Eligibility Criteria & Readiness Guidance

The Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin's Fiscal Sponsorship Program exists to temporarily support community projects that are not yet ready to operate as their own nonprofit. Fiscal sponsorship allows a project to receive tax-deductible donations through the Community Foundation's nonprofit status while the project builds capacity and delivers community benefit.

This document explains:

- What types of projects are eligible
- What the Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin looks for in readiness and organizational fit
- What groups can do to become eligible if they are not yet accepted

What is the Fiscal Sponsorship Program?

A Fiscally Sponsored Fund is an account at the Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin that supports a specific project. The fund types that fall under our Fiscal Sponsorship Program include both Special Project and Activity Funds. The Community Foundation processes donations and manages the fund while the project team carries out the work and is responsible for delivering the activities as described, following Community Foundation policies.

Important: Fiscal sponsorship is intended for time-limited projects (even if they take several years). It is not designed for ongoing annual fundraising activities with no plan to end or transition to another long-term structure. This does not prevent a project from holding more than one fundraiser while the project is active.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for fiscal sponsorship through the Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin, a proposed project/fund must meet all of the following:

1. Mission & Community Benefit

Your project must have a clear mission that benefits the public. This means:

- **Who benefits:** A specific community group or the broader community
- **How it helps:** Activities are designed for community/public benefit (not personal profit)

This helps ensure donations can be treated as tax-deductible.

2. Strong Fit for Fiscal Sponsorship

Fiscal sponsorship is intended for projects that:

- Are community-based and mission-driven
- Need help accepting donations and managing funds while the project is getting established
- Are not yet positioned to be an independent nonprofit
- Are prepared to work within the Community Foundation's financial and operational policies

Projects that may **not** be a good fit include those that:

- Could be more appropriately housed within an existing nonprofit with a similar mission
- Are primarily commercial or for-profit in nature
- Are intended to be ongoing with no plan to end or transition away from fiscal sponsorship

3. Project Leadership & Capacity

Even early-stage projects must show basic capacity to lead and carry out the work responsibly. The Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin looks for:

- Identified leaders or a core team
- Ability to manage the project's activities
- Willingness to collaborate with Community Foundation staff

4. A Plan (or Plan in Progress)

A perfect plan is not required, but proposed projects should have at least a working plan. Eligible projects typically can describe:

- What they will do
- Who they will benefit
- How they will operate
- Early goals and indicators of success

5. Public Partnerships *(if applicable)*

Projects involving a government, school, or other public entity are eligible when:

- The partnership is clear and documented
- The project remains mission-driven and provides community/public benefit
- Roles and responsibilities are well defined

Common Reasons a Project is Not Yet Eligible

- A project may not be accepted at this time if:
- The project's mission/community benefit is unclear
- The project appears to primarily benefit private individuals or a closed membership group
- The project is intended to be ongoing (e.g., annual fundraising) with no plan to end or transition
- Another nonprofit organization is a better fit to house the work
- Leadership/team structure is not yet established
- There is no workable plan for activities, fundraising, and use of funds
- Intended activities fall outside public/community benefit or Community Foundation policy
- If this happens, the Community Foundation will share feedback and may recommend alternatives.

How to Become Eligible (Steps for Readiness)

If you are not yet eligible, these steps often help projects become ready:

Clarify your mission and community benefit

- Write a 1-3 sentence mission statement
- Clearly describe public benefit and who is served

Strengthen leadership and structure

- Form a small leadership or advisory group
- Identify decision-makers and project roles
- Gather letters of support or partner commitments if relevant

Build or refine your project plan

Your plan doesn't need to be long; it just needs to be clear. Plan to include:

- Goals and outcomes
- Core activities
- Expected beneficiaries
- Any early fundraising ideas and expected community support (including projected or expected significant gifts)
- Timeline or next milestones

Confirm fiscal sponsorship is the right option

Ask:

- Would this work be better executed inside an existing nonprofit?
- Is this a time-limited project, or is it meant to continue indefinitely?
- Is the project intended to become its own nonprofit later?
- What support do we need from a fiscal sponsor?

Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin staff can help you think through these questions.

Application & Review Process

1. **Submit the Fiscal Sponsorship Interest Form**

   Share your project basics, mission/community benefit, team, and project readiness.

2. **Staff Review**

   Community Foundation staff assess eligibility using established criteria.

3. **Follow-Up Conversation**

   Qualified projects are contacted to clarify details, discuss structure, and/or review policies.

4. **Decision & Next Steps**

   Projects may be:

   a. Accepted and moved into fund setup,
   b. Asked to strengthen readiness and reapply later, or
   c. Referred to another organization that is a better fit.