



2026 Protect Communities for Community Resiliency Grant Program

2026 Webinar Transcription

Time	Transcription
0:00	<i>Introduction</i> Madisson Masucci: Alright, we're good to go. All right. Thank you for joining today. We are very excited to discuss the 2026 Protect Community Forests for Community Resilience grants opportunity that posted open for applications today. My name is Madisson Masucci and I'm the Urban & Community forestry coordinator for the Department of Natural Resource. My colleague, Rachael Dvoracek is here as well. She is a Community Forest Project Specialist and will be assisting us throughout this grant opportunity.
0:35	<i>DNR Urban & Community Forestry Assistance and Grant Life Cycle</i> Madisson Masucci: So the DNR provides a variety of urban and community forestry assistance, including grants. Eligible activities depend on the grant program, so if you've applied to or received some of our grants in the past, things may look different in this presentation. Our grants are competitive, which means that applications. These are evaluated according to a set criteria which I will discuss later in this presentation. This flow chart shows an overview of the life cycle of an urban and community forestry grant. Let's go through it together. So the request for applications is where we are right now. This is when the application and all of associated documentation was posted. Once applications are submitted, they are scored by a grant review committee. Scores from the committee along with the pre award risk assessment questionnaire and supplemental paperwork determine who is awarded. Once grantees are selected, the contract negotiation process begins, which includes any necessary risk mitigation. Throughout the grant work, there are periodic reporting and reimbursement request deadlines. If the trees are, or if trees are being removed or planted or pruned like physical work being done, we will go out and do compliance checks, either our team or our foresters to check the work on the ground. Once all documentation is in order and we've done that compliance check, payment will be issued to the grantee on that reimbursement basis. This process continues to happen until all funding is expended or the grant is closed, whichever comes first. And then the grant closeout is conducted and final payment made.
2:35	<i>Project Components</i>

Madisson Masucci: So, moving into the project components. Project application scoring varies by grants. However, each of these components listed are part of the application process. Generally, applications should be clear, complete, descriptive, and clearly meet all minimum requirements and additional requirements.

Timeline should provide specific dates for all activities and should be realistic given the extent of the proposed project activities as well as realistic based on the resources available and requested in the application to accomplish the project.

Budgets should only request grant funds for eligible expenses. And budgets should be realistic and cost effective. We would recommend that if you are planning to contract work out that you obtain bids so you have an accurate budget. We do hold you to the budget you apply for so it needs to be as accurate as possible.

Communities affected or benefited are engaged and input is incorporated prior to project implementation and throughout the project. Communication strategies are directly related to project accomplishments, activities or both, and multiple forms of communication are listed with the potential to reach the public.

And finally, key personnel are listed with corresponding project roles and showcase the expertise and capacity to complete proposed grant work. We should be able to see that you or your contractor have both the capacity and expertise to conduct the work you are suggesting.

Our website has a checklist that should hopefully help you through this process. We'll get into that past performance consideration if applicable in some later slides here. Part of the scored criteria for this grant is around following best management practices.

4:37

EAB Management Guidance

Madisson Masucci: Part of the scored criteria for this grant is around following best management practices. Minnesota Department of Agriculture considers May 1st through September 30th to be the flight season for Emerald Ash Borer. This means that EAB adult beetles are emerging from invested wood or trees and flying in search of new hosts during this time.

The best management practice is to not remove ash trees when EAB are actively flying –so that May through September – to avoid the risk of EAB

emerging from this material or in transit or in a processing location. Please ensure your timeline accounts for the flight season

Some general guidance here for folks, Emerald Ash Borer infestations are difficult to identify in those early stages of the infestation. I know we have a variety of, stages throughout the state where some areas are not infested yet and some have been dealing with this for years. So please know if you are in one of those areas where it's early or not quite there yet, that it is really difficult to identify, as the early stages of infestation are there.

Emerald Ash Borer infestations areas grow via human assisted movement and throughout or through natural dispersion. For these reasons, when new Emerald Ash Borer infestations are discovered, quarantines are enacted on a large scale with the assumption that the infestation is beyond what's been observed.

However, quarantine, doesn't necessarily cover or doesn't necessarily indicate that Emerald Ash Borer is present and the distribution of Emerald Ash Borer is not likely uniform throughout that area, so it maybe outside of these borders and hasn't been detected yet.

These guidelines ideally should be followed 100% of the time when working with ash trees throughout the state of Minnesota. However, once a community is heavily invested with EAB to the point where EAB ash trees are so numerous that year-round removal of hazardous trees is necessary to mitigate risk to the public, conducting ash tree removals during the flight season may be necessary to avoid risk to public safety and property.

Following these guidelines will provide the lowest chance of risk for movement of Emerald Ash Borer, but we do understand if there are specific cases where public safety needs to take priority. Please explain those in your application, if applicable.

7:30

Required Documentation

Madisson Masucci: Each grant has a unique request for applications which lays out in detail all of the requirements for the grants. Please read it as this should be what your application is based around.

The minimum required documents and information for our grants are the Application form, the budget form, and the list of authorized signers. Other documentation may be required depending on your project. This includes a

three-year establishment plan and species selection and stock list if you are planting trees.

If you're a local unit of government, you need to submit an Emerald Ash Borer management plan or plans to obtain one should be integrated into your application. If you're requesting more than \$50,000, you should be submitting the Pre-Award Risk Assessment Questionnaire and supplemental documentation as required.

If you're collaborating with any outside organization, you should provide a letter of support from that organization. Letters of support need to be clear about the role the partnering organization will have in the project.

And if you've had a grant with us before that's since been closed out you need to submit the most recent UCF grant closeout form along with your application. More detailed information will be asked in the application portal, which I'll discuss later and can be found in the request for applications.

We highly encourage you to read the application request for applications in full. It is a long document, but all of the information that you need for understanding what we're looking for and the required and minimum requirements are all listed in there.

9:25

Pre-Award Risk Assessment

Madisson Masucci: Alright, we know pre award risk assessment is maybe new to some folks, so we wanna go through some of the details around that for you guys so that you understand what, what we're asking for.

So organizations including political subdivisions, nonprofit organizations, and schools applying for \$50,000 or more to our grant programs will be required to fill out the pre award risk assessment questionnaire and provide any required supporting documentation. Tribal governments, sovereign nations, and those applying for less than \$50,000 do not need to fill out this paperwork.

This policy was created with the intent to assess and mitigate the risk that a potential grantee may have prior to awarding grant agreements. Before making a grant of \$50,000 or more granting agencies must request, review, and analyze required information.

This analysis must be completed for all potential grantees to assess the risk that the potential grantee cannot or will not perform the duties specified in the grant agreements. If applicable You will need to submit this document with your application. We're gonna walk through this questionnaire as it may be new to many of you.

First, we're gonna ask you to describe your organization's services and experience such as skills, knowledge, available resources, processes, and leadership with administering grants. Then we ask to describe how your organization will ensure that grant contract requirements are met based on those services and experiences.

Then we ask: have you ever had a grant from the Department of Natural Resources before?

Have you ever received a grant from another state agency before? Have any of your current principles of your organization been convicted of a felony financial crime within the last ten years?

If yes, we need an explanation around that and if no so you'll complete the exhibit A at the end of this document and provide an org chart with all of your financial principles.

The org chart, it's very important that it's not just the titles of folks or titles of positions in your organization, we need specific names for the folks that are in those positions as well.

Moving on, are any of your staff or board members current employees at the DNR? And then you'll provide your organization's annual operating budget related to tree care and attach an annual budget or expenditure report to support that amount that you've reported. It should be as recent as possible and demonstrate the amount of funding that you're spending on forestry related work within your community on an annual basis.

Next, we ask you to describe your organization's experience with this type of project. Has your organization previously done work in this specific program area? If this is a new area for your organization, what steps have you taken to build necessary capacity or expertise? Some examples may include partnerships, new hires, and training.

Has your organization previously managed a grant of this scope and size? If not, what will be different about your approach or capacity for this award compared to prior grants?

Number nine, this is a very long one, so please bear with me. Explain your internal control system for tracking expenses, staff time, and contract relevant information. Some examples of internal controls include but are not limited to documented policies and procedures, segregation of duties - such as having different staff who enter receivables versus those who post payments using a

payroll system - requiring usernames and passwords along with appropriate levels of access to systems. Supervisor review and approval of payments and time cards and other internal controls to ensure compliance with laws and regulations to safeguard the use of grant funds.

Additional prompts include: what controls will your organization have in place to ensure expenses are direct and necessary and allocated to the correct project activity and account. Who at your organization is involved in implementing this project and those controls? And how will you ensure that double billing does not occur, and how will you correct a billing error if you submit an incorrect charge? Please answer this question in full and make sure to touch on every bullet point that we've outlined here.

Question ten is list any concerns your community has had regarding financial irregularities, fraud, waste or abuse with grant performance.

Question eleven, please list any grant or contract cancellations that you have had within the past five years. Note who the granting agency was and what the contract deliverables were and why the grant was canceled.

And then we move on to the choose your organization type and then this is where we branch off into a few different options here. If you're a local unit of governments, you will attach audited financial statements and then proceed to Exhibit A, which is signing the declaration that you do not have any principles with a felony financial crime and then if you are a nonprofit, you'll proceed to question 13.

For nonprofits, we will ask you, did you file a form 990 or 990EZ in the last fiscal year? If yes, attach a copy of your most recently filed form 990 or 990EZ.

Question 14. If no to question 13, were you eligible for an exemption to the filing requirements? And if yes, you should attach a copy of your IRS determination letter and explain your exemption.

If no, please explain to us why you did not file. Question 15, if you did not file a form 990 or 990EZ in the last fiscal year, attach the most recent set of board reviewed or managing group, if applicable, financial Statements.

Question 16, did you have \$750,000 or more in revenue in the last fiscal year and were required to have an audit? If yes, attach a copy of those audited financial statements.

Are you registered and in good standing with the Secretary of State? And that is our final question.

I know this is a lot, so if there's any questions as we get towards the end of this session, we can come back to this and answer those.

Alright, so the process for this is if an applicant is applying for that \$50,000 or more and does not qualify for an exemption as noted earlier, the pre award risk assessment questionnaire and all accompanying paperwork must be submitted along with your application by the application due date.

We review all the documentation you provide as well as grant close out forms, if applicable, and fill out a pre award risk assessment checklist for all grantees and a financial review form, as applicable.

17:49 *Pre-Award Risk Assessment Continued*

Madisson Masucci: After working through the supplemental checklist and the financial review form, we determine if there is risk that needs to be mitigated based on those checklist prompts.

If no risk is found, the award process can continue as normal. If there is risk found, we will fill out a risk plan and communicate with you on what risk we found.

We then give you time to address the risks found during this process and discuss the risk mitigation plan. Risk mitigation plans will be individually tailored to each grantee to address any existing risk and maybe subject to change during the grant period if substantial changes happen to the grantee organization.

Risk mitigation plans will be attached to the grant documents and additional monitoring will be included in exhibit A documents as needed. If a grantee has risk that cannot be mitigated through a risk management plan agencies have the authority to not award a grant.

If a grant is not awarded based on the outcome of the pre award risk assessment, the agency must provide written notifications to the potential grantees. DNR will be working to process the pre award risk assessment paperwork in conjunction with the rest of the application materials and will work to finish the process prior to award notifications being sent out.

If DNR needs further information from applicants, they may request additional information. If awards are contingent on addressing risk, DNR will note that contingency within the email.

19:47

I understand that it's likely that more questions will arise as you navigate. The pre-award risk process, but do we have any questions at this time? We're good. All right.

Grant Introduction

Madisson Masucci: So, the meat of today, the grants I will be talking about today is the 2026 Protect Community Forests for Community Resiliency or Protect for short.

This funding is focused on reducing the impacts of Emerald Ash Borer through tree management and maintenance and education and engagement efforts. And that all these efforts that enhance community forest health and resilience.

We have a total of \$1,703,800 available to fund eligible grant activities. There is no minimum dollar amount required, and the maximum amount that will be funded is \$150,000.

No matching funds are required and submitting match as part of your application is not recommended. Funding for this project was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the

Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources or LCCMR.

20:52

Eligible Applicants & Activities

Madisson Masucci: Eligible applicants include nonprofit organizations with 501(c) status, schools, local units of governments -including cities, counties, regional authorities, joint power boards, towns, and soil and water conservation districts - Tribal governments and parks and recreation boards in cities of the 1st class.

Eligible activities for this grant program may take place on lands permanently protected by conservation easement or public ownership and on private low income unprotected lands.

All work on private low income unprotected lands will adhere to the residential tree care requirements outlined in the RFA or request for applications.

Eligible activities include conducting community forestry work on non-state public land or on residential land for low income residents. Please note there are specific requirements for work done on residential properties.

Conducting a tree inventory, developing an Emerald Ash Borer management plan or a plan that includes an EAB components.

As a reminder, local units of government must adopt the management plan if they do not have one in place already, and that should be less than ten years old.

Removing and replacing ash or high risk on safe trees, planting trees for diversity constructing and maintaining gravel beds, chemically treating ash trees with an injectable non-neonicotinoid insecticide in communities within or up to 10 miles outside of the general infested areas. We do have a map that shows you. whether you are within that 10 mi buffer of the generally invested areas.

Maintaining existing canopy including needed pruning or watering establishment. Educating and engaging residents and developing purchasing or printing educational or outreach materials to engage residents in urban and community forestry.

So eligible project expenses are those incurred through project activities directly related and necessary to achieve the outcome described in the project application and that meet the conditions of the grant contract.

Grant funds can be used for but may not be limited to professional contracts for technical assistance, resident education and engagement or project implementation, project related materials, including things like tree stock, mulch, watering bags, staking materials, protection materials, shovels, printing and chemicals for the injectable non-neonicotinoid insecticide treatments.

If you have questions, please ask us on what project materials maybe eligible before applying.

Equipment purchases of \$4,999 or less. That are used to complete the project. Multiple pieces of equipment or tools or project supplies can be purchased with grant funds, but no one tool or unit can have a cost of \$5,000 or more, even if that cost is split across grants and match funds. And equipment rental is also an eligible project expense.

24:44

Technical Assistance

Madisson Masucci: Specific to this grant program is the technical assistance component. You will not have to budget or pay for technical assistance through either of the following programs if you are awarded the funding.

If applying for assistance with tree plantings, you will need to purchase the trees for the planting either through grant funds or through other means. The technical assistance programs below are supported through the LCCMR grant package separate from the competitive grant program and they're provided for free to grant recipients.

Please note that snacks for volunteers are an ineligible expense and must be budgeted through non-grant funds if you do use operational support or do educational assistance for either of those programs.

Operational assistance through Tree Trust, helps communities with the design planning and management of community volunteer tree plantings and the Tree Steward program through the University of Minnesota is a community based program where city or county staff or representatives will request training for community members to turn them into knowledgeable volunteers that can assist with grants program activities. More details and examples are in the request for applications.

26:16

Ineligible Activities & Expenses

Madisson Masucci: So what is ineligible – costs incurred prior to the start date of the fully executed grants agreements. That means any money you spend before we sign the final signature on the grant contract is not eligible for reimbursement. Do not start grant work if you are awarded until you have an executed contract in place.

Purchase of trees listed on the Minnesota Noxious Weed List or the DNR's invasive terrestrial plants list. Some of these examples that would be found on these lists include Callery pear, Amur cork tree, Amur maple, autumn olive, black locust, buckthorn, Norway maple, Russian olive, Siberian elm, Tree of heaven, to name some.

The Purchase of balled and burlap trees larger than two-and-a-half-inch caliper, containerized trees larger than a number 20, or bare root trees greater than 2 " or less than three quarters inch in caliber diameter.

Purchase of tree species in a genus that already makes up 10 % or more of the of the community or in a family that makes up 20 % or more of the trees. We can provide you with those specific numbers based on your 2020 community survey data that we have if you don't have a more recent inventory than that.

Purchase of plants other than trees such as shrubs, living ground covers, sod, grass seed and flowers, purchase of land or easements, major soil purchases, great changes or construction. Work on state lands, capital expenditures, so

those things that cost \$5000 or more, for example, buildings, motor vehicles, trails, and other permanent structures, purchase of meals or snacks and experimental practices not approved by the DNR. If you're wondering if something is an experimental practice, ask us before you apply.

28:28 *Project Evaluation – Underserved Populations*

Madisson Masucci: All right, also within the request for application is a scored criteria around considering underserved populations in your project.

For this grant, underserved populations includes but it's not limited to individuals living in areas with high exposure to negative environmental conditions such as high air pollution, low tree canopy, low income, persons with disabilities, individuals with less than a high school education, those with limited English proficiency populations experiencing low life expectancy, older adults, veterans, persons of color.

We do have a webpage with tools to help you potentially identify these different metrics within your communities. If you are looking for that data, it is on the grant webpage.

29:28 *Reimbursements*

Madisson Masucci: Alright, some considerations for applicants around reimbursements. If awarded, all funds through this grant program will be awarded on a reimbursement basis.

Each reimbursement request is reimbursed at a rate of 90 %. With the final 10 % retained until the project is completed. Reimbursement requests will be paid only be paid with all required paperwork in reporting.

For organizations that cannot navigate it on our standard reimbursement basis, basis. Accommodations can be made in collaboration with DNR staff. Please reach out to us if you have questions on that.

30:12 *New This Year – Application Portal*

Madisson Masucci: This year we have a new method for submitting your grant application. All applications will be submitted through what we are calling the application portal. Anyone who submits via email will be directed to the website.

So what does this look like? Our application form now includes a list of all the information that you will be asked in the application portal, such as required documents, project information, et cetera.

No more wondering if you've emailed all the right documentation in. If you're asked to submit the file based on your previous answers, that is a required document for your proposed project.

However, the application cannot reliably be saved and should be submitted in one session. We've compiled a checklist of all the information and attachments you will need to complete the application, so you don't have to search for the information while you're filling out that application portal.

You will also receive a copy of all of your answers via email when you submit your application.

So, the format is new, the required documentation and information has not changed. Most questions throughout the form are required to ensure all the necessary information is submitted. But you will not be asked questions unrelated to your project. For example, if you indicate that you will not be planting in this project, you will not be prompted to submit a species and stock list.

The image on the right is a screenshot of the information and documentation you will need to compile for your application. The required documentation could be shorter depending on your proposed activities.

Let's go through what the new application portal looks like. This is not a review of the entire application, but rather how to navigate the features of the portal for those unfamiliar with submitting applications in this way.

When you click the link to the application portal, you will see this cover page with instructions. You will also notice a progress bar at the bottom and how to navigate throughout the pages in the bottom right. If you have any questions, please email us at the UCF.DNR@state.mn.us. We can help you navigate any concerns or challenges as you submit your application.

Most of the questions will have an asterisk, meaning that the question is required. The format of the questions should be familiar to anybody who has previously applied for our grant programs. Answering some of these early questions will help determine what you see later in the application, like our example with tree planting.

Some of the required fields may have NA or not applicable written in them. This is, so if you, for example, don't have a 2nd conflict of interest signer, you can skip that box instead of needing to type in because the question is required.

As mentioned before, there are some questions that will determine what you see later. If you're planting, you'll be prompted to upload documents related to planting, and if you're not, you won't see those questions, so make sure you select the right project elements to ensure that all of your paperwork is properly uploaded.

The minimum documentation required is that application documents submitted as a PDF and the budget form. Each file upload question will only allow you to upload one file. If you have multiple files, you can combine them into a single PDF or there's an opportunity at the end of the application submission to attach supplemental documentation.

After you complete and sign the application, you'll be prompted to review your answers to ensure that everything is correct. The listed project coordinator will also receive a copy of these via email after submission.

Once you're done reviewing your submission, you can either click the back button to change your answers or select next page to submit that application. After this, you cannot make any changes to your application. Any issues or questions again can be directed to us at that UCF.DNR@state.mn.us email.

35:17

Scoring Criteria

Madisson Masucci: Alright, the meat of the scoring. Applications will be scored according to a rubric, which you can find at the end of the request for applications. Applications are reviewed on a hundred-point scale and past grant performance is scored on a five-point scale.

Total scores will be used to develop those final recommendations. To be funded, the application must meet a minimum required project score of 60 or greater and either have NO past performance score or a minimum past grant performance score of three or greater.

Now we will quickly go through the rubric. This is exactly the same as the one you will see in the request for applications and each section corresponds to a question in the application.

The first section is project overview and need. This is where you will lay the groundwork for your proposed project. You'll be evaluated on the clarity and

completeness of your response, whether your organization has a readiness to take on your proposed project. Whether your project identifies underserved populations and to what extent. Your response should also show the significant need and impact of the work and seek to maintain or expand existing tree canopy.

The second section of this rubric is the timeline. In your response, in the application, you want to ensure that the timeline provides specific dates for all activities. It's easy to read and comprehend. That accounts for grant execution and end and reporting dates follows best management practices and is realistic for the project.

The third section, which is the budget, should be a more detailed description of your budget attachment. This helps us ensure that funds are only used for eligible expenses, the math matches between the application form and your budget form, and the budget is realistic and cost effective.

The next section is community engagement and impact. We want to see that planning and collaboration clearly serves and includes residents within the project area with explicit consideration for underserved populations as defined in the project evaluation section of this document, so in that request for applications.

Applications should detail actionable goals for resident engagement. It should also demonstrate how affected communities will be benefited and the ways in which input will be incorporated prior to and throughout the project.

Environmental impacts should be addressed and show appropriate approaches to mitigate negative impacts. For examples the danger of that ash trees, benefits of planting trees, stormwater mitigation.

The application should demonstrate awareness and intention to potential barriers to participation by some community members and address actionable items for these communities. Examples include program focal areas, outreach in multiple languages, inclusion throughout the project. Mitigation strategies for engaging underserved populations as identified in the request for applications need to be clear and measurable.

The fifth section outlines communications. Your response to this may be similar to the previous section, and that's ok. We're looking that your communication strategies are directly related to your project, you have multiple ways of reaching your audience. For example, email, newspaper, website, and that you include tree care related messaging.

Lastly, we have the key personnel section. For this question in the application, you will list all of the people involved with your project, where they work, their title, their qualifications, and their role in the project. Anybody collaborating with outside organizations must have a letter of support submitted with their application. That letter should identify the specific role the partner organization will play throughout the project.

40:22

Past Grant Performance

Madisson Masucci: We are obligated to take past grant performance into account. This is something that we do through the pre-award risk assessment, but are now incorporating into the scoring system in an effort of transparency.

If you have had a grant with the DNR UCF program in the past, you will need to address your past grant performance. This holds its own scored section in the application itself.

In order to address this section, you will need your most recent UCF grant closeout form, which you can get by emailing us at UCF.DNR@state.mn.us if you do not have it.

If you are unsure if your organization has previously held a grant contract with the UCF program, please reach out to us and staff will confirm your past grant status and provide the closeout form if applicable.

If you have never had a grant with the DNR UCF program or we do not have a grant closeout form for you on file, you may leave this section blank and there will be NO penalty for the application.

Past grant performance, when applicable, will be cons, a consideration. That when awarding grant funding. This means that a project could score well based on the strength of the application but receive additional grant consideration or conditions reduced funding or even no funding due to past grant performance for which there is no evidence of corrective actions being taken.

So, in this section of the application, make sure you've obtained and are addressing your most recent UCF grant close out form. Make sure that past performance issues and corrective actions are explained if applicable. Describe strong grant management practices from past performance and how they will be continued.

A high scoring applicant will provide insightful reflection on past performance and provide specific examples of learning and corrective actions. Or continued strong grant management practices.

Does anybody have questions on this section? I'm sorry.

Unintelligible off camera

Okay, sounds good.

42:53

Review Process & Timeline

Madisson Masucci: Then we have a couple of slides here and then we will go back through questions, so please bear with me.

So, the timeline for this grant, today August 3rd, the request for applications was posted on the DNR website. We are accepting questions from applicants on the application process through August 31st, 2026.

If you ask questions after 31 August, we are not able to answer them and will refer you back to the website. Please make sure you get any questions in before that date. All questions asked will be posted on the grant website, and you'll be able to see all the questions other applicants have asked as well.

Applications are due September 14th, 2026. Please get everything in through the application portal by September 14th end of day. Anything submitted after that will not be considered for review.

Starting September 15th through November 12th, we enter the grant review process, project selection, and financial and capacity review. It is at that point, we will have a steering committee reviewing all of the applications for scoring, and then we will be conducting the pre-award financial risk assessment.

Those two things will be happening, and we hope to have those wrapped and be able to do grant notifications on November 13th 2026. Please note if there are issues with the quality of applications or that we are missing documentation, these timelines may take longer because we need to get additional documentation for you and we have to start a 15 day clock every time we ask you for documentation around the pre award risk assessment.

Please submit everything properly through the application portal.

All right. After we notify you of the grants, we go into grants agreement negotiations in which we require you to amend anything as identified through the grant review process. And we develop your exhibit A, which becomes part of your contract.

Once that process is done, we anticipate getting those contracts ready to be signed by the start of February. February 3rd. And then the signature process can take several weeks depending on your organization's processes for assigning things.

So, we anticipate at least a month for contract signing and execution, and we anticipate contracts being executed by March 3rd 2027. Do not start your project timeline before that date.

All grant work needs to be completed and final reimbursement requests submitted June 1st 2029. That means you have from March 3rd approximately depending on when your application or your contract is executed through June 1st 2029 to do work. About two and a quarter years.

46:29

Application Tips

Madisson Masucci: Finally, we have some application tips for you as you navigate the process. Please, please please please read the entire request for applications. Respond thoroughly to each question, as applicable, and note that in the request for applications, the scoring rubric directly ties to each question we are asking you.

Ensure that you are meeting all the grant requirements and incorporate how you are meeting the requirements into your application as applicable. Ensure that your application is consistent with itself, so across the application portal, the application documents, and the budget, please make sure those all align together, and any supplemental documentation.

So, if you say in your application that you're removing and replanting 50 trees and then your three-year establishment plan says you're doing 25, we do note those inconsistencies. So, proof-read everything.

Also, your application submitted or through those final negotiations, if we have amendments, becomes your contract. So, what you propose in your application will be incorporated into your contract with us. So, propose the amount of work that you can reasonably and feasibly accomplish within the grant period, and make sure you complete the work that you apply for.

We really wanna ensure that all funds that are requested or awarded are utilized because when the grant expires, if funding is left unutilized, it goes back to LCCMR, in this case.

And we know communities desperately need this funding and it's never quite enough for the need that's out there. So, if you apply for more than you're able

to use, that's funding that could have been used by a community to do this work, as well.

All right. My last slide is the thank you slide. So why don't we switch over to questions and we can move throughout the document.

49:03

Q&A

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Yes.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Yes, so the question is, is \$4,999 the total ceiling for equipment purchases or just for individual unit prices.

That would be for an individual unit price. So, if you were to buy three pieces of equipment that all cost \$400,000 [\$4,000] that's allowable, but if one thing is \$5,000 or more, that is not allowable regardless of how you pay for it. So even if you use organization funds to get it below the \$4,999 threshold that would still be ineligible

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Yeah, so the question was, does this mean that all plantings need to go through Tree Trust or would they be helping with planning, planting with another contractor?

The technical assistance. Opportunity through Tree Trust is only if you would like to incorporate that within your application. You are not required to incorporate either Tree Trust or the University of Minnesota Tree Steward program in your application or project. Those are just available if you are interested

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Yeah, yes, so typically what we see for oh, I'm sorry, repeating the question.

So, the question was, if a rural low-income homeowner would like to be considered for the grant, who is the best entity to reach out to in their area to apply for funding?

And typically, what we see are county soil and water conservation districts stepping into that role for our more rural community areas. We also see nonprofits bridging that gap if there's a non-profit in your area that does this type of work you could reach out to them. But typically, county level administration townships are eligible to apply if your local township is interested, I think that's the typical typically what we see.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Yeah, so what is considered the low-income threshold for eligibility?

And we leave that up to the organizations to determine, as we understand, our state is variable across, income and different benchmarks for considering low income.

Typically, what we see from folks is tied to that adjusted median income threshold, but if what we're looking for from an organization applying is for you to identify your threshold and explain to us how you are going to stick with that threshold. So, if for example you did want to stick with 80 % adjusted median income, then you would describe how you are going to do that within your program and how you're gonna screen residents who apply for your program.

53:22

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: With the application deadline, what is considered end of day?

11:59 PM.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Yes, the application portal will be closed after that, so you will not be able to submit after 11:59. We know technology is wonderful in many ways and sometimes difficult. Please don't wait till 11:58 to submit them because we do not staff our UCF inbox after 04:30. So if you're encountering issues try to do it before four on the day that it closes so that you can actually connect with one of us.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Question is, does the organization and still, is the organization still eligible to apply if they already have an open award with us?

And the answer is yes, you're able to apply for funding. If you have several open awards with us or you have a lot of unexpended funding that maybe factored into your pre-award risk assessment process, but that doesn't mean you wouldn't get awarded or aren't able to apply. It just may be an additional consideration for us.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: So, the question was, if providing low-income residential support, can the private citizen contract of the work?

We do not like to see that situation, and I'll explain why, because if you run it on a reimbursement basis to the like landowner, the low income, private residential homeowner, that is considered taxable income for them.

And when you're trying to assist with low-income residential support, that's adding another barrier for residents to have to navigate. So, the scenario that we prefer to see and that we would ask you to follow is you would be contracting directly with the tree care companies as the organization to remove that barrier for residents

56:20

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: So, the question was for local units of governments or organizations who have a procurement process that they have to follow – Can procurement process begin before the grant's execution since they are not expending funding at that time? Or do they need to wait until the contract execution?

What I'll say is activities that help you get ready for the grants that are not being billed to the grants, you can start, I will say there's always the risk that something happens and your grant contract is not able to be executed although that's a very small risk once you're awarded and we're in the process, there's always that potential, so, if you're gonna start work ahead of the grant contract execution, just know None of it can be reimbursed for and you do have like a small amount of risk that you're undertaking if you're going to start those processes.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Okay, there's just a comment if you all wanna take a look at the Q and A, if you're not seeing it or the comments section I mean, let us know and we'll make sure you guys can all see the comments.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Yeah, great question. So can applicants allocate funds towards multiple eligible activities like treat inventory and planting, and the answer is absolutely.

You can apply for whatever eligible activities that you are able to accomplish within the grant period, up to that \$150,000 maximum request amount. So, if that looks like for your community getting an inventory, management plan and doing some park removals and replantings. You can apply for everything on the eligible activities list that makes sense for you and the budget you're working with

59:11

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: So, we do publish a list of awardees. Sorry, the question was, will the DNR publish a list of awardees or maintain a vendor contractor list for grantees to reference? And we do publish a list of all awardees.

The caveat to that is that we cannot publish them until all contracts are fully executed. So, it does take some time as we work with communities to get those final signatures in place, but that will happen after all contracts are executed.

In regards to a like contractor vendor list, as a state agency, we're not able to like manage referrals for companies or things like that, so we're not able to do that but if you're interested once the list is public, as a private company, you can always reach out to grantees for, work with grantees during the or work with applicants during the application period.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Okay so the question was, does the \$4,999 equipment limits apply to a contractor used equipment as well and can the total for a contractor, including labor and usage of these types of equipment exceed \$5,000.

And the answer is, yes, if it's like a rental, like we can't, we don't pay for a comp so if you're gonna pay for a private contractor to do work, it can be over that \$5,000 amount. But you can't pay the private contractor to obtain a piece of equipment that they don't already own. Does that make sense?

So, if it's a rental, let's say they're gonna come stump grinds 50 trees and the cost for that is over that \$5,000 for their equipment usage and their labor and overhead, that's totally acceptable within the grant. But if the invoice included like, we're contracting with this company, then they need to purchase this to do the work, then that would not be included. Does that make sense?

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Yeah, so the question is which activities require ISA certification or TCIA accreditation or equivalents, and could a land consultant do some of the site preparation and activities if an ISA certified Arborist is doing the planting of that property?

And the things that require ISA certification or TCIA accreditation are work done on that low income residential property. So, any work done there needs to have ISA certified arborists or TCIA accreditation.

We do have a like asterisk for equivalent qualification, please run that by us if you have questions on would this be considered an equivalent qualification. Work done on public properties like city owned land or county or whatever jurisdiction those do not require that ISA certified arborists or TCIA accreditation.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: But education, yes, good, good point Rachael. Education of residents does also require ISA certified arborists to at least be involved in the planning and curriculum development components of that.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: So, can one lead organization submit an application for across several partnering organizations or does one, does each organization have to apply individually?

And the answer is if it's under the \$150,000 threshold, you can apply as one big partnership as long as you have all of those letters of support in place. If you are applying for if your partnership. So I think I heard schools as part of the potential partnership. I'd say you want to work with several different schools and the total amount of work that would need, that could be done with funding is more than \$150,000, that is when you would need to apply separately.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: So the question is around invasive species management and what is allowable within the scope of this grant program.

And if it is a component of site preparation, where you've, you know, removed the tree or are planning a planting project in an area and there is invasive species that need to be removed right where the tree is going to be planted that could fall under that site preparation costs. Widespread invasive species management like is found in our ReLeaf grant program is not an allowable expense in this.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Yeah, so question on, can grant funding, support contracted services for watering, mulching, and other establishment activities. And who carries the responsibility after the grant period ends for getting through the three year establishment program or establishment period.

And the first part of that question is yes contractors can be utilized for tree establishment costs including watering, mulching, and other establishment activities.

In regard to what happens at the grant close, we're, we do not do another inspection after the grant period ends. We expect you to as the grantee organization to follow what you have identified in your three year establishment plan.

So, if that indicates that the organization is taking responsibility for those services, then we expect you to continue to take responsibility for that. If you are looking for more capacity to continue maintenance activities or establishment activities beyond the grant period. I would highly recommend you look at the University of Minnesota Tree Stewards program because they can train volunteers to be able to do these activities throughout the three-year establishment period.

Off Camera: Can I ask a question?

Madisson Masucci: Yeah, go ahead.

Off Camera: Is the three-year maintenance on planting on private property, is that required or not for private?

Madisson Masucci: So the question was, is the three year establishment activities required on private lands or not required because it's private.

And the answer is if you read the RFA, there's some language that we require for private residential support. So every landowner that you're providing private

residential support should be signing a waiver around caring for their tree and committing to do that care.

They should be receiving a copy of the tree owner's manual, and we also have some additional outreach materials that we can provide to grantees including tree care door hanger on how to water and care for your tree.

And they will also need to sign that they will allow access for establishments and like compliance checks on those trees. So there is some leverage to be able to, if, if your organization wants to go water and do establishment, that's also included within the language that we outlined in the request for applications. Does that answer your question?

Off camera: Yes

1:09:55 *Unintelligible off camera*

Madisson Masucci: Okay, so question about if we don't have, if the local unit of government does not have an inventory management plan in place, are they able to utilize grant funding to be able to finish an inventory and get a management plan in place?

And the answer is yes, please write it into your grant narr, or your grant application for that funding and included as a component of your budget. So those are eligible expenditures within the grant.

Unintelligible off camera

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: For this specific program, staff time from grantees is not eligible.

Oh, sorry. The question was, is staff time spent on the grants for grantee organizations an eligible expense as it wasn't listed on the ineligible?

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: The question was, is there a minimum amount or percentage of ash trees required in a community for the community to be eligible for the grants?

And the answer is no, there are no percent metrics regarding this specific grants. We, I assume this question might be coming from the Community Tree

Planting and ReLeaf grants where we had some prioritization elements identifying percent ash removed and replaced. Those do not apply to the funding.

1:12:25 *Unintelligible off camera*

Madisson Masucci: So the question is, could the grants fund watering for trees that had been previously planted but are still within their three year establishment period?

And yes, you could do that, there, you can incorporate watering for existing trees or establishment costs for existing trees as long as it's seeking to maintain or experience tree canopy as identified in the project overview and needs section.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: So the question was a relief grantee has not started expanding existing funding. They're asking how that existing funding that they have would impact their eligibility for this grants program, even though the application eligible activities would be different.

And the answer is if you, so what we are looking for it in the pre-award risk assessment because if a community has several large awards that are unexpended and we're not seeing grants performance that's consistent with the scoring rubrics like in our annual monitoring closeout form, then we're gonna ask questions about, hey, are you actually gonna spend this money?

And if you're so let's say you've previously been awarded \$500,000 and you have, you haven't expended any of it, we are gonna ask for proof that you're doing work and that you have plans in place before we're able to award you another award to ensure that the funding is utilized.

Cause, like I mentioned earlier, when the grant program expires, that funding just goes back into the legislative appropriation accounts and we're not able to use it again. So we want to ensure that all funding is utilized by grantees because we want to demonstrate to the legislature and the LCCMR that this funding is needed and we know it's desperately needed because we, every grant we have more requests for funding than we have funding available.

If we turn back funding, it seems like the need isn't there when we know it so desperately is. So, we are gonna ask you some questions if you have large awards that are not being expended and that process to navigate will be a part of the pre-award risk assessment. It's not gonna affect your ability to be

awarded as long as you have plans in place and can show us that that is the case.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Yeah, so the question is if we're running a residential removal program, do we need to replace those trees and or does that fall onto the resident?

And the answer is all trees removed must be replaced for one-to-one ratio. If a resident does not want a tree, you need to document that they are refusing the tree, and then that needs to be planted elsewhere.

So, if that's on another resident's property or on a public, in a public area, that's fine but you need to document that their refusing the tree and why its being moved to another place.

All trees removed one-to-one need to be replanted in the same location as much as possible, you have trees that you know you're gonna remove and you cannot replant because it's not feasible to do so in the same area, please talk to us before you plant them in a different area so that we can approve of that change.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: So the second question was do we need to have a three year assessment plan or does that fall on the resident?

And kind of circling back to our previous question about who's in charge of the establishment on private residential, you'll need to set the resident up with the language that I mentioned from the request for application within their signed agreement for the work and that should include a statement that says I, The landowner, signs, I will care for my tree as long as it is within my rate to do so or something to that effect potentially not a direct quote but along those lines.

So the the onus is on the landowner unless you would like to also provide those services, which is also acceptable for the grant program.

1:18:40 *Unintelligible off camera*

Madisson Masucci: Yeah. Yeah, so can I describe the grants review process and who's likely to be on the committee?

So we'll start with who's likely to be on the committee. We typically have. A few UCF grants or UCF program staff, so internal DNR staff, and then we ask for

representatives from industry, from the Minnesota Shade Tree Advisory Committee. We often ask for somebody in academia and a community or citizen volunteer.

We try to get as much diversity of opinion as possible within the scope of grants and we look to add folks when possible. We'll ask somebody from the local unit of government if they're not applying, obviously, to sit on their review panel.

So, just to give you an idea of the types of folks who would potentially be on the panel, and then the way the process works is when you submit your applications to us, we will organize and ensure everything is within like we've, we have gotten all of your application documents in a couple of days and then we send them to the grant reviewers and those grant reviewers typically six to eight people will go through every application or if it's a really huge application pool, we might have more grant reviewers and, have a different, folks different reviewing different things across all of the applications.

Then we meet and we review all of the scored criteria, and we walk through with the grant review committee, their scores and provide opportunities for conversation around why scores, why things may have scored high or low or if there's big differences.

We have the grants review committee discuss those and then they create their final recommendations after, or as a result of that conversation. So as we move through the In person grant review session, they provide those recommendations and then we separately do the pre-award risk assessment process to ensure that we have identified any risk as required by state policy.

And those two things together will determine awards for apple or for all of the applications. So, are there any other questions?

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Okay, perfect. Well, if you have questions as you continue to navigate the process, please feel free to reach out to us at that UCF.DNR@state.mn.us email.

We are happy to answer questions until August 31st. Starting September 1st, you will be referred back to the webpage. So make sure you get your questions in sooner than later.

And if you have any, any other questions, yeah, feel free to reach out. And we will have office hours virtual office hours, you can drop in, you can check those

out on the website, and those you should just be able to join and talk to myself or Rachael.

Unintelligible off camera

Madisson Masucci: Yes, we will be transcribing the recording and getting it posted within the next week, so it'll be up on the webpage as well. So, you can refer back to this.

Okay. All right, thanks everyone. Have a great day and thanks for joining us.

All right.

Madisson Masucci: Did you stop recording?