



# How It Works: Community Outreach Organizations

by Leslie Potter

**As part of US Equestrian's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan, the Community Outreach Organizations program is bringing horses to more people in more communities.**

At Promise Landing Farm in Upper Marlboro, Md., participants in equine-assisted therapy programs ride alongside recreational riders in the lesson program.

"We run the spectrum of services, but we don't split people up based on diagnosis," said Rachel Neff, Executive Director of Promise Landing Farm. "It's very common to have someone with a disability and someone without riding in a lesson at the same time. Our whole idea is that, right now, the equestrian community is very much like, 'The people with disabilities go ride at that barn, and everybody else comes and rides at this barn.' It's our belief that that's a bad way to do society in general. The goal is to bring people together

where they're in contact with each other, learning from each other, and hopefully that'll push out into the community and bring more inclusion and acceptance in day-to-day life."

Promise Landing Farm is one of US Equestrian's Community Outreach Organizations working to bring horses to more communities and, in doing so, bring more diversity into the equestrian world.

## **What is The Community Outreach Program?**

US Equestrian's official vision statement describes a straightforward goal: "To bring the joy of horse sports to as many people as possible."

Bringing the joy of horses to people is a simple idea but is often a challenge in practice

The horses at Horses N Heroes are largely retired show horses who benefit from a lower-impact career, and all have a home for life at the facility after retirement.



due to the resource requirements inherent in keeping horses and hosting equestrian activities. Fortunately, there are organizations across the country working to connect horses and people from all backgrounds. In 2021, US Equestrian launched its [Community Outreach Program](#), which partners with many of these organizations to support their work.

The Community Outreach Program consists of two main components. The first is a [directory of Community Outreach Organizations](#), groups that provide equine-based learning opportunities for underrepresented and underserved communities. These organizations must reach certain standards for inclusion, including horse and human welfare and safety and availability of free or sliding-scale fees for participants in their programs.

The second component is the [USEF Opportunity Fund](#) grant program. Community Outreach Organizations are eligible to apply for grant money to support their programs and services.

Community Outreach Organizations may focus on riding instruction and equine programs for Black, Indigenous, and people of color, people from lower-income backgrounds, or those from inner-city communities. Others may provide equine-assisted therapies for people with physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities. Some are designed to accommodate riders with behavioral and emotional health concerns, while others specialize in veterans and active military. The common thread is that they are actively working to bring horses and equestrian activities to communities and individuals who might not otherwise have access to them.

At Horses N Heroes in Ocala, Fla., horses are a pathway from difficult home situations to education, leadership, and friendship.

"My program is focused on leadership and mentoring with a strong emphasis on horsemanship," said Executive Director Mindy Nolan-Morrow. "I work with girls primarily who live at the poverty level, but not all of them do. Sometimes it's a situation where a parent is dying and they come to me through hospice, or they were taken out of their homes and are being raised by a relative."

The horses at Horses N Heroes are largely retired show horses who benefit from a lower-impact career, and all have a home for life at the facility after retirement. This gives participants the added opportunity of learning the commitment and maturity required to take responsibility for animals.

All of the participants work at the farm at least one weekend day every week, doing barn chores, bathing horses, and getting hands-on experience with horse care and equine first aid. Many of the girls also take riding lessons, but some choose not to and simply enjoy the time on the farm. Regardless of their goals, Nolan-Morrow believes in the power of friendships forged through horses, and her program aims to bring that to the kids who need it most.

"They like the camaraderie of being around the farm and being with other girls in a non-judgment zone," she said. "I'm super-strict about that. I want this to be a place where they can come and have a positive day and a group of friends that they can grow up with. Like I told them, I'm in my 50s, and my best friends to this day are my friends I grew up riding with. I want them to have that type of experience."

## History of the Program

The Community Outreach Program came about as part of [US Equestrian's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan](#), which was developed in 2020 and 2021 by a group of thought leaders recruited from across diverse backgrounds and various segments of the horse industry. This working group recognized that many individuals and organizations were already doing outreach and DEI work in their own communities, and US Equestrian could work together with them rather than trying to create something new.

US Equestrian approved the first class of 17 Community Outreach Organizations in early 2022. New programs are welcome to apply during open application periods posted on the USEF website at [usef.org/about-us/diversity-inclusion/organizations-program/join-outreach](#).

## Becoming a Community Outreach Organization

Organizations interested in becoming a Community Outreach Organization must meet certain eligibility requirements to apply, such as providing services for free or on a sliding scale of fees based on economic need. Other requirements include adhering to [USEF Safe Sport policies](#), having 501(c) status, and setting standards for participant safety, horse welfare, and educational programming. The full list of eligibility requirements is available online at [usef.org/about-us/diversity-inclusion/organizations-program](#).

"My advice to people who are interested in applying is that it's not scary! You can do this," Neff said. "A lot of times, horse people would rather spend time in the barn than filling out applications, but it's easy. Just tell them about the awesome things you are already doing. It's not a terribly cumbersome process."

A review committee comprised of USEF Board of Directors members, executive staff, and athletes reviews applications to ensure applicant organizations meet all requirements prior to acceptance into the program.

Once approved, Community Outreach Organizations receive free USEF [subscriber-level memberships](#) for their participants, a listing in the [Community Outreach Organizations directory](#) on [usef.org](#), and eligibility to apply for grants through the USEF Opportunity Fund. US Equestrian also offers additional support for Community Outreach Organizations by connecting them with local competition organizers, athletes, and equine professionals for clinics or meet-and-greets and by facilitating educational webinars on various topics around diversity, equity, and inclusion in the equestrian community.

For Nolan-Morrow, the benefits of being part of the program are well worth the time it takes to apply.

"I would encourage anyone to do it," she said. "I'm really good at running my program, and if somebody comes to me and says, 'Hey, I heard about your program. Tell me about it,' I'm all about that. But I'm not great at going out and meeting new people or making a cold call to try to get them to sponsor my program. The Community Outreach Organization program helped bring awareness to my program. It gave us an opportunity to go to the [Live Oak International](#) [combined driving and jumping competition] event last March, which was amazing, and through that we met some incredible people. That's the biggest thing for me, is the fact that more people know who we are and what we do." 8