



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

a grantmaking publication of the Community Foundation of Abilene



SPRING 2026 COMMUNITY GRANT CYCLE

Cover photo courtesy of *The Mentoring Alliance*.



Grant Distribution Committee:

- Sue Schackmuth, *Committee Chair*
- Melody Hunt
- Kelly Cannon
- Omar Ortiz
- Eric Emerson
- Dottie Preston
- Jason Hall
- Gustavo Villanueva
- Shea Hall
- Liz Wagstaff
- Jay Hardaway
- Noreen White

Community Foundation Staff:

- Katie Alford, *President/CEO*
- Emerald Cassidy, *Marketing & Communications Director*
- Misti Collier, *Donor Relations Director*
- Patrick Lewis, *Chief Financial Officer*
- Kassidy Nygaard, *Grants Director*
- Michelle Parrish, *Chief Impact Officer*
- Dru Pruitt, *Finance Administrator*
- Barbara Richert, *Office Manager*
- Jennifer Weber, *Scholarships Director*
- Raegan Yeager, *Program Associate*

The generosity and compassion of Abilenians is truly remarkable!

In this issue of Community Connections, you'll find spring grant requests from local nonprofits, carefully reviewed by the grant committee. We invite you to consider a donation to support the organizations that serve our community and speak to your heart.

Thank you for believing in the power of collective giving.

Sue Schackmuth,
Grants Committee Chair



Contact the Foundation:

✉ cfa@cfabilene.org
☎ 325-676-3883

📍 850 N 1st St, Abilene, TX 79601
📦 PO Box 1001, Abilene, TX 79604

NONPROFIT GRANT APPLICANTS

Grant Requests & Summaries

CURRENT NEED

\$12,000
2026 C.A.L.F.

Abilene Arts Alliance

The 14th annual Children's Art & Literacy Festival will celebrate the art of Winnie-the-Pooh. E.H. Shepard's illustrations of Winnie-the-Pooh and his friends are some of the most iconic, beloved storybook characters of all time. Key elements of the four-day festival include dramatic readings, art activities, workshops and performances, all geared to instill a love of reading. Funding will support interactive entertainment throughout the event, to engage all the senses and inspire children's literacy and creativity.

CURRENT NEED

\$7,500
The Center for Theater Education

Abilene Community Theatre

ACT's mission is to educate, entertain, and engage the community through the performing arts, on the belief that access to high-quality performing arts experiences is essential for community engagement and cultural enrichment. Through this initiative, ACT aims to provide theater education opportunities to traditionally underserved populations. This will include workshops, classes, and performance experiences designed to engage youth and adults in the theater arts.

CURRENT NEED

\$5,000
Program support

Abilene Home Away from Home

Abilene Home Away from Home provides new Airmen an avenue to form community friendships and gather support beyond the work environment. The program offers Abilene community members a rewarding opportunity to host young Airmen in a family environment through monthly activities. Their events also encourage community involvement and support local businesses. A grant will assist in funding operational costs of the program.

CURRENT NEED

\$10,000

Increasing access to healthy homes for vulnerable students

Abilene Independent School District

This project through Abilene ISD supports public health by providing low-income students and families with immediate pest control services to maintain a healthy home and prevent a public health crisis at school. Most notably, the substantial cost of bed bug removal is one that many families cannot afford, and there are no other community resources for this assistance. Grant funds are utilized to pay pest removal companies directly and will aid in the prevention of more widespread outbreaks of highly transmittable pests.

CURRENT NEED

\$9,500

Direct support for high-risk families

Abilene Youth and Family Services Network *through New Horizons Ranch and Center*

This network has developed over the past two years with the goal of unifying organizations that serve youth and families, reducing redundancy, and enhancing collaboration to better serve clients, many of whom face significant barriers. Participating agencies include New Horizons, WTHN, Betty Hardwick, BCFS, Youth Voice, Serenity House, and more. Funding will address gaps for vulnerable families identified by network providers, including driver's education, housing deposits and repairs for high-risk families, and other critical needs.

CURRENT NEED

\$50,000

Capital request: "A Bold Adventure: Wild Encounters & Ferocious Eats"

Abilene Zoological Society

The Abilene Zoo is embarking on its largest expansion project since its inception in 1919: "A Bold Adventure," a four-phase capital project that will develop 22 new acres to expand conservation, education and community engagement. This funding request supports Phase 1: Wild Encounters & Ferocious Eats, breaking ground in spring 2026, which will introduce multiple new species, an educational amphitheater, a community stage and event lawn, a two-story cafe and a repurposed C-130 aircraft.

CURRENT NEED

\$19,000

Food pantry support

All For One Missions (AFOM)

AFOM's food pantry addresses critical food insecurity in Abilene's Alameda neighborhood, one of the city's most economically distressed areas, where many households struggle to meet basic needs. The pantry serves more than 100 individuals each week through a model that promotes dignity, nutrition, and client choice. Funding will ensure consistent access to nutritious food while allowing the pantry to continue providing compassionate, faith-centered support to vulnerable families, seniors and at-risk youth.

CURRENT NEED

\$22,000

Animal medical care and wellness

All Kind Animal Initiative

All Kind's mission is to improve animal welfare through community resources, education and shelter care. Formed in 2021 to address Abilene's animal welfare crisis, they recently constructed a state-of-the-art Pet Adoption and Resource Center to serve the community in partnership with the City of Abilene. Funds will provide animal medical care and life-saving efforts, as well as propel efforts to reduce animal overpopulation in Abilene.

CURRENT NEED

\$5,000

Child care program support for holiday camps

Alliance for Women & Children

The Alliance for Women and Children seeks funding to support scholarships for holiday camps, which provide care for children and relief for working families during school holiday breaks. The camps combine structure and fun, engaging children in hands-on STEM learning, arts and crafts, and recreational play in a nurturing environment. With an expected attendance of more than 100 children per session, the program addresses a critical local child care gap, particularly for families classified as working poor.

CURRENT NEED

\$20,000

Home fire relief program

American Red Cross (ARC)

The local ARC is a vital component of disaster response and relief. Their Home Fire Relief program helps stabilize fire survivors in crisis, prevent temporary homelessness and financial insolvency, reduce family stress, and begin the recovery process. They also deliver critical fire safety prevention tools and information to the Abilene community and install free smoke alarms, helping to avert needless losses. Funds will support programs and provide financial assistance to residents who suffer a house fire.

CURRENT NEED

\$5,000

Fiestas de Mexico

Ballet Folklorico de Alvaro Munoz Academy

"Fiestas de Mexico" Dance production illustrates the history of Mexico through the art of dance, presenting dances from six regions of the country. The production will be held at the Paramount Theatre in September and will feature special guest performances by Abilene Ballet Theatre and award-winning professional Folklorico dancers, as well as authentic mariachi musicians. The goal of the event is to educate Abilene and surrounding communities about the beautiful culture and history of Mexico through the arts.



Photo courtesy of Chorus Abilene.

CURRENT NEED

\$20,000

*Beltway Kids Academy Child Care
Tuition Assistance*

Beltway Ministry Center

Beltway Kids Academy (BKA) is part of Beltway Ministry Center, a nonprofit started in 2024 by Beltway Park Church to address the practical needs of quality child care and counseling in our community. BKA is a licensed, faith-based early childhood education center for children from infancy through 5th grade. Grant funds will support tuition assistance for families on a basis of need through an assistance application process, keeping child care more affordable for families who cannot afford the full tuition rate.

CURRENT NEED

\$5,000

General support

Big Country AA Conference

The Big Country AA Conference is organized annually over Labor Day weekend to provide mentorship, support, and education promoting understanding of 12-step recovery from alcohol addiction. Established in 1985, the conference is in its 41st year in Abilene. Attendees include clients of local and Big Country treatment centers, recovery homes, and AA groups seeking education and mentorship to achieve and maintain sobriety. People who are in a relationship with an alcoholic and want support are also welcome.

CURRENT NEED

\$5,000

Program support

Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) – Big Country Chapter

CEF is a Bible-centered, interdenominational, worldwide organization whose mission is to evangelize children with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They partner with community centers, schools, childcare centers and churches to disciple children and families, with a focus on underserved areas to help build healthier neighborhoods. Since 2023, the Big Country Chapter has launched Good News Clubs at several elementary schools and all four Boys & Girls Clubs in Abilene. They seek funding to support local programming.

CURRENT NEED

\$7,619

Operating support

Chorus Abilene

Chorus Abilene's mission is to promote choral music through performance and participation by singers of all ages and to foster community through the arts. Chorus Abilene promotes choral music and community engagement through performances and various choirs catering to singers of all ages and skill levels. Operational grant funds will be used to support essential day-to-day functions including marketing, technology support, administrative assistance, and more.



CURRENT NEED

\$35,000

Indigent dental care

Community Dental Assistance Program through Christian Service Center of Abilene

Since 2022, the Christian Service Center has partnered with local agencies and dentists to administer this dental program for low-income eligible patients in need of acute dental care. The program aims to improve quality of life by alleviating dental pain and preventing infections, while reducing unnecessary emergency room visits. Funding will aid in meeting their goal of serving 215 patients in 2026 through treatment from partnering local dentists.

CURRENT NEED

\$15,000

Utility and rental assistance program

City Light Community Ministries

City Light, a program of First Baptist Church, aids with basic needs through several programs. They provide meals, showers, and hygiene items to homeless neighbors and additional services through case management, including financial assistance for rent and utilities. Neighbors are eligible once every six months to receive financial assistance with a rent payment or utility bill, paid directly to the service provider. Grant funds will be used for rent and utility assistance.

CURRENT NEED

\$50,000

Child care expansion/acquisition

Day Nursery of Abilene (DNA)

DNA is seeking funds to support the first phase of improvements associated with the potential acquisition of an existing childcare program. This phase will focus on basic cosmetic, functional, and safety modifications to improve efficiency and align the program with organizational standards. These initial updates will establish a strong foundation for a long-term expansion plan over the next two to three years, including the development of a permanent facility addition to increase capacity and services.

CURRENT NEED

\$28,000

Transportation Works program

Disability in Action (DIA)

Disability in Action's Transportation Works program provides rides to individuals with disabilities, promoting independence and addressing barriers like cost and limited assistance. Grant funds will help cover operating costs for their bus which are not covered through government funding. They partner with multiple transportation providers in the community, and the flexibility of this program allows DIA to fill transportation gaps for those with special needs.



Photo courtesy of Food Bank of West Central Texas.

CURRENT NEED

\$16,508

Counseling and case management

FaithWorks of Abilene

The mission of FaithWorks is to help the chronically unemployed acquire the confidence and skills for gainful and long-term employment. They provide a 13-week career development course focused on the whole person. This includes counseling, conflict resolution, recovery education, bible study, and wraparound supports, in addition to job skills. Funding will be used toward counseling services and to support essential needs for program participants and recent graduates.

CURRENT NEED

\$24,000

Increasing volunteerism

Food Bank of West Central Texas

With the Food Bank's expansion nearing completion, they are planning for increased partner agency trainings, food bank tours and events, and volunteer projects that grow collective impact. Volunteer engagement is expected to increase both at the Food Bank and at partner distribution sites. Funding will be used for volunteer supplies and equipment, nutrition education tools, and community engagement resources to safely and effectively engage youth, individual, group, and corporate volunteers.

CURRENT NEED

\$9,825

Caregiver and family support program

Greater than Three Outreach (GT3)

GT3's outreach is a transformative initiative dedicated to fostering community, connection, and empowerment for individuals with spinal cord injuries and limb loss. Their Caregiver Support Program is designed to meet the often-overlooked emotional and practical needs of caregivers. Monthly gatherings will focus on stress reduction, communication, and strategies for maintaining balance between caregiving and personal well-being, through support groups and activities to encourage self-care and peer bonding.

CURRENT NEED

\$13,000

Dream-Makers Professional Development for Teachers

Hardin-Simmons University (HSU)

HSU Irvin School of Education is offering a four-day professional development workshop, Dream-Makers, for area elementary and middle school teachers, with a focus on those who are new or have not completed a traditional teacher prep program. The workshop will focus on training for differentiated instruction for diverse learners, ranging from advanced learners to struggling and Special Education students. Participants will also receive CPE credits for their training.

of West Central Texas



CURRENT NEED

\$9,000

Abilene outreach

Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health

The Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health is housed within Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. The Institute is requesting funding for outreach to young women in 6th through 12th grades. In partnership with various community entities, goals of the initiative include promoting education, self-esteem, and mental health. Funding will allow outreach to a larger population, providing resources and mentorship to enhance future opportunities for these young women.

CURRENT NEED

\$12,500

Autism training workshop and diagnostic testing scholarships

LEAP! Educational Resources

The mission of LEAP Educational Resources is to remove the financial and systemic barriers that prevent children with learning differences from receiving early identification and effective interventions. Funding is requested to support two key initiatives in 2026: a community Autism Workshop designed to equip families and educators with practical strategies to support neurodiverse learners, and an expanded scholarship fund that helps cover the cost of diagnostic testing for students who would otherwise go without it.

CURRENT NEED

\$10,000

Wish granting for Abilene children

Make-A-Wish Foundation

Make-A-Wish West Texas grants wishes for children ages two to 18 who have been diagnosed with critical illnesses, bringing hope and joy to them and their families. Every wish is thoughtfully customized to reflect each child's unique passions and sense of wonder. When a wish must be granted within a specific time frame due to medical reasons, rush wishes are provided. Funding will help support the wish experience for Abilene families, covering items such as gifts, medical accommodations, and travel.

CURRENT NEED

\$20,000

Saturday meal program support

Meals on Wheels, Plus, Inc. (MOW)

Established in 1975, MOW provides a balanced noon meal delivered by trained volunteers Monday through Friday to frail seniors and younger adults with disabilities who are unable to provide balanced meals for themselves. In addition to weekday meals delivered to around 1,600 local clients, MOW provides a weekend frozen meal for 345 higher-need clients, delivered with their weekday lunch. The program focuses on clients living alone in low-income areas in Abilene and surrounding rural Taylor County communities.



Photo courtesy of National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature.

CURRENT NEED

\$9,000

Wylie High School mentoring for at-risk students

Mentors Care

Mentors Care provides one-on-one mentoring through community volunteers at Wylie High School to students who are at risk of not graduating. Mentors address academic and life skills and work on emotional well-being in weekly structured meetings, on-site at the school. A site coordinator connects students with community resources related to housing, food and clothing, medical care, and behavioral health care. Grant funds are requested to cover Wylie program costs.

CURRENT NEED

\$10,000

Food pantry support

Methodist Service Center and Food Pantry

Established in 1954, the organization provides for the food-insecure residents of Taylor County. They provide a week's worth of healthy, fresh food to income-qualified residents once per month. Food-insecure clients include people who have incurred unexpected medical expenses, elderly clients living on a fixed income who are tasked with raising their grandchildren, and people with temporary losses of income. Funds will be used to purchase fresh food.

CURRENT NEED

\$35,000

Samaritan and Kids' Place scholarship funds

Ministry of Counseling & Enrichment (MOCE)

Therapists at the MOCE help meet the growing needs of families in the Abilene area by providing affordable family life resources and licensed therapy services regardless of ability to pay. Grant funds will be used to provide mental health services for low-income and uninsured clients of all ages through the Samaritan and Kids' Place Scholarship Funds. Fees are set according to client income and ability to pay, with these funds offsetting the cost of services.

CURRENT NEED

\$21,000

Creative Connections Art and Literacy program

National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature (NCCIL)

The NCCIL exhibits, tours, collects, preserves, and promotes original art from the finest children's literature, and is dedicated to cultivating a legacy of local artists and fostering a love of reading in children. They offer a range of community engagement and education services to inspire literacy and creativity among children and families, with an emphasis on underserved communities. Grant funds will support these programs, providing free, low-barrier access to fine art and literacy initiatives.



CURRENT NEED

\$35,000

Operating support

Nehemiah Abilene

Nehemiah Abilene is a faith-based, one-year residential recovery program designed to retrieve men from lives plagued by poverty, addiction, crime, and homelessness, and help them rebuild their lives. Operating since 2019, the program provides all services, including shelter, at no cost to the participant. Their recovery approach includes therapies, life-skills, and job readiness training to provide renewal so men can successfully return to their families and communities. Funds will support program operating costs.

CURRENT NEED

\$10,000

Support programs for Abilene's military and veteran families

Operation Homefront

Operation Homefront collaborates with local partners to provide support for Abilene's military and veteran families through programs aimed at assisting vulnerable families during financially stressful periods. The Back-to-School Brigade offers backpacks and school supplies for K-12 students, and Holiday Meals for Military provides meal kits and grocery gift cards at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Grant funding will help provide direct support through these programs, which impacted over 1,400 local individuals last year.

CURRENT NEED

\$9,000

Cleats to Careers: helping vulnerable youth find their trade

Play4More™ Foundation

The Play4More™ Foundation is a soccer-based charity focused on transforming the lives of refugee and at-risk children through play, education, and community engagement. This pilot initiative is designed to equip vulnerable local youth with practical pathways to meaningful careers in the skilled trades through hands-on education sessions, job-shadowing opportunities, and exposure to in-demand career options as well as potential trade program scholarships, reducing financial barriers to long-term success.

CURRENT NEED

\$13,000

Campus beautification and education project

Premier High School of Abilene

This project will transform the school's courtyard into a vibrant garden featuring raised beds with produce, flowers, and a butterfly habitat. This outdoor learning space will support student wellness, reduce stress, and help address local food insecurity by providing fresh produce for school programs and nearby families. Designed in partnership with local universities, the project will offer hands-on educational opportunities in nutrition, ecology, and community stewardship.

CURRENT NEED

\$10,000

*Abilene child and family program***Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services**

The Child and Family Program provides short-term services to families struggling with a crisis such as death, divorce, abuse, or poverty. The program helps families become self-sufficient while ensuring that children can safely remain in the home with their families. Funding will support the salary of the program specialist who visits families in their homes, works with the family to create a service plan, and supports the family as they work towards self-sufficiency.

CURRENT NEED

\$5,000

*Ropes course safety restoration and enhancement***Texas Trails Council – Boy Scouts of America**

Camp Tonkawa's ropes course is a powerful leadership and confidence-building tool for area youth, but several course elements require repair to pass annual inspection and operate safely at full capacity. This grant funding will replace and repair critical components, restoring safe participation for scouts and community groups. Research indicates that challenge ropes courses produce measurable gains in outcomes such as self-efficacy, teamwork, and personal growth, which the camp experience is designed to foster.

CURRENT NEED

\$12,000

*Lending Economic Assistance for Pets (LEAP) program***Texas Veterinary Medical Foundation (TVMF)**

TVMF operates the LEAP program, providing veterinary care to companion animals belonging to Meals on Wheels Plus clients at no cost. Their goal is to enrich and prolong both human and animal lives by maintaining health and quality of life for pets of vulnerable seniors. In turn, companion pets alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression, assist in healthy aging, encourage mobility, and motivate purposeful livelihoods for their caregivers. Grant funds will be used to cover vet expenses.

CURRENT NEED

\$20,000

*Summer camps and after-school programs***The Mentoring Alliance**

The Mentoring Alliance provides summer camps and after-school programs in Abilene that offer safe, structured, and enriching environments for elementary children. Serving primarily students from low-income families, they partner with schools and community organizations to meet critical needs when school is not in session. Programs support academic growth, social-emotional development, and positive relationships. Funding will help sustain high-quality programming and expand local access for families.

CURRENT NEED

\$10,000

*Meet and make for senior adults***The Old Jail Art Center (OJAC)**

OJAC's Meet & Make is an outreach initiative developed to bring meaningful, hands-on art experiences directly to senior adults in care facilities in Abilene, Texas. This program serves individuals who often have limited access to group programming, increasing issues such as feelings of isolation and limited physical and mental activity. Meet & Make offers participants the opportunity to express themselves through art by connecting with others.

CURRENT NEED

\$19,000

*Support for feeding and housing programs***The Salvation Army**

The Salvation Army emergency shelter provides safe beds, hot meals, caseworkers, daily living skills classes, mental and physical health resources, and a guided pathway to sustainable living in their own home to individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness, or at-risk of experiencing homelessness. The Abilene shelter has 75 beds. This grant would provide a bed and two hot meals per day at full shelter capacity for two weeks.

CURRENT NEED

\$10,000

*MESSH training support***United Rescue Alliance (URA)**

Founded in 2014, URA is a local nonprofit dedicated to equipping communities with tools, training, and trauma-informed care to face emergencies and recover. Part of URA's mission focuses on training leaders in emergency management for disaster response and community empowerment, through their mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health (MESSH) training program. The program emphasizes preparedness and whole-person health. This grant request would support the program framework to train additional volunteers.

CURRENT NEED

\$35,000

*Prevention and diversion program***West Texas Homeless Network (WTHN)**

WTHN is a coalition of local organizations working to prevent and end homelessness in Abilene. The prevention and diversion program is a proven strategy for keeping people from falling into homelessness by connecting them with wrap-around social services and financial assistance to help them stay and/or return to permanent housing. WTHN community partners can utilize these funds to solve situations and prevent putting additional strain on the homeless crisis system.



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION
of ABILENE

PO BOX 1001 • ABILENE, TEXAS 79604

NON-PROFIT
ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
ABILENE, TX
PERMIT NO. 18

2026 Abilene Gives

Join us in celebrating a decade of philanthropy!



abilenegives.org | Tuesday, May 5

Fundholders, the 10th and final Abilene Gives will be held Tuesday, May 5 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Abilene Gives has been a success because of donors like you! Before the giving day, you will receive a few reminders and event invitations.

- Invitation to attend our finale watch party at Frontier Texas!
- Personalized letter with your fund balance, including details on how you can designate grants or “Matching” gifts to nonprofits.

If you would like to walk through giving day options, call the Foundation at 325-676-3883 to visit with Katie Alford, *President/CEO* (cfa@cfabilene.org) or Misti Collier, *donor relations director* (mcollier@cfabilene.org).