



# Innovation Islands: 2026 Grant Opportunity

## *Overview & Rubric*

*This grant program supports the partnership's goal of connecting people through parks by providing inspirational experiences that strengthen community and foster broad based support for and engagement in island stewardship and care.*

## Overview

Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park and the Boston Harbor Islands Partnership announce another year of funding to support grants for local leaders to plan and execute island programming that speaks to the needs and interests of members of their community. Compelling proposals will create opportunities for people to come together through music, the arts, the sharing of cultural traditions, recreation, island exploration and stewardship.

This year, in light of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, the Park Partnership celebrates and reflects upon the concept of “We The People” – focusing on what this phrase has meant in the past and which voices have historically gone unheard. The Innovation Islands 2026 cohort will reflect an intentional and inclusive vision of We The People, amplifying the complex and vibrant stories of communities whose contributions and histories are too often forgotten.

### **Help us bring your community to the Boston Harbor Islands!**

**What:** We are awarding grants of up to \$5,000 to local community leaders. You can use grant funds to design, promote, and facilitate programming on and around the Boston Harbor. Boston Harbor Islands Partnership staff will offer consultations to support your program planning.

**Who:** Local individuals, community leaders, nonprofit organizations, and small businesses interested in engaging their constituents in the park and waterfront. We hope to partner with groups that may be new to the island experience or

underrepresented in island/waterfront programming, including but not limited to: veterans and active duty military and their families, communities of color, LGBTQIA2S+ communities, new immigrants, families of children on the Autism spectrum, and individuals engaged in adaptive sports programs.

**When:** Applications must be submitted by **11:59 pm ET on Friday Feb 27th, 2026**. Funded programs will take place between June and September, and dates must be approved by park staff. Later dates will also be considered for Harborwalk locations.

**Where:** Your program can take place at the following locations:

[Spectacle Island](#) | [Harborwalk](#)

**Why:** Together, we can expand access to the Boston Harbor Islands and waterfront in ways that best serve your community's needs and interests. These grants seek to empower and invest in these community members, amplifying their impact, voices, and presence within our recreational spaces. We are excited to learn from you about how we can shape the future of park offerings to better engage with your community!

## Eligibility

Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park and the Boston Harbor Islands Partnership announce a fifth year of funding to support grants for local leaders to plan and execute island programming that speaks to the needs and interests of members of their community. Compelling proposals will create opportunities for people to come together through music, the arts, the sharing of cultural traditions, recreation, island exploration and stewardship.

**Communities served:** We hope to partner with groups that may be new to the island experience or underrepresented in island/waterfront visitorship demographics or programming. This includes environmental justice populations and other diverse communities.

**501(c)3 status:** While many of our applicants are non-profit groups, 501(c)3 status is **NOT** a requirement for eligibility.

**3-year rule:** Groups are eligible to receive the grant for a maximum of 3 consecutive years. Following their third year, a hiatus must be taken for a minimum of 2 years. During hiatus years, groups are still eligible and encouraged to apply to other [Free and Discounted Access](#) opportunities available through the park partnership.

**Insurance:** We require all grantees to have a Certificate of Insurance (COI) to host programming on the Islands. If not already held, prospective grantees may include COI-associated costs within their budget breakdown.

**Timely submission of reports:** Grantees are required to submit all documentation and reports in a timely manner. Failure to submit the Final Grant Report will disqualify grantees from future funding through the Innovation Islands Grant Program.

## Expectations for Grant Recipients

In addition to the grant (up to \$5,000) grantees with island locations will receive up to 200 ferry tickets to support transport for programming. Grant recipients will design, promote, and facilitate park-based programming that meets the unique needs and interests of their communities. In addition, recipients will:

- Promote the program and manage program sign-up.
- Secure photo releases; program photos may be used in promotional materials and media
- Arrange for any land transportation and other essential programming content, experiences, or support.
- Encourage participants to share feedback and ideas with Boston Harbor Islands staff.
- Provide a final report with information on what the group liked most about the experience and recommendations for park partners on what steps we might take so that a future program like this is the best it can be. Timely completion and submission of a final report is required to be eligible for funds in future years.
- Share and encourage program participants to share their Harbor Islands experience via social media to heighten awareness of the islands as a place that enables all people to experience the full, multi-sensory joy of being in the outdoors with family, friends, and community.
- All equipment and costs associated with the program (with the exception of ferry tickets) are the responsibility of the grantee.
- While Boston Harbor Island staff offers consultations and boat transportation support, Grantees are expected to plan, staff, and facilitate their programs independently.
- Though there are many exceptions, we typically expect funding requests will be proportionate to the estimated number of participants engaged. For example:
  - 100 - 200 participants: up to \$5,000
  - Less than 100 participants: \$2,500

## RUBRIC

### Criteria #1: Engage New or Strategic Audiences (0 – 5 points)

#### Q1: Who is the intended audience and why?

Clearly define the intended audience and describe why this audience will be engaged (consider market research, statistics or demographics). (0 – 5 points)

- **0 Points:** Does not identify an audience.

- **1 Point:** Identifies a general audience or audience is unclear. Provides little to no explanation for why the audience was chosen.
- **3 Points:** Identifies a specific audience. Provides an explanation, but explanation may be underdeveloped and/or targets a demographic already well represented in park demographics or programming.
- **5 Points:** Includes a well-developed explanation for choosing their audience, their experience serving this group, and clearly identifies a specific audience that targets a demographic underrepresented in park visitor demographics or programming, including but not limited to: environmental justice populations, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA2S+ groups.

## Criteria #2: Park Relevance (0 – 5 points)

### Q2: How does the program help the intended audience forge meaningful and enduring connections with their Harbor Islands?

Describe how the project or program helps the intended audience forge meaningful and enduring connections with their Harbor Islands. (0 – 5 points)

- **0 Points:** Does not describe how the program or project helps the intended audience forge meaningful and enduring connections with the Boston Harbor Islands.
- **1 Point:** General description is provided, but response is unclear or incomplete when describing how the program helps the intended audience forge meaningful and enduring connections with the Harbor Islands.
- **3 Points:** Includes a clear description of how the program was developed to be impactful, but lacks substantial explanation for either how the forged connection is meant to be meaningful to the audience AND how it is designed to be enduring.
- **5 Points:** Includes how the project or program was developed for the targeted audience so that the audience clearly has the opportunity to find value in and sustained connection with the Harbor Islands.

## Criteria #3: Strategic Alignment (0 – 5 Points)

### Q3: What are your program's goals and measurable outcomes?

Specify the goals of the program, any measurable, and how the project aligns with the community partner's strategic mission if any. (0 – 5 points)

- **0 Points:** Does not demonstrate specific goals or outcomes.
- **1 Point:** Identifies unclear or highly underdeveloped goals or measurable outcomes for the program.

- **3 Points:** Identifies goals or needs that would be addressed through this program, but description lacks direct references to measurable outcomes.
- **5 Points:** Clearly identifies what strategic goals, management plan(s) and/or identified needs that would be met through this program; demonstrates organization-level management support for this effort by citing current management planning documents, annual planning strategies, or other formal processes.

## Criteria #4: Budget (0 – 10 points)

### Q4A: Please provide a detailed budget and budget narrative for this program.

Include a budget that clearly and accurately reflects the needs of the project (clearly identified expense categories and realistic cost estimates). (0 – 5 points)

- **0 Points:** Lump sum or incomplete budget.
- **1 Point:** Has minimal budget detail. Cost needs to be better identified and/or little to no information in the description column.
- **3 Points:** Has a detailed budget plan that specifically addresses the project. Expenses are broken out with minimal lumping.
- **5 Points:** Has a detailed expense breakdown and budget narrative, with expenses properly broken out AND there is a clear and realistic connection to the scope and scale of the project.

### Q4B: How does the budget align with the program's goals and measurable outcomes?

Describe how your budget strategy connects to the goals and outcomes of this program and maximizes dollars spent. (0 - 5 points)

- **0 Points:** No explanation of budget strategy or alignment with goals/measurable outcomes provided.
- **1 Point:** Limited information justifies how the proposed budget might efficiently and effectively meet their goals.
- **3 Points:** Provides a budget strategy, but does not describe how that plan will support project goals and measurable outcomes.
- **5 Points:** Includes an adequate explanation of the budget strategy and describes how that plan will meet the project goals and measurable outcomes while maximizing the dollars spent.

**APPLY NOW**

