FY2027 RFP 01: Community Impact Funding Round

Name of Granting Agency: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Title of Grant Program/Opportunity: Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Community Grant Program FY2027 RFP 01: Community Impact Funding Round

FY2027 RFP 01 Request for Proposal Cover Sheet

Topic	Description	RFP page number
Overview, grant description and purpose	The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Community Grant Program supports projects that protect, conserve, preserve or enhance Minnesota's environment and natural resources while expanding the number and diversity of organizations that benefit from ENRTF funding. This funding opportunity is designed as a more accessible entry point for smaller, community-based projects and uses a two-stage competitive application process to reduce applicant burden while maintaining responsible stewardship of public funds.	5
Eligible applicants	Eligible applicants are expected to include nonprofit organizations, Tribal Nations and eligible tribal governmental entities, eligible local and regional governmental entities and other eligible recipients consistent with governing law. State agencies, the University of Minnesota Board of Regents and for-profit businesses will not receive Community Grant Program awards. A Stage 1 Concept Note must identify an eligible legal applicant. See the RFP for complete applicant and project eligibility requirements.	13
Eligible and ineligible projects	Projects are required to take place in Minnesota, provide an environmental or natural resource benefit in Minnesota and fit at least one of five statutory activity areas: helping adversely impacted communities respond to environmental degradation and related health concerns, environmental and natural resource education and awareness, preserving or enhancing natural resources, maintaining or improving existing state, regional or local trails or aquatic invasive species management. The RFP and applicable activity area appendix provide the controlling eligibility requirements and identify activities that are not eligible.	16-19
Amount available, award amounts and key funding items	Approximately $4,000,000 is expected to be available through this funding opportunity. Applicants may request $20,000 to $150,000. No match is required. The activities that directly carry out the approved environmental and natural resource projects must be completed within	9

Topic	Description	RFP page number
	12 months or less. The grant period may include up to two additional months for approved startup and close-out administration. See Section 4.3 for details. Reimbursement is the standard payment method. All proposed Community Grant Program awards are subject to applicable pre-award risk assessment requirements. Requirements vary based on award amount, applicant type and applicable law.	
Application timelines	• RFP publication: November 5, 2026 • Applicant preparation period: November 5 – November 30, 2026 • Stage 1 Concept Note opens in Foundant: December 1, 2026 • Applicant questions due for guaranteed pre-deadline response: Friday December 18, 2026, at 4:30pm Central Time (CT) • Stage 1 Concept Note due: Thursday, January 7, 2027, 11:59pm CT • Anticipated Stage 1 notifications and Stage 2 invitations: February 2027 • Anticipated Stage 2 application period: February – April 2027 • Anticipated funding selections: Spring 2027 • Anticipated grant start: Summer 2027 **Note:** Dates after the Stage 1 Concept Note deadline are estimates and may be adjusted based on the number of Concept Notes received, the time needed to complete eligibility review and competitive scoring and the number of applicants invited to Stage 2. The DNR will publish confirmed Stage 2 dates and related applicant instructions for invited applicants after Stage 1 review is complete.	40
Application format	The Community Grant Program uses a two-stage application process. Stage 1 is a short Concept Note that will be used to determine who will be eligible to submit a Stage 2 Full Application. Only applicants invited through the Stage 1 competitive process will be allowed to submit a Stage 2 application. Stage 2 is a separate competitive evaluation and an invitation to Stage 2 does not guarantee funding. The RFP, application questions, instructions, accessible application materials and applicant resources will be available on the Community Grant Program webpage. Stage 1 Concept Notes and Stage 2 Full Applications will be submitted through the Foundant application portal which will open on December 1, 2026, unless the DNR formally authorizes another submission method. Accessible offline versions of the application questions and instructions will be available for review and preparation. The Stage 1 Foundant application link will be published when the application opens on December 1, 2026. The DNR will add the link to the Community Grant webpage. The DNR will also email the link to people who have signed up for the Community Grant Program email list. Signing up for the email list is not required to apply.	7, 40

Topic	Description	RFP page number
Questions, technical assistance and contact information	Applicants should submit questions through Ask an ENRTF Community Grant Program Question, the DNR's primary question submission form. During Stage 1, the DNR will provide generally available applicant information and support, including plain-language resources, information sessions, eligibility guidance and application-system instructions. Applicants invited to Stage 2 will receive additional structured technical assistance to support development of the Full Application. Generally applicable substantive information will be shared through frequently asked questions, information sessions or other official applicant resources. The deadline to submit questions is 4:30 PM CST on December 18, 2026. Questions submitted by the deadline will receive a response by December 22, 2026. Questions submitted after December 18, 2026, are not guaranteed to receive a response. Current applicant-support information will be available on the Community Grants webpage. Stage 1 information sessions • November 17th: 12:00 PM-1:00 PM CT • November 19th: 12:00 PM-1:00 PM CT • December 8th: 12:00 PM-1:00 PM CT • December 15th: 12:00 PM-1:00 PM CT Stage 1 information-session dates, registration instructions and access links will be available on the official Community Grant Program webpage.	12, 52
Grant implementation requirements	Applicants selected for funding must complete applicable pre-award requirements before an award is executed. Grantees will be responsible for complying with the approved award, allowable cost and payment requirements, reporting, recordkeeping, monitoring, financial reconciliation (when applicable), performance evaluation, procurement and contracting requirements (when applicable) and grant closeout. Grant-funded work must not begin until the required grant agreement is executed and the DNR has authorized work to begin. Any work completed before a grant agreement is fully executed cannot be reimbursed. See the RFP and applicable Office of Grants Management policies for complete requirements.	38, 50

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Section 1. Funding opportunity and authority

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources administers this Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Community Grant Program funding opportunity. The DNR expects to award approximately $4,000,000 through a two-stage competitive process, with individual grant requests from $20,000 to $150,000.

Applicants begin with a short Stage 1 Concept Note. Applicants whose Concept Notes advance through the Stage 1 competitive process will be invited to develop a Stage 2 Full Application. Stage 1 and Stage 2 are separate competitive evaluations and an invitation to Stage 2 does not guarantee funding.

Substantive project implementation must be completed within 12 months or less. The grant period may include up to two additional months for approved startup and close-out activities, for a total grant period of up to 14 months.

1.2 Program authority and legislative foundation

The ENRTF Community Grant Program is established under Minnesota Statutes, chapter 116X. The Legislature directs the Department of Natural Resources to administer the Community Grant Program for purposes authorized under the Minnesota Constitution.

The Community Grant Program is intended to expand the number and diversity of recipients benefiting from the ENRTF, with an emphasis on communities adversely affected by pollution and environmental degradation. Grants are required to provide benefits across Minnesota's regions and residents. Its two-stage application process, applicant resources and published evaluation criteria are intended to support expanded participation while maintaining the eligibility and competitive requirements established in this RFP.

This funding opportunity is subject to applicable state law, statewide grants-management requirements and DNR requirements. Applicable law controls if there is a conflict between this RFP and controlling legal requirements.

The DNR has incorporated applicable authorities into the eligibility requirements, competitive process, evaluation criteria, pre-award requirements and grant-administration provisions described in this RFP.

Principal authorities include:

- Minnesota Constitution, article XI, section 14
- Minnesota Statutes, chapter 116X, Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Community Grant Program
- Minnesota Statutes, section 116X.03, Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Community Grant Program
- Applicable provisions of Minnesota Statutes, sections 16B.97, 16B.98 and 16B.981
- 2025 First Special Session, chapter 1
- 2026 Session Law, chapter 104
- 2026 Laws, chapter 119, article 2, section 9
- Applicable Office of Grants Management policies

Section 2. Is this opportunity a potential fit?

2.1 Who should consider applying?

This funding opportunity could be a good fit if you have a project idea that:

- Addresses an eligible environmental or natural resource need or opportunity in Minnesota
- Fits at least one of the five statutory activity areas identified in Section 2.2
- Is expected to provide a meaningful environmental or natural resource benefit in Minnesota
- Is appropriately scaled for a grant request of $20,000 to $150,000
- Can accomplish its substantive project work within 12 months or less
- Can be further developed during Stage 2 if the DNR invites the project to continue

Projects may also provide important community, educational, cultural, public health, recreational or other benefits when those benefits are connected to an eligible environmental or natural resource purpose.

You do not need previous ENRTF or Minnesota state grant experience.

Review sections 7–14, Applicant and Project Eligibility and the applicable statutory activity appendix for the controlling applicant and project eligibility requirements before submitting a Concept Note.

2.2 Five statutory activity areas

To be eligible, the proposed project must fit at least one of the five statutory activity areas below. Applicants must select the one activity area that best represents the primary purpose for which Community Grant Program funds would be used.

A. Adversely Impacted Communities

Helping adversely impacted communities respond to environmental degradation and related health concerns. See Appendix A.

B. Education and Awareness

Education and awareness related to stewardship of Minnesota's air, land, water, forests, fish, wildlife and other natural resources. See Appendix B.

C. Preserving or Enhancing Natural Resources

Preserving or enhancing Minnesota's air, land, water and other natural resources that otherwise may be substantially impaired or destroyed. See Appendix C.

D. Existing Trail Maintenance and Improvement

Maintenance and improvement of existing state, regional or local trails. New trail construction is not eligible under this activity area. See Appendix D.

E. Aquatic Invasive Species Management

Aquatic invasive species management consistent with applicable legal, permitting, planning and technical requirements. See Appendix E.

A project is allowed to create benefits or include activities relevant to more than one statutory activity area. Select the activity area that most directly reflects the principal purpose for which Community Grant Program funds would be used. Applicants do not need to prepare separate Concept Notes merely because one project could create benefits relevant to multiple activity areas.

Section 3. How the two-stage competitive process works

This funding opportunity uses two competitive stages.

Stage 1 uses a short Concept Note to evaluate eligible project concepts, establish a competitive ranking and determine which projects will advance into the limited Stage 2 cohort. Stage 2 allows invited applicants to further develop the project that advanced from Stage 1 into a Full Application. Each Full Application is competitively evaluated under the published Stage 2 criteria.

An invitation to Stage 2 is not a grant award and does not guarantee funding.

3.1 Stage 1: Concept Note

Stage 1 begins with a short Concept Note designed to allow applicants to explain a project idea without preparing a complete Full Application.

The controlling Stage 1 questions and instructions are provided in Appendix F: Stage 1 Concept Note Form and Instructions and in the authorized application system when Stage 1 opens. See Section 17, Stage 1 Concept Note, for the Stage 1 application requirements and Section 37, Application System, Submission and Receipt for the controlling submission process.

The Concept Note will collect focused information about the applicant, community, identified need and proposed project.

The DNR will review Concept Notes for completeness and eligibility before applying the published Stage 1 competitive scoring criteria.

After eligibility review, the DNR will score eligible Concept Notes using the four published Stage 1 criteria, totaling 100 points and rank them from highest to lowest based on total Stage 1 score. The criteria, point values and information considered under each criterion are provided in Section 18, Stage 1 Scoring Criteria.

The DNR will invite the highest-ranked Concept Notes to Stage 2, subject to the application limit and tie provisions in Part 3 of this document, until the established Stage 2 cohort is filled.

To be considered for advancement to Stage 2, an eligible Concept Note must receive a minimum Stage 1 score of 50 out of 100 points under the published scoring criteria.

Meeting the minimum score does not guarantee advancement.

The number of Stage 2 invitations is limited by the program's ability to administer the Stage 2 project

development, technical assistance and review process consistently and by the scale of funding available through this funding opportunity.

Stage 2 remains a competitive process, as the number of applicants invited to Stage 2 will exceed the number awarded funding.

See Part 3 for the controlling Stage 1 scoring and advancement rules.

3.2 Stage 2: Full Application by invitation

An invitation to Stage 2 is not an award and does not guarantee funding.

Only applicants invited by the DNR will be allowed to submit a Stage 2 Full Application.

Invited applicants will use **Appendix G: Stage 2 Full Application Form and Instructions** and **the DNR's grants management system, Foundant,** to apply. Appendix G provides an offline accessible version of the Full Application questions, instructions and required information for Stage 2. The Full Application presented in Foundant is required to be substantively equivalent to Appendix G.

The DNR will provide invited applicants with additional Stage 2 operating instructions, including Foundant access and submission instructions, the Stage 2 schedule, technical assistance information and other administrative details needed to complete the Full Application. These instructions will explain or implement this RFP but are not allowed to add or change substantive eligibility requirements, evaluation criteria or other competitive requirements. If needed, any substantive change to the requirements established by this RFP or Appendix G will be made through the formal RFP amendment process.

During Stage 2, invited applicants will further develop the project that advanced from Stage 1 into a complete Full Application for technical and competitive evaluation. Applicants should further develop implementation methods, work plans, expected results, budgets, partnerships, fiscal arrangements, site details, permits and governmental approval requirements, application status and anticipated timelines, staffing, procurement approaches and other implementation details that were not required to be completed at Stage 1.

The Full Application must remain materially consistent with the project described in the Concept Note that resulted in the applicant being invited to submit a Stage 2 Full Application. It may not substitute for a materially different applicant, project purpose, primary statutory activity, core environmental or natural resource need, essential community or place relationship or other element that was material to the project's Stage 1 evaluation and advancement.

Governmental applicants may have authorization, documentation or internal approval processes that differ from those of nongovernmental applicants. During Stage 2, the DNR will identify the requirements applicable to the proposed project and applicant while applying the same published competitive criteria to all eligible Full Applications. Additional provisions addressing governmental authority, including Tribal governmental authority where applicable, are provided elsewhere in this RFP.

Stage 2 is a separate competitive process. Stage 1 scores do not carry forward into Stage 2. The DNR will evaluate each eligible Full Application using the four published Stage 2 criteria, which total 100 points. The

criteria, point values and information considered under each criterion are provided in Section 27, Stage 2 Scoring Criteria. A Full Application is required to receive at least 70 points to be considered for funding. Meeting the minimum score does not guarantee an award. Funding decisions remain subject to the applicable selection, approval and funding requirements established in this RFP.

3.3 Stage 2 technical assistance and competitive evaluation

Applicants invited to Stage 2 will have access to a defined technical assistance process to help them understand Full Application requirements and further develop the project that advanced from Stage 1.

Support will include training, templates and tools, established open office hours, explanations of requirements, project development questions and project-specific guidance.

Applicants remain responsible for their projects, decisions, applications, permits and governmental approvals. The DNR will not write an application, make substantive project decisions for an applicant, advise on or complete regulatory or governmental processes on an applicant's behalf or provide an applicant with unpublished competitive requirements or scoring information.

Any generally applicable substantive guidance developed through the technical assistance process will be made available to all the Stage 2 applicants. The DNR will use reviewer-assignment controls to preserve the independence of competitive scoring when substantive individualized project-development assistance is provided.

Review Part 4 for the complete Stage 2 evaluation and selection process.

Section 4. Funding available

4.1 Total funding available

The DNR expects to award approximately $4,000,000 through this funding opportunity. The DNR does not guarantee that all available funding will be awarded.

4.2 Grant amounts

Applicants may request amounts from $20,000 to $150,000.

Applicants should request the amount reasonably necessary to accomplish the proposed project. Requesting the maximum amount does not make a Concept Note or Full Application more competitive.

The amount requested in the Stage 1 Concept Note is a preliminary estimate based on information reasonably available to the applicant at that stage.

If invited to Stage 2, an applicant may increase or decrease the requested grant amount within the $20,000 to $150,000 funding range as the project design, work plan and budget are developed.

Any adjustment must remain materially consistent with the project that advanced from Stage 1 and comply with

the applicant and project continuity requirements established by this RFP.

Applicants must explain any increase in the requested amount and demonstrate how the revised funding supports the proposed project activities and expected results.

The DNR will evaluate the revised funding request under the published Stage 2 criteria, competitive ranking and available funding. An increased request does not provide a competitive preference or guarantee selection or an award at the requested amount.

All selected applicants must complete applicable state grant requirements before receiving a grant award. Review Part 5 for selection, pre-award and grant development requirements and Part 7 for grant administration requirements.

4.3 Project implementation and grant period

Applicants are required to design the substantive project work to be completed within no more than 12 months.

The authorized grant period may include up to two additional months for necessary startup and close-out activities, resulting in a total grant period of up to 14 months. The additional administrative time does not extend the 12-month maximum for substantive project implementation and may not be used simply to continue unfinished substantive project work.

Costs may be charged to the grant only when they are included in the approved budget, incurred during the authorized grant period, permitted by the grant agreement and otherwise allowable.

Review Part 7 for detailed eligible costs, payment, reporting, monitoring, performance evaluation and closeout requirements.

Section 5. Stage 1 competitive advancement

5.1 How projects advance

Stage 1 is competitive. After determining applicant and project eligibility, the DNR will score eligible Concept Notes using the four published Stage 1 criteria and rank them from highest to lowest based on total Stage 1 score.

The DNR will consider qualifying Concept Notes for advancement in competitive rank order, subject to applicant-limit and tie provisions in Part 3 and any applicable statutory funding requirements. The number of Concept Notes invited to Stage 2 will reflect available funding, applicable statutory constraints and the Community Grant Program's capacity to provide consistent Stage 2 project development, technical assistance and review.

To be considered for advancement to Stage 2, an eligible Concept Note must receive a minimum Stage 1 score of 50 out of 100 points under the published scoring criteria.

Meeting the minimum score does not guarantee advancement. Before final advancement decisions, the DNR will establish and document the number of Stage 2 invitations based on the scale of funding available and the number of projects the Community Grant Program can administer consistently through Stage 2 project development, technical assistance and review. The capacity determination does not change applicant scores or create an additional competitive criterion.

Review Part 3 of this document for the controlling Stage 1 scoring, ranking, tie, advancement, notification and feedback requirements.

Section 6. RFP documents, applicant resources and official communications

6.1 Controlling RFP and application documents

This RFP includes appendices, which are attachments containing activity-specific requirements and application materials. This RFP, the applicable activity-area appendix, Appendix F: Stage 1 Concept Note Form and Instructions, Appendix G: Stage 2 Full Application Form and Instructions for invited applicants and any formal RFP amendments establish the substantive requirements of this funding opportunity.

Applicants should review the main RFP and the appendix corresponding to the project's primary statutory activity area. Applicants do not need to review activity-area appendices that do not apply to their proposed project.

The electronic application system will organize approved application content into fields, screens, instructions or system functions, but it will not create additional substantive eligibility, application or competitive evaluation requirements that are not established through this RFP, its applicable appendices or a formal amendment.

6.2 Applicant resources and online navigation

The Community Grant Program webpage will serve as the official public source for current funding opportunity information, including the RFP, Request for Proposal Cover Sheet, applicable appendices, application materials, formal amendments, application access, applicant resources, frequently asked questions and other official program information.

Applicants will be able to review the RFP and application requirements before creating an account in the application system.

Applicant resources will include eligibility and application guidance, information sessions, application system instructions, accessibility and language-access information and other resources.

Applicant resources explain and support the funding opportunity but do not create eligibility requirements, scoring criteria, application requirements, deadlines or other competitive rules that are not established in this RFP or a subsequent formal amendment.

6.3 Official questions, amendments and communications

Applicants should submit questions about FY2027 RFP 01: Community Impact Funding Round through the Ask an ENRTF Community Grant Program Question form.

Applicants who cannot use the online question form or who are directed by the DNR to submit a question by email, may submit questions through the official Community Grant Program mailbox:

enrtf.communitygrants.dnr@state.mn.us

Program contact

Gwendolyn Tweed
ENRTF Community Grant Program Supervisor
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Phone: 651-259-5225
Email: enrtf.communitygrants.dnr@state.mn.us

The telephone contact is provided for assistance accessing program information, navigating the official question process or requesting additional assistance. Questions requiring interpretation of eligibility, allowable activities, application requirements or competitive evaluation should be submitted through the official question form or authorized email process to ensure consistent guidance and documentation.

The DNR will assist applicants who cannot use these methods, including through appropriate accessibility accommodations. Information provided by telephone does not constitute an official eligibility determination, authorize an exception to published requirements or modify this RFP.

Applicants should submit questions by the deadline identified on the RFP cover sheet to allow the DNR sufficient time to consider and, when appropriate, provide guidance before the Stage 1 application deadline.

The DNR will review submitted questions and respond individually when appropriate. Questions may also identify recurring issues that warrant clarification through frequently asked questions, applicant resources, technical assistance or other official Community Grant Program communications.

Applicants are responsible for reviewing formal amendments and other official communications issued by the DNR. Review Section 41, Questions, Answers and Formal Changes, for the controlling question, amendment and official-change process.

If an applicant resource conflicts with this RFP or a formal amendment, the RFP and any applicable amendments control.

The Ask an ENRTF Community Grant Program Question form is not an application submission method and may not be used to submit, amend, supplement or replace a Stage 1 Concept Note or Stage 2 Full Application.

Part 2. Applicant and project eligibility

Section 7. Who can apply?

7.1 Eligible legal applicants

Each Stage 1 Concept Note must identify an eligible legal applicant.

For purposes of this funding opportunity, an eligible legal applicant is an organization or governmental entity that:

- Falls within an eligible recipient category under the governing Community Grant Program authority;
- Can be identified as the applicant throughout the competitive process; and
- If selected for funding, can enter into the applicable state grant arrangement and accept responsibility for the award

Eligible applicants include nonprofit organizations, Tribal Nations and Tribal governmental entities, local and regional governmental entities and other recipients permitted under the governing Community Grant Program authority.

7.2 Who Is not eligible to apply?

The following are not eligible to receive a Community Grant Program award:

- State agencies
- The University of Minnesota Board of Regents
- For-profit businesses

7.3 Community groups and other project participants

The DNR will request legal status and other organizational documentation during pre-award review rather than at Stage 1. Review Sections 31–34 for pre-award and grant structure requirements.

An individual, community group, informal organization or other participant that is not itself an eligible legal applicant may participate through an eligible legal applicant and may serve as the substantive project lead or a project partner.

The eligible legal applicant shall be identified at Stage 1 and remains the applicant throughout the competitive process. When the legal applicant and substantive project lead are different, the application shall identify their roles clearly. The arrangement must not be used to evade application limits, substitute a different competitive applicant or break the project continuity requirements between Stage 1 and Stage 2.

Partnership, fiscal agent and other administrative arrangements may continue to develop after Stage 1 as permitted by this RFP.

Review Part 5 for pre-award and grant structure requirements.

Section 8. Project leadership, partners and fiscal agents

8.1 Substantive project lead

Each Concept Note must identify one substantive project lead.

The substantive project lead is the person, group or organization principally responsible for the project idea, relevant community or place relationships and the substantive environmental or natural resource work.

For many projects, the eligible legal applicant, substantive project lead and eventual grantee will be the same organization. In other projects, different organizations or participants may have distinct projects, partnerships or fiscal roles.

The eligible legal applicant identified at Stage 1 remains the applicant throughout the application process and, if selected, will be the grantee, presuming successful pre-award review and execution of final grant agreement documents. Project partners and fiscal arrangements may continue to develop as permitted by this RFP, but they shall not be used to substitute a different competitive applicant.

When roles differ, the application shall identify them clearly enough for the DNR to understand all participants' roles, including who leads the project and who would carry legal and financial responsibility for the grant.

8.2 Partners and collaborators

Projects may include partners or collaborators. Collaboration among multiple organizations is welcome but is not required. Each Concept Note must identify one eligible legal applicant and one substantive project lead (those two could be the same entity in some cases), regardless of the number of project partners.

At Stage 1, applicants should identify significant known partners when their role is important to understanding the proposed project. Formal partner agreements are not required at Stage 1 unless a specific Stage 1 requirement in this RFP or the applicable activity area appendix expressly requires them. If invited to Stage 2, applicants will further develop the partner roles and commitments needed to demonstrate that the project can be implemented.

Review Part 4 for Stage 2 project development and Full Application requirements.

8.3 Fiscal agents

A fiscal agent may provide financial or administrative support when an applicant or substantive project lead needs additional capacity to administer a grant.

A fiscal agent does not replace the eligible legal applicant or grantee and does not increase an application's competitive score or standing.

At Stage 1, an applicant may identify that fiscal or administrative support is needed without having a completed fiscal agent agreement. If invited to Stage 2, the applicant shall further develop the proposed fiscal structure and identify the organization(s) that would carry the relevant financial and administrative responsibilities.

A fiscal agent must provide genuine financial or administrative capacity. A fiscal agent arrangement should not be used only to lend an organization's name, avoid application limits or obscure the identity of the substantive project lead.

One fiscal agent may support more than one Community Grant Program project when the arrangement provides sufficient capacity and accountability for each project and is otherwise permitted under applicable grant requirements.

Final fiscal agent responsibilities, payment arrangements, documentation and grant structure will be determined during Stage 2 and pre-award as applicable. Review Part 5 for pre-award and grant-structure requirements.

Section 9. Application limits

9.1 Stage 1 limit

A substantive project lead may submit no more than two distinct Stage 1 Concept Notes in this funding round. This limit applies to each substantive project lead, regardless of the eligible legal applicant. An eligible legal applicant may submit Concept Notes for more than two projects if the projects have different substantive project leads and each project otherwise meets the requirements of this RFP.

The two Concept Notes from the same substantive project lead must describe genuinely different project concepts. Each separately submitted Concept Note counts toward the two-Concept-Note limit, even when the submissions describe the same project or identify different eligible legal applicants, partners or fiscal agents. Submitting the same project through two different organizations therefore counts as two Concept Notes, not one.

9.2 Stage 2 limit

No more than one Concept Note from the same substantive project lead may advance to Stage 2. This limit applies to each substantive project lead, regardless of the eligible legal applicant. An eligible legal applicant may be associated with more than one project advancing to Stage 2 if those projects have different substantive project leads and otherwise meet the requirements of this RFP.

Participation as a partner or collaborator on another project does not count against this limit. Using a different legal applicant, partner or fiscal agent does not create an additional Stage 2 opportunity for the same substantive project lead.

Review Part 3 for the Stage 1 advancement process.

Section 10. General project eligibility

10.1 Statutory activity

A proposed project must fit at least one of the five statutory activity areas described in Appendices A–E.

Applicants must select one primary statutory activity area that best reflects the principal purpose for which Community Grant Program funds would be used.

A project may include activities or benefits related to more than one statutory activity area, but the applicant must identify the activity area that most directly represents the proposed project's primary purpose.

The DNR will evaluate activity area eligibility under the primary statutory activity area selected by the applicant.

Applicants who are uncertain which activity area best fits their proposed project should review the Five Eligible Activity Areas guidance and available applicant support before submission.

10.2 Minnesota environmental or natural resource benefit

The proposed project must provide a meaningful environmental or natural resource benefit in Minnesota.

A project may focus on a neighborhood, Tribal Nation, lake, watershed, trail, school community, local jurisdiction or another appropriately defined Minnesota place. A project does not need statewide geographic reach to be eligible.

Community Grant Program funds may only be used for funded project activities that take place in Minnesota.

A project may also provide community, educational, cultural, public health, recreational or other benefits when those benefits are connected to an eligible environmental or natural resource purpose.

10.3 Stage-Appropriate project information

Stage 1 applicants must provide enough information for the DNR to determine project eligibility and evaluate the proposed project under the published Stage 1 criteria.

At Stage 1, applicants must provide the information identified in this RFP and Appendix F for eligibility and Concept Note evaluation. Detailed implementation information that is not required at Stage 1 may continue to develop and, if the project advances, will be addressed through the Stage 2 Full Application as applicable.

Review Part 3 for Stage 1 requirements, Part 4 for Stage 2 development and evaluation and Appendices A–E for activity-specific requirements.

Section 11. Property, jurisdiction, permissions and approvals

11.1 Project location and property

At Stage 1, applicants must identify the project location or geographic area with enough detail for the DNR to understand the proposed Minnesota benefit and any major site conditions relevant to eligibility or feasibility.

An exact parcel or final site does not need to be established at Stage 1 unless this RFP or the applicable statutory activity appendix requires it.

A project may occur on private property when the project is otherwise eligible, provides the required environmental or natural resource benefit and satisfies applicable property, public benefit and grant requirements.

A project is not automatically ineligible because proposed work would occur on property that is not publicly owned.

Applicants must identify the property owner or controlling entity when known and describe any known site control issue that could materially affect the project.

Applicants do not need final landowner authorization or site-control documentation at Stage 1 unless the applicable activity-area appendix expressly requires it. If the project advances, the DNR will request the property information needed for Stage 2 or pre-award review. Before grant-funded work begins, the grantee must obtain the property permissions, approvals, permits or other authority required for the project.

11.2 Tribal lands, waters, resources and jurisdiction

Funding through this RFP does not substitute for Tribal governmental authorization or other Tribal governmental action that is required for a proposed project.

Projects involving Tribal lands, waters, natural resources, jurisdiction, treaty-protected interests, culturally important resources or other matters subject to Tribal governmental authority will require coordination, authorization or other action by the affected Tribal Nation.

At Stage 1, applicants should identify any known Tribal governmental approval, jurisdictional requirement or other Tribal governmental action that could materially affect project feasibility when that information can appropriately be included in the Concept Note. If invited to Stage 2, the applicant should further develop the status, timing and project implications of material approvals or governmental actions that remain unresolved.

Applicants should not include protected cultural information, precise sensitive resource locations, traditional knowledge, sacred information or other information that should not be publicly disclosed in ordinary application fields.

Review Part 7 for data practices and sensitive information requirements.

11.3 Permits and other approvals

At Stage 1, applicants should identify major permits, permissions, site approvals, Tribal governmental approvals, other governmental approvals or authorizations that are known or reasonably foreseeable and could materially affect the project.

Applicants generally do not need to obtain permits or approvals before submitting a Stage 1 Concept Note unless this RFP or the applicable statutory activity appendix expressly requires them at Stage 1.

If invited to Stage 2, applicants will further develop the status, timing, responsible party and expected process for material permits and approvals.

Required permits and authorizations, including any required Tribal governmental approval, must be obtained by the time required by law, the applicable statutory activity appendix, the final grant requirements or the responsible authority.

Section 12. Project scale and timing

Projects must fit the scale of this funding opportunity: a grant request of $20,000 to $150,000 and no more than 12 months of substantive project implementation.

Review Section 4.3, Project Implementation and Grant Period, for the distinction between substantive project implementation and any approved startup or closeout period.

Stage 1 does not require a fully developed implementation plan. The DNR will consider whether the proposed concept can reasonably become a feasible project within the available funding, project period and Stage 2 development process.

At Stage 1, an unresolved permit, partner agreement, procurement step, site issue, governmental approval or technical detail does not by itself make a project ineligible when the matter should reasonably be addressed during Stage 2 or before implementation. A project is ineligible if it fails to meet a published eligibility requirement. Otherwise, a material unresolved issue will be considered under the Stage 1 Project Feasibility criterion when it raises reasonable concerns about whether the project can be successfully implemented within the available funding and project period.

Projects that inherently require multiple years of substantive implementation are outside the scope of this funding opportunity.

Review Part 4 for Stage 2 work plan, feasibility and implementation-readiness requirements.

Section 13. Prohibited and ineligible projects

13.1 Scientific research

Community Grant Program funds must not be awarded for a scientific research project.

In distinguishing prohibited scientific research from eligible project implementation, the DNR will consider the project's primary purpose, design, methods and intended use of data, analysis or findings generated by the project.

A project does not become scientific research solely because it uses established monitoring, measurement, data collection, testing or evaluation methods to support management, prevention, response, stewardship, education or project implementation.

Review the applicable statutory activity appendix for additional activity-specific requirements or guidance.

13.2 New trail construction

Community Grant Program funds must not be used for construction of a new trail or new trail segment.

Review Appendix D for the eligibility requirements that apply to trail-related projects.

13.3 Other ineligible projects

A project is ineligible if it does not fit at least one authorized statutory activity area or violates a prohibition that applies to the proposed project.

Appendices A–E identify additional activity specific eligibility requirements and restrictions.

A project is ineligible when it fails to meet a published applicant or project eligibility requirement that applies to the proposed project. Other matters, such as an unfinished partner agreement, unresolved permit or incomplete implementation detail, do not automatically make a project ineligible at Stage 1 unless a published eligibility requirement applies. The DNR will consider these matters through the applicable competitive scoring criterion, pre-award review and/or grant-administration process.

13.4 Eligible and ineligible project costs

Project eligibility and the allowability of individual project costs are separate determinations. A project could be eligible even when a particular proposed expense cannot be paid with Community Grant Program funds.

A detailed project budget is not required at Stage 1. Applicants must provide the funding information requested in Appendix F for Concept Note evaluation.

Applicants invited to Stage 2 will develop a detailed project budget. Proposed costs must be necessary and reasonable for the project, connected to the approved work and allowable under applicable requirements.

Review Part 4 for Stage 2 budget requirements for guidance explaining applicable cost requirements and budget-preparation expectations. Applicant guidance will explain these requirements but will not create additional cost restrictions.

Section 14. Match and other funding

14.1 No required match

No matching contribution is required.

An applicant does not receive a competitive advantage simply because it can contribute more cash, staff time, donated services or other outside resources.

14.2 Other funding

Projects may use other compatible funding sources.

ENRTF money may supplement traditional sources of funding for environment and natural resource activities and must not be used as a substitute for those traditional funding sources. In practical terms, Community Grant Program funds should support eligible work in addition to, rather than replace, funding that is already available or ordinarily used for the same environmental or natural-resource activity. At Stage 1, applicants need to identify another funding source only when the project depends on that funding to be feasible. A complete financing package is not required for the Stage 1 Concept Note.

If invited to Stage 2, applicants will develop the project budget and identify other funding needed to implement the project.

The same cost must not be charged to more than one funding source.

Review Part 4 for Stage 2 budget requirements.

Part 3. Stage 1 Concept Note competitive process

Section 15. What information is needed at Stage 1?

15.1 Minimum Stage 1 information

Stage 1 is designed to evaluate a project concept, not a complete implementation plan. The Concept Note must provide enough information for the DNR to determine applicant and project eligibility and evaluate the proposed project using the published Stage 1 criteria.

The Stage 1 Concept Note requires concise information needed to determine eligibility and evaluate the project under the published Stage 1 criteria, including:

- The eligible legal applicant and substantive project lead
- The project idea, location or geographic area and primary statutory activity area
- The environmental or natural resource need or opportunity and expected benefit
- The proposed work and the change or result the project is intended to produce

- Basic project feasibility, including material dependencies or unresolved matters the applicant already knows about
- The amount requested and proposed substantive project duration
- Partners, fiscal support, site conditions, permits, governmental approvals or other matters when relevant to the proposed project

Detailed implementation information that is not required at Stage 1 should continue to be developed and, if the project advances, will be addressed through the Stage 2 Full Application as applicable.

The complete Stage 1 questions, response limits and required certifications are provided in Appendix F: Stage 1 Concept Note Form and Instructions.

15.2 Stage 1 certifications

Appendix F identifies the certifications and acknowledgments required when a Concept Note is submitted.

The DNR will require at Stage 1 only those certifications or acknowledgments that apply at that stage of the competitive process.

Additional certifications or documentation required based on the proposed award amount, applicant type or applicable pre-award requirements will be requested later in the process.

Review Part 5 for pre-award requirements.

Section 16. Stage 1 eligibility screening

16.1 Eligibility before scoring

The DNR reviews Stage 1 applicant and project eligibility before competitive scoring.

Eligibility screening determines whether the applicant and proposed project meet the published requirements to advance in the review process. Eligibility screening is separate from competitive evaluation.

The eligibility review uses the requirements in Part 2, the applicable statutory activity appendix and the Stage 1 requirements in Appendix F.

16.2 Eligibility questions and verification

When eligibility depends on a narrow fact that is unclear or incomplete, the DNR will use the limited clarification process in Section 21.

The DNR will verify submitted information when necessary to determine whether a published eligibility requirement applies. The DNR will assess activity-area eligibility under the primary statutory activity area selected by the applicant.

The DNR will not use clarification or verification to move an application to a different statutory activity area or allow an applicant to add or improve substantive competitive information after the application deadline.

Section 17. Stage 1 Concept Note

17.1 Purpose

The Concept Note is the entry point for Stage 1 application. It is intended to provide a concise and accessible way for applicants with different levels of grant writing and state grant experience to present a project concept.

Applicants should explain the proposed project in plain language.

17.2 Application and submission process

Applicants must submit the Stage 1 Concept Note through Foundant unless the DNR formally authorizes an alternative submission method.

Appendix F: Stage 1 Concept Note Form and Instructions is the official offline accessible version of the Stage 1 questions, instructions and required application information. Applicants should use Appendix F to review the requirements and prepare responses outside Foundant.

The DNR will maintain substantive equivalence between Appendix F and the Stage 1 application presented in Foundant. System labels, help text and navigation explain how to use the system but will not create additional substantive eligibility, scoring or application requirements.

Completing Appendix F outside Foundant does not constitute submission unless the DNR has formally authorized an alternative submission method.

17.3 Concept Note organization

Appendix F contains the complete Stage 1 questions and instructions. Applicants will be evaluated on the information submitted through the authorized application process by the deadline, subject only to the limited clarification and verification processes permitted by this RFP.

Section 18. Stage 1 scoring criteria

18.1 Scoring overview

All eligible Concept Notes are evaluated using four published criteria totaling 100 points.

The applicable statutory activity appendix determines activity-specific eligibility and provides technical information relevant to evaluation under a published criterion. An activity appendix does not, however, create a separate scoring criterion or scoring track.

Stage 1 criterion	Points
Expanding access and statutory priority	25
Environmental or natural resource need and expected benefit	30
Project idea and expected results	25
Project feasibility	20
Total	100

18.2 Criterion 1: Expanding access and statutory priority, 25 Points

This criterion considers whether the Concept Note demonstrates expanded access to ENRTF participation and an applicable statutory priority.

Relevant information could include the substantive project lead, prior direct ENRTF participation, project location or community, applicable environmental conditions and the project's grounding in the place or community it is intended to benefit.

The DNR will use structured information and controlled verification to apply this criterion consistently.

18.3 Criterion 2: Environmental or natural resource need and expected benefit, 30 Points

This criterion considers the environmental or natural resource condition, problem or opportunity the proposed project addresses, why it matters and the benefit that could reasonably result from the proposed work.

18.4 Criterion 3: Project idea and expected results, 25 Points

This criterion considers whether the proposed work is a reasonable response to the identified environmental or natural-resource need and whether the Concept Note provides a clear and credible explanation of the change or near-term result the project is intended to produce.

18.5 Criterion 4: Project feasibility, 20 Points

This criterion considers whether the proposed concept presents a credible path to successful implementation within the funding range, project period and basic program requirements.

Reviewers will consider the project information available at Stage 1, including known material dependencies or unresolved issues and whether there is a reasonable path for addressing those matters during Stage 2 or before implementation, as applicable.

Section 19. Stage 1 scoring and review method

19.1 Standardized review

Reviewers will evaluate each eligible Concept Note using the published Stage 1 criteria and point values. Scores are based on the submitted Concept Note and information properly confirmed through a clarification or verification process permitted by this RFP.

Stage 1 Concept Notes will be reviewed and scored by designated DNR Community Grant Program staff using the published evaluation criteria and standardized scoring procedures.

The DNR will use standardized reviewer instructions, scoring tools, calibration and quality-control procedures to promote consistent application of the published criteria. Internal reviewer guidance will not establish additional competitive criteria, change a published point value or introduce evaluation requirements or priorities that are not established in this RFP.

If required competitive information is not provided by the deadline, reviewers evaluate the Concept Note as submitted.

Section 20. Competitive advancement to Stage 2

20.1 Score, rank and advancement

After eligibility review and scoring are complete, the DNR will rank eligible Concept Notes from highest to lowest based on total Stage 1 score.

To be considered for advancement to Stage 2, an eligible Concept Note must receive a minimum Stage 1 score of 50 out of 100 points under the published scoring criteria. Meeting the minimum score does not guarantee advancement.

The DNR will consider qualifying Concept Notes for advancement in competitive rank order, subject to the application-limit and tie provisions in this Part and any applicable statutory funding requirements. The number of Concept Notes invited to Stage 2 will reflect available funding, applicable statutory constraints and the Community Grant Program's capacity to provide consistent Stage 2 project development, technical assistance and review.

20.2 Application Limit at the advancement boundary

A substantive project lead may not have more than one Concept Note advance to Stage 2. If two Concept Notes from the same substantive project lead would otherwise fall within the Stage 2 cohort, the higher-ranked Concept Note advances and the next highest-ranked eligible Concept Note from another substantive project lead is considered. The lower-ranked Concept Note is not reclassified as ineligible; it does not advance because of the published Stage 2 application limit.

If two Concept Notes from the same substantive project lead have the same Stage 1 score and the application limit affects advancement, the tie process in Section 20.3 applies.

20.3 Ties at the Stage 2 advancement boundary

If Concept Notes are tied at a point that determines advancement to Stage 2, the DNR will apply the following order:

1. The Concept Note with the higher Criterion 2 score will rank higher.
2. If still tied, the Concept Note with the higher Criterion 1 score will rank higher.
3. If still tied, the DNR will assign an additional reviewer who did not participate in the initial scoring of the tied Concept Notes. The additional reviewer will evaluate the tied Concept Notes using the published Stage 1 criteria and the information that will properly be considered under this RFP. The additional review will be used only to resolve the tie.

The DNR will apply the tie process consistently to similarly situated Concept Notes.

Section 21. Stage 1 clarifications, corrections and fairness

21.1 Narrow factual clarification

The DNR may request a narrow factual clarification when needed to confirm or resolve ambiguity in information already contained in the submitted Concept Note and necessary to determine eligibility or apply another published non-merit requirement.

A clarification may confirm an existing fact but must not:

- Add missing competitive information
- Improve a competitive response
- Substitute a different applicant or project
- Change the applicant-selected primary statutory activity area, or
- Otherwise provide a post-deadline opportunity to strengthen the Concept Note

The DNR will document material clarification requests and responses and apply the clarification process consistently.

21.2 Administrative corrections

The DNR may correct a documented DNR or DNR-controlled system error when the correction does not allow an applicant to add, replace or improve substantive application information. If correcting the error changes an application score, rank or advancement result, the DNR will update the affected records and decisions accordingly.

The DNR will document the error, correction and basis for the correction and will apply the correction process consistently to similarly situated applicants.

21.3 Verification and equal treatment

Clarification, verification and administrative correction must not create an unpublished scoring factor or allow an applicant to add or improve the competitive substance of a Concept Note after the deadline. The DNR will apply these processes consistently to similarly situated applicants and document material actions affecting an application.

Section 22. Stage 1 notifications and feedback

22.1 Written Stage 1 decision

The DNR will provide each Stage 1 applicant with a written decision.

The decision will identify whether the Concept Note:

- Is ineligible under a published requirement
- Is eligible but did not advance under the published Stage 1 scoring and advancement rules, or
- Is invited to Stage 2

22.2 Stage 1 feedback

The Stage 1 written decision will identify the applicant's outcome under Section 22.1. The DNR may provide additional applicant feedback or general learning resources to applicants not advancing to Stage 2 when program capacity permits. Any additional feedback is informational and does not create an appeal or reconsideration process.

22.3 Administrative error

This RFP does not establish an appeal of competitive reviewer judgment unless applicable law or statewide grant requirements provide otherwise.

The DNR may correct a documented administrative, mathematical or DNR-controlled system error without reopening the applicant's competitive response. A correction may change the affected score, rank or advancement decision when necessary to reflect the corrected record.

Section 23. Transition to Stage 2

23.1 Invitation is not an award

An invitation to Stage 2 allows the applicant to develop and submit a Full Application for the project that advanced from Stage 1. The invitation is not a grant award, does not guarantee funding and does not authorize grant-funded work or costs. Review Part 4 for the Stage 2 competitive process.

23.2 Develop the same project

Stage 2 is intended to further develop the project that earned the Stage 2 invitation. Applicants are not expected to have every implementation detail completed at Stage 1.

The eligible legal applicant, substantive project lead, core environmental or natural resource need, project purpose, primary statutory activity area, underlying project concept and essential community or place relationship must remain materially consistent between Stage 1 and Stage 2.

During Stage 2, applicants will develop the additional implementation information required for the Full Application, including work plan, budget, results, roles and other project details that were not required to be completed at Stage 1.

Stage 2 may not be used to substitute a materially different applicant or competitive project.

If a proposed change could materially alter an element that affected the project's Stage 1 eligibility, scoring or advancement, the DNR will determine whether the project remains eligible to proceed as the project invited to Stage 2.

Part 4. Stage 2 Full Application competitive process

Section 24. Stage 2 Project development and technical assistance

24.1 Purpose of Stage 2

Stage 2 is a separate competitive process for applicants invited to develop and submit a Full Application. Stage 1 scores do not carry forward into Stage 2.

During Stage 2, invited applicants will complete the additional project information required for evaluation under the published Stage 2 criteria. The Full Application must remain materially consistent with the project that advanced from Stage 1 under the continuity requirements in Part 3.

An invitation to Stage 2 is not a grant award, does not guarantee funding and does not authorize grant-funded work or costs.

24.2 Stage 2 technical assistance

Invited applicants will have access to a defined Stage 2 technical assistance process intended to help them understand Full Application requirements and develop the project that advanced from Stage 1.

Technical assistance may include training, templates and tools, open office hours, explanations of requirements, project development questions and proportionate project-specific guidance.

Detailed technical assistance schedules, service information and operating instructions will be provided through

the Stage 2 invitation or official applicant resources. Those materials may explain this RFP and Appendix G but must not create new substantive competitive requirements or evaluation criteria.

24.3 Applicant responsibility and assistance boundaries

The applicant remains responsible for the proposed project, substantive project decisions and the Full Application it submits, including determining and obtaining permits, governmental approvals and other external authorizations required for the project.

DNR staff may explain requirements, ask developmental questions, identify gaps or concerns and provide examples or tools. They will not write the Full Application, make substantive project decisions for the applicant, provide legal or engineering representation, complete regulatory or governmental processes on the applicant's behalf or guarantee funding.

Participation in Stage 2 technical assistance does not increase or decrease an application's competitive score or funding priority.

Section 25. Fairness and separation of technical assistance from evaluation

25.1 Fair access to Stage 2 technical assistance

The DNR will provide a transparent Stage 2 technical-assistance framework for invited applicants. The type or amount of assistance may vary reasonably, based on the project, the applicant's questions, accessibility needs and project development needs. If technical assistance identifies information about Full Application requirements or evaluation that would be useful to all Stage 2 applicants, the DNR will share that information with all invited applicants through an official communication or applicant resource, as appropriate. The DNR will protect applicant-specific, non-public, sensitive, accessibility-related and government-to-government information and will not disclose that information through general applicant guidance.

25.2 Separation from evaluation

A person who provides substantive individualized project development assistance to an applicant must not competitively score that applicant's Full Application.

The DNR Community Grant team may use other DNR staff or subject-matter reviewers for eligibility, technical, fiscal, administrative or compliance review when those roles do not provide the competitive scorer with unpublished applicant evidence or otherwise compromise the independence of scoring.

Information shared through technical assistance is not additional application evidence and is not scored unless it is submitted through the Full Application or properly considered through a clarification or verification process permitted by this RFP.

Section 26. Full Application requirements

26.1 Full Application

The Full Application is the competitive application for Stage 2. Appendix G: Stage 2 Full Application Form and Instructions contains the complete Stage 2 questions, instructions and required application information.

The Full Application must provide enough information for the DNR to evaluate the proposed project under the published Stage 2 criteria, determine whether the application meets the minimum Stage 2 merit threshold and establish its competitive rank for funding consideration.

Stage 2 requires greater project definition than Stage 1. The level of information required should be proportionate to the proposed project and applicable activity area.

Submission of a Full Application does not guarantee selection or funding. Review Part 6 for submission requirements.

26.2 Project design and technical approach

Applicants must describe the purpose of the project, environmental or natural-resource needs, proposed activities and methods, why the proposed approach is appropriate and material project-specific technical requirements or assumptions. The level of technical details must be proportionate to the proposed project. Applicants should identify material unresolved technical questions when they could affect successful implementation and explain the planned path for resolving them.

26.3 Work plan, feasibility and implementation readiness

Applicants must provide a feasible implementation plan that identifies, as applicable:

- Major activities or tasks
- Sequence and milestones
- Responsible parties
- Project timing and significant seasonal constraints
- Partner roles
- Staffing or expertise
- Site status
- Permits, permissions and governmental approvals
- Procurement or contracting needs
- Major dependencies
- Material implementation risks

Applicants should identify material implementation matters that remain unresolved and provide a credible path and expected timing for resolving matters necessary to implement the project. Completion of a permit,

agreement, governmental approval, procurement action, contractor selection or similar prerequisite before Full Application submission is not required unless this RFP or applicable authority expressly requires it at that stage.

26.4 Results and performance

Applicants must explain what the proposed project is expected to accomplish and how they will document the work performed and practical near-term results achieved.

Depending on the project, this could include deliverables, completion standards, counts, observations, measurements or other proportionate evidence.

26.5 Budget and value

Applicants must provide the amount requested, a detailed but proportionate project budget and enough explanation for the DNR to understand significant costs, assumptions and how proposed costs connect to the work plan.

Applicants must identify significant cost assumptions, dependencies, any other funding needed for project feasibility and any proposed fiscal agent fee, as applicable.

Match or other outside resources are not required and do not receive a competitive advantage merely because they are available. They are considered only when relevant to project feasibility, the proposed budget or value under the published Stage 2 criteria.

Review Part 7 for applicable eligible and ineligible cost requirements.

26.6 Legal applicant, partners and fiscal structure

The eligible legal applicant identified at Stage 1 must remain the applicant for the Stage 2 Full Application.

The Full Application must confirm the legal applicant and substantive project lead, identify material project partners and their roles and describe any proposed fiscal agent arrangement.

Partnerships and fiscal arrangements should continue to develop when permitted by this RFP, but they are not allowed to substitute a different competitive applicant or a materially different project.

If a fiscal agent is proposed, the Full Application must identify the proposed fiscal agent, anticipated role and responsibilities and any expected fee. Final fiscal agent approval and grant structure requirements are addressed during pre-award. Review Part 5.

26.7 Information reserved for pre-award

Stage 2 does not require completion of the full pre-award process. The DNR will request pre-award documentation after selection through the appropriate process unless a specific requirement must be addressed earlier under this RFP or applicable law.

Applicants should not submit bank information, sensitive financial records or other protected information

through ordinary application fields or attachments unless the DNR specifically instructs them to do so through an approved process.

Review Part 5 for pre-award requirements.

Section 27. Stage 2 evaluation criteria

27.1 Scoring overview

Each complete and eligible Full Application will be evaluated using the same four published Stage 2 criteria, totaling 100 points. Stage 1 scores do not carry forward or combine with Stage 2 scores.

Stage 2 evaluation criteria	**Maximum Points**
Project design and technical approach	35
Work plan, feasibility and implementation readiness	30
Results and performance	20
Budget and value	15
Total	100

A Full Application must receive at least 70 of 100 points to meet the minimum Stage 2 merit threshold and remain eligible for funding recommendation. Meeting the minimum threshold does not guarantee funding. Applications meeting the minimum threshold will be competitively ranked and considered for funding in accordance with Sections 29 and 30.

Activity-specific requirements and technical information are allowed to inform evaluation under an applicable published criterion but do not create an additional competitive criterion or separate scoring track.

27.2 Project design and technical approach, 35 Points

Reviewers consider whether the project design reasonably responds to the identified environmental or natural resource need, whether the proposed methods are appropriate, whether material technical conditions are addressed and whether the project presents a credible path to the expected environmental or natural resource benefit.

27.3 Work plan, feasibility and implementation readiness, 30 Points

Reviewers consider whether the project can reasonably be implemented on the proposed scale and within the proposed timeframe.

Relevant considerations could include sequencing, roles, staffing or expertise, sites, partners, permits, governmental approvals, procurement, seasonal constraints, dependencies and material unresolved issues.

Reviewers will consider whether the work plan provides a credible pathway and reasonable timing for resolving matters necessary for implementation.

27.4 Results and performance, 20 Points

Reviewers consider whether the proposed results are appropriate to the project and whether the applicant presents a practical and proportionate way to document the work performed and near-term results achieved.

27.5 Budget and value, 15 Points

Reviewers consider whether requested costs are understandable, reasonable, necessary for the proposed work, connected to the work plan and proportionate to the project and expected benefit.

Lowest cost does not automatically represent the best value. Match, outside resources or an applicant's ability to absorb project costs do not by themselves increase competitive merit.

Section 28. Stage 2 evaluation process

28.1 Stage 2 evaluation and technical review

The DNR will evaluate each complete and eligible Full Application using the published Stage 2 criteria. Stage 2 Full Applications will be competitively reviewed by designated DNR staff, with appropriate technical and subject-matter expertise incorporated into the review process. Additional technical, fiscal or other subject-matter review may be used as needed to evaluate submitted information and determine whether published requirements are met.

Technical or subject-matter review does not create an additional competitive criterion, change a published point value or introduce an unpublished preference.

28.2 Clarification and verification

The DNR may request a narrow factual clarification when needed to resolve ambiguity in information already contained in the submitted Full Application and necessary to determine eligibility or apply another published requirement.

Clarification or verification may confirm information already submitted or help the DNR apply a published requirement. It may not be used to add missing information needed for competitive evaluation, improve the project's competitive standing or introduce an unpublished scoring factor.

The DNR will document material clarification or verification actions and apply the process consistently to similarly situated applicants.

Section 29. Stage 2 competitive evaluation and funding recommendation

29.1 Final Stage 2 score

Reviewers will score each complete and eligible Full Application using the published Stage 2 criteria and point values.

Scores will be based on the submitted Full Application and information properly considered through the clarification, verification and technical review processes permitted by this RFP.

A Full Application must meet the minimum Stage 2 merit threshold established in Section 27.1 to remain eligible for a funding recommendation. Stage 1 scores do not carry forward or combine with Stage 2 scores.

29.2 Competitive funding determination

The DNR will rank complete and eligible Full Applications that meet the minimum Stage 2 merit threshold from highest to lowest based on final Stage 2 score.

Funding recommendations will proceed in rank order based on available funding and applicable published legal or program requirements. Meeting the minimum score does not guarantee funding.

A Full Application that does not meet the minimum Stage 2 merit threshold or fails an applicable eligibility requirement will not be recommended for funding.

The DNR will document the final score, rank and basis for each funding recommendation.

29.3 Stage 2 decision documentation

The DNR will maintain sufficient documentation to show how each Stage 2 funding recommendation was based on the published criteria, final scores, competitive ranking and applicable requirements.

Section 30. Stage 2 selection

30.1 Selection based on Stage 2 competitive evaluation

The DNR will make Stage 2 funding selections from complete and eligible Full Applications that meet the published minimum Stage 2 merit threshold. Qualifying Full Applications will be considered in final Stage 2 rank order based on available funding and applicable published legal or program requirements.

Stage 1 ranking determines advancement to Stage 2 but does not determine Stage 2 selection.

30.2 Consistent application of published requirements

The DNR will apply the published Stage 2 criteria and applicable requirements and will not use an unpublished competitive preference to alter final Stage 2 ranking or selection.

Any selection requirement imposed by applicable law will be administered consistently with that authority and this RFP.

30.3 Selection for pre-award review

Applicants selected through Stage 2 will move to the pre-award process described in Part 5. Selection is not an executed grant agreement and does not authorize grant-funded work or costs. The selected project shall remain materially consistent with the project competitively evaluated under this RFP.

Part 5. Selection, pre-award and grant agreement

Section 31. Selection and proposed award status

31.1 Selection for funding

Applicants selected for funding through the Stage 2 competitive process will receive written notice from the DNR.

Selection identifies a project the DNR intends to move forward for pre-award review and grant development. Selection is not an executed grant agreement and does not guarantee that a grant will be executed.

Grant-funded work shall begin only after the required grant agreement is fully executed and the DNR establishes the authorized start date. Costs incurred before the authorized start date will not be reimbursed.

31.2 If a selected applicant does not proceed

If a selected applicant withdraws, becomes ineligible, cannot complete applicable pre-award requirements or cannot proceed to an acceptable grant arrangement, the DNR may discontinue the proposed award.

If funding remains available and timing permits, the DNR may consider the next highest-ranked Full Application that met the Stage 2 minimum merit threshold, subject to applicable eligibility, legal and pre-award requirements. The next-ranked applicant is not automatically entitled to an award and the DNR is not required to award all available funds.

Section 32. Pre-award review and funding refinement

32.1 Purpose of pre-award review

Pre-award review occurs after competitive selection and before grant execution.

Its purpose is to confirm that the selected applicant and proposed grant can proceed under applicable Community Grant Program, state and DNR requirements and to identify any financial, administrative, legal, compliance or implementation conditions that must be addressed before the grant is executed.

Pre-award review is not a new competitive scoring stage. It does not reopen the Stage 2 competitive evaluation and must not be used to substitute a materially different applicant or project.

Pre-award requirements will vary based on the proposed grantee's legal structure, award amount, project characteristics and the state requirements that apply to the proposed grant. The DNR will review legal authority, required risk information, financial and administrative capacity, grant structure, payment method and project-specific conditions needed to establish a grant that meets applicable requirements and can be successfully administered.

The DNR will request pre-award information when it is needed rather than requiring applicants to submit unnecessary financial or administrative documentation during the competitive application stages.

32.2 Pre-Award Risk Assessment

The DNR will conduct the applicable Pre-Award Risk Assessment required for the proposed award before grant execution.

For a proposed Community Grant Program award of less than $50,000, Minnesota Statutes, section 116X.03, subdivision 3c, applies the pre-award risk-assessment requirements of Minnesota Statutes, section 16B.981. For proposed awards of $50,000 or more, the DNR will apply Minnesota Statutes, section 16B.981 and applicable statewide grants-management requirements to the proposed grantee. The assessment may consider, as applicable, experience and performance on similar responsibilities, organizational and financial capacity, internal controls, required financial information, organizational standing, certifications and other information authorized by applicable requirements.

Selected applicants must provide required pre-award information accurately and within the timeframe established by the DNR.

32.3 Responding to Pre-Award Risk Assessment

Identification of a pre-award risk concern does not automatically prevent an award. The DNR will follow applicable state requirements for applicant response, risk mitigation and final pre-award determination.

When permitted, an identified risk may be addressed through an appropriate mitigation plan, grant condition, oversight or payment control. If applicable requirements do not allow the proposed grant to proceed or an acceptable risk response cannot be established, the DNR may decline to execute the grant.

32.4 Funding and project refinement

Before grant execution, the DNR will work with the selected applicant to refine and, as appropriate, revise the proposed award amount, budget, work plan, results and performance requirements, technical conditions, fiscal arrangements or other implementation details when necessary to establish a grant that meets applicable administrative, financial and technical requirements.

Any proposed adjustments will be discussed with the selected applicant and incorporated into the final grant agreement only through mutual agreement. The DNR may propose adjustments to the final award amount within the funding limits of this RFP when necessary to complete pre-award grant development, provided the resulting project remains feasible and materially consistent with the project selected through Stage 2. These adjustments must not substitute a materially different applicant or project, change the project's primary statutory activity or core purpose or add substantial new activities that were not part of the competitively evaluated project.

If the proposed award amount or project scope is reduced through pre-award revisions, the DNR and selected applicants will work together to adjust the work plan, budget, results and performance requirements so the resulting project remains feasible within the agreed funding level and grant period.

The DNR may identify reasonable pre-award conditions necessary to proceed with an award. These conditions will be communicated to the selected applicant and addressed through the pre-award revision process, consistent with applicable law and this RFP.

If the DNR and selected applicants cannot reach agreement on a feasible grant within the competitively selected project scope and applicable requirements, the DNR will decline to proceed with the proposed award.

Section 33. Legal grantee, fiscal agent and payment structure

33.1 Legal grantee

The eligible legal applicant identified at Stage 1 and maintained through the competitive process is the proposed grantee if the project is selected for funding.

Before grant execution, the DNR will confirm the proposed grantee's legal status, authority to enter into the grant agreement and other requirements applicable to the proposed award.

The grantee remains responsible to the DNR for compliance with the grant agreement and administration of the funded project, including when the project involves partners, collaborators or an approved fiscal agent.

The final grant structure must remain consistent with the applicant and project continuity requirements established by this RFP.

33.2 Fiscal agent

A fiscal agent may provide defined financial or administrative support when permitted by this RFP and applicable law.

A fiscal agent must provide genuine fiscal or administrative capacity. A fiscal agent arrangement must not be nominal or used only to avoid applicant, application or grant requirements.

Before grant execution, the DNR will review the proposed fiscal agent arrangement and any documentation needed to confirm the fiscal agent's authority, capacity, responsibilities, fee and accountability for the proposed grant structure.

A qualified fiscal agent may support more than one Community Grant Program project when the DNR determines that the arrangement provides sufficient capacity and accountability for each grant and complies with applicable requirements.

Use of a fiscal agent does not replace the competitive applicant or transfer the grantee's responsibility for the funded project.

When a fiscal agent is used as part of an advance payment arrangement under Section 33.3, the fiscal agent must satisfy the requirements applicable to that arrangement.

33.3 Reimbursement and cash flow

The Community Grant Program will be administered on a reimbursement basis unless the DNR approves an advance-payment arrangement authorized by Minnesota Statutes, section 116X.03, subdivision 4a.

Under reimbursement, the grantee incurs and pays eligible project costs and then requests reimbursement from the DNR in accordance with the approved budget, grant agreement and applicable requirements.

Applicants should consider cash flow during Stage 2 and pre-award. A selected applicant that is unable to implement the approved project on a reimbursement basis should raise that issue with the DNR during grant development so the DNR can determine whether an authorized payment structure is available and appropriate. The commissioner may approve an advance payment when:

- The recipient has obtained a surety bond in an amount and form approved by the commissioner, or
- A fiscal agent has been designated and approved by the commissioner for purposes of the advance payment arrangement

A fiscal agent approved for advance payments is subject to the applicable requirements of Minnesota Statutes, sections 16B.97 through 16B.991.

An advance payment is discretionary and is not an applicant entitlement.

The DNR must approve the applicable payment structure before grant execution. The grant agreement will establish the approved payment method and applicable financial controls.

33.4 Tribal Nations and Tribal governmental entities

The DNR will use a legally appropriate pre-award and grant-development process for Tribal Nations and eligible Tribal governmental entities.

During pre-award, the DNR will identify the authorization, documentation, payment structure and other grant-execution requirements applicable to the proposed Tribal governmental grantee.

The DNR will apply the competitive requirements established by this RFP while recognizing that governmental authorization, documentation and grant-execution processes applicable to a Tribal government may differ from those applicable to a nongovernmental grantee.

The DNR will not require a Tribal Nation or Tribal governmental entity to deny its sovereignty as a requirement or condition of a grant.

Section 34. Grant agreement, grant period and authorization to begin

34.1 Grant agreement

A grant becomes effective only through an approved grant agreement executed in accordance with applicable state and DNR requirements.

The grant agreement establishes the enforceable terms of the award, including the approved project scope, work plan, budget, grant period, payment method, performance and reporting requirements, monitoring and financial controls, project-specific conditions, amendment requirements and closeout requirements.

The final project scope, work plan, budget and results must remain materially consistent with the project competitively selected through Stage 2.

Selection for funding does not create a grant agreement and does not authorize project costs.

Grant-funded work must begin only after the grant agreement is fully executed and the DNR has established the authorized start date.

Costs incurred before the authorized start date will not be reimbursed.

34.2 Grant period

The grant agreement must include a total grant period of up to 14 months: no more than 12 months for substantive project implementation, plus up to two additional months when necessary for approved startup and close-out administration.

The 12-month substantive implementation limit is a requirement of this funding opportunity.

The additional administrative period may be used only for approved startup and close-out activities. It must not be used to extend substantive project implementation beyond 12 months or to complete unfinished substantive project work.

Reasonable and necessary startup or close-out costs may be charged to the grant only when they are included in the approved budget, incurred within the authorized grant period and otherwise allowable under the grant agreement and applicable requirements.

34.3 Reporting, monitoring and financial reconciliation

The Community Grant Program is subject to the grant recipient reporting, monitoring and small grant administration requirements established in Minnesota Statutes, section 116X.03, as amended by 2026 Session Law, chapter 104.

Under Minnesota Statutes, section 116X.03, subdivision 5a, each Community Grant Program recipient is required to submit a written progress report to the commissioner at least quarterly, in a form and manner approved by the commissioner, until all grant funds have been expended and all terms of the grant agreement have been met.

Under Minnesota Statutes, section 116X.03, subdivision 3b:

- For grants of $50,000 or more, the DNR must conduct at least one in-person unannounced monitoring visit before final payment
- For grants under $50,000, the DNR must select a sample from the grants awarded each year and conduct at least one unannounced monitoring visit on each selected grant before final payment

Under Minnesota Statutes, section 116X.03, subdivision 3c, grants under $50,000 are also subject to the small-grant administration requirements established for the Community Grant Program, including financial reconciliation of a sample of grantee expenditures before final payment.

Additional monitoring, financial reconciliation, reporting or oversight shall apply when required by statewide grants management requirements, the grant agreement, project-specific conditions or identified risk. Grantees are required to maintain the records necessary to support payment, reporting, monitoring, financial reconciliation, audit and closeout.

Review Part 7 for additional grant administration and close-out requirements.

34.4 Transition Support for New Grantees

The DNR will provide grant-startup support to help grantees understand the financial, administrative, reporting, monitoring and project-management requirements that apply after award. Where practical, startup will build on the work plan, budget, results and implementation information developed during Stage 2, so grantees do not need to re-create the same information unnecessarily.

Startup support does not replace the grantee's responsibility to comply with the executed grant agreement and applicable requirements.

Part 6. Application submission and application support

Section 35. Official funding opportunity information and communications

35.1 Official funding opportunity information

This funding opportunity is ENRTF Community Grant Program FY2027 RFP 01: Community Impact Funding Round.

The official Community Grant Program webpage provides access to current funding opportunity information, application materials and applicant resources. See Part 1, Section 6, for information about controlling RFP documents, official communications and amendments.

35.2 Official questions

Applicants may use the official question process described in Part 1, Section 6.3, to submit questions about this funding opportunity.

Submitting a question does not extend an application deadline or create an exception to a requirement in this RFP. See Section 41 for the procedures governing questions, answers and formal changes.

Section 36. Application schedule and preparation period

36.1 Competitive process schedule

The current application schedule is provided in the Request for Proposal Cover Sheet and Part 1 of this RFP and will also be available through the official Community Grant Program webpage.

A material change to an application deadline or another substantive competitive requirement will be communicated through a formal RFP amendment.

Applicants are responsible for reviewing formal amendments and current official funding opportunity information during the competitive process.

36.2 Applicant preparation period November 5 – November 30, 2026

Publication of the RFP begins the applicant preparation and support period. Applicants may use official applicant resources, information sessions and question channels to understand the funding opportunity and prepare a Concept Note.

Applicant resources, examples and support are allowed to explain the published requirements but must not create or change eligibility, scoring, deadlines or other substantive competitive requirements.

Section 37. Foundant application system, submission and receipt

37.1 Foundant application system and offline forms

Stage 1 Concept Notes and Stage 2 Full Applications must be submitted through Foundant unless the DNR formally authorizes another submission method under this Part.

The DNR will publish the Foundant application link on the official Community Grant Program webpage when the applicable application period opens. The DNR will also email the link to people who have signed up for the Community Grant Program email list. Applicants do not need to subscribe to the email list to apply.

Appendix F is the official offline accessible version of the Stage 1 Concept Note questions, instructions and required application information.

Appendix G is the official offline accessible version of the Stage 2 Full Application questions, instructions and required application information for applicants invited to Stage 2.

Applicants should use Appendix F or Appendix G to review application requirements and prepare responses outside Foundant.

The DNR will maintain substantive equivalence between the information required in Foundant and the corresponding official application form in Appendix F or Appendix G. Foundant labels, help text, navigation and branching will explain system use but will not create additional substantive eligibility, scoring or application requirements.

Completing Appendix F or Appendix G outside Foundant does not constitute submission unless the DNR has formally approved an alternative submission method.

37.2 Submission and receipt

An application is submitted only when the applicant completes the required submission steps through Foundant or another submission method formally authorized by the DNR.

Saving, drafting or partially completing an application does not constitute submission.

For applications submitted through Foundant, the official submitted status and system timestamp will establish whether the application was received by the applicable deadline.

Applicants are responsible for confirming that the application has been successfully submitted.

Foundant system instructions will be available through official applicant resources and will not change the substantive requirements of this RFP.

37.3 Final submitted version

The version received through the authorized submission method by the applicable deadline is the submitted application used for the competitive process.

Draft, saved or incomplete entries that have not been submitted through the authorized process are not submitted applications.

Any correction, withdrawal, clarification or verification after submission is governed by this Part and the applicable Stage 1 or Stage 2 rules.

Section 38. Accessibility, reasonable accommodation and language assistance

38.1 Accessible application materials

The DNR will provide accessible funding opportunities and application materials consistent with applicable requirements.

The DNR will ensure applicants can review the substantive Stage 1 application requirements through Appendix F and the substantive Stage 2 application requirements through Appendix G without relying solely on access to Foundant.

The DNR will maintain substantive equivalence between the applicable offline accessible application form and the information required through Foundant.

Applicants should contact the DNR if they identify an accessibility barrier in the RFP, an appendix, an applicant resource or the application process.

38.2 Reasonable accommodation and alternative submission

An applicant who needs a reasonable accommodation to access funding opportunity information, participate in applicant support, prepare an application or submit an application may request assistance from the DNR.

Depending on the individual need, the DNR could provide an accessible format, communication support, a reasonable modification to the application process or, when necessary and approved, an alternative method for submitting substantively equivalent application information.

An approved alternative submission process must preserve equivalent application content, applicable deadline controls, receipt documentation and competitive treatment.

Requesting or receiving a reasonable accommodation does not affect competitive evaluation.

Applicants are encouraged to request an accommodation as early as possible. Applicants should provide only the information necessary for the DNR to understand the access barrier and requested accommodation. The DNR does not require unnecessary medical or disability information to arrange an accommodation.

The official Community Grant Program webpage will provide the current accessibility contact and request process.

38.3 Language assistance

The DNR may provide selected applicant resources in languages other than English to improve access to the funding opportunity. Translated resources available will be identified through the official Community Grant Program webpage.

Translated applicant resources explain and support the funding opportunity. They do not replace the controlling English-language RFP unless the DNR expressly identifies a translated document as a controlling version.

Unless the DNR formally authorizes another submission process, Stage 1 Concept Notes and Stage 2 Full Applications are required to be submitted in English.

Section 39. Corrections, withdrawals, incomplete applications and late submissions

39.1 Corrections and withdrawals before the deadline

An applicant may correct, replace or withdraw an application before the applicable deadline only through the process supported by Foundant or another process formally authorized by the DNR.

Applicant instructions will explain the available procedure.

Any replacement application must be fully submitted through the authorized process by the applicable deadline.

39.2 Incomplete applications

Applicants are responsible for submitting the information and materials required by this RFP and the applicable application form by the published deadline.

After the application deadline, applicants may not add missing competitive information or improve their submitted applications. The DNR may request narrow factual clarifications, verify submitted information or correct documented administrative errors only as permitted under the applicable Stage 1 or Stage 2 rules. These processes must not provide applicants with an opportunity to improve their competitive standing.

39.3 Late applications

Applications received after the published deadline will not be accepted, except through an approved reasonable accommodation or a formally authorized competitively applied contingency under Section 40.

An applicant's individual technology problem, incomplete application, failure to complete submission or failure to confirm successful submission by the deadline does not by itself extend the deadline.

Individual DNR staff shall not privately accept a late application or create an informal deadline exception.

Section 40. System outages and submission contingencies

40.1 Application system readiness

The DNR will identify the Stage 1 application opening date through the official competitive process schedule.

If a material application system issue requires the DNR to change an announced opening date, deadline or submission method, the DNR will communicate that change through the formal process required by this RFP.

40.2 DNR-controlled or system-wide failure

If Foundant or another DNR-controlled application process experiences a documented failure that materially prevents applicants from submitting an application, the DNR may use a uniform remedy necessary to preserve fair access to the competitive process.

A remedy could include:

- Extending the applicable deadline
- Authorizing an alternative submission method with documented receipt and timeliness controls

Any material deadline change will be issued through a formal RFP amendment.

A system contingency process is not allowed to be used to allow an applicant to add or improve substantive application information after the deadline.

The DNR will apply the approved remedy consistently to applicants materially affected by the documented DNR-controlled or system-wide failure.

Section 41. Questions, answers and formal changes

41.1 Questions and applicant support

Applicants should submit questions through the official Ask an ENRTF Community Grant Program Question online form available through the Community Grants webpage.

The DNR is allowed to respond directly to applicant-specific administrative questions or factual matters. When a response provides generally applicable substantive guidance about published application requirements or evaluations that could reasonably benefit other applicants, the DNR will share that guidance through a frequently asked question, applicant resource, information session or other official communication, as appropriate.

Questions and applicant support responses may explain the published funding opportunity but do not change this RFP.

41.2 Question deadline

Applicants should submit questions by the deadline identified in the official competitive process schedule.

The DNR may continue to receive questions after the published question deadline. However, the DNR does not guarantee that a response, frequently asked question update, applicant-resource update or other guidance will be available before the applicable application deadline.

When a question identifies an issue that is broadly relevant to applicants, the DNR may share the resulting guidance through an official frequently asked question, applicant resource, information session or other official communication, as appropriate.

Submitting a question does not extend an application deadline or create an exception to the requirements of this RFP.

41.3 Formal amendments

A material change to the funding opportunity must be made through a formal RFP amendment.

Material changes include changes to eligibility, scoring criteria or point values, required competitive application information, available funding, application deadlines, the authorized submission method when it materially affects applicants or another substantive competitive requirement.

A formal amendment becomes part of the controlling funding opportunity and supersedes earlier language to the extent stated in the amendment.

Applicants are responsible for reviewing formal amendments issued during the competitive process.

41.4 Administrative and system updates

The DNR may update applicant instructions, examples, frequently asked questions, training materials or system guidance when the update only explains an existing requirement. An administrative or system update may not create a new eligibility rule, scoring factor, required competitive response or other substantive application requirement.

If an update would materially change the funding opportunity, the DNR will use the formal amendment process in Section 41.3.

Section 42. Applicant resources and navigation

42.1 Applicant resource system

The DNR provides applicant resources to help people understand the Community Grant Program, determine whether a project could fit, prepare an application and navigate the two-stage application process.

Resources may include eligibility and activity-area guidance, information sessions, frequently asked questions, application system instructions, accessibility and language-access information and Stage 1 or Stage 2 preparation tools.

Applicant resources may explain the requirements established by this RFP but must not create additional eligibility, scoring or substantive application requirements. Current resources will be available through the Community Grants webpage.

42.2 Stage 1 resources

Stage 1 resources are intended to help applicants understand eligibility and activity area fit, prepare the Concept Note and use the authorized application process.

42.3 Stage 2 resources

Applicants invited to Stage 2 will receive additional guidance, tools, training and technical assistance to support development of the Full Application and preparation for possible grant implementation.

Stage 2 resources will help applicants develop the project design, work plan, budget, results, implementation information and other content required by this RFP and Appendix G. They must not create undisclosed competitive requirements.

Part 7. Grant administration and closeout

Section 43. Government data practices and protection of information

43.1 Grant application data

Information submitted to the DNR through this funding opportunity is government data and is governed by the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act and other applicable laws.

Under Minnesota Statutes, section 13.599, application responses are private or nonpublic until the application responses are opened.

Once responses are opened, the following information becomes public:

- The applicant's name
- The applicant's address
- The amount of funding requested

Other application response data remain private or nonpublic until completion of the evaluation process as defined by Minnesota Statutes, section 13.599.

After completion of the evaluation process, remaining application response data become public except for data classified as trade secret data or otherwise protected by applicable law.

Data created or maintained by the DNR as part of the competitive evaluation process are protected nonpublic data until completion of the evaluation process and then become public except for data that remain protected under applicable law.

Applicants should not assume that information submitted as part of an application will remain confidential after the applicable statutory data-classification period ends.

43.2 Sensitive Information and Data Minimization

Applicants and grantees should provide only information required by the RFP, applicable appendix, Foundant, grant agreement or an authorized DNR request.

Do not submit sensitive information unless the DNR specifically requests it and identifies an appropriate submission process.

Unless specifically requested through an approved process, applicants and grantees should not place sensitive or legally protected information in ordinary application fields, attachments or email. Examples include Social Security or government identification numbers, bank information, tax records, private personnel or health information, security information, legally privileged material and trade-secret information.

Pre-award financial or risk information will be requested through the process designated by the DNR when required.

43.3 Tribal, cultural, archaeological and sensitive resource information

Applicants and grantees should not unnecessarily disclose culturally restricted, sacred, Tribal, archaeological, traditional knowledge, security-sensitive or precise-location resource information.

When information necessary for project review or administration could require special handling, contact the Community Grant Program before submitting the information through an ordinary application field, attachment or email.

Where an exact location or sensitive detail is not necessary for eligibility, competitive evaluation or grant administration, the DNR may allow the information to be provided at a more general level.

The DNR cannot guarantee confidential treatment solely because information is identified by an applicant or grantee as sensitive. Data classification and disclosure are governed by applicable law.

Section 44. State rights of the funding opportunity

44.1 State administrative rights

Subject to applicable law, statewide grants management requirements and this RFP, the DNR may cancel or formally amend the funding opportunity; enforce published eligibility, submission and clarification rules; make fewer or no awards; award less than the total amount available; complete required pre-award review; and establish or administer lawful grant conditions within the limits described in this RFP.

The exercise of these administrative rights does not create a new competitive scoring criterion or authorize substitution of a materially different project for the project selected through the competitive process.

Section 45. Financial administration, records and grant compliance

45.1 Use of grant funds and payment

Community Grant Program funds must be used only for approved, allowable project costs incurred in accordance with the approved budget, grant agreement and applicable requirements.

The Community Grant Program operates on a reimbursement basis unless the DNR has approved an advance payment arrangement authorized under Section 33.

Under reimbursement, the grantee incurs and pays an eligible project cost before requesting reimbursement from the DNR.

Reimbursement requests must correspond to the approved grant budget and be supported by documentation required by the grant agreement and DNR instructions.

The DNR will review a payment request against the approved budget, expenditures to date, project progress and applicable reporting requirements before approving payment.

Unsupported, unallowable or otherwise ineligible costs must be disallowed, withheld from payment or subject to repayment as authorized by applicable law and the grant agreement.

Grant payments must be withheld when required reports are past due unless the DNR has approved an applicable extension.

45.2 Ineligible costs

Community Grant Program funds must not be used for costs that are prohibited by applicable law, the funding appropriation, statewide grants management requirements, DNR requirements, this RFP or the grant agreement.

Ineligible costs include, but are not limited to:

- Fundraising
- Lobbying or political contributions
- Bad debts
- Late payment fees, finance charges or contingency funds
- Fines, penalties, parking violations or traffic violations
- Costs that are not necessary and reasonable for the approved project
- Costs incurred outside the authorized grant period
- Costs that are not supported by required documentation
- Costs charged to another funding source for the same expense
- Other costs prohibited by applicable law, statewide grants management requirements, DNR requirements, this RFP or the grant agreement

Taxes and travel costs are allowable only when permitted under applicable state, DNR and grant requirements.

Applicants invited to Stage 2 should develop budgets using the cost guidance provided by the DNR. Final cost allowability is determined through the approved budget, grant agreement and applicable requirements.

45.3 Records, retention and audit access

Grantees must maintain sufficient records to document grant expenditures and payment requests, project implementation and required approvals, applicable procurement or contracting, project results, compliance with the grant agreement and required monitoring and close-out.

Under Minnesota Statutes, section 16B.98, subdivision 8, books, records, documents and accounting procedures and practices relevant to the grant are subject to examination by authorized state officials, including the commissioner of administration, the state granting agency, the state auditor, the attorney general and the legislative auditor, as applicable.

Grantees must retain applicable grant records for at least six years from the grant agreement end date or the DNR's receipt and approval of all final reports, whichever is later, unless applicable state or program requirements establish a longer retention period. The grant agreement will identify applicable recordkeeping, retention, audit and access requirements.

45.4 Procurement, contracting and conflicts of interest

Grantees must comply with the procurement, contracting, competitive bidding, prevailing wage, suspension and debarment and conflict-of-interest requirements applicable to their organization, project and grant-funded purchases or contracts. Requirements may differ based on the grantee's legal status and the type and amount of the purchase or contract.

Grantees must maintain documentation supporting purchasing and contracting decisions, including applicable competitive selection procedures and authorized exceptions. When a fiscal agent is used, the applicable grant documents will identify the fiscal and administrative responsibilities of the grantee and fiscal agent, including responsibility for purchasing, contracting and maintaining supporting records.

The grant agreement and grantee administration resources will identify the procurement and contracting procedures applicable to the award, including requirements specific to governmental, Tribal governmental and non-governmental grantees.

Significant procurement and contracting needs that affect project feasibility, schedule or budget should be identified during Stage 2.

45.5 Financial reconciliation

Community Grant Program grants are subject to financial reconciliation requirements established by Community Grant Program law and applicable state grants management policy.

Under Minnesota Statutes, section 116X.03, subdivision 3c, as amended by 2026 Session Law, chapter 104, the DNR must conduct a financial reconciliation of grantee expenditures on a sample of Community Grant Program grants under $50,000 before final payment.

For grants of $50,000 or more, applicable statewide grants management policy requires financial reconciliation of grantee expenditures before final payment, subject to any authorized sampling, monitoring plan or policy exception.

Financial reconciliation will require the grantee to provide supporting documentation necessary to verify that selected expenditures were made in accordance with the approved budget and grant agreement. The DNR will document completed financial reconciliations in the grant record.

45.6 Affirmative action and nondiscrimination

Grantees must comply with applicable state nondiscrimination and affirmative action requirements, including Minnesota Human Rights Act, Minnesota Statutes, chapter 363A and applicable Minnesota Rules.

Grantees must not discriminate against employees or applicants for employment on grounds prohibited by applicable law. Where required, grantees must take affirmative action in employment, recruitment, advancement, training and other employment practices consistent with applicable legal requirements.

Grantees must comply with applicable rules and orders of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights issued under the Minnesota Human Rights Act. The grant agreement will establish the nondiscrimination and affirmative action obligations applicable to the grantee and grant-funded activities.

45.7 Voter registration

As applicable, grantees must comply with Minnesota Statutes, section 201.162, by providing voter registration services for their employees and for members of the public served by the grantee.

Section 46. Reporting, monitoring and performance

46.1 Quarterly progress reporting

The Community Grant Program is subject to the grant-recipient reporting requirements established in Minnesota Statutes, section 116X.03, as amended by 2026 Session Law, chapter 104.

Each grantee is required to submit a written progress report to the DNR at least quarterly, in the form and manner established by the DNR, until all grant funds have been expended and all terms of the grant agreement have been met.

Progress reports will address project implementation, expenditures, results and other information needed to administer and monitor the grant.

Reporting may address:

- Project activities and progress
- Expenditures
- Results and accomplishments
- Implementation issues or delays
- Changes or risks requiring DNR attention
- Upcoming work
- Other information reasonably necessary to administer the grant

Reporting requirements should be proportionate to the project and award while still providing the information needed to meet statutory and grant-administration requirements.

The grant agreement and grantee guidance will establish the reporting format, schedule and submission process.

46.2 Grant monitoring

The Community Grant Program is subject to the monitoring requirements established in Minnesota Statutes, section 116X.03, subdivision 3b, as amended by 2026 Session Law, chapter 104.

For Community Grant Program grants of $50,000 or more, the DNR must conduct at least one in-person unannounced monitoring visit before final payment.

For Community Grant Program grants under $50,000, the DNR must select a sample from grants awarded each year and conduct at least one unannounced monitoring visit on each selected grant before final payment.

The DNR will conduct additional monitoring when required by applicable state grants management requirements, the grant agreement, project conditions or identified risk.

Monitoring will review project progress, use of grant funds, compliance with the grant agreement, supporting records, results and other matters necessary to administer the grant.

Grantees must cooperate with required monitoring and make applicable project records, responsible personnel and project locations available as required.

46.3 Results and performance

The Community Grant Program is required to provide measurable results.

The grant agreement will identify the results, outputs, outcomes or other performance expectations appropriate to the project and the evidence the grantee must provide to document progress and completion.

Performance documentation should be proportionate to the project.

Grantees should communicate material implementation issues that could affect expected results and work with the DNR through the applicable grant administration process when an approved project needs to adapt.

Post-award reporting and monitoring are used to confirm that the grant is being implemented in accordance with the approved project, grant agreement and applicable requirements.

46.4 Grantee performance evaluation

Minnesota Statutes, section 16B.98, subdivision 12, requires a written grantee performance evaluation for a grant agreement more than $25,000.

Because Community Grant Program awards range from $20,000 to $150,000, this requirement applies to Community Grant Program grants over $25,000.

The evaluation is required to address the grantee's timeliness, quality and overall performance in meeting the terms and objectives of the grant.

Required evaluations are submitted through the state process and made publicly available as required by law.

A grantee may request a copy of its performance evaluation and is allowed to provide a written response. A grantee response will be maintained with the grant file as required by law.

Section 47. Project changes, property and continuing responsibilities

47.1 Changes to an approved grant

After the grant agreement is executed, a grantee must obtain DNR approval before implementing a change when approval is required by the grant agreement or applicable requirements.

Changes to the approved scope, budget, work plan, schedule, results, location, grant structure or another material grant condition may require prior DNR approval under the grant agreement or applicable requirements.

The grantee must notify the DNR when a proposed change could materially affect the approved project.

When a formal grant amendment is required, the amendment is required to be approved and executed before the grantee incurs costs or implements work that depends on the amendment.

A grant amendment may refine an approved project but is required to remain consistent with the purpose and scope of the grant originally awarded.

A grant agreement amendment is different from an amendment to this RFP.

47.2 Property, equipment, permits and continuing responsibilities

Projects involving equipment, physical improvements, real property, permits, site access or continuing maintenance could be subject to project-specific requirements during or after the grant period.

Depending on the project, the grant may include requirements concerning site control, permits or governmental approvals, equipment or property, maintenance, access, asset disposition or continuing stewardship.

These requirements do not apply identically to every Community Grant Program grant.

Applicable requirements will be identified through the activity-area appendix, Stage 2 project development process, pre-award review, grant agreement or grantee guidance, as appropriate.

Receiving a Community Grant Program grant award does not substitute for a permit, governmental approval, landowner authorization or other authorities required to carry out the project.

Section 48. Noncompliance, final payment and grant closeout

48.1 Compliance and corrective action

Grantees must administer Community Grant Program funds in accordance with the grant agreement and applicable requirements.

If a grantee does not comply with an applicable requirement, the DNR is allowed to use corrective action or another remedy authorized by law, state grants management requirements or the grant agreement.

The DNR will determine an appropriate corrective action or other authorized remedy based on the nature and severity of the issue, the grant agreement and applicable legal requirements. Corrective actions may include requesting additional information, providing technical assistance, imposing corrective conditions or increasing monitoring. When authorized, the DNR may also disallow or withhold payments, require repayment, suspend the grant or terminate the grant agreement.

Under Minnesota Statutes, section 116X.03, a Community Grant Program recipient is required to return grant money that is not used in accordance with the applicable grant agreement.

48.2 Final payment and closeout

Completion of the final project activity does not by itself close the grant.

Before final payment and administrative closeout, the grantee must complete all requirements applicable to the award, including required reporting, payment documentation, financial reconciliation, monitoring, results documentation, resolution of questioned costs, return of unused or improperly used funds, property or equipment requirements and outstanding grant conditions**.**

The DNR will determine when applicable grant requirements have been satisfied and the grant will be allowed to be administratively closed.

Continuing responsibilities established by the grant agreement or applicable law will remain in effect after administrative close-out.

Closeout administration is separate from substantive project implementation and shall occur during the approved administrative closeout period described in Part 5.