

SPECIAL EDITION
2026



**Community
Foundation**
OF SOUTHEAST KANSAS

25th
Anniversary

NEWSLETTER



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Thoughts from the President

BY LINDA GRILZ

Welcome to this special edition of the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas newsletter.

Over the past 25 years, we have worked hard to earn the trust of our communities by building strong relationships and demonstrating our commitment through meaningful action.

The growth we have experienced is truly remarkable. The number of scholarships and grants we facilitate has increased dramatically, particularly over the last five years. As our impact and visibility have grown, more individuals, families, and organizations have chosen the Community Foundation as a trusted way to invest in Southeast Kansas and ensure their charitable dollars remain local.

I am proud of the difference CFSEK has made throughout our region. Our foundation is recognized as a leader in bringing people together and finding solutions to some of our communities' most challenging issues.

As I look to the future, I am encouraged and inspired by the values that continue to guide our work and the positive impact they have on the people we serve. Our Board of Trustees remains strong and committed to carrying forward the vision and dedication of those who came before us. Because of their leadership, we have a solid foundation on which to build.

Thank you for your continued support and enjoy this special edition.



*Livestock Sweepstakes,
Kansas 4-H Foundation,
Bill House Agricultural Grant Recipient*



*EKG Machine Upgrade,
Girard Medical Center Foundation,
Mount Carmel Foundation Grant Recipient*



From a Challenge to a Legacy: CFSEK Celebrates 25 Years

BY DEVIN GORMAN

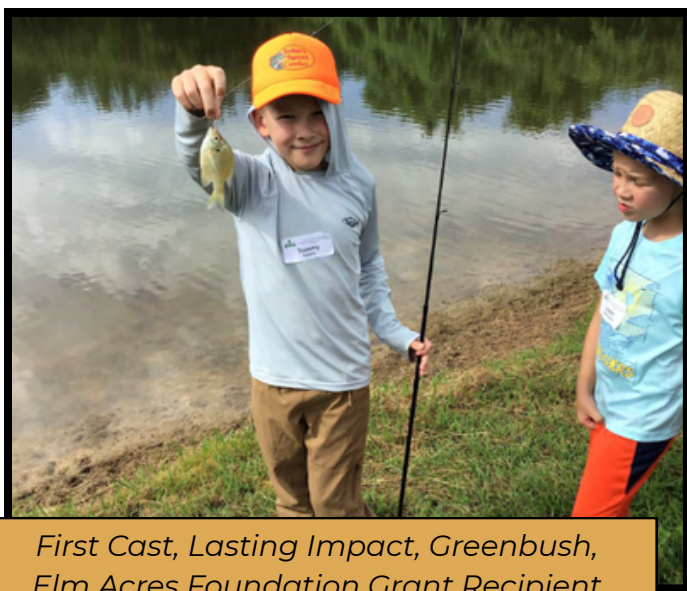
Looking Back

In 2001, a group of Southeast Kansas leaders said yes to an opportunity that would shape the future of philanthropy in our region forever.

Founded as the Pittsburg Area Community Foundation, it started with a challenge to raise \$300,000 to establish a local community foundation and create a permanent resource for charitable giving in our region. There was no staff and no guarantee that the idea would work. However, they did have a firm belief and an idea that they were willing to put their names behind. More than 40 donors stepped up, committing \$328,325 in donations and pledges. In its first year, the Foundation awarded over \$9,000 in grants.

Twenty-five years later, that early belief in something bigger than themselves has grown into something far beyond what those first leaders likely imagined.

Today, the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas serves as a regional partner for donors, nonprofits, students, and charitable organizations across Southeast Kansas.



First Cast, Lasting Impact, Greenbush, Elm Acres Foundation Grant Recipient

Since our founding, CFSEK has facilitated more than \$30 million in total granting back into the region, supporting new programs and services, community amenities, healthcare initiatives, scholarships for students, nonprofit capacity building, and many other efforts that have improved Southeast Kansas.

Our growth has been built one relationship, one fund, one gift, and one grant at a time. That may sound simple, but it is the real work of a community foundation. It takes shape in conversations with donors around kitchen tables and board members around conference room tables. It happens when organizations bring us an idea, when students apply for scholarships, when local leaders see a need in their community, and when someone decides they want their generosity to benefit future generations.

Our financial growth has well exceeded what was thought possible in those early days. In 2024, CFSEK celebrated a truly historic year, with total assets growing from \$58 million to more than \$69 million. Now, in 2026, CFSEK manages over \$77 million in assets, which is a remarkable milestone for an organization that began with a local challenge and a small group of committed community leaders.

Over the past 25 years, CFSEK has grown from a single part-time employee to a dedicated full-time staff of six. Our growth reflects more than just a larger organization. It reflects the increasing trust that donors, nonprofits, and partners place in CFSEK to help turn kindness into action. It also reflects the growing amount of behind-the-scenes work required to do what we do: stewarding funds, administering grants and scholarships, hosting workshops, building donor relationships, helping nonprofit partners navigate opportunities, and supporting affiliates.

From the beginning, CFSEK's story was never just about Pittsburg. The vision grew outward because the needs, generosity, and community pride of Southeast Kansas have never stopped at one city limit or one county line. By 2005, the Foundation had already begun serving communities beyond Pittsburg and Crawford County, leading to the name change from Pittsburg Area Community Foundation to the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas. Our regional identity has continued to grow through affiliate foundations in Columbus, Fort Scott, and Girard.

Our affiliates represent one of the most important lessons of CFSEK's first 25 years. Every community deserves the chance to build charitable resources of its own and guide its own future. Today, that belief continues through local advisory boards, community grantmaking, and regional partnerships that help charitable dollars stay connected to local needs. The affiliate model gives local leaders the ability to respond to the needs they see every day while remaining part of a larger foundation built for long-term stewardship.

Another example of that regional spirit is the growing success of Match Day, and the transition to Match Week. What began as a way to encourage support for nonprofit sustainability has become one of CFSEK's most visible celebrations of generosity. Each year, Match Week brings donors, nonprofits, and community members together around a shared goal to strengthen the organizations that serve Southeast Kansas every day. In 2025, Match Week raised over \$1 million for Southeast Kansas, benefiting more than 60 participating organizations. That success says something important about our region. When Southeast Kansans are invited to give, they respond.

Our impact reaches across a wide range of causes. CFSEK funds support arts and culture, education, environment and animals, health and wellness, public and societal benefit, religion, scholarships, and many other community needs. We support nonprofits, schools, churches, civic groups, healthcare providers, and community projects that make Southeast Kansas stronger. Some grants get more attention than others, but each one matters to the individuals who benefit.



*Youth Camp, Inspire Health Foundation,
Mount Carmel Foundation Grant Recipient*

One of the most powerful examples of how the community foundation is committed to preserving legacies comes from a notable Kansas rancher, Mr. Bill House. In 2024, CFSEK completed the sale of the nearly 6,300-acre Bill House Ranch property in Chautauqua County. The proceeds created two sizable endowed funds honoring Bill House and strengthening CFSEK's capacity to support agricultural projects and education throughout Kansas. Through grantmaking and scholarships, his generosity will continue to open doors for students, support agricultural education, and invest in the future of rural communities. It is hard to imagine a more fitting legacy. The land that was part of Bill's life's work has now become a permanent source of opportunity for future generations.

The goal of building our future may be most evident in our support of students. Our scholarships represent more than just financial assistance; they represent confidence in a student's potential. Over the years, CFSEK's scholarship funds have helped students pursue college, technical training, and career opportunities. As the Foundation grows, scholarships will remain a vital part of our mission to connect the generosity of past and present donors with the dreams of future leaders.

Looking Ahead

As we celebrate our first 25 years, we are also preparing for what comes next. One of the most significant opportunities on the horizon is impact investing, a tool that will allow us to put more of our assets to work in new ways for Southeast Kansas. For most of our history, grants and scholarships have been the primary ways we support our region, and those will always remain at the core of who we are. However, some community needs require more than grants. Some projects need a partner willing to help close a gap, take an early step, or bring others to the table.

For CFSEK, this work is still developing, and we are approaching it with the same care that has guided our first 25 years. We will need strong local partners, clear expectations, thoughtful policies, and a willingness to learn. If our first 25 years were about building trust, growing assets, and proving the power of permanent charitable resources, then impact investing may become one way our next 25 years build on that foundation: putting more of our resources to work, in more ways, for the long-term good of Southeast Kansas.

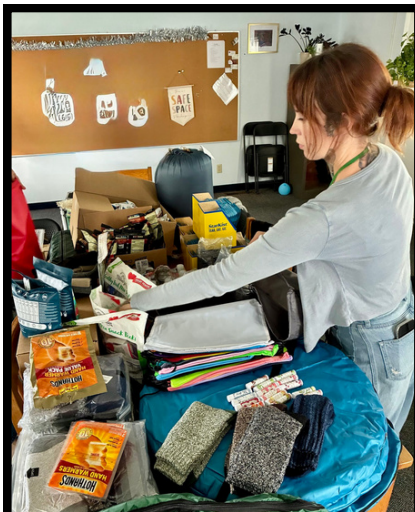
From the beginning, community foundations have been built on the simple but powerful promise that generosity can last forever. Through wills, trusts, beneficiary designations, and other planned gifts, donors can continue supporting the causes and communities they love long after their lifetimes.



*Healing Beyond the Uniform Veteran's Retreat,
Outside the Wire Foundation,
Knights of Columbus Grant Recipient*

One of CFSEK's founders, Grady Smoot, once compared the concept of community foundations to a mighty oak tree. A community foundation gathers resources, invests them, and eventually passes them on to provide shade, shelter, and beauty for all. Our roots were planted by people who believed in Southeast Kansas. Over 25 years, those roots have deepened. Our branches have grown through new funds, new donors, new affiliates, new staff, new grants, new scholarships, and new partnerships. The shade now reaches into towns and communities across the region.

The first 25 years proved what a strong vision and a generous community can build. In the next 25 years, the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas will find new and innovative ways to provide needed resources while continuing to build a Southeast Kansas where generosity shapes a brighter future for everyone.



*Assertive Community Treatment Program,
Crawford County Mental Health,
Community Impact Grant Recipient*



*Jazz Camp, Josiah Fletcher Foundation,
Community Impact Grant Recipient*

EVOLUTION OF THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF SOUTHEAST KANSAS



Feb. 28, 2001

Founding of the Pittsburg Area Community Foundation

May 23, 2005

Name Change to Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas



2008



Ft. Scott Area Community Foundation Affiliate joins CFSEK

2010

Girard Area Community Foundation Affiliate joins CFSEK



2011



Logo updated to the sunflower

2015

Logo updated to add lines to sunflower logo



2021



Celebrated 20 years of CFSEK with over \$50 million in assets and over \$17 million total granted

2023

Columbus Area Community Foundation Affiliate joins CFSEK



2026

New Logo & Celebrated 25 years of CFSEK with over \$77 Million in assets and over \$30 million total granted





Celebrating 25 Years of Impact

BY MATTHEW BUCK



Joe Hart and Gordon Elliott place CFSEK banner at Crawford County Fair, 2016

As the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2026, it's a good time to remember how it all began—not with a grand plan, but with an opportunity, a challenge, and a handful of community leaders willing to ask, "Why not?"

The story starts in early 2001.

Kayla Joy was serving as President of the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce when she attended a conference in Wichita hosted by the Kansas Community Leadership Initiative, which eventually became the Kansas Leadership Center.

"We were just chatting over lunch when a Kansas Health Foundation representative casually mentioned a matching funds opportunity to benefit leadership in local communities," Joy said. "I still laugh that it was so nonchalantly mentioned when it could mean so much to a community, but it stuck with me!"

The challenge was straightforward enough: raise \$300,000 by the end of 2001, and those funds would be matched by the Kansas Health Foundation.

There was just one problem—the money had to be housed in a community foundation, and Southeast Kansas didn't have one.

With a challenge to meet and no community foundation, work had to start quickly.

"I've found that if you want something done, you need to involve the right people. Namely, Lynda Wilkinson," said Joy. "I went and presented her with the idea of doing this challenge and starting a community foundation."

"As Lynda put it, we were caught up in the logistics of it. Then Rita (Bicknell) said, 'What have we got to lose?' And the rest was history!"

"She jumped right on board, and we got to work getting a leadership team and laying out the groundwork! I also remember calling Judy Scudamore and talking to her about becoming the first executive director for the foundation, which was so amazing, and she was a perfect fit!"

As community leaders began discussing the idea, there were plenty of questions about fundraising, logistics, and whether such an ambitious goal was even possible.



*Docushred, CLASS LTD,
Future Fund Giving Circle Grant Recipient*

"That initial group was so important," said Lynda Wilkinson. "We needed a clear vision, and that's what our team offered."

There was concern about how to raise money and how to maintain momentum. As Lynda put it, "we were caught up in the logistics of it. Then Rita (Bicknell) said, 'What have we got to lose?' And the rest was history!"

A few weeks later, on Wednesday, February 28, 2001, that history officially began.

That afternoon, 23 community leaders gathered at Crestwood Country Club to establish the Pittsburg Area Community Foundation. None of them could have known just how much impact that decision would have on Southeast Kansas over the next quarter century.

What began as a foundation serving the Pittsburg area didn't stay limited to Pittsburg for long. As the organization continued to grow, it became clear that its reach extended well beyond Pittsburg and Crawford County. In May of 2005, the organization officially became the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas, reflecting its expanding mission across the region.

Growth continued at a remarkable pace. By 2006, foundation assets were nearing \$7 million, leading to the launch of the memorable "7 by 7" campaign.

"I walked around with a 7 Up can, talking to everyone about our goal and the foundation's work," Wilkinson said. "By the end of the campaign, everyone in the community knew our goal of reaching \$7 million in assets, and we accomplished it thanks to community involvement. I think that's the story of CFSEK, setting a goal, and then having really dedicated people and incredible donors to help get us to that next level. It's like a game!"

Looking back today, the numbers tell an incredible story. The foundation that once hoped to reach \$300,000 in donations now manages more than \$77 million in assets and has facilitated over \$30 million in grants throughout Southeast Kansas since 2001.

"It's incredible to see how a simple goal set by a small group of community leaders blossomed into a regional powerhouse for good," said CFSEK Executive Director Devin Gorman. "Over the last 25 years, CFSEK has become the bridge between passionate donors and the most pressing needs of our communities, proving that when Southeast Kansans pull together, we can do incredible things."

The \$30 million granted since 2001 represents new programs and services, community amenities, healthcare support, student scholarships, and critical funding for local nonprofits. In 2025 alone, CFSEK awarded more than \$2.8 million in grants from all foundation funds.



*Jazz Camp, Josiah Fletcher Foundation,
Community Impact Grant Recipient*



Members of the Rita J. Bicknell Women's Health Fund pose for a photo with Rita, 2011

For the people who were there at the beginning, though, the most remarkable thing isn't the numbers—it's how quickly the years have gone by.

"When the foundation started, my daughter was just a baby, and now she has a baby of her own!" Joy said. "Time flies, but the work of the foundation is for forever, so who knows where we will be in another 25 years!"

Wilkinson shares that same sense of amazement.

"I can't believe how fast the foundation has grown, and how quickly time has gone by! I remember worrying about getting \$7 million, and now we are over \$75 million in assets! I think that is a testament to how this community steps up when a cause is worth supporting. We just make it happen! I hope people understand that this is about leaving a legacy from the community today to benefit our future, because community foundations are forever."

Twenty-five years after a lunch conversation, a challenge opportunity, and one community leader asking another to get involved, CFSEK continues to do exactly what its founders hoped it would do: connect generosity with opportunity and create a lasting resource for Southeast Kansas.



Cooking on a Budget, Crosstimbers Food Pantry, Community Impact Grant Recipient



Poolside Landscaping, Parsons Recreation Commission, Get Busy Livin' Grant Recipient



The Running Camp, SEK Running Club, Community Impact Grant Recipient



A New Logo to Celebrate 25 Years

BY SAMANTHA GUY

Working with LimeLight Marketing in Pittsburg, the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas (CFSEK) developed the new logo to reflect the impact the foundation has made in Southeast Kansas over the last 25 years, and the growth it envisions for the next 25 years and beyond.

The new logo is made up of elements that build on the Foundation's mission as well as growth over the last 25 years and the many years to come. We will break down each of these elements below.

The 'C' form of the logo represents both the community we serve and also a hand reaching out to lend assistance.

The 'F' form stands for our Foundation, but also a subtle human form to represent the human element at the center of our work.

The 'Heart' form. We care deeply about our communities. By encouraging charitable giving, we benefit the common good of the community and its health therein.



**Community
Foundation**
OF SOUTHEAST KANSAS

All these elements combined represent a visual change for the organization; the organization's core values and dedication remain unchanged: serving the region by encouraging charitable giving benefiting the common good and the quality of life.



C Form



F Form



Heart Form



Grants & Scholarships: A Reflection of 25 Years

BY KARA MISHMASH

I have not had the pleasure of experiencing CFSEK's growth and impact over the last 25 years, but I have been part of this organization for the past 2.5 years. In that relatively short time, I've witnessed remarkable growth and the impact that comes with it. When I think back to where we started and where we are now, it's hard to believe how much has changed in such a short window.

When I joined, our granting and scholarship work looked very different from what it does today. Since then, we've added two large grant cycles, three, soon-to-be four, scholarship opportunities, and expanded greatly on an existing scholarship opportunity. Each of these additions was intentional, built to reach organizations and students who might otherwise have fallen through the cracks. Together, they've expanded our impact by hundreds of thousands of dollars. Dollars that have gone toward education, housing stability, food access, support for youth and foster families, and community programming throughout Southeast Kansas.

And that number won't stay still; it will continue to grow year over year as these programs mature, as word spreads, and as more organizations and students learn what's available to them.

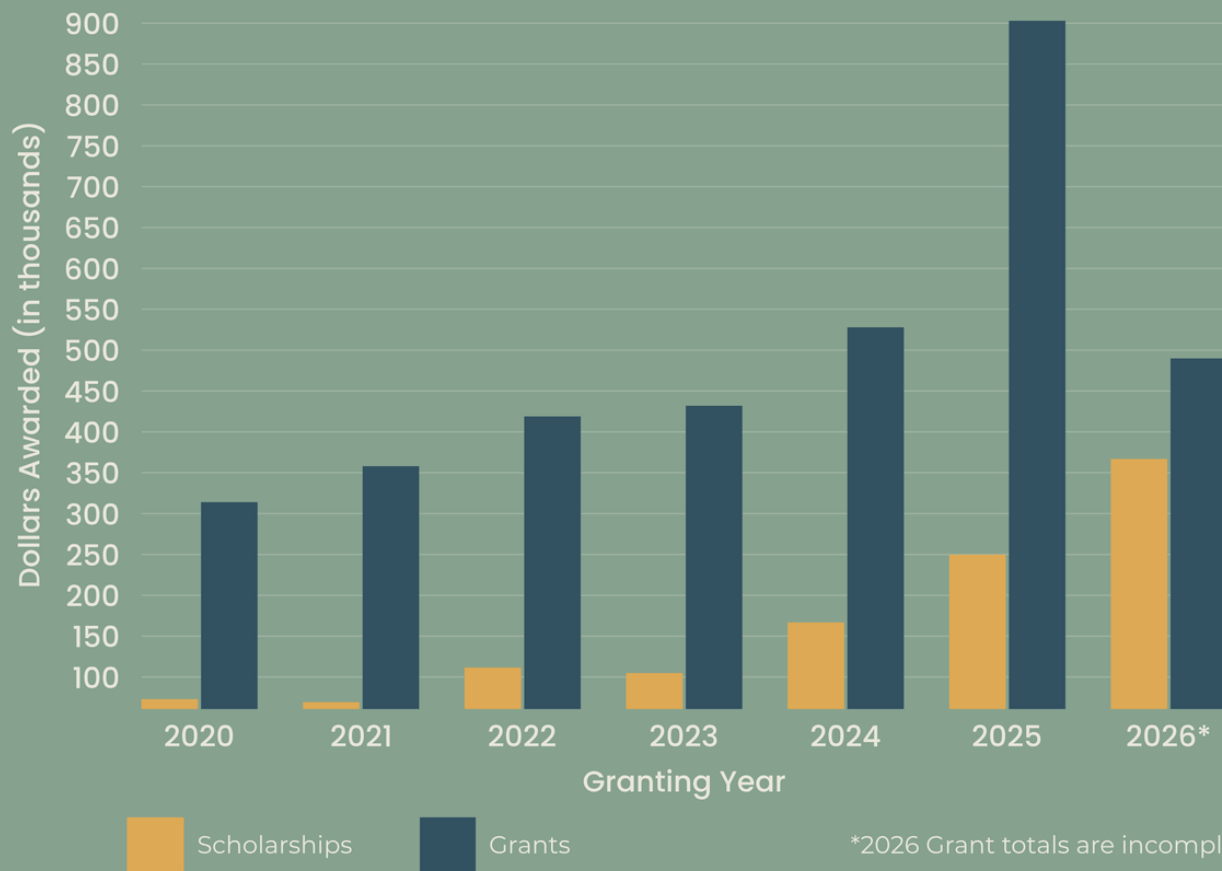
But the numbers only tell part of the story. It has been an incredible experience to see the real, tangible impact CFSEK has had across our area. Driving past a funded grant project in progress, watching a project take shape or a program take root, is a quiet kind of pride that doesn't show up on any spreadsheet. And meeting a student who received one of our scholarships; hearing about the classes they're taking, the goals they're working toward, the doors that have opened for them; brings the mission home in a way statistics never could. Every time, it makes me smile. It's a reminder that behind every grant cycle and every scholarship fund, there are real people whose lives look a little different because this organization exists.

Twenty-five years is a long history, and I'm grateful to be adding my own small chapter to it.

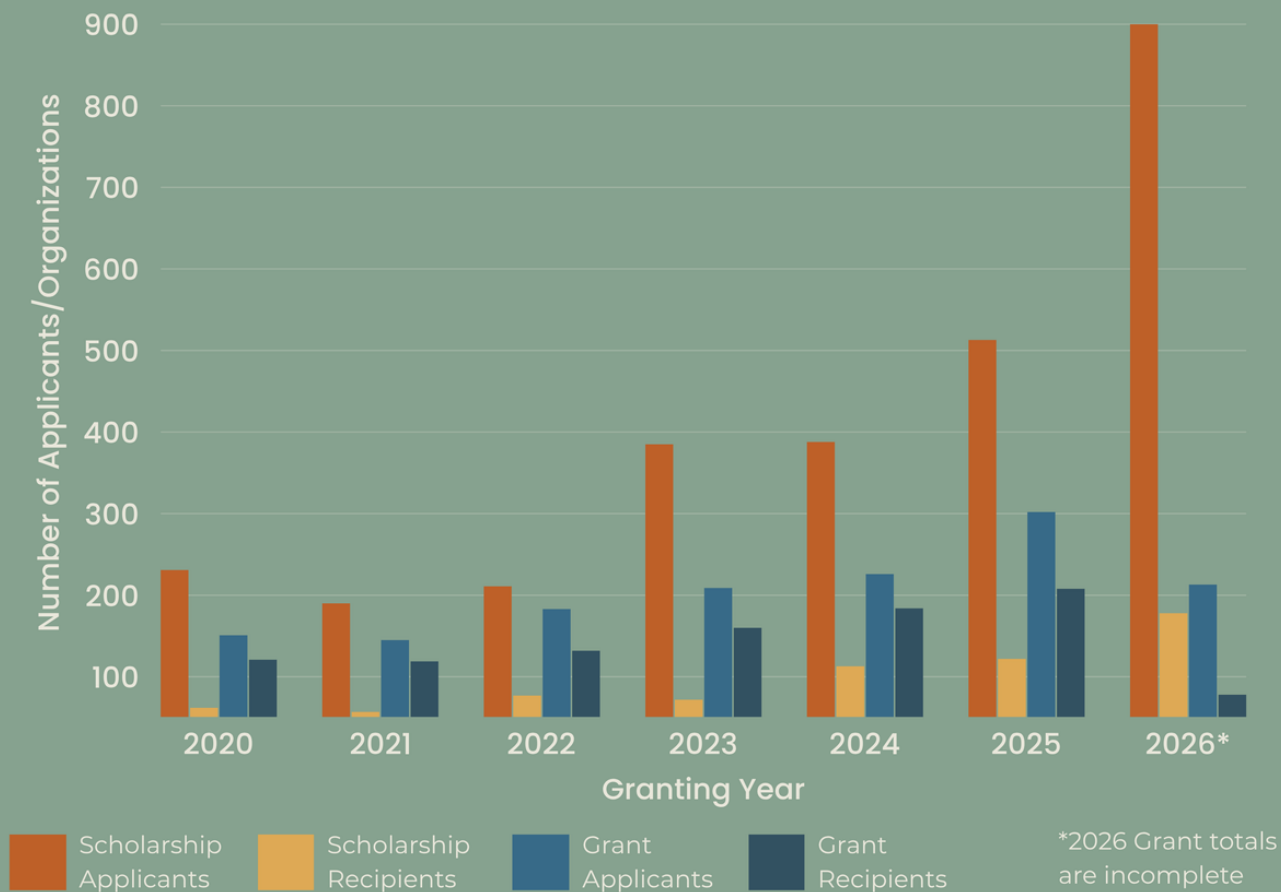


*2025/2026 School Outreach Series,
Memorial Auditorium,
Community Impact Grant Recipient*

Competitive Grant and Scholarship Award Totals



Competitive Grant and Scholarship Applicant/Recipient Totals



Don't Forget!



match week

November 9-13, 2026

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