

Back to School with the Beacon Grant

For many children, the bitterness of summer's end is sweetened by the prospect of the things that make school exciting: reunions with classmates and favorite teachers, the shine of a new pencil case, and the squeak of fresh markers.



But too many in our communities don't experience that sweetness. Too many struggle to afford the supplies needed for a new school year, from clothes to backpacks to notebooks and folders.

Elks Lodges across the country recognize this need and are stepping up. Many Lodges plan to use grant money from the Elks National Foundation for back-to-school drives, and a number have already held successful events as September swiftly approached. Intended for an ongoing community project with active Elk involvement, the \$3,500 [Beacon Grant](#) is available to every Lodge. School supply drives make a great use of the Beacon Grant, as the same event serves a new population of students each year.

Christian County, Mo., Lodge No. 2777 has done a massive back-to-school project for the last nine years. This summer, almost 70 Lodge members shopped with students for school clothes over four weekends. For every student, about \$100 was spent on shoes, t-shirts, and whatever else was needed to start the new school year in style.

The Christian County Lodge partnered with a local food pantry to ensure that those most in need could participate.

Tulsa, Okla., Lodge No. 946 focused its grant project on one nearby school, Darnaby Elementary. The Tulsa Lodge merged its Beacon Grant with the Spotlight Grant, using \$5,500 to purchase new supplies and books for each of the 27 classrooms in the school.



For the seventh year running, Elgin, Ill., Lodge No. 737 used its grant money to support the local First Baptist Church's Step It Up program. This event is held every August, providing new shoes for those in pre-K through high school. (The CIP got a firsthand look at the event in 2019. Check out CIPster Meaghan Morris' blog about it [here](#).)

This year, nearly 1,000 pairs of shoes were given to kids in need. "With so many people out of work, this is an important project," says Elgin's Grants Coordinator Sharlene Huske. "The [kids] are so excited about their new shoes, and they love to tell everyone how they got them!"

The Elgin Lodge was joined by members from nearby Chicago Northshore, Ill., Lodge No. 1316; Wheaton, Ill., Lodge No. 2258; and Des Plaines, Ill., No. 1526. From shopping for shoes to helping with sizing and directing parking lot traffic, Elks from all over Northeastern Illinois stepped up for this hands-on event.

Another Lodge-favorite project is backpack distribution. Lake Oconee, Ga., Lodge No. 2849 used its Beacon Grant to purchase 100 backpacks to fill with supplies including notebooks, folders, crayons and other classroom essentials. The full backpacks were delivered to the local Boys & Girls Club.



“A lot of these children were not in school last year due to COVID and were not able to keep up online because of a lack of computers at home,” says Lake Oconee Grants Coordinator William Lewis. “It is vitally important that these children be able to go to school this year with the things that they need to take part in classroom activities.”

The Elks National Foundation helps Lodges serve their communities by offering Beacon Grants of \$3,500. To find out more about Beacon Grants and the Community Investments Program, visit enf.elks.org/beacongrants.