



Harney County Community Projects Awarded Civic Experiment Grants Through Trust for Civic Life Initiative

Seven local organizations receive funding to strengthen community connection, youth enrichment, and civic participation across Harney County

February 2026

Thanks to funding from the Trust for Civic Life, seven Harney County projects, from 15 total applicants, have been selected by community volunteers to receive funding to support bringing a season of community-building events, youth programs, and cultural opportunities throughout Harney County.

The grants support a diverse slate of projects – from free swim lessons and children's theater to art enrichment and community concerts – each designed to reduce barriers to participation and bring Harney County residents together.

"These projects reflect exactly what makes Harney County resilient," said Denise Rose, Youth Changing the Community Collaborative Coordinator. "When local organizations create welcoming spaces for people to gather, learn, and contribute, the whole community benefits."

2026 Grant Recipients:

Making Waves: Free Swim Lessons for Our Community will provide four weeks of free swimming instruction to approximately 180 children at the High Desert Swimming Pool this summer. Youth lifeguards will lead instruction, building water safety skills among underserved families while removing the financial barriers that often keep rural children from accessing the pool. The program runs June 15 through July 10.

Celebrate America with Music, presented by the Harney County Library Foundation, will offer a series of three free outdoor summer concerts at Arrowhead Plaza celebrating America's 250th birthday. The concerts will bring together families, seniors, and youth who might not otherwise find their way to a shared community event, with local student talent featured as opening acts.

Missoula Children's Theater, organized by the Harney County Arts in Education Foundation, will return to Slater Elementary June 8–13 – from kindergarten through high school – a week-long immersive experience in acting, singing, and choreography. Two public performances will cap the week, drawing families from across the community.

Cultural Concert Series at Burns High School will bring K–12 students and the broader public together through a series of interactive, culturally diverse music events featuring guest ensembles including the Elgin High School Calypso Band. AVID students will plan, promote, and manage the events, gaining hands-on leadership experience while helping position Burns High School as a cultural hub for the entire county.

Art Enrichment for Harney County's Youth, led by the Frontier Art Center, will provide programming for K–12 youth including monthly high school art nights, a new middle school art program, summer art camp, and a fall student art exhibition. The program serves tribal youth and students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds – groups who currently have limited access to ongoing arts programming.

Family Centered Community Engagement Opportunities, coordinated by CASA of Harney County, will offer a series of free, inclusive family events including Cool Down with CASA, a Trick or Treat Parade, Nerf Night, and Parents' Night Off. Designed to be sensory-friendly, age-appropriate, and accessible to home-bound children, the program will also connect families with community resources and volunteer opportunities.

Community Play Dates, organized by Kids Club of Harney County, will host quarterly free play events at Geno's Youth Center and local parks, featuring inflatable obstacle courses and organizational resource booths. This project brings together youth-serving organizations – including the Harney County Library, High Desert Parks and Recreation, 4-H, CASA, the Burns Paiute Tribal youth center, and local schools – creating a visible, joyful gathering point for all ages in the community.

Together, these projects are expected to engage hundreds of Harney County residents throughout 2026, with a particular emphasis on youth, families experiencing economic hardship, and community members who have historically had fewer opportunities to participate in civic life.

The Civic Experiment Grants are a pilot project of and funded by the Trust for Civic Life; the grants are administered locally by High Desert Partnership, who is a Trust for Civic Life Civic Hub grantee, as part of its work supporting community-led collaboration across Harney County.

For more information about the Civic Experiment Grants, contact Denise Rose with High Desert Partnership at denise@highdesertpartnership.org or 541 589 0901. Information about each of the funded programs will be provided by each of the grantees as their programs, camps and events are planned and announced.