

ENRTF Community Grant Program advisory council welcome and what to expect at the first meeting

Welcome

Thank you for serving on the ENRTF Community Grant Advisory Council.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources looks forward to working with you as the council begins its work. Council members bring different kinds of experience, including community knowledge, environmental and natural resources expertise, public service, Tribal and local government experience, grantmaking, nonprofit work, education, outreach and lived experience with environmental issues.

The first meeting is designed to create a shared starting point. Members are not expected to come in with the same knowledge of the DNR, state grantmaking, ENRTF funding or the Community Grant Program.

Purpose of the first meeting

The first meeting will focus on orientation, relationship building, and setting up the council for future work.

The main purposes are to:

- Welcome members and begin building working relationships
- Explain what the DNR does and where the Community Grant Program sits within the agency
- Provide an overview of the ENRTF Community Grant Program
- Orient members to the advisory council's statutory role and public body responsibilities
- Explain the current program development timeline, including the first funding opportunity
- Describe how council input will be gathered after the first meeting
- Begin discussing how the council may want to organize its leadership, meetings and recommendations

The first meeting will launch the council's involvement in program design by sharing what the DNR is building, hearing initial questions, and identifying where council input will be most useful. Detailed RFP review and program design input will continue after the first meeting through a structured survey and future council discussions.

About the DNR

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources works with Minnesotans to conserve and manage the state's natural resources. The DNR's work includes natural resource conservation, fish and wildlife management,

forestry, ecological and water resources, parks and trails, outdoor recreation, enforcement, land and water management, education, permitting, public engagement and technical assistance.

Because the DNR's work covers many technical areas, the Community Grant Program will rely on both grants management expertise and subject-matter expertise from across the agency.

[Introduction to DNR Video](#) (Optional Viewing)

Where the Community Grant Program sits within the DNR

The ENRTF Community Grant Program is administered by the DNR within the agencywide grants structure.

The Community Grants Supervisor serves as the primary DNR program lead and the primary DNR coordinator for the advisory council.

The program is connected to the DNR's Office of Management and Budget Services grants function and works with Agencywide Grants. This structure helps ensure the program is designed and administered with:

- Consistent grant-management practices
- Fiscal controls
- Compliance with state grants requirements
- Clear application, review, award, monitoring and reporting processes
- Technical assistance for applicants and grantees
- Documentation and transparency
- Coordination across DNR technical areas

Agencywide Grants provides internal DNR grant management support and consultation. Agencywide Grants complements the advisory council by providing internal grant management expertise and consultation.

What the Community Grant Program does

The ENRTF Community Grant Program is a new grant program established under [Minnesota Statutes, chapter 116X](#).

The program is intended to expand the number and diversity of recipients who benefit from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, especially in communities adversely affected by pollution and environmental degradation.

The program may fund eligible activities related to:

- Helping adversely impacted communities respond to environmental degradation and related health concerns
- Education and awareness related to stewardship of air, land, water, forests, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources
- Preserving or enhancing air, land, water, and other natural resources that may otherwise be impaired or destroyed

- Trail maintenance and improvement on state, regional, or local trails
- Aquatic invasive species management

The program cannot fund certain applicants or uses, including state agencies, the University of Minnesota Board of Regents, for-profit businesses or scientific research projects.

How the DNR, Agencywide Grants, technical teams and the advisory council work together

The Community Grant Program requires several kinds of input and responsibility.

DNR Community Grant Program staff develop and administer the program, coordinate the advisory council, prepare materials, support applicants and grantees, manage grants and document program decisions.

Agencywide Grants supports alignment with state and DNR grant requirements, grant policies, funding opportunity development, risk assessment, agreements, monitoring, reporting and other grant management practices.

DNR technical teams help identify eligible project examples, technical risks, applicant guidance needs, review considerations, outcomes, reporting questions and grantee support needs.

The advisory council advises, reviews and makes recommendations on the program. The council brings public, community, technical and practical perspective to help the DNR design a program that is accessible, understandable, accountable and responsive to the statutory purpose.

The DNR remains responsible for final program administration, compliance, fiscal controls, grant management, funding opportunity release, award administration and implementation.

Advisory council role

The advisory council provides advice, review and recommendations on the Community Grant Program. The council's work may include input on:

- Forms and applications
- Reporting expectations
- Draft program policies
- Budget considerations, where applicable
- Draft eligibility concepts and applicant accessibility
- Barriers to access
- Applicant and grantee support
- Outreach
- Program improvement
- Recommendations to DNR and, where applicable, the legislature

The council does not administer grants, score individual applications, select grantees, or make final grant awards.

What members should review before the first meeting

Please review the materials included in the first meeting packet, if possible.

The packet includes:

- Meeting agenda
- Advisory council charter
- Advisory council roles and boundaries summary
- Open meeting and public-body overview
- Conflict-of-interest overview
- Program development timeline
- Technical design and council input overview
- Meeting logistics and participation information

Members are not expected to come prepared with final recommendations on the RFP, application, scoring criteria, grant policies, payment models or operating procedures.

What will be discussed at the first meeting

The meeting will include:

- Introductions from members and DNR staff
- Overview of the DNR and where the Community Grant Program sits within the agency
- Overview of the Community Grant Program purpose and statutory activities
- Explanation of the advisory council's advisory, review and recommendation role
- Discussion of public meeting expectations
- Overview of conflicts of interest and member responsibilities
- Update on the technical design process for the first funding opportunity
- Discussion of how council input will be gathered after the first meeting
- Initial conversation about council organization, including leadership roles after the interim period
- Discussion of timing and objectives for the next advisory council meeting
- Next steps and timeline

What will not be decided at the first meeting

The first meeting will not include finalizing:

- The first RFP
- Application questions
- Scoring criteria
- Grant award decisions
- Final payment model

- Advance payment standards
- Fiscal agent or bonding requirements
- Annual program budget
- Final operating procedures
- Final recommendation procedures
- Committees or workgroups
- A full annual council work plan

Some of these topics will come back to the council after members have received more information and the DNR has completed additional internal review.

Technical design and future council input

The Community Grant Program team is currently meeting with DNR technical teams to develop use cases, outcomes and logic model concepts for the five statutory Community Grant Program eligible uses.

After the first meeting, the DNR expects to provide council members with structured co-design survey to gather input on program design topics such as:

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

The DNR will use council input, DNR technical team input, statutory requirements, grant management requirements, accessibility considerations, and other review to support development of the draft funding opportunity.

The DNR's goal is to provide a draft funding opportunity to the council in early August for review, comment and discussion.

Public body expectations

The advisory council is a public body. Council meetings are open to the public.

DNR will support public notice, meeting access, accessibility, agendas, meeting materials and meeting records.

Members should avoid discussing, deliberating, polling, or attempting to reach agreement on council business outside a properly noticed meeting. This includes serial conversations by email, phone, text, shared documents or other channels.

Members may contact DNR staff with individual questions, logistical needs, accessibility requests or requests for information.

Hybrid meeting participation

The first meeting will be held in a hybrid format, with an in-person option at the DNR Central Office in St. Paul and a virtual option through Microsoft Teams.

The DNR will provide:

- Meeting location and Teams access information
- Parking or building access instructions
- DNR staff contact information for accessibility needs
- Meeting materials
- Technical support information
- Instructions for public access

Members attending virtually should plan to join from a location where they can participate fully and hear the discussion clearly.

Per diem and reimbursement

The DNR will provide separate guidance on per diem and expense reimbursement.

Members will receive instructions describing any required State payment registration or supplier processes before reimbursement can be issued.

Members should not email or upload Social Security numbers, tax identification numbers, banking information, signatures, or other sensitive payment information to the external Advisory Council SharePoint site.

Former working group and future outreach

The DNR recognizes the value of the former working group and other partners who helped inform early program development. Now that the statutory advisory council has been appointed, the advisory council is the formal advisory body for the program. DNR may explore ways for former working group members and other partners to support public outreach, awareness, road shows and applicant engagement this fall.

Any future role for former working group members or other partners will need to be clearly distinguished from the advisory council's formal role and structured to maintain fairness, transparency and the integrity of the grant process.

What happens next

After the first meeting, the DNR expects to:

- Send a structured council input survey on technical design and RFP development
- Continue developing the first funding opportunity
- Prepare draft RFP materials for council review in early August
- Continue grant management system configuration and testing
- Develop additional council operating materials
- Clarify recommendation and operating procedures with council input
- Continue preparing for planned RFP release in late September

Questions

Please contact DNR Community Grant Program staff with questions about meeting logistics, materials, accessibility or participation.

Questions about advisory council business are welcome, but discussion or deliberation among council members should occur during properly noticed public meetings.

DNR contact:

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