

Vibrant Spaces Grant



APPLICATION CHECKLIST AND INSTRUCTIONS

Program Timeline

Application Released	Applications Due	Applications Reviewed & Scored	Award Announcement
September 16, 2024	December 9, 2024	December 10- January 31	To awardees: March 14 To public: April 25

Network Wisconsin

Applicants will be required to submit applications through Network Wisconsin. Contact your Regional Economic Development Director to receive a grant application and instructions on how to use Network Wisconsin. WEDC Regional Director map and contact info.: wedc.org/regional

Project Deliverables

All project contracts will require:

- Start the project in 2025. End the project and final performance report in 2026.
- Photos of the completed project
- WEDC logo on project signage
- Narrative identifying project impact including: the increase in the number and type of audiences using the space, impact on nearby businesses, number of events held

Application Checklist

- 1) Municipal resolution to apply.
- 2) Relevant community plan, records/minutes indicating previous project identification/discussion and/or letters of support that identify the project as a positive community investment.
- 3) Completed budget and cost estimates.
- 4) Photos and plans for the space (pictures of the amenities to be installed or project renderings).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Project Selection

Project elements:

- 1) My space is specifically designed for one use, but will be open to others to use, is it eligible? **Answer:** No, projects must accommodate multiple uses.
- 2) Is a project to build new pickle ball courts eligible? **Answer:** No, because projects must accommodate multiple user groups and activities.
- 3) Is my boat ramp and fishing pier eligible? **Answer:** If the ramp and pier are elements of a projects improving a space accessible and visible from a commercial corridor and are part of a broader project, they are eligible, but standalone waterfront projects or those not adjacent to commercial uses would not be.
- 4) Are streetscaping elements eligible? **Answer:** Landscaping and public amenities within a defined space are eligible. Streetscaping or amenities for an entire corridor are not.
- 5) Are alley improvements eligible? **Answer:** Yes, but the alley should be a defined space that can be programmed for use. Alley improvements over multiple blocks and/or alleys that do not cater to pedestrians are not eligible.
- 6) Can the grant be used to renovate the inside and outside of a building in the space? **Answer:** The only interior renovations allowed inside of buildings are the construction (and renovation) of restrooms. Other renovations to the structure are not eligible (Those elements in the space - e.g. concessions - could be done separately from the grant).
- 7) Can the space be fenced and have operating hours for public use? Can the space be used for private events? **Answer:** Yes, provided that the space is generally accessible to the public, it may be fully/partially fenced to accommodate certain activities. Operating hours (such as nighttime closures of restrooms) are permissible. Private events may also be permitted – as often seen in other municipal public spaces.
- 8) Is fencing an eligible expense? **Answer:** Yes, if it is associated with the space.
- 9) Would relocation of a memorial be an allowable expense as part of the overall project? **Answer:** Site preparation is eligible as a match, so the grading work associated with the relocation would be a match. The relocation itself would be outside of the grant and not eligible as a match expense.
- 10) Would a PA system be eligible? **Answer:** Yes, as long as its use is related to the space.

Project location:

- 11) Can the project be located on privately-owned property? **Answer:** Yes, but the site/property does need to be publicly accessible. If privately-owned, then a multi-year lease agreement or formal Memorandum of Understanding will be needed as well as property owner permission to carry out activities on the site.
 - a. How long does the lease term need to be? **Answer:** Suggestion of two years or more.
- 12) Can the grant be used in a neighborhood park that isn't necessarily in a downtown space? **Answer:** Yes, but only if you can show the impact to neighborhood businesses.

Project Logistics and Funding

Applicants:

- 1) Can previous Vibrant Spaces grant recipients apply? **Answer:** FY23 awardees are not eligible to apply in FY25. Moving forward, municipalities may receive a VS grant every other year.
- 2) How do you define a community? **Answer:** Municipal boundaries define a community. One (1) application per community is allowed due to limited funds.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS, CONT.

- 3) Does the municipality have to be the entity carrying out the project? **Answer:** No, the municipality has to be the applicant and pass a resolution in support of the project, but the space can be built out/managed/programmed by community partners including but not limited to Business Improvement Districts, Chambers, Downtown Associations, Arts Districts, Libraries, etc.
- 4) Can the County or Redevelopment Authority (RDA) apply on behalf of a project in a municipality in the region? **Answer:** Yes, a County or RDA may be the applicant for a project, but only one application per municipal boundary will be accepted regardless of the applicant.
- 5) Can contiguous municipalities submit coordinated applications relating to projects such as a bicycle/pedestrian trail that would connect multiple communities? **Answer:** Trail extension is not eligible, but trail head and gathering spaces along trails that would benefit commercial district businesses, and that will be used for multiple audiences, are eligible. If a space spans municipalities, is recommended that one or both municipalities submit grants for their portion of the project, as contracts will be with a single entity.
- 6) How do we find out who to contact at our local municipality? **Answer:** Contact your WEDC Regional Director and they will provide you with the appropriate community contact information.

Funding:

- 7) Do I have to have all 'match sources' secured at the time of application? **Answer:** No, anticipated match sources need to be identified at the time of application, but funds don't need to be secured until time grant fund disbursement is requested. WEDC will allow a total of two (2) draw requests for the project. Grant funds will be disbursed on a pro-rata basis to match the amount of matching funds identified with the draw(s).
- 8) Is ongoing maintenance of the site eligible? **Answer:** No, but we encourage applicants to have a plan to maintain their project/installation and to address that plan in their application.
- 9) What are eligible grant and match activities? **Answer:** Eligible activities include the following:
 - a. Public Space Enhancements (projects activating alleys, programmable park spaces, vacant parcels, and underutilized parking lots including elements such as public art, landscaping, benches, bike racks, etc.)
 - b. Public Signage (wayfinding, interpretive signage, kiosks and other signage located in and associated with the space)
 - c. Public Infrastructure (restrooms, water features, electrical, lighting, site preparation)
 - d. Seasonal Equipment with the intent to use annually (tables, chairs, umbrellas, heaters)
 - e. Site preparation such as grading, stormwater, etc. (Both grant and match eligible in FY23.)
- 10) What are ineligible grant and match activities? **Answer:** Ineligible activities include the following:
 - a. Building improvements (other than restrooms for public space use) – no interior renovations
 - b. District- or community-wide improvement projects
 - c. Events, staffing, programming, ongoing maintenance
 - d. Private spaces not open and accessible to the public
 - e. Site acquisition costs and lease costs
 - f. Activities otherwise eligible to be funded through other WEDC programs
 - g. In-kind contributions of materials or labor
 - h. Demolition
- 11) Can donated goods or services be used as match for the grant? **Answer:** No, but the value/impact of the donations should be summarized in the narrative.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS, CONT.

Grant Application and Process

- 1) How long do we have to complete the project? **Answer:** Project must start after the application is accepted into WEDC's Underwriting (anticipated to be sometime in February 2025) and must end by December 31, 2026.
- 2) Is the space design expected to be final by the time of application? **Answer:** No, but a close representation of the future space needs to be provided with the application to have an accurate budget, and stakeholder/partner consensus regarding the project and process must be very well defined within the application.
- 3) If we are planning to start some of the project in 2024, can we still apply? **Answer:** Yes, once a completed application is received (and accepted as complete into WEDC's Underwriting), costs incurred on and after the acceptance date may be considered eligible as match, assuming the grant is awarded. Project elements completed prior to that date will not be eligible for match or reimbursement, but prior progress does not impact the eligibility for funding of the space. Provided sufficient costs remain after the acceptance date to support both match and funding, projects may still apply.
- 4) Can your project be out to bid, but just not have started yet? **Answer:** Yes.
- 5) Is a project eligible to apply that already has site work started? **Answer:** Yes, but the date the application is accepted into WEDC's Underwriting is the "start date" for the project. Only after the "start date" will expenses be considered grant and match eligible.
- 6) If I don't have a community plan that identifies the project, what other documentation would be acceptable to provide? **Answer:** Meeting minutes, news articles, community meeting announcements, and/or documentation of the conversations/meetings that have been had to date with partners/stakeholders regarding the project.
- 7) Are there any requirements or advantages for low-income areas? **Answer:** No.
- 8) If a project has more than one of the eligibility requirements, will it score higher? **Answer:** Yes.

Vibrant Spaces Grant

SCORING MATRIX

Category	Possible Points	Competitive Grant Scoring Matrix
Creation of visible and pedestrian-oriented public space	10	1 – Space is not visible from primary roads and is not walkable from businesses and destinations 5 – Space is visible from a primary road but not easily accessible via foot OR space is walkable from business and destinations but not visible to pedestrians and vehicles 10- Space is prominently located within a downtown/commercial district and easily walkable to nearby businesses and public amenities
The potential of the space to attract multiple user groups and activities	10	1 – Space serves a single purpose (i.e. sports field) 5- Space can accommodate multiple user groups but focuses on single-purpose activities (i.e. several structured elements in one space – fishing pier, play area, shelter, etc.) 10 – Space is a flexible space that can accommodate many user groups simultaneously and will also be used by multiple community partners/stakeholders to host events
Impact of the project on the community, district, and nearby businesses	10	1 - Space will be primarily used and programmed by one entity, is not located near complementary businesses, and will serve primarily nearby residents or existing user groups 5- Space will accommodate the entire community and will boost traffic to a few nearby businesses or accommodate new events 10 - Space is centrally located to multiple businesses and creates foot traffic in a commercial corridor. Space actively encourages interaction between community members, businesses, and visitors
Demonstrated community support for the project (multiple funding partners, civic organization participation). Partnerships and collaboration.	10	1 - Project targets an underutilized space and is supported by one or more community partners/stakeholders, but not included in any previous plan (or history of meetings/discussions about the project) and no formal agreements are in place to carry out the project 5 - Project not included in formal plan, but meets identified need in the district, has been discussed by community groups and has support from multiple community partners/stakeholders to help make the project/space successful 10 - Project is part of a community or district plan, has support from multiple community partners and will be programmed and developed in conjunction with partners/stakeholders
Budget and match funding preparedness (ie: detailed budget including sources of funds)	10	1 - Budget identifies key elements needed for project and potential sources of funding, less than 25% of project funds have been committed 5 - Budget includes detailed cost estimates, at least 50% of funds have been committed and remaining funds have source identified 10 – Budget includes detailed site plan, detailed cost estimates, and has 75% of funding sources committed with funds coming from diverse sources
Total	50	

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