

Community Impact Project (CIP) Request for Proposals & Partnership Information

About the Community Impact Project

A key component of Leadership Columbus's 10-month Signature Program is the Community Impact Project (CIP). Running alongside monthly program days, the CIP serves as a hands-on leadership and capacity-building experience where participants work in small teams with community-focused organizations to address a strategic organizational challenge or opportunity.

The CIP is designed to create meaningful value for both participating organizations and Signature Program participants. Through the process, participants apply and strengthen leadership, collaboration, communication, and project management skills while gaining deeper insight into the opportunities and challenges facing our community. At the same time, partner organizations receive strategic support tailored to a current organizational need.

Each year, Leadership Columbus invites nonprofit and community-focused organizations to submit project proposals for consideration. Selected projects are matched with teams of Signature Program participants who will work collaboratively with the organization throughout the program year.

What Makes a Strong Community Impact Project?

Strong CIP projects are:

- Strategic and capacity-building in nature
- Clearly defined, with realistic and measurable goals
- Sustainable beyond the project timeline
- Collaborative and supported by organizational leadership
- Appropriate for a team of volunteer leaders serving in a consulting and thought-partnership capacity

Projects should address one identified organizational challenge, opportunity, or area for growth that could benefit from:

- Strategic planning and organizational development,
- Research, evaluation, or process improvement,
- Communications, partnership, or stakeholder engagement strategies,
- Governance, volunteer, or operational systems support,
- Or other organizational capacity-building efforts that strengthen long-term sustainability and impact.

Priority will be given to projects that:

- Create long-term organizational impact,
- Have strong internal support and readiness
- Provide meaningful leadership and learning opportunities for participants

Projects That Are Generally Not a Good Fit

The CIP is intended to support strategic thinking and organizational capacity, not provide operational staffing support or direct service labor.

Projects that are generally not a good fit include:

- routine administrative support
- staffing-gap coverage
- direct service delivery support
- one-time event execution
- ongoing operational tasks
- projects that rely primarily on participant execution rather than organizational partnership

Additionally, the Signature Program project team cannot be utilized for direct fundraising solicitation or as substitute staff capacity.

Expectations of Partner Organizations

Successful Community Impact Projects require active engagement and collaboration between the organization and the participant team.

Partner organizations are expected to:

- Designate a primary project lead who will serve as the main point of contact throughout the process
- Ensure the project lead has the authority or access needed to facilitate timely decisions and organizational participation
- Engage consistently with the participant team throughout the project period
- Provide relevant organizational information, context, and stakeholder access as needed
- Participate in meetings, check-ins, and project discussions in a timely and collaborative manner
- Maintain clear expectations regarding organizational roles and participant team responsibilities
- Remain open to participant feedback, recommendations, and evolving project direction as new insights emerge

Organizations should anticipate dedicating meaningful time and engagement throughout the project period. While the exact level of involvement will vary by project, successful partnerships typically require ongoing communication, responsiveness, and leadership engagement.

Organizational Readiness

The most successful CIP partnerships occur when organizations are prepared not only to identify a challenge, but also to actively engage in the process and carry the work forward after the project concludes.

As part of the proposal process, organizations will be asked to share information related to:

- organizational capacity
- staffing structure
- leadership involvement
- implementation readiness
- project sustainability

Organizations of all sizes are encouraged to apply. However, selected organizations should have sufficient internal capacity and partnership readiness to support a collaborative, year-long strategic engagement.

Project Flexibility & Collaboration

The Community Impact Project process is intentionally collaborative and exploratory. As teams engage more deeply with an organization's work, they may identify underlying opportunities, challenges, or considerations that influence the direction or scope of the original project request.

Organizations selected for participation should approach the CIP process with openness to new perspectives and recommendations. Participant teams may surface strategic insights, ideas, or considerations that differ from an organization's initial assumptions or expectations. The most successful projects are those in which organizations are open not only to receiving support, but also to critically evaluating existing assumptions, practices, and opportunities for growth through thoughtful collaboration and honest dialogue.

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for consideration, organizations must:

- Be a nonprofit or community-focused organization serving the Central Ohio community
- Provide a current 501(c)(3) IRS Determination Letter
- Demonstrate organizational readiness and leadership support for the proposed project
- Identify a clear organizational need appropriate for a strategic volunteer consulting team

Leadership Columbus welcomes proposals from both faith-based and non-faith-based organizations. However, proposed projects cannot require or assume a specific religious background or participation.

Community Impact Project Timeline

- **June 15, 2026** - Request for Proposals opens
- **July-August 2026** - Brief conversations/interviews with applicant organizations will be conducted on a rolling basis to better understand project scope, organizational readiness, and partnership expectations
- **August 7, 2026** - Proposal submission deadline
- **August 28, 2026** - Selection decisions shared with applicant organizations
- **September 16, 2026** - Signature Program participants will receive their project assignments and meet with their CIP groups for the first time as part of the Opening Retreat, ideally in person at Flying Horse Farms. Participant teams and partner organizations will continue project planning, communication, and engagement following the retreat.
- **October 1, 2026 - May 31, 2027** - Active project period
- **February 2027** - Midpoint organizational check-in with Leadership Columbus
- **By May 31, 2027** - Final project deliverables submitted and shared

Proposal Review Considerations

- Alignment with the goals and structure of the Community Impact Project
- Clarity and feasibility of the proposed project
- Potential organizational and community impact
- Organizational readiness and engagement capacity
- Opportunity for participant leadership development and collaboration
- Participant skillsets
- Sustainability and implementation potential beyond the project timeline

Questions?

If you have questions about the Community Impact Project process, proposal expectations, or organizational fit, please contact Leadership Columbus at info@leadershipcolumbus.org.