

The Leighton Award for Nonprofit Excellence is intended to celebrate, reward, and encourage outstanding achievement in the charitable sector. Every other year (odd calendar years), this \$200,000 \$2:\$1 endowment challenge grant will be awarded competitively to a St. Joseph County nonprofit demonstrating superior leadership, management, and programming.

ELIGIBILITY

Candidates for the Leighton Award for Nonprofit Excellence must be nonprofit organizations organized and operated for charitable purposes for the benefit of St. Joseph County residents with annual operating budgets under \$30 million. (See FAQ for exceptions to this rule). Recipients of the Leighton Award for Nonprofit Excellence may reapply after five years.

AWARD

The Leighton Award for Nonprofit Excellence will be awarded in odd calendar years (e.g., 2023, 2025, 2027...).

The award is a \$200,000 \$2:\$1 endowment challenge grant. Recipients must raise \$100,000 in matching funds. The resulting \$300,000 will be used to create or add to a fund in the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County for the award recipient's benefit.

In award years, the winner will be publicly announced each September by the Community Foundation. Recipients will have two years to secure \$100,000 in matching gifts and pledges. Pledges will be matched only as received and must be paid in full by December 31 of the third year following receipt of the award. For example, the recipient announced in 2025 will be notified by September 30, 2025 and have until December 31, 2027 to raise \$100,000 in gifts and pledges. These pledges must be paid in full by December 31, 2028. If the award recipient fails to raise the full amount within the timeframe, the award will be reduced by the amount of the shortfall. Matching gifts and pledges can be made directly to the Community Foundation for the benefit of the Leighton Award recipient or made directly to the recipient and transferred to the Community Foundation.

SELECTION PROCESS AND CRITERIA

Intent to Apply Deadline: No later than July 1 award years (odd calendar years).

Candidates interested in applying should submit their Letter of Intent through the online grant system (<https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=cfsjc>). If invited, organizations will then be asked to submit a full application.

Full Application Deadline: August 1 of each award year.

Applications will be reviewed by the Leighton Award for Nonprofit Excellence Committee and staff of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County. The committee may choose to conduct site visits and meet with the organization's staff and board leadership. At its discretion, the committee may select 1-2 other organizations to receive special recognition highlighting particular achievements or qualities. Recipients of Special Recognition Awards shall also receive a grant of \$10,000 to be used in furtherance of the specified achievement.

APPLICATION

The full application and all required attachments should be submitted to the Community Foundation's online grant system (<https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=cfsjc>) by August 1st.

Below you'll find the general layout of the online application.

PART I. LEADERSHIP

1. **MISSION:** Describe your organization's mission or purpose.
2. **VISION:** What does your organization intend to accomplish in the next three years and beyond?
3. **IMPACT:** Describe what makes your contribution unique and the impact of your organization on 1) your constituency and 2) our community. In what ways does your organization set the standard for achievement in your field?
4. **PARTNERSHIPS:** List partnership/collaborations in which your organization is engaged. Choose two as examples and describe them in some detail.
5. **PROMISING EFFORT:** What is the most promising effort in which your organization is now engaged?

PART II. QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT

1. **BUDGET:** Revenue – Comment on your strategy to sustain your organization; Expenses—Explain how your use of resources reflects your plans, goals, and values.
2. **LEVERAGE:** In what ways does the organization leverage other community resources?
3. **VOLUNTEERS:** Describe the organization's goals for and use of volunteers.
4. **TECHNOLOGY:** Describe the existing use of and plans for technology within your organization.

PART III. QUALITY OF PROGRAMS

1. **PROGRAMS:** List programs offered by your organization. Describe your best program(s) in some detail, including as much concrete information about its scale, scope, and effectiveness as possible (one is sufficient; choose no more than three).
2. **EVALUATION:** How do you evaluate your programs, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and what does the data show?

PART IV. ATTACHMENTS:

1. Résumé of organization CEO.
2. A current board roster including addresses, officer and leadership roles, and specific committees that members serve on, if applicable.
3. A list of active committees, with 1-2 sentences describing their purposes.
4. An organization chart listing key staff positions.
5. Agency budget with a column for budgeted amounts and column for actuals of *most recently completed fiscal year*. Please explain any significant variances as well as any category that may not be easily understood.
6. A financial audit conducted by an independent accounting firm completed within six months following the end of the organization's most recently completed fiscal year. If calendar year, we must have the audit from December 31 of the previous year. (Additional information may be requested.)
7. Brief summary of strategic plan or comparable document (if available – not required).

Please do not include additional materials that have not been requested. They will **NOT be forwarded to the selection committee.*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHY SHOULD MY ORGANIZATION APPLY?

Pursuing an award for excellence should result in a better, more effective organization. It reflects well on you to even make the statement that your organization deserves to win an award for excellence. The Leighton Award for Nonprofit Excellence represents an opportunity to tell the Community Foundation why you think your organization is excellent in a broader context than a typical funding request provides. It is also an opportunity to educate Community Foundation staff and volunteers about your organization's mission, strengths, and capacity which may prove beneficial when making other requests for funding.

Articulating the merits of your organization should be useful. Hopefully existing copy may be used to some extent while other copy developed specifically for the award application may be used later for other purposes (promotional literature, annual reports, grant applications, donor appeals, etc.). Finally, attempting to win this award may provide a helpful motivational tool for board, staff, and volunteers.

CAN MY ORGANIZATION REAPPLY THE NEXT AWARD YEAR IF NOT SELECTED THIS YEAR?

Yes. This is encouraged. Make sure you save your files so that your application can be revised and refreshed each year for resubmission the following year if you do not win. Make sure to download and read the latest version of the guidelines before preparing your application as the guidelines are updated annually.

CAN EVEN SMALL ORGANIZATIONS WIN?

Yes. The committee will strive to take many factors into account. While smaller organizations may have more limited capacity in certain respects, they may still be remarkable for the quality of their impact, use of volunteers, ability to stretch a dollar, commitment to service, etc. Also, the potential impact of a \$300,000 endowment on a smaller organization may weigh in that organization's favor.

CAN VERY LARGE ORGANIZATIONS WIN?

Beginning in 2014, the eligibility criteria were changed to exclude organizations with total annual budgets exceeding \$30 million. The Community Foundation understands, however, that there are cases when large organizations provide needed services that are not funded through their typical revenue sources (fees, public funding, etc.). Large organizations may be granted an exception to apply on behalf of programs that meet a standard of excellence and are fully or significantly supported by the local community.

CAN MY ORGANIZATION APPLY WITH PART OF OUR SERVICE AREA OUTSIDE OF ST. JOSEPH COUNTY?

Yes. If your organization serves multiple counties, you are eligible to apply, but please focus responses on St. Joseph County.

WHAT IF MY ORGANIZATION HAS AREAS THAT NEED IMPROVING?

The Community Foundation recognizes that few if any organizations will be excellent in every respect. Every organization has to dedicate its limited resources as effectively as possible, which may mean certain areas are neglected to some degree in the interest of excelling in more critical areas. Focus on your strengths. Your ability to demonstrate strong self-critical analysis and plans for continuous improvement will help.

HOW WILL THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION ASSIST WITH RAISING THE MATCHING FUNDS?

The Community Foundation will work with the media and other resources to provide maximum exposure to the winning organization. We intend to make sure winning the Leighton Award for Nonprofit Excellence aids in attracting resources to some of our community's best organizations. The matching gift opportunity will be publicized in a number of ways, including the Community Foundation's newsletters, website, and other communications. If desired, Community Foundation staff will consult with the winning organization on effective strategies to obtain the required matching funds.