

**Neighborhood Improvement Program**  
**NEIGHBORHOOD ENRICHMENT GRANT PROGRAM**  
**FY25-26 GUIDELINES**

\*\* Grant changes are effective beginning Fiscal Year 25/26 (July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026) \*\*

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Richland County Community Planning & Development Neighborhood Improvement Program P.O. Box 192 Columbia, SC, 29202	<a href="mailto:NIP@richlandcountysc.gov">NIP@richlandcountysc.gov</a> Phone: (803) 576-2190 Fax: (803) 576-2182 Website: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/NIPGRANTS">https://tinyurl.com/NIPGRANTS</a>	Richland County Community Planning & Development Neighborhood Improvement Program 2020 Hampton St, Columbia, SC 29204

Please thoroughly read the entire Guidelines before applying.

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## ABOUT

The Neighborhood Enrichment Grant Program (NEGP) was designed to provide neighborhood organizations funding to promote leadership, independence, and overall improvement within communities through enrichment projects. These projects are to improve the quality of life of all residents within the applicant's neighborhood. This is different from the Neighborhood Matching Grant that the Neighborhood Improvement Program has provided over the last several years. Unlike the Neighborhood Matching Grant, the Neighborhood Enrichment Grant Program does not require a match or volunteer hours.

The NEGP is a competitive grant program. Funding is not guaranteed by simply submitting a completed application. NIP will begin accepting applications on **December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024**. The last day to submit applications is **February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025**.

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**Application Period: December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 – February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025.**  
**Applications that are incomplete or late will not be processed for consideration.**

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Grant Training Sessions are available to help prepare applicants for applying to the NEGP. Attendance is recommended, but not required, to aid you in the application process. NIP will host Grant Training Sessions before and during the grant application period. See the "Dates" section for the training session schedule. One-on-one training sessions can be scheduled by contacting NIP staff (see contact info on page 1).

## APPLICANTS

### *Eligible applicants:*

Any neighborhood-based organization located in Richland County (incorporated or unincorporated) is an eligible applicant. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Neighborhood Associations
- Homeowners Associations
- Property Owners Associations
- Other like neighborhood-based associations and related groups

These organizations must be open to anyone that lives in the neighborhood (renters or owners) regardless of race, creed, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, or physical and mental disability and must actively seek membership from everyone in the neighborhood. To be considered an official neighborhood organization, applicants must have: officers (required at minimum of a President, Secretary and Treasurer), established neighborhood boundaries, by laws, a tax identification number, IRS W-9 Form, and bank account dedicated to said organization. New organizations can view the [Neighborhood Plan Workbook Toolkit](#) for guidance with establishing themselves.

### *Ineligible applicants:*

Any group that is **not** a neighborhood-based organization and/or **not** located within Richland County is an ineligible applicant. This includes but is not limited to:

- Churches
- Religious organizations
- Apartment management companies
- Businesses
- Umbrella organizations
- County wide organizations
- College/University Greek Organizations
- Colleges and Universities
- Political groups
- Public agencies

However, ineligible organizations may participate by forming partnerships with a qualified neighborhood organization. For example, two local businesses can partner with a neighborhood organization to host a community festival. The neighborhood organization must be the lead applicant.

In accordance with Council Actions Report, any neighborhood-related entity which does not allow public attendance will be prohibited from receiving any form of funding from Richland County. (effective July 1, 2015)

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**Tip: NIP gives priority to applicants who develop projects that partner with local businesses. If you are unsure of your eligibility, ask NIP staff.**

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## **FUNDING**

Funding tiers are based on median neighborhood income. Low-to-moderate income areas include those where 50% of residents within a block group are considered low-income. Two funding tiers are available: Tier 1 and Tier 2. Tier 1 funding is for neighborhood organizations that live *outside* low-to-moderate income areas. Their funding is maxed at \$1,500 per fiscal year. Tier 2 funding is for neighborhood organizations that live *within* low-to-moderate income areas. Their funding is maxed at \$2,500 per fiscal year. If a neighborhood comprises multiple block groups, the criterion is satisfied if at least one of the block groups meets the above standard. See the online interactive [Tier Funding Map](#) for reference. The Tier Funding Map is updated every Fiscal Year.

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**Tip: To be considered for Tier 2 funding, at least 25% of the area within the neighborhood organization's boundary must be blue. Anywhere outside of the blue is considered Tier 1.**

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Grant funds are issued as upfront payment (per County Council's directive on December 6, 2011) or as a reimbursement. After being approved and notified of their award, Grantees will submit the signed Grant Agreement & Check Request Form to NIP staff to start the funding process. Staff will then send the award amount to Richland County Finance for processing. Allow thirty (30) business days to process the check request. The last day to submit the signed Grant Agreement & Check Request Form is **September 30<sup>th</sup> 2025**. Grantees will be notified when their check is available and will be provided instructions on how to pick up

their check. Checks will not be mailed. Funding can only be spent on eligible expenses starting after July 1, which is the start of the fiscal year. See “Ineligible Projects and Expenses” for more information.

## PROJECTS

Projects are meant to improve, enrich, or benefit an entire neighborhood. Projects must cater to a neighborhood and its residents, involve neighborhood residents directly in all phases, comply with applicable Federal, State, County, and, where applicable, municipal codes, and be achievable within the Fiscal Year (**July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025 - June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026**). Projects that include printed materials (flyers, posters, etc.) must include the Neighborhood Improvement Program logo and Community Planning & Development Logo. JPEG and PNG versions of the logos are available on NIP’s [NEGP Webpage](#). Before determining a project, consider the following:

### Do I have a clear vision?

Communicate with your neighbors to identify a need and a project to solve that need. Check [RCGIS](#) to see if your project is within a neighborhood improvement area. If so, find your correlating [Master Plan](#) and review it for ideas on projects that would benefit your community.

### How will I measure the success of my project(s) outcome?

When planning a project, it is important to determine what will make the project successful and identify any obstacles that might arise. Speak with your neighbors or have a brainstorming session.

### Does the project require permits/permissions?

Applicants should check with appropriate government entities to ensure they receive necessary permissions and/or permits to put on a project. For example, projects relating to signage will need permits from Richland County Zoning Department. Contact NIP staff for additional help.

### What organizations are available to partner with?

To enhance your projects, partner with local non-profit or government agencies where appropriate to provide enrichment for neighborhood residents. Priority is given to applicants who choose to do so. Some examples of groups to partner with include:

- United Way
- Richland Library
- Voter Registration
- Healthy food organizations
- Palmetto Pride
- Personal budgeting organizations
- Job placement
- Home rehab & repair

There are many other groups not listed here. Contact NIP staff for additional help.

### What other grant programs are available for additional funding?

Applicants are encouraged to apply for additional grants, if needed. For more funding options, visit <http://www.richlandcountysc.gov/Government/Departments/Grants>

### *Project Categories:*

Project categories are themes on which to base your project. Determining the category for a project beforehand will help make planning for your projects easier. It is recommended that you speak with NIP Staff with any questions or for assistance. Projects should fit into one or more of four project categories: *Neighborhood Beautification, Community Engagement, Safety & Health, and Leisure.* Note that project categories may have some overlap for individual projects. See a list of project examples below.

#### *Neighborhood Beautification: Projects that improve the overall aesthetic of the neighborhood*

- Neighborhood Signs
- Neighborhood Bulletin Board
- Banners/flags in public areas
- Placemaking markers/monuments
- Park repairs\*\*
- Neighborhood Clean-up
- Lighting improvements
- Bush/Flower Planting\*

#### *Community Engagement: Projects that bring the community together*

- Neighborhood Clean-Up Day
- Generational Day
- Community Resource Fair
- Back to School Drive
- Membership Drive
- Newsletters & Websites
- After School Programs (*tutoring, cultural arts, etc.*)
- Community Gardens

#### *Safety & Health: Projects that improve the safety and health of everyone in the neighborhood*

- Safety Fair
- Surveillance Cameras
- Trash Cans/Pet Poop Trash Cans
- Community Resource Fair
- Gates/Locks
- 5K marathon
- Lighting improvements
- Emergency preparedness giveaway
- Updating playground equipment
- Defense classes
- Clean Ups
- Community Gardens
- Traffic calming methods (*i.e. 'Children at Play' signs, etc.*)

#### *Leisure: Projects that are just for fun*

- National Night Out
- Festivals
- Outdoor/Drive In Movie Event
- Picnic in the Park
- Family Fun Day
- Block Parties
- Little Free Library

Considerations for specific project types:

\*Plants cannot be more than 4 feet tall at maturity

\*\*Park must not be owned by City of Columbia

### *Ineligible Projects & Expenses*

Richland County prohibits Grantees to use county funds for the following:

- Major infrastructure improvements (*i.e. sidewalk improvements*)
- Property purchases
- Travel and travel expenses
- Personal equipment (*computers, lawn mowers, etc.*)
- Alcohol, weapons or drugs
- Awards/gift cards/coupons/prizes/raffles
- Consulting, workshop, and speaker fees
- Operating expenses (*rent, utilities, insurance, etc.*)
- Fundraising or scholarships
- Equipment for businesses, schools, or government departments
- Funding towards savings accounts
- City of Columbia property
- Funding towards schools, public agencies, and other non-profits
- Expenses incurred prior to the grant award date
- Salaries/honorariums
- Mailboxes
- Reoccurring maintenance expenses
- Home repairs for personal property
- Plants more than 4 feet tall at maturity

### **SCORING CRITERIA**

The Review Committee, a group of County employees, uses the below Scoring Criteria to evaluate the quality of applications. Projects are evaluated at a 100-point scale with an opportunity to earn up to 15 bonus points. Staff will review each project based on its impact and need, budget accuracy and reasonableness, neighborhood participation, and preparation. Keep this in mind when planning your project. A score of at least **70** will allow for an approval, while a score of 69 or less leads to denial. Only approved projects are able to move forward with the grant process. Denied projects shall not be funded with NEGP funds.

Scoring Criteria		Points
Impact and Need	Project's ability to provide a substantial and lasting neighborhood benefit. Project addresses a recognized problem or identified need.	25
Budget Accuracy and Reasonableness	Detail and reasonableness of budget.	25
Neighborhood Participation	Planning and implementation show evidence of broad-based neighborhood participation. Proof of neighborhood wide discussion in regards to the project.	25
Preparation	Clarity and realism of project. Explanation of how the project can be maintained or continued.	25
Bonus points	<i>Does this project target an underserved population?</i>	5
	<i>Does this project involve collaborating with local businesses?</i>	5
	<i>Does this project involve collaborating, with local non-profits or government agencies?</i>	5



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**Under our county guidelines, any single item costing \$1,500 or more requires having 3 quotes submitted to compare pricing. Additionally, if you are purchasing multiple units of the same item that together total \$1,500 or more, 3 quotes are also required.**

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## PROCESS

### *Application Phase – Funding Opportunity Announcement & Application Submittal.*

1. Review the Grant Guidelines.
2. Check if your organization is eligible in the grant guidelines.
3. Check if your organization is Tier 1 or Tier 2 in the [Tier Funding Map](#).
4. Speak with your neighbors to decide on projects.
  - a. **Tip: Download the NextDoor app to help determine neighborhood boundaries, engage in community affairs, and stay up to date about crime in your area.**
  - b. **Tip: Keep attendance and meeting minutes spent brainstorming project ideas to attach to the application. This ensures a better chance of being approved.**
5. Check if your projects are eligible in grant guidelines.
6. Determine project dates.
  - a. Project dates should fall within Fiscal Year 2025-2026 (**July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025-June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026**)
  - b. **Tip: Applicants should plan their project dates 30 days after the start of the fiscal year if they require an upfront payment.**
7. Determine project budget.
8. Get needed permissions/permits.
  - a. Call NIP Staff for assistance.
9. Complete the application with necessary attachments.
  - a. See “How to Apply” section for a list of attachments.
10. Create a copy of your application for your documentation.
11. Double-check your application for accuracy. Once you submit your application, it cannot be edited.
  - a. Your application will not be reviewed by the Review Committee until February 2025.
  - b. **Tip: Applicants can schedule a Quick Application Check with NIP before submitting. This Quick Application Check involves NIP Staff checking to make sure your application is complete. This is not an application review.**
12. Submit your application.
13. Wait for an email confirmation from NIP staff.
  - a. If NIP does not respond within 3 business days, we did not receive your application.

### *Award Phase – Review, Award Decisions & Requesting Checks*

1. NIP will conduct a Quick Application Check. This process involves reviewing the completion, eligibility, and accuracy of the application--not the quality. Applications that are missing information or report inaccurate information will be denied.
2. NIP and other County staff will form the Review Committee, (non-biased, qualified staff members) to review the quality of your application. Reviewing the quality of an application includes approving or



denying the application based on the score tallied in the Score Criteria. Members of the Review Committee will record their individual scores. All scores are then averaged to be the project's final score.

3. Council Review – Council will get the final say on awarding/denying applicants. Council will notify NIP of their decisions in Spring/Summer 2025.
4. Wait for Award Packet or Denial Letter
  - a. NIP Staff will contact the designated applicant contact person to inform them of their awarded/denied status (by email/mail-out) by **July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025**.
  - b. Award Packet includes: Award Letter, Grant Agreement & Check Request Form, Expenditure Form, and Post Implementation Review (optional)
  - c. Denial Letters will include the reason why the applicant was not awarded. Applicants that are denied are encouraged to apply next fiscal year.
5. Grant Agreement & Check Request Form
  - a. Grantee will thoroughly read and sign the Grant Agreement & Check Request Form
  - b. Submit the form to NIP Staff between July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025 and September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025.
    - i. Direct deposit is not available for this grant.
  - c. Allow up to 30 business days for your check request to process. If you do not receive a notice of your check within 30 business days, contact NIP Staff.
6. Pick up check
  - a. NIP Staff will notify the Grantee when the check is ready to be picked up.
    - i. Checks cannot be mailed.
    - ii. Checks will be picked up at the Planning & Development counter on the 1<sup>st</sup> Floor of 2020 Hampton Street.

#### *Grant Closeout Procedures -- Implementation, Reporting & Closeout*

1. Implement your project(s).
2. Spend funds on eligible expenses.
  - a. Review the "Projects" section for information on eligible expenses. If you have questions, call NIP staff.
3. Prepare and submit Grant Closeout Report.
  - a. Grantees must provide NIP staff with proof that the grant funds were used as specified through the Grant Closeout report. The Grant Closeout Report includes receipts, project proof, expenditure form, and Post-Implementation Review (optional)
    - i. Receipts
      1. Keep all receipts of items that were used with NEGP funds.
      2. If you have NEGP funds left over, return the money via check. Checks should be made to the Richland County Finance Department and given to NIP Staff. Last day to return the money is **June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026**.
      3. Grantees that have funds that have not been spent and not returned will be ineligible for future funding.



4. Receipts must be dated between the time at which the grantee has been awarded to the last day of the Fiscal Year (**June 30<sup>th</sup> 2026**)
- ii. Project proof
  1. This can include at least one or more of the following: pictures, flyers, or sign in sheets. Receipts do not count as project proof.
- iii. Expenditure Form
  1. This form contains a list off all expenditures spent with NEGP funds.
- iv. Post-implementation review (optional)
  1. A Post-Implementation Review is optional. A Post-Implementation Review provides your organization and NIP Staff with a written report documenting the success, failures, and maintenance plans for your project(s).
- b. Grantees will be required to submit a Grant Closeout Report to be eligible to apply in the future. Grantees that do not provide this will not be eligible for future NEGP funding until the required documentation is provided to NIP Staff. Final day to submit Grant Closeout Report is **June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026**.

## SPECIAL SCENARIOS

If, for any reason, the Grantee decides not to use NEGP funds, they must submit a Termination of Grant Letter to NIP stating their decision to decline grant funding, provide reasoning, and return the funds. Failure to do so will result in the organization to be ineligible for future NEGP funding, until funding is returned.

- If the Grantee does not submit a Grant Agreement & Check Request Form by the deadline, the Grantee must submit a Termination of Grant letter.
- If the Grantee receives their check, but decides not to go through with their project(s), the Grantee must submit a Termination of Grant letter and return all NEGP award funds to NIP Staff via check by the deadline. Check must be made to Richland County Finance Department.
- If the Grantee receives their check, but spends partial NEGP award funds, the Grantee must submit a Termination of Grant letter and return remaining awarded grant funds to NIP Staff via check by the deadline. Check must be made to Richland County Finance Department. Grant Closeout Report is still required.
- If the Grantee has used NEGP award funds on ineligible expenses, they must refund the amount spent on said expenses to NIP Staff via check by the deadline. Check must be made to Richland County Finance Department.
- If the Grantee has broken rules as outlined in the NEGP Guidelines and Grant Agreement & Check Request Form, the grantee's organization will be unable to apply for funding in the future. Certain situations can allow the organization to receive funding again. This can include and is not limited to:
  - New organization board members
  - The passing of the original Applicant

Contact Neighborhood Improvement Program Staff at (803) 576-2190 for any questions or concerns.

## DATES & DEADLINES

- Grant announcement: November, 2024
- Grant Training Sessions: 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room, 2020 Hampton St. Richland County Administration
  - Nov. 14th
    - 10am – 11:30am
    - 2pm – 3:30pm
  - Dec. 12th
    - 10am – 11:30am
    - 6pm – 7:30pm
  - Jan. 9th
    - 2pm – 3:30pm
    - 6pm – 7:30pm
  - Jan. 16th
    - 2pm – 3:30pm
    - 6pm – 7:30pm
- Grant application submittal period: December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 – February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025
- Review Process: February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025 – June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025
- Grant Award/Denial Notice: July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025
- Submit Grant Agreement & Check Request Form: July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025 – September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025
- Last Day to return funds & Termination Letter (if necessary) – June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026
- Last day to submit Grant Closeout Report: June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026

## HOW TO APPLY

Applications are preferred to be sent via email to [NIP@richlandcountysc.gov](mailto:NIP@richlandcountysc.gov). Other options are fax, mail, and in-person drop off. Mail received **after February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025** will be considered late and will be denied. Only one application per organization will be considered. NEGP applications are available here:

Website | <http://www.richlandcountysc.gov/Government/Departments/Planning-Development/Neighborhood-Planning/Grants>

Email | [NIP@richlandcountysc.gov](mailto:NIP@richlandcountysc.gov)

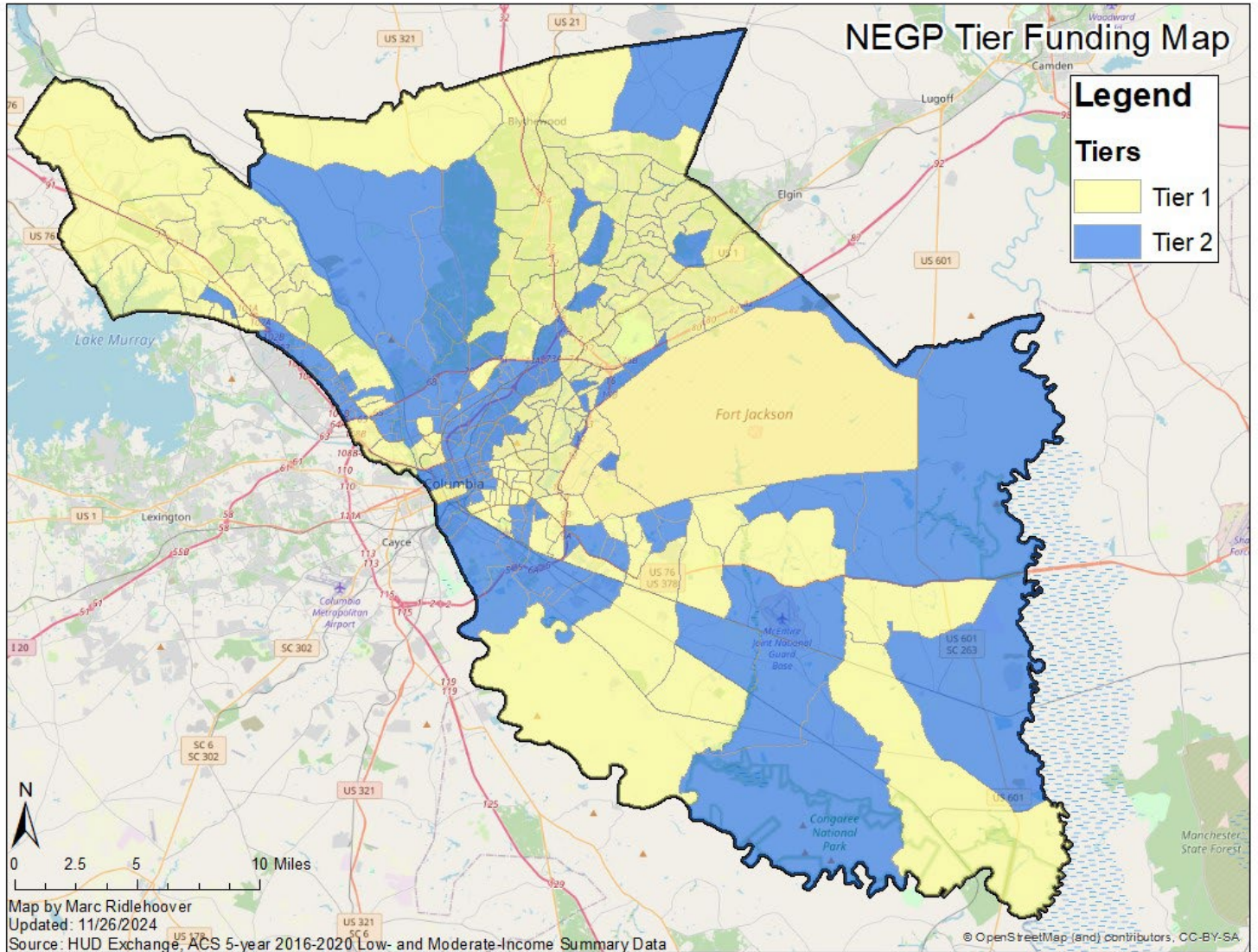
### You will need the following documents to attach to your application:

- Official vendor quote/estimate for every proposed project expense
  - Must include vendor letterhead
  - Online quotes accepted with vendor name
  - Quotes must be no more than 30 days old
- Copy of most recent neighborhood organization's bank statement
- By-Laws of your neighborhood organization
- Completed IRS W-9 Form (latest version)
- Necessary permissions/permits (if applicable)
- Organization meeting minutes (recommended)
- Map of neighborhood boundaries (recommended)

# APPENDIX

## Tier Funding Map

The interactive map can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/TIERMAPNEGP>





# PLANNING SERVICES

Community Planning & Development