



Sunflower Foundation

Request for Proposals

Sunflower Trails

PAVING THE WAY:

From Blazing Trails

To Building Community



Key Information

RFP Release: Wednesday, January 14, 2026

Informational Webinars:

Tuesday, January 20, 2026, 12:00 PM (NOON) CST [Register here!](#)

Thursday, January 22, 2026, 3:00 PM CST [Register Here!](#)

(Webinars will be recorded and posted on the [Sunflower Foundation RFP web page](#))

Final Application Submission Due Date: Friday, February 20, 2026 – 4:00 PM CST

Funding Notifications: On or before April 30, 2026

Eligible Applications:

- A nonprofit organization with the IRS tax classification described in Internal Revenue Service Code section 501(c)(3) with designation as a 509(a)(1) or (2)*
- A community coalition or other nonprofit organization that partners with an appropriate fiscal agent that carries the tax-exempt nonprofit status above
- A municipality or local unit of government**
- A Kansas sovereign Native Nation

*If an organization has questions about their eligibility status, please reach out to Sunflower Foundation Grant Manager Anne Zajic (Azajic@sunflowerfoundation.org.)

** Trail Town applications are expected to be units of local government OR application should include a Letter of Support/Commitment from the local government

Available Funding:

Trail Blazers – Up to \$10,000 (see pages 8-9 for more details)

Trail Stewards – Up to \$10,000 (see pages 10-11 for more details)

Trail Towns – Up to \$25,000 (see pages 11-13 for more details)

Eligible Expenses: See page(s) (9,10, 12) for more details

Grant Timeline: 12 months – awarded projects should anticipate a start date of May 1, 2026

Sunflower Support: Please read the entire RFP before you begin the electronic submission process. To ensure timely and appropriate responses to inquiries, please email questions to Kelli Mark, Sunflower Foundation Director of Healthy Communities (Kmark@sunflowerfoundation.org).

INTRODUCTION

The Sunflower Foundation invites Kansas communities and nonprofit organizations working on behalf of communities to submit proposals for the **Sunflower Trails: Paving the Way – From Blazing Trails to Building Community** funding initiative.

Sunflower is offering this RFP to support trails as an evidence-based strategy to increase opportunities for outdoor physical activity, strengthen social connections, and improve overall health and quality of life in Kansas communities. This initiative recognizes that communities are at different stages of trail development and provides multiple funding pathways to support local readiness, leadership, and long-term impact.

SUMMARY OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

This RFP includes **three competitive grant categories**. Applicants should carefully review each category to determine the best fit. Grants will be awarded based on the quality of the proposals, as well as alignment with the current RFP criteria and the foundation's mission. NOTE: Each applicant may apply for only one category. If you are unsure which category is the best fit, please contact Kelli Mark at (Kmark@sunflowerfoundation.org.)

Grant Category	Intended Applicants	Maximum Award	Awards Available
Trail Blazers	Communities pursuing their first public trail, or emerging trail champions advancing new public trail projects	\$10,000	8
Trail Stewards	Communities with existing trails seeking to elevate impact and diversify users/supporters	\$10,000	8
Trail Towns	Communities pursuing the Trail Town model and certification (available to communities with legally railbanked and developed Rail Trails)	\$25,000	8

BACKGROUND

For more than 20 years, Sunflower Foundation has invested in trails as a strategy to improve public health and community vitality. Since the launch of the Sunflower Trails program in 2005, the foundation has supported more than 200 trail projects across Kansas, primarily through support for direct trail construction.

While this type of support is essential and will continue, Sunflower has learned that communities also benefit from customized planning support, technical assistance from experts, and peer learning from across the state. This RFP reflects that evolution, supporting communities not only to build trails, but to plan, steward, and activate them as lasting community assets.

In 2024, Sunflower made a catalytic investment to support the creation of [Kansas Trails, Inc. \(KTI\)](#), a statewide organization dedicated to trail coordination and technical assistance. This RFP complements KTI's role by pairing grant funding with learning opportunities and expert support.

PROGRAM DETAILS

1. Summary

The overarching goal of this initiative is to support Kansas communities in their efforts to develop, strengthen, and sustain trails and trail systems that:

- Increase opportunities for outdoor physical activity and exposure to nature, thereby improving physical and mental health
- Enhance community health and quality of life
- Strengthen civic pride and local identity
- Support trail-oriented economic development

This initiative strives to help communities reach their goals with multi-layered support, including:

- Customized virtual learning series and technical assistance for trail communities at all stages of readiness
 - Networking opportunities for peer learning and expert guidance
 - Grant funds to support participation in learning and networking
 - Grant funds to support costs associated with reaching individual applicant goals
-

2. Eligible Organizations

Eligible applicants for this RFP will fall into one of the following categories:

- A nonprofit organization with the IRS tax classification described in Internal Revenue Service Code section 501(c)(3) with designation as a 509(a)(1) or (2) *
- A community coalition or other nonprofit organization that partners with an appropriate fiscal agent that carries the tax-exempt nonprofit status noted above
- A municipality or local unit of government **
- A Kansas sovereign Native nation

*If an organization has questions about its eligibility status, please reach out to Sunflower Foundation Grant Manager Anne Zajic (Azajic@sunflowerfoundation.org)

**Trail Town applicants are expected to be units of local government, OR the application should include a Letter of Support/Commitment from the local government.

3. Allowable Expenses

Eligible expenses are specific to each grant category. Please review (starting on page 9) eligible expenses in the grant category your organization plans to apply for.

4. Unallowable Expenses

While each grant category does have some specific non-eligible expenses (see specific grant categories starting on page 8), general Sunflower Foundation unallowable expenses include:

- Medical equipment and/or healthcare equipment or supplies
- Implementation of fundraising campaigns and events that are not directly related to advancing trails and the goals of this RFP; contact Kelli Mark (Kmark@sunflowerfoundation.org) with questions.
- Routine continuing education (e.g., for licensure, accreditation, organization requirements, etc.)
- Individual health care or support
- Other items may be excluded from funding at Sunflower's discretion.

5. Grantee Expectations

- Grantees are expected to actively participate in all six sessions of the virtual learning series and attend the in-person Trail Exchange Day at the Sunflower Nonprofit Center.

- In addition, grantees must submit a final narrative report detailing activities, outcomes, and lessons learned, along with a final financial report documenting the use of grant funds, in accordance with Sunflower Foundation reporting requirements.
 - Grantees also are encouraged to attend Trail Appreciation Day in March 2027, when Trail Town grantees completing Kansas Trail Town certification will be recognized in an awards ceremony.
-

6. Required Documents

- For grant awards of \$10,000, grantees are required to submit their most recent 990 or a W9 if not required to file a 990.
- For grants awards of \$25,000, grantees are required to submit their most recent 990 or W9 if not required to file a 990; recent financial statements to include are an income statement (dated within the last 6 months), a balance sheet (dated within the last 6 months), and, if available, their most recent financial audit (not more than two years old).

All applicants are required to submit a fully completed Budget Workbook (available to download in the documents section of the application).

7. Grant Awards

- For \$10,000 grant awards, grantees will receive an award letter and grant check concurrently.
 - For grants of \$25,000, grantees will be required to sign a formal Letter of Agreement (LOA) outlining the grant terms and conditions. These grants will be disbursed in two installments: the first payment of \$20,000 will be issued upon receipt of the signed LOA by Sunflower Foundation; and the final payment of \$5,000 will be released upon receipt and approval of the final narrative and financial reports.
-

8. Reporting Requirements

Grantees are expected to complete a brief evaluation survey at the conclusion of each virtual learning session. In addition, grantees are required to submit a final narrative and financial report documenting activities, outcomes, lessons learned, and use of grant funds, in accordance with Sunflower Foundation reporting requirements.

9. Additional Considerations

- This is a competitive grant program; funding is not guaranteed to each applicant.

- Priority will be given to applicants that demonstrate readiness, the ability to fully participate in the learning opportunities offered, and alignment with the goals of this RFP.
- Preference may be given to projects that demonstrate meaningful community engagement and broad community support, particularly with populations historically underserved by trail and outdoor recreation investments.

IMPORTANT DATES

I. RFP Release and Fluxx Registration Opens: Wednesday, January 14, 2026

Online applications are available in Sunflower's online grant management system, [Fluxx](#). Applicants must register in Fluxx to apply.

II. Informational Webinars:

Sunflower will offer two optional, one-hour informational webinars. The webinars will have identical content. Webinars will be recorded and available on the [Sunflower RFP page](#).

Tuesday, January 20, 2026, at 12:00 PM CST (NOON) - [Register here!](#)

Thursday, January 22, 2026, at 3:00 PM CST - [Register Here!](#)

III. Virtual Office Hours:

Virtual office hours will be scheduled every Thursday from noon to 1:00 PM CST from January 15 through February 19. These are voluntary drop-in sessions for applicants to virtually connect with Sunflower staff if you have questions about the RFP or Fluxx. Registration for these sessions is not required, and calendar invites will not be sent. You can join a [virtual office hours session using this link](#).

We suggest you mark your calendar now for the virtual office hours session of your choice:

Thursday, January 15, 2026: 12:00 PM (Noon) to 1:00 PM CST

Thursday, January 22, 2026: 12:00 PM (Noon) to 1:00 PM CST

Thursday, January 29, 2026: 12:00 PM (Noon) to 1:00 PM CST

Thursday, February 5, 2026: 12:00 PM (Noon) to 1:00 PM CST

Thursday, February 12, 2026: 12:00 PM (Noon) to 1:00 PM CST

Thursday, February 19, 2026: 12:00 PM (Noon) to 1:00 PM CST

IV. Fluxx registration closes: Wednesday, February 18, 2026, at 5:00 pm CST (two days before application due date)

Applicants must be registered in Fluxx at least two days prior to application submission to ensure timely technical assistance, if necessary. Reminder: Current or past Sunflower Foundation grantees can use their existing Fluxx login and DO NOT need to register again.

V. Final Application Submission Due Date: Friday, February 20, 2026, at 4:00 pm CST

Please allow plenty of time for submission to ensure technical assistance will be available, if necessary. No technical assistance will be available after 4:00 pm on February 20, 2026.

VI. Funding Notifications: Expected no later than Thursday, April 30, 2026.

For applications received by the Friday, February 20, 2026, deadline, funding notifications are expected no later than April 30, 2026.

VII. Virtual Learning Series

- Trail Blazer Virtual Learning Series will occur on the third Tuesday of every month from April 2026 to September 2026.
- Trail Stewards and Trail Town Virtual Learning Series will occur on the first Tuesday of every other month from April 2026 to February 2027.

VIII. Trail Exchange Day at the Sunflower Nonprofit Center in Topeka. More details, including dates and times, will be provided to awarded applicants at the beginning of the grant cycle.

GRANT CATEGORIES

A. Trail Blazers – First-Time Trail Planning

Purpose: Supporting communities pursuing their first public trail, or emerging trail champions advancing new public trail projects

Grant Award: Up to \$10,000 | Up to 8 grants

Grant Term: Up to 12 months

Additional Benefits

- Grant supported participation in a free, six-session virtual learning series (additional details in appendix A) taught by a national expert covering the topics of trail visioning, partnerships, route planning, legal considerations, funding, design, and sustainability.
 - Learning Series will occur virtually on the third Tuesday of every month from April 2026 to September 2026. All grantees will receive calendar invitations.

- Grant supported participation in a free, in-person event at the Sunflower Nonprofit Center designed to bring together Trail Blazers and experts from across the state to learn from each other and connect directly to relevant state agencies and trail support organizations.
 - Kansas Trail Exchange – Sunflower Nonprofit Center, 5820 SW Sixth Ave., Topeka, KS 66606. More details, including dates and times, will be provided to awarded applicants at the beginning of the grant cycle.

Allowable Expenses:

- Dedicated planning time by staff/volunteers for activities, including but not limited to:
 - Participation in Trail Blazer trainings/homework
 - Research efforts related to trail development and funding opportunities
 - Proactive connections with other trail champions (e.g. travel costs for site visits and in-person trail education events)
 - Community engagement and support (e.g., meeting costs, materials)
 - Application preparation for available funding, including state agencies (e.g., Kansas Department of Transportation, Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks)
 - Volunteer recruitment and retention

In addition, **up to 50%** of funds may be used as a match for any upfront trail development work, such as trail design, GIS/Mapping, legal costs, etc.

Unallowable Expenses:

- New trail construction related capital expenses
- General foundation unallowable expenses; please refer to page 5 of this RFP

Expected Outcomes:

- Community readiness to lead a public trail project
- A clear, phased plan for trail development
- Establishment of a local trail “expert”(s) with confidence and skills to apply for trail grants and develop a supporter base
- Strong partnerships and connections across the state
- Defined pathways to future funding

B. Trail Stewards – Strengthening Existing Trails

Purpose: Supporting communities that wish to fully optimize their existing trails by increasing user and supporter base and enhancing the trail experience

Grant Award: Up to \$10,000 | Up to 8 grants

Grant Term: Up to 12 months

Additional Benefits

- Grant supported participation in a free, six-session virtual learning series (additional details in Appendix B) taught by a national expert covering the topics of trail visioning, partnerships, route planning, legal considerations, funding, design, and sustainability.
 - Learning Series will occur virtually on the first Tuesday of every two months from April 2026 to February 2027. All grantees will receive calendar invitations.
- Grant supported participation in a free, in-person event at the Sunflower Nonprofit Center designed to bring together all cohort participants and experts from across the state to learn from each other and connect directly to relevant state agencies and trail support organizations.
 - Kansas Trail Exchange – Sunflower Nonprofit Center, 5820 SW Sixth Ave., Topeka, KS 66606. More details, including dates and times, will be provided to awarded applicants at the beginning of the grant cycle.

Allowable Expenses:

Dedicated planning time by staff/volunteers for activities, including but not limited to:

- Participation in Trail Town training (completing benchmarks optional)
- Proactive connections with other trail champions (e.g., travel costs for site visits and in-person trail education events)
- Community engagement and support
- Trail marketing, promotions and programming, especially to diverse groups and nontraditional users
- Volunteer recruitment and retention
- Increasing supporter/donor base for ongoing trail support

In addition, **up to 50%** of grant funds may be used for match funds for direct trail improvements and/or enhancements, including:

- Trail signage/kiosks

- Trail enhancements (i.e., benches, bike repair stations, lighting, bathrooms, etc.)
- Routine trail maintenance or specific repairs (e.g., resurfacing, bridge repair)

*Any capital expenses (a single item over \$5,000 with a useful life of one year or more) will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and a professional bid must be submitted with the initial application.

Unallowable Expenses:

- General foundation unallowable expenses; please refer to page 5 of this RFP.
- New trail construction and related capital expenses.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased base of trail users and supporters
- Increased knowledge and plan of how to more fully optimize existing trails
- Improvements and enhancements to existing trails, as needed
- Increased capacity and technical knowledge of trails
- Enhanced community engagement and cross sector partnerships

C. Trail Towns – Trail-Oriented Community Development

NOTE: Due to the specific nature of this pilot program, only communities with legally railbanked and developed rail trails are eligible for 2026 funding. We encourage other interested applicants to reach out to Kelli Mark (Kmark@sunflowerfoundation.org) to discuss other options. Trail Town applications are expected to be units of local government, OR the application should include a Letter of Support/Commitment from the local government.

Purpose: Support communities pursuing the Trail Town model and Kansas Trail Town certification

Grant Award: Up to \$25,000 | Up to 8 grants

Grant Term: Up to 12 months

Additional Benefits

- Grant supported participation in a free, six-session virtual learning series (additional details in Appendix B) taught by a national expert covering the topics of trail visioning, partnerships, route planning, legal considerations, funding, design, and sustainability.
 - Learning Series will occur virtually on the first Tuesday of every two months from April 2026 to February 2027. All grantees will receive calendar invitations.

- Grant supported participation in a free, in-person event at the Sunflower Nonprofit Center designed to bring together all cohort participants and experts from across the state to learn from each other and connect directly to relevant state agencies and trail support organizations.
 - Kansas Trail Exchange – Sunflower Nonprofit Center, 5820 SW Sixth Ave., Topeka, KS 66606. More details, including dates and times, will be provided to awarded applicants at the beginning of the grant cycle.
- Technical assistance for the completion of certification benchmarks to achieve Kansas Trail Town certification (optional).

Allowable Expenses:

- Dedicated time by staff/volunteers for activities, including but not limited to:
 - Participation in Trail Town trainings, including completion of work to achieve Trail Town certification
 - Development and coordination of a multi-stakeholder Trail Town team
 - Proactive connections and communications with other Trail Town participants and/or trail champions (e.g., travel costs for site visits/events)
 - Community engagement and support
 - Volunteer recruitment and retention
 - Donor development for ongoing trail support
- Trail marketing, promotions, and programming for multiple audiences (e.g., local users and tourists). Consultation/material to assist with enhanced marketing of trail for tourism purposes
- Sub-grants to local partners and businesses to fully achieve Trail Town vision (\$2,500 limit per subgrant and must be submitted with a signed Memorandum of Understanding or Interlocal Agreement)

In addition, **up to 50%** of grant funds may be used for match funds for direct trail and/or trailhead improvements and/or enhancements, including:

- Trail signage/kiosks
- Trail enhancements (i.e., benches, bike repair stations, lighting, bathrooms, etc.)
- Routine trail maintenance or specific repairs (e.g., resurfacing, bridge repair)
- New trail construction that directly connects to the Trail Town vision

*Any capital expenses (a single item over \$5,000 with a useful life of one year or more) will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and a professional bid must be submitted with the initial application.

Unallowable Expenses:

- General foundation unallowable expenses; please refer to page 5 of this RFP.

Expected Outcomes:

- Grantees complete all Trail Town sessions and required competencies to achieve Kansas Trail Town certification
 - Demonstrated buy-in and support for the Trail Town concept by local units of government and other key stakeholders
 - Increased knowledge, confidence, and materials to encourage trail-based tourism and economic activity
 - Stronger local collaboration and shared understanding of what it means to be a Trail Town
 - Stronger regional and statewide collaboration with other Trail Towns and key partners to advance the work
-

EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS**Review and Selection Process**

Proposals will be reviewed by a panel of Sunflower Foundation staff and expert external reviewers. All application components – including narratives, budgets, and supporting documentation – will be considered.

Final funding recommendations are subject to approval by the Sunflower Foundation Board of Trustees.

Criteria and Considerations

Funding decisions will consider:

- Demonstrated community need and support
- Willingness to fully participate in learning opportunities
- Alignment with community plans and priorities
- Strength of partnerships and local leadership
- Readiness to implement proposed activities
- Potential for long-term health and community impact

Recommended Supporting Documents

Supporting documents enhance the application. Every existing or potential trail project is special and distinctive, just like the communities that wish to build them. We encourage you to be creative in sharing details that provide a rich picture, such as the following:

- Original (not template) Letters of Support from current and potential stakeholders and diverse community members who share your vision and the goals of this RFP
- Use of past community surveys, local data, minutes from public meetings, photos, webpages, screenshots of social media activity, community strategic plan or planning document – anything that demonstrates the community’s desire for trails
- Smartphone video (<5 min) to capture what written words can’t always express or explain.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

Sunflower Foundation is subject to the Kansas Open Meetings Act and the Kansas Open Records Act (K.S.A. 75-4317, 45-215 through 45-223). Any information received from the grantee, including documents and materials submitted as part of this application process, may be subject to disclosure to the public under the provisions of these Acts.

Sunflower Foundation looks forward to partnering with Kansas communities to advance health, connections, and positive possibilities through trails.

Appendix A – Trail Blazer Learning Series

Definition of Trail Blazer

A Trail Blazer is a community pursuing its first public trail, or emerging trail champions advancing new public trail projects.

Learning Series:

These 75-minute Learning Series sessions will be held virtually on the third Tuesday of each month from April 2026 to September 2026. All grantees will receive calendar invitations.

Session 1 – Vision & Community Engagement – April 21, 2026 – 10:00 AM CST

Session 2 – Land, Routes & Partnerships – May 19, 2026 – 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

Session 3 – Legal, Safety & Accessibility Basics – June 16, 2026 – 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

Session 4 – Funding & Resources – July 21, 2026 – 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

Session 5 – Trail Design & Public Engagement – August 18, 2026 – 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

Session 6 – Implementation & Long-Term Sustainability – September 15, 2026 – 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

*Details of sessions could be subject to change based on feedback from attendees and facilitators.

Appendix B – Trail Stewards and Trail Town Learning Series

Definition of a Trail Town

A Trail Town is a community that recognizes and embraces its trail as a vital part of its cultural identity, local character, and future growth. It is a place where residents, businesses, and civic leaders work together to intentionally create welcoming, inclusive, vibrant spaces for trail users – whether they are hikers, cyclists, runners, equestrians, or casual visitors.

A Trail Town not only celebrates the trail as a recreational asset but also integrates it into community life, economic development, and tourism. This means fostering strong connections between the trail and local businesses, promoting opportunities for healthy living, and ensuring that visitors feel invited and supported.

Importantly, a Trail Town develops long-term systems and strategies to sustain trail-related growth—building infrastructure, partnerships, and policies that preserve the trail, enhance user experiences, and contribute to the community’s resilience. In doing so, Trail Towns cultivate a sense of pride, stewardship, and shared benefit that enriches both residents and visitors alike.

Learning Series:

Trail Stewards and Trail Town grantees will participate in the same learning series. While benchmarks for certification may be completed by both Trail Stewards and Trail Town grantees on an optional basis, certification through this pilot program is available exclusively to Trail Town grantees.

These 75-minute Learning Series sessions will be held virtually on the first Tuesday of every other month from April 2026 to February 2027. All grantees will receive calendar invitations.

Virtual Session 1 – Welcome to the Trail Town Program – April 7, 2026 – 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

-  *No benchmark, orientation only*

Virtual Session 2 – Trail Town Committee Formation – June 2, 2026 – 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

- **Benchmark for Certification:**
 - Formal Trail Town Committee formed OR
 - Municipal agreement/resolution established committing partnership and advocacy

Virtual Session 3 – Assessments & Baseline Data – August 4, 2026 – 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

- **Benchmark for Certification:**
 - Completed self-assessment & baseline data report

Virtual Session 4 – Placemaking Workshop – October 6, 2026 – 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

- **Benchmark for Certification:**

- Hosting a placemaking workshop in your community

Virtual Session 5 – Promotion & Brand Awareness – December 1, 2026 – 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

- **Benchmark for Certification:**


- Creation of a brand identity + at least one promotional material (flyer, website, social media presence)

Virtual Session 6 – Action Plan Development – February 2, 2027 – 12:00 PM (NOON) CST

- **Benchmark for Certification:**

- Completed Action Plan

Virtual Wrap-Up (wrap-up technical assistance, questions, etc.) – TBD

-  *No benchmark, wrap up only*

*Details of sessions could be subject to change based on feedback from attendees and facilitators.