



2025 Request for Proposals

Overview

The Daybreak Fund is soliciting proposals for nature-based projects in the Western Lake Michigan Basin at the intersection of climate change and water quality. The Fund will award at least \$1.5 million in grants in 2025 to support initiatives with multiple benefits to water quality, carbon storage, biodiversity, and people and communities throughout the basin.

Background

The Daybreak Fund is a donor collaborative supported by Brico Fund, Caerus Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Cool Choices, Crown Family Philanthropies, Fund for Lake Michigan, Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, Hunter Family Foundation, McDougal Family Foundation and Walder Foundation.

These foundations have come together with a shared vision that the abundant but threatened natural resources of the Midwest hold enormous potential to protect Lake Michigan and the communities within the basin from further impacts of climate change.

With that in mind, the Daybreak Fund seeks to demonstrate how nature-based solutions can play a pivotal role in addressing climate change while improving water quality and strengthening communities in the region. Nature-based solutions are those that enhance the ability of our ecosystems to sequester carbon and other pollutants in plants, trees, soils and sediments, and lead to improved health, cleaner water, flood and erosion control, increased biodiversity and resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Nature-based solutions lend themselves to active local engagement and unique partnerships which are key components of environmental and climate justice and long-lasting, sustainable change. These solutions also bring multiple benefits for both urban and rural areas and can help address some of our most pressing environmental challenges.

Guiding Principles

The Daybreak Fund partners believe that by weaving together Great Lakes, climate, biodiversity, and equity philanthropy we can implement solutions that provide maximum benefits to society and the environment. We also believe that by working together we can increase our collective impact and strengthen connections among and between funders and grantees.

The central goal of the Daybreak Fund is to improve the lives of people while safeguarding our environment. To achieve that goal, we will prioritize initiatives that demonstrate how innovative nature-based solutions to climate change and water quality issues can empower communities to build resiliency, transition to a sustainable economy, and promote system change.

The Daybreak Fund is committed to an equitable and transparent grant-making process and recognizes the importance of supporting community-based solutions that value and center local knowledge and local



leaders. We are also committed to investing at least 40 percent of our grant dollars in communities that are underserved and/or overburdened by pollution.



Funding Priorities and Objectives

The Daybreak Fund will focus its grant-making on real-world demonstration projects that show how nature-based solutions can address climate change while improving water quality and enhancing the quality of life for all residents in the region. Ideal projects will have near-term, tangible benefits and direct impacts on climate, water, and community.

The majority of our funding will support projects that test innovative solutions or emerging strategies, provide robust and measurable results and/or have a plan for replicability. Grant funds can be used to support project implementation, planning, design, community engagement, monitoring, staffing, and maintenance as well as applied research that supports or advances nature-based initiatives.

While we are particularly interested in driving innovation, we also understand that there are many proven methods of impacting change that need resources, and the Daybreak Fund will consider those applications as well.

Examples of Daybreak Fund-supported nature-based solutions include:

-  **Supporting frontline communities in their efforts to address and adapt to climate change.**
Climate change disproportionately impacts low-income and vulnerable communities. Frontline communities are those that experience the consequences of climate change and other environmental injustices “first and worst.” These communities may be located in urban or rural areas depending on the risks they face. We will support frontline groups’ efforts to build resiliency and address environmental injustices in their communities through implementation of nature-based demonstration projects. For example, the Daybreak Fund has supported tree planting, urban agriculture and green stormwater projects in urban areas to reduce heat islands, capture carbon and build climate resiliency in vulnerable neighborhoods.
-  **Innovative agricultural practices that mitigate and reduce or capture carbon, improve water quality and lead to systems-level shifts in behavior.**
Agriculture is key to our region’s identity and economy, but it also plays a critical role in delivering solutions to our environmental challenges. Regenerative farming practices can reduce runoff, store carbon, improve soil health and increase biodiversity all while increasing crop yields. These sustainable farming methods can lead to market transformation and provide an opportunity for our region to be at the forefront of this transition. The Daybreak Fund seeks projects that *push the boundaries* of how regenerative farming can be incorporated on agricultural lands.
-  **Forest and land stewardship practices that store carbon while protecting or enhancing biodiversity and water quality.**
Our area’s landscape is filled with forests, prairies, wetlands and publicly and privately owned lands that provide a range of ecosystem services when managed properly. These lands hold potential for carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, water quality improvement, and biodiversity protection. We seek projects that intentionally promote, integrate or pilot strategies to capture and/or reduce greenhouse gases and create co-benefits for water quality and biodiversity.



In recognition of the power of Indigenous ecological knowledge to restore ecosystems and heal our relationship with nature, we also seek to support projects that incorporate Indigenous practices for stewarding land, growing food, managing forests, and otherwise caring for the natural world in a way that addresses climate change. We recognize that Indigenous practices are based on centuries of knowledge and experience living in harmony with nature. Supporting and listening to Indigenous wisdom and insights can help us better understand and address the current climate crisis, and we seek to do so through this grant opportunity.

 **Combining renewable energy with water quality solutions.**

To achieve clean energy goals, renewable energy will be an increasing part of the landscape. Pairing renewable energy projects with nature-based initiatives like green stormwater infrastructure, pollinator habitat or other land, forestry and agricultural practices has great potential to create co-benefits for our ecosystems. Proving the co-benefits of renewable energy paired with additional sustainability measures will help reduce land use conflicts, improve water quality and increase other ecosystem benefits. Likewise, projects that combine renewable energy and green stormwater infrastructure will help communities adapt to the increasing risks posed by climate change.

This list is only intended to provide examples of areas that lend themselves to nature-based initiatives that benefit our water and climate. **This list should in no way limit innovative thinking about how to use nature-based approaches that could catalyze meaningful change** – we are very willing to consider projects outside these areas that show promise.

Geographic Focus

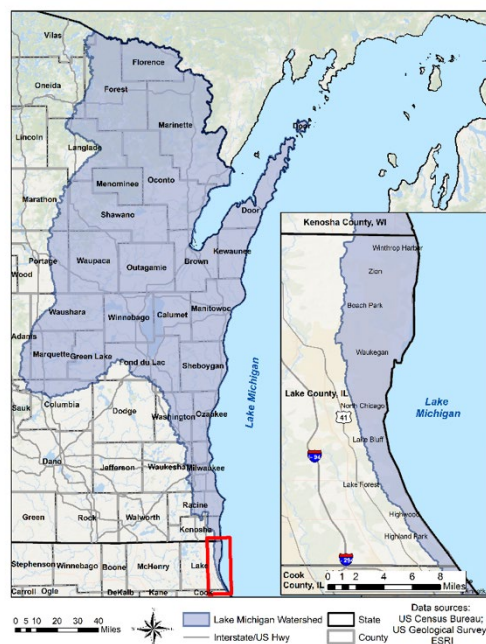
Daybreak grants will be targeted to watersheds within the Lake Michigan Basin in Wisconsin as well as projects within the basin in Lake County, Illinois. The Daybreak Fund will also consider grants in Wisconsin outside of the Lake Michigan Basin by invitation. **If you have a project idea outside the basin, please contact Amber Meyer Smith at amber@fundforlakemichigan.org to discuss.**

View a larger version of the map at the [Daybreak Fund website](#).

Eligibility

501(c)3 non-profit organizations, municipalities and local government agencies, tribes, and educational institutions are eligible for funding. Collaborations are strongly encouraged, and projects that include sub-grants to partners are eligible. We also encourage those without 501(c)3 status to seek fiscal sponsorship through an eligible organization.

Stand-alone advocacy, academic research, public education and general outreach efforts are not eligible for funding. Exceptions may be considered if these activities are a component of a larger demonstration project that advances near-term, measurable, on-the-ground nature-based solutions.





Additional examples of ineligible activities, projects and entities:

- Direct grants to for-profit entities or individuals
- Lobbying or political advocacy
- Land management practices without a clear and measurable impact on both carbon storage and water quality
- Invasive species management without an intentional and focused link to climate mitigation
- Renewable energy projects without a direct connection to water quality and/or habitat improvement
- Reports, convenings or educational efforts without a strong plan for implementation of on-the ground solutions
- Grey infrastructure solutions

Additional guidance for applicants:

- Successful projects will produce tangible and/or measurable results. All proposals should incorporate on-the ground elements or real-world demonstration projects that seek to enhance or prove your concept or strategy. Successful projects will also include a plan for replication of the results that encourage systems change.
- Successful **land restoration** or **land management** projects should focus on significantly reducing or capturing greenhouse gases. We encourage applicants to try new and different ways of managing our lands, which can include applying Indigenous land knowledge to impact climate change. Land restoration and management projects that simply focus on building resiliency to climate change are not a focus of Daybreak fund. Exceptions may be made for projects in urban or more urbanized areas.
- Successful **local government** requests will focus on showing proof of concept or be instructive for other local governments facing similar challenges or opportunities. Local government projects should include meaningful involvement from at least one community-based organization or nonprofit partner. The Daybreak Fund prioritizes local solutions that work for the community, and demonstrating local support and engagement is an important element of local government applications. Successful local government applications will avoid duplicating, overlapping or otherwise fulfilling what would be considered traditional government responsibilities.
- Successful **applied research** requests will be linked to a direct demonstration project and clearly articulate the next steps for using the data or research results to impact systems change. The Fund may consider applied research projects that provide information important in advancing catalytic, systems-level strategies that advance innovative climate change and water projects.

Funding Availability and Match

We anticipate awarding at least \$1.5 million in grants in 2025. There are no maximum or minimum grant award amounts. However, Daybreak Fund grants have ranged from \$17,000 to \$185,000 with an average grant size of \$100,000. While we do not limit the size of requests, please keep in mind we are trying to maximize the impact of our available funding.



At the same time, in order to leverage the Daybreak Fund’s investments, we try to help applicants connect with other sources of funding. While the Daybreak Fund awarded \$3 million in grants in its first two years, we were also able to help applicants secure more than \$3 million in additional grant funding from various philanthropic sources.

Matching funds are not required, but we appreciate efforts to demonstrate any additional investment in the project.

Grant Duration

We will consider annual projects as well as multi-year efforts (up to 3 years).

Grant Application Evaluation

Grant awards will be determined by program officers representing each participating funder. Additional input on applications will be collected from an independent technical team and community representatives from the region to gain insights, reduce bias, and check assumptions.

Timeline and Process

The Daybreak Fund seeks to establish connections with its grantees. To help us accomplish this mission, we will be available to answer your questions about this grant opportunity via virtual office hours, which can be scheduled [here](#). Additional times are available by request.

March 3, 2025: Request for Proposal issued

March 10 – April 11, 2025: Virtual office hours available. Schedule your meeting [here](#).

April 11, 2025: Pre-applications due

May 9, 2025: Full applications invited

June 16, 2025: Invited full applications due

August, 2025: Grant awards announced

September/October, 2025: Grant awards delivered

How to apply

All application materials must be submitted through the Daybreak Fund’s online application and reporting grant portal called [Foundant](#). **Note that this portal is shared with the Fund for Lake Michigan.** You can use your Daybreak Fund **OR** Fund for Lake Michigan login credentials if you already have an account. Otherwise please follow instructions below to create a new account.

Please follow these steps to access the application materials:

1. [Foundant](https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=lakemi) can be accessed at <https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=lakemi>



2. If your organization has an existing account with either the Daybreak Fund or the Fund for Lake Michigan, log in by filling in the email address and password for your **organization's** account. If you cannot locate your credentials contact amber@fundforlakemichigan.org. Please do not create another account.
3. If your organization has not applied in the past, select "Create a New Account." This will prompt you to fill out a profile for your organization.
4. Applicants should **complete the application titled "The Daybreak Fund – 2025."**

Contact Information

All questions can be directed to Amber Meyer Smith, Fund for Lake Michigan/Daybreak Fund Program Officer at amber@fundforlakemichigan.org.