



2026 Community Experts Fund Application Preview

The following is a preview of what to expect when completing an application for funding from the Community Experts Fund. For more information, log into the grants portal: <https://towerfdn.link/grants-portal>. **Applications must be received by 11:59 PM on September 4, 2026.**

Before You Start Looking at the Questions

- Please drop us an email (info@thetowerfoundation.org) to let us know what accommodations would make it easier for you to apply.
- Note the character limits that are new this year.

I. Organizational Information

We're looking for some pretty standard information here. Where do you work, whom do you serve, and what do you do?

- Which of the Tower Foundation counties does your organization/collaboration serve? (Barnstable, MA; Dukes, MA; Erie, NY; Essex, MA; Nantucket, MA; Niagara, NY)
- What age groups does your organization/collaboration serve? (Children, Adolescents, Young Adults)
- Applicant organization's current/most recent annual operating budget
- In what issue areas does your organization/collaboration work? (intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health, substance use disorders)
- What is your organization's or collaboration's mission? (500 character limit)
- What services/programs does your organization/collaboration provide? Highlight existing programs within the Foundation's service area. (2,500 character limit)

II. Equity Information

As previously noted, the Tower Foundation's Community Experts Team will prioritize inclusive, accessible, and culturally responsive program design for people with disabilities, races/ethnicities, income levels, and for those who speak different languages or communicate differently. To help the Community Experts Team understand more about your organization and the people you support, applicants are asked to share the following:

- If your organization collects demographic data, applicants are asked to enter the number of individuals of each race/ethnicity for each role (Executive Director, Staff, Board of Directors, People Served) in a chart.

Equity Information Continued

- Indicate if your organization is led by a person who identifies as Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC), or as a person with a disability/disabled person, or if your organization's leader shares a key identity with the population served.
- We also ask applicants to respond to this question: What additional information about your organization's diversity and inclusion practices would you like to share? (2,500 character limit)

A Note About Confidentiality and Data Security: *We understand that sharing information about your organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion practices can be sensitive and, frankly, a little scary in the current environment. We promise to hold any such information you provide in confidence and to do our level best to ensure that your data are stored safely and securely.*

III. Application Narrative

If you have applied to the Tower Foundation for funding before, the following questions will look very familiar to you. Please know that while these questions map to the typical Tower Foundation grant application structure, ***the Community Experts Fund application requires character limits that our other funding opportunities do not.*** This is in an effort to make the grant applications concise and accessible to the review team. We appreciate your flexibility!

Pro tip: The strongest applications will address criteria included in the What Makes a Strong Application? section of the RFP.

1. Project Summary (500 character limit)

Imagine explaining your project in two very short sentences. That's what we're looking for here. This is the express elevator pitch. Don't worry, we promise to keep reading.

2. What do you want to do? (2,500 character limit)

This is the longer, slower elevator pitch. We're looking for a high level, general description of what you're trying to accomplish. Don't get into the concrete details/day-to-day aspects of the project yet – that's going to come up later in the "How do you want to do it?" section.

3. Why do you want to do it? (2,500 character limit)

Tell us why you see your project as important and/or urgent. Give us some background information to help us understand the issue(s) and how it affects your community. This is also where you'd want to connect your project with the Foundation's focus areas, including a description of the people you serve.



4. How are you going to do it? (2,500 character limit)

Now you can get into the nuts and bolts of your project's activities! Describe the methods or special approaches you plan to take. Remember to consider "what makes a strong application" in the section above and to speak to how you plan to meet those expectations.

5. What do you need to do it? (2,500 character limit)

Briefly describe the resources you need, monetary and otherwise. This section should complement the budget you provide but could also speak to the required resources that may not come with a price tag. If it makes sense, you can also use this section to discuss less tangible requirements (e.g., culture change, interagency cooperation, and community engagement).

A note on overhead: *The Tower Foundation allows most organizations to apply an administrative overhead rate of 30%, though the administrative overhead rate for colleges and universities is capped at 10%. If, for some reason, you don't want to take any administrative overhead, that's fine – just be sure to make that explicit in this section so we know that's your plan and not an oversight.*

IV. Budget

Please complete the budget template in the online system. You are welcome to create your own budget so long as it minimally shares the information requested in the template provided.

Having Problems with the Grants Portal?

- *If you're having trouble with the grants portal (e.g., you aren't able to create a new application), please use the Support button on the grants portal home page to request assistance. Please do not send an email to the general info email address or to any specific Program Officer (even if you know them well and really like them).*
- *If the issue is that you can't get into the grants portal, please try a password reset (there's a link on the login screen). If that doesn't help, please send an email to support@thetowerfoundation.org and our system administrators will get you squared away.*



Accommodations & Contact Information

Please drop us an email to let us know what accommodations would make it easier for you to apply (e.g., application translation, video application submission or discussion of alternate submission formats): info@thetowerfoundation.org

Photograph of the 2025 Community Experts Team

Kalvin Booker/Through His Lens Photography in partnership with Get Fokus'd Productions

Notes on Using Generative Artificial Intelligence

While we're not big fans of using generative artificial intelligence to write grant proposals, we absolutely encourage you to use these tools to help you strengthen your requests. Two important caveats:

- You're still responsible for what you submit, so make sure to review anything you let AI touch to ensure quality and accuracy!
- Do not ever submit sensitive information without checking on the privacy policy and settings (and even then, think twice). Most AI platforms – even the free versions – have a setting to turn off data sharing for model training.
 - **ChatGPT:** Profile icon → Settings → Data Controls → turn off “Improve the model for everyone.” New conversations after you change this setting will not be used to train OpenAI’s models; you can also use “Temporary chat” for individual conversations that are not saved or used for training.
 - **Claude:** Unless you are on a Team or Enterprise plan, Claude uses chats for model training by default. To turn off data sharing for training, go to Claude’s privacy or account settings, look for an option such as “Help improve Claude” or similar, and switch it off to opt out of training. Also avoid using the thumbs up/down feedback tools if you do not want those conversations used for training.
 - **Gemini:** Go to “Gemini Apps Activity” in your Google account and turn off “Keep activity” for Gemini Apps. This stops those chats from being stored long term or used to improve Google’s AI models, but you will not have ongoing access to the history of new chats initiated after changing this setting (Google may still keep short-term logs for safety).
 - **Copilot (consumer):** In your Copilot or Microsoft account privacy settings, turn off “Model training on text” and “Model training on voice” wherever they appear (web, desktop, or mobile). This prevents Microsoft from using your chats and voice inputs to train Copilot’s models, though some processing for safety and service operations may still occur.



Photographs of past Community Experts Team Retreats by Calvin Booker Through His Lens Photography in partnership with Get Fokus'd Productions.

