

ENRTF Community Grant Program advisory council current program status and council input roadmap

Purpose of this overview

This overview summarizes the current working status of the ENRTF Community Grant Program and identifies when advisory council input will be most useful.

The program is being built across several connected workstreams. The DNR is developing the first funding opportunity, application structure, technical design, outreach plan, grant management system, operating procedures, records structure and advisory council support materials at the same time.

The first advisory council meeting is intended to orient members, explain the current design status and prepare members to provide informed input after the meeting. The advisory council is not being asked to approve or finalize the program at the first meeting.

Where the program is now

The ENRTF Community Grant Program is in startup and design.

The DNR is preparing the first Community Grant Program funding opportunity for anticipated public release in late September 2026. Before release, the DNR must complete applicant-facing materials, internal procedures, technical design, system workflows, outreach plans and advisory council engagement steps.

The first funding opportunity is still being refined. “Small Grants” is a working name, not a final public title. The DNR expects to seek advisory council input on naming and framing before public-facing materials are finalized.

July 2026: Orientation, technical design and internal buildout

In July, the DNR’s primary focus is to orient the advisory council, continue technical design and prepare materials for council input.

Current July work includes:

- Preparing for the first advisory council meeting
- Orienting council members to the program purpose, statutory role, public meeting expectations and near-term workplan
- Preparing advisory council onboarding materials, including roles, expectations, per diem, reimbursement, meeting logistics, public meeting requirements and conflict-of-interest expectations

- Continuing technical design meetings with DNR technical experts and other internal partners
- Continuing to refine the first community grant program funding opportunity
- Refining draft application structure, eligibility approach, review process, evaluation concepts, reporting expectations and monitoring approach
- Continuing work on program process maps and internal operating procedures
- Continuing staffing and onboarding planning for community grant program positions
- Continuing internal SharePoint and external advisory council material development
- Continuing security and data-security screening for the grant management system before contract execution
- Identifying which topics need advisory council input before public release

August 2026: Internal refinement and launch preparation

In August, the DNR expects to continue refining applicant-facing and internal materials and prepare a draft funding opportunity for advisory council review in mid-August.

Current August work is expected to include:

- Preparing a full draft RFP for advisory council review followed by discussion in early September
- Preparing eligibility, evaluation and outreach materials for advisory council review
- Refining the funding opportunity name, structure, application questions, eligibility language, scoring or evaluation approach, applicant guidance and technical assistance materials
- Continuing development of logic model, outcome and performance measure options
- Reviewing access-barrier topics such as payment approach, fiscal agents, bonding, grantee capacity and technical assistance
- Continuing outreach and communications planning
- Continuing grant management system security review, contracting steps, configuration planning and testing preparation
- Reviewing applicant-facing materials for clarity, accessibility, usability and plain language
- Drafting or refining internal procedures for intake, eligibility review, application review, records, reporting, monitoring and applicant support

September 2026: Final readiness and anticipated public launch

In September, the DNR's focus is expected to shift toward final readiness and public release.

Current September work is expected to include:

- Finalizing the RFP, application, guidance, scoring or evaluation materials, FAQ, outreach materials and technical assistance schedule
- Completing readiness checks for the grant application and review system
- Confirming workflows for application intake, review, notifications, records and reporting
- Confirming staff readiness for applicant questions, information sessions, application support and intake management
- Confirming records, SharePoint and tracking systems are ready

- Addressing final review comments and required approvals
- Preparing for anticipated public release of the first Community Grant Program funding opportunity in late September 2026
- Beginning applicant outreach, information sessions, office hours and technical assistance after launch in October 2026

Current workstreams

The DNR is advancing several connected workstreams.

RFP and application design

The DNR is drafting and refining the first funding opportunity. Current work includes application questions, instructions, eligibility language, ineligible uses, review approach, evaluation concepts, applicant guidance and FAQ structure.

Council input will be important for reviewing whether the RFP and application are understandable, practical and aligned with the program's statutory purpose.

Technical design

The DNR is consulting DNR technical experts, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency staff, DNR Tribal Relations Office, DNR Performance Management Unit, DNR Grants Unit and other internal partners whose responsibilities relate to the program. These consultations test the five eligible uses in statute against practical project examples and help identify appropriate outcomes, reporting expectations, monitoring needs and technical assistance.

This work is intended to help DNR create a funding opportunity that is technically sound, practical for applicants and reasonable to administer.

Grant management system

The DNR is conducting security and data-security screening before contract execution with a grant management system vendor. The DNR is also identifying required workflows for application intake, review, status tracking, records, notifications and reporting.

Some system features must be ready for the anticipated September launch. Other improvements may occur after launch.

Outreach and communications

The DNR is preparing public launch communications, applicant-facing materials, FAQ structure, information sessions, office hours and outreach approaches.

Council input will be important for identifying networks, communication channels, trust barriers, plain-language needs, and ways to reach communities and organizations that have not historically received ENRTF funding.

Staffing and internal procedures

The DNR is interviewing and hiring Community Grant Program staff, defining roles and handoffs, and building procedures future staff can follow consistently.

This work supports continuity, accountability and consistent grantee support as the program moves from startup to implementation.

SharePoint, records and program knowledge

The DNR is building an internal Microsoft SharePoint workspace, which will serve as an online location for staff records and working documents. It will organize program records, standard operating procedures, templates, guidance, decision logs and working materials.

The DNR is also developing materials and a future online workspace for advisory council members. The goal is to make approved materials easier to find, preserve program decisions and maintain consistent records for current and future staff.

Advisory council onboarding

The DNR is preparing orientation materials, member role and expectations documents, public meeting guidance, conflict-of-interest guidance, per diem and reimbursement materials, and processes for gathering and documenting council input.

How the council will be involved

The first meeting is primarily for orientation, shared understanding and questions.

After the first meeting, the DNR expects to gather council input through a structured survey and future meeting discussions. This input will help the DNR refine the first funding opportunity and related program materials.

Likely council input points include:

- Clarity and usability of the RFP
- Whether eligibility language is understandable
- Whether application requirements are practical for smaller or first-time applicants
- Whether evaluation criteria are clear and aligned with program purpose
- Whether reporting expectations are proportional to grant size and grantee capacity
- Whether proposed outcomes are understandable and useful
- How to reach communities and organizations that have not historically received ENRTF funding
- Barriers related to awareness, trust, grant readiness, application design, payment timing, fiscal agents, bonding and technical assistance
- What members need in order to provide informed recommendations

Technical design input of the advisory council after the first meeting

The DNR expects to send council members a structured survey after the first meeting. Survey responses will inform continued program design before a draft RFP is brought to the advisory council for review and discussion in early September.

The RFP co-design survey may ask about:

- Examples of eligible projects
- Applicant barriers
- Grantee support needs
- Advance payment considerations
- Fiscal agents and partnership models
- Bonding concerns
- Outreach channels
- Reporting burden
- Plain-language RFP design
- Realistic outcomes for different grant sizes
- Resources, organizations, or examples the DNR should consider

The survey is intended to gather general program design input. It is not intended for members to advocate for a specific applicant, project, fiscal agent, consultant or partner.

Topics not ready for decision at the first meeting

The following topics are still under development and are not expected to be finalized at the first meeting:

- Final name, RFP language and application questions
- Final eligibility interpretations, evaluation criteria and scoring approach
- Final logic model, outcomes, reporting and monitoring requirements
- Final advance payment, fiscal-agent, partner and bonding requirements
- Final technical assistance and outreach approach
- Final grant management system workflow and applicant experience
- Final staff procedures and internal standard operating procedures

These topics may be introduced or discussed at a high level, but they will require additional design, review and advisory council input before finalization. The DNR expects the next substantive advisory council discussion to occur in early September 2026.

Appropriate first-meeting discussion

At the first meeting, the DNR expects to focus on:

- Shared understanding of the program purpose and council role
- Current status of program design
- What DNR staff are building before launch

- The anticipated path to late September public release
- What council members need in order to provide useful input
- Which topics should be prioritized for early council review
- How council feedback will be gathered and documented
- What questions members have about the program, timeline and process

Working dates and milestones

Date or timing	Current working milestone
July 22, 2026	First advisory council meeting and orientation
After first meeting	Advisory council technical design survey
August 2026	Program refinement, technical design, system work and outreach material development
Early September 2026	Draft RFP review and discussion with advisory council
September 2026	Final readiness checks, required reviews and launch preparation (translations, toolkits, outreach and technical assistance schedule)
Late September 2026	Anticipated public release of the first Community Grant Program funding opportunity
October 2026	Applicant outreach, information sessions, office hours and technical assistance

What members should take away

- The program is still under development.
- The DNR is building the RFP, application, evaluation approach, outreach plan, technology, records, staffing and operating structure at the same time.
- The council will not be asked to finalize the program at the first meeting.
- The first meeting will help members understand the program and prepare for meaningful input.
- Detailed advisory council input will begin after orientation through a structured co-design survey, followed by draft RFP review and discussion at a future meeting expected in early September.
- Council input will help the DNR improve program clarity, accessibility, grantee support, outreach and accountability before the first funding opportunity is released.