The Gathering
www.thegatheringwis.org

The Organization: Established in 1982, The Gathering is one of the largest all-volunteer meal programs in Milwaukee, founded on the belief that healthy food is a right, not a privilege. Their mission is to serve, with dignity, those directly affected by hunger and poverty, and to address the root causes of these issues. The Gathering annually provides more than 60,000 fresh, nutritious meals to the hungry and food-insecure from four neighborhood-based sites. Over the years, The Gathering has grown beyond their meal sites to become an aggregator of healthy foods otherwise thrown away by local restaurants and large companies, like Amazon. They also serve as a distribution hub for food and meal services to other nonprofits including Running Rebels, The Cathedral Center, The Benedict Center, and Myndful Daycare.

The Project: Store More, Serve More
Affordable and accessible food is difficult to find in low-income neighborhoods. The Gathering frequently must turn away large food donations due to inadequate safe food storage facilities. The Gathering could receive more than 2000 lbs. of food per week from Amazon through Feeding America but currently do not have the capacity to store it all. By securing larger refrigeration and freezer units, and updating electrical infrastructure, The Gathering would be able to accept more food donations and provide up to 48,000 additional meals per year. Expanding into adjacent rental space on site would add room for storage and a larger dining area for fellowship. This project will also expand their Fresh Produce Preservation Project (FPPP) providing more fresh and nutritional choices for Milwaukee area food-insecure families and individuals.

The Need: Milwaukee is one of the top ten poorest large cities in the United States, with 1 out of every 4 people living under the federal poverty level. Poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness go hand in hand, and in our community, hunger is often the result of a lack of availability and access to nutritious food. Consequently, the need for meal support is great, primarily among the working poor and homeless. This need is anticipated to skyrocket given the end of pandemic-related SNAP funding coupled with price inflation. Additionally, a growing number of local nonprofits are looking to The Gathering to meet the food needs of their clients due to their own decreases in funding and increasing expenses. The Sojourner Family Peace Center and a local Senior Housing community will join the list of nonprofits The Gathering serves if they receive a $100,000 Impact grant.

Use of Impact100 Grant Funds: A $100,000 grant would cover all of the costs for an infrastructure update (primarily electrical enhancement and room modification), space rental, and the purchase of additional refrigeration/freezer storage units for this existing program.

Sustainability: Any on-going personnel or rental costs would be covered by other funding sources after the grant ends. The Gathering has a strong long-range marketing and fund development plan coupled with a resourceful and well-connected Executive Director, plus an involved Board of Directors, to further sustain this project and their organization.

From the Grant Committee: "This is an organized, far-reaching and impactful nonprofit that is positioned to transform the lives of many more food insecure Milwaukeeans. We were incredibly impressed by their dedication, thoughtfulness, and resourcefulness!"

GRAND AVENUE club
A community that works

Grand Avenue Club (GAC)
www.GrandAvenueClub.org

The Organization: Grand Avenue Club (GAC) was formed in Milwaukee in 1991 by a coalition of 23 community organizations that included psychiatric patients, family members, advocates, service providers, and concerned citizens. It is a non-clinical membership community that helps any adult, 18 and older in Milwaukee County experiencing mental illness, achieve recovery, inclusion, and self-reliance through education, pre-vocational training, paid employment opportunities, and an enriching community life. GAC is focused on defeating isolation for their uniquely diverse membership. GAC owns a 24,000 square foot building referred to as their Clubhouse, which is divided into four units: Music & Art; Employment & Education; Retail Management; and Culinary & Socialization. The members manage and maintain their clubhouse themselves.

The Project: Expanding the Heart of Grand Avenue Club
The heart of Grand Avenue Club is their culinary unit. The design and layout of the existing kitchen, which includes a food preparation station, cooking area, refrigeration, storage, and dishwashing area, severely limits their potential. A redesigned and renovated culinary space will allow members to serve more meals, allow those with limited accessibility better access, attract new members, reinvigorate disengaged members, and improve programmatic capacity across all units through increased attendance. The goal is to create an open and safe workspace that better supports the mental and emotional health needs of the members. In addition, the newly designed and renovated space will better serve to provide culinary experience and education as pre-vocational training. Many members who get their start cooking in the Club transition to independent employment at a local restaurant after gaining confidence and experience.

The Need: Each year members (also referred to as colleagues) prepare over 18,500 nutritious and unique meals. The culinary area often serves as the gateway between all other GAC units and programs. GAC members will be responsible for preparing the space for the professional demolition work and for post construction projects such as painting walls. The impact of this project goes beyond simply providing a safer and more inclusive learning environment. It supports the core goal of the GAC to successfully help people experiencing mental illness achieve recovery through work, education, and community life.

Future Expectations/Sustainability: Grand Avenue Club's proposed project is simple and self-contained in terms of cost and execution. There will be no ongoing cost considerations to ensure its success. The culinary unit is a vital part of their organization and will be funded as long as Grand Avenue Club operates. Every year they receive funding from foundations and private individuals who support their mission. GAC also works with organizations such as Feeding America to address ongoing food sourcing.

From the Grant Committee: "Grand Avenue Club embodies the true spirit of Impact100. They engage, develop, and inspire their members to collectively effect sustainable, transformational, and impactful change for each other within their community."

ISLANDS of Brilliance

Islands of Brilliance
https://www.islandsofbrilliance.org

The Organization: Islands of Brilliance (IOB) is an organization that pioneered the use of art, creativity, and creative technologies to spur self-confidence, independence, and pathways to employment for autistic individuals. The founders, parents of a then 3-year-old autistic son, created this innovative model of working with autistic students, using programs such as Photoshop, Illustrator, and/or 3D Modeling software. Students gain skills in creative/digital design, build confidence and learn in a safe, caring atmosphere with programming geared to individual student's needs.

The Project: IOB's Brilliant Studio: Creative Hub for Autistic Youth
The new Brilliant Studio will serve as a creative home for autistic youth, young adults, parents, and mentors, and as an office hub for IOB's growing staff. With a six-fold increase in enrollments since pre-pandemic, a flexible, state-of-the-art studio space is critical for current programming as well as future expansion. The organization, currently using space at the Lubar Entrepreneurship Center at UWM, has leased new permanent space, and now needs funds to outfit the studio with furnishings, computers, and technology to facilitate this life-changing learning.

The Need: According to a CDC December, 2021 report, the incidence of autism has increased to 1 in 44 children. This, coupled with the staggering 83% unemployment rate for autistic young adults, makes early intervention critical. IOB's education team partners with parents, educators, and support agencies to identify the appropriate programming mix to meet each student's needs and goals. There is no other community organization for autistic individuals like this in Wisconsin and very few in the nation. The studio serves as the hub, where students can connect virtually and in-person with their 1:1 mentor, as well as provides space for parents to gather informally. The IOB staff spoke of the high demand for in-person programming and the importance of IOB maintaining a "high touch" atmosphere.

Use of Impact100 Grant Funds: IOB seeks Impact100 funding to purchase office furniture, laptops, monitors, and other computer technology devices for the Brilliance Lab. The IOB vision is for the digital equipment and flexible furniture to serve as the 'invisible' conduit for students to build confidence, connectivity, and community.

Future Expectations/Sustainability: IOB is in a position to impact more individuals than ever before in their 10-year history. They are part of the Think Ability WI coalition, a program for developing learning opportunities to enhance employability for individuals with cognitive disabilities. IOB's unique intervention model is being studied by researchers at UWM through the newly established National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) funded Autism Brilliance Lab for Entrepreneurship (ABLE). Their in-progress research study will open new funding doors and a fully outfitted space will be critical to allow them to leverage those opportunities into long-term, increased support for their work.

From the Grant Committee: "We heard touching accounts of the impact of their IOB experiences, highlighting the depth of student/mentor connections over time and how families have moved from their 'islands' of isolation to finding a comforting community in their IOB 'home'."

SILVER SPRING NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER EST. 1958
A COMMUNITY OF SUCCESS

Silver Spring Neighborhood Center (SSNC)
https://www.ssnc-milw.org

The Organization: SSNC's mission is to build a safer, stronger community and has been helping families and individuals obtain self-sufficiency since 1958. Conveniently located in the Westlawn Neighborhood and next to Browning Elementary School, SSNC is the only community center serving Milwaukee's Northwest side. Current programs include child day care, afterschool recreation, teen enrichment, adult employment and education, youth sports, nurse clinic, family nights, and a food pantry.

The Project: Roads to Success
Resident surveys indicated strong interest in technology and fitness. The "Roads to Success" program has two components:

- A STEM Lab will be created and provide robotics, coding, and science activities for youth, classes for adults, and access to technology for residents. The lab will host a First Lego League program as well as introduce participants to robotics, 3-D printing, coding, technology education, and computer science.

- A Fitness Center will be modernized and house new exercise equipment to support instructional classes (strength training, cardio/movement, yoga, etc.). The fitness center is open to the community, offering those who don't have a gym membership elsewhere access to a workout space.

The Need: Milwaukee's Northwest side is an area struggling with poverty, unemployment, and crime. Additionally, limited access to health and wellness care and quality technology options persist in the community.

Use of Impact100 Grant Funds: SSNC's Roads to Success Program is designed around early childhood education participants, youth social development program participants, and adults seeking health and wellness opportunities. The new STEM Lab will serve participants aged 5-19, and the Fitness Center will serve ages 16 and older.

Future Expectations/Sustainability: The fitness program will be initially staffed with teachers from Browning Elementary School. With proper care and routine maintenance, fitness systems are designed to last as long as 10 to 15 years. The STEM Lab will be supported by engineering students from local universities. SSNC has a long history of developing such partnerships and fundraising. Upkeep will include any needed maintenance, community partnerships, a program coordinator, and sanitation products/stations.

From the Grant Committee: "Our committee sees this project as a golden opportunity to close the technology gap and provide a much needed health and wellness outlet on Milwaukee's Northwest Side. Given SSNC's 60+ year track record of positively impacting lives and empowering the underserved to reach their full potential, we are confident SSNC will achieve success with these two exciting new programs."

VIA Community Development Corporation
www.viacdc.org

The Organization: Founded in 1995 by the School Sisters of St. Francis, VIA CDC, formerly known as Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, has worked for over 28 years fulfilling its mission to assist in building strong, healthy neighborhoods where residents can thrive. VIA's work has been anchored in, but not limited to, the diverse neighborhoods on Milwaukee's near south side: Silver City, Burnham Park, and Layton Park.

The Project: VIA CDC Affordable Model Home Initiative
VIA CDC will build two model homes, one each on Milwaukee's north and south sides. The homes will showcase a new style of affordable home construction, Lange Urban Sustainable Housing (LUSH), in which 127 pieces of prefabricated lumber are framed into an 1100 square foot house in five days. The carefully planned design has a longer, narrower footprint, compatible with the width of many of the vacant lots in Milwaukee. LUSH construction requires less time and labor, produces less waste, and utilizes sustainable building materials. These two homes will serve as models for one year, enabling low income families, home builders, and other organizations to learn about LUSH construction as an affordable housing option.

The Need: There is a tremendous gap in the availability and accessibility of single-family starter homes. There are over 17,000 Black and Latino families in Milwaukee aspiring to buy a $100,000 home, yet less than 1000 homes in this price range are available each year.

Use of Impact100 Grant Funds: Impact100 grant money would be used for construction and project expenses, including excavation, green energy infrastructure, building materials, plumbing, electrical, permits, etc. Without the $100,000 Impact grant, VIA CDC would likely need to borrow money to close the funding gap. As a result the down payments from the model homes would not be reinvested into future LUSH starter homes.

Future Expectations/Sustainability: In early 2025, two income-qualified families will be able to purchase the model homes. The projected cost to develop each 1100 square foot home is $220,000. Utilizing federal subsidies, VIA CDC plans to sell the homes for $100,000, which brings the price point within reach for more Black and Latino families. Down payments on the model homes then creates a ripple effect to finance the next homes built in the following year, and so on. The intention is to jump start a new wave of home building to help meet the dire need for starter homes. The City of Milwaukee owns more than 3,000 vacant lots. VIA CDC's goal is to build ten LUSH homes each year for the next ten years on Milwaukee's south side vacant lots.

From the Grant Committee: "Our Committee is beyond excited for VIA CDC's affordable model home initiative given its potential to elevate families through home ownership along with its ability to positively impact communities. It is a truly transformative opportunity."