

2025 CALL FOR PROPOSALS

TEXT-ONLY VERSION

Shared Voices: Charting a Course for Community Action

01 INTRODUCTION

Sasaki Foundation

Our mission is equity in design. Our Design Grants fund community experts to create design solutions for challenges in their neighborhoods.

Call for Proposals

Do you have ideas about community building and wellbeing, housing or transit inequities, or climate change? Is your project in Greater Boston or the Gateway Cities? Apply for a Design Grant today!

The deadline to apply is April 24, 2025, at noon.

See our most recent Design Grants winners here: <https://www.sasakifoundation.org/2024-design-grants-winners/>

Already familiar with the call, criteria, and guidelines? Jump straight to the application: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/8175098/2025-Call-for-Proposals-Application>

02 WE NEED YOU

Are you a neighborhood expert? Creative? Designer? Storyteller? Artist? Community leader? Nonprofit organization? Activist? Community organizer? Data scientist? Urban planner?

03 GRANTS

Grants

We will award up to 3 grants of \$17,500 each to winning teams. Grants also include access to design experts.

Funding

Grant funding provides you with capacity to design the framework of your solution. Your grant work should move your project towards implementation. The Design Grants are not intended to provide operational or capital funding. To support your efforts, grants also include access to design experts at Sasaki, a world-renowned design firm.

Note: for teams that include a student member, additional funding may be available to provide a separate student stipend through state and city workforce grants.

Selection Process

Finalist teams will present their project ideas in person at Pitch Night, a public event.

A jury at Pitch Night will make recommendations to the Hideo Sasaki Foundation Board of Trustees, who will decide on funding. The audience will include other funders and design firms interested in providing pro bono consultation and/or design work. All finalist teams will receive an honorarium for their time at Pitch Night. Finalists also gain exposure to other potential project supporters.

Grant Expectations

Winning teams will spend 10 months working on their proposed projects.

- You will lead your project and identify key deliverables, like conceptual drawings, where volunteer designers will provide advice and supplement your work to advance your project.
- You will gain access to monthly programming to hear from design experts on relevant topics.
- You will build connections through the Sasaki Foundation's network.
- You will co-learn with your peers in the Design Grants cohort.
- You will deliver the following:
 - **Project work plan**, including planned hours and specific actionable deliverables (like research, community engagement, design creation, pilot testing, or installations)
 - **Final report**, including photos and visuals, to share as open source on our website and in the annual research publication
 - **Final presentation**

04 THEME AND FOCUS AREAS

The Call for Proposals—Shared Voices: Charting a Course for Community Action

The challenges in addressing environmental resilience, displacement, affordable housing, access to mobility choices, meaningful public engagement, and other social equity considerations in planning and design are so broad and complex, they require a shared approach to facilitate all the necessary conversations and deliver solutions. Most of these challenges faced by Massachusetts communities are not limited to local neighborhoods—their effects are felt and shared across the Commonwealth and beyond. Multiple futures are at stake, and we can make a difference by acting now.

The Hideo Sasaki Foundation recognizes the need for interdisciplinary approaches, diverse community voices, and regional cooperation as key drivers to find shared solutions and create shared impact.

1: Creative Community Building

We seek themes of collective memory and community storytelling, investment in historic neighborhood fabric, and local business development. Designing and planning for our communities can extend beyond the concept of placemaking to include the idea of placekeeping—the preservation of local identity through strengthening social bonds, celebrating neighborhood history, and developing strategies for enhancing neighborhoods.

- How can we preserve a community's cultural identity while improving its social and economic wellbeing?
- How can storytelling bridge racial divides in neighborhoods damaged by past design decisions?
- How can we build local capacity for economic development and promote local entrepreneurship?
- How can we leverage technology to give power over design to marginalized voices? What tools can we create for better and more equitable decision making?

2: New Models for Housing

We seek strategies to improve housing affordability, promote a more diverse housing stock, and address gentrification and displacement. Housing shortages in Massachusetts cities require innovative approaches to planning and design. Displacement of families, caused by economic and environmental forces, is exacerbated by the limited supply of affordable, family-oriented housing units.

- How can we provide better access to affordable housing for more people?
- How can we strengthen community networks as displacement increases?
- How can cities respond to increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness?

3: Innovation in Transit and Access to Mobility Choices

We seek design solutions for challenges to our transportation systems. Strengthening public-private partnerships, expanding transportation choices, bringing safety to the forefront, and leveraging technology can provide a more accessible and functional transportation system. In Massachusetts, local mobility networks and regional systems have tremendous potential to improve accessibility, equity, and safety for users.

- How can we increase mobility choices and access in our communities?

- How can we ensure that our transportation system is equitable, especially for people of color and low-income neighbors?
- How can we create a safer transportation system?
- How can better access to technology improve mobility?
- How can we progress accessibility and disability rights in the design of our cities?

4: Innovation in Health and Wellbeing

We seek efforts to enhance community health through the built environment. Equitable access to outdoor spaces, creative reuse of the public realm, and innovative and inclusive programming are integral to our collective community health. Codesigning innovative solutions to challenges within our built environment can begin to positively affect our physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing in cities across Massachusetts.

- How can we expand access to open space and the public realm to allow for greater health and wellness?
- How can we increase access to health and wellness opportunities?
- How can we co-create community spaces that improve our physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing?

5: Proactive Approaches to Climate Adaptation

We seek responses that address the impacts of climate change, including extreme heat, stormwater, flash flooding, and coastal and river flooding. Challenges associated with climate change, especially related to the urban heat island effect and flooding, disproportionately impact communities of color and low-income communities.

- What is a collaborative approach to mitigate and prepare for the impacts of climate change?
- What can we do to increase climate resilience in a community, and can it scale to greater impact?
- How can we empower communities to advocate for environmental justice?
- How can we provide a just transition as communities adapt to extreme weather?

6: New Uses for AI in Design

We seek strategies for utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) responsibly and effectively in the pursuit of community-led design solutions. The integration of AI in the design industry has raised several concerns, spanning the ethical, practical, and social, but also offers immense opportunity.

- How can we use AI to enhance community involvement and engagement in planning processes?
- How can we develop AI ethically to ensure algorithms are fair, unbiased, and inclusive?
- How can we amplify decision-making processes and make regulatory frameworks clear and equitable?

05 TYPES OF PROJECTS

Types of projects the foundation will fund:

- Community toolkits
- Advocacy campaigns
- Place-based interventions
- Community design processes
- Data collection and analysis
- Digital tools
- Groundbreaking community programs
- Art installations
- Innovative prototypes
- Neighborhood dialogues

06 EVALUATION CRITERIA

1. Design

We seek proposals that use interdisciplinary thinking to challenge the status quo. We support design ideas that engage and contribute to communities. Winning projects will have creative yet actionable ideas.

2. Equity

We seek proposals that benefit historically underrepresented communities by targeting systemic barriers. Winning projects will collaborate deeply with a community to meet its unique needs.

3. Inclusion

We value diverse perspectives. We seek to find inclusive processes that make space for dialogue and difference. We encourage proposals from women; transgender, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming individuals; members of racial or ethnic minorities; and individuals with physical and/or intellectual disabilities.

4. Innovation

We seek proposals that foster innovation, creativity, and interdisciplinary approaches to design. Winning projects will include forward-thinking, rather than reactive, concepts and ideas.

5. Impact

We seek proposals that can produce positive impacts within the communities they serve. Winning projects will exhibit scalability or replicability across other communities with similar characteristics.

Jury

Our jurors will be representatives from design, transit, housing, and environmental organizations.

- Timothy Gale, Jury Chair | Sasaki and Sasaki Foundation
- Eudad Gonzalez | Turner Construction Company
- Nigel Jacob | New Urban Mechanics Labs
- TBD
- TBD
- TBD

07 PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Access to Sasaki Designers

During the 10-month grant period, winning teams will have scheduled time with Sasaki design professionals, including architects, civil engineers, graphic designers, interior designers, landscape architects, planners, urban designers, and data analytics and visualization experts. Winning teams may also benefit from Sasaki's Fabrication Studio and design software.

Community Focus

Equity is one of the cornerstones of the Hideo Sasaki Foundation's work. Winning teams must include a community advisor. This advisor can be a local leader, nonprofit professional, designer, artist, business leader, or other individual from the project's focus community. Note: All winning projects must have a community focus in Greater Boston or the Gateway Cities.

Team Approach

Applicants must be teams of two to four individuals. At least one individual must be from the project's focus community. Teams can also include individuals or representatives of nonprofits, civic, and community organizations. We encourage teams to be multidisciplinary in their composition and thinking.

Storytelling

Applicants must create a compelling story around how their project meets the specific needs of their focus community. This narrative must include a community outreach and engagement plan.

Deliverables

Applicants must submit a work plan, including projected use of grant funds and total project budget. Winning teams will connect regularly with the Sasaki Foundation. Winning teams will complete a final presentation and a final report for the annual Sasaki Foundation Design Grants Research publication (see: <https://www.sasakifoundation.org/2022-design-grants-research/>).

Open Source

To multiply the impact of the Design Grants, winning teams commit to their project concepts and ideas being open source.

08 TIMELINE

February	Call for Proposals issued – rolling submissions
March and April	Virtual office hours (15-minute slots 12-1 p.m. every Friday)
April 1	Design Grants Mixer to meet potential team members (virtual at noon)
April 2	Design Grants Mixer to meet potential team members (in person at 5:30 p.m.)
April 24	Deadline to submit applications (noon)
May 13	Finalists announced
May 29	Pitch Night for finalists, open to the public
June 18	Grant winners announced
September 2024 – June 2025	Grant period

09 QUESTIONS

Questions

Watch the under 15-minute overview video.

- <https://youtu.be/pChtcxLoWgA>

Download the FAQ document, last updated February 24, 2025.

- https://www.sasakifoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025_Call-for-Proposals_FAQs.pdf

Download a text-only PDF of the call for proposals.

Sign up for office hours, available every Friday from noon to 1 p.m. in March and April.

- <https://calendly.com/designgrants/officehours>

Email info@sasakifoundation.org.

Events

Meet potential team members at one of our Design Grants Mixers. We will host a virtual mixer at noon on April 1, 2025, and an in-person mixer at 5:30 p.m. on April 2, 2025.

- Register for the virtual mixer: <https://sasakifoundation.networkforgood.com/events/82269-2025-design-grants-mixer-virtual>
- Register for the in-person mixer: <https://sasakifoundation.networkforgood.com/events/82272-2025-design-grants-mixer-in-person>

We will host Pitch Night on Thursday, May 29, 2025 from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. Finalist teams will present their project ideas in person to the Design Grants jury and a public audience. All are welcome.

- Register: <https://sasakifoundation.networkforgood.com/events/82273-2025-design-grants-pitch-night>

10 APPLY

<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/8175098/2025-Call-for-Proposals-Application>