will receive notice of the submission deadlines and review schedule. An applicant may submit an application for more than one project. However, each project must be able to stand-alone. Grant funds cannot be used to replace the organization’s current operating budget or supplement city services. Applications are due to the Neighborhood Program Administrator located in the Garland Municipal Building (150 S. York Street, Room 245) by 5pm on the proposal due date. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

As funds being utilized for this matching grant are taxpayer dollars, the City of Gastonia requires that a minimum of two (2) quotes/bids are provided for goods/services being requested through the project described in the application. Receiving multiple quotes shows that the community and City are utilizing monies in the most responsible manner. The City of Gastonia encourages utilizing vendors within the city limits of Gastonia, and this will be taken into consideration during the application evaluation.

The A.C.E. Matching Grant program is competitive. Each application will be evaluated on the basis of how well the project demonstrates the program’s main purpose of improving neighborhoods by addressing a specific need or concern. A review committee comprised of representatives from various City departments will review each application and score them based on the evaluation criteria (see table 2.). The committee will make a funding recommendation to the City Manager. The City Manager will make a final recommendation to City Council, who has the final authority to approve or deny a grant request.

Table 2 Evaluation Criteria

CRITERIA	POINTS	EXPLANATION
Supports Program Mission	25	Proposed activities are an effective response to a recognized issue or concern. The activities described in the project proposal are designed to address one of the five category areas.
Benefit to Recognized Community	35	Project provides a public benefit to the Recognized Community and directly involves the neighborhood residents in all phases.
Neighbor Involvement	10	A broad base of participation from Recognized Community residents exist.
Budget/Match	15	Budget is reasonable projection of expenses and accurately depicts neighborhood match.
Project Readiness	10	Project is well-planned, cost-effective and ready for implementation; shows a clear and reasonable vision for sustaining the project and resulting improvements.
Community Partnerships	5	Efforts were made to include community partners – evidence can include donations of in-kind services or professional services.
	100	Total Possible Points

VII. DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS

Because grant funds are public dollars, the City must meet certain audit requirements for funds that it expends. All required documentation must be submitted before funds can be disbursed. Grant funds will be disbursed using City Purchase Orders, reimbursement directly to approved vendors, or reimbursement directly to the applicant. Reimbursement to the applicant will only be made when supported by original third party receipts up to the approved grant amount. The neighborhood must submit a request for reimbursement to the Neighborhood Program Administrator. To include the following:

1. Letter requesting reimbursement; signed by the leader/s of the Recognized Community
2. Copy of paid invoices or receipts (for proof of purchase)
3. Copy of cancelled check
4. Copy of Recent Form W-9 (if requesting more than \$599.99 in grant funding)
5. Images of Completed Project (when applicable)

