



Elks National Foundation

2026-27 Chicago Convention CIP Grant Seminar Script

Slide 2: All great programs start the same way: with a dream.

In 1928, the delegates at the Grand Lodge Convention established the Elks National Foundation with an initial grant of \$100,000 because of a dream. Then -National President John F. Malley envisioned that the ENF would “unite the forces of the Order into a mighty army for the service of mankind.”

Nearly 80 years later, at the February 2005 meeting in San Diego, the board approved a modest budget of \$350,000 to further that dream and fund the CIP with two grants available to Lodges: the Gratitude Grant and Promise Grant.

Now, more than 20 years later, we’re living that dream, with Elks across nearly 1,700 communities reporting more than 400,000 volunteer hours just last year alone, banding together to build stronger communities with CIP grants.

Slide 3: So, what is the CIP? The CIP is the largest program run by the Elks National Foundation, and this year, it will invest more than \$18.8 million into Elks communities through grants made directly to Lodges. Last year, more than 88% of Lodges used at least one CIP grant to put on a charitable project to strengthen their communities. Between the Beacon, Gratitude, and Spotlight Grants, and with this year’s \$500 increase to the Spotlight Grant in celebration of America 250, Lodges have the opportunity to receive up to \$11,500 for local charitable projects.

Slide 4: Why does the CIP exist? The CIP grants offer Elks opportunities to serve their community in many ways. Besides the fact that doing good makes us feel good, grant projects can help energize Lodge membership and encourage former members to return to the fold. Last year, more than 60,000 Elks members volunteered on charitable projects through CIP grants. Grants also raise the Lodge’s profile in the community and attract the attention of people who want to be part of an organization that’s doing great things. So much so that more than 500 Lodges reported a membership gain after

running a CIP grant project. But ultimately, the CIP wants to help Elks build stronger communities, and with four different grant options, we believe we can do just that.

Slide 5: Originally, the CIP received a budget of \$350,000. Through consistent investment in the program, the budget has grown exponentially. For 2026-27, the program's budget is \$18.8 million. That's a 5371% increase since the program launched!

Slide 6: The investment doesn't stop with just the ENF's budget. More Lodges have used the CIP grants every year, with each participating Lodge receiving an average of 2.8 grants per year.

The very first day the program opened in 2005-06, we received 29 applications. In the first year, we approved applications from 695 Lodges. And we've only seen the applications increase, more than 530% since the first year, in fact.

Over 65,000 grants have been approved since the beginning of the program, putting nearly \$200,000,000 directly in the hands of Lodges to serve youth and veterans, combat hunger and homelessness, and overall build stronger communities.

Slide 7: So, what grants do we offer?

The Gratitude Grant is the ENF's way of saying thank you to Lodges that meet the Grand Exalted Ruler's per-member-giving goal to the ENF in the prior fiscal year. This year's per-member-giving goal will be \$5.25. By meeting the PMGG, the Lodge is eligible for a \$3,000 Gratitude Grant; there are then four additional \$500 bonuses that a Lodge can receive, making the Gratitude Grant range from \$3,000 to \$5,000.

Slide 8: Our first bonus is the Membership Support Bonus. Lodges in which 15% of members donated \$10 dollars or more are eligible for a \$500 bonus.

The next bonus is the Fidelity Club bonus. The Fidelity Club is the ENF's monthly giving program, and to obtain this bonus, the Lodge needs to have 10% of its prior year donors enrolled in the Fidelity Club. This percentage is based off total donors, not total

members. So, if your Lodge had 100 individual donors, only 10 of them would have to be a part of the Fidelity Club to receive this \$500 bonus.

Then, we have the Chair Challenge Bonus. The Chair Challenge Bonus was introduced to recognize Lodges that have strong, broad-based fundraising programs in support of the ENF. To be eligible for this bonus, the Lodge would need to appoint one Fundraising Chair and, throughout the year, that Fundraising Chair would have the opportunity to participate in the Chair Challenge run through our Development Department. To be eligible for this \$500 bonus, a Lodge would have to attain a score of 550 points or better in the prior year's Chair Challenge.

The newest bonus is the Fundraising Increase Bonus. To receive this \$500 bonus, a Lodge needs to increase its giving to the ENF by 10 percent over the previous year.

Slide 9: With all these bonuses, it can get confusing trying to keep track. We have introduced a new dashboard to track your Lodge's individual progress towards the bonuses. This Dashboard can be found on the Gratitude Grant webpage.

Congratulations to Texarkana, Texas, Lodge No. 2771, shown here, for meeting all the bonus criteria for its 2026-27 Gratitude Grant!

Slide 10: Gratitude Grants are the most flexible CIP grant. It is the only grant that can be used as a donation of funds toward 501c3 nonprofit organizations that go beyond providing essential needs assistance, including sports programs. Gratitude Grants are also the only grant that can be split between more than two projects. Gratitude Grants can also be supersized with the other two CIP grants to create a larger Beacon or Spotlight Grant.

Slide 11: Penn Yan, N.Y., Lodge No. 1722 was one of 126 Lodges to receive all four bonuses for a \$5,000 Gratitude Grant last year! The Lodge improved quality of life for local seniors by refurbishing a gazebo at an assisted living facility and offering free cooking and nutrition classes led by an Elk member who is a professional nutritionist. The classes reached over 40 seniors, and its community presence helped attract two new members.

Slide 12: Next up is the Beacon Grant. The Beacon Grant is known for ongoing, active grant projects. The Beacon Grant is available to every single Lodge and is worth \$4,000.

Beacon Grants must be used for projects that are Lodge-led, active, and ongoing. As the word implies, Lodge-led means that the Lodge is leading the project, as in another organization is not in charge of the grant funds; active means that there's plenty of hands-on Lodge participation; and ongoing means that the project happens at least annually. Take the opportunity to look around the community, identify an area where the Elks can assist, and get involved!

Slide 13: Beacon Grants need to have significant Elks active participation. This could look like Elks packing and delivering backpacks to students from families living below the poverty line, purchasing essential hygiene supplies for homeless shelters, or hosting social events for individuals with disabilities. Donations are not permitted under the Beacon Grant.

Beacon Grants can be split between two projects. So, if your Lodge wanted to provide foster children with new clothing, while also organizing a job fair for veterans experiencing homelessness, you're able to do so!

Slide 14: Onancock, Va., Lodge No. 1766 uses its Beacon Grant for its annual "Adopting Wellness" project, partnering with local nonprofits to promote mental wellness and suicide prevention awareness while helping shelter pets find loving homes.

Slide 15: Now, on to the Spotlight Grant! Spotlight Grants shine a light on issues facing every American community—family literacy, veterans homelessness, and essential needs insecurity. In celebration of America 250, Spotlight Grants have increased from \$2,000 to \$2,500, and will offer Lodges the opportunity to shine a brighter spotlight than ever before.

Every Lodge is eligible to apply for a \$2,500 Spotlight Grant to complete one of seven ready-made projects. Three of these projects increase family literacy, three support

veterans experiencing homelessness, and one provides hunger and essential needs assistance. Lodges can choose one of these seven project plans, as Spotlight Grants cannot be split between multiple projects, but they can be merged with the Beacon Grant, which we will discuss later.

Slide 16: Similar to the Beacon Grant, Spotlight Grants require active participation from the membership and must go beyond providing funding to a partner organization. We are prioritizing active, Lodge-led projects so donations under the Spotlight Grant are determined on a case-by-case basis. If there is not a substantial reason why the Lodge cannot purchase items rather than donating funds, it will not be approved. Out of the nearly 200 Spotlight Grants we currently have approved, less than ten have been approved as donations.

Slide 17: The three projects that address family literacy are Warm Welcome to the Library, Suds & Stories, and Community Baby Shower. Warm Welcome to the Library projects ask the Lodge to partner with a local library to host a coat distribution project. By inviting kids to receive a new coat at the library, the Lodge will also introduce the youth to the resources that the library has to offer. This project can be done in partnership with Operation Warm, which could supply the coats for the event, but this is not required.

In Suds & Stories, the Lodge would make a laundromat a center for literacy by providing free laundry for families in need, while entertaining their children with literacy activities, such as Elks reading to children. Elks would provide laundry services as well as books and educational materials to families during the event.

Community Baby Shower projects host baby showers for expecting mothers or families with newborns, with literacy as the main focus. This would include hosting literacy workshops, registering children for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, or providing books along with diapers, wipes, and other necessary products for newborns.

Slide 18: As for the three projects focused on veterans experiencing homelessness, we have Welcome Home, Stand Down, and Adopt-a-Haven.

Welcome Home projects assist veterans who have experienced housing insecurity in turning their new house into a home. The Lodge should provide home goods like furniture, cookware and cleaning supplies to vets who are moving into stable housing. Stand Down projects provide central locations to distribute supplies and services to veterans experiencing homelessness. Lodges can partner with VA hospitals or other organizations to participate in an already-existing Stand Down by supplying food for the event, or host a new one as a Lodge by providing items like clothing, hygiene supplies or comfort items.

In Adopt-a-Haven projects, the Lodge should partner with and establish a relationship with an emergency shelter or transitional housing facility specifically for veterans. The Lodge would support the shelter and the veterans by doing activities such as maintenance projects, monthly dinners, or holding regular social events.

Slide 19: Lodges can also choose the Hunger and Essential Needs Assistance project plan with the Spotlight Grant. This could look like producing active projects designed to alleviate food and essential needs insecurity in their communities, like delivering meals, starting a garden, teaching cooking classes, providing diapers and formula to pregnancy centers, creating hygiene bags for individuals experiencing homelessness, or building Little Free Pantries around the community. The possibilities are plentiful, and we have many resources on our website to help

Holiday food baskets are approved as hunger relief projects under the Spotlight Grant, but please keep in mind that we will ask your Lodge to provide relief as soon as it is able, instead of waiting for the holidays. After all, hunger exists all year round.

Slide 20: You may be wondering what we consider essential needs. Essential needs include items crucial to maintaining basic health, hygiene, and well-being, like hygiene products, cleaning supplies, tents and sleeping bags, diapers, and winter clothing. Items like sports equipment, decorations, luxury goods, or electronics would not qualify.

Slide 21: Lodges are also able to merge the Spotlight Grant with the Beacon Grant to increase the Beacon Grant project to \$6,500. Your Lodge can merge the Spotlight Grant

with the Beacon Grant on the Grants Dashboard, where you can apply for grants. There will be a green button at the top that says “Merge Spotlight + Beacon.” Please keep in mind that this process cannot be undone, and merged projects will take the guidelines of a Beacon Grant.

Slide 22: Tempe, Ariz., Lodge No. 2251 used last year’s Spotlight Grant for a Hunger and Essential Needs Assistance project. The Lodge provided bedding, linens, hygiene products, and kitchen supplies to people transitioning from homelessness into permanent housing, with seven Elks spending more than 40 hours serving and connecting with eight individuals.

Slide 23: You may be thinking, “what about the Impact Grant?” When the Impact Grant component was introduced in 2008, with just two grants totaling \$800, we hoped to provide substantial funding of up to \$10,000 to Lodges looking to make visible, meaningful impacts in their communities. That vision has been realized in spades. As the investment in *every* Lodge continues to grow, and with Beacon, Gratitude, and Spotlight Grants now totaling up to \$11,500, the “smaller” grants have afforded Lodges the opportunity to make large-scale impacts in their communities. As a result, we will no longer offer new Impact Grants. We remain committed to Impact Grant renewal projects.

Slide 24: Between the Beacon and Spotlight Grants, you may have noticed that we are moving away from direct donations to other organizations in favor of active, Lodge-led projects. In response to the pandemic, we temporarily expanded grant guidelines to allow Lodges to use grant funds as donations to organizations providing immediate essential needs assistance. Communities were facing extraordinary challenges, and we wanted to give Lodges as much flexibility as possible to respond.

As we’ve learned to live with the pandemic, we’re returning to the core purpose of the CIP grants, which is active, Lodge-led service.

There are many wonderful foundations, nonprofits, and government agencies that write checks to other organizations. What makes the Elks different is that we are realizing

Malley's dream by becoming "a mighty army for the service of mankind" through combining financial support with exceptional Elks volunteer service. When Elks members are distributing food boxes, serving meals, building wheelchair ramps, mentoring students, cleaning parks, and organizing community events, you're building relationships not only with the people you serve, but with other members. You're creating opportunities for members to volunteer together, and introducing the community at large to the Elks and showing what our organization stands for. We've seen time and time again that the projects that generate the most excitement attract new members. The projects with the biggest impact are the projects where Elks are actively involved. A strong community is one that knows they can count on the Elks. That doesn't mean Lodges can't partner with other organizations; we encourage partnerships! But the Elks should have a meaningful role in planning, organizing and carrying out the project, just like Malley dreamed.

Slide 25: Now that we know about all the grants, here are the important dates to keep in mind! The deadline for Beacon, Gratitude and Spotlight Grant applications is January 20, 2027. So you have plenty of time to get applications in and approved, but, as always, we recommend submitting sooner rather than later, as projects cannot take place until the application is approved. We've also been experiencing some delays with our post office, with Lodges indicating checks are arriving later than usual, so please submit as soon as possible if your Lodge has a project idea. Beacon, Gratitude and Spotlight Grant projects must be completed by the end of the grant year, which is March 31, 2027.

Slide 26: Once a grant project is completed, the Lodge must submit a Final Report. Final Reports are submitted online and provide an opportunity for Lodges to share the successes of the grant project with the CIP office. Brief descriptions of the project and receipts need to be submitted online, so please be sure you keep all of your receipts throughout the process! Final Reports are due 30 days after the day of project completion, which the Lodge specifies in the grant application. If you need to extend a

project's end date, just let us know and we can extend it for you, so long as the project is in the current grant year.

Slide 27: If the Final Report is not submitted and approved before 60 days, the Lodge will be considered out of compliance and will be barred from applying for additional grants until the Final Report is approved. But, once we get the Final Report approved, your Lodge will be back in compliance and able to apply for grants.

A Lodge can also be designated as out of compliance if CIP funds are misused. In this scenario, the CIP will determine an appropriate period of time before the Lodge is eligible to apply for CIP grants again, based on how severe the misuse of funds is.

Misuse includes if the grant application is not followed. We understand that changes happen to projects after the grant has been approved, but we need to be kept aware of any changes. We're very amenable, so if this happens, just give us a call with any changes, and we'll work with your Lodge to find a solution.

Lastly, Lodges that are late on their Grand Lodge insurance and assessment dues and Property Plus premiums will be designated as out of compliance until the fees are paid. Once a Lodge is back in compliance, you'll be able to apply for grants.

Slide 28: While 88% of Lodges received at least one grant last year, we strive to have 100% of Lodges receive all three grants we offer. The first step to receiving a CIP grant and starting a charitable project is to identify the needs in your community. To have a successful CIP grant, you need to know who you're helping and why. You know your community best—get a group of Lodge members together and start brainstorming!

The first step is to discern what issue your Lodge wants to alleviate. Consider populations in your community with a need your Lodge can help meet, like providing nutritious meals to youth facing food insecurity or helping veterans experiencing homelessness.

Learn more about local issues and best practices for serving by connecting with other community groups and local nonprofits. Research how established charitable organizations are already serving your community. There are websites and search

engines like GreatNonprofits.org, or you can search your county, township, or other local government website to see what programs and services are offered. If you see a service gap, fill it!

Slide 29: With so many grants available, we understand it may be a bit overwhelming to think of projects that will benefit your community. Well, the CIP has made it easy! We have come up with 20 project plans to serve youth, veterans, families that are under-resourced, and people facing food insecurity. You can find all of these project ideas on our website to get inspired and implement into your community.

Some project ideas include hosting healthy eating workshops to teach elementary students about the food-to-table process; collecting and distributing hygiene items and other supplies not covered by food stamps at a local soup kitchen; building wheelchair ramps or making repairs to the homes of local veterans with disabilities; and helping local high school students with resume writing and interview skills and providing interview clothing.

Slide 30: Every CIP grant project needs at least one Elks volunteer to get the job going; and every great CIP grant project harnesses Lodge support. Don't underestimate the power of your Lodge members! You and your Lodge know your community best—get a group of Lodge members together and start brainstorming together! Talk to members and find out what motivates them. Does your Lodge have a large veteran committee? Consider using grants to assist veterans, and you'll have a built-in volunteer base to assist.

Keep your Lodge members up-to-date with grant progress. Whether it's at meetings, in Lodge newsletters, or even informally around the Lodge itself, hearing news of the great, charitable work your Lodge is doing can motivate and inspire Lodge members to get involved. Members want to be involved in Lodges that are doing great things—sometimes asking people individually is the best place to start inspiring them to action.

Slide 31: If the project still needs more volunteers, consider reaching out to Elks scholars in your area to volunteer! We're always looking to expand the Elks family, and scholars are genuinely looking for ways to be involved.

This effort to connect the nationwide network of ENF scholarship recipients with CIP grant projects is called ScholarCIP. There are about 3,600 ENF scholarship recipients currently studying at colleges and universities across the country.

Engaging local scholars to participate will expand the Lodge's connections with a younger generation and the local student body, and give it an extra hand in its efforts. To further strengthen their connection to the #ElksFamily, Legacy scholars must complete an act of service with a Lodge at least three times during their collegiate career. These Elks scholars are looking to get involved, and the partnerships are mutually beneficial!

While there are scholars concentrated at certain universities—such as Notre Dame, Brown University and Clemson University—the schools that scholars attend are as geographically diverse as Lodges. Between the four scholarships offered by the ENF, recipients attend 470 unique institutions nationwide, so chances are there may be a scholar near you!

Sam and our Program Relations Associate Libby Willkomm lead this initiative and reach out to Lodges that may be a good fit for ScholarCIP activity. But, you can always search and contact scholars through our Scholar Database.

Slide 32: Volunteerism is essential to great CIP grant projects, but overworking volunteers can have detrimental effects. Burnout is a common challenge when working on grant projects, and preventing it is crucial for maintaining the well-being and effectiveness of volunteers. To help prevent burnout and keep your Lodge motivated, we have a few tips:

First, set realistic goals. Break large projects into smaller, manageable tasks and prioritize them based on their importance and deadlines. Use planners or digital tools to keep track of deadlines and tasks. This can help volunteers to stay focused and avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Next, take regular breaks. If your Lodge is doing a daylong event, short breaks throughout the day can significantly improve your volunteer's productivity and mental health, and ensure that Lodge members will return as volunteers annually. If possible, have an area for volunteers to take a break, or encourage volunteers to use these breaks to stretch, walk, or engage in something enjoyable, even if it's just for a few minutes.

Seek support from your colleagues. Don't hesitate to ask for help or share your concerns. Collaborating with others can lighten your workload and provide new perspectives—and if you're asking non-Elks, it may be the impetus for membership!

Recognize achievements by celebrating small wins and milestones. Acknowledging the efforts of volunteers will boost morale and motivation. Consider a Volunteer of the Month shoutout in the Lodge newsletter or on social media!

Finally, stay connected by fostering a supportive community among volunteers. Regularly communicate and share updates to keep everyone informed and engaged. Sharing the stories of your Lodge's grant project will inspire members to get involved and stay involved.

Slide 33: If identifying needs in your community is the first step to a grant project; and harnessing Lodge support is second; then promoting your grant project in your community is the next step for grant success. Get the word out there about what great work your Lodge is doing! Partner with local organizations that serve the population you're assisting to identify project participants and garner interest. Reach out to tv stations and newspapers for press coverage. Word-of-mouth will not only help reach

program participants, but it will inspire your community to get involved with the amazing work your Lodge is undertaking.

We also love to help get the word out about your projects! We use photos included on Final Reports by Lodges to post on social media, write features, highlight stories, create visuals, and bolster presentations like this to spread the word of the good deeds done by your Lodges. Take lots of photos of grant activity, and send them over to us! We'd love to feature your Lodge. Some photography tips for useful photos: make sure the lens is clean. There's nothing worse than getting a great shot and then realizing it's completely smudged after the fact. Make sure everyone is in the full shot; don't accidentally crop off someone's head. You can make sure the focal points of the picture are in the middle. And finally, capture the action with candid shots instead of just staged pictures.

Slide 34: The CIP wants to see every Lodge apply for and receive grants, and we have many resources available to your Lodge on our website to help in all aspects of the grant process. Our website is elks.org/cip. We have webpages dedicated to each one of our grants, and written Toolkits for each grant that provide guidelines, project ideas, sample applications and FAQs that you can review. We have a Grant History tool that allows you to look at any Lodge in the Order and the grant projects they have completed. We also have a CIPerstars of the Week page that is updated every week for CIP staff to share stories about Lodges and their exceptional grant projects for you to get some inspiration. We have a page dedicated to the Final Reporting process, with visuals that go over required receipts and how to upload receipts if your Lodge does not have a scanner. We have recorded webinars led by CIP staff that go into detail about each of our grants. There is also the CIP Participation Report, which shows whether your Lodge is in compliance, the Lodge's Gratitude Grant amount, and what grants the Lodge has received in the current year.

Slide 35: All these resources, and more, are available on our website, but the most valuable resource is us, the CIP staff. The CIP staff is available via phone or email. We are here today through Tuesday at the ENF Booth to answer any questions you have,

discuss project plans or even hear of the many successes of current grant projects. We're experts and we'll be able to help solve any issue that arises during the grant process. We are so humbled by the work Elks volunteers do in the field, so please come say hi or take one of our business cards to contact us after Convention.

You can connect with us outside of Convention, too! Each month Sam sends out a newsletter, CIP Club, highlighting great grant projects, providing project inspiration, CIP tips to make grants more accessible, and more.

And of course, post on social media—tag us on Facebook or Instagram, and use the hashtag #ElksAlwaysCare so we can repost!

Slide 36: Last year, the average Lodge received 2.8 grants totaling \$9,580.24. We want every single Lodge to apply for and receive every grant available to them. We have been here for more than 20 years to help Elks build stronger communities, and together, we can, and we do. Thank you for attending the Community Investments Program #ElksAlwaysCare Seminar. I'll now open the floor to any questions.

