



DarkSky International

Advocate and Chapter finance policy

Purpose and scope

This policy outlines the financial responsibilities, permissions, tools, and restrictions for recognized DarkSky International Chapters without independent legal status. It ensures that all financial activity conducted in DarkSky's name is mission-aligned, transparent, legally compliant, and appropriately overseen.

This policy supplements the Chapter Handbook, Chapter Agreement, and, where applicable, the Bill Spend and Expense Agreement. Chapters and Advocates must remain in good standing to maintain access to financial tools and support.

Financial structure and legal status

No independent legal status (Volunteer Chapters)

Volunteer Chapters are not independent legal entities. They operate under the authority and oversight of DarkSky International.

Foundational principles

All financial activity must support DarkSky International's mission to protect the night from light pollution.

Appropriate use of funds includes expenses tied to:

- Education and public outreach
- Community engagement
- Responsible lighting advocacy
- Volunteer training
- Modest equipment supporting mission delivery
- Internal Chapter operations directly enabling mission activities

Funds may not be used for:

- Personal benefit
- Political contributions or partisan activity
- Unrelated subscriptions or services
- Cash awards
- Any purpose not directly connected to DarkSky's mission

Chapters and Advocates serve as stewards of resources entrusted to DarkSky and must act with integrity, transparency, and accountability.

Chapters may not:

- Open independent bank accounts
- Maintain financial accounts in the Chapter's name
- Use a personal bank account to hold Chapter funds
- Establish PayPal, Venmo, Stripe, or similar payment accounts outside of DarkSky systems

All Chapter funds must flow through DarkSky International's approved financial infrastructure.

No authority to bind DarkSky

Chapters and Advocates may not:

- Enter into contracts, leases, or financial agreements on behalf of DarkSky
- Commit DarkSky to financial obligations
- Submit grant applications using DarkSky's EIN without prior written approval

Any arrangement that creates legal or financial liability must be reviewed and executed by DarkSky International staff.

Financial sustainability

Financial sustainability is primarily a local responsibility. DarkSky International does not provide ongoing operational funding to Chapters.

Limited financial support may be available through mini-grants (see below), which are competitive and discretionary.

Chapters are expected to develop simple, mission-aligned, community-based fundraising strategies to support their local work.

Approved financial tools

Bill Spend and expense accounts

Bill Spend replaces the need for Chapter-held bank accounts. Approved Chapters use Bill Spend as the designated spending platform. Bill Spend and expense accounts cannot be transferred between transitioning chapter leadership. New chapter leaders must resign an updated Bill Spend and Expense agreement.

Requirements:

- Signed Chapter Agreement
- Signed Chapter Financial and Expenditure Agreement
- Signed Chapter Bill Spend Agreement
- Identified leadership team
- Active programming
- Good standing with reporting requirements

Bill Spend cardholders must:

- Upload itemized receipts for every transaction
- Provide a clear transaction description
- Stay within assigned budget limits

DarkSky staff may review transactions at any time.

Failure to comply may result in suspension or revocation of access.

DarkSky-hosted donation pages

Recognized Chapters may request an online donation page hosted on darksky.org.

- Donations are tax-deductible
- 90% of funds are allocated to the Chapter
- 10% administrative fee retained by DarkSky (see below)
- Funds are accessed via Bill Spend

DarkSky reserves the right to suspend or remove donation pages at any time.

In-kind donations

Chapters may accept mission-aligned in-kind donations (e.g., printing, equipment, venue space).

Requirements:

- Must be disclosed to staff in advance
- Chapters may not issue tax receipts
- Donor determines value of in-kind gift
- DarkSky may issue acknowledgment letters where appropriate

Administrative fee

A 10% administrative fee applies to:

- Donations raised through DarkSky systems
- Grants processed through DarkSky on behalf of Chapters

This fee supports:

- Financial management
- Donation tracking and processing
- Tax receipting
- Compliance oversight
- Staff support

Chapters should incorporate this fee into fundraising plans and grant proposals.

Fundraising permissions and restrictions

Permitted fundraising activities

Chapters may conduct:

- Community-driven fundraising campaigns
- Optional-donation events
- Giving challenges
- Milestone or anniversary campaigns
- Social media fundraising through approved platforms

Events should remain accessible and inclusive. Participation should not be contingent upon payment.

Prohibited fundraising activities

To protect the organization and volunteers, Chapters may not engage in:

- Selling merchandise or managing inventory
- Raffles, lotteries, or cash-split drawings
- Games of chance or gambling-based activities
- Ticketed events requiring paid admission
- Handling or storing cash without proper documentation
- Opening independent payment accounts
- Submitting grants using DarkSky's EIN without written authorization

If uncertain, Chapters must consult staff before proceeding.

Cash and check handling

Cash should be avoided whenever possible.

If cash is received:

- It must be counted and documented by two individuals to verify accuracy
- Staff must be notified promptly
- Instructions will be provided for proper processing

All checks must be mailed to the DarkSky office within 48 hours of receipt.

Chapters may not deposit checks into personal or independent accounts.

Mini-grants

DarkSky may offer limited mini-grants to support Chapter-led projects.

Typical parameters:

- \$250–\$1,000 awards
- Offered 1–2 times per year
- Subject to funding availability

\$500–\$1,000 awards require 1:1 match (cash or approved in-kind)

Mini-grants may support:

- Education events
- Outreach materials
- Local advocacy efforts
- Modest equipment purchases

Mini-grants may not be used for:

- Ongoing operating expenses
- Compensation
- Multi-year commitments

Recipients must submit a brief post-project report and expense confirmation.

Failure to report may affect future eligibility.

Budgeting and documentation

Chapters with financial access must:

- Develop a basic annual or project budget
- Maintain internal spending records
- Submit fundraising summaries in annual reports

Bill Spend users must upload receipts and transaction notes promptly.

Incomplete documentation or policy violations may result in suspension of financial access.

Conflict of interest and personal benefit

Chapter leaders and Advocates may not personally benefit from funds raised in DarkSky's name.

Financial decisions must prioritize:

- Mission impact
- Transparency
- Community trust

Any perceived conflict of interest must be disclosed to DarkSky staff.

International access

Financial tools may be limited in certain countries due to banking or regulatory restrictions. Where standard tools are unavailable, DarkSky will evaluate alternatives case-by-case.

Enforcement and revocation

DarkSky International reserves the right to:

- Suspend or revoke financial access
- Remove donation pages
- Restrict fundraising activity
- Require corrective action
- Revoke Chapter recognition for repeated or serious violations

Financial privileges are contingent upon compliance with this policy and all associated agreements.

Chapter liability

Chapters are expected to manage their allocated funds with diligence. Please note that Chapters are solely responsible for covering costs arising from:

- Financial Discrepancies: Any costs associated with mistakes in financial reporting at the Chapter level.
- Contractual Violations: Any penalties, legal fees, or costs incurred due to a violation of the terms set forth in the Chapter Agreement.

Questions and approvals

Advance consultation is encouraged before launching new fundraising activities or financial initiatives.

This policy may be updated as new tools are developed, systems are updated, or organizational priorities change. Questions about the implementation or use of any financial tools can be directed to the DarkSky Engagement team at engagement@darksky.org.