



Community Resilience Grant Program: Spring 2026

Background

Communities thrive when they are strong, connected, and ready to face whatever challenges come their way. Understanding the key factors that contribute to community strength is essential for fostering an environment where individuals and their institutions can flourish. This program seeks proposals for interdisciplinary scholarship and creative activity focused on furthering community resilience and community engagement within the Bloomington-Normal community based upon recommendations from two comprehensive studies: COUNTRY Financial's Community Resilience Index created in partnership with Ipsos, and the Optimal College Town Assessment (OCTA) Survey adapted by Illinois State University's Center for Civic Engagement. Both studies aim to characterize how communities recover from difficulties, build trust, and create meaningful connections. The COUNTRY Financial Community Resilience Index offers defining characteristics of resilient communities and actionable recommendations for enhancing community preparedness. The OCTA characterizes the relationship between Illinois State University and the Bloomington-Normal community and identifies opportunities for increased partnerships.

Community Resilience Index

Recognizing how disasters impact policy holders, COUNTRY Financial created the Community Resilience Index to help communities understand and measure their ability to withstand and recover from challenges. This research takes a deeper look into what makes some communities more resilient than others and highlights areas where improvements can be made to help promote resiliency. The goal of this index is to provide actionable insights that can help residents, local leaders, and businesses come together to strengthen their communities.

Communities that Americans describe as resilient share these factors:

1. **Engagement:** People participate in local events and celebrations and cooperate well.
2. **Collaboration:** People prioritize things that help the community improve and face challenges.
3. **Respect:** People welcome newcomers and are friendly and inviting overall.
4. **Trust:** People trust their neighbors and local leaders in times of need and every day.

Building community resilience has positive impacts on quality of life, including improving relationships between residents and local officials. Communities with above average resilience are more likely to believe their community is prepared to deal with catastrophic events in the future, believe that local government understands the community's needs, talk to neighbors, trust local officials to provide equal support and respect to residents regardless of culture or demographic differences, and care for each other in times of need. COUNTRY Financial has developed a Resilience Index to characterize community resilience based on 13 factors related to engagement, collaboration, respect, and trust.

Town/Gown Relationship Between Illinois State University and Bloomington-Normal

Relationships between universities and local communities, also known as “town/gown relationships,” foster mutual support and collaboration between universities and their surrounding communities, enhancing the quality of life and economic vitality for both. Strong town-gown relationships also promote civic engagement, resource sharing, and a positive environment for students, faculty, and community members. The OCTA characterizes town/gown relationships into four categories based on the two dimensions of effort and comfort, derived from responses about personal contact and relationships, perceptions of contact and relationships, and active community contributions.

1. **Devitalized:** Characterized by both low comfort and low effort, this type indicates a disengaged relationship where both parties have little interest or energy to maintain any connection.
2. **Conflicted:** Defined by low comfort and high effort, this relationship involves ongoing tensions and challenges, despite attempts to engage and collaborate.
3. **Traditional:** Marked by high comfort but low effort, this type reflects a more passive relationship where both parties coexist without significant interaction or joint initiatives.
4. **Harmonious:** Characterized by both high effort and high comfort, this relationship involves active collaboration and mutual respect, leading to shared benefits for both the university and the community.

Results suggest that both community members and ISU affiliates perceive the town/gown relationship as traditional (61% of community members and 62% of ISU affiliates), meaning it is comfortable but may lack active engagement or collaboration. Of the remaining respondents, community members tend to view the relationship more positively, with a significant portion (38%) seeing it as harmonious, indicating a belief that collaboration and mutual respect are present. In contrast, ISU affiliates show more concern: while a majority still see it as traditional, a notable portion (20%) see it as devitalized, suggesting they feel disengaged or disconnected from the community, and fewer (18%) see it as harmonious.

Other notable results from the OCTA include substantial alignment in priorities between ISU and the Bloomington-Normal community, with 76% of community respondents and 87% of ISU affiliates perceiving some degree of overlap between campus and community priorities. Further, 85% of community members surveyed report that they believe that ISU students, faculty, staff, and/or administrators actively contribute to the well-being of the Bloomington-Normal community. Similarly, 84% of community respondents and 74% of ISU respondents reported positive personal relationships between ISU and the Bloomington-Normal community. The full data set includes modules addressing student partying, policing, discrimination, and common concerns between campuses and communities, with responses filtered by ISU role (undergraduate student, graduate student, faculty, staff, administrator), community role (business owner, government official, nonprofit employee, teacher, resident), race, and ZIP code.

Call for Proposals

Building a resilient community requires intentional collaboration, continuous reflection, and a shared vision for the future. Findings from the OCTA demonstrate many strengths of the town/gown relationship, and when considered alongside the COUNTRY Resilience Index, highlight strong engagement, collaboration, respect, and trust. ISU already plays an essential role in the Bloomington-Normal community, but results suggest that targeted efforts to enhance engagement and transparency can further improve town/gown relations and build a more resilient and interconnected community better equipped to face future challenges and opportunities. Thus, this grant program seeks to fund proposals exploring **interdisciplinary strategies that strengthen community resilience and enhance the town/gown relationship between Illinois State University and the Bloomington-Normal community by fostering engagement, collaboration, respect, and trust.** [Proposals are due at 11:59pm CDT on March 15, 2026 via Qualtrics.](#)

Eligibility

- A minimum of three disciplines must be represented on the team;
- Lead investigator shall be full-time tenure-track faculty, administrative professional, or civil service with tenured faculty status at Illinois State University;
- Team must include at least one representative of a community organization (may be non-profit or for-profit);
- Other team members may include full-time tenure-track faculty; full-time non-tenure track faculty; full-time staff, including chairs/directors; ISU graduate or undergraduate students; and/or experts from governmental, community, academic, or corporate partners;
- Teams should both reflect and advance the University's core value of equity, diversity, access, and belonging;
- Pre-existing groups or Centers/Institutes are eligible to apply;
- An individual may be listed on only one application.

Funding

Total funding per team will not exceed a maximum award of \$5,000 for one year. Funds will be disbursed by March 31, 2026.

Eligible/Allowable Expenses: All expenses to be used for the program must be allowable under general University and ISU Foundation policies. Eligible expenses include:

- Graduate and undergraduate student salary.
- Additional pay for faculty members.
- Research expenses, including fieldwork, data, laboratory analysis, archival search, travel, publication costs, equipment, supplies, research incentives (often in the form of gift cards), and materials related to the proposed research and creative scholarship activity.
- Reasonable team meeting expenses (such as food if meetings are during lunchtime, food for focus group participants, or room reservation costs if needed).

- Public event costs (e.g., room reservations, poster printing, other reasonable costs directly related to the grant aims).

Ineligible/Unallowable Expenses

- Salaries and personnel (except for graduate or undergraduate students or additional pay for faculty members).
- Tuition support.
- Facilities & Administration (indirect) costs.
- Pilot sub-grants.
- Administrative support, including course buyouts or director stipend.
- Entertainment including alcohol.
- Space renovation.

Required Events for Grant Recipients

- Attend workshop on OCTA and Community Resilience data
- Present at Civic Engagement Celebration
- Submit proposal to University Research Symposium, if students are on grant team

Deliverables

- A mid-term accountability report will be due via Qualtrics by October 1, 2026. The Center for Civic Engagement will provide a template for the report.
- A written summary of project activities and future goals must be submitted via Qualtrics to the Center for Civic Engagement by April 1, 2027, who will share the report with COUNTRY Financial. The Center for Civic Engagement will provide a template for the report.
- Lead PI and team members commit to presenting their project to the Illinois State community and to participate in related Center for Civic Engagement and/or COUNTRY Financial events as requested and able, including the annual Civic Engagement Celebration poster session in April 2027, and the University Research Symposium in April 2027 if the team includes student researchers.
- Lead PI and team members commit to entering any public service or community engagement partnerships related to this work in our institutional community engagement database, [Collaboratory](#), by October 1, 2027.
- As allowable, Lead PI and team members commit to depositing data, outcomes, presentations, and reports in our institutional repository, [ISU ReD](#), by October 1, 2027.
- Lead PI and team members commit to acknowledge ISU in outcomes and reports with the following statement or something similar: “This material is based upon work funded by Illinois State University’s Center for Civic Engagement in partnership with COUNTRY Financial.”
- Lead PI and team members commit to notifying CCE of publications and follow-up funding achieved resulting from this grant.

Full Proposal Outline

Proposals are to be written for an informed, interested, non-expert audience. Please use single spacing, 1-inch margins, and 12 pt standard font.

- Cover page that includes Project Name, principal investigator/project lead with contact information (department, position title, email), and co-principal investigators with contact information.
- An abstract summarizing the project, its novelty, its connection to the Community Resilience Index and ISU's town/gown relationship, and its main goals, written for a general audience (no more than 250 words).
- Narrative of 1800-3000 words detailing:
 - How the project addresses an issue related to the Community Resilience Index and/or ISU's town/gown relationship as defined above.
 - How the project demonstrates alignment with [ISU's definitions of civic engagement and/or community engagement](#).
 - A brief but relevant literature review and how the proposed project fits in with this extant literature, including a clear description of how the project integrates theoretical frameworks from multiple disciplines and requires the use of perspectives and skills from multiple disciplines.
 - Appropriate methodology for gathering evidence to reflect on/study the social or community issue or question posed, and this method is clearly described.
 - Ethical considerations related to the project, including human subjects research compliance **and** concerns related to power dynamics between partners.
 - Project timeline, including major milestones and expected deliverables.
 - Anticipated outcomes of this work directly connected to community resilience and the town/gown relationship.
 - Specific possibilities for dissemination (e.g., presentation, performance, representation, or publication) of funded scholarship.
- References
- Figures/tables/graphs, if necessary
- Team biographies (no more than one-half page per team member), including each team members' roles on the project, given their expertise. Clearly specify the role each team member plays on the project, including the expected role of any students.
- Team management plan (no more than 1 page).
- Budget (no more than 1 page, use attached template).
- Budget justification (no more than 2 pages).

Be sure to consult the Review Process section on p. 7 for other criteria that will be considered during proposal review.

Team Management Plan

The team management plan should outline the structure and dynamics of the project team, detailing roles and responsibilities, communication strategies, and conflict resolution methods. It should clearly specify who is responsible for each aspect of the project. Additionally, the plan should describe how team members will collaborate, including regular meeting schedules, decision-making processes, and tools for effective communication. It should also address how the team will manage potential conflicts and ensure accountability, fostering a productive and cohesive working environment. This approach ensures that all team members are aligned and working towards the project's goals efficiently. Teams are encouraged to use CCE's [partnership development resources](#).

Budget Template

Category	Request
Personnel	
Travel	
Equipment	
Supplies	
Other (Specify)	
Total	

Budget Justification

1. Personnel:
2. Travel:
3. Equipment:
4. Supplies:
5. Other (Must be specific):
6. Total: A maximum of \$5,000.

Review Process

An interdisciplinary panel will review eligible applications for rigor and potential to accomplish program objectives. Review criteria include but are not limited to:

1. Required components of narrative:
 - a. How the project addresses an issue related to the Community Resilience Index and/or
 - b. How the project demonstrates alignment with [ISU's definitions of civic engagement and/or community engagement](#).
 - c. A brief but relevant literature review and how the proposed project fits in with this extant literature, including a clear description of how the project integrates theoretical frameworks from multiple disciplines and requires the use of perspectives and skills from multiple disciplines.
 - d. Appropriate methodology for gathering evidence to reflect on/study the social or community issue or question posed, and this method is clearly described.
 - e. Ethical considerations related to the project, including human subjects research compliance and concerns related to power dynamics between partners.
 - f. Project timeline, including major milestones and expected deliverables.
 - g. Anticipated outcomes of this work directly connected to community resilience and the town/gown relationship.
 - h. Specific possibilities for dissemination (e.g., presentation, performance, representation, or publication) of funded scholarship.
2. Clear demonstration of interdisciplinary team membership and, where appropriate/necessary, a clear strategy to recruit additional members to the team;
3. Demonstrate that the team reflects and advances the University's core value of equity, diversity, access, and belonging;
4. Show a solid and successful record of prior accomplishments in terms of publications or creative activities (as appropriate to the discipline or area), measurable output, and ability to deliver on research outcomes successfully;
5. Consider how the project or community outcomes related to the project might be sustained in the future;
6. Evidence of intentional and thoughtful partnership.