Neighborhood Improvement Grant
2019 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.

Grants of up to $15,000 are available to neighborhood groups in 2019 with a total cap of $100,000. The grant funds are provided by the Redevelopment Commission (Commission) and the program is administered by the Community Engagement Department.

Improvement projects may include: 1) physical improvements like fixing sidewalks, planting trees or enhancing park equipment; 2) creative art displays that add unique character by representing the neighborhood; 3) neighborhood signage/branding and 4) other placemaking and community-building projects. Eligible projects must improve or enhance public spaces (city owned property or right of ways) in neighborhoods. Projects must not conflict with existing city policy. This program is not meant to provide funding for social events or routine maintenance projects typically covered by homeowners' associations. Note that city departments have a limited capacity to take on more than a couple of grant projects each funding cycle, so competition for certain projects may be higher. View a summary of projects funded by this program in 2018.

Neighborhood-based groups are encouraged to apply while an individual or individual institution is ineligible. 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 leadership team members. Applications will be evaluated first for feasibility and then for merit. The following criteria highlight what the review committee will be prioritizing when evaluating applications. In addition, you may view our Review Checklist.

- 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 city departments, local businesses or organizations to complete the project?

The application form will ask 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 2019

Notice to Public	April 18, 2019
Neighborhood Improvement Grant Information Sessions	• April 29 at 7:00pm at Valparaiso Public Library • May 1 at 12:00pm at Valparaiso Public Library • May 14 at 5:00pm at Valparaiso Public Library
Planning Meeting with Community Engagement Department *Required!	May – September scheduled individually
2019 Applications Due	September 20, 2019
Funding Recommendations Presented to the Redevelopment Commission	October 10, 2019
Notice of Grant Awards	No later than October 14, 2019

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! Contact us to discuss what would work best for your neighborhood.

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 is important. Make sure we know how consensus was reached with your neighbors in your application as that will help towards the neighborhood involvement evaluating criteria.

3. **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 and that is reflected in the evaluating criteria. To provide community benefit the project should be open to all residents in a public space (city-owned property or right of ways). The city would be open to discussing the option of having HOA or privately-owned property donated or developing a detailed maintenance plan for projects on privately-owned property, but this would need to be determined on a case by case basis.

4. **Where can we find plans and/or codes to make sure we are staying compliant with the city?** Helpful resources may include:
   a. Unified Development Ordinance, resources such as the zoning map, development ordinance
   b. Building Codes
   c. City Ordinances, state and local legislation through 2017
   d. *Or simply give us a call to discuss at 462-1161!*

5. **If two or more neighborhoods apply for a project together, does the cap remain $15,000?** The cap would remain $15,000 per application. The review committee would prefer to distribute funds throughout different areas of the city rather than cluster funds in one area. While we are eager for our neighborhoods to form partnerships, we want to see where the demand is for funding throughout the city at this time.

6. **If we received funding in 2018 through this program, can we apply again?** Yes, all neighborhoods are eligible to apply again in 2019. 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 sidewalk project in 2018, we would encourage you to apply for something other than a sidewalk improvement.

7. **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.

8. **Who presents the project/application to the Redevelopment Commission for final consideration?** The Community Engagement Department will present the review committee's recommendations to the Redevelopment Commission for final approval on October 10. By meeting with the Community Engagement Department while working on your project, it allows them to be more knowledgeable about the work that you have put in and provide tips to enhance your application.

9. **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.

10. **Will applications be available to the public after funding decisions are made?** Yes, applications will be edited for addresses/contact information and then posted on our website. You may view last year's applications online now.

11. **How has the program changed since its pilot year?** After surveying neighborhood groups that applied in 2018, the program has been modified to have a longer application period, a mandatory meeting with the Community Engagement Department and increased outreach/promotion of the program. The guidelines, application and review checklist have also been enhanced since the pilot year.