



# DON WOOD FOUNDATION

## Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program

2026 Pilot Program Guidelines

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### Program Contacts

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## About the Don Wood Foundation

The Don Wood Foundation is leading the development and growth of the next-generation manufacturing workforce in northeast Indiana by supporting programs and initiatives that align opportunities between students, education, and industry. Formerly known as the 80/20 Foundation Trust, the Foundation was founded in 2018 by Don Wood, the late founder of 80/20, Inc. Today, the Foundation operates as an independent, private foundation governed by a seven-member Board of Trustees.

## About the Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program

Through the Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program, the Don Wood Foundation partners with regional leaders and intermediary organizations to help manufacturers accelerate technology adoption, support workplace learners, and build partnerships with educators – strengthening northeast Indiana’s manufacturing competitiveness in a rapidly changing economy.

During the inaugural year of this program, the Foundation may invest up to +/- \$2 million to support high-impact, industry-led initiatives that accelerate the region’s manufacturing competitiveness by developing and activating a next-gen workforce. Although the initial funds are expected to be fully deployed in 2026, the grant period and reporting requirements will likely extend over multiple years. Payment of a grant over multiple years may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Please note that this amount may vary depending on the quality, feasibility, readiness, and alignment of the proposals received.

The Foundation seeks to support programs that meet one or more of the following three objectives:

- **Accelerate next-gen technology integration and innovation.** Next-generation manufacturing requires systems that enable manufacturers to collectively identify, adopt, and scale emerging technologies. Although industry partners are best positioned to recognize technology trends, widespread adoption depends on shared infrastructure, coordinated learning, and aligned investment across organizations. The Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program supports initiatives that move beyond individual-firm adoption to strengthen regional systems for technology integration, build shared knowledge, reduce structural barriers, and enable manufacturers to access common resources that support sustained innovation across the manufacturing ecosystem.
- **Co-design innovative approaches that empower manufacturers to play a leadership role in developing next-generation talent and strengthening sustainable, future-ready workforce systems through industry-education partnerships.** Industry partners know the real-world skills and mindsets needed for success in modern manufacturing. Their active participation ensures education and training remain aligned with evolving industry needs. The Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program supports industry-led partnerships to better connect talent pipelines with job opportunities, address skills gaps, enhance employment outcomes, optimize resources, and strengthen regional competitiveness.
- **Foster lifelong learning for working learners.** Modern manufacturing requires a region-wide commitment to formal and informal training, professional development, peer learning, and mentorship. This work moves beyond isolated training opportunities to strengthen how manufacturers, education providers, and intermediaries align resources and responsibilities to support emerging and incumbent workers over time. By creating shared approaches to skill development, leadership growth, and building an entrepreneurial mindset, the Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program supports systems that enable workers to continuously gain next-generation skills, fostering a sustained culture of innovation and adaptability and building long-term capabilities for the region’s manufacturers.

## II. GRANT DETAILS

### Eligibility

The Don Wood Foundation welcomes applications from nonprofit or educational institutions that represent collaborative, mutually beneficial partnerships with manufacturers. Applicants must have demonstrated capacity to deliver impact in northeast Indiana, defined as **Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Grant, Huntington, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells, and Whitley Counties**.

Likely Applicants and Initiatives:

- Nonprofit intermediaries supporting industry-led or industry-co-designed initiatives
- Multi-partner collaborations, with a preference for those that are industry-led and supported
- Response to a demonstrated demand from manufacturers
- Potential for regional scale or replication

Grants will only be awarded to nonprofit organizations classified as public charities and tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The Foundation does not provide grants to individuals or for-profit companies. Manufacturers may provide leadership and governance, but charitable organizations must retain control over funds, program design, and outcomes.

### Charitable Purpose

A grant from the Don Wood Foundation may only be used to support activities that advance a recognized charitable purpose by producing a clear and demonstrable public benefit, such as improving economic conditions for communities or populations, and may not be used to subsidize the operations or interests of individual businesses.

#### **EXAMPLES WITH A CHARITABLE PURPOSE**

*(Primarily benefit the public; any private benefit is incidental)*

- **Workforce development and job training** that expand employment, advancement, or upskilling opportunities for workers, particularly incumbent and under-skilled populations, and strengthen regional talent pipelines.
- **Initiatives that advance science, technology, and innovation** by generating shared, non-proprietary knowledge, methods, or practices that strengthen education systems, workforce infrastructure, or regional manufacturing capacity.
- **Industry-education partnerships** aligned to documented employer demand and embedded within public or nonprofit education and workforce systems, resulting in transferable skills or credentials.
- **Collaborative initiatives with shared governance and accountability**, where manufacturers contribute leadership, data, and resources in service of a clearly defined public or systems-level charitable purpose.

#### **EXAMPLES LACKING A CHARITABLE PURPOSE**

*(Primarily benefits private firms; public benefit is limited or incidental)*

- **Employer-specific professional development** that does not result in transferable skills, credentials, or broader workforce or community benefit.
- **Scientific or technical initiatives that are proprietary or confidential**, designed primarily to advance a single firm's commercial interests.

- **Training or technology investments** intended solely to support one manufacturer’s internal operations, workforce, or productivity.
- **Activities indistinguishable from normal business expenses**, such as internal HR initiatives, equipment purchases for proprietary use, or consulting that benefits only one firm.

## Roles & Responsibilities

As members of the Foundation’s staff, **program officers** are not decision-makers or gatekeepers, but trusted partners and connectors—helping grant seekers navigate the process by submitting strong, aligned proposals and, if a grant is awarded, by reporting on outcomes. As representatives of the Grant Committee and the Board of Trustees, Program Officers conduct due diligence and analysis to ensure the Foundation’s resources are used in ways that produce meaningful, measurable results for students, employers, and communities in northeast Indiana.

The **Grant Committee** consists of Trustees and volunteers with expertise in education, manufacturing, and workforce development. The Committee oversees the development of grant programs and guidelines, reviews proposals, and advances funding recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

The **Board of Trustees** holds ultimate fiduciary and strategic responsibility for the Foundation’s grantmaking. The Board ensures that grant decisions align with Don Wood’s donor intent, the Foundation’s mission and strategic plan, and its desired impact, while exercising stewardship over the Foundation’s financial resources.

## Permitted Uses of a Don Wood Foundation Grant

The Don Wood Foundation permits grant funds to be used for programmatic, project-based, and capacity-building efforts that align with its strategic priorities and donor intent. Examples include:

- Direct program expenses necessary to deliver approved outcomes (e.g., instruction, supplies, materials, technology, participant supports)
- Program-related administrative expenses necessary to deliver approved outcomes (e.g., personnel, mileage, supplies, and other related administrative expenses)
- Capital building and equipment for shared training, education, or systems-level outcomes
- Curricula, program materials, and professional development that incorporate proven, best-practice approaches that are aligned with Foundation priorities and support approved outcomes
- Planning and research activities that support data-informed program design or systems improvement
- Scholarship programs administered by organizations (not individuals), including costs associated with managing and delivering those scholarships

## Prohibited Uses of a Don Wood Foundation Grant

Grant funds may not be used for purposes outside the Foundation’s mission, donor intent, or explicitly excluded categories, including:

- General operating support, annual funds, or unrelated fundraising expenses
- Activities that are solely for the purpose of fundraising or marketing, including tickets or goodwill advertising

- Creation of entirely new, unproven approaches when the request is solely for experimentation rather than building on established best practices
- Endowments, endowed funds, or private foundations
- Expenses not directly related to the approved project or program, or incurred outside the grant period without written approval
- Grants to individuals or for-profit companies
- Organizations or programs that discriminate by age, race, national origin, ethnicity, color, creed, sexual orientation, gender, or disability
- Political activities, including advocacy, lobbying, or support for political campaigns or elections
- Professional development for employees of individual organizations or companies when not tied to the delivery of the approved program outcomes
- Religious organizations, except for nonsectarian activities

## Grant Period

A grant period generally lasts one year; however, it may range from several months to up to five years, depending on the funded program's requirements and scope. The grant period will be specifically stated in the grant agreement. Modification or extension of the grant period must be requested in writing.

## Grant Award Amounts and Funding Considerations

**The Don Wood Foundation does not establish a fixed minimum or maximum grant award.** It is highly recommended that applicants discuss the amount they plan to request with a program officer before submitting their proposal.

**If a grant is awarded, the approved amount may differ from the amount requested.** Grant award decisions are based on the scope of the project, alignment with the Foundation's priorities, the strength and clarity of the proposed outcomes, and funds available.

**The Don Wood Foundation is rarely, if ever, the sole funder of a program or project.** Grant applicants are advised to demonstrate multiple sources of funding, as this indicates they are prepared to advance the program, are financially stable in the long term, and can successfully secure resources and form partnerships. Shared investment also reflects stakeholder commitment and confidence in the proposed work.

## III. APPLICATION AND SELECTION CRITERIA

### 2026 Application Timeline

| Action   | Date, subject to change                       |
|--|---|
| Grant Guidelines Distribution                        | March 2026                                    |
| <b>Letter of Intent</b>                              | <b>Due on or before Friday, May 22, 2026</b>  |
| Meeting(s) with a Program Officer                    | March 2026 – June 2026                        |
| <b>Application (if invited by a Program Officer)</b> | <b>Due on or before Friday, June 26, 2026</b> |
| Grant Committee Review*                              | July 2026                                     |
| Grant Committee Q&A Period                           | July 15, 2026 – August 5, 2026                |
| Board of Trustees Review and Decision*               | September 2026                                |
| Notification of Award Decision                       | On or before September 25, 2026               |

\*Applicants are not invited to attend Grant Committee or Board of Trustees meetings.

### 2027 Application Timeline

The Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program may be continued in 2027 upon review by the Grant Committee and Board of Trustees, and the application timeline will likely be modified. For inquiries, please contact Susan Mendenhall or Patrick Buesching.

### Letter of Intent

The Don Wood Foundation will accept and review Letters of Intent to identify eligible and interested applicants and assess the alignment of their objectives with the desired outcomes of the Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program.

Please prepare a Letter of Intent (LOI) on the lead applicant’s letterhead, signed by the organization’s leader, that describes your overall interest in applying for a grant. In the letter, please include a brief overview of the following:

- Organizational overview
- Explanation of the problem(s) you aim to solve
- Description of the outcome(s) you aim to address
- List of all your collaborative partnerships
- Identification of program lead contact(s)

Please email a PDF of your Letter of Intent to Vice President of Programs Susan Mendenhall at [smendenhall@donwoodfoundation.org](mailto:smendenhall@donwoodfoundation.org).

## Meeting with a Program Officer

After you submit your Letter of Intent, the program officer will request a meeting to discuss your program's eligibility and readiness to apply. If your program strongly aligns with the Foundation's strategic objectives for this program, the program officer will send a link to a formal application through the Foundation's grant portal.

Vice President of Programs Susan Mendenhall and Vice President of Strategic Initiatives Patrick Buesching will serve as program officers for the Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program. They are available for scheduled meetings at any stage of the Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program.

## Application, if invited

Invited applications are due on or before June 26, 2026, through the Foundation's grant portal. The application will include the following components to aid the Grant Committee's review.

- **Alignment:** Questions that prompt the applicant to describe how a grant for the proposed project or program aligns with the stated objectives of the Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program.
- **Outcomes:** Opportunity to clearly demonstrate a positive benefit for the manufacturing ecosystem and workforce by providing three or more SMART outcomes. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.
- **Capacity:** Questions that prompt the applicant to demonstrate their capacity to produce, evaluate, learn from, and report on their proposed outcomes. This includes a description of manufacturers' involvement in the design, governance, implementation, evaluation, and continuation of the proposed program, as well as the qualifications of the program's leaders, the strength of partnerships and collaborations, track record of success, and detailed budgeting and sustainability planning.

## Grant Committee Q&A Period

The Grant Committee may provide feedback or ask additional questions before making a final funding recommendation to the Board of Trustees. Questions will be communicated by the program officer, and the applicant will have about two weeks to respond.

## SMART Outcomes

The Don Wood Foundation places a strong emphasis on SMART outcomes because we believe meaningful impact begins with clarity of purpose and measurable results. By focusing on outcomes that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, our grant partners and we can better understand what is working, learn from challenges, and continuously strengthen programs that support the development of the Next-Gen Manufacturing Workforce.

Applicants should include at least three SMART outcomes that illustrate how their proposed program enhances manufacturers' competitiveness by accelerating technology adoption, upskilling working learners and incumbent workers, and/or fostering system-level collaboration between manufacturers and educators. The examples provided below are illustrative; grant seekers should tailor their outcomes to reflect the specific goals, design, and context of their program or project.

- **Technical Advancement**  
*Example: Within a year of program completion, at least five of the seven participating manufacturers will implement new or expanded technical capabilities, such as automation, data analytics, or digital*

*systems, with outcomes verified by equipment utilization data, process improvements, or system adoption metrics.*

- **Technology Adoption**  
*Example: By the end of the grant period, 50% (10 of 20) of participating manufacturers will report measurable improvements in productivity, quality, or efficiency resulting from adopting new technology and upskilling their workforce, as measured by employer surveys or operational indicators.*
- **Workforce Capacity**  
*Example: By December 2028, 10 participating manufacturers will upskill or reskill at least 150 incumbent workers, resulting in documented improvements in job-specific technical or leadership competencies.*
- **Cross-Sector Coordination**  
*Example: Within two years, a regional partnership of manufacturers, educators, and workforce organizations will implement at least one shared training program, with documented employer participation and alignment across partners.*
- **Entrepreneurial Mindset**  
*Example: By the end of the grant period, five participating manufacturers will report increased entrepreneurial behaviors, such as innovation, continuous improvement, and opportunity recognition, as reflected in documented process changes or new business practices.*
- **Leadership Skill Development**  
*Example: By the end of the grant period, at least 70% of participating managers will demonstrate improved leadership skills, including change management, communication, and talent development, as measured through employer evaluations.*
- **Expanded Availability of Aligned Training Opportunities**  
*Example: By fall 2028, launch or expand three manufacturing-aligned postsecondary or training programs that address documented local employer demand.*
- **Sustained Local Capacity Beyond the Grant Period**  
*Example: By the final grant year, secure at least two non-Foundation funding sources or policy commitments to sustain manufacturing-aligned programs for a minimum of two years post-grant.*
- **Other Employer-Focused Outcome**  
Defined by the grant seeker in collaboration with the program officer

## Additional Selection Considerations

During their review, the Grant Committee will look for evidence of:

- Strategic alignment with the Don Wood Foundation’s mission and the stated objectives of the Empowering Manufacturing Grant Program.
- Evidence of the strength and authenticity of collaborative partnerships with manufacturers in the design, governance, implementation, and evaluation of the funded program.
- Clarity of timeline and evidence of readiness to initiate the project in the next 12 months.
- Sustainability and scalability of the initiative, including an evaluation of short- and long-term funding sources.
- Capacity, experience, and prior effectiveness of applicant organizations.

## IV. IF A GRANT IS AWARDED

### Communication Protocols

Grant recipients are expected to maintain timely, transparent, and professional communication with the Don Wood Foundation throughout the grant period. A designated program officer serves as the primary point of contact for programmatic questions, reporting, and required check-ins. Grant partners are responsible for promptly notifying the Foundation of any material changes related to organizational leadership, contact information, project schedule, budget, or tax-exempt status.

### Grant Agreement

All approved grants are governed by a formal grant agreement that outlines the purpose of the grant, approved use of funds, grant period, reporting requirements, payment terms, and compliance expectations. Grant agreements are prepared by the Foundation and executed electronically via DocuSign. Grant funds may only be used for the purposes described in the approved application and incorporated into the Grant Agreement.

### Payment Schedule

Grant payments are issued in accordance with the terms of the grant agreement and may be made in one or more installments. Payment timing is determined on a case-by-case basis and may be contingent upon execution of the Grant Agreement, submission of required documentation, and receipt of satisfactory interim or final outcomes reports. Payments are issued by check and sent via FedEx, and grantees are expected to cash checks within the timeframe specified in the Grant Agreement.

### Amendments or Reallocation Requirements

Grant funds must be used solely for the purposes approved in the Grant Agreement and within the designated grant period. Any proposed changes to the project scope, timeline, or budget, including any significant reallocation of funds between budget categories, must receive prior written approval from the Don Wood Foundation. Grant partners are required to inform the Foundation immediately of any circumstances that may delay or materially affect the implementation of the funded project.

### Publicity Guidelines

If the grant partner chooses to formally and publicly acknowledge the receipt of this grant, the use of the Foundation's name and/or logo should follow the Foundation's marketing and publicity guidelines. If the grant partner wishes to issue a news release or social media post about their grant, the text of the proposed release should be submitted to the Foundation for review and approval before the release date. Temporary and permanent signage must also be reviewed and approved by the Foundation. In some cases, the Foundation may require a separate agreement detailing the terms and conditions of signage.

### Outcomes Reports

Grant recipients are required to submit annual outcomes reports as outlined in the grant agreement and via the Foundation's online grant portal. Outcomes reports document progress toward the approved outcomes, describe key activities completed during the grant period, and summarize the financial use of grant funds. Multi-year grants may require annual interim reports in addition to a final outcomes report, and satisfactory

completion of reporting requirements may be a condition of subsequent grant payments and future funding eligibility.

## Check-in Meetings and Site Visits

The program officer may request a check-in meeting or site visit during the grant period to better understand project implementation, observe activities firsthand, and support learning and continuous improvement. Site visits are intended to strengthen relationships, provide additional context for reported outcomes, and inform the Foundation's understanding of what is working and where additional support may be helpful. When applicable, meetings and site visits are coordinated in advance with the grant partner.

## Presentation to the Board of Trustees

In rare circumstances, the Don Wood Foundation may invite a grant recipient to share a brief presentation with the Board of Trustees. These invitations are selective and intended to provide Trustees with deeper insight into a funded program's design, implementation, outcomes, or learning to date. Invitations are typically extended when a project is of strategic interest, demonstrates promising or exemplary practices, or offers lessons that may inform future grantmaking. Presentations are informational and not part of the standard application or approval process.