

Valparaiso Neighborhood Improvement Grant 2021 Program Guidelines



The [Neighborhood Improvement Grant](#) program is intended to give residents an opportunity to have direct input and influence into the improvement of Valparaiso's neighborhoods. The funds provide for small neighborhood-based projects with community-wide benefit. The goal is to bring neighborhoods together and to increase partnerships between neighborhoods and the city through positive improvement projects.

Improvement projects may include:

- Sidewalks
- Tree Plantings
- Signage
- Landscaping
- Public Art
- Playground or Park Equipment
- Special Features (benches, shelters, little library)
- *Other Innovative Ideas!*

In 2021, grants of up to \$15,000 are available to neighborhood groups. Eligible projects must improve or enhance public spaces in neighborhoods and offer a benefit to the community. Projects must not conflict with existing city plans or policy and must be discussed with city staff prior to approval. If you wish to improve private property, HOA-owned common areas or complete a maintenance-related project, a 51% may be required. If two or more neighborhoods work together on an application and project planning efforts, they can apply for up to \$30,000. [View a catalog](#) of all grant projects awarded to date.

Neighborhood-based groups are encouraged to apply. Eligible neighborhood groups must [sign-up](#) to be included in the City's Neighborhood Directory prior to applying. To learn more about organizing your neighborhood, [view our Neighborhood Toolkit](#).

Applications will be reviewed by a committee of city staff. The following criteria highlight what the review committee will be prioritizing when evaluating applications. Additionally, neighborhoods who have not received a grant in the past may be given priority over those that have received multiple neighborhood grants. View our [Review Checklist](#) before submitting your application.

- **Neighborhood Involvement:** How did the applicant involve neighborhood residents in the planning and implementation of the project? What efforts did the neighborhood group take to engage neighbors and get input on the project? (neighborhood meetings regarding the project, seeking feedback through surveys, promoting the project in newsletters, flyers, etc.)
- **Feasibility and Longevity:** How does the project align with current city projects and standards? Is this a seasonal improvement or one that will last several years with little maintenance?
- **Neighborhood Investment:** Is the neighborhood group leveraging additional funds or volunteer labor and/or time towards the project?
- **Community Benefit:** Do residents beyond the neighborhood boundaries benefit from this project? Does the project improve health, safety or the sense of community for residents?
- **Partnerships and Collaborations:** Is the neighborhood group working with local businesses or organizations to complete the project?

The application form asks 10 questions to gain a better understanding of your project in terms of the evaluating criteria. **It is required to schedule a planning meeting with the Community Engagement Department prior to applying.** The Community Engagement Department will help connect you with necessary city departments, provide information for your budget and provide guidance on your application materials.

For questions or comments about the Neighborhood Improvement Grant program and guidelines contact Maggie Clifton, Community Engagement Director, at mclifton@valpo.us or 219-462-1161.

Neighborhood Improvement Grant Timeline 2021

Notice to Public	March 15, 2021
Neighborhood Improvement Grant Information Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 31 Zoom Information Session • Webinar Recording Available by March 31
Planning Meeting with Community Engagement Department *Required!	March through July scheduled individually
2021 Applications Due	July 31, 2021
Funding Recommendations Presented to the Redevelopment Commission	August 12, 2021
Notice of Grant Awards	No later than August 16, 2021

Beginning in 2022, to better align with the budget and to complete projects within the same year as awarded, the Neighborhood Grant Program will transition to a February 27 application deadline.

Block Party Grant – Special 2021 Add-on Opportunity!

To encourage neighborhood engagement, the City of Valparaiso is offering Block Party Grants of up to \$500 to go towards food, entertainment or other creative ideas that bring neighbors together. Block parties can offer a time to reconnect with neighbors after distancing over the past year and can be a great opportunity to gather ideas for Neighborhood Grant Applications. Neighborhoods are encouraged to host safe and appropriately sized, outdoor gatherings to bring people together. Block Party Grants are available for events hosted between May 15 – September 5 (limit one grant per neighborhood).

Eligible block parties must be organized by neighborhood groups and must be open to all neighbors (while maintaining Porter County Health Department’s gathering guidelines). An application telling us more about your event must be submitted to the Community Engagement Department. These grants can be used to reimburse neighborhoods or to pay invoices from vendors directly, determined on a case-by-case basis.

Eligible expenses include:

- Food catering or food truck rental
- Live music or entertainment
- Materials like plates, napkins, etc.
- Other party rental supplies

Ineligible expenses include:

- Alcohol
- Fireworks

By participating in the Block Party Grant program, neighborhoods will have access to additional printed materials to help promote the party. A giant chalkboard to gather neighborhood improvement ideas will also be available. Neighborhoods are encouraged to use our [Neighborhood Toolkit](#) for tips to plan a successful block party.

Learn more about applying for a Block Party Grant. (link to info and [application](#) on website)

Neighborhood Improvement Grant Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. Where should I begin if I want to organize and mobilize my neighborhood to submit a grant application this year?** Start out by reviewing our [Neighborhood Toolkit](#) that offers tips for neighborhood groups looking to form. The Community Engagement Department can also be a great resource to you! We can support you by printing materials to promote a neighborhood meeting, facilitating a conversation with your neighbors to determine the best improvement project and more!
- 2. Can one neighborhood apply for multiple projects?** Neighborhoods that apply can only request up to \$15,000 total. Neighborhood groups are highly encouraged to reach consensus on a single project. If you apply for multiple projects, note that the review committee may choose to fund one project while denying funding to another, so prioritizing them in your application is very important.
- 3. If two or more neighborhoods apply for a project together, does the cap remain \$15,000?** Grants could be awarded up to \$30,000 if multiple neighborhoods are working together on the application and its planning efforts.
- 4. If the neighborhood contributes funds toward the project, will those dollars be considered part of the \$15,000 cap or would it be able to expand the project beyond \$15,000?** Donated dollars would allow the total project cost to go beyond \$15,000. Proof of your donations or pledges should be submitted with your application.
- 5. If we received funding previously through this program, can we apply again?** Yes, all neighborhoods are eligible to apply again in 2021. However, priority may be given for neighborhoods that have not yet received a grant. Neighborhoods that received funding in the past are encouraged to propose a project that is different than the project previously funded. For example, if you did a park project in 2020, we would encourage you to apply for something other than a park improvement.
- 6. Will the funds go towards completing full projects only or could partial funding be awarded?** The review committee will determine this based on the demand and size of projects that are submitted. If there is a need to do partial funding, the review committee will contact the applicant(s) before the final recommendation is submitted to the Redevelopment Commission for approval. We want as many high-quality applications to succeed as the budget allows.
- 7. Can projects be done on HOA owned, private or vacant spaces within the city?** A goal of the program is to fund neighborhood-based projects that provide community-wide benefit. While we prefer to see projects completed in public, city-owned spaces, we are open to exploring projects on HOA-owned or private property on a case-by-case basis. Any project completed on HOA-owned or private property may require the neighborhood to pay 51% of the total project costs. The match may be waived if the project is adjacent to a public amenity or feature or is accessible to the public. Additionally, a detailed maintenance plan will need to be submitted with your application to ensure that the neighborhood can manage any upkeep successfully.
- 8. Where can we find plans and/or codes to make sure we are staying compliant with the city?** Helpful resources may include [Unified Development Ordinance](#), [Building Codes](#), [City Ordinances](#), [Valpo Parks Plans](#) or simply give us a call to discuss at 462-1161!