



Bush Prize: North Dakota

In partnership with Strengthen ND and the Bush Foundation

Applications Open April 1, 2026

Applications Close April 30, 2026



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Application Guidelines

The Bush Prize program identifies and honors extraordinary organizations that consistently engage and lead their community toward creative solutions and provides them with flexible support to keep doing that work and supports them to amplify their story to inspire others.

Beginning in 2023, the Bush Foundation Prize competition has been divided among the three states and Native Nations sharing their geography supported by the Bush Foundation, with separate localized organizations managing the competition for their state and 23 Native Nations.

Strengthen ND is managing the Bush Prize process for North Dakota, and you will find the focus and purpose remain the same, with very similar guidelines to the application. Please carefully review the guidelines below and/or watch our webinar on March 26th, 2026 at 12:00 pm CST.

Please Note: Potential applicants are strongly encouraged to attend or view the live information session regarding the Bush Prize, which will be offered on March 26th, 2026. Due to the nature of the Bush Prize as a competitive award, individual technical assistance and brainstorming regarding an applicant's proposal content will not be held. Any direct assistance with explaining criteria, application input systems, or timeline can be directed to megan@strengthennd.com.

Bush Prize Overview

The Bush Prize celebrates organizations with a track record of successful community problem solving. Bush Prize honorees are extraordinary not only in what they do, but in how they do it. They work inclusively, in partnership with others, to make our region better for everyone.

The Bush Prize program **identifies** and **honors** *extraordinary* organizations that *consistently* engage and lead their community toward creative solutions, **equips/provides** them with flexible support to keep doing that work, and **supports** them to amplify their story to inspire others.

Every year, two Bush Prize: North Dakota honorees will be selected. Honorees receive a package of recognition, including a flexible award of \$250,000 to invest in their creative capital.

Each year the Bush Prize is awarded in each of the three states served by the Bush Foundation: Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, including the [23 Native Nations](#) that share the same geography.



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Eligibility

1. Bush Prize awards must be used for a charitable purpose.
2. Organizations that are 501(c)(3) public charities or government entities (including schools) are eligible for the Bush Prize.
3. Strengthen ND will accept Bush Prize applications from fiscal sponsors. The fiscal sponsor organization must submit the award application and, if the award is approved, becomes the awardee and receives the funds.
4. Prize honorees must be located in North Dakota or one of the [5 Native Nations](#) that share the same geography. The specific community innovations highlighted in the Bush Prize application must also have occurred within that geography.

Definitions

Creative Community Problem Solving: Creative community problem solving is the process of developing, testing, and spreading innovative ideas to address community challenges effectively. It focuses on utilizing available resources to create solutions that are effective, sustainable, and impactful. This approach inspires and equips leaders to lead transformative efforts, generating solutions that can influence others and achieve measurable outcomes.

Transformational Change: Transformational change refers to systemic shifts that address the root causes of community challenges, resulting in meaningful and lasting improvements. It focuses on reimagining and redesigning systems or practices to create more effective, sustainable, and equitable outcomes. These shifts inspire hope and foster long-term progress by building capacity and resilience within communities.

Track Record of Creative Community Problem Solving: A track record of creative community problem solving reflects an organization's consistent success in applying innovative approaches to address challenges. It demonstrates a history of developing and implementing solutions that produce measurable impact and serve as models for others. This track record highlights the ability to adapt, test, and spread ideas that solve complex problems and enhance the community's capacity for ongoing change. Strengthen ND will be assessing organizational histories of between three and five years to understand that track record.

Innovation: Innovation is the process of developing, testing, and spreading ideas that address important community issues and create opportunities for improvement. Innovation emphasizes the potential for ideas to benefit multiple communities or organizations and supports the learning process to understand and evaluate the impact



of those ideas. It involves inspiring, equipping, and connecting leaders to drive change and ensure the scalability and adaptability of successful solutions.

Selection Criteria

Impact of Creative Community Problem Solving: Does the organization have a pattern of engaging in and leading creative community problem solving? NOTE: Significant impact can happen through creative solutions of all sizes, within communities of all sizes, and through organizations of all sizes.

- Are these creative solutions that address community needs more effective, equitable or sustainable than existing approaches?
- Did these creative solutions make a significant difference?
- Could the organization inspire or inform others?
- Could the organization's practices serve as a model for others navigating diverse challenges and innovative solutions?

History of Creative Community Solutions: Does the organization have a pattern of working across their community to develop new and innovative solutions to their community's needs?

- Does the organization have a history of using innovative approaches that offer real solutions for the challenges and issues affecting their community?
- Can the organization identify and describe specific examples of processes, programs or projects that use creative approaches, technologies, collaborations, and methods to drive sustainable change and solve problems more effectively?

Culture of Creative Community Problem Solving: Does the organization have strong leadership and a culture of innovation? Is the organization rooted in their community and values-driven?

- What deeply rooted values exist that enhance organizational culture and strengthen partnerships?
- How does leadership encourage and exemplify creative thinking and problem-solving?
- How does the organization demonstrate their focus on solutions that tackle root causes for meaningful, lasting community change?
- In what way does that organization demonstrate a strong track record of financial stability?

Additional Considerations

Over time we seek a portfolio of Bush Prize honorees that represents the full diversity of North Dakota, and includes a variety of:



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- Applicant organization sizes
 - Communities served (both in terms of size and demographics)
 - Types of issues addressed
-

Timeline

March 26, 2026 - [Bush Prize Virtual Informational Session](#)

April 1, 2026 - Applications Open

April 30, 2026 - Applications Close

June 1, 2026 to July 31, 2026 - Internal Organizational Due Diligence

August 1, 2026 to August 31, 2026 - Internal Selection & Confidential Notification

September 1, 2026 to October 15, 2026 - Prize Honoree Promotional Collateral Development

October 2026 - Public Announcement of Bush Prize Honorees

ABOUT BUSH PRIZE

The Bush Prize celebrates organizations that are highly valued within their communities and have a track record of successful community problem solving.

Bush Prize grants are flexible and can be used to build up reserves or test that next big idea or whatever else would best support the organization's ongoing good work. Each year, two honorees will be selected for flexible award amounts of \$250,000.

The Bush Prize is done in partnership between the Bush Foundation and Strengthen ND. Strengthen ND will select and announce the Bush Prize honorees, as well as provide any support along the way.

HOW TO APPLY

The deadline for Bush Prize applications is April 30th, 2026 at 11:59pm Central. Our online application system will automatically close, and we will not accept applications after that time. If applying online presents a barrier for you, please let us know - we'd be happy to help.

Once you've started an application in our online system, you cannot save it and return later to continue working.

Application questions for the Bush Prize are provided below as a reference.



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Applicant Organization

All the information provided in this section should be for a single Applicant Organization. If working with a Fiscal Sponsor, the Fiscal Sponsor is the Applicant Organization.

Organization/Contact Information

- Applicant Organization name, organization legal name (if different), address, city, state, zip, phone, website, Employer Identification Number
- Application Primary Contact Information first name, last name, title, phone, email, address, city, state, zip

Organization Questions

- Is your organization certified by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) public charity? (Y/N)
- Is your organization a public agency/unit of government or Indian tribal government under Section 7871 of the Internal Revenue Code? (Y/N)
- What issue area does your organization address? (Select up to three. The options below are from the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities.)
 - o Arts, Culture and Humanities
 - o Education
 - o Environment
 - o Health
 - o Human Services
 - o Other
 - o Public and Societal Benefit
- What best describes the community served by your organization? (Select one.)
 - o Rural
 - o Town or City – population under 50,000
 - o Town or City – population over 50,000
 - o Combination: Rural/Town/City

Sponsored Project (if applicable)

If you are applying using a fiscal sponsor arrangement, this section applies to you. The information below should be about the organization that is being sponsored, not the applicant. In addition, a signed fiscal sponsorship agreement is required for all applicants using a fiscal sponsorship arrangement. Please upload your signed agreement at the bottom of this page.



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If you are not applying using a fiscal sponsorship arrangement, there is no need to complete this section. Most organizations do not use a fiscal sponsorship arrangement. Click “Next” at the bottom of the page to go to the next section.

NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

1. In 4,500 characters or less (approximately 750 words), provide a brief introduction to:

a. Your organization, its history, and its mission. *If you're applying as a fiscal sponsor, briefly describe both your organization and the group you're sponsoring.*

b. Your community. What do we need to understand about your community or context to better understand the work highlighted in your proposal?

2. The Bush Prize honors organizations that consistently engage and lead their community toward creative community-based solutions. Tell us how you have done this in your community over the last 3-5 years (provide up to 2 specific examples). What issues were you seeking to impact? Who did you work with? What were the results? Why were these solutions unique and innovative? *Maximum of 6,000 characters (approximately 900 words)*

3. How does the leadership of your organization support cross-community collaboration and community problem-solving? What does this look like day-to-day? What practices or beliefs are embedded in your organization that supports collaboration and innovative solutions to flourish? *Maximum of 3,000 characters (approximately 500 words)*

4. What sets your organization apart in your community or broader field? How is your approach to developing creative solutions or community problem-solving different from the status quo? How are you trying to inform and inspire your field with your work?

Maximum of 3,000 characters (approximately 500 words)

5. The Bush Prize provides creative capital for organizations to think bigger and think differently about how they address community problems. What is your dream for the future of your organization and its work? What are you doing now to work towards that dream?

Maximum of 1,500 characters (approximately 250 words)



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6. Is the *primary* purpose of your organization to advance racial and/or economic equity in our region? *At least 50% of Bush Prize honorees will be organizations that advance racial and/or economic equity in our region. For the purposes of this grant program, the Bush Foundation defines this as organizations whose primary purpose is to improve access, outcomes, opportunities or treatment based on race and/or economic standing. At least 50% of Bush Prize honorees will be organizations that actively work to advance equity.*

If yes, how? *Strengthen ND will take your entire application into consideration when determining whether your organization meets the above commitment. If your work does not actively work to advance racial and/or economic equity, you do not need to provide an answer to this question. Maximum of 900 characters (approximately 150 words)*

SELECTION PROCESS AND TIMELINE

The deadline for Bush Prize applications is April 30, 2026 at 11:59 pm Central.

Initial Review. Strengthen ND and its Grantmaking Committee will conduct an initial review of applications and select finalists. We will let you know in late June whether your application is moving forward.

Finalist Review. Strengthen ND and its Grantmaking Committee will conduct site visits and review references in June and July.

It is important to us that our processes are fair. If any of our Grantmaking Committee members have a conflict of interest with an organization being considered for the Bush Prize, they will not be a part of any selection discussion or decisions for that year. Strengthen ND defines “conflict of interest” as being a staff or board member of or having a contractual relationship with an organization.

We will let finalists know in August whether they have been selected as a 2026 Bush Prize honoree.

All selections are based on program eligibility requirements and criteria.

SUPPORTING BUSH PRIZE HONOREES

Strengthen ND hopes to build a supportive relationship with Bush Prize honorees by:

Working Together



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We will create an award agreement including an agreed-upon timeline, reporting schedule, and use of funds. The Bush Prize awards are flexible and can be used to advance the charitable purpose of your organization. Funds must be used to support work in North Dakota or one of the five Native nations that share our geography.

We will be responsive and direct in our communication with you, and we will continue to be available to you throughout the award period. We hope to build a relationship that is supportive and helpful, but also allows you to focus on what you do best.

Learning and Evaluation

We want to know if we're making a difference, and we will ask you to participate in the evaluation of the Bush Prize program, including your experience as a Prize honoree. We will use what we learn together to improve the program over time.

We will ask you to share how you used your funds and key lessons learned (successes as well as challenges) as part of your final report. We may share portions of these reports publicly on the Strengthen ND's website with your permission.

We will periodically invite you to participate in Strengthen ND-sponsored events for Bush Prize honorees to connect, share stories of their work, and learn together.

Sharing Your Story

We want to publicly recognize you as a Bush Prize honoree. We will work with you to identify your media needs and how to best share your story.

We may request that you share periodic, informal updates for the Strengthen ND's media promotional opportunities.

We will invite you to partner with us in various ways to help others learn from your successful innovation experience(s).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Applying for the Bush Prize

How do I submit my application?

We use an online application system. To start an application, please visit the Bush Prize page on our website. Once you've started your application, it cannot be saved for you to revisit. Please consider using a Word document to craft your responses and to then copy/paste your responses into the online system.

If applying online presents a barrier for you, let us know, and we will send an application by email.



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Understanding the Bush Prize Program

What if the proposed work is a collaborative effort? How do we determine which organizations will be publicly acknowledged and which organizations will receive the grant?

We will only provide an award to one entity but will happily credit multiple organizations publicly, if that is your preference. The primary applicant organization will be the award recipient.

How much of a “track record” of creative community problem-solving do we need?

We are looking for organizations that can demonstrate their leadership in and support of creative community-based problem solving for between three and five years.

How much funding comes with a Bush Prize?

Each Bush Prize honoree is provided an award of \$250,000.

We heard that with the new administration of the program, there may be multiple Bush Prize honorees. Is this true?

Yes. Annually, Strengthen ND will select two *Bush Prize: North Dakota* honorees.

What can Bush Prize honorees do with the grant money?

The Bush Prize awards are flexible and can be used to advance the charitable purpose of the organization, not repay debt. Funds can be used for a wide variety of purposes, including but not limited to project work, general operating expenses and building financial reserves. Funds must be used to support work only in North Dakota. Bush Prize honorees will report publicly on the use of their funds.

If my organization is not awarded a Bush Prize, can I get feedback about our application?

We believe that learning is an important part of this process and will certainly provide written feedback upon request.

Not finding an answer to your question? We're happy to help. Please contact us at 701-303-0840 or megan@strengthennd.com with questions about the Bush Prize.



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