



NATURAL & CULTURAL HERITAGE GRANT PROGRAM 2026 GRANT GUIDELINES

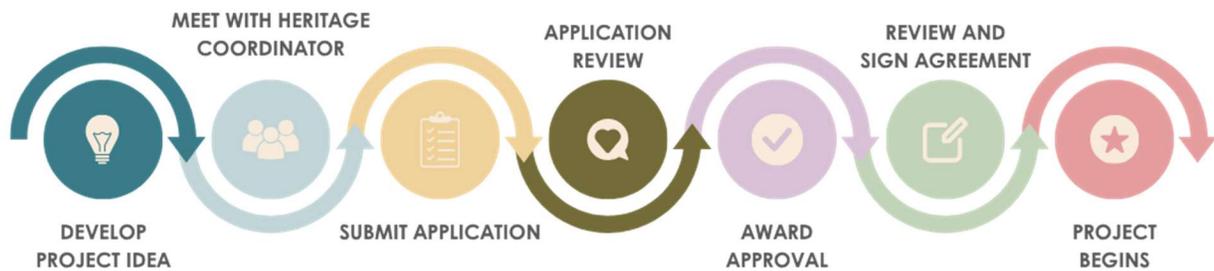
GRANT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

First launched in 2011, the annual Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant Program supports community-led heritage conservation projects across Douglas County, Kansas. This program is administered by the Douglas County Heritage Conservation Office and is overseen by the Heritage Conservation Council (HCC). As an advisor to the Board of County Commissioners, HCC promotes and advocates for the conservation of tangible and intangible natural and cultural heritage to honor the past, enrich the present, and inspire the future.

Up to **\$250,000** is available for grant awards in 2026. **\$40,000** of the total grant pool is earmarked to support projects with a budget of \$5,000 and below (Seed Grants).

Funding for this program has been allocated by the Board of County Commissioners as a part of the County’s annual budget process.

PROGRAM TIMELINE



Pre-application Meeting Deadline: Friday, February 20, 2026

Application Deadline: Thursday, March 5, 2026, at 5 pm

Award Recommendation Meetings: Thursday, March 26, 2026, and Thursday, April 2, 2026

Project Start: Approximately May 1, 2026, with project agreement fully executed.

Project Completion: Projects should be completed by May 1, 2028.

GRANT CATEGORIES

Grant awards can be up to \$60,000. The two grant categories are listed below:

- **Seed Grants – Up to \$5,000:** Proposals for requests of \$5,000 and below are encouraged to help support smaller scale projects and to launch new heritage conservation efforts. These proposals have a simplified application process and will be reviewed independently of the larger awards.

Examples of Seed Grant projects include, but are not limited to:

- Annual or one-time cultural event
 - Developing curriculum or educational materials
 - Supporting a permanent or temporary art installation
 - Interpretive signage
 - Planning and development of complex projects
- **Target Grants- \$5,001-\$60,000:** Proposals above \$5,000 and up to \$60,000 should demonstrate a significant and lasting impact on the conservation of Douglas County’s natural and cultural resources.

To learn more about projects that have previously been funded by this program, explore our interactive web map: www.dgcoks.gov/hcc/grantmap.

GRANT PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

ELIGIBILITY OF THE APPLICANT

The following types of organizations are eligible to apply for this program:

- Non-profit organizations
All 501(c)(3) non-profit applicants must be in current good standing with the IRS regarding their Form 990 filing requirements.
- Universities, K-12 schools, and libraries
- For-profit businesses, including agricultural businesses
- Cemetery Associations
- Any unit of local government or adjacent agencies within Douglas County, Kansas

Fiscal sponsorship, or pass-through funding to unincorporated organizations or individuals, is allowed for this grant program. Applicants should be the organizations that will administer and receive funds.

Organizations in good standing with current or completed Natural & Cultural Heritage Grant awards may apply for grant funds. Applicants may apply for multiple grants to fund separate projects.

ELIGIBILITY OF THE PROJECT

PROJECT THEME: Projects **must** fall into at least one of the following categories:

- **Cultural Heritage**

Cultural Heritage projects can touch any theme related to culture or history. Examples of Cultural Heritage projects include recording oral histories, digitization of archives, museum exhibit development, and cultural celebrations and community events.

- **Natural Heritage**

Natural Heritage projects can touch any theme related to native ecosystems, natural history, agricultural heritage, or land conservation. Examples of natural heritage projects include ecosystem restoration, educational resources for land stewards, and recreational trail development.

- **Historic Preservation**

Historic Preservation projects center the preservation of historic structures or other human-built resources. Examples of these projects include restoration of windows, rehabilitation of barns, preservation planning for a historic site, or consultant fees for registering a site on the state and/or national historic register.

PRIORITY THEMES: As guided by the Heritage Conservation Council's Strategic Plan, the following project themes will be prioritized for funding recommendations:

- Multidisciplinary Approaches to Heritage Conservation
- Uplifting Under Told Heritage Stories
- Protecting and Enhancing Open Spaces
- Preserving Stories and Heritage of Rural Communities
- Accessibility and Visibility of Historic Sites

PROJECT LOCATION: All grant projects must occur in Douglas County, Kansas. The benefit of the project must primarily impact Douglas County residents and visitors.

PROJECT TIMELINE: All grant projects should be completed within two years. Extensions may be granted with approval from the Heritage Coordinator.

ELIGIBILITY OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROJECTS: Projects that involve the preservation of historic resources are eligible to apply for funding. Historic is defined as more than 50 years old, and resources include structures, buildings, historic sites, and more.

However, priority will be given to historic preservation projects that involve either 1) sites listed on the State or National Register of Historic Places and 2) sites eligible for listing on a Historic Register if the applicant is in the process of seeking such listing (must have written notice of eligibility from SHPO). Historic preservation projects outside of these parameters may be considered with reasonable explanation.

For projects that involve physical work related to historic resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places or Register of Historic Kansas Places, the applicant must have the proposed work reviewed and approved by the Kansas State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to ensure compliance with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Written approval must be submitted with the grant application.

Any projects that are related to archaeological sites and/or unmarked burials must consult with the State Archaeologist, impacted communities, and associated Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPO) to ensure compliance with the Unmarked Burial Sites Preservation Act, Antiquities Act, and THPO guidelines.

PROJECT BUDGET

Applicants may request funds up to **\$60,000** per project. A budget template to assist with project planning is available on the HCC website: dgcoks.gov/hcc/grants.

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES: Eligible expenses for proposals include, but are not limited to:

- Personnel Expenses and Staff Time
- Contractor Fees or Professional Services
- Materials and Supplies
- Travel
- Communications, Printing, and Signage
- Equipment

INDIRECT COSTS: Overhead or indirect costs are allowable expenses; however, indirect costs should not exceed 10% of the grant award. Exceptions may be allowed on a case-by-case basis if an indirect cost estimate exceeds 10% in ways that can be reasonably attributed to costs fairly associated with the proposed project.

MATCHING FUNDS: There is no minimum amount or percentage of matching funds, either cash or in-kind, required for this grant program. However, applicants applying for **Target Grants** are expected to demonstrate support or investment in the project beyond County grant funds. For **Target Grant** requests, projects with a greater percentage of matching funds, either through cash or in-kind support, will be given priority consideration.

- *In-Kind Match:* In-kind match combines the value of all non-cash contributions (goods & services) directly related to the grant activity. This may include donated use of a facility space, use of equipment, donated staff time, or volunteer time. If calculating the value of general volunteer time, please use the estimated value of volunteer time for the state of Kansas: \$30.86 per volunteer, per hour (<https://independentsector.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/vovt-report-2025.pdf>). Volunteers using professional skills may use professional rates.
- *Cash Match:* Includes other cash contributions including other grant awards, internal funding support, and donations.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

APPLICANT MEETING

The first step in the grant application process is to **schedule a pre-application meeting with the Heritage Coordinator**. This meeting must take place by **February 20, 2026**.

The purpose of this meeting is to confirm that the proposed project is eligible for funding, ensure that the applicant has considered all grant guidelines, and assist and answer questions to help the applicant develop a competitive grant proposal.

To schedule this meeting, email kammerlaan@dgcoks.gov or call 785-330-2878 with preferred times and method for meeting (in-person, online, or over the phone).

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

- **NEW IN 2026:** Applicants requesting \$5,000 or less will have a reduced application length. To help make the application process simpler for applicants requesting smaller awards, only three narrative responses will be required.
- Applications will be submitted online through our application portal available at dgcoks.gov/hcc/grants.

- Applicants are encouraged to be **as direct and concise as possible** in their responses to the application questions.
- **Letters of support from any organization named as a partner or collaborator on the proposed project are highly encouraged.**
- In case of any unforeseen technical difficulties, we highly recommend preparing your answers in a **separate document**. A downloadable, Word version of the application is available on our website.
- Submit your completed application online by **Thursday, March 5, 2026, at 5 pm**. The application will close at this time. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.
- Contact the Heritage Coordinator at kammerlaan@dgcoks.gov or 785-330-2878 if you experience any technical difficulties or need assistance with the application. If you do not have reliable access to internet, the Heritage Coordinator will work with you to accommodate your needs. Assistance will be provided as available, however last-minute requests might not be accommodated.

APPLICATION EVALUATION

APPLICATION EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications for Seed Grants and Target Grants will be evaluated independently, utilizing separate sets of evaluation criteria.

Seed Grant Evaluation Criteria

- Feasibility
- Impact
- Public Benefit

Target Grant Evaluation Criteria

- Feasibility
- Impact
- Public Benefit
- Equity
- Urgency
- Sustainability
- Matching Resources

The scoring rubrics for each grant category with more information can be found at the end of this document.

AWARD RECOMMENDATION PRIORITIES

The following priorities will be considered when making the full slate of recommendations for grant awards:

- Projects that align with at least one priority theme as outlined in this document
- Geographic diversity of projects across Douglas County
- Projects with demonstrated collaboration between multiple organizations
- Projects that offer knowledge sharing, educational, or interpretive opportunities
- When considering historic preservation projects, priority will be given to projects that involve either 1) sites listed on the State or National Register of Historic Places and 2) sites eligible for listing on a Historic Register if the applicant is in the process of seeking such a listing.

APPLICATION EVALUATION PROCESS

After the application deadline, the Heritage Coordinator will review each application for eligibility and completeness and may contact applicants if questions arise. Once reviewed by staff, the Heritage Coordinator will distribute application materials to the HCC members for evaluation.

The grant reviewers are committed to the following principles in their grant deliberation:

- **FAIRNESS:** Evaluation will be based on the use of a scoring matrix that incorporates stated evaluation criteria. This matrix is meant to minimize bias and score grants based on merits and appropriateness of the project to fulfill goals of the grant program. Any grant reviewer who has a conflict of interest with an application must recuse themselves from the deliberation related to the application with the apparent conflict.
- **TRANSPARENCY:** The application deliberation and review meetings will be open to the public to attend, however there is no public comment at these meetings. Feedback on applications is available to applicants on request at the conclusion of the review process.

The HCC will forward grant award recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. The Board of County Commissioners will make all final funding and award decisions.

The complete Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant Program Review Procedure can be found on the HCC website.

GRANT AWARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Awarded grantees must sign a project agreement with Douglas County before the proposed project can begin.
- Due to the competitive nature of this grant program, **grant project requests may be partially funded**. The Heritage Coordinator will work with any partially funded applicants, if necessary, to refine the project scope to align with the funding provided.
- In some instances, conditions specific to the awarding of funds may be added as amendments to the grant agreement. The Heritage Coordinator and HCC will work with the grant applicant to ensure these amendments are feasible and cooperatively defined.
- All projects with a duration of more than six months are required to submit quarterly reports.
- All grant projects are required to file a final report to remain in good standing with the grant program and be eligible for future Natural and Cultural Heritage Conservation grants.
- Grant funding must be acknowledged in any public messaging about this project. This includes social media posts, press releases, signage, and public events.
- The grant award is distributed according to the following:
 - **Grant awards of \$5,000 or less (Seed Grants)** are distributed in an up-front, lump-sum payment upon the execution of the project agreement.
 - **Grant awards greater than \$5,000 (Target and Major Grants)** are distributed as follows:
 - Grantees will receive an initial payment of 30% of the grant award upon full execution of the project agreement.
 - After the initial 30% has been spent, the next 60% of the award can be requested by submitting a Payment Request form.
 - The final 10% of Major and Target Grant awards will be held until the Final Report is submitted. Upon approval, the final 10% will be reimbursed. The reimbursement requirement may be waived upon approval from the Heritage Coordinator.

**NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE GRANT PROGRAM
2026 IMPORTANT DATES**

DATE	ITEM
Tuesday, January 6, 2026	Grant guidelines and application released.
Thursday, January 22, 2026 at 6 - 7:30 pm	<p style="text-align: center;">Grant Information Session</p> <p>This grant information session will be held in-person at the Douglas County Public Works Building (3755 E 25th Street, Lawrence, KS). Applicants are not required to attend to be eligible to apply.</p>
Friday, February 20, 2026	Deadline for required meeting with the Heritage Coordinator in person, or via phone/ Zoom.
Thursday, March 5, 2026, at 5 pm	Application submission deadline.
Thursday, March 26, 2026, and Thursday, April 2, 2026	Application review and award deliberation meetings.
Wednesday, April 15, 2026 <i>Date is tentative.</i>	HCC presents final recommendations for grant awards to the Board of County Commissioners for consideration at a regular business meeting.
Thursday, April 16, 2026 <i>Date is tentative.</i>	Notification of award to applicants. Heritage Coordinator to send grant agreements or reach out to refine project scope/work plan to awarded applicants.
Late April 2026	<p>Projects may begin (contingent upon signing of agreement).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Initial grant payment sent.</p>
May 2028	Grant projects are expected to be completed within a 24-month period from the project start date.



SEED GRANT APPLICATION SCORING RUBRIC

CRITERIA (ASSOCIATED APPLICATION QUESTIONS)	SCORE OF 5	SCORE OF 3-4	SCORE OF 1-2	SCORE OF 0
FEASIBILITY (QUESTION 1, BUDGET)	Logical and strong alignment between project budget, goals, and activities. Demonstrates a clear and complete project plan and budget. Project distinguishes itself from others.	Some alignment between project budget, goals, and activities. Demonstrates a general project plan and budget, deficiencies or overestimations exist within tolerable range. Project appears achievable despite gaps or leaps.	Minimal alignment between project budget, goals and activities. Project plan and budget are unclear and may lack sufficient detail. Project outcomes are unlikely to be achieved in the project's current form.	No alignment between project budget, goals and activities. Insufficient information to appropriately gauge feasibility.
IMPACT (QUESTION 2)	Relative to project scale, project will profoundly impact the conservation of heritage in Douglas County. Project has a broad and significant benefit to either specific communities or the public.	Project will have some impact the conservation of heritage in Douglas County. Project has a narrower scope but will have some benefit to either specific communities or the public.	Project will have little impact the conservation of heritage in Douglas County. Project has a limited benefit to either specific communities or the public.	Project has no demonstrated impact or benefit to heritage conservation in Douglas County.
PUBLIC BENEFIT (QUESTION 3)	Project engages and is fully accessible (within reason) to Douglas County residents and visitors. Offers ample opportunities to engage with the project and/or heritage resource. Strong and clear focus on public outreach, educational opportunities, and/or connection with the community.	Project engages and is accessible to Douglas County residents and visitors, although access to the project may be limited in scope . Offers some opportunities to engage with the project and/or heritage resource. May include some public outreach, educational opportunities, and/or connection with the community.	Public access and engagement are limited for this project. There may be some opportunity to learn more and engage with the project and/or heritage resource, but these plans are not specific or unconvincing .	No demonstration of public benefit for the project.



TARGET GRANT APPLICATION SCORING RUBRIC

CRITERIA (ASSOCIATED APPLICATION QUESTIONS)	SCORE OF 5	SCORE OF 3-4	SCORE OF 1-2	SCORE OF 0
FEASIBILITY (QUESTION 1, BUDGET)	<p>Logical and strong alignment between project budget, goals, and activities. Demonstrates a clear and complete project plan and budget. Project distinguishes itself from others.</p>	<p>Some alignment between project budget, goals, and activities. Demonstrates a general project plan and budget, deficiencies or overestimations exist within tolerable range. Project appears achievable despite gaps or leaps.</p>	<p>Minimal alignment between project budget, goals and activities. Project plan and budget are unclear and may lack sufficient detail. Project outcomes are unlikely to be achieved in the project's current form.</p>	<p>No alignment between project budget, goals and activities. Insufficient information to appropriately gauge feasibility.</p>
IMPACT (QUESTION 2)	<p>Relative to project scale, project will profoundly impact the conservation of heritage in Douglas County. Project has a broad and significant benefit to either specific communities or the public.</p>	<p>Project will have some impact the conservation of heritage in Douglas County. Project has a narrower scope but will have some benefit to either specific communities or the public.</p>	<p>Project will have little impact the conservation of heritage in Douglas County. Project has a limited benefit to either specific communities or the public.</p>	<p>Project has no demonstrated impact or benefit to heritage conservation in Douglas County.</p>
PUBLIC BENEFIT (QUESTION 3)	<p>Project engages and is fully accessible (within reason) to Douglas County residents and visitors. Offers ample opportunities to engage with the project and/or heritage resource. Strong and clear focus on public outreach, educational opportunities, and/or connection with the community.</p>	<p>Project engages and is accessible to Douglas County residents and visitors, although access to the project may be limited in scope. Offers some opportunities to engage with the project and/or heritage resource. May include some public outreach, educational opportunities, and/or connection with the community.</p>	<p>Public access and engagement are limited for this project. There may be some opportunity to learn more and engage with the project and/or heritage resource, but these plans are not specific or unconvincing.</p>	<p>No demonstration of public benefit for the project.</p>

<p>EQUITY (QUESTION 4)</p>	<p>Project centers under-told stories or narratives of BIPOC, immigrants or refugees, LGBTQ+ or other marginalized communities. Impacted communities will be leading or directly involved with the project’s development, execution, and promotion.</p>	<p>Project features under-told stories or narratives of BIPOC, immigrants or refugees, LGBTQ+ or other marginalized communities. Project may include some involvement by impacted communities, but this may be limited to a portion of the project’s scope.</p>	<p>Project mentions under-told stories or narratives of BIPOC, immigrants or refugees, LGBTQ+ or other marginalized communities. It is not clear if impacted communities will be involved with this project.</p>	<p>Project does not mention or elevate under-told stories or narratives of BIPOC, immigrants or refugees, LGBTQ+ or other marginalized communities.</p>
<p>URGENCY (QUESTION 5)</p>	<p>Urgent action is needed. Without funding, the heritage resource will soon be lost.</p>	<p>Timely action is supported by the proposal. Funding would be important, but is not critical, to the protection of the heritage resource.</p>	<p>Action is supported by the proposal, but immediate action is not necessary.</p>	<p>Urgency is not defined or is unconvincing.</p>
<p>SUSTAINABILITY (QUESTION 6)</p>	<p>Project will have exemplary maintenance or support to ensure the sustainability or impact of the project after grant funds have completed.</p>	<p>Project will have adequate maintenance or support to ensure the sustainability or impact of the project after grant funds have completed.</p>	<p>Project will have may have some maintenance or support to ensure the sustainability or impact of the project after grant funds have completed, but plans may not be clear.</p>	<p>Project will not be supported in any reasonable way after grant funds are completed.</p>
<p>MATCHING RESOURCES (BUDGET)</p>	<p>Matching resources are available and represent a significant percentage of the project budget. Applicant and/or partnering organizations are invested in the project through a demonstrated match of in-kind contributions and/or cash match. Grant funds will be greatly magnified with this project.</p>	<p>Matching resources are available and represent a smaller, yet still significant percentage of the project budget. Applicant and/or partnering organizations propose in-kind contributions and/or cash match that will extend grant funding.</p>	<p>Matching resources are limited and represent a small percentage of the project budget. The project is heavily reliant on grant funds and limited external resources are available.</p>	<p>No matching resources or external support are presented for this project.</p>