

**Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust**  
2026 Guidelines and Application Instructions  
Revised: May 2026

**The Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust** was established in 1988 by Joan Morton Kelly and her mother, Mildred Duncan Morton, to facilitate their philanthropic activities. This information, and more details about the Trust's grantmaking are available at [www.morton-kelly.org](http://www.morton-kelly.org).

## **2026 Guidelines**

The application guidelines for the 2026 grant cycle have been modified only slightly from last year. We acknowledge that these are uncertain times and as a Maine-based philanthropy we want to be flexible and remain committed to our core program areas in arts and culture, historic preservation and environmental protection while also responding to urgent needs. These are outlined below and in more detail on our website Program pages.

**Please note that we require that new applicants or organizations that have not received a grant in the last 3 years call or email us before submitting an application to be sure your request will align with our priorities. Additionally, grantees who have received 2 years of consecutive grants must take a year off before applying again.** Please contact us if you have any questions.

## **Foundation Program Areas**

**Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust's overarching interest is to connect people and place through the arts, culture and the natural environment in Maine.** Program Areas are 1) Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation and 2) Environmental Initiatives. Our priorities in arts and culture include improving access to cultural experiences and fostering creative expression, elevating the diverse and rich cultural heritage of Maine and supporting cultural facility improvements and historic preservation projects. Environmental initiatives include land conservation and stewardship, watershed protection and restoration, and environmental outdoor learning.

Our Program Areas reflect how communities can cultivate creative expression and a sense of responsibility towards the lands and waters around us. Proposals may be for operating support or specific projects of local, regional or statewide benefit. The Trust may also support special grantmaking initiatives that address sector-wide needs in our program areas.

**Across all programs, community connection is paramount. We will give preference to organizations and programs that demonstrate:**

- **Equitable access for Maine residents, including in rural areas**
- **Community representation in program design and delivery**
- **Expanded collaboration and vibrancy through program activities**
- **Responsiveness to new voices and the less visible histories of Maine**
- **Deepening connections between people and place**

## How to Apply

### Eligibility:

Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust supports nonprofit organizations and projects throughout Maine that align with one or more of our Program Areas.

- If your organization has received a grant in each of the last two years, you must take a **one-year hiatus** before applying again.
- If you are a new applicant or have not received a grant in the last 3 years, please contact the Trust before submitting an application. Contact information is given below.

### Types of Grants:

Applicants may request project or operating support. The same application is used for both types of grants. Project requests may be for specific community programs or for capital projects including historic preservation or cultural facility improvement. Project requests should articulate clear goals, partnerships, timelines, and outcomes for the project. Operating support requests should provide the organization's current strategic direction or priorities. In all cases, requests should align with at least one of our stated goals and priorities.

### Grant Size:

Up to \$20,000 in grant funding may be requested for one year.  
Grant size ranges from \$5,000-\$20,000 and averages around \$10,000.

### Application deadline

The Trust considers grant requests once per year. The [online grant application portal](#) accepts applications only from May 1 to October 1. All requests will be acknowledged upon receipt. The application period closes at midnight October 1. We are not able to grant extensions.

### Review process

Please note that the Trust's grants are competitive. The Trust generally receives many more proposals than we are able to fund. Typically, staff review of requests is in October with Board reviews in November. Award decisions are made in late November and grants awarded before the end of December of each year. We expect 2026 to be another highly competitive grant cycle.

Past grants - See past grants [here](#).

### Grant Reports

Grant reports are no longer required. The application has space for reporting on last year's grant if you received one. We enjoy hearing about your progress and seeing photos!

### Contact

Feel free to contact Lissa Widoff, Program Advisor at [programs@morton-kelly.org](mailto:programs@morton-kelly.org) if you have any questions or to discuss your request.

## Other considerations

- For **capital funding requests**, applicants should include a budget and timeline for the project and evidence of the fiscal and fundraising capacity necessary to complete the proposed work beyond the amount of the Morton-Kelly grant request.
- For **Historic Preservation projects**, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide a letter indicating that the Maine Historic Preservation Commission or appropriate Tribal Historic Preservation Office is aware of the project, and that restoration work is being conducted to appropriate preservation standards.
- **We typically do not fund:**
  - endowments or annual campaigns
  - internships and scholarships
  - national or regional organizations based outside of Maine, except in cases where a project is being conducted entirely within the state
  - organizations that are primarily social service providers - *unless the request emphasizes arts, culture or environment with dedicated staffing or partnership*
  - trade schools, school districts – *we prefer to fund through nonprofits that develop partnerships with schools*
  - summer-only festivals and artist residencies – *unless tied to year-round community programming.*

### Application Submission/Grant Application Portal

The Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust accepts grant applications only from June 1 to October 1 each year using an [online grant application portal](#).

The application and registration are available at the grant portal. If it is your first time applying through our on-line system, you will need to create an account for your organization before completing an application. If you have applied previously, you can access the grant application portal using the same username and password. If you are not sure or need to update primary contact information, please reach out to [programs@morton-kelly.org](mailto:programs@morton-kelly.org) so that we may assist.

An application form will only be visible on the site during the application period. Attachment size limits are small and we recommend using pdfs whenever possible, If your attachment is too large, you can email it to us for upload.

## Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation

The Trust is interested in community arts and cultural programs, cultural facility improvements, historic preservation projects and celebration of the diverse cultural heritage of Maine. Please note: The Trust does **not** fund summer festivals or artist residencies unless it includes year-round Maine-based programming and community engagement.

The Trust's Arts and Culture Program Area welcomes operating support or project proposals that meet any of the following goals and priorities:

## **1. Improve access to the arts, creative expression and community cultural programs**

### Priorities include:

- Community-based arts and culture programs that foster vibrant communities and creative expression – *E.g. art centers offering art classes, cultural events hosted at a local library, a theater with year-round community classes, performances and opportunities for connection, and historical societies and museums open to the public.*
- Collaborative efforts that improve access to year-round arts education and programming serving all ages and abilities. *Preference is given to efforts that leverage and support local relationships and collaborations rather than one-time experiences. School partnerships are welcome if a non-profit partner is the grantee*
- Preservation and presentation of historical resources through educational exhibits and programs that build community connections and support diverse perspectives.

## **2. Facility improvements for community cultural centers**

### Priorities include:

- Capital improvements for structural integrity, health and safety, public accessibility, technology or energy efficiency
- Small venues in rural or underserved areas where few other resources are available, and which contribute to community revitalization and cultural life

## **3. Celebrate the diverse cultural heritage and multiple histories of Maine.**

### Priorities include:

- Expanding cross-cultural understanding of the unique and layered histories of Maine and contemporary expressions of culture and heritage. *Preference is given to efforts that elevate cultural histories of place, expand awareness, and share learning.*
- Efforts to build community connection, celebrate the diverse cultural heritage of Maine communities and elevate the unique experiences of under-represented groups.

## **4. Support historic preservation projects that contribute to community vitality.**

### Priorities include:

- Restoration and rehabilitation of significant historic structures such as those listed on the National Register of Historic Places or have documented importance through Tribal Historic Preservation Departments or are a known community landmark. *Support may include structural improvements and building systems (such as electrical service) rather than maintenance, painting or short-term repairs.*
- Priority is given to projects that provide a community cultural space and those with the most urgent needs and matching funds.

## Environmental Initiatives

The Trust is interested in environmental initiatives that protect ecological values, water quality and ecosystem health through land conservation, stewardship, restoration and education programs. The Trust prioritizes community-based approaches that promote positive human relationships with nature including scientific, ecological and cultural perspectives and efforts to address climate change.

The Trust's Environmental Initiatives Program Area welcomes proposals for operating support or projects that meet any of the following goals and priorities:

### 1. **Provide equitable access to nature-based education.**

Priorities include:

- Nature-based learning experiences for youth and community members that inspire care and responsibility for the environment. *This may include place-based programming and partnerships with schools. Year-round or sustained programming is preferred.*
- Systems-level efforts to expand youth awareness and civic engagement on environmental concerns. *For example, programs that build youth climate literacy and action.*
- Improving access to safe, inclusive spaces that foster appreciation for nature, science and the cultural dimensions of land and place. *This may include opportunities for underserved communities, including Wabanaki youth-led efforts.*

### 2. **Advance new approaches for land conservation**

Priorities include:

- Conserving land to advance biodiversity protection, climate resilience and/or public access. *Organizations requesting funding for land acquisition should include a complete funding plan for the project.*
- Centering partnerships, tools and relationships for conservation that result in increased equity and inclusion. *Eligible projects include trail access, and expanded efforts to conserve culturally significant lands for Wabanaki lifeways and culture.*
- Programs and partnerships that engage community members in environmental stewardship, restoration and education.

### 3. **Promote restoration and improvement of water quality in coastal and inland watersheds.**

Priorities include:

- Using science, policy and community engagement to address climate change impacts in watersheds.
- Promoting water quality, habitat improvement and restoration efforts in coastal and inland watersheds, particularly through community scale actions.