

2026 Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant Program Awardees

Douglas County Historical Society

Project Title: Indigenous Lawrence: Nations, Peoples, and Place

Amount Requested: \$60,000

Recommended Award: \$35,000

Returning Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: Indigenous Peoples and their experiences are integral to the history and ongoing vitality of the Lawrence area. Indigenous Lawrence: Nations, Peoples, and Place, a series of interactive permanent exhibits, will incorporate stories of Indigenous Peoples' lives in Lawrence and Douglas County, Kansas, told from their perspectives and in a way consistent with their storytelling traditions, throughout the Watkins Museum. Exhibitions will explore experiences of Indigenous Peoples and their relationships with other groups in Douglas County across time and are united by the following theme: Local Indigenous Peoples and their cultures are not rooted in the past but informed by the past as well as the by the present and their hopes for the future. Consistent with the approach in all the museum's core exhibitions, stories will emphasize the contributions of ordinary people from the various nations that have lived here and remind visitors that actions today will shape our community in the future. Heritage Grant funding will support installation of exhibitions on the second floor, collectively titled "Stories of Resilience."

Haskell Indian Nations University

Project Title: Honoring a Century of Resilience: Haskell Stadium & Arch 100th Anniversary Powwow and Buffalo Feed

Amount Requested: \$60,000

Recommended Award: \$35,000

Returning Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: The proposed Powwow and community buffalo harvest and feed will commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the Haskell Stadium and Arch, two of the most iconic cultural structures in Douglas County and enduring symbols of persistence, pride, and collective identity for tribal nations across the United States. This community-led event will bring together Native students, alumni, tribal leaders, artists, and the broader Douglas County public to honor the past, celebrate the present, and inspire future generations. Funding from the Douglas County Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant Program will support cultural programming, educational components, artists and dancers, event logistics, and documentation efforts that preserve this historic event.

Native Lands Restoration Collaborative

Project Title: Strength Through Stewardship - Restoring the banks of Burroughs Creek through community engagement and cultural reconnection

Amount Requested: \$60,000

Recommended Award: \$30,000

Returning Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: Strengthened by community volunteers and partnerships, Native Lands Restoration Collaborative will lead restoration of the woodlands encompassing Burroughs Creek to native plant life. This project will connect restoration work at Haskell Indian Nations Campus to the public lands of Lawrence, providing education on native landscapes and the deep human connections with native plants in our region, now and throughout history. Stewardship of this heavily visited landscape will help to improve water quality in the creek, improve habitat for native animals, and provide in-depth educational experiences in a diverse ecosystem for our community. Collaborative cultural gatherings will further connect the community to native landscapes, through native foods, crafting, and nature-inspired celebration.

KU Museum Studies (University of Kansas Center for Research)

Project Title: Expanding Access to Haskell Cultural Center & Museum's Historic Collection

Amount Requested: \$26,654

Recommended Award: \$26,600

Returning Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: A Graduate Assistant from KU's Museum Studies Master's program will conduct preservation, documentation, and publicity activities relating to the historic collections of the Haskell Cultural Center and Museum. The student will work 20 hours per week across two semesters to document, rehouse, digitize, and publicize the Haskell collection of approximately 3,000 Native American historical artifacts, photographs, and artworks. This project will preserve the physical artifacts and make them more widely accessible to the Douglas County community, the represented tribal peoples, and researchers. Haskell will receive much-needed support from a qualified student, who will gain hands-on experience in these unique heritage collections.

Outdoors Unscripted

Project Title: Living Heritage: Biodiversity, Cultural Storytelling, and Community Art in Douglas County

Amount Requested: \$20,000

Recommended Award: \$20,000

Returning Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: Outdoors Unscripted is a Douglas County-based nonprofit that connects artists and community members with local landscapes through creative, place-based experiences. Anchored in our 2026-2027 theme, Learn Local, this project will support five artist commissions and present five public events that invite residents to explore prairie ecosystems, river corridors, and rural heritage sites through art, storytelling, and hands-on discovery. Programs include guided prairie walks and workshops, a countywide "One Square Meter" biodiversity initiative, a multilingual storytelling event along the Kansas River, and collaborative art-making in local parks. Together, these activities create welcoming entry points for people of all ages and backgrounds to notice, document, and celebrate the natural and cultural heritage of Douglas County.

Kapwa Leadership

Project Title: Douglas County Native Mural Mentorship Project

Amount Requested: \$35,000

Recommended Award: \$19,200

First Time Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: The Douglas County Native Mural Mentorship Project is a pilot initiative that commissions five Native artists to create five garage-door-scale public murals across Lawrence, while pairing each artist with a paid intern to build the next generation of public art practitioners. By centralizing administrative support (through Kapwa Leadership) and mentorship (through community advisors like Dave Loewenstein), the project removes barriers that often prevent Native artists from participating in public art. The murals will center Indigenous perspectives on land, ecologies, community, and cultural continuity in Douglas County, and will be accompanied by a public learning event that shares practical tools and knowledge with the broader community. Funding this pilot would be the first step toward a larger vision of making Lawrence a national and international hub for native art and native perspectives on community, legacy, land stewardship, passing on traditional knowledge, and imagining futures where all of us can belong.

Kansas Biological Survey (University of Kansas Center for Research)

Project Title: Freshwater Mussels of the Wakarusa River Valley

Amount Requested: \$14,436

Recommended Award: \$13,000

Returning Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: This project will create an exhibit for the Baker Wetlands Discovery Center that shows the variety of freshwater mussels found in the Wakarusa River, their importance to river ecology, and threats to mussel populations. We will dig into past data to learn what mussel species are no longer found in the river and why and perform scientific surveys in the river to find out what species remain. We will train a Haskell Indian Nations University student in these methods, and the student will contribute to information in the display regarding tribal uses of mussels. Finally, we will create educational kits that schools and other organizations can borrow from the Baker University Wetlands, along with teaching collections for Haskell Indian Nations University and Baker University.

United Cemetery Association

Project Title: Historic Appanoose Cemetery Restoration

Amount Requested: \$30,792

Recommended Award: \$12,200

Returning Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: A professional restoration service will be hired to clean and restore grave markers in need of attention at Appanoose Cemetery, which is on both the Kansas and National Registries of Historical Sites. Appanoose Cemetery is located in the southwest corner of Douglas County. These markers date from the late 1800's to the early 1900's. Priority will be given to those in most need of restoration and cleaning.

Lawrence Model Railroad Club

Project Title: Public education of the history of railroads in Douglas County using the media of a new model railroad

Amount Requested: \$22,900

Recommended Award: \$10,000

First Time Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: The planned model railroad of the Lawrence Model Railroad Club (LMRC) will educate the public about the historical significance of railroading in the development and growth of Douglas County. The model railroad will focus on transportation of goods and people, local industries, and the natural environment and will include the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (AT&SF) depots in Baldwin City, Lawrence, and Vinland and the Union Pacific Depot in Lawrence. Other vital industry buildings such as grain elevators, fertilizer plants, fuel facilities, and lumber yards will be included. As work progresses on the model railroad, the LMRC plans to present educational seminars, develop electronic media covering real railroad operations, plus model railroad planning, construction, and operations.

Botanical Belonging

Project Title: Planting Heritage: School-Based Native Gardens & Prairie Education in Douglas County

Amount Requested: \$15,000

Recommended Award: \$5,000

First Time Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: Botanical Belonging proposes to develop and implement a school-based native garden and prairie education initiative in partnership with USD 497 and the Environmental Studies Program at the University of Kansas. Through a structured three-part workshop sequence, students will explore Kansas prairie ecology, participate in the installation of native plant gardens on school grounds, and learn long-term stewardship practices. Environmental Studies Capstone students will contribute research, curriculum development, and evaluation support, strengthening the educational framework while gaining experience in

community-based environmental education. The project will also include public-facing adult workshops that build teacher capacity and community engagement while creating lasting, visible ecological infrastructure at Douglas County schools.

Fisch Bowl

Project Title: OpenHaskell

Amount Requested: \$12,850

Recommended Award: \$4,000

First Time Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: OpenHaskell is a new collaboration between OpenStudios and the Haskell Cultural Center and Museum. By partnering with landlords who own vacant storefronts, we will offer indigenous artists free studios in the heart of downtown Lawrence. These artists will in turn share their art, history, and culture directly with the public. We're timing OpenHaskell to launch alongside the 2026 FIFA World Cup, giving us a unique opportunity to feature indigenous culture for a large international audience, and marking the beginning of our ongoing commitment to an indigenous cultural presence in downtown Lawrence.

Seed Grant Awards

Lawrence Arts Center

Project Title: La Yorda Children's Book

Amount Requested: \$5,000

Recommended Award: \$5,000

Returning Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: The La Yorda children's book will provide an educational resource to communicate the history of the East Lawrence Mexican American community that was housed by the Santa Fe Railroad between 1920-51. This written and illustrated work will tell the story in a vibrant and simple way to engage youth in cultural understanding. The piece will feature artwork by Javy Ortiz as seen in his public art mural on the Lawrence Trail System, and written work by La Yorda descendant Jacinta Langford Hoyt. It will be widely distributed to the local schools, libraries and museums as a companion to the existing public artwork.

Prairie City Cemetery Association

Project Title: Prairie City Cemetery Preservation & Heritage Project – Phase 2: Tombstone Repair

Amount Requested: \$5,000

Recommended Award: \$5,000

Returning Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: The Prairie City Cemetery Preservation & Heritage Project – Phase 2: Tombstone Repair Project is the second phase of a planned four-phase project involving the Prairie City Cemetery Association and Santa Fe Trail Historical Society of Douglas County. The project has two goals: one to achieve the strategic preservation of historic Prairie City Cemetery. The second goal is to tell the story of Prairie City, its interred, and their little-known yet important roles in Territorial Kansas and early Douglas County history. Phase 2 involves preserving 95 historic tombstones in need of resetting, straightening, and/or having their bases repaired or replaced. Ninety-one of these stones range in age from 107-170 years old, with 35 over 140 years of age. In addition, the history of Prairie City and the obituaries and biographical information of the interred will be researched.

Kaw Valley Prescribed Burn Association

Project Title: Kaw Valley PBA Equipment

Amount Requested: \$5,000

Recommended Award: \$4,500

First Time Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: The Kaw Valley Prescribed Burn Association was formed in July of 2025 after years of collaboration and desire from the community. A PBA is a group of landowners who help each other with prescribed burning to benefit wildlife, combat woody encroachment and reestablish native habitat. Through the work of the newly established board, the PBA has been successfully setting up the framework and legal documents to become a non-profit. Now that legal requirements are met, the board has been recruiting members in our community. Our next step is gathering the equipment needed to burn safely and begin implementing prescribed fire on our landscape.

Harvestry by Hand

Project Title: Local Wool Weaving

Amount Requested: \$5,000

Recommended Award: \$4,000

First Time Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: Community members will be invited to engage with every step wool takes from being shorn off of a sheep to being woven. Events will take place throughout Douglas County, utilizing as many locally sourced materials as possible, as wool moves through the stages of this process- shearing, skirting and scouring (washing the wool), carding, hand spinning, mordanting and naturally dyeing (using locally grown plant dyes), and weaving on a variety of looms. All events will be free of charge. Participants will learn hands on craft skills in a group setting, tapping into local knowledge and fiber networks, and experiencing the seasonal nature of this work which supports a healthy ecosystem, community, and economy.

Lawrence Public Library

Project Title: Rooted in the Land: Resources, Education, & Natural Arts

Amount Requested: \$5,000

Recommended Award: \$4,000

First Time Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: Our goal is to increase education on and access to native plants while simultaneously supporting educators and community partners involved in the work of land conservation and stewardship. Additionally, we would partner with local artists and craftspeople engaged in natural and culinary arts education to provide free access to hands-on art, craft, and cooking workshops, presentations, and learning opportunities on the land. This initiative would connect more people to native plant seeds, provide learning opportunities on the benefits of growing native plants as well as land stewardship, and offer hands-on opportunities for people to engage in crafts, skills, and arts utilizing local, natural materials in a sustainable way.

Sparks on the Creek

Project Title: Firefly Festival: Sparks on Burroughs Creek

Amount Requested: \$5,000

Recommended Award: \$4,000

First Time Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: During the month of June, fireflies turn the Burroughs Creek into a silent symphony of bioluminescence. Last year, we celebrated this phenomenon with our community's first ever Firefly Festival - a one-night event showcasing local art, a live concert complete with a picnic. This year, we hope to grow the firefly festival into multiple events along the Burroughs Creek during the month of June engaging our neighbors with nature appreciation, art, music, education and celebration.

Great Blue Heron

Project Title: Rock Creek Paddling Access

Amount Requested: \$5,000

Recommended Award: \$3,000

First Time Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: This project will create or improve canoe and kayak access points on Rock Creek above Clinton Reservoir. Rock Creek offers attractive paddling, but is underutilized largely because current access to Rock Creek is very difficult via one of several abandoned boat ramps further north on Clinton Lake, both of which are mostly unusable because of excessive silt. Our plan is to create a paddle craft access point on the north side of the bridge across Rock Creek on N950 Road and improve access further south on Rock Creek at the low water crossing of N750 road.

Douglas County Extension Master Gardeners

Project Title: Create Gravel Pathways for Native & Medicinal Garden

Amount Requested: \$3,911

Recommended Award: \$3,000

Returning Applicant and First Time Grantee

Project Description: This grant request is for the cost of materials and labor to create walking/working paths of gravel (1500 sq feet X 5 inches deep) in the larger Master Gardener project. The plan is to have a new, more accessible native and medicinal garden (5,000 sq.ft.) where we will: (1) demonstrate integration of native plants in the home garden; (2) engage all ages of the public in examining native species attributes and benefits and (3) explore medicinal uses of specific plants. Included in this grant request is funding for signage to indicate that the Native and Medicinal Garden is Coming Soon. Also, rental equipment for pounding down the gravel.

Bert Nash Center

Project Title: Bert Nash Center Tradition's Festival

Amount Requested: \$5,000

Recommended Award: \$2,725

First Time Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: In honor of Minority Mental Health Month, the Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center (Bert Nash Center) Equity Committee will host its third annual Traditions Fest. In 2026, the committee will expand the event into a community-building gathering for both team members and Bert Nash Center clients. Catered food will be provided to create a welcoming environment that encourages connection, cultural sharing, and meaningful interaction across the Center's diverse community. This event aligns with equity priorities identified in the Douglas County Strategic Plan, which highlights the importance of addressing disparities that disproportionately impact Black and Indigenous community members and elevating the voices of individuals with lived experience. By intentionally creating spaces where historically underrepresented individuals feel seen, valued, and included, the Bert Nash Center contributes to broader community efforts to foster belonging, strengthen relationships, and reduce social isolation. Traditions Fest reflects the Bert Nash Center's commitment to inclusive, person-centered practices that honor identity, culture, and community voice as essential components of mental health and well-being.

Operation Wildlife

Project Title: Backyard Wildlife Conservation Project

Amount Requested: \$5,000

Recommended Award: \$2,500

First Time Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: Douglas county residents enjoy a rich natural heritage of native birds, mammals, and reptiles in their backyards and neighborhoods. However, predation by free-roaming domestic cats is a top cause of declining local wildlife populations in the U.S. and one of the most common injuries treated at Operation Wildlife (OWL). This project provides OWL with the resources to purchase and seasonally distribute educational yard signs that prompt pet owners to take easy steps to protect wildlife during fledgling season. The goal is to reduce wildlife deaths and injuries while also reducing the administrative and intake burden placed on OWL and the Lawrence Humane Society.

Lumberyard Arts Center

Project Title: Where Land and People Meet

Amount Requested: \$2,275

Recommended Award: \$2,275

Returning Applicant and Grantee

Project Description: This collaborative program between the Lumberyard Arts Center and the Kansas Land Trust invites Douglas County residents to explore conserved and historically significant landscapes and respond through creative expression. From April through October 2026, participants will engage with local lands, culminating in a public exhibition and educational speaker series. The Baldwin City Library will curate a Kansas landscapes display in the Kansas Room and host associated programs through their "Our Local History Series" linking literature, history, and conservation. By merging conservation, history, and the arts, the project strengthens community connection to place and inspires long-term stewardship of Douglas County's natural and cultural heritage.