



## Community Partner Program

**Overview:** Commute.org is a government agency in San Mateo County dedicated to reducing vehicle miles traveled and solo commutes by offering free, sustainable transportation programs. These include shuttle connections to Caltrain, BART, and the SF Bay Ferry, as well as incentives for biking, carpooling, and vanpooling. In 2023, Commute.org [identified participation gaps among priority communities](#) and launched a pilot grant program for 2024-26 to better engage historically underrepresented audiences.

The Community Partner Program forms intentional, two-way partnerships with trusted community-based organizations. Through collaboration and shared learning, the program ensures transportation benefits are well-communicated and responsive to diverse community needs. Financial support for partners expands access, strengthens long-term relationships, and increases awareness, participation, and meaningful input from underrepresented communities across San Mateo County.

**For 2026-28, Commute.org is launching a new outreach microgrant program for up to 5 Community Partner (non-profit) recipients. Grants will be awarded \$10,000 per organization per year for work to be completed over two years, starting July 1, 2026.**

The types of engagement will be determined through the application process, with organizations being compensated for their time and effort collaborating with us. Grant recipients will be asked to:

- Provide accurate information about Commute.org's programs and services to their community
- Help enroll their constituents in Commute.org programs
- Collaborate with Commute.org on the development and refinement of programs and services that best meet the needs of the community

Grantees will be provided:

- \$10,000 grant
- Outreach materials/marketing toolkit in relevant languages, including digital and print flyers, social media posts and graphics
- Training by Commute.org staff to your staff twice a year on programs and services
- Presentations or tabling by Commute.org staff twice per year to your audiences
- Information on other relevant transportation benefit programs in the region
- Exclusive raffles for Community Partner Grantees' constituents
- Commute.org swag/prizes for your audience
- Personalized CommuteStar network for your organization/constituency

### Grant Program Eligibility

All 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, or their fiscally sponsored projects, with an established track record of public outreach, communications, providing social services, or case management in San Mateo County are eligible and encouraged to apply.

#### *Priority audiences:*

These audiences were determined by data analysis of Commute.org's current program participants as well as Equity Priority Community Maps from SamTrans and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). Ideally, your organization works with one or more of the following groups:

<b>Latinos</b>	
<b>Non-English speakers</b>	
<b>People earning less than \$75,000 per year</b>	
<b>Women</b>	
<b>People living in these geographies</b>	North Fair Oaks East Palo Alto South San Francisco Daly City Coastside
<b>People working in these industries</b>	Small employers (under 50 employees) Warehouse/Light Industrial Hospitality (Restaurant, Hotel) Healthcare Agriculture Grocery, Retail

### Grant Recipient Work Plans

Commute.org recognizes that nonprofit organizations in San Mateo County have varied and unique methods for conducting outreach and engagement with the communities that they serve. For that reason, we encourage applicants to become familiar with the existing Commute.org programs and services and propose a work plan via the application to best achieve the following goals during the funding period:

1. Provide accurate and timely information about Commute.org programs and services
2. Provide feedback to Commute.org on programs, resources, and messaging
3. Assist individuals in registering for and/or participating in Commute.org's FREE programs, such as CommuteStar rewards, Guaranteed Ride Home, Try Transit, Caltrain Pass Forward, and first/last mile shuttle services
4. Conduct outreach for newly developed programs as they are launched

## Grant Program Deliverables

Commute.org expects that organizations will integrate Commute.org's key messages into existing outreach, as applicable. Grantees will also be expected to produce the following deliverables:

1. **Attend two mandatory trainings per year and two mandatory meetings per year.**
  - a. **Virtual Group Trainings** on Commute.org key messages and programs. Attendance is mandatory for grantee organization staff involved in implementing the outreach grant. Commute.org will train Community Partner staff to educate their community members on Commute.org's programs, CommuteStar platform, and rewards. Commute.org will also provide free branded materials to assist with outreach.
    - i. 90-minute kick-off training (July of each year).
    - ii. 1-hour training (January of each year)
  - b. **1:1 One-hour Virtual Check-in Meetings with Commute.org (January and July of each year)** to go over progress specific to your organization, including data metrics: how many activities have been completed, how many people have been reached, etc.
2. **Participate in an online commute tracking network, called CommuteStar.** Organization staff must sign up and will be trained to sign up community members. Commute.org's CommuteStar platform is a way to connect people to commute options, offer rewards and incentives, and track drive-alone rates and carbon emissions reductions. We will provide a personalized sign-up link and a Community Partner-specific CommuteStar network.
3. **Direct Community Engagement:** provide targeted messaging to key audiences. Commute.org will provide content, flyers, a marketing toolkit, social media posts, and a promotions calendar. Organizational activities could include:
  - a. Email marketing
  - b. Social or traditional media
  - c. In-person or virtual events
  - d. Other activities based on organization's capacity, existing communications and events, and ideas
4. **Host Commute.org:** Your organization will additionally provide opportunities for Commute.org to table or present to Community Partners' community members up to 2 times a year. Topics may include CommuteStar how-to, Clipper Card enrollment support, transportation options in their area, bike education, and more. Commute.org will bring giveaway items for the attendees.
5. **Submit two annual reports** on the work plan provided in the proposal (mid-year and end of year), including estimated number of people reached by each outreach method, dates and locations of activities. The report format will be like the work plan. The annual reports are required to be eligible for future funding opportunities.
6. **Participate in two surveys:** organization staff will take a brief survey once a year to report on estimated demographics of people reached based on target populations, community feedback on Commute.org messaging, lessons learned, and proposed next steps.

## Grant Selection Criteria

- Eligibility:
  - 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, or ability to provide a letter of fiscal sponsorship from a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that will receive the grant on your behalf
  - Works in San Mateo County
- Suitability: focuses on one or more priority audiences across Commute.org's member jurisdictions
- Project plan: Applicants should clearly describe:
  - **Who you will reach**
    - Number of people in San Mateo County
    - Priority communities served (e.g., underserved languages, geographies, industries)
  - **How you will do the outreach**
    - Outreach strategies and activities
    - Ability to carry out the proposed work
  - **What you expect to achieve**
    - Expected outcomes and impact
    - How success will be tracked or measured
  - **Your experience and capacity**
    - Past success with similar outreach or grant programs
    - Ability to meet deliverables on time

## Grant Application Process and Requirements

All materials will be posted [here](#). Deadline for applications is **March 20, 2026 at 5 pm PT**.

The timeline for this process is outlined below and subject to change.

- March 2, 2026: Call for Applications posted on Commute.org website and promotion
- March 6, 11 am: Virtual Workshop (will be recorded)
- March 11: Questions due for Q&A. Please send questions to Emma Shlaes [emma@commute.org](mailto:emma@commute.org) with the subject line "Community Partner Grant Program questions"
- March 16: Q&A posted on Commute.org website
- **March 20: Proposals due by 5 pm PT**
- March 23-April 3: Review committee meets
- April 16: Board meeting to approve grantees; Grantees notified
- May and June: contracting
- July 1, 2026: Grant period begins

Complete applications must include:

1. [This online form, which includes space for a 200-400 word narrative](#)
2. Email the following to Emma Shlaes [emma@commute.org](mailto:emma@commute.org) with the subject line “Community Partner Grant Program”
  - a. [Work plan](#) using table format provided in application
  - b. Your 501(c)(3) letter OR fiscal sponsor documentation

### Workplan

Please attach your proposed work plan using the table format provided. Please fill out the template with one line for each major outreach action (or type of action) you propose. See example below and [download the work plan template](#) here. Add more rows if needed. Please submit the work plan table as an Excel or Google Sheets document.

Examples of metrics include:

- If you conduct case work with 2,000 clients and share Commute.org materials with 500 of them, please list “500 clients” in your metrics.
- For digital outreach, please set a goal for the number of unique visitors you will send to the Commute.org website via custom QR codes (that we will provide)

### Sample Workplan

Outreach Action	Timing	Location	# of People Your Org Proposes to Reach	How # People Reached Will be Measured
Organize 2 webinars on Commute.org programs	September and May of each year	online	50 SMC residents/workers at each, 200 visits to Commute.org website via unique link	Registration information, participant count, # of visits to Commute.org website
Organize in person Spanish language workshop	July	Redwood City Library	50 SMC residents/workers, 100 visits to Commute.org website via unique link	Registration information, participant count, # of visits to Commute.org website
In-person assistance for enrollment in Commute.org programs	Monthly	Food drive in East Palo Alto	100 SMC residents enrolled	Number of San Mateo County residents enrolled
Include information in organization's newsletter	Monthly	online	1,000 people receive newsletter, 100 visits to Commute.org website via unique link	# of people who received and opened newsletter, # of visits to Commute.org website



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