



Bluebonnet

Community Grants

Bluebonnet launches \$3 million program to strengthen nonprofits in the region

By Will Holford

Thriving, prosperous communities and nonprofit organizations are essential to the strength of a region.

To build that strength throughout its service area, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors unanimously voted in May to create a community grants program.

Bluebonnet Community Grants will donate \$3 million over three years to nonprofit groups within the co-op's service area. The program's goals are to improve communities through economic development; attract public and private enterprises; and promote communities through enriched education and training, community planning, recreation, public safety, health care and transportation.

"It's the right thing to do," said Ben Flencher, chairman of Bluebonnet's Board of Directors. "Bluebonnet believes in giving back to the communities and people who have supported us for the last 76 years."

The grants program is funded through a recent legal settlement. The money does not come from Bluebonnet's operating revenue and is not related to electric sales or members' electric bills.

"We wanted to create a grant program that would partner with our area's nonprofit organizations to improve our communities and help our friends in need," said Roderick Emanuel, Bluebonnet board member and chairman of the board's Member Experience Committee, which began developing the program in 2014. "We looked at some of the best company and charitable foundation grant programs (in the country) and adapted their most successful practices to fit our goals."

The Bluebonnet Community Grants program will fund infrastructure (capital) projects for up to \$100,000 each. It will award operational grants for \$5,000 to \$20,000. Grants will be awarded once in 2015, twice in 2016 and 2017, and once in 2018. The first grants will be awarded this fall, and applications must be submitted by Aug. 15,



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2015. Grants will be awarded within four months of the application deadline.

The application deadline for the spring 2016 grants cycle is Feb. 15, 2016.

Nonprofit organizations eligible to apply for grants must be within the outer boundary of Bluebonnet's service area, including municipalities that are not served by Bluebonnet. For example, nonprofit organizations located in cities not served by Bluebonnet, such as Bastrop, Brenham, Lockhart and Giddings, but whose services benefit the surrounding co-op service area, are eligible to apply for Bluebonnet Community Grants.

Organizations not eligible for the program include for-profit entities, organizations that engage in political lobbying and nonprofit organizations limited to group membership. Projects not eligible include completed projects, religious or church-sponsored facilities that can be used only by church members, land acquisition, debt-reduction programs, political lobbying, individuals, sponsorships and advertising.

To be considered for a Bluebonnet Community Grant, organizations must submit a completed application form, project narrative, budget summary for capital projects, project timeline, pictures of the project or asset (if applicable), current Internal Revenue Service (IRS) documentation confirming tax-exempt status (if applicable), a completed IRS Form W-9, and a list of elected body or board of directors with their individual contact information. Additional requirements are stated on the grant application.

Grant program information, application forms, a map of the co-op's service area boundaries and more information are available online at bluebonnet.coop/grants. Applications and information materials can also be picked up at any one of Bluebonnet's

five member service centers in Bastrop, Manor, Lockhart, Giddings and Brenham during office hours.

Bluebonnet staff members will review all grant applications received by each deadline. The Bluebonnet board's Member Experience Committee will review the staff's recommended recipients for grants, and the committee will select finalists to be considered for approval by Bluebonnet's Board of Directors. Grants may be awarded for less than the amount requested, depending on the number and types of projects being funded. Total funding for all operational expense grants will be capped at \$100,000 per grant cycle. There is no per-cycle limit for capital project grants.

Organizations that apply for but do not receive grants may reapply during the next grant cycle. Organizations that receive a grant must wait 18 months and fully use their grant money before being eligible to apply for another grant.

"This is a great program that will reap benefits for years to come," Bluebonnet director Emanuel said.

The new Bluebonnet Community Grants program is separate from — and in addition to — the Lower Colorado River Authority's Community Development Partnership Program, in which Bluebonnet participates. That program has assisted numerous Bluebonnet service-area community programs for many years. ■

For more information, visit the Bluebonnet Community Grants web page at bluebonnet.coop/grants.

