
Third Ward Early Capacity Building Grant Fund APPLICATION WORKSHOP

Helping Third Ward organizations, small businesses, and entrepreneurs prepare a complete, competitive application before the portal opens September 1, 2026.

Applications open September 1, 2026

houstonlandbank.org



What We'll Cover Today

1	About the Program — Houston Land Bank & the Grant Fund	5 min
2	Who Can Apply — Eligibility, tiers, and priorities	5 min
3	Financial Literacy Basics for Grant Applicants	10 min
4	What Is a Project Proposal & How to Outline One	10 min
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The Third Ward Early Capacity Building Grant Fund

A community-centered funding initiative administered by Houston Land Bank, designed to strengthen organizations, small businesses, entrepreneurs, and resident-led initiatives actively serving Houston's Third Ward.

- Builds long-term organizational capacity and supports economic opportunity
- Invests in projects aligned with the Third Ward Complete Communities Action Plan
- Awarded through a competitive application process
- Funded by the ION District Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)

\$1,000,000

Total grant funding available

TIER 1 — COMMUNITY MICRO GRANT

Up to \$15,000

2+ years established

TIER 2 — GROWTH FUND

Up to \$75,000

5+ years established

Who Can Apply

To be eligible, applicants must:

- Demonstrate a clear connection to Houston's Third Ward
- Serve Third Ward residents through programs, services, or business activities
- Propose a project aligned with one of the five grant priorities
- Be legally organized as a registered business, nonprofit, or recognized legal entity, or have a registered DBA

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

- Nonprofit organizations
- Small businesses
- Entrepreneurs
- Community-based organizations
- Resident-led initiatives

GRANT PRIORITIES

- Workforce & small business development
- Community health & food access
- Youth & education
- Community leadership
- Cultural preservation

Two Grant Tiers

\$1,000,000 deployed across both tiers

TIER 1 · COMMUNITY MICRO GRANT

2+ years

Up to \$15,000

For early-stage and grassroots organizations beginning to grow their impact in Third Ward.

Designed for:

- Grassroots organizations
- Emerging nonprofits & small businesses
- Entrepreneurs & resident-led initiatives

Funds released in installments pending approval

TIER 2 · GROWTH FUND

5+ years

Up to \$75,000

For established nonprofits and businesses with a proven track record of impact in Third Ward.

Designed for:

- Established nonprofits
- Established small businesses
- Organizations scaling programs & community impact



Tier 2 funds released in three installments (50% / 30% / 20%) based on milestone achievements

SECTION

Financial Literacy Basics



What grant reviewers look for — and how to show your organization is financially ready.

Key Financial Concepts You Need to Know



Revenue vs. Expenses

Revenue is money coming IN (fees, donations, grants, sales). Expenses are money going OUT (salaries, rent, supplies). Your budget shows both. Grant reviewers want to see they balance or that you have a plan if they do not.



Operating Budget

Your organization's full annual financial plan — all income and all spending. Different from your project budget. For Tier 2, you must submit this. For Tier 1, a simple summary is fine.



Profit & Loss (P&L) Statement

A summary of your revenue and expenses over a time period — usually a year. Shows whether your organization had a surplus or deficit. Tier 2 requires a recent P&L, tax return, or balance sheet.



Cash Flow

The timing of money in and out. A grant may arrive months after you start spending. Know what you can cover up front. Describe this in your budget narrative if there is a timing gap.



Budget Narrative

A written explanation of every line in your budget. Required with the HLB template. Say what you are buying, why it is needed, and how you calculated the cost. Example: "Graphic designer — 10 hours x \$45/hr = \$450."



Indirect Costs

Overhead costs not tied to one project — bookkeeping, insurance, office supplies.

What Grant Reviewers Are Looking For

Signs of Financial Readiness

- Budget numbers match what you say in your project description
- Costs are specific and show your math (e.g., "4 hrs x \$25/hr x 20 weeks")
- You can explain where the rest of your project funding comes from
- Your organization has managed money before — even informally
- You know the difference between your project budget and your operating budget
- You have a plan if grant funds arrive later than expected

Common Financial Red Flags

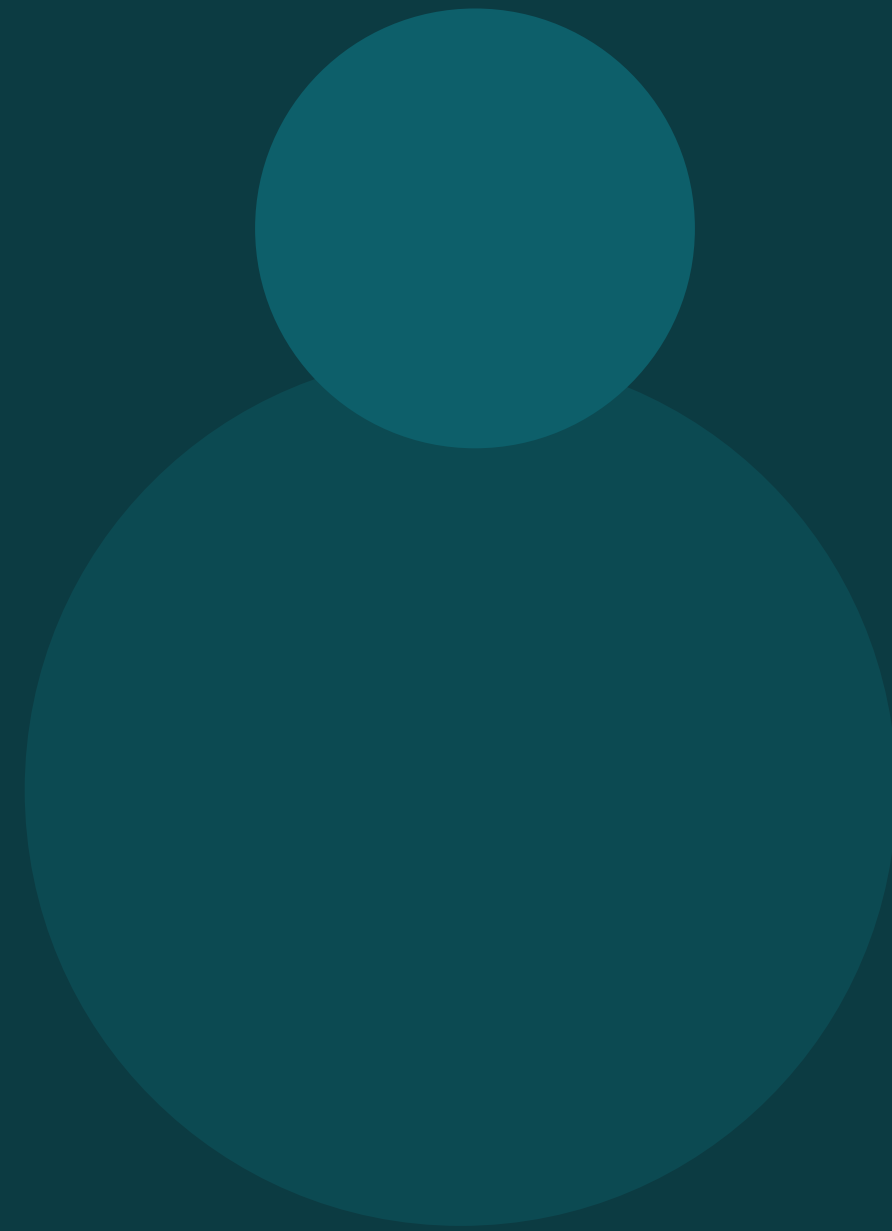
- Budget totals do not match the amount requested on the form
- Vague line items like "miscellaneous" with no explanation
- Admin costs are more than 15% of the total request
- No budget narrative — numbers with no explanation
- Costs for things purchased before the grant period
- Debt repayment, alcohol, legal fees, or political activity
- Request amount exceeds your tier maximum (\$15K or \$75K)

Remember: You do not need perfect finances to apply. You need an honest, organized, and well-explained budget.

SECTION

What Is a Project Proposal & How to Write One

A strong proposal tells reviewers exactly what you will do, who you will serve, and why it matters in Third Ward.



Understanding the Grant Proposal

A project proposal is your plan for how you will use the grant money.

It answers four core questions for reviewers:

WHAT?	What will you do? What activities or services will happen?
WHO?	Who will benefit? How many Third Ward residents will be served?
HOW?	How will you do it? What are the steps, and who is responsible?
WHY?	Why does Third Ward need this? What community problem does it solve?

PROPOSAL vs. APPLICATION

Your Proposal

The detailed plan you write describing your project — what, who, how, why, when, and how much.

The Application Form

The structured online form at houstonlandbank.org where you enter your proposal answers, upload documents, and submit.

The Budget Template

The required HLB Excel spreadsheet that itemizes every cost. It accompanies your proposal and must be uploaded with your application.

All three are required. A strong proposal makes the form easy to fill out.

Proposal Outline: Six Sections

Use this structure to draft your proposal before opening the application form.

1

Organization Overview

"Who are we?"

Name, mission, type of org, years in operation, Third Ward connection.

Tip: 300 words max. Be specific about what you do and who you serve. Mention your Third Ward history.

3

Project Description

"What will we do?"

Activities, services, or programs you will run. Who will implement. How it will work.

Tip: Be concrete and operational. "We will host 8 monthly workshops" beats "We will provide workshops."

5

Project Timeline

"When will things happen?"

Key milestones and activities from January 2027 to December 2027.

Tip: List 4–6 milestones with months. Shows the project is real and planned, not just an idea.

2

Community Need

"What problem are we solving?"

The gap, challenge, or unmet need your project will address in Third Ward.

Tip: Use specific examples. "Our community lacks X" is stronger with evidence: surveys, observations, data.

4

Goals & Outcomes

"How will we know it worked?"

Measurable results: residents served, jobs created, events hosted, youth engaged, businesses supported.

Tip: Use numbers. "30 residents" is better than "community members." HLB asks for specific outcome counts.

6

Sustainability Plan

"What happens after the grant?"

How the project or its impact will continue once grant funding ends.

Tip: Other funders, earned revenue, volunteers, reduced costs over time. Even a partial plan is better than none.

Sample Proposal: What a Strong Answer Looks Like

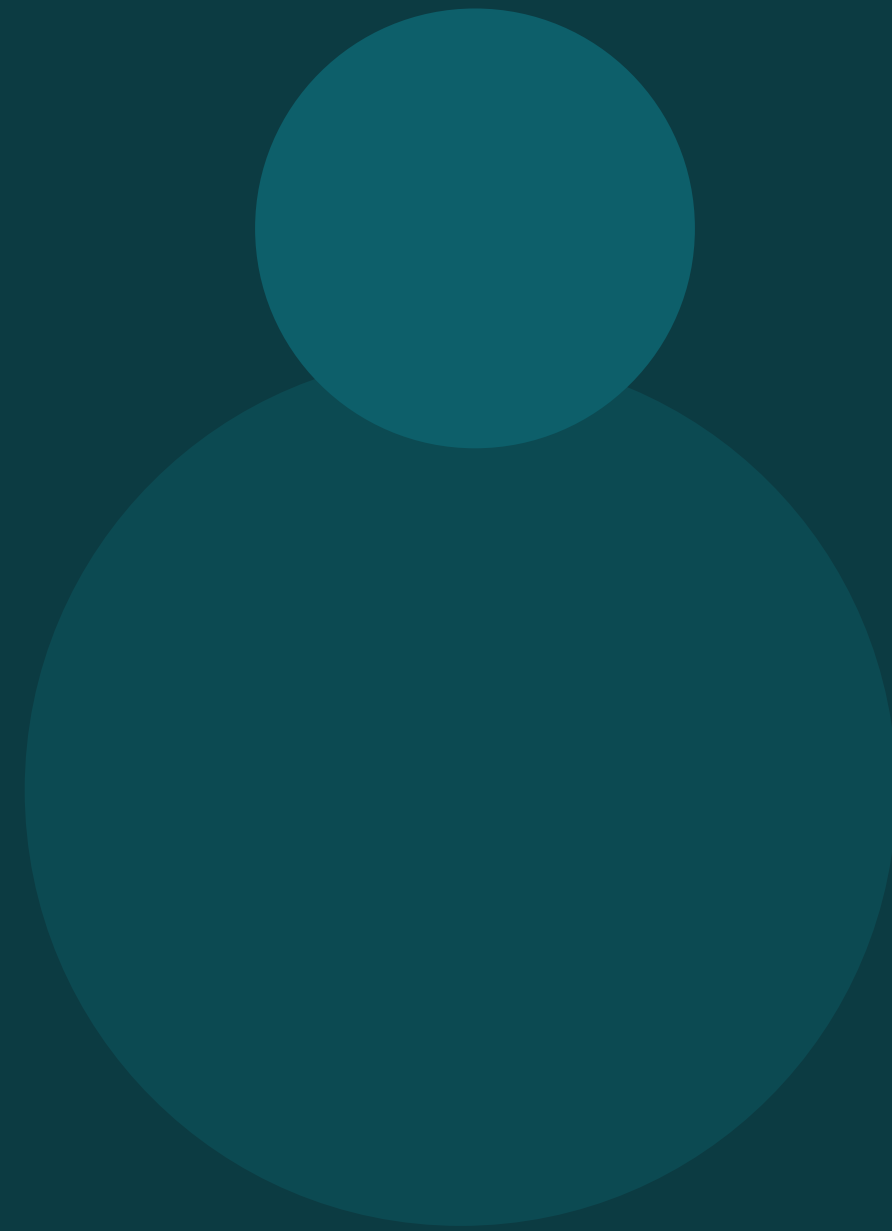
Example: Small business applying for Tier 1 (\$8,500) to launch a community cooking class series

Community Need	WEAK	<i>"Third Ward needs food resources."</i>	STRONG	"Over 60% of Third Ward residents live in a USDA-designated food desert. Our customers regularly ask how to stretch their food budget. No affordable cooking instruction exists within 2 miles."
Project Description	WEAK	<i>"We will offer cooking classes for residents."</i>	STRONG	"We will run 8 bi-weekly Saturday cooking classes at our storefront (3456 Elgin), each serving 15 residents. Classes cover meal prep on \$50/week, taught by our owner and a volunteer nutritionist."
Goals & Outcomes	WEAK	<i>"We will help people eat better."</i>	STRONG	"120 Third Ward residents will complete at least one session. 80% will report improved confidence in meal planning (post-class survey). We will distribute 120 recipe booklets."
Sustainability	WEAK	<i>"We plan to continue after the grant."</i>	STRONG	"After the grant period, we will charge a sliding-scale fee (\$5–\$15/class). Our monthly revenue from the storefront will cover instructor time. We are also applying to the Houston Health Foundation."

SECTION

Walking Through the Application Questions

Understanding what each question is asking — and how to answer it well.



What the Application Asks: Your Organization

Q: Describe your organization's mission and primary services. (300 words max)

Answer tip: Be clear and concise. What do you do, who do you serve, and how? Reviewers use this to understand if your work fits the grant priorities. Avoid jargon — write it like you'd explain it to a neighbor.

Q: Describe how your organization has served Third Ward residents over the past 2–5 years.

Answer tip: Include specific programs, events, or services. Numbers help: "served 120 families," "hosted 6 events." This is your proof of connection to the community.

Q: Describe your existing partnerships within Third Ward.

Answer tip: List schools, churches, neighborhood groups, businesses, or coalitions you work with. Even informal relationships count — name the people and organizations.

Q: Explain how your organization reflects, represents, or remains accountable to the community it serves.

Answer tip: Examples: resident board members, community input in planning, leadership from the neighborhood. If you are from the community, say so plainly.

What the Application Asks: Your Project

Q: Describe the project or initiative you are requesting funding for. (500 words max)

Answer tip: Explain what you will DO, who will be served, and how it will operate. Be specific: "We will run 8 weekly workshops for 20 small business owners in Third Ward..." Reviewers should picture exactly what happens.

Q: What specific community issues or challenges does this project address in Third Ward?

Answer tip: Connect your project to a real, local need. Use data if you have it or describe what you hear from residents. The more specific to Third Ward, the better.

Q: Describe the goals and expected outcomes of your project. (500 words max)

Answer tip: Be concrete. Examples: "30 residents served," "5 jobs created," "12 businesses supported," "3 youth events hosted." Reviewers want to know what success looks like.

Q: Proposed project timeline (major activities, Jan 2027 – Dec 2027)

Answer tip: List 4–6 key milestones with estimated dates. Example: "January: Hire coordinator. March: Launch first workshop cohort. June: Mid-program check-in." Shows the project is real and planned.

What the Application Asks: Organizational Capacity

Q: Describe your organization's experience managing grants, programs, or community initiatives. (300 words max)

Answer tip: If you've managed grants before, name them and describe outcomes. If you're new to grants, describe managing events, programs, or budgets — those experiences count.

Q: Describe how this project will continue or remain sustainable after grant funding ends.

Answer tip: Reviewers want to fund things that last. What's your plan after the grant? Other funding sources, earned revenue, partnerships, or reduced costs over time all work.

Q: Describe your organization's internal structure and leadership. (300 words max)

Answer tip: Include owners, directors, board members, key staff, and volunteers. For Tier 2: upload an organizational chart. Reviewers want to know real people are accountable for this project.

Q: Describe any operational challenges and technical assistance your organization may need if awarded.

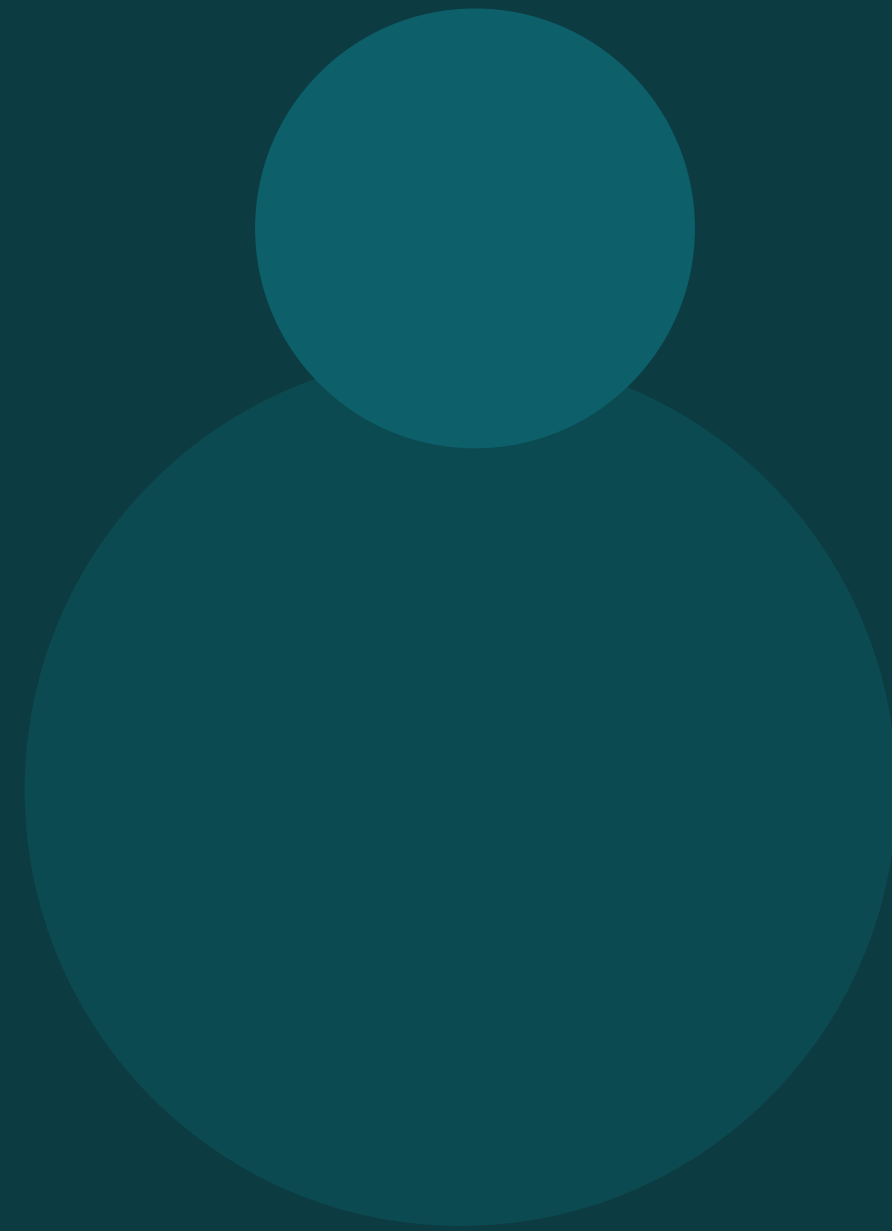
Answer tip: Be honest. Challenges like 'we need help with bookkeeping' are not disqualifying. Houston Land Bank can help connect awardees with support.

SECTION

The HLB Budget Template Walkthrough

Every application requires the completed HLB budget template.

Download it at houstonlandbank.org/earlycapacitybuildinggrantfund



Budget Template: Seven Categories

Fill in shaded boxes only. Totals calculate automatically. Use whole dollars. Skip any category that does not apply.

1. People

Staff time, stipends, or wages for people working on the project
TIP: Show math in Notes: e.g., "10 hrs/week x 26 weeks x \$23/hr." Include payroll taxes.

2. Equipment & Supplies

Tools, technology, materials, program supplies
TIP: Equipment = things that last (laptop, tables). Supplies = things you use up (paper, food, art materials).

3. Professional Services

Contractors, consultants, accountants, trainers you hire
TIP: Anyone you pay who is not your employee. A bookkeeper to help track grant spending is eligible.

7. Everything Else

Any project cost that does not fit above (up to 15% for admin/overhead)
TIP: Admin/overhead cannot exceed 15% of your total request.

5. Rent & Space Costs

Program space, utilities, storage for this project
TIP: Only the portion used for THIS project. If space serves other programs, charge only this project's share.

6. Travel

Local mileage or travel needed for the project
TIP: Mileage math example: 100 miles/month x 12 months x \$0.67/mile = \$804.

How to Complete the Budget Template

1

Download the template

Go to houstonlandbank.org/earlycapacitybuildinggrantfund and download the HLB Excel budget template. Open the "Sample Budget" tab first to see a completed example before you start.

2

Fill in your org name, project name, and tier

At the top of the template, enter your organization name, project name (same as your application), and type "Tier 1" or "Tier 2." This tells reviewers which funding limit applies.

3

List every cost — one line per item

Go through each category and add a row for every expense. Be specific: instead of "staff," write "Program coordinator — 20 hrs/week x 24 weeks x \$18/hr." The more detail, the stronger your budget.

4

Show your math in the Notes column

For every dollar amount, explain how you calculated it. Reviewers look for this. Format: [quantity] x [rate] x [time] = [total]. Example: "5 participants x \$20 bus pass x 8 months = \$800."

5

Check your total against your tier limit

The template auto-calculates your total. Tier 1 cannot exceed \$15,000. Tier 2 cannot exceed \$75,000. If you go over, review your priorities — not everything has to be in this request.

6

Save and upload with your application

Save the completed Excel file and upload it when submitting your application on the HLB portal. Also write a brief budget narrative (2–3 sentences per category) in the application explaining your choices.

Budget Quick Rules & Common Mistakes

Funds CAN be used for:

- Equipment, supplies, and technology
- Professional or contracted services
- Marketing, outreach, and printed materials
- Training and capacity-building activities
- Program implementation expenses
- Personnel and administration costs (up to 15% admin/overhead)
- Facility costs directly tied to the project

Funds CANNOT be used for:

- Paying off existing debt or back payments
- Political activity or lobbying
- Alcohol
- Fines, penalties, or legal settlements
- Anything purchased BEFORE the grant period
- Costs not directly tied to the proposed project
- Personal expenses of applicants or staff

Required Materials — Tier 1 vs. Tier 2

TIER 1 · Community Micro Grant | 2+ years

Designed to stay simple:

- ☐ Completed application form (via HLB online portal)
- ☐ Brief organization description (300 words max)
- ☐ Brief project description: use of funds, community need, expected outcomes
- ☐ Timeline of your project proposal
- ☐ Completed HLB budget template (required for ALL applicants)
- ☐ Proof of Third Ward connection (utility bill, lease, photos, attestation)
- ☐ Business registration document (LLC filing, DBA, or nonprofit registration)
- ☐ Current organizational operating budget

TIER 2 · Growth Fund | 5+ years

Everything in Tier 1, plus:

- ☐ Legal formation documents (LLC, Articles of Incorporation, IRS letter, or fiscal sponsor agreement)
- ☐ Most recent financial statements: P&L, tax returns, or balance sheet (1 year)
- ☐ Organizational chart or leadership structure
- ☐ Detailed project proposal: scope, timeline, outcomes, Third Ward impact
- ☐ Minimum 3 letters of support from community leaders
- ☐ Organization-wide operating budget
- ☐ Audited financials (for-profit) or IRS Form 990 and board roster (nonprofit)
- ☐ Strategic plan or business plan

How Applications Are Scored — 100-Point Rubric

EVALUATION CATEGORY	POINTS
Community Impact & Third Ward Alignment Is the project clearly rooted in Third Ward? Does it address a real community need?	20
Project Plan & Feasibility Is the project realistic? Does it have clear activities, a timeline, and measurable outcomes?	20
Equity & Community-Centered Approach Does the project center the people most affected? Is the organization accountable to its community?	20
Budget & Cost Effectiveness Does the budget make sense? Are costs justified and aligned with project activities?	20
Sustainability & Long-Term Impact Will the project continue after the grant? Is there a plan for lasting impact?	20
TOTAL	100

75

/ 100

Minimum score required
to be considered for funding

Tier 2: Also requires 3 letters of support from community
leaders

Important Policies

1 One application per organization or business will be accepted.

2 Applicants may apply to only one grant tier, not both Tier 1 and Tier 2.

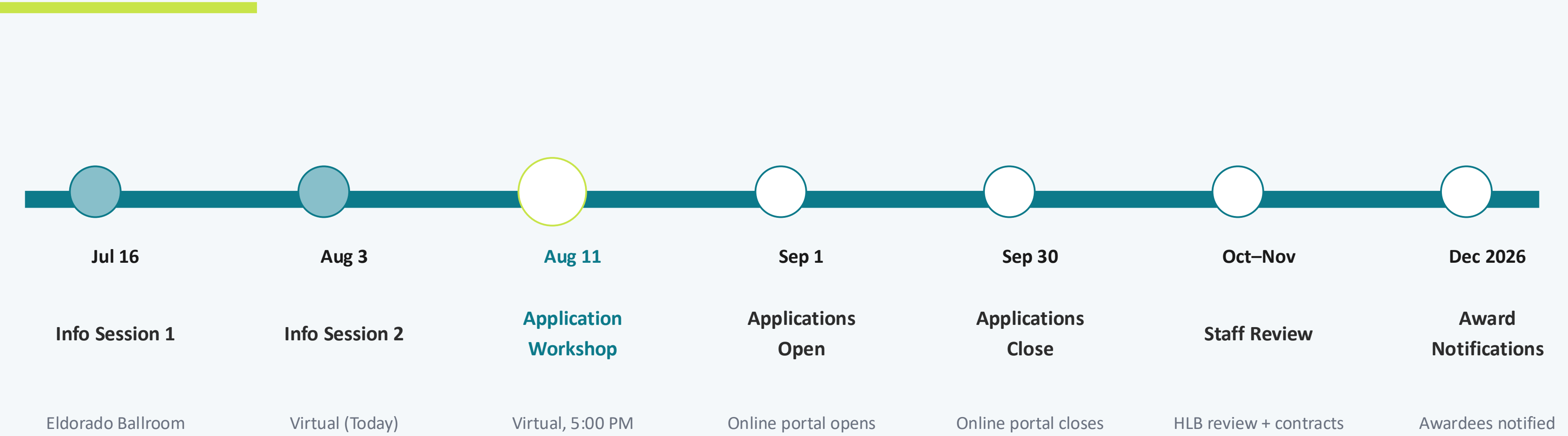
3 One or more eligible project activities may be proposed, provided the total request stays within the tier maximum.

4 A completed HLB budget template must be submitted with every application.

5 Houston Land Bank reserves the right to partially fund a proposal based on available funding, project scope, budget reasonableness, and alignment with program priorities.

6 All applications submitted through the HLB online portal at houstonlandbank.org — opens September 1, 2026, closes September 30, 2026.

Full Program Timeline



Next Workshop

August 11 | Virtual | 5:00 PM

Applications Open

September 1, 2026

Register for the workshop at houstonlandbank.org

Key Takeaways

Questions?

Reach out to:

Kadiatou Fofana

Program Manager

k.fofana@houstonlandbank.org

281.655.4600

houstonlandbank.org

1

You must have a Third Ward connection — service, operations, or residency — to be eligible.

2

Choose Tier 1 (up to \$15K, 2+ years) or Tier 2 (up to \$75K, 5+ years) — not both.

3

A strong proposal answers: What? Who? How? Why? Include specific outcomes and a realistic timeline.

4

Every application requires the completed HLB budget template. Show your math on every line.

5

The 100-point rubric has 5 categories, 20 points each. A minimum of 75 is required to be considered.