

Catalytic Consulting

Guidelines for Grantee Partners

Updated January 2026



Overview

The Catalytic Consulting program is part of The Lenny Zakim Fund's (LZF's) Catalytic Community Building Program and grantmaking approach. For most grassroots nonprofits with limited budgets and staff capacity, high-quality consulting support can be transformational but is often an unattainable luxury. The Catalytic Consulting program aims to provide targeted, **short-term support** for grantee partners to work with a consultant on a **project that advances organizational learning, strategy, or sustainability, with the goal of enhancing your organization's capacity for mission delivery or growth.**

LZF's grantee partners may access **up to \$1,500 per grant year to work with a consultant.** Grantee partners may work with any consultant they choose, subject to final approval by LZF. LZF maintains a list of pre-approved consultants if you need recommendations.

Some examples of possible consulting projects:

- Setting up or refining organizational processes (e.g., board committees, hiring protocols, handbooks, emergency response protocols, etc.)
- Testing or piloting a new program (e.g. design and implement a year-end mail appeal)
- Creation of customized tools (e.g., cash flow projection, scenario planning)
- Training(s) or professional development for staff or board members (e.g., project management training, how to use QuickBooks, etc.)
- Conducting research, analysis, or data collection to better understand your organization's donors, community, or stakeholders
- Facilitating strategic conversations or board development efforts
- Program evaluation or creation of a Theory of Change
- Organizational assessment to identify key priorities, needs, and/or growth areas

How it works

- 1) Identify an area of need or potential project. Look through LZF's list of pre-approved consultants or identify someone who best meets your organization's needs.
- 2) Email Tiffany Lau (tlau@thelennyzakimfund.org) to set up a brief 30-minute conversation about your consulting project. Tiffany will confirm your project's eligibility and is also happy to serve as a thought partner in project design and consultant selection.
- 3) You, LZF, and your consultant sign LZF's Grant Service Agreement.
- 4) Complete your consulting engagement.
- 5) Upon project completion, your consultant emails Tiffany with an invoice detailing their rate and scope of work (either measured by deliverables or number of hours).
- 6) LZF will process the payment of up to \$1,500.
- 7) Tiffany will reach out to you for any feedback you are willing to share (via survey or conversation) on the Catalytic Consulting program and your consulting engagement.

We have secured funding for **up to 20 current and former grantee partners to participate this year on a first come, first served basis**, understanding that not all our grantee partners may be in a position to utilize and take advantage of this offering at this time.

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Clarifications and FAQ

How do I know how much a project should cost?

- The example projects listed above are all accomplishable with \$1,500.
- Most consultants will be upfront about what they can deliver within the budget. Tiffany will also be able to weigh in with a second opinion when she approves your project.

What is a reasonable hourly rate?

- **We recommend agreeing on a project scope (e.g. deliverables or outputs from the consultant) for a flat fee of \$1,500 rather than budgeting hourly.**
- If needed, LZF's recommended consultant hourly rate for grassroots organizations is **\$175 / hour**, which we believe to be a fair rate for this kind of work. Consultants often work on a sliding scale, and we suggest you have a conversation with your consultant about what they would consider reasonable.
- We anticipate projects to be around 8-12 hours of work for the consultant.

When is the deadline to apply?

- Catalytic Consulting is a continuous program that rolls over with the calendar year. The last day of the 2026 cycle is December 31, 2026.
- We recommend reaching out to Tiffany by November, as **all consulting invoices must be submitted before December 15**.
- Each organization may only be granted Catalytic Consulting funds once per calendar year. If your organization already used Catalytic Consulting funds in 2026, you would be able to apply for a new project starting January 1, 2027.

What projects or costs are not eligible for this program?

- Hiring contractors (i.e., bookkeepers, grant writers) and outsourcing organizational work is not considered consulting and is not eligible.
- Back-dated consulting work is not eligible.
- Products and intellectual property are not eligible. For example, a consultant may be compensated for their time developing a cash flow framework for your organization, but they should not charge you for use or ownership of the framework.

What if we want to pursue a larger or longer-term consulting project?

- Longer-term consulting projects such as strategic planning, development audits, fundraising campaigns, or feasibility studies typically cost much more than \$1,500. If you are interested in pursuing a larger project, we are happy to connect you with consulting partners who may take on the project pro bono or at significantly subsidized rates.
- A portion of a larger consulting project *is* eligible to be covered through Catalytic Consulting. Please keep in mind that **your organization would be responsible for any remaining cost beyond \$1,500**.

I have other questions about Catalytic Consulting.

- Should you have questions anywhere along the process, please don't hesitate to contact Tiffany Lau, Deputy Director, at tlau@thelennyzakimfund.org.