

VALUES & PILLAR PRIORITIES

VALUES

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Civic Engagement
Environmental Sustainability
Organizational Sustainability

PILLARS

Arts & Culture
Environment
Education
Community Health & Wellbeing

VALUES & PILLAR PRIORITIES

The Wege Foundation's Grants Policy established four “pillars”:

1. Arts & Culture
2. Environment
3. Education
4. Community Health & Wellbeing

In addition, The Wege Foundation has long embraced certain cross-cutting values applicable to all four pillars, such as requiring LEED certification for capital grants and a commitment to helping the under-resourced and marginalized. The Foundation has clarified these values and priorities for each of the pillars to focus its grantmaking, provide better guidance to potential applicants and enhance evaluation.

As with the grantmaking allocations among the pillars, these values and priorities are intended as “targets” to guide the Grants Committee and staff in recruiting and reviewing grant applications. The Foundation will continue to be flexible and strategically opportunistic in funding initiatives that forward Mr. Wege's goal that Grand Rapids become “the best medium-sized city in the United States” and that export effective programs from Grand Rapids to other communities.

VALUES

applicable to all pillar priorities

- DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION: Implement the Foundation's "Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Policy" with respect to all pillars and all grantees.
- CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: Foster civic engagement¹ through grantees that intentionally and systematically develop in the individuals they serve the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make a difference in civic life and policy choices.
 - ¹A civically engaged individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association board, writing a letter to an elected official or voting. An engaged citizen should have the ability, agency, and opportunity to move comfortably among these various types of civic acts.
- ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: Encourage, support, and educate grantees to demonstrate environmental responsibility by rigorously tracking, taking into account and seeking to eliminate or minimize the adverse environmental impacts of grantees' programs, activities, facilities and operations and by inculcating values of, and educating about environmental stewardship, the people they serve, including their board, staff, volunteers, vendors, collaborators, partners, constituents and beneficiaries of their programs.
- ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY: Encourage grantees to achieve organizational sustainability through a clear mission; thoughtful long-term planning and near-term implementation; outstanding board and staff leadership; effective use of volunteers; diverse, robust and stable revenue streams; creative fundraising programs, expanding their donor base; rigorous budgeting and financial controls; effective collaboration and partnerships; and satisfied beneficiaries of programs and services.

PRIORITIES

ARTS & CULTURE

1. Foster authentic artistic and cultural expression by diverse neighborhoods and communities, especially those that are historically under resourced and marginalized.

Example Grants:

Adaptive arts program for individuals with disabilities; Digital arts programming to uplift the voices of youth impacted by inequities in the justice system; Incorporation of Native American worldviews and indigenous knowledge in staffing, internships and expanded programming; Free youth music training program and after-school music club that teach students how to perform; Arts and tech program for teens in under resourced communities to explore different career paths

2. Ensure affordable and welcoming access by lower-income and diverse individuals to a wide variety of artistic and cultural exhibits and performances through relevant programming and aggressive outreach.

Example Grants:

Implement accessibility upgrades for individuals with disabilities to experience art and film programming; Provide financial support to ensure individuals can attend local arts exhibits and performances; Support large-scale public art exhibitions with environmental education and civic engagement focus; Mobile studio that provides access to art, cultural, and educational experiences for individuals with disabilities

PRIORITIES

ENVIRONMENT

1. Ensure access to experiential environmental education for public school students that is regular, systematic, integrated with curricula, and connected with “real world” community initiatives such as Grand River restoration, renewable energy & efficiency, water conservation and protection, addressing climate change, wildlife habitat conservation and sustainable food systems.

Example Grants:

Hands on youth STEM program exploring careers in sustainability; Engage youth in projects reducing urban and agricultural run-off pollution in local watersheds; Engage children of color in environmental action to focus on increasing access to nature; Environmental education summer camps for youth from underserved communities

2. Ensure access to and the protection, restoration, and development of Michigan watersheds and natural environments.

Example Grants:

Statewide collaboration network to address PFAS contamination in West MI; Innovative stormwater credit trading program to reduce water pollution; Mobilizing public support for Grand River restoration project and clean water policies; landscape-scale conservation planning for Grand River mouth and coastal corridor; Engage community members through hands-on programming to address invasive species; Support community-led initiatives to restore green areas in urban neighborhoods

3. Ensure Grand Rapids continues to be a state, national, and/or international leader in its commitment to sustainable development, i.e. “Economicology” or circular economy.

Example Grants:

Environmental certification programs for affordable housing projects; Reduce energy burden for residents in diverse and underserved neighborhoods; Raise awareness of the environmental impacts of future industry developments; Reduce waste through recycling, refurbishment, and redistribution of vital equipment to under resourced communities in Grand Rapids

4. Ensure that Michigan is a national and international leader in policies to protect the environment, including the Great Lakes, in ways that recognize the connection between environmental protection, human health, and promoting economic and social justice.

Example Grants:

Development of equitable policies to reduce carbon emissions from building sector in W MI; Engagement with people of color to enhance climate justice leadership and increase social connectivity; Removal of barriers to on-site renewable energy generation in Michigan and development of improved programs for purchase of renewable energy; Law and policy center focused on protecting Great Lakes water as a shared public trust resource

PRIORITIES

EDUCATION

1. Ensure access to extracurricular services and programming (pre-K through post-secondary) that prepare under-resourced students to learn and enhance academic and life skills achievements to promote the next level of development.

Example Grants:

Implement culturally relevant financial literacy program with an individualized and diversified teaching approach; Tutoring and academic support for underserved youth and under resourced schools; Interactive after-school autism program to increase social skills; Program focused on STEM and literacy with social and academic support to prepare refugee youth for academic success; English and digital literacy classes for under resourced communities of color; Program that focuses on full spectrum of careers in media including technology, broadcasting and production for underserved youth of color; Arts and sciences program for special needs students and adults

2. Support effective strategies for involvement by adult caregivers and mentors in children's education, especially in public schools with diverse student populations.

Example Grants:

Personal and professional mentorship program serving young women; Mentorship program for marginalized youth during difficult life transitions; Assist newly immigrated African youth through tutoring; Support parents and caregivers to provide screenings and coaching focused on early childhood development; Peer mentoring to increase college graduation rates among youth in foster care; Mentoring for underserved youth to improve literacy and social emotional learning; Support lived experience leaders to provide programming including driver's training, workforce readiness, and leadership development

PRIORITIES

COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELLBEING

1. Address disproportionate racialized outcomes in health, housing, and economic equity to improve the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age in the greater Grand Rapids metropolitan area. The Wege Foundation encourages community collaborative approaches that foster long-term solutions.

Example Grants:

Legal services, advocacy, education, and outreach for refugees; Preventative health programs that address chronic diseases and food injustice; Creating a self-sustaining life and fostering a sense of belonging for new Americans by bringing people together to build connections; Temporary housing and financial literacy program for underemployed and/or unhoused individuals; Free therapeutic services for women, children, immigrants, domestic abuse survivors and LGBTQIA+ community; Affordable rental program for women aging out of foster care

2. Ensure a pipeline of diverse and culturally competent talent to create racial justice and equity within greater Grand Rapids metropolitan area.

Example Grants:

Empowering Latinx entrepreneurs through education with a focus on equitable growth and development of Latinx talent; Technical support for historically excluded entrepreneurs; Repurposing and upcycling manufacturing materials to create diverse workforce and equitable circular economy for textiles; Construction industry training program to create broader access for historically under represented individuals and businesses

COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELLBEING

3. Strengthen and sustain equitable access to a network of quality healthcare, mental wellbeing, housing stability, and/or food security services that positively impact the greater Grand Rapids area.

Example Grants:

Nutritious, culturally-relevant meal delivery program for under resourced, diverse individuals experiencing serious illness; Post-partum program that reduces isolation and promotes mental wellness for Black and Latinx mothers in the months following childbirth; Provide navigation services to LGBTQIA+ individuals in Grand Rapids; Provide medical, mental, and dental services to under resourced communities and improve access to specialists and other essential resources; Provide a streamlined, one-stop shop for unhoused youth connecting them to housing resources, vital documents, and various support services; Provide temporary housing, navigation support, foreclosure prevention, and address root causes of homelessness in greater Grand Rapids area