



WHATCOM COUNTY
**HEALTH AND
COMMUNITY
SERVICES**



UNITED WAY
Whatcom County

2025 Community Impact Grants Common Application

PART A: COVER PAGE

Please fill out this form completely. Note that individual funding agencies have specific grant requirements and will require supplemental materials. Please check the agency website below for details.

To which source are you applying?

- City of Bellingham’s Housing or Human/Social Services NOFA:
<https://cob.org/services/housing/funding-opportunities-2/partnerships-funding>
- United Way of Whatcom County’s Community Impact Fund:
<https://www.unitedwaywhatcom.org/help-for-organizations/>
- Whatcom County Health and Community Services:
<https://www.whatcomcounty.us/Bids.aspx>

Agency Contact Information:

Agency Name: Max Higbee Center

DBA (if applicable): n/a

EIN: **91-1275451** UEID (from SAM.gov): HBMYEGSY2UE3

Mailing address: 1400 North State Street #101, Bellingham, WA 98226

Website: maxhigbeecenter.org

General phone: 360-746-7181

State of Washington Business License Number(s): 602421375

Executive Director (or authorized representative):

Name: Riannon Bardsley

Title (if not ED): Executive Director

Email: riannon@maxhigbeecenter.org

Phone: 206-612-8704

Application Contact (If different):

Name: Click here to enter text.

Title: Click here to enter text.

Email: Click here to enter text.

Phone: Click here to enter text.

Program Information:

Program Name: Weekday Program

Program Address: 1400 North State Street #101, Bellingham, WA 98226



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Are all program services delivered at this



address? Yes No



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Funding Request: The award amount is dependent on the funding organization. Please see individual funder’s supplemental materials for more information about the funds available.

How much funding per year are you requesting for this program?

\$ 30,000

Total Annual Project Budget:

\$ 445,387

Annual Organizational Budget:

\$ 1,177,073

PART B: AGENCY INFORMATION

Please limit your responses to no more than two pages for questions 1-5.

1. **Agency Mission.** Please paste or copy your agency’s mission statement below.

Max Higbee Center (MHC) is a non-profit organization that provides community-based recreation programs for youth and adults with developmental disabilities in Whatcom County, Washington.

2. **Agency Beneficiaries.** Briefly describe the intent of your agency’s programs and who primarily benefits from them. Please describe your organization’s impact, specifying the number of beneficiaries or clients served per year and their demographics.

The MHC serves a historically underserved and disproportionately isolated population that experiences poorer health outcomes compared to the general population. According to a 2021 National Institute for Health Care Management report, 42% of people with disabilities reported experiencing depression compared to 11.6% of people without disabilities. People with developmental disabilities are some of the most underserved and financially constrained individuals in our community. Families often describe a “services cliff” after graduation when there is a sudden lack of resources, support, and a sense of community. 100% of the more than 225 MHC members (beneficiaries) have intellectual disabilities, and many have additional physical disabilities to contend with.

3. **Qualifications and expertise.** Briefly summarize your agency’s qualifications and expertise (e.g., years of operation, accreditations, experience of staff members, and number of volunteers). Please mention any recent major organizational changes.



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MHC was founded in 1985 by educators, families, and individuals with disabilities who wanted quality recreation and social opportunities in Whatcom County. Dr. Max Higbee, a special education professor at Western Washington University, spearheaded this movement. Along with his work to start the Center, he was instrumental in developing the Washington State law that requires a free and appropriate public education for all students with disabilities. This law was later used as a model for federal legislation, making Bellingham a nationwide leader in inclusion. Organizational leaders, both board and staff, are experts in this field of work, and two MHC Board members have been with the organization since its formation and were students of Max Higbee; also, one of the MHC Board Members is a lived expert and member of the Center. One board member and one staff member are professors at WWU in the Recreation Management & Leadership program. Additionally, multiple MHC staff have intellectual and physical disabilities, making them lived experts and resulting in a more effective MHC. Additionally, The Max Higbee Center went through an Executive Leadership transition where the long-time Director, Kait Whiteside, resigned and was replaced with Riannon Bardsley, who is a parent of a Max Higbee Center Member and previous Executive Director of a local non-profit for 10 years.

4. Racial Equity and Social Justice. What steps has your organization taken to address issues of racial equity and social justice within your agency? Which steps are complete, and which are planned or ongoing?

MHC does not discriminate against any person based on race, color, nationality, immigration status, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender expression and/or identity, genetic information, or age. Racial equity and social justice matter and are core to what the MHC does. One of the four aims of our mission is to promote and embody justice, diversity, inclusion, and equity in our organization and community. The Capability Approach is a theory of rights based on human development that has achieved considerable attention in philosophy and the social sciences based on Martha Nussbaum's formulation. A theory of human development, well-being, and justice, the Capability Approach, refers to the freedoms or opportunities (capabilities) to lead lives people want to lead, to do what they want to do, and to be who they want to be. Capabilities are the freedoms or opportunities available for individuals to do what they desire with their lives. Attributing dignity to all human beings, Nussbaum contended that "the failure to deal adequately with the needs of citizens with impairments and disabilities is a serious flaw in modern theories [of justice]." Nussbaum identified core capabilities that are of central importance in any human life, including those with disabilities. All ten of these core capabilities are experienced by members at the MHC. Additionally, staff have participated in trainings like Groundwater and org-specific books to unlearn white supremacy values.

5. Agency Funding. List your organization's most significant funding sources from greatest to least (including the United Way, Whatcom County Health and Community Services and City of Bellingham); dollar amounts are not necessary. Significant funding sources can be defined as sources that make up more than 15% of your program budget. If you have many funding sources, you may



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list them by category (i.e., federal, state, foundation, individual donors). Please mention any anticipated or recent changes in your future funding or financial position.

state, foundation, individual donors). recent changes in your future funding or financial position.

Individual donations and fundraising events are Max Higbee Center's primary funding sources. Other sources include private foundation grants, the Department of Social and Health Services (state funding), private pay, the City of Bellingham and United Way. All of which are essential to the on-going operations of the Weekday Program. Max Higbee Center has no federal funding.

PART C: PROGRAM INFORMATION

Please limit your responses to no more than two pages for questions 6-8.

6. **Program Summary.** Briefly summarize the program and its core activities in one or two sentences.

The program offers more than 40 hours per week of vital support to individuals and their families who are often in lifelong caregiving roles. The weekday program also provides essential, healthy, and unique adaptive recreational opportunities to those with intellectual disabilities.

7. **Program Purpose.** Identify the community need(s) that the program addresses. What are the measurable outcomes that will result from the services provided?

MHC's weekday program provides community-based recreation programs for teens and adults with developmental disabilities. MHC has four broad aims: 1) provide personal enjoyment and enrichment through a diverse range of leisure activities; 2) promote social, physical, emotional, and cognitive growth and development; 3) help participants achieve greater community engagement and independence in life; and to promote and embody justice, diversity, inclusion, and equity in our organization and within our community. Activities decrease isolation, promote wellness, improve life skills, increase self-reliance, offer opportunities for friendship, support community inclusion, and create a sense of belonging.

The resources and support provided are critical social determinants of health and quality of life issues for a vulnerable population. People with intellectual developmental disabilities (IDD) are disproportionately experiencing homelessness at a rate of 2.5 times higher than that of the general population. Additionally, people with intellectual developmental disabilities (cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder, down syndrome, etc.) experience higher risks for poor physical and mental health conditions. Furthermore, many people with IDD rely on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) where there is no housing market in the US where less than \$900 a month will pay for a safe and decent rental unit. In addition to systemic and structurally imposed poverty, common factors that contribute to homelessness for these individuals are low educational attainment, challenging behaviors, and the breakdown of family relationships. Other issues that have been identified as contributing to homelessness in this population include the caregiving burden and stigma associated with having a family member with IDD, leading to instability in the family home. The MHC supports members and their families in ways that reduce the risk to homelessness, increase social support,



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promotes skill-building and meets
and joyous adaptive care to those with IDD.

basic needs by providing safe, nurturing

8. **Program Status.** How long has this program been in operation in Whatcom County? Since your last application, have you made any changes in how you offer services? If this is a new program, how far along is your agency in the planning process? What resources has your organization already invested?

The Weekday Program offers enriching recreation activities Monday - Fridays from 9:30 am-5:30 pm (though some members arrive as early as 8:30 a.m. and leave as late as 6:00 p.m.) to support teens and adults with developmental disabilities in opportunities for social connection, life-long learning, the building of transferable skills, the improvement of health and wellness, personal growth, and community access/inclusion. MHC is in downtown Bellingham, close to a transit hub since many participants rely on public transportation, making it accessible to many folks. Staff ratios for the weekday program are 1:6 when at the center and are closer to 1:4 on community outings. However, some members benefit from having more staff to ensure safety during recreational activities. The MHC weekday program sometimes sees as many as 45 members a day. Members have unique accessibility needs, interests, and recreational goals, and it is at the heart of MHC's mission to provide adaptive opportunities for members to create a meaningful and healthy life. Members and their families often need connections to other community resources. To support them, the MHC sends monthly newsletters to families that include an array of resources, hires translators, collaborates with county school districts, and consults with partner organizations (The ARC of Whatcom County, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, WISE, Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center, etc.). The Max Higbee Center was formed in 1984 and has offered the community weekday program since 2014. The most recent shift in programming has been to a drop-in model, which allows more flexibility for its members and expands the support offered to family and other caregivers.



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UNITED WAY FOCUS AREAS

1. To support financial stability in Whatcom County, we have identified three funding priorities below: basic needs, economic mobility, and breaking the cycle of poverty. Choose **one** category below that best aligns with your agency/program:

Basic Needs

- Food security
- Stable, attainable, affordable housing
- Health and mental health care access

Economic Mobility

- Financial literacy and training
- Vocational readiness training and support
- Adult education programs

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

- Affordable child care and early learning programs
- Academic programs to increase student attendance and achievement
- Parenting support
- Addiction treatment and recovery
- Abuse prevention

2. Please describe how your program/agency services align with the category you selected above.

The Max Higbee Center supports the financial stability, wellness, and resiliency of families that include a person with a developmental disability through community-based respite care for family caregivers and skill-building opportunities for individuals with a disability.

3. Please provide two or three key outcomes you measure that indicate progress toward your mission. List the number of clients being served, what you track, and the most recent results.

Key Outcome: The Weekday Program delivers reliable and high-quality respite care to families to support them in fulfilling personal and family needs and obligations (such as going to work, grocery



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shopping, or going to doctor appointments) while their family member with a developmental disability is in a safe and enriching environment.

Indicators:

Metric 1: 100% of family members who completed our annual survey indicated that the Weekday Program supports them in fulfilling personal and family needs and obligations. 100% indicated significant support in this area.

Metric 2: The Weekday Program delivers reliable and high-quality respite care to families to support them with opportunities to earn income and rest from caregiving roles and responsibilities while their family member with a developmental disability is in a safe, enriching, supportive environment.

100% of family members who completed our annual survey indicated that the Weekday Program supports them in rest and recuperation. 97% showed significant support in this area.

Metric 3: The Weekday Program supports 181 individuals with developmental disabilities in increasing their community connections and learning transferable skills that benefit their work, school, and home life.

98% of individuals who completed our annual survey indicated that the Weekday Program helps them increase community connections and build new skills.

181 individuals served

4. How does United Way's investment help meet the funding needs of the organization or program? Please give specific examples of how United Way funds are/will be utilized.

According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, people with disabilities are a categorically low-income population. The Weekday Program serves 181 individuals with developmental disabilities who experience financial struggles due to a myriad of social, health, and economic factors. According to an October 2023 publication by the National Council on Disabilities, "people with disabilities have higher costs of living due to disability-specific expenses and needs; people with disabilities consistently have poorer outcomes for employment, earnings, savings, and overall net wealth." Additionally, people with disabilities widely reported more profound isolation/restrictions that negatively affected physical, emotional, and psychological health. Max Higbee Center and the Weekday Program provided vital support to a group of people (those with disabilities and their families) who are financially struggling, socially isolated, and experiencing a decline in physical and emotional health. The



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Weekday Program provided enriching, supportive, and meaningful activities five days per week to create opportunities for people to stay connected, informed, active, and practice critical social and life skills.

67% of Weekday Program participants live at home with family members due to financial constraints, limited employment opportunities, limited community resources, and supported living options. This creates a lifelong financial burden and caregiving role that many families must assume. After children with disabilities age out of daycare and after-school programs, Max Higbee Center's Weekday provides high-quality and reliable respite care to 122 families caring for and financially supporting teens, young adults, and adults with developmental disabilities.

The United Way of Whatcom County funds will be utilized to pay for staffing and activity expenses related to providing respite care.

5. Briefly describe how your agency/program will utilize community partnerships or coordinate with other agencies (UW partner agencies, other community non-profits, government agencies, local companies, schools, etc.) to advance your work/mission.

The Max Higbee Center and the Weekday Program rely heavily on community partnerships. Current partnerships include, but are not limited to, 1) Collaborating with Bellingham, Lynden, and Ferndale Community Transition Programs to help young adults receiving special education services begin the transition from school to community support respite, 2) Community Boating Center to provide on-the-water adaptive recreational opportunities, 3) Vital, where MHC members are able to participate in adaptive yoga classes, 4) Western Washington University to place students in practicums and offer volunteer opportunities, 5) Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS) where we host workfirst supported employment opportunities, 6) City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation for garden plots and facilities uses, 7) Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) for free bus passes to members for program outings, 8) YMCA where members access the gym, swimming pool, basketball court and racket ball court, 9) Wild Whatcom for hiking, snowshoeing and use of their wheelchair accessible bus, and 10) The Arc of Whatcom County to support members and caregivers with benefit navigation. In addition to these partners, the Max Higbee Center hosts individuals who lead music, art, dance, and cooking sessions. Our work would not be possible without these fantastic community partners.

6. United Way focuses on ALICE households in Whatcom County. ALICE refers to households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level but not enough to afford the basic cost of living in our community.
 - a. What percentage of your program recipients are below the ALICE threshold based on the survival budget for Whatcom County? 47%
 - b. What percentage of your program recipients are ALICE (above FPL but below the ALICE threshold)? 26.5%



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- c. Do you collect client data by zip code? Yes, 98225, 98226, 98227, 98229, 98230, 98240, 98247, 98248, 98264, 98274, 98284

Visit the [United for ALICE](#) website for the most recent (2024 report) Whatcom County data to determine the survival budget guidelines for ALICE households.

7. Please share an example of a client who was helped by your services.
**Note: if you receive a 2025 Community Impact Grant, this story may be shared on your behalf by United Way for the purpose of our community fundraising. Names and details may be altered for privacy.*

The Max Higbee Center provides respite care through financial aid to families unable to afford care. In 2024, we provided more than \$50,000 in financial aid to Whatcom County residents. Hermano is one of them, a member who joined MHC in 2024. He is non-speaking from a primarily Spanish-speaking family, and before joining MHC, he had few opportunities to get out of the house, which made daily living challenging for the family. As MHC staff got to know Hermano, they noticed he was generally eager to try new things, and if he approved, he'd give a distinctive 'thumbs up' and smile. The staff of MHC and Community Boating Center (CBC) collaborated to get the CBC boating waiver translated into Spanish, and Hermano's mother agreed to let him go. However, she was unsure he'd get into a boat. The first time Hermano went to the CBC, he donned a life jacket with some support and was encouraged to get into a double kayak. He did, and at first, his staff paddling partner was unsure how he felt about it. However, after a few minutes of being on the bay, the staff asked Hermano how he liked it, and received the approving smile and thumbs up (Hermano had even turned back so the staff could see his smile). The next paddling program Huber attended, he rushed over to the life jackets and was the first member to put one on, excited to enjoy the beauty and fun of kayaking with a smile on his face.