Community Match Fund

Sustainable CT's innovative Community Match Fund is a crowdfunding grant-matching program that provides fast, flexible funding and support to implement sustainability projects. The Community Match Fund supports projects that have a free and public benefit, align with our action roadmap, and take place in a Sustainable CT registered town. Through this fund we match local crowdfunding efforts dollar-for-dollar to assist in bringing community-driven ideas to life- whether it's the addition of a pollinator garden, a community composting initiative, a local arts and creative culture program, tree planting, greenways for biking and walking, etc.

Unlike traditional funding programs, the Community Match Fund has no traditional grant application, accepts rolling submissions, and has minimal reporting requirements. The program is structured to support and amplify grassroots efforts to transform communities for the better. Community Match Fund projects can be led by municipalities, individual residents, nonprofits, community groups, schools, libraries, or other organizations.

Sustainable CT has a responsibility to its funders to ensure maximum impact of their dollars and therefore assesses a group's ability to carry out the project. Sustainable CT aims for a balance among projects across regions and activity types. Discussing a proposal with Sustainable CT staff does not entitle the applicant to any funding from Community Match Fund. Past funding does not guarantee that your project will receive future funding.

****To learn more about the Community Match Fund program and discuss if your project is eligible, please contact funding@sustainablect.org to set up an initial inquiry call with Sustainable CT staff.****

Sustainable CT's Community Match Fund Eligibility Requirements:

1. The project must be located in a Sustainable CT registered town (or towns).
Check here to see participating communities. Registering is easy. If your town isn't already registered, reach out to info@sustainablect.org and we can help you get your town registered.

2. The project must align with Sustainable CT's mission and actions of creating equitable, sustainable communities.
Our staff will determine with you which action your project best aligns, if any. By aligning with a Sustainable CT action your town will be able to earn points towards Sustainable CT certification when the project is complete. See the eligible project examples below to get an idea of possible projects.

3. The project must have a free public benefit and be inclusive to members of your community(ies).
Projects cannot lead to private profit for the entity leading the project, nor can users of the project incur a cost to enjoy the project.

4. The project must have a specific and concrete idea with a detailed budget.
Projects must be well-defined and specific. Project budgets can range from several hundred dollars to thousands. There is no minimum project budget. Your final budget goal should be based on the costs for a specific, defined project, and take into consideration what is feasible for you to crowdfund from your networks. Sustainable CT will match what you raise dollar-for-dollar up to $6,000.

Please note:

- We encourage project leaders to create mindful, sustainable budgets. By prioritizing sustainable choices, such as incorporating secondhand or recycled materials where appropriate, project leaders help us to reach our goal of financially supporting as many sustainability initiatives as possible across the state.

5. Organizational overhead, regular operating expenses, and budget allocations for existing staff are not eligible.

Please note:

- Your project budget may **not** include funds for paying yourself, including any fees, salary or other compensation for your time.
- Infrastructure or equipment supplies may only be purchased for a project being led by a nonprofit entity. The equipment must also have an ongoing use associated with your project that continues to provide or further a free public benefit.
- Funds raised prior to the campaign going live **cannot** be leveraged toward the match.

6. The project must be completed within 12 months of receiving the grant.
The Community Match Fund is intended to support projects with immediate funding needs, so work on your project should start in the near-term after your crowdfunding campaign is complete. Once the project has been completed, project leaders are required to complete a post implementation survey and post photos of the completed project to their crowdfunding campaign page.

7. A project leader or entity running a project is only eligible to run one Community Match Fund project per calendar year. This rule applies to all projects except for municipally run projects.
While there is no limit to the total number of projects that can be happening in your city or town at any one time, you or your group can only run one Community Match Fund project per calendar year. However, projects that are run by municipal entities are not limited in the number of projects per year they can run. Additionally, to be eligible for a project in the following year, you must have successfully implemented your previous project and submitted all required reporting information to Sustainable CT.

8. The Project Leader must be available for a conversation with your city or town's Sustainable CT Sustainability Team or municipal representative.
Once your project has been approved and you have launched your crowdfunding campaign, our team will connect you to the Sustainable CT Municipal Liaison so that you can discuss opportunities to collaborate.

9. Repeat event-based projects are only eligible for funding for two years. This rule applies to all projects except for municipally run projects.
Beginning in 2024, projects that seek funds for annual events may only receive funding twice. For example, if your annual event received funding in 2024, it may only be funded for one additional year. However, projects that are run by municipal entities are not limited in the number of repeat event-based projects they can run. Event-based project campaigns must be completed prior to the event date.

10. Nonprofits with an annual budget that exceeds $300,000 are not eligible to receive funds.
If the entity leading the project is a nonprofit organization, you must submit your annual operating budget for the current fiscal year and your IRS Determination Letter.

11. If you are working with a fiscal sponsor, only a municipality or a non-profit may serve in this role.
Only administrative fees associated with fiscal sponsorship are permitted. If your project has a fiscal sponsor the fiscal sponsor may not pay themselves or existing staff through the total project budget, including funds not provided through the Community Match Fund process.

12. For profit entities are not eligible to receive funds.

Crowdfunding & Donor Requirements:

The spirit of the Community Match Fund is to support and amplify grassroots efforts that strive to transform their community, neighborhood, and town for the good of all. We have found that crowdfunding is an effective way to ensure that projects are responding to a need in their community and have community buy-in for their projects.

To ensure that all projects are responsibly practicing crowdfunding, we have developed donor requirements:

1. Meet the Sustainable CT minimum crowdfunding donor requirement.
This is your crowdfunding goal (not including Sustainable CT's match) divided by 100. (Ex: your crowdfunding goal is $5,000. $5,000/100=50. You must have at least 50 crowdfunding donations at any level.)

2. We welcome donations at all levels, however any donation that exceeds 35% of your crowdfunding goal will only be matched by Sustainable CT up to the 35% threshold.
Ex: If your crowdfunding goal is $6,000 and you receive a donation of $2,400 (40% of your crowdfunding goal), Sustainable CT will only match up to $2,100 (35% of your goal) of the $2,400 donation. This reduced match only applies to donations above the 35% threshold; all other donations below that threshold are matched $1 to $1.

3. While the project leader (individual, group, organization, or municipality) may donate to their own campaign, any donation that exceeds 20% of your crowdfunding goal will only be matched by Sustainable CT up to the 20% threshold.
Ex: If your crowdfunding goal is $6,000 and you donate $1,500 to your own campaign (25% of your crowdfunding goal), Sustainable CT will only match up to $1,200 (20% of goal) of the $1,500 donation.

4. If you exceed your crowdfunding goal by $500 or more, you must provide Sustainable CT and donors with an updated budget on how the additional funds will be used. This updated budget will be included on your project page to update your donors on how the funds will be used.

5. If you do not reach your crowdfunding goal, you must have a conversation with your crowdfunding coach and Sustainable CT to discuss if your project is eligible for a reduced match. If Sustainable CT finds that your project is fundable with a reduced budget, you must provide Sustainable CT and donors with an updated budget that is representative of the funds raised and the reduced match. This updated budget will be included on your project page to update your donors on how the funds will be used.

Please note:

Sustainable CT cannot accept any donations on behalf of a project, including donations made through Donor Advised Funds (DAF). All donations must be made directly to the entity leading the project or through the Patronicity crowdfunding campaign page.

Eligible Project Examples

NOTE: For all projects, we encourage project leaders to minimize adverse environmental impacts by following environmental best practices and using environmentally responsible products and services.

Arts and Culture and Local Economies- Projects that promote local arts and creative culture, enhance community spaces, and/or support local business and tourism.

- Youth arts program
- Community arts festival promoting foot traffic to downtown small businesses
- Parklets that provide gathering spaces in main street areas
- Outdoor community arts and culture events
- Art installations, sculpture gardens, artists walks, etc.
- Buy local campaign
- Main Street beautification projects
- Repair cafe or tool library

Renewable and Efficient Energy Use - Projects that utilize or increase the use of renewable energy and reduce energy use in community facilities and public spaces.

- Energy efficiency improvements to public buildings/spaces
- Community energy campaigns
- Electric vehicle charging stations
- Green Jobs Youth Development Program
- Climate education events
- Municipal infrastructure energy efficiency programs
- E-bike projects
- Energy efficient housing projects

Public Transportation - Projects that improve or create sustainable mobility options, including walking, biking, and public transit.

- Expansion or development of sidewalks, bike lanes, bike paths
- Bike safety classes
- Bike-accessibility programs
- E-Bike programs
- Bus shelters and seating

Land and Natural Resource Protection - Projects that promote the protection, conservation, and sustainable use of lands, waterbodies, and other natural resources.

- Developing and maintain public trails or trail systems
- Tree planting in public and open spaces
- Rain gardens, bioswales, green infrastructure
- River/watershed cleanups, protection, or restoration
- Stormwater education
- Pollinator gardens
- Invasive species management and habitat restoration
- Sustainable landscaping/groundskeeping
- Preserving open space

Healthy & Sustainable Food Networks - Projects that provide food & health education, increase food security, and promote local food production.

- Education programs for community growing
- Food justice programs
- Community gardens
- Giving gardens
- Outdoor classrooms and growing gardens
- Farmers markets

Waste Reduction - Projects that promote reuse and reduce waste.

- Food scrap recycling educational campaigns
- Community cooperative composting
- Municipal food waste collection program
- Home composting campaign
- School food waste diversion and composting

Equity and Inclusion - Projects that create more equitable, inclusive, and connected communities.

- Events that promote cultural awareness and celebrate diversity
- Outreach campaign to include underserved residents
- Events that bring the community together to discuss equity opportunities and challenges

Ineligible Project Examples

- Planning exercises and other municipal projects that are not public-facing and will have minimal community engagement.
- Projects that are already funded through an organization or municipality's budget.
- Events limited to the membership of a specific organization that are not reasonably accessible to community residents.
- Fundraising for a pool of funds to be re-granted to others or used for an unspecified purpose in the future.
- Fundraising for a business startup costs, or for projects through which a local business is charging a fee for a product or service.
- Political advocacy focused on an individual politician or party or a specific piece of legislation.

If you have questions or would like to discuss a potential project, contact Sustainable CT at funding@sustainablect.org

Community Match Fund Process

To start your Community Match Fund inquiry, please review our streamlined process:

1. **Send us an email!**: Project leaders reach out to Sustainable CT (funding@sustainablect.org) with an idea for a project that *provides a free and public benefit*, takes place in a *Sustainable CT registered community*, and aligns with our *action roadmap*.
2. **Initial meeting**: Sustainable CT staff and project leaders discuss the project, Community Match Fund process, and go over Sustainable CT's eligibility criteria and project readiness requirements.
3. **Project approval**: If the project is eligible for funding and the project readiness requirements have been reviewed and approved, then the project leader is connected with our Patronicity crowdfunding coach to build their crowdfunding campaign page.
4. **Crowdfunding campaign**: Once the project leader's campaign page has received its final approval from the Sustainable CT Team, they launch their 30-to-60-day crowdfunding campaign on the Patronicity platform with support from our crowdfunding coach. Check out all of our project pages here.
5. **Matching grant and implementation**: Once the crowdfunding campaign reaches its goal, Sustainable CT will match what is raised $1 for $1 up to $6,000. Patronicity then disperses the crowdfunded dollars and Sustainable CT Matching grant so project leaders can begin the implementation of their project!
6. **Post implementation reporting:** Sustainable CT has no formal grant reporting. Instead, we send project leaders a survey to complete once the project has been implemented and ask that project leaders post photos of their completed project to their campaign page.