

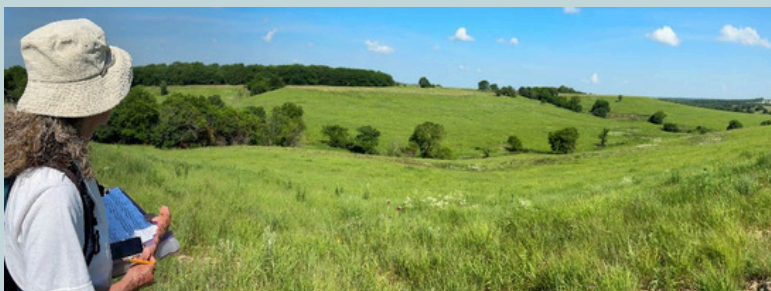
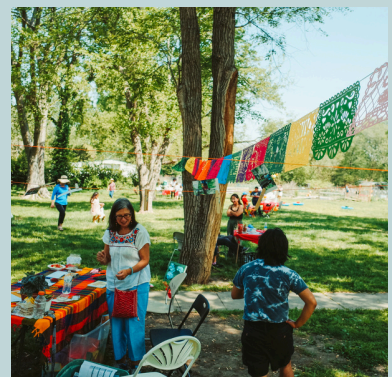
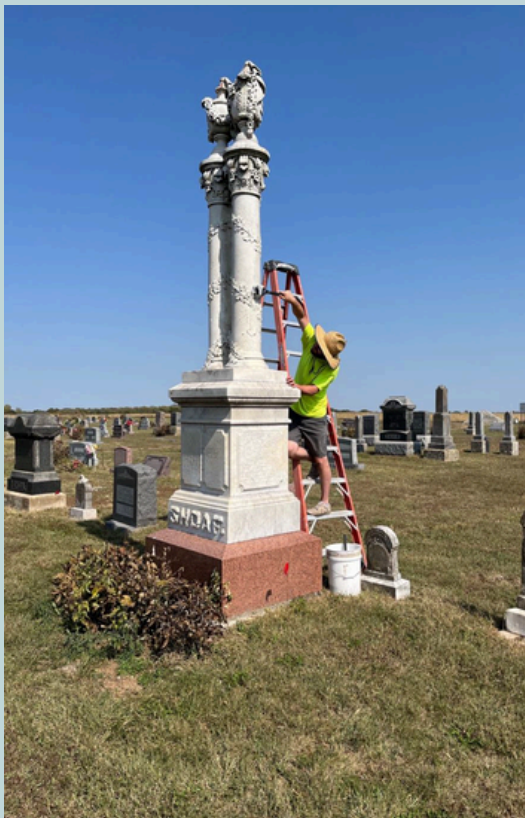
# Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant Program

## Reflecting on 16 Years of Heritage Investment in Douglas County

Heritage Conservation Council  
Douglas County, Kansas

Report Completed October 2026

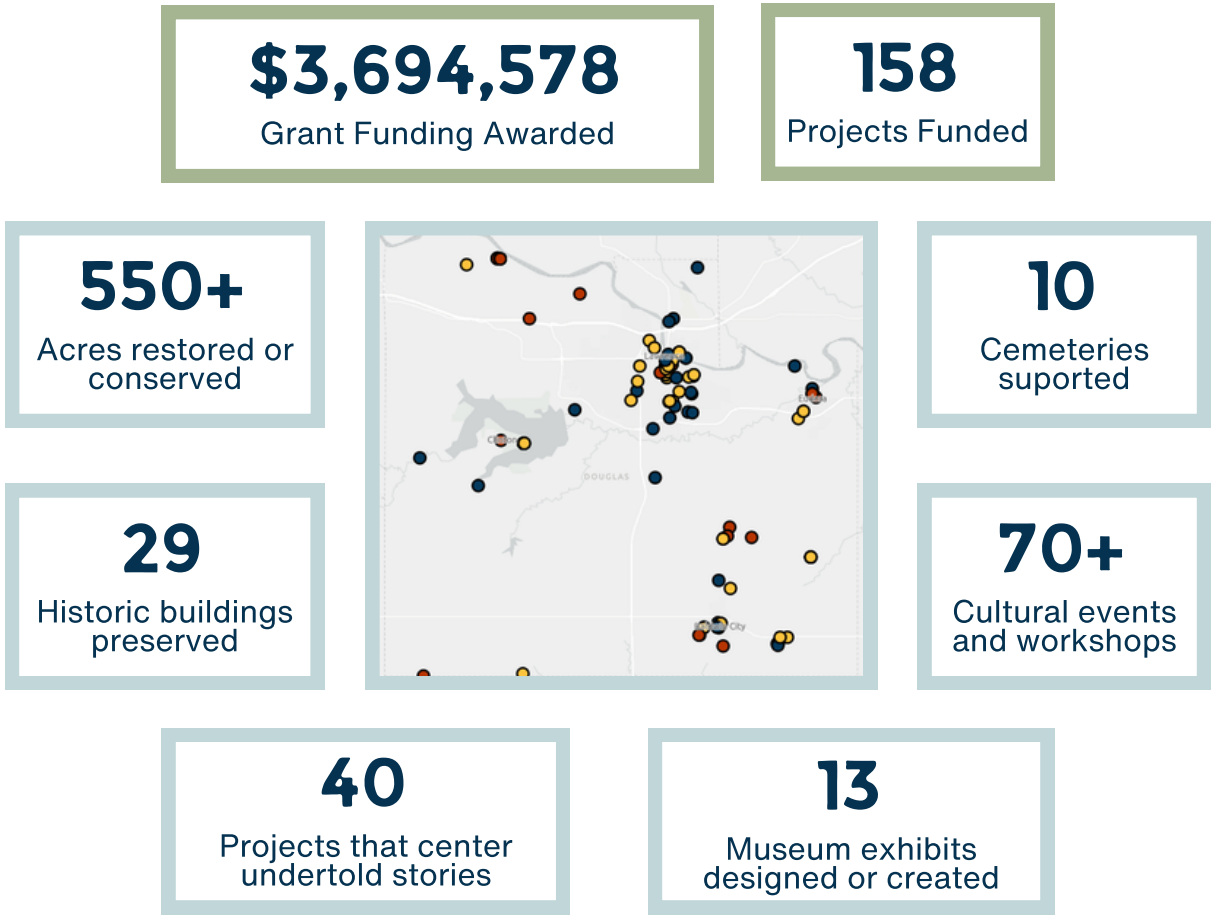
Prepared by: Kaitlyn Ammerlaan, Heritage Coordinator



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

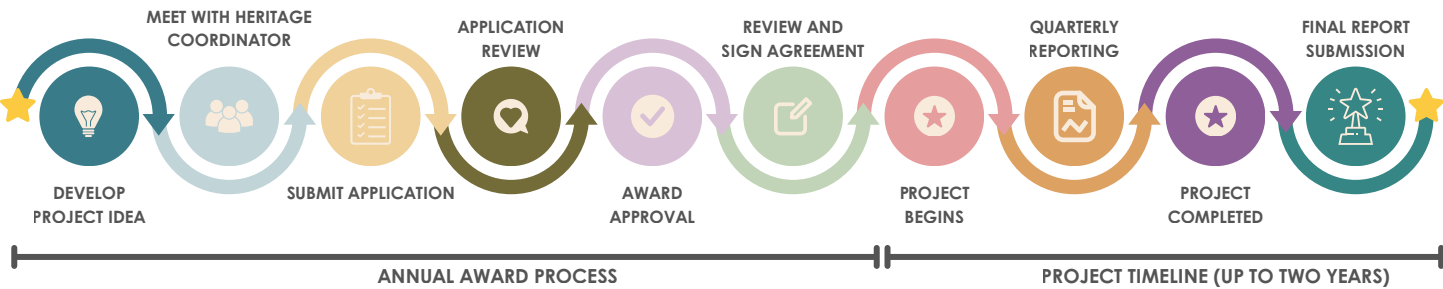
Established with the Heritage Conservation Council (HCC) in 2011, the Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant Program provides funding to support natural and cultural heritage conservation projects in Douglas County. This program has become a vital funding source for heritage and preservation projects and initiatives, filling an important gap in the heritage funding landscape. Douglas County’s support through this program ensures that our community’s historic resources are not lost to time and are instead preserved, uplifted, celebrated, and shared.

## Grant Program Impact At-A-Glance



## Application and Review Process

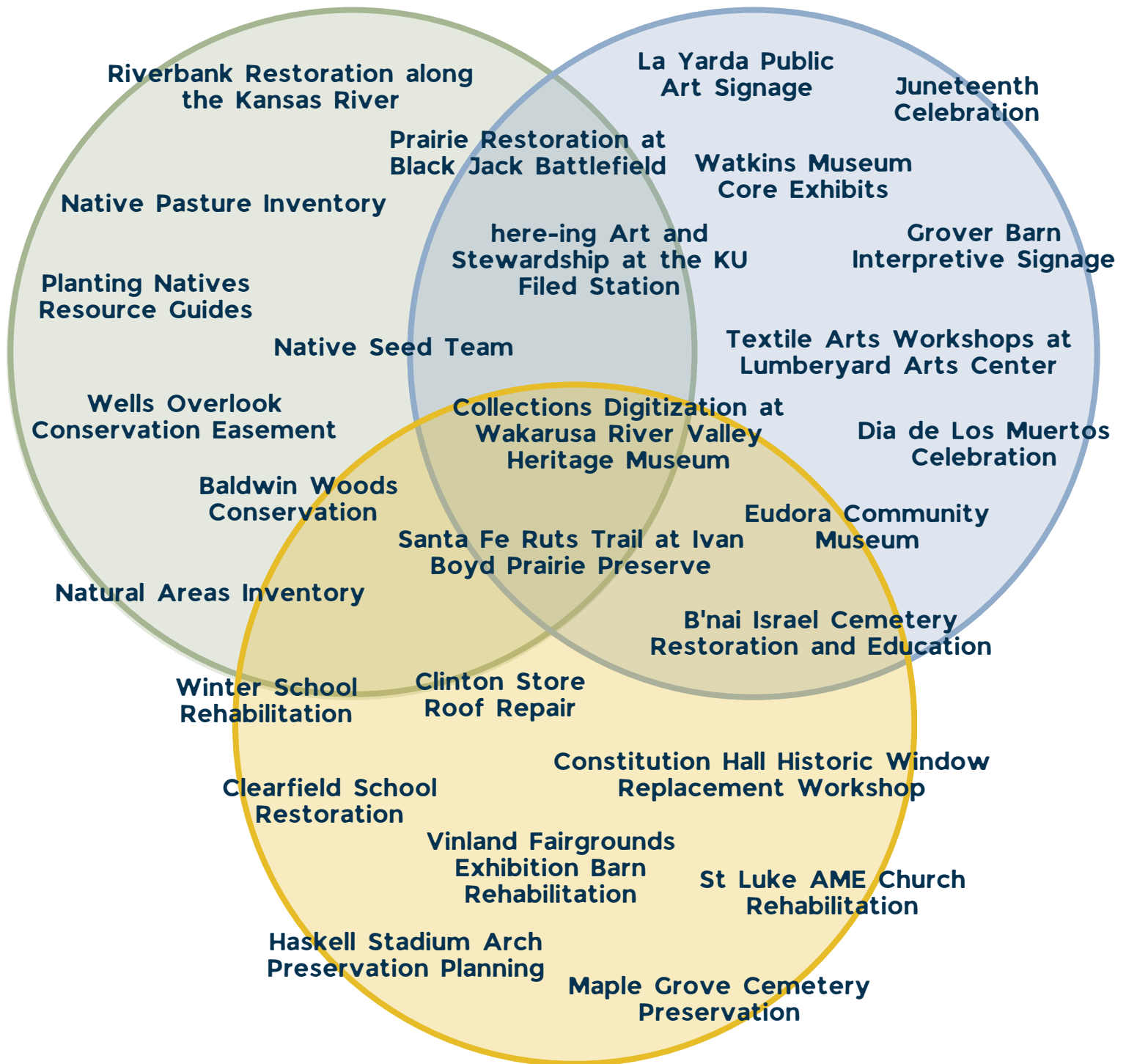
The Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant Program is a competitive grant program that has operated on an annual schedule since 2011. Submitted applications are evaluated by the HCC based on a list of standard review criteria. In addition to considering the merits of each proposal, HCC members are guided by a list of funding priorities, such as geographic diversity, to develop the annual award recommendations. Once consensus is reached by HCC, the award recommendations are forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners for final approval.



# EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS

## NATURAL HERITAGE

## CULTURAL HERITAGE



## HISTORIC PRESERVATION

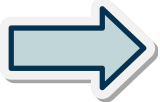
For a comprehensive list of funded projects, an online, interactive viewer can be found at: [dgcoks.gov/hcc/grantmap](https://dgcoks.gov/hcc/grantmap)

# REPORT OVERVIEW

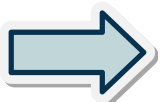
This report highlights the funding history of the Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant Program to assess how the grant awards have been distributed across priorities. This assessment can help inform future opportunities and adjustments that should be made to the program. The following program areas were analyzed for this report:

- Request and award amounts
- Project theme and focus areas
- Project location
- Applicant and awardee type

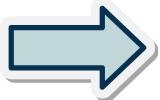
## KEY REPORT FINDINGS



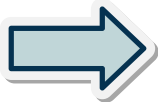
The grant program is relatively **well-balanced** among the many goals that the Heritage Conservation Council has been tasked to support. No urgent or extreme intervention appears to be needed.



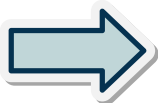
The program is overall becoming **more diverse**, supporting more themes, project areas, and community organizations. The program is becoming increasingly multipurpose and interdisciplinary, supporting an expansive view of heritage conservation in our community.



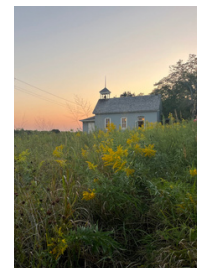
Grant awards often cover only **partial support** of requested funding, particularly for Major and Target categories. Full funding of proposals is infrequent, especially as the volume of funding requested has increased. The average award amount has also decreased over time.



Targeted efforts to welcome new applicants to the program have been successful.



Application volume and funding requested have generally increased since 2020. This diversity is a clear strength of the program; however, the pressure to do too many things with limited dollars available to award may ultimately limit the effectiveness of the program as demand increases. The program's priorities and goals should be routinely evaluated to make sure the grant program dollars are maintaining an effective level impact.



# PROGRAM FUNDING

**\$10,106,299.47**

Grant Funding Requested

**\$3,694,578**

Grant Funding Awarded

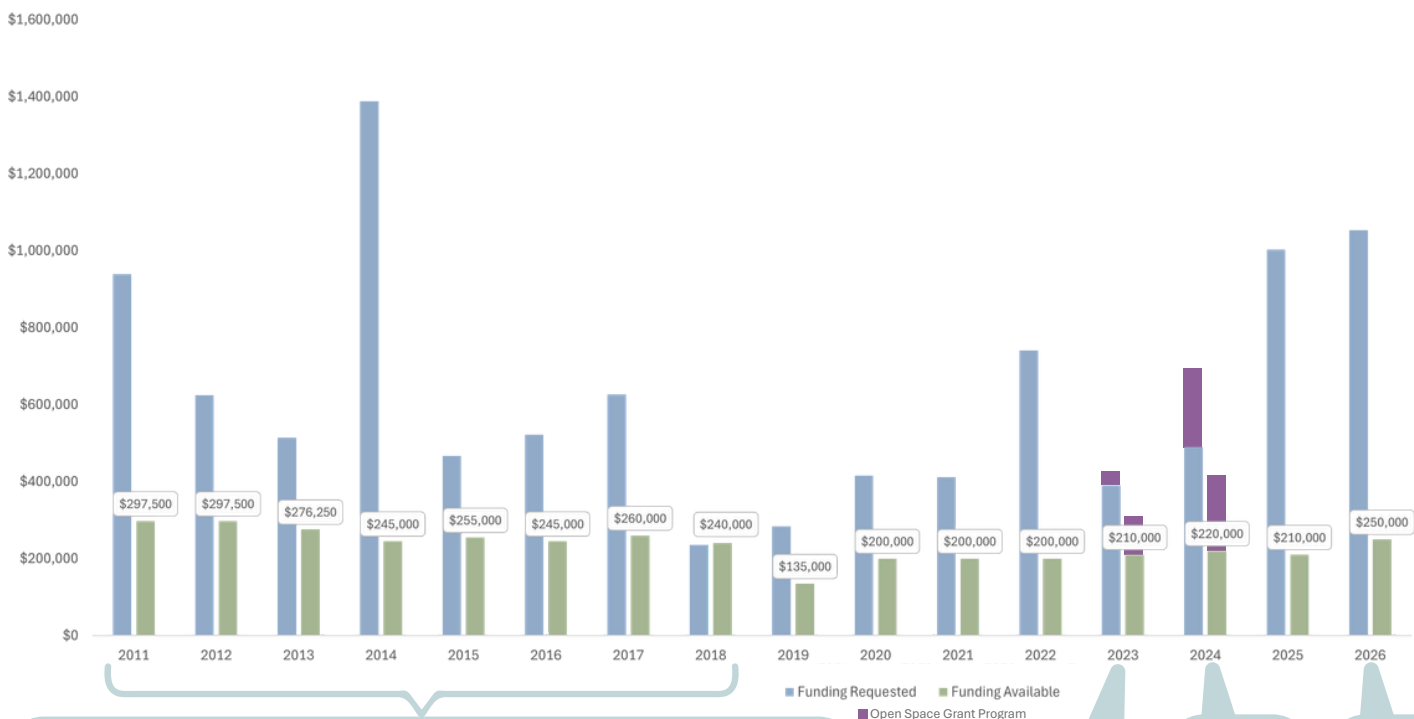
**275**

Applications

**158**

Projects Funded

## Funding Requests and Total Amount Available to Award



### Available grant funding was previously a percentage of the overall heritage conservation budget.

When the program was initiated, the grant program was supported by a set percentage of the County's overall budgeted amount to implement the final report of the Natural and Cultural Heritage Taskforce.

Below is the budget table included in the report.

| Heritage Conservation: Funding Priorities                | Allocation Percentage |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Major Project(s)                                         | 55%                   |
| Target Projects                                          | 30%                   |
| Douglas County Inventory of Natural & Cultural Resources | 10%                   |
| Administration                                           | 5%                    |
| Total                                                    | 100%                  |

### Available funding is now a set line item in the heritage conservation budget.

The current budgeted amount for the grant program is \$210,000.

**Open Space Grants: One-time \$75,000**  
ARPA Award, not included in data

**One-time \$10,000**  
\$5,000 memorial donation, \$5,000 County match  
**Open Space Grants: One-time \$200,000**  
ARPA Award, not included in data

**Seed Grant Pilot: One-time \$40,000**  
Allocation from the Heritage Reserve balance

More information on the Open Space and Seed Grant pilot programs on Page 13.

# AWARD AMOUNTS

The amount of funding per project has changed throughout the program's history. This has been influenced by 1) the amount of funding available and 2) the stated program priorities in the annual grant guidelines. For reporting purposes, three award amount categories are tracked: Major, Target, and Seed awards.

## Major Awards

**\$40,000 and above**

24 awards, totaling \$1,837,786  
50% of the program's investment

The upper limit of the award amount has changed significantly over time. At the program's inception, the maximum award amount could be up to 55% of the program allocation, or \$163,625. This upper limit has trended downward since 2011. The largest single award was \$163,000 in 2011.

## Seed Awards

**\$5,000 and below**

48 awards totalling \$194,877  
5% of the program's investment

The emphasis on smaller awards has grown throughout the program's history, although the number of seed award each year has remained relatively steady, with the exception of 2026. The Seed Grant category was added to the Grant Guidelines in 2022.

## Target Awards

**\$5,001-\$39,999**

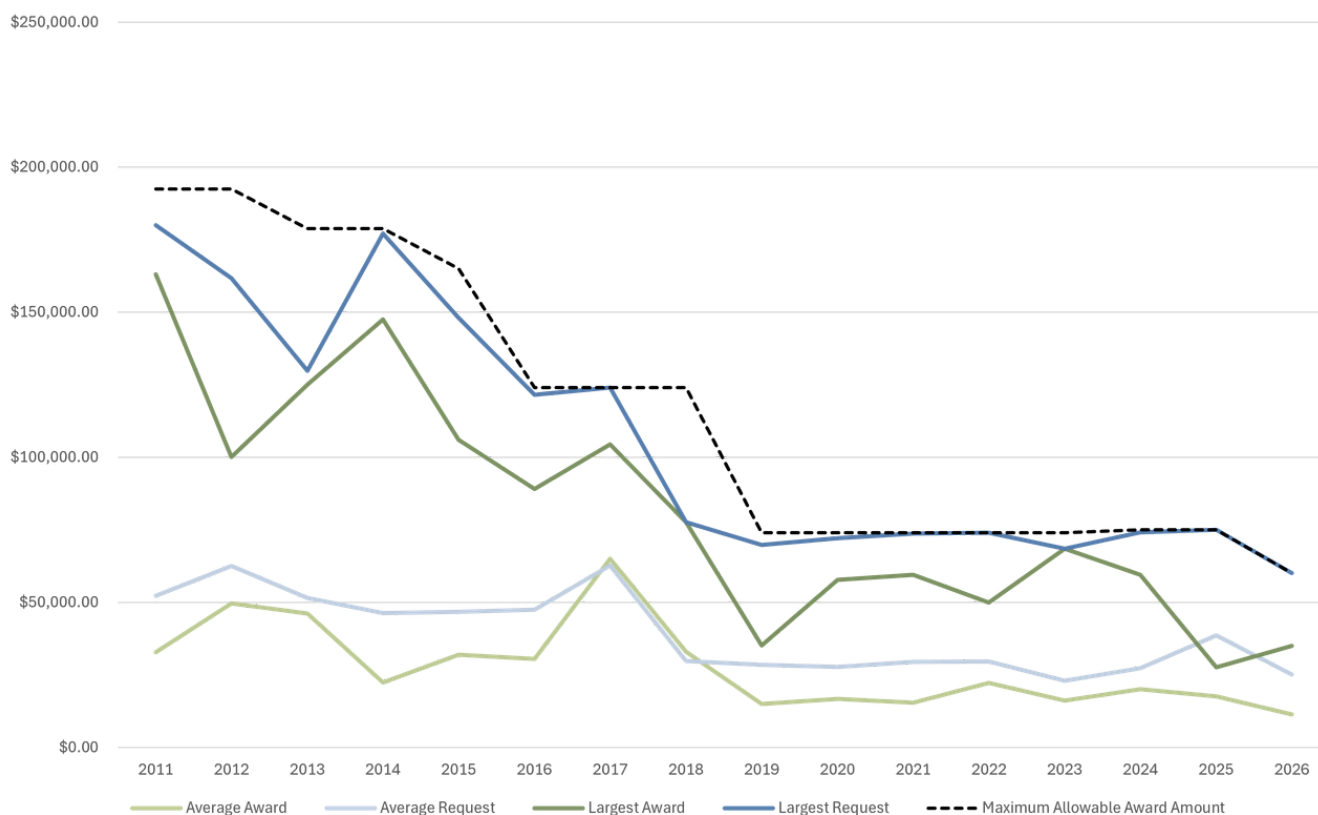
85 awards totaling \$1,646,915  
45% of the program's investment

Target awards make up the majority of awards made through the grant program. Awards between \$10,000 and \$27,2500 are the most common target grant awards.

**\$22,844.28**

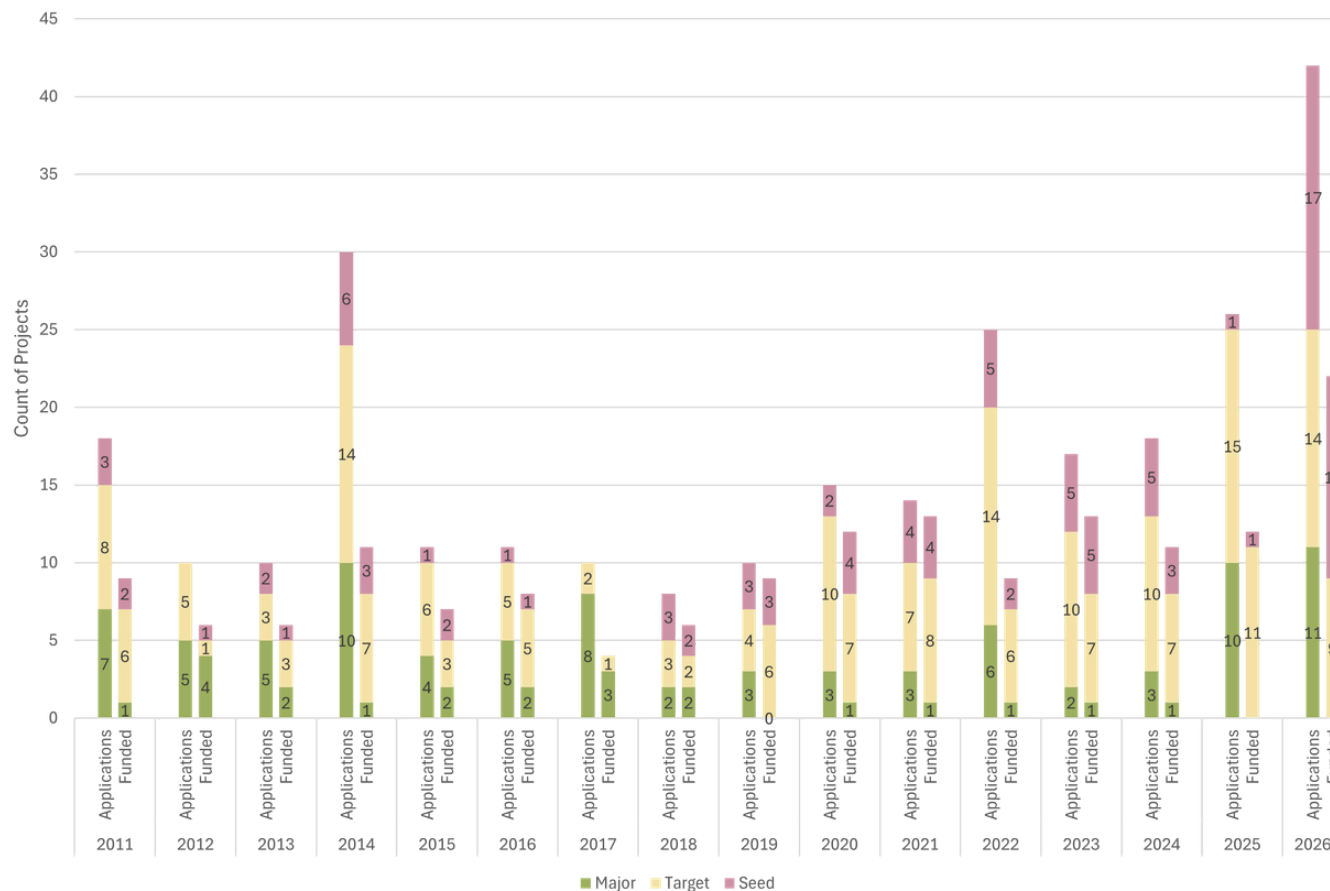
**Average Project Award**

## Program Funding Requests and Award Amounts



# AWARD AMOUNTS

## Number of Applications and Awards per Award Type

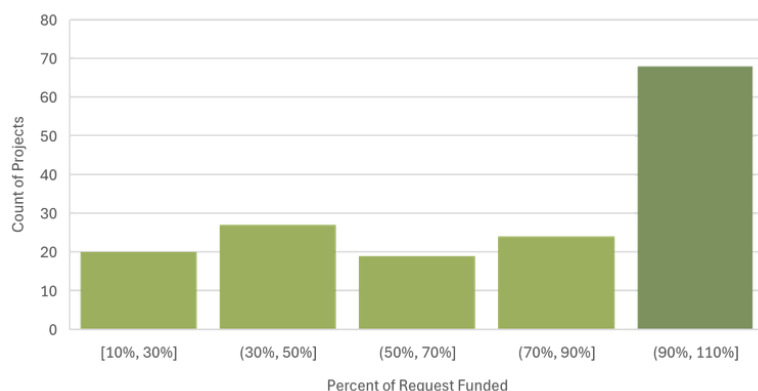


## Funding Percentage and Partial Awards

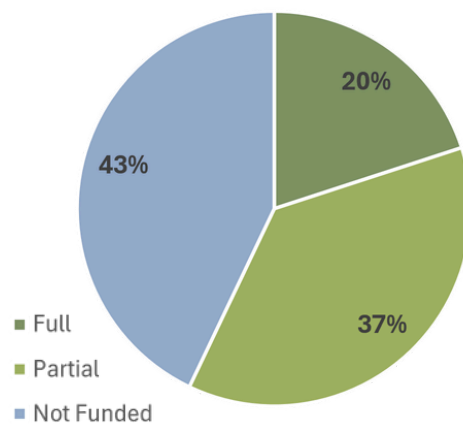
To fund a diverse slate of projects and meet the demand of the program each year, the Heritage Conservation Council has often recommended partial funding of project proposals.

To date, 57% of applications received have been awarded funding. Of the 158 projects supported by the program, 103 have been partially funded.

### Distribution of Funding Percentages



### Total Funding of Applications

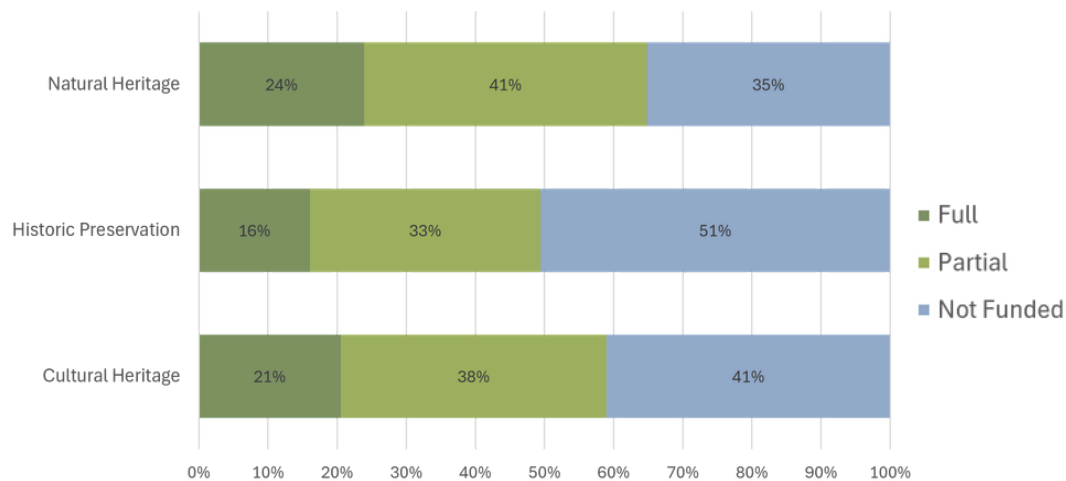


Seed projects are most likely to be funded in full, while a majority of Major and Target awards are partially funded.

# TYPES OF PROJECTS

To be eligible for funding through this grant program, a project must meaningfully support the conservation of Douglas County’s natural or cultural heritage. This is defined in three broad categories: Natural Heritage, Cultural Heritage, and Historic Preservation. Many projects span multiple categories; however, for reporting purposes, each project is categorized by just **one** primary project category.

Funding Percentage per Category



## Cultural Heritage

69 awards, totaling \$1,315,155

35% of the program’s investment

Cultural Heritage projects funded by this program are just as diverse as the heritage stories in Douglas County. This category is perhaps the most expansive and supports projects such as museum improvements and exhibits, events and festivals, and oral history and archival preservation.

This category collects the highest total number of project requests and awards, and represents the highest total investment of the grant program to date.

## Natural Heritage

46 awards, totaling \$1,172,306

32% of the program’s investment

The inclusion of natural heritage projects in the program ensures that the County supports heritage in all forms. The natural heritage category includes ecological restoration, land conservation, and outdoor recreation and trail projects.

Natural heritage projects have increased significantly in volume since 2015, and larger, more complex projects have emerged since 2020. Requests in this category are funded at the highest rate of the three primary categories.

## Historic Preservation

43 awards, totaling \$1,207,117

33% of the program’s investment

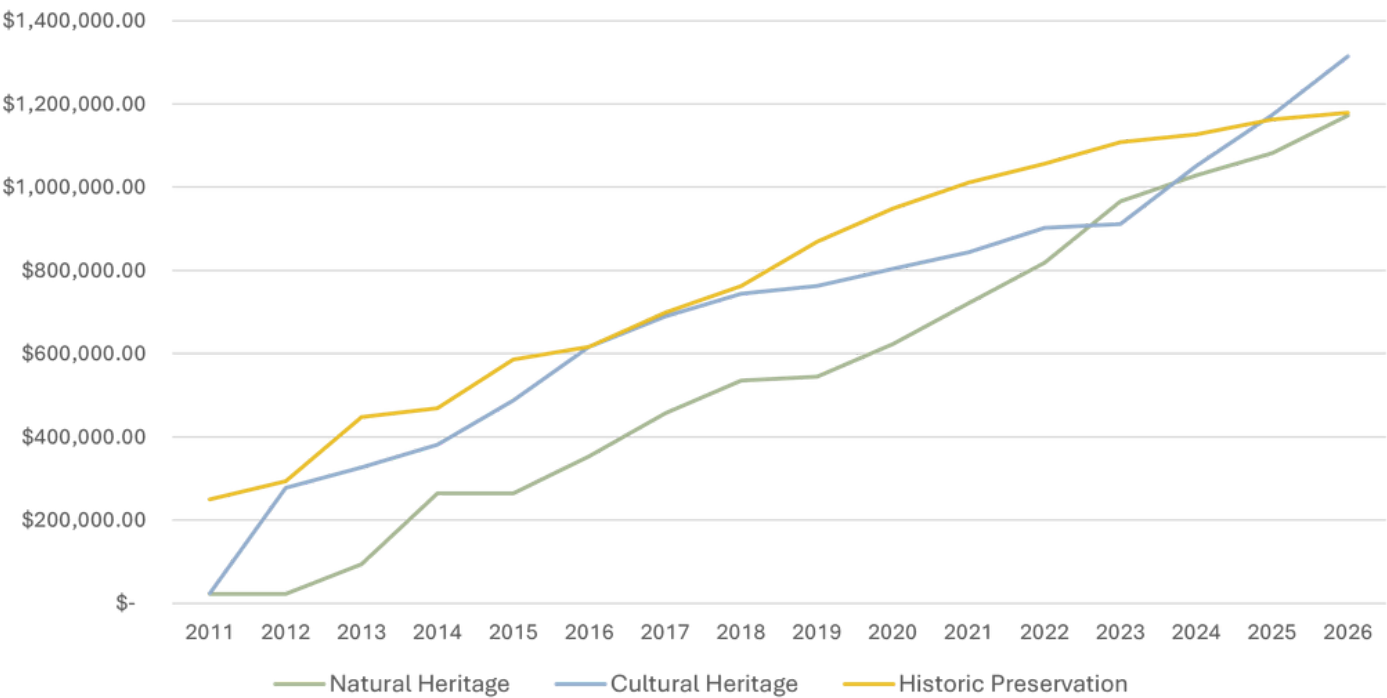
Historic Preservation projects have been a mainstay of the grant program since its inception. Projects in this category include building rehabilitation, headstone restoration, and preservation planning.

Early years of the grant program were heavily focused on preservation projects. But projects have diversified more over time and, as such, fewer historic preservation projects are recommended for funding each year.

Historic preservation projects have the highest average request amount (\$43,686.86) and the highest average award (\$28,072.49). Many of the requests are high-cost capital projects; partial funding is common.

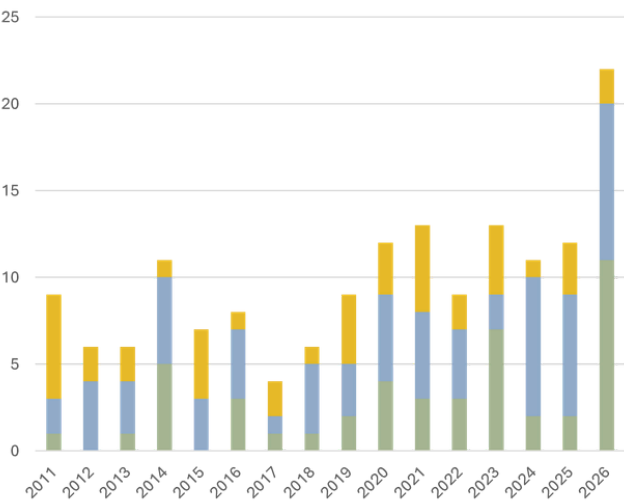
# TYPES OF PROJECTS

Cumulative Funding Awarded by Category

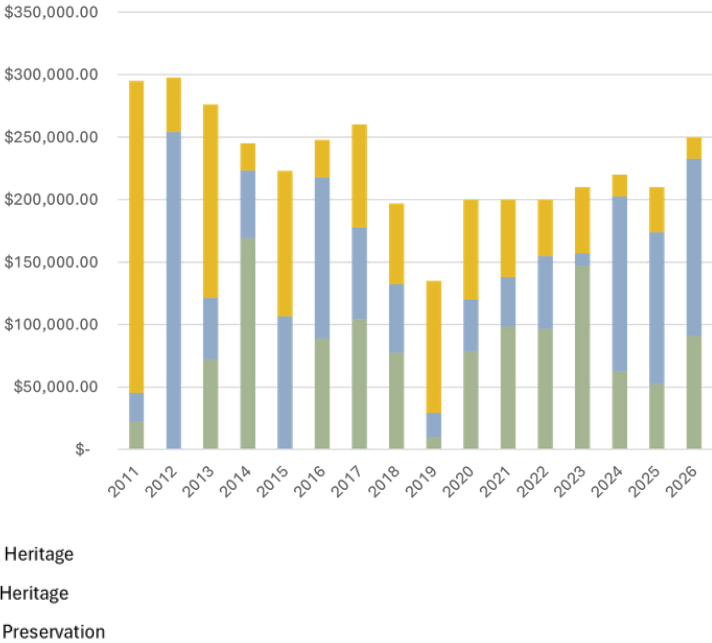


Prior to 2025, Historic Preservation Projects received the largest cumulative amount of funding. The total investment has increasingly evened out among the primary project categories in more recent program years.

Projects Funded per Category



Amount Awarded per Category

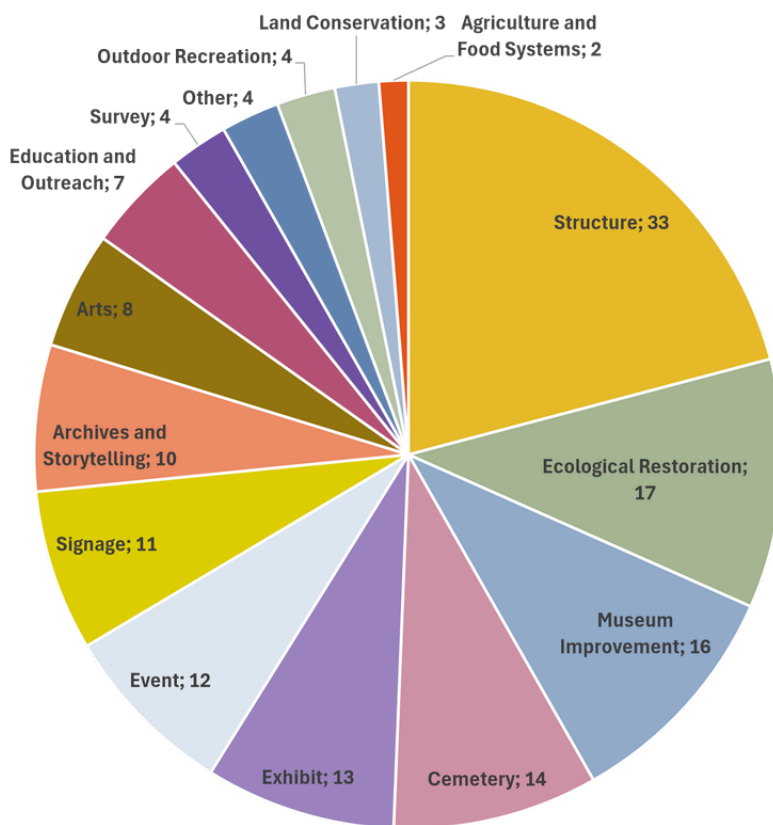


# TYPES OF PROJECTS

The diversity of projects supported by this program is perhaps one of the program's largest strengths. It can, however, be challenging to summarize the broad impact that the program has had over many sectors of natural and cultural heritage conservation here in Douglas County. To track this diversity in project types, each project is assigned a subcategory that summarizes the primary project activity or focus.

| Subcategory                  | Funded | Not Funded |
|------------------------------|--------|------------|
| Outdoor Recreation           | 80%    | 20%        |
| Cemetery                     | 78%    | 22%        |
| Event                        | 75%    | 25%        |
| Museum Improvement           | 70%    | 30%        |
| Exhibit                      | 68%    | 32%        |
| Other                        | 67%    | 33%        |
| Ecological Restoration       | 65%    | 35%        |
| Education and Outreach       | 64%    | 36%        |
| Signage                      | 61%    | 39%        |
| Arts                         | 57%    | 43%        |
| Structure                    | 46%    | 54%        |
| Survey                       | 44%    | 56%        |
| Land Conservation            | 43%    | 57%        |
| Archives and Storytelling    | 39%    | 61%        |
| Agriculture and Food Systems | 22%    | 78%        |

**Projects Funded per Subcategory**



- Museum improvements and exhibit projects are common and have generally received consistent support throughout the program.
- Ecological restoration and other natural heritage projects have grown in volume in recent years and generally perform above average in funding success.
- Structural projects are the most common type of project funded and typically carry the highest award amounts; these projects are often straightforward and easier to categorize.
- Cemeteries, outdoor recreation (trails), and events have some of the highest funding rates.
- Agriculture and food systems projects struggle most to secure awards. These can be often less aligned with the program's funding priorities and are generally less competitive.

**Event projects are most likely to be funded in full or at a higher-than-average percentage.**

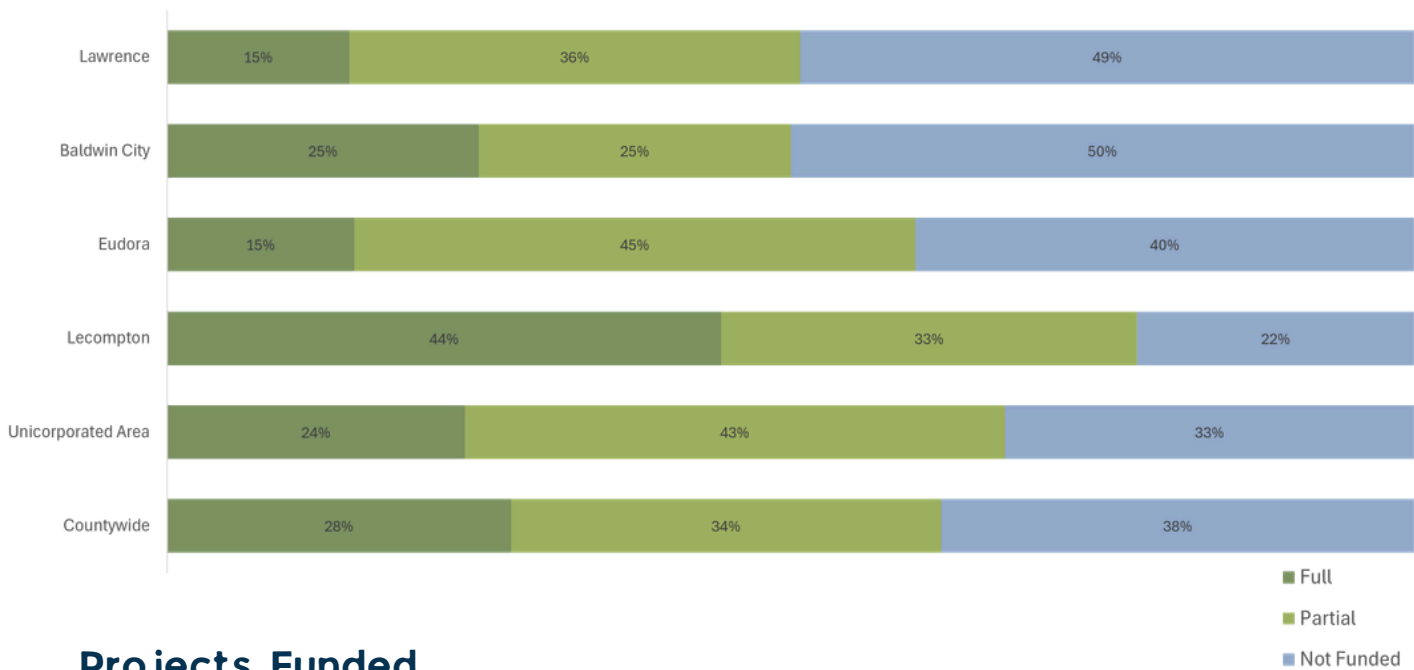
**Structural projects have only been awarded 29% of the funding requested.**

# PROJECT LOCATIONS

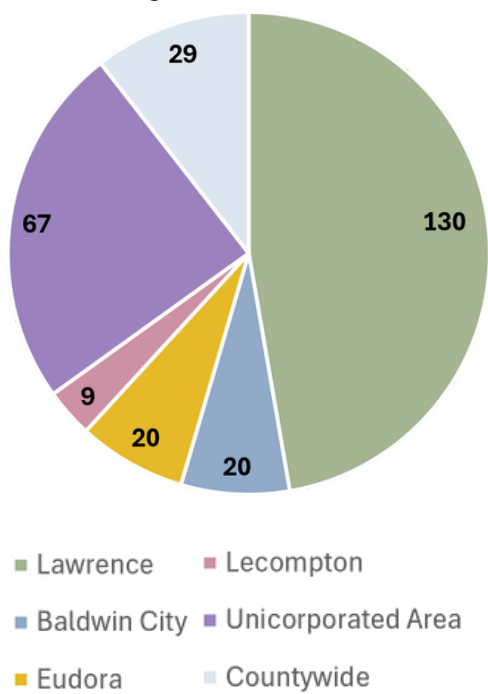
A goal of the grant program is to support projects and impact communities across Douglas County. Similar to the project category or theme, the Heritage Conservation Council strives for a balance of projects across the county; but there are no set requirements for geographic diversity to meet each year.

For reporting purposes, the project’s primary location is listed. Projects included in the countywide category have multiple locations or are not explicitly site based. These projects include surveys, education and outreach projects, and projects with multiple locations that span beyond a single township or municipality.

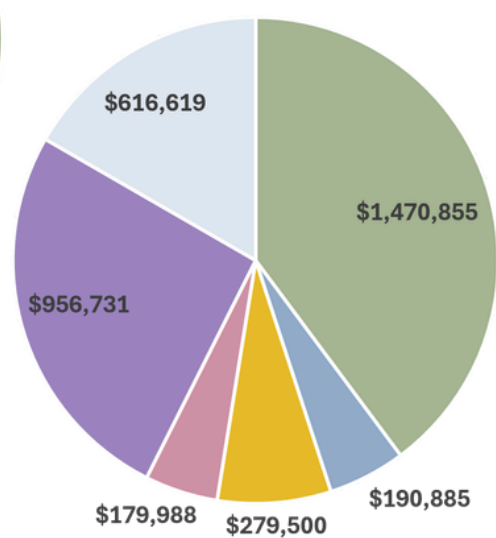
## Funding Percentage per Location



## Projects Funded



## Amount Awarded



## Key Trends

- Lawrence:** High volume- the diverse project categories reflect volume of heritage organizations active here
- Eudora:** Relatively large preservation and museum activity for the city’s size
- Baldwin City:** Mix of preservation and natural heritage projects
- Lecompton:** High success rate and strong preservation identity
- Unincorporated Area:** Focus on natural heritage and rural historic sites
- Countywide:** Strong-performing interdisciplinary projects

# APPLICANTS AND GRANTEES

Eligible applicants for the Natural and Cultural Grant Program are non-profit organizations, universities, K-12 schools, libraries, for-profit businesses, cemetery associations, or any unit of local government within Douglas County. Organizations may submit more than one application per year and there are no limits on the number of awards an organization can have at a given time.

**109**  
Unique Applicants

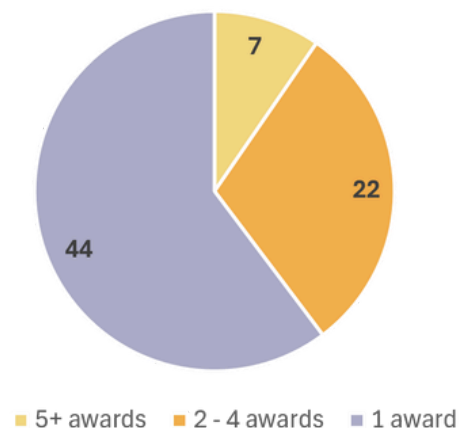
**73**  
Unique Grantees

**About two thirds (67%) of all applicants have had at least one proposal funded.**

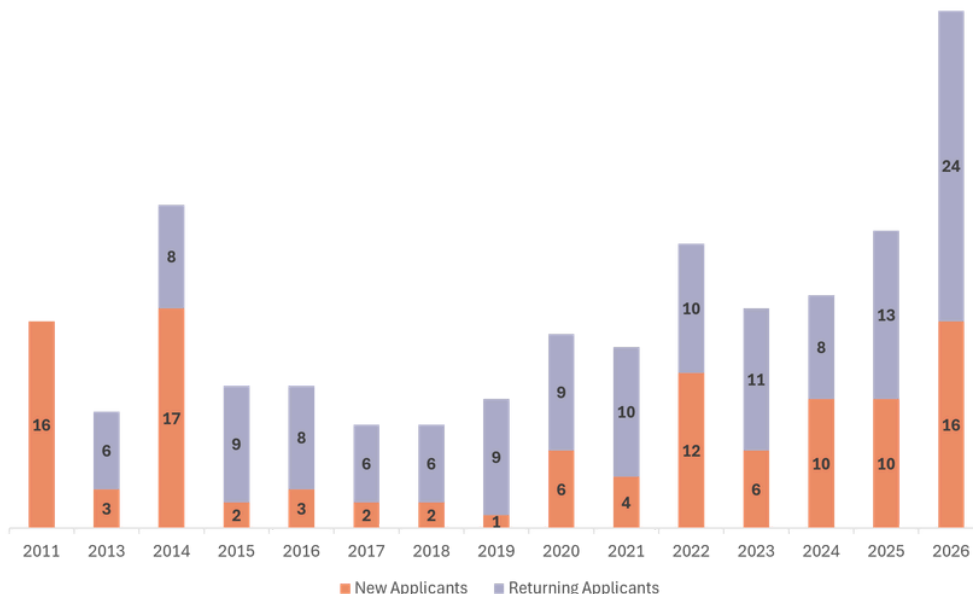
40% of all grantees have been awarded multiple grants through the history of the program. There are 7 organizations that have received 5 or more awards:

- Douglas County Historical Society- 12
- University of Kansas (all departments)- 10
- Eudora Area Historical Society- 8
- Clinton Lake Historical Society- 8
- Lecompton Historical Society- 7
- Friends of the Kaw- 5
- Haskell Indian Nations University- 5

**Number of Awards Per Applicant**



**Count of New and Returning Applicants**

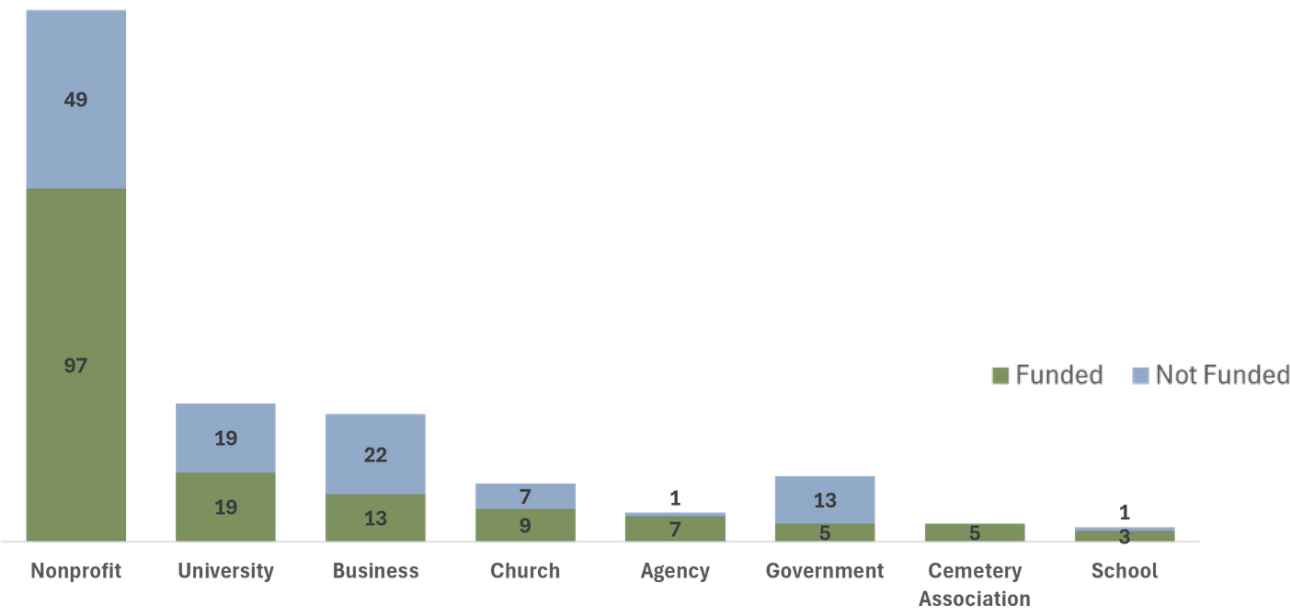


**52 organizations have applied more than once, or 47% of all applicants are returning applicants.**

**The program has steadily attracted new applicants, and the program's reach has increasingly grown since 2022.**

# APPLICANTS AND GRANTEES

Count of Total Applications and Awards per Organization Type



| Organization Type     | Activity Level | Award Success | Funding Percentage<br>(\$ Requested/<br>\$ Funded) | Typical Project Types                              | Key Trend                                |
|-----------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Nonprofits            | Highest        | High-Moderate | 44 %                                               | Structures, museums, archives, restoration, events | Backbone of the grant program            |
| Universities          | Moderate       | Moderate      | 44 %                                               | Surveys, ecological restoration, exhibits          | Focus on scientific and ecological work  |
| Government            | Moderate       | Low           | 20%                                                | Public structures, cemeteries, signage             | Large requests, often partially funded   |
| Businesses            | Moderate       | Low           | 16%                                                | Structure preservation, historic building repair   | Largest variability in funding outcomes  |
| Churches              | Moderate       | High          | 40%                                                | Structure restoration, cemeteries                  | Focused on structure preservation        |
| Agencies              | Low            | High          | 61%                                                | Education, ecological events                       | Effective and high-performing            |
| Cemetery Associations | Low            | High          | 50%                                                | Cemetery restoration                               | Very strong success rates                |
| School                | Low            | High          | 59%                                                | Education, preservation                            | Minimal activity in grant program so far |

# PILOT PROJECTS

## Open Space Grant Program \$225,000 Awarded

In coordination with the developing Open Space Plan, funding was allocated to support Open Space grant projects in 2023 (\$75,000) and 2024 (\$200,000). This funding was a portion of the \$2.7 million awarded to further Open Space conservation in Douglas County from the county's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocation.

### Projects Funded

- Showcasing Open Space Adventure Through Art Grant Program (Coneflower Consulting, \$15,000)
- Kaw River Agricultural Survey (Maseuakuali Farms, \$10,123)
- Showcasing Open Space Adventure Through Art Grant Program (Outdoors Unscripted, \$25,000)
- Mary's Lake Restoration (Prairie Park Nature Center, \$71,000)
- KLT Conservation Plan and Landowner Resource Guide (Kansas Land Trust, \$29,000)
- Baldwin Woods Trail (KU Field Station, \$75,000)



### Outcomes

- Limited program awareness and confusion with applicant eligibility limited the number of applicants in 2023. Lessons learned from this year, paired with more time developing the Open Space Plan and cultivating relationships with potential applicants, much improved the applicant pool and slate of fundable projects in 2024.
- Demand for Open Space grant funding exists in Douglas County. Staff continues to field questions regarding funding availability for trail and conservation projects.
- Introducing Open Space-specific grant funding could reduce the pressure and overall demand on Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant Program. It could also help focus the grant program investment in other funding categories, such as historic preservation, that have become less competitive over time.

## Seed Grant Pilot Program \$40,000 Awarded

In 2026, \$40,000 of the Heritage Conservation reserve account balance was allocated to support Seed Grant awards, or requests that were \$5,000 or less. This was accompanied by a separate, shorter application and fewer review criteria for Seed Grants to help reduce the administrative burden on applicants.

### Outcomes

- 17 Seed Grant applications were received in 2026, in contrast to just one in 2025. Seed Grant requests totaled \$79,770 and 11 of the 17 applications received (65%) were from first-time applicants to the program.
- Very positive feedback was received from applicants, and the shorter application appeared to have the desired effect to make the program easy to access and approachable for first-time applicants.
- The Heritage Conservation Council intends to propose a continuation of this program as funds allow.