



MAKE A STRONG IMPRESSION IN YOUR GRANT PROPOSAL

by Philip J Vonada
National Grange Communications Director

The deadline for the “Bridging the Gaps” round of National Grange Rural Life Initiative (RLI) grants is fast approaching. Grant applications are due on **February 28**, so now is the time for Granges to refine their ideas and present strong, well-organized proposals.

RLI grants support projects that strengthen rural communities through projects and events that build sustainability through food access, wellness, youth engagement, education, and community connection. With increased interest in the program, making a strong impression in your application can help your project stand out and move from concept to meaningful impact.

Lead with a Compelling Community Need

Strong proposals begin with a clear explanation of why the project matters. Reviewers want to understand the real challenges your community faces and how your Grange is prepared to address them.

Before writing, take time to:

- Speak with community members and local leaders.
- Connect with schools, food pantries, libraries, and service agencies.
- Review relevant local data or reports.

Use specific examples and observations to show why your project



A PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL GRANGE

is necessary. A well-defined need immediately strengthens your application.

Using concrete examples, community input, or local data strengthens your case.

Present a Thoughtful, Organized Plan

Well-prepared applications reflect strong leadership and planning. Reviewers look for proposals that clearly outline:

- What the event is - beyond just a title. What local disparity does your program plan to address?
- When and where they will happen.
- Who will be participating - including your partner organization - AND who will be impacted?
- How participants will be engaged.
- Why this particular project or event is important or necessary in your community at this time?

continued on page 3

IN THIS ISSUE

Make a strong impression in your grant proposal 1

Apply for a Rural Life Initiative grant 2

Grange Heirloom for February 3

2026 National Grange Programs now available online 4

Support the Grange Foundation through the Common Routes Challenge 4

Understanding Cardiovascular Disease Risk Factors: Numbers to Know in 2026 5

Apply for the Ernestine Keiser Memorial Scholarship 5

Hamp Watch: Where is our National Grange President? 6

Recipes from the Heartland 7

Member Benefit: Aflac 8

Grange Store: Veteran Recognition Pin 8





NATIONAL GRANGE

Elevating rural interests since 1867

1616 H St. NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20006



RURAL LIFE INITIATIVE: BRIDGING THE GAPS

WHAT IS THE RURAL LIFE INITIATIVE?

The Rural Life Initiative is a flagship program of the National Grange, created to empower community-driven projects that strengthen and enrich life in rural and small-town America. Originally piloted in 2024 through seven State Granges and a holiday mini-grant program, the initiative expanded nationwide in 2025, opening the door for all Granges to get involved and make a meaningful local impact. **To date, more than \$175,000 has been granted to local Granges and projects.**

HOW CAN I RECEIVE A GRANT?

In January 2026, a new grant cycle, "**Bridging the Gaps**," was announced, with forty (40) \$1,000 grants available to Community or Pomona Granges who wish to create or expand an event or project that educates their community and addresses a local disparity.

- Grants are open to Community Granges or Pomona Granges
- All grants require a simple application form, due by **February 28, 2026**.
- Grants must include at least one non-Grange **partner organization**.
- Projects must educate the community and address a disparity their community faces.
 - Granges may choose their own projects, but funding is meant to support the project or event, and should not be used for Grange Hall improvements or supplies that do not directly support the event.
 - Grant may be used for new events OR to expand upon a pre-existing event.
- Projects must be completed by **August 31, 2026**, with final reports due by **September 30, 2026**.
- Projects must include a plan for recruiting and gaining members
- Additional can be earned for documented membership growth.

Grant applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis. All Granges will be notified in mid-March with fund distribution by **March 31, 2026**.

ACCESS GRANT APPLICATIONS: www.nationalgrange.org/rural-life-initiative

GRANGE HEIRLOOM FOR FEBRUARY

Use the **Grange Heirloom Program** to teach your members and the community about some of the key cornerstones of the Grange. Materials are available at <http://www.nationalgrange.org/heirloom-program>.

You are welcome to choose any of the **Grange Heirlooms** at any time. We are currently in “Year D,” which runs through February 2026. The final year in the Heirloom Program cycle will begin in March.

Use the hashtag #GrangeHeirloom when you share these important pieces of our work and history on social media.

**IN KIND WORDS AND
DEEDS DISPENSE
CHARITY, AS FREELY
AS FLOWERS DO
THEIR PERFUME.**

Flora, Fourth Degree



GRANTWRITING

continued from page 1

Projects supported by active members and community partners often have greater reach and sustainability. Highlight volunteer involvement, committees, and any partnerships with schools, nonprofits, health providers, or local agencies. Remember that every RLI-funded project must have at least one partner organization that is not another Grange, nor is it Grange-related.

If youth or Junior members are involved, be sure to include that information, as intergenerational engagement strengthens your proposal and your community.

Strong applications explain how success will be measured and how the project may continue beyond the grant period. Even simple evaluation methods and modest sustainability plans demonstrate long-term thinking.

Your proposal represents your Grange and your community. Proofread carefully, answer every question fully, and ask another member to review your application before submission. Clear, professional writing makes a positive impression.

With the February 28 deadline approaching, now is the time to finalize and submit your RLI: Bridging the Gaps application.

By clearly presenting your community need, using available resources, partnering with another community organization, and planning with intention for long-term success and replication, your Grange can submit a proposal that reflects both readiness and vision.

Granges preparing applications are encouraged to watch the two “**From Idea to Impact**” webinars, available on National Grange social media channels. These sessions walk members through the RLI process, share practical tips, and highlight successful project examples.

Using these resources can help your Grange strengthen both your proposal and your implementation plan.

For full guidelines, resources, and application materials, visit nationalgrange.org/rural-life-initiative.

Thoughtful preparation today can help turn your ideas into lasting community impact tomorrow.

Remember that these tips aren’t just for your Rural Life Initiative grant applications, but can be applied to funding requests or grant proposals through other community giving programs.

STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITIES

A National Grange Webinar Series

MARCH

ENGAGING NEW ENERGY

10

60 MINUTES

Join Amanda Brozana to explore strategies for welcoming and involving new members who join through the Rural Life Initiative, fostering active participation, lasting connections, and stronger, more vibrant Grange communities.



Register: <https://grange.biz/RLIwebinar>

*All webinars will begin at 8:30pm ET / 5:30pm PT.
Can't make it? Recordings will be available following the event.*

2026 NATIONAL GRANGE PROGRAMS NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

The 2026 program guides for the National Grange are now available on the National Grange website.

Updated program guides, entry forms, project information, and more are now available for:

- Community Service
- Lecturer's Department
- Youth & Young Adults
- Grange Youth Fairs
- Distinguished Grange
- Grange In Action
- *and more!*

Note: (Junior Grange will be completed soon! Stay tuned!)

Many of these departments have substantial changes to their 2026 programming, so we encourage all Grange members to review the guides and share

the information with their Granges.

In addition to departmental programming, information is available on ongoing programs, including [America250](#), [Project Sustenance](#), the [Rural Life Initiative](#), and [Reaching Rural Surgical Seniors](#).

Granges are encouraged to use parts of departmental programs in their annual Grange calendars. For example, the Lecturer's department has programs prepared for National Ag Literacy Week, Project Sustenance can guide service projects, or the Distinguished Grange application has ideas that can be incorporated to help YOUR Grange become "Distinguished," too.

All guides and program information can be accessed at www.nationalgrange.org/programs.

SUPPORT THE GRANGE FOUNDATION THROUGH THE COMMON ROUTES CHALLENGE

Through April, the Grange Foundation is encouraging members and friends of the Grange to celebrate unity through movement by participating in the [Common Routes: Choose Your Challenge](#) event.

This virtual *-thon* allows individuals to support the work of the Grange Foundation at the level and with the activity of their choice, from running a 10K to taking a few long Sunday drives. Pets and children can even take part!

"The idea is simple - use your time on the move to reflect on the impact the Grange has had on your life or community and share that with others," Grange Foundation Chairman John Benedik said. "You can choose how you want to participate, when you want to participate and in doing so, you'll move the Grange Foundation forward into 2026 and beyond."

Adult and Junior racers will receive a cooling towel and sticker pack. If you sign up a child under 5, you will receive a special waterproof "Baby's first 5k" sticker.

You can even choose to have your pets get in on the fun by signing them up to take part in the pup strut - though it's



open to any pet you'd like to participate. They will receive an event-branded pet bandana.

Racers are encouraged to have friends register and enjoy being on the move together, but they may also want to secure sponsors. By encouraging people who do not wish to race to sponsor you, you'll be helping the Foundation and entered into our contest for "biggest fundraisers." Just tell your friends and family to click the donate button on the website, select their amount and choose "Other" and enter your name under the On Behalf Of option.

To honor the idea that you can choose your challenge and move any way you'd like, we've also created a Sunday Driver

and passenger category. Sunday drivers will receive a keychain and sticker pack. Passengers will receive an event sticker pack.

Finally, if you don't want to race or drive but still wish to support the Grange Foundation and have your name added to the event supporters, you can register as a cheerleader.

Registration is open through Grange Month (April)!

When you register however, you will receive a digital bib so you can show your support and participation on social media platforms. Print the bib and hang it at your hall or office to encourage others to take part. Swag items will be sent by mail.

"This is a great way to get a friend to support the Foundation and learn why the Grange is important to you while walking, running, biking, riding or doing any other type of movement that you choose," Grange Foundation Associate Amanda Brozana said. "No matter what mode of movement you choose, we challenge you to share the value of Grange with others through this event."

Register here: <https://runsignup.com/grangefoundation>

UNDERSTANDING CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE RISK FACTORS: NUMBERS TO KNOW IN 2026

Courtesy of Family Features / Feature Impact

Taking care of your heart with healthy behaviors may be at the top of your wellness priority list already, and there may be good news about the effects of adhering to expert recommendations.

New information from the [American Heart Association's 2026 Heart Disease & Stroke Statistics Update](#) shows deaths from heart disease and stroke are on the decline. However, rates continue to climb for high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity - all of which are health risk factors that contribute to cardiovascular disease.

Following expert guidance can be your prescription for better health as 80% of heart disease and stroke is preventable.

To help maintain and improve your cardiovascular health, consider following the American Heart Association's [Life's Essential 8](#), which is a set of four health behaviors (eat better, be more active, quit tobacco and get healthy sleep)



Photo courtesy of Shutterstock

and four health factors (manage weight, control cholesterol, manage blood sugar and manage blood pressure).

In the United States, optimal Life's Essential 8 scores could prevent up to 40% of annual all-cause and cardiovascular disease deaths among adults.

Consider these highlights from the statistics update:

- ♥ Heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the U.S. and stroke is the No. 4 leading cause of death.
- ♥ Together, heart disease and stroke accounted for more than a quarter of all deaths in the U.S. in 2023.
- ♥ Cardiovascular diseases, including all types of heart disease and stroke, claim more lives in the U.S. each year than all forms of cancer and accidental deaths - the Nos. 2 and 3 causes of death - combined.
- ♥ On average, every 34 seconds, someone died of cardiovascular disease in 2023.
- ♥ On average, about two people died of heart disease every 3 minutes in the U.S. in 2023.
- ♥ On average in 2023, someone died of stroke every 3 minutes, 14 seconds in the U.S.
- ♥ Nearly half of U.S. adults now have high blood pressure.
- ♥ Nearly 29.5 million U.S. adults have diagnosed diabetes.
- ♥ About 50% of U.S. adults have obesity or severe obesity, and 28.1% of youth ages 2-19 have obesity.
- ♥ Only 1 in 4 U.S. adults meets national physical activity guidelines. Only 1 in 5 U.S. youths ages 6-17 are physically active for 60 minutes or more every day of the week.

To learn more about how to reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease, visit heart.org.

APPLY FOR THE ERNESTINE KEISER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP



For the third year, the Grange Foundation is now accepting applications for the Ernestine Keiser Memorial Scholarship, an annual award that supports students who exemplify academic excellence, leadership, and a dedication to service.

Established in memory of Ernestine "Ernie" Keiser, this scholarship reflects her belief in education as a pathway to opportunity and her lifelong commitment to strengthening communities. Through this program, the Grange Foundation continues that legacy by investing directly in students who are preparing to make a positive impact in their hometowns and beyond.

The Ernestine Keiser Memorial Scholarship is open to Grange members who are in pursuing or enrolled in postsecondary education. Applicants should demonstrate strong character, involvement in community or civic life, and a clear commitment to personal growth through education.

Applications must include 2 letters of recommendation as well as an essay - so don't delay in getting started!

Application deadline: March 1, 2026

Learn more and apply: <https://grangefoundation.org/ernestine-memorial-scholarship/>

By supporting education and service-driven leadership, the Grange Foundation continues its mission to cultivate opportunity and resilience in rural and agricultural communities nationwide.

HAMP WATCH: WHERE IS OUR NATIONAL GRANGE PRESIDENT?

This monthly feature highlights where National Grange President Chris Hamp has been and what she's been up to. Do you want to see her in your neighborhood or at your Grange event? Email her at champ@nationalgrange.org. This week, we're looking back on the end of December, as well as January.



December 22: Our trip home to Monroe for Christmas with family found us taking the scenic route through the Tualco Valley for a stop at Tualco Grange #284 - my home Grange.



January 5: Five Mile Prairie Grange often begins our annual event calendar with a community potluck and Bingo. It's always a great night when every table is up and full!



December 27: On our way home to Spokane after Christmas, we made a detour to be able to present Sister Codi Titus with her 2025 National Grange Connector Award. Codi has been a lifetime mentor and friend!



January 26: We attended the Washington State Grange Legislative Day and heard from a great agenda of speakers. We were also able to meet with one of the State Representatives from our home district.



Recipes from the Heartland

The America's 250th Grange Workgroup is celebrating our country's 250th Anniversary by "throwing back" to some classic recipes from Grange cookbooks. Do you have favorite recipes that evoke the American spirit which you would like to see published again? Send them to Lew Gaskill at olgaskill@comcast.net. Please include which Grange cookbook your recipes come from.

This week's recipes come from the **Grange Favorites Cookbook** by the New England Grange Building - West Springfield, MA - 2012

These recipes are great for chilly days and Valentine's Day!

Hearty Beef Stew

Courtesy of Doris Johnson
Old Lyme Grange #162 (CT)

3 carrots, peeled and sliced	1/4 cup flour	1 cup beef broth
3 potatoes, diced	1 1/2 teaspoon salt	1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1 onion, chopped	1/2 teaspoon pepper	1 teaspoon paprika
2 stalks celery, sliced	1 clove garlic, minced	2 teaspoons browning and seasoning sauce
2 pounds stew beef, cubed	1 bay leaf	

Arrange vegetables in a slow cooker: top with beef and set aside. Mix flour, salt and pepper, sprinkle over meat. Stir well; add remaining ingredients. Cover, heat on low setting for 8 to 10 hours or on high setting for 4 to 5 hours. Remove and discard bay leaf. Serves 4 to 6.

Tip: It's easy to convert your favorite stew recipe from stove top to slow cooker. If it usually simmers 35 to 40 minutes, that equals 6 to 8 hours on low or 3 to 4 hours on high. Recipes that cook 1-3 hours on the stovetop will be done in 8 to 16 hours on low or 4 to 6 hours on high.

Strawberry Pretzel Salad

Courtesy of Brenda Noble
NY State FAC Director

2 cups thin unsalted pretzels, crushed (salted pretzels can be used)	1 10-ounce package frozen strawberries
1 1/2 cup sugar (divided)	1 Carton of Cool Whip
1/2 cup butter, melted	2 3-ounce packages of strawberry Jello
	8 ounces cream cheese, softened

For the first layer, crush the pretzels and combine with 1/2 cup sugar and butter, cover the bottom of a 9 x 13 pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 9 minutes. Cool completely.

For the second layer, cream together 1 cup sugar and the cream cheese. Fold in the cool whip and spread over the cooled first layer.

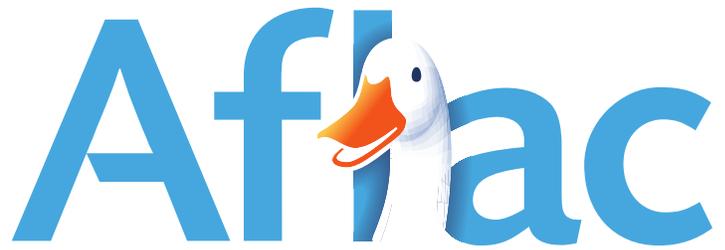
For the third layer, dissolve the Jello in 2 cups boiling water. While the Jello mix is still hot add the frozen strawberries. Mix until berries separate and the Jello is congealing. Spoon evenly over layer two.

Let set and refrigerate until serving. When ready to serve, cut into number of desired portions.



Photo via AdobeStock

GRANGE MEMBER BENEFIT:



The National Grange offers Aflac. Staying fully informed about these benefits, how they work, and what to expect is the best way to help you choose the right plan for you and your family.

Contact our dedicated advisor and representative, Theon Karabatsos, to schedule a time with him at your convenience to learn about your options!

We're here when you need us, ask about:

- Applying for our insurance policies
- Changing beneficiaries
- Adding/deleting family members from your coverage
- Going on a leave of absence
- Submitting a claim
- Updating Information
- Wellness Benefit - Payable for routine medical exams to encourage early detection and prevention.
- Maternity Coverage
- Covid-19 (Protection during treatment and recovery)
- Keeping your coverage when you retire or change jobs

BACK IN STOCK



SUPPLY STORE

www.grangestore.org

VETERAN RECOGNITION PIN

Are you looking to honor a veteran in your Grange? This special .75" pin combines honoring their service in the military as well as honoring their Grange membership. Perfect for adding to a Quilts of Valor presentation or Veteran recognition ceremony.



Order online through the Grange Supply Store at grangestore.org or by calling Loretta at (202) 628-3507 ext. 109.

\$5.00
PLUS SHIPPING

Theon Karabatsos, Aflac Advisor and Representative
Phone: (561) 398-1204

Email: theon.karabatsos@us.aflac.com

[CLICK HERE](#) to view the Aflac insurance policies you are eligible to apply for and/or can enroll in.

Supply Store notice: Price Change Effective May 1!

The price of Golden Sheaf, Silver Star, and 75-year Awards, as well as 80- and 85-year letters will increase to \$15.00 each *plus shipping*. Thank you for understanding!

NATIONAL GRANGE

HEADQUARTERS: 1616 H ST. NW, SUITE 300, WASHINGTON, DC 20006 | (202) 628-3507

Publisher - Christine Hamp, National Grange President. Available to members at champ@nationalgrange.org or by phone at (509) 953-3533

Editor - Philip J Vonada, National Grange Communications Director. Contact to submit a story idea for *Grange Today!* or *Good Day!* magazine, request assistance with publicity, business cards, social media, and more. Email pvonada@nationalgrange.org or call/text (814) 404-7985

Leadership Training & Membership Development - Amanda Brozana, National Grange Membership and Leadership Development Director. Contact us to learn more about membership recruitment or how to start or reorganize a Grange, leadership training, and more. Email abrozana@nationalgrange.org or call/text (301) 943-1090

Legislative and Policy Issues - Burton Eller, Legislative Director - *National HQ*, ext. 114 or email beller@nationalgrange.org

Membership Recognition, Grange Supply Sales, Grange Programs and Member Benefits - Loretta Washington, *National HQ*, ext. 109 or email Lwashington@nationalgrange.org

Free Grange Websites, Emails, Good Day! subscription questions, and Membership Database - Stephanie Wilkins, IT Director. *National HQ*, ext. 101 or email swilkins@nationalgrange.org

Lecturer - Dr. Richard Stonebraker, lecturer@nationalgrange.org or (301) 606-1221

Junior Grange Programming - Katie Girtler, Director - junior@nationalgrange.org

Grange Youth & Young Adult Programming - Samantha Wilkins, Director - youth@nationalgrange.org

Grange Youth Fair Program - grangeyouthfairs@grange.org

National Grange Community Service - communityservice@grange.org

Distinguished Grange - Connie Johnston, Administrator distinguishedgrange@grange.org

Grange Foundation - John Benedik, Chairperson ngfb@grange.org

