

10 Akron projects among finalists in Knight Cities Challenge

By Dan Shingler J v

With \$5 million up for grabs, there is plenty of competition for the grant money that will be awarded by the Knight Foundation's Knight Cities Challenge – and Akron has a good shot at winning some of that cash.

The city is one of 26 communities in which the program is run, and Akronites submitted proposals that represent 10 of the 158 finalists in this, the second year of the program.

“Akron did an excellent job of responding. I love what I see coming out of Akron. I think it's going to be a good year for Akron,” said Carol Coletta, vice president of community and national initiatives at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

The program is aimed at funding grassroots efforts to improve cities, neighborhoods or even individual blocks by providing money to help local residents institute their own project ideas. The Knight Cities Challenge asks that projects “focus on one or all of three key drivers of city success: attracting and retaining talent, expanding economic opportunity, and creating a culture of robust civic engagement.”

“The challenge has a bias for action,” Coletta wrote in a recent blog. “We want to fund projects that can be completed (and tested) during the 18-month grant term. We want to capture that learning and share it among those in our network so that all of our grantees can work more effectively.”

Beyond that there are few limits, and the types of projects proposed vary wildly. Among the submissions from Akron this year are plans to build a website to help local residents meet for conversation, new services and amenities aimed at helping people access local park systems and even a plan to turn an apiary into a community space in Akron's historic Middlebury neighborhood. (A complete list of the proposed Akron projects is at the end of this story.)

There were actually a fewer submissions this year than in the program's first year, Coletta told Crain's Akron Business, but she thinks that's actually a good thing.

“We had everything thrown against the wall last year -- people didn't really know what to expect,” Coletta said. “This year the applications are

lion to be doled out this year, based on the strength of the applications.

Akron finalists for the 2016 Knight Cities Challenge

#Route10: Akron's Better Bus Stop Project by 8 80 Cities (submitted by Alyssa Bird): Encouraging new conversations about transit and life in the city of Akron with a day-long event that invites civic leaders to experience newly animated bus stops along Route 10, featuring entertainment and new amenities.

Coffee/Drink/Dance (submitted by Annal Vyas): Creating a new website that pairs residents who don't know one another to attend events and meet for conversations that help break down barriers between people from across the city.

Middlebury House by Akron Honey Co. (submitted by: Brent Wesley): Developing the Akron Honey Co.'s apiary in the historic

Middlebury neighborhood into a community space for recreation, education and other activities that help residents connect with each other and other areas of the city.

Cuyahoga Explore-a-Foot (submitted by Brian Davis): Encouraging visitors to explore remote regions of Cuyahoga Valley National Park by providing services and amenities, such as help with travel arrangements and baggage transport to make it more accessible.

Akron Shorts by The Devil Strip (submitted by Chris Home): Strengthening civic engagement by installing stations around the city that would dispense art, stories, trivia, games and more, and encourage the public to share their own creations with fellow residents.

Akron Innerbelt Bike Park (submitted by Jonathan Morsch): Providing new life for an abandoned section of highway by creating a “bicycle park” that promotes cycling, encourages new riders and attracts cyclists from throughout the region and nation.

Invite Akron by Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park (submitted by Jen McAnlis-Harvey): Encouraging the use of Cuyahoga Valley National Park by inviting residents from every walk of life, and especially those who don't regularly visit the park, to celebrate the National Park Service Centennial with free transportation and events.

Developing Community Blue Zones: Keys to Longer, Healthier Lives by Akron General Health System/Akron General Foundation (submitted by Laura Jo Hawk): Exploring how to create successful “Blue Zones” in Akron — areas that promote healthful living conditions and options, such as developing walking trails, promoting ways to shed stress and eliminating food deserts.

One Lake One Community by #KenmoreUnited (submitted by Nolan James): Bringing together residents from different sides of Summit Lake who don't traditionally interact through a meal and celebration that encourages use of the lake as a shared resource.

Akron Tread Lightly (submitted by Shane Wynn): Encouraging biking throughout the city with a campaign that emphasizes the variety of experiences and amenities that are available by exploring the urban core on two wheels.

Source: Carol Coletta, vice president, Knight Foundation.

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