

Columbus Youth Climate Action Fund

Program Overview

With 84 percent of youth around the world reporting that they are worried climate change threatens people and the environment, the Columbus Youth Climate Action Fund continues to support young people in leading local climate action projects. After two successful years of youth-led projects, the City of Columbus is continuing the program for a third year with almost \$50,000 available to support youth groups working to address climate change and its impacts on our community. Through microgrants, the program helps young people turn their ideas into action while supporting the goals of the Columbus Climate Action Plan and building the next generation of local climate leaders.



YCAF grant recipients with the Charles Madison Nabrit Memorial Garden, working to create a youth-participant designed edible forest and educational workshops for the community.

Microgrants are available to youth groups (ages 15 – 24) in amounts of \$1,000 - \$5,000 to implement new projects that support one of the following program areas in our Columbus Climate Action Plan:

- **Empowering the Community the “Columbus Way”:** Builds or supports community collaboration, education, awareness, and leadership related to climate action
- **Sustainable Neighborhoods and Environment:** Supports climate resilient neighborhoods or a healthy environment
- **Buildings and Energy:** Promotes renewable energy or energy efficiency in residential, commercial or community buildings
- **Transportation:** Supports mode shift to bikes, scooters and public transportation or promotes zero-emission vehicles
- **Waste Reduction:** Reduces waste generated or sent to the landfill

Projects can be focused on climate mitigation (reducing pollution), climate resilience (adapting to the impacts of climate change), or climate engagement (getting people educated or involved). Be creative! As youth leaders, we’re looking to you for new ideas for the future!

Example Projects

- Tree and native species planting
- Recycling, composting, and other waste reduction projects
- Climate education programs
- Public art and awareness campaigns
- Biking, walking and pollution-free transportation initiatives

How To Apply

- Read the following program guidance.
- Download the application Word document.
- Complete the application digitally.
- Email the completed document to Roberto Burga at RWBurga@columbus.gov with the subject line: **YCAF Application - [Your Project Title]**.
- After submitting, applicants may be contacted for a follow-up meeting, clarification, or additional documentation. Submission of an application does not guarantee funding. Selected applicants will receive next steps

Eligibility Requirements

Grants are available to youth-led and youth-serving organizations and groups. Youth-serving organizations are those that provide programs and resources intentionally designed to meet the needs of young people. In all cases, at least three youth ages 15 to 24 must lead and participate in project planning, proposal writing, and project implementation.

Eligible applicants must meet the following requirements:

1. Organizational Eligibility

Applicants must fall into one of the categories below:

- An organization with an existing, documented youth program, such as a nonprofit that already operates youth-focused programming.
- An established youth group with a documented name and organizational structure, such as a college or university student organization.

OR

If an applicant does not meet one of the categories above, they may still be considered eligible if they clearly demonstrate all of the following in their application:

- The proposed project is youth-led.
- There will be sufficient youth participation and organizational capacity to successfully carry out the project.
- If the project is led by youth under age 18, an adult sponsor, teacher, mentor, or other responsible partner has committed to guiding the project and managing funds as needed.

Eligibility may be verified after application submission through a meeting or other follow-up.

Timeline

Aug. 10, 2026	Applications Open
Oct. 23, 2026	Applications Close
Nov. 16, 2026	Grant Awards Announced
Jan. 19, 2027	Projects Begin Implementation
July 30, 2027	Grant Projects Should Be Complete



2. Funding Eligibility

Grant funds cannot be paid directly to individuals. Eligible applicants must either:

- Be incorporated as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization with a bank account that can receive funds, or designate an incorporated nonprofit 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor with a bank account that can receive funds

If you have a project idea but need help identifying a fiscal sponsor, please contact us for assistance. If selected, the organization receiving funds may be required to complete additional City payment or grant paperwork before funds are released.

3. Grant Project Requirements

- Projects must be new and support the Columbus Climate Action Plan.
- Youth (ages 15 to 24) must lead and implement the project, though projects may serve or benefit residents of any age.
- Projects should take place in the City of Columbus and clearly identify the site or community where the project will be implemented.
- The City may limit the number of awards made to the same organization to ensure funds are distributed across multiple youth-led projects.
- **Projects should target completion by July 30, 2027.**
- Improvements to buildings or other infrastructure cannot exceed 50% of the project budget.
- Standalone litter clean-up projects are not eligible for funding through this program.
- Grant recipients must submit monthly reports and documentation of expenditures.

Scoring Criteria and Funding Priorities

Applications will be scored by a committee that includes city staff, young leaders, and members of the environmental community in Columbus.

Scoring Criteria	Description	Point Value
Project Planning and Feasibility	Demonstrates clear action plan, results, and how they will be achieved. Demonstrates the group has the capacity to implement and manage the project.	10
Community Impact and Climate Action Plan Support	Demonstrates clear impacts and benefits in support of Climate Action Plan priorities.	5
Budget Rationale	Clearly describes costs and how they were determined; costs appear reasonable for the project as presented.	5
Creative Solutions (Bonus)	Up to 2 bonus points may be awarded for new/creative/innovative solutions or approaches to climate change.	2
Equity and Environmental Justice (Priority)	When projects have similar scores, the committee may prioritize projects that clearly benefit communities disproportionately impacted by climate change, including communities of color, low-income residents, and neighborhoods most affected by heat, flooding, drought, air pollution, or other environmental burdens.	Y/N



Guidance for Developing Your Project

Big changes start with small actions that grow over time. Think about how you can make a change in the spaces where you live, work, or go to school! If you would like to extend your project into another community, seek out leaders there to collaborate on your project proposal. Projects should be led by youth who are members of the community in which the project is taking place.

Consider your capacity to accomplish the project. Here are some questions to help guide you:

- Can you manage the project with the resources available to your group? Do you need to seek out additional resources?
- Do you have the skills and experience to accomplish the project? If not, can you find mentors who may be able to assist?
- Do you have enough time to accomplish the project? If not, could you modify the concept to fit within the program timeframe?
- Are any approvals necessary to implement your project? Can they be obtained before or soon after application submittal?
- Is there long-term maintenance required, and if so, who will manage and pay for it?

Eligible and Ineligible Expenses

Eligible grant costs include:

- Project supplies and materials, including rental and purchase of items directly needed to carry out the project, such as equipment, tools, art supplies, or technology.
- Costs for organizing community events, workshops, or educational sessions, including venue rental, printing of materials for participants, and basic refreshments.
- Costs for any necessary permits to implement the project in accordance with local regulations.
- Reasonable ground travel expenses for youth participants or team members directly involved in project implementation.
- Promotional materials to raise awareness about the project, encourage engagement from stakeholders and the greater community, and share project results including photography, editorial support, and videography.
- Reasonable fees for training and mentorship offered in workshops with youth participants.
- Project sponsorship costs that local NGOs, civic groups, neighborhood clubs, schools or other organizations may charge for receiving a microgrant on behalf of youth project leads. The costs should be no more than 15% of the microgrant value.
- Funds to enable youth participation such as bus fare, per diems for food or gift cards. These costs should comprise a minimal portion of the project budget.

Ineligible project expenses include projects already ongoing; services covered by existing city initiatives; speaker honorariums and speaker fees; projects that primarily serve religious organizations; indirect costs like rent or utilities; nonprofit incorporation fees; scholarships; direct support to individuals or families; partisan political organizations, candidates, fundraisers, or projects; legislative advocacy or lobbying activities; capital campaigns, endowments, or endowed chairs.

Contact Information

For more information, contact Roberto Burga, Columbus YCAF program manager, at RWBurga@columbus.gov.

