



February 20, 2024

COMMUNITY POWER INITIATIVE

- ANNOUNCEMENT OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY -

1. Background

For nearly four decades, the Marin Community Foundation (MCF) has served as a crucial resource and asset for the residents of Marin County, facilitating over \$1 billion in funding to Marin causes. We have had the privilege of supporting organizations and projects that enable every resident to have the opportunity to lead full lives with dignity and respect. Together, we have built hundreds of affordable housing units, piloted Marin’s first guaranteed income program, supported thousands of young people in their journey into and through college, and ensured access to nurturing and safe early learning and care. When COVID-19 struck, we rallied our communities to raise over \$10 million for emergency rental assistance, food and more.

Our new strategic vision builds on that legacy and sets a simple North Star: more impact for our communities in Marin and beyond. Inherent in that vision is an acknowledgement of the vital role that trusted nonprofit organizations play in Marin. These organizations represent a 24/7, boots-on-the-ground presence in the county — the people that day in and day out, provide skilled, critical services and support to those in need. They build social capital and grassroots leadership through their longstanding and holistic commitments to their neighborhoods. They seek to change the systems at the root of inequity. They drive both proven and newly fostered, innovative solutions to our community’s most vexing and troubling challenges. These are the groups that embody and represent the power of community and the ability of community itself to care for, uplift, and transform.

Too often though, philanthropic support comes with more strings than flexibility, more reporting requirements than partnership, and as many months of application-writing as months of support. Nonprofit leaders are left chasing dollars instead of serving their communities and fighting for equity. Power continues to reside with grantmakers instead of communities. We at MCF believe the time has come to put more power in the hands of those that are most directly engaged in the work: organizations serving our community, working tirelessly to create the world that we all wish for — a world of peace, opportunity, and dignity.

2. Goals

To support this commitment, we are launching the **Community Power Initiative** with up to \$10 million in funding for fiscal year 2025 (July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025) to explore a new model for how MCF can support community-based organizations. Our goal is to reduce the administrative burden, increase flexibility, build the health and vitality of organizations, sustain crucial organizations, recognize innovative ones, and ultimately empower leading organizations throughout Marin County to flourish and focus on the critical work at hand.

The Community Power Initiative offers any organization serving Marin residents the opportunity to apply through a simple Request for Proposal (RFP) process for **general operating support grants for one to three years**. We hope that this will be seen as an explicit statement of the trust that we have in the nonprofit community, along with a reduction in the burden of administration.

We seek to support organizations and collaboratives or networks that work with and support Marin’s most marginalized communities. These are communities that have been historically underserved, underrepresented, and disproportionately harmed by society’s failures. They often face the greatest challenges to their well-being, and often suffer from the poorest outcomes. We will continue to work county-wide, and we will give special attention to the areas where the concentration of need is greatest. Data shows that these communities are largely concentrated in four areas of Marin County that continue to be geographically, socioeconomically, and racially segregated: the Canal in San Rafael, Marin City, and pockets in West Marin and Novato. We also recognize that there are marginalized residents residing in other parts of the county. We welcome proposals from entities that are advancing equity and are working outside of these four geographic areas.

As described in Section 4 below, we will fund **two different kinds of organizations** through this initiative: 1) larger organizations that play an essential, irreplaceable role in Marin County through their services and/or advocacy to marginalized communities at scale, and 2) smaller organizations that are taking unique, innovative, or entrepreneurial approaches to their missions to be more effective in creating impact.

3. Learning and continuous improvement

MCF strives to be a learning organization. We may need to change course after this first effort based on what we learn in partnership with the organizations and residents throughout the County. For example, we may learn that in addition to financial support, certain cohorts of grantees would benefit from specific capacity building or convening opportunities, and we would like to be able to adapt according to those needs.

We recognize that we cannot support all worthy organizations and that the need for this funding will outstrip our ability to provide it. Marin is fortunate to have such a vibrant social sector for a county its size, but we anticipate the budget allocation for this initiative will only be sufficient to fund a small portion of applications during this process despite comprising a major share of our available grantmaking. We also likely will have to give many applicants grants that are lower-budget and/or shorter term than what they applied for. Future funding opportunities will depend on budgets and on what we learn through this initial round of investment.

4. Funding opportunities

The Community Power Initiative comprises two funding opportunities, each of which we expect to receive far more applications than we will be able to fund. Each organization should apply to *one* of them. Applications will be considered independent of whether an applicant receives or intends to receive funds from any other MCF program. Each of the funding opportunities seeks the goals described above but in different ways. They are:

1. **Larger applicants.** This funding opportunity provides general operating support grants for one to three years to sustain crucial organizations in Marin. It supports organizations and collaboratives with a consistent track record of providing essential, irreplaceable

benefits to marginalized communities, at scale. Applicants are likely to have a significant number of staff employed in specialized positions and/or a robust volunteer network, with an annual budget of \$2 million or more. Organizations applying for funding are expected to exhibit a high level of financial and organizational effectiveness (please see Eligibility Criteria section).

2. **Smaller applicants.** This funding opportunity provides general operating support grants for one to three years to help nurture smaller entities seeking to build their impact. Applicants for funding are *not* expected to exhibit the same track record, level of organizational effectiveness or service delivery, or level of staffing as in the first funding opportunity. However, they should clearly demonstrate unique, innovative, or entrepreneurial approaches to achieving their mission. These applicants likely have an annual budget under \$2 million. They also should meet basic standards of financial and governance controls.

Collaboratives are welcome to apply to whichever of the two funding opportunities best reflects their history and current capacity. Collaboratives may be independent fiscal entities, a joint proposal from a set of organizationally independent partners, or a lead organization on behalf of and serving as the backbone for a set of partners. An organization *can* apply as part of a collaborative, as well as a stand-alone entity for one of the funding opportunities.

The Community Power Initiative is a \$10 million funding opportunity. As this is a highly competitive process, MCF encourages grant seekers to request grant amounts consistent with your organization’s current budget and general operating support needs. We aim to support organizations in maintaining key services and activities that prioritize the communities needs and aspirations.

- For Large Organizations (budgets of \$2 million or more), grant requests can be made for up to \$600K per year, for 1-3 years if needed.
- For Small Organizations (budgets under \$2 million), grant requests can be made for up to \$125K per year, for 1-3 years if needed.

Final awards will be based on organization size, scope, Marin presence, and available funding. Please note that grant awards may differ from the applicant’s requests, and not all applicants will receive the maximum amount.

5. Key dates

Milestone	Date
Application open	February 20, 2024
Application due	April 5, 2024 (at 2 pm)
Awards announced	May 30, 2024
Grant period begins at earliest	July 1, 2024

6. Eligibility Criteria

Any organization or collaborative that works with and supports marginalized communities in Marin County and meets the criteria below is eligible to apply. We fund both larger organizations providing essential services or advocacy at scale, as well as smaller, innovative organizations seeking impactful approaches.

Applicants may demonstrate greater strength and focus on some criteria than others, but priority will be given to applicants demonstrating commitment across the full set of criteria.

- **Efficacy.** Applicants should demonstrate a commitment to defining, achieving and tracking impact, and an alignment between their mission and community need. They should:
 - **For larger applicants:** Demonstrate a consistent track record of meaningful impact in their work in the past. The organization should have benefitted residents of the community for five or more years.
 - **For smaller applicants:** Demonstrate innovative, unique, and/or entrepreneurial approaches to addressing persistent challenges in Marin County.
 - **For all applicants:**
 - Articulate clear organizational goals.
 - Provide unique, irreplaceable, essential benefits that serve important populations at risk.
 - Present a clear plan for achieving results.
 - Deliver and track outcomes and impact on people and communities served.
 - If possible, leverage other funding in collaboration with MCF (e.g., public funding, other private philanthropic funders) to achieve greater impact.
- **Commitment to equity.** MCF believes that all residents in Marin deserve the opportunity to lead thriving, joyous, and dignified lives in their community. Applicants should explicitly describe how they are working on behalf of the most marginalized populations. Applicants should:
 - Serve Marin County residents, with priority given to applicants that serve the key populations described above (e.g., Marin City, the Canal neighborhood of San Rafael, Novato, West Marin, at-risk populations across the County).
 - Reflect efforts to embrace a community-driven approach (e.g., identify the specific needs facing the community and use community input to determine how it will address those needs).
 - Represent the diversity of the community served, including in its leadership.
 - Seek to build community from the ground up.
 - Articulate how your commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) influences your programs, policies, and practices.
- **Organizational and financial due diligence.** Applicants should demonstrate:
 - **For larger applicants:** If an audit is required, the current and prior-year auditor’s letter indicates the organization is following all financial regulations and has strong financial practices; there is evidence the organization has implemented any recommendations from the prior year.
 - **For all applicants:**
 - Ongoing financial support for the organization separate from MCF support.

- Consistent history of running without substantial operating deficits.
- Boards and staff that are skilled, diverse, and knowledgeable; and have shown a desire to move the organization forward to achieve the best results.
- A sound financial management system and financial stability.

Consistent with general MCF guidelines, only certain kinds of applicants are eligible. Eligible entities are those with a 501(c)(3) designation, those that have a fiscal sponsor with a 501(c)(3) designation, collaborations of nonprofit and public agencies, coalitions, or other entities that have a designated charitable purpose to directly serve or benefit Marin County residents.

7. Submission details

Applications should include a complete but brief proposal. Applicants who have been selected to move forward in the process will then be invited to provide additional information. Final funding levels may be lower than the requested amount.

Applications must be submitted through our online [Grant Center](#). The appendix includes narrative questions for individual organizations and collaboratives. The application in Grant Center asks for various pieces of standard information (e.g., organization name, CEO's name, tax status, amount of request), current fiscal year budget, financial statements, and sources of income; and a narrative portion tied to the objectives and criteria described above.

The application will be available in the Grant Center on **February 20, 2024**. If you are new to the Grant Center, please allow 3 to 5 business days for your registration to be approved. Proposals are due by **2:00 pm on April 5, 2024**. Additionally, we will set up times when you can ask questions of our staff about this initiative and the proposal process and offer any feedback to us. These are tentatively set to begin late February.

In the meantime, please do not hesitate to submit any questions on the content of this opportunity to our team email box, ceteam@marincf.org.

Appendix:

Narrative Questions for Individual Applicants

1. Summarize your organization's mission, vision, strategic priorities, staff and board expertise, service area(s), and capacity for impact. Additionally, outline the organization's 3- to 5- year goals and strategies for achieving them, including the ways in which you partner with others to achieve desired results.
2. Please describe your priority populations or communities who are the focus of your work. What are the strengths of the community you would like to highlight? What recent challenges has the community experienced that you are addressing?
3. Highlight your organization's strengths, unique position, and role in promoting and achieving equity. Outline major contributions to advancing equity in your community and/or the region. How will unrestricted general operating support help to propel your work?
4. Describe how your organization actively seeks input from community members who are directly impacted by your work.
5. What community impacts do you anticipate from your work? If applicable, provide qualitative and quantitative data demonstrating past, current, and anticipated impact.
6. If applicable to your work, please describe the issue(s) or policy(ies) that your leadership and advocacy work is attempting to address. Give examples of past work you've done in this area. How will you influence the current situation and who will you partner with to make that change happen?
7. Provide an overview of your organization's current financial status including details on reserves and percentage of unrestricted revenue (if applicable). Describe any challenges such as deficits, cash flow issues, or concerns about facilities and your plans to address these challenges.
8. Describe your organization's fund development strategy including any plans to leverage funding.

[continued]

Narrative Questions for Collaborative Applicants

1. Summarize your collaborative's mission, vision, strategic priorities, staff and board expertise, service area(s) and capacity for impact. Additionally, outline the collaborative's 3- to 5- year goals and strategies for achieving them including the ways in which you partner with others to achieve desired results.
2. Please describe the lead agency's role along with the names and roles of each collaborative partner.
3. Please describe your priority populations or communities who are the focus of your work. What are the strengths of the community you would like to highlight? What recent challenges has the community experienced that you are addressing?
4. Highlight your collaborative's strengths, unique position, and role in promoting and achieving equity. Outline major contributions to advancing equity in your community and/or the region. How will unrestricted general operating support help to propel your work?
5. Describe how your collaborative actively seeks input from community members who are directly impacted by your work.
6. What community impacts do you anticipate from your work? If applicable, provide qualitative and quantitative data demonstrating past, current, and anticipated impact.
7. If applicable to your work, please describe the issue(s) or policy(ies) that your leadership and advocacy work is attempting to address. Give examples of past work you've done in this area. How will you influence the current situation and who will you partner with to make that change happen?
8. Provide an overview of your collaborative's current financial status including details on reserves and percentage of unrestricted revenue (if applicable). Describe any challenges such as deficits, cash flow issues, or concerns about facilities and your plans to address these challenges.
9. Describe your collaborative's fund development strategy, including any plans to leverage funding.