



LOCAL TRAIL CONNECTIONS PROGRAM



2023 Program Manual

Revised 12/2022

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I. PROGRAM INTRODUCTION

This program is intended to accelerate local trail connections to planned and existing state trails and other public facilities, not to create significant new recreation trails. Its primary purpose is to complete connections between where people live (e.g., residential areas within cities, entire communities) and significant public resources (e.g., historical areas, open space, parks and/or other trails).

Grants are awarded for the acquisition and development of connecting trails and for removal of barriers that impede full access to these facilities. Historically, priority has been given to projects that seek to develop residential connections to state and regional facilities and to link existing trail systems.

The Local Trail Connections Program depends on local communities and their local government representatives to provide inspiration, planning and commitment, as well as the local matching financial requirement, to make these trail projects a reality. Local governments complete the acquisition and/or projects and are reimbursed for a portion of the acquisition and/or project actually completed.

The program was first funded in 1993 and has funded 280 trail projects statewide to date.

Contact Information:

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II. IMPORTANT ITEMS YOU NEED TO KNOW

A. How to Apply

- Anticipated funding available for FY 2024 is approximately \$1.1 million from “In Lieu Of” lottery proceeds. This funding is divided between three Park and Trail grant programs. This funding is subject to appropriation from the MN Legislature and signature of the Governor.
- **All applications must be received electronically by March 31, 2023**
- Applications are to be submitted electronically in a “.pdf” format by the due date above. Paper submission of applications are not accepted. To submit the application, email a pdf version of the application and attachments to Trailgrants.DNR@state.mn.us. This is the official submittal email box. Submitting to any other email will not be accepted. Format the entire application, including all attachments, as one pdf document with all pages 8 ½” by 11” in dimension. After submission, make sure you have received a confirmation email that your application has arrived in a useable format by the due date. **A confirmation email should arrive within one or two business days after you have submitted your application and after it is reviewed for readability.** Each email is opened to insure files are readable and then followed with a confirmation email. Applications submitted in an unusable format will NOT be considered for funding. If there are any questions about submitting the application, please contact program staff.
- Grant awards will be announced by June 2023.
- **Funds will first be available no earlier than July 1, 2023 to start the contracting process.** This means projects funded in this grant round will not have a contract in place before July 1st and thus cannot begin the project prior to this date (see B. Grant Timeline section).
- All local units of government (typically cities, counties, and townships) are eligible to apply. Also, user groups and/or trail organizations may apply, but only in coordination with a local unit of government per legislation. Funding is only available to a local unit of government.
- The maximum permissible request is \$250,000. The minimum is \$5,000.
- These grants are 75/25 “cash match” reimbursement grants. That means the grantee must complete the project and fully pay for it, produce documentation that shows actual expenditures and proper procurement process has been followed. Then they will receive 75% of what was spent up to their grant award.
 - **Neither this funding source, nor the match can be used for in-house labor services and/or to meet existing payroll (see Section III, D. Non-eligible Reimbursement Costs for additional ineligible costs).**
 - Only contract services, materials, and supplies are reimbursable.

All projects awarded through this grant round must be completed by **June 30, 2025** and immediately available for use to the general public for no less than 20 years.

- If land is purchased with these funds, it is required that a “Twenty-Year Easement for Recreational Trail Purposes” is attached to the deed. Also, the property must be appraised by a state certified appraiser and in accordance with DNR and Federal requirements. Please see land acquisition and appropriate land appraisal requirements in this manual.
- Trails must be at least 10’ wide.
- Applicants are required to design and construct their trail to meet ADA standards, unless it meets an ADA exemption. The applicant must site the exemption from ADA in the application for it to be considered, otherwise provide details and list design specifics in the ADA question of the application in how the project will meet ADA requirements. Do not just state the trail project will be ADA compliant; this is an insufficient answer.
- If your project is selected, and the project will need to be evaluated for applicability of environmental review under [Minnesota Rules, Chapter 4410](#). The local unit of government listed in the application is considered the Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU). Mandatory EAW categories are described at Minnesota Rules, 4410.4300. Exemptions from environmental review are described at Minnesota Rules, 4410.4600. Verify if your project is or is not exempt.
- All facilities that are funded through this program also require a commitment from the applicant that the trail will be open and available for use, as well as maintained, for no less than twenty years and should be stated in their resolution.
- Each proposal must specifically and directly address each requirement and criterion to qualify and receive consideration. If one section of the application is not addressed, the application will not be reviewed for consideration.
- All pages and attached maps must be **8 1/2 X 11 inches ONLY** and in color.
- Read each question thoroughly to make sure each part of a question is answered. Do not answer a question inside the same box as the question. Use the blank box associated with each question for the response.
- When identifying recreation use for your project, make sure to only mark those uses that will actually use the trail.
- [Local Trail Connections](#) application.

B. Grant Timeline

Grant Application Timeline

December, 2022	→	Grant application materials available on the DNR website
March 10, 2023	→	Draft applications due if grant applicant seeks comments by Grant Coordinator (not required)
March 31, 2023	→	Grant application due date: Applications will NOT be accepted after this date.
March 31, 2023 - July 2023	→	Application review and selection process.
July 2023	→	Grant applicants are notified of the results. All grant applicants will be sent a letter if they are awarded a grant or not. Copy of the notification letter will also be sent to the applicant partner, if applicable. Awarded grantees then will follow the timeline below.

Awarded Grant Timeline

July 2023	→	Award letter received! Congratulations! Required documentation checklist also included with notification letter.
July 2023	→	Grantee must begin work on the required documentation checklist items. All items must be completed in order to receive a grant contract. Such items include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural Heritage determination letter • SHPO Archeological Review determination letter • Water Wetland review • Land Certification • Environmental Quality Board determination letter • Environmental Assessment Statement completed
June 30, 2025	→	The project must be completed by 6/30/2025. Grant extensions past 6/30/2025 are not available because the funds expire 6/30/2025 per the legislation . The Grantee must plan accordingly to complete the project no later than 6/30/2025.

III. PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

A. Eligible Projects

Eligible projects may include, but are not necessarily limited to the following examples:

- Land acquisition from willing sellers, where value is established by a licensed and certified appraiser, whose conclusions of value are certified by the State, and only if perpetual easement for recreation trail purposes is conveyed to the state. See the land acquisition requirements section of this manual for more information.
- Construction of trails on public or private lands where a twenty-year easement for the purpose of the project can be obtained.
- Development of trail linkages near homes and workplaces.
- Development of permanent trailside improvements and trailhead facilities (e.g., drainage, crossings, stabilization, parking, signage, controls, open-sided shelters, water, and sanitary facilities).
- Provision of features that facilitate access and use of trails by persons with disabilities.
- Restoration of existing trail facilities, such as resurfacing, repair, or rehabilitation of trails or trailhead facilities.
- Contracted maintenance of existing recreational trails.
- Construction or restoration of trail bridges.

B. Eligible Reimbursement Costs

- Advertising costs solely for (1) Recruitment of personnel; (2) Solicitation of bids; and (3) Disposal of scrap materials.
- Capital and labor expenditures for facilities, equipment, and other capital assets
- Materials and/or supplies.
- Freight transportation expenses.
- Professional services and Project administration costs provided that they do not exceed 20 percent of the total cost of the project.
- Land acquisitions (including permanent easements) whose value a licensed appraiser establishes and whose conclusions of value are certified by the state. See land acquisition requirements section of this manual.

Any cost not defined as an eligible cost or not included in the approved Application shall not be paid from state funds committed to the project unless the Department has provided written authorization.

C. Non-eligible Projects

Non-eligible projects include but are not limited to the following:

- Projects within state park boundaries, state recreational areas, on state trails, and elements of the Metropolitan Open Space System.
- Construction of trails within federally designated wilderness areas (with some exceptions).
- Construction of ordinary sidewalks.
- Planning projects that are preliminary to construction of any trail projects.
- Improvements on highways or other roadways, including but not limited to, lighting, striping, on-street routing, and shoulder work.
- All paved multi-use bicycle/pedestrian trails **less than 10 feet in width**; Short distance exceptions may be allowed on a case-by-case basis.

D. Non-eligible Reimbursement Costs

Including all costs not defined as eligible costs, but not limited to the following:

- Any expenditure that occurs before the effective date of this agreement
- Fund raising
- Taxes, except sales tax on goods and services
- Insurance, except title insurance
- Attorney fees
- Loans, grants, or subsidies to persons or entities for development
- Bad debts, late payment fees, finance charges or contingency funds
- Interest, investment management fees
- Lobbyists
- Political contributions
- Wages and expenses of Sub grantee's employees
- Fringe benefit costs of Sub grantee's employees
- Land appraisals
- Entertainment, gifts and prizes, food, and refreshments
- Purchase of phones, computers, tablets, or audiovisual equipment
- Memberships (including subscriptions and dues), publications, periodicals, and other subscription fees
- Agency advertising and marketing expenses
- Office Rental Fees, and Overhead and Indirect Expenses (including, but not limited to office or storage space rental, utility expenses, copier rental, phone bills, office materials and supplies)

IV. APPLICATION PROCESS

[Local Trail Connections](#) application.

Applicants are urged to begin the application process early in order to allow time to complete application requirements, such as getting a local unit of government resolution. Completed applications must be received electronically by **March 31, 2023**.

Applications are to be submitted electronically in a “.pdf” format by the due date above. Paper submission of applications will not be accepted. To submit the application, email a pdf version of the application and attachments to Trailgrants.DNR@state.mn.us. This is the official submittal email box. Submitting to any other email will not be accepted. Format the entire application, including all attachments, as one pdf document with all pages 8 ½” by 11” in dimension. After submission, make sure you have received a confirmation email that your application has arrived in a useable format by the due date. **A confirmation email should arrive within one or two business days after you have submitted your application.** Each email is opened to insure files are readable and then followed with a confirmation email. Applications submitted in an unusable format will NOT be considered for funding. If there are any questions about submitting the application, please contact program staff.

This is a competitive program. Staff members are available to discuss your project or review application materials prior to submittal. You are encouraged to submit any draft application or materials by March 10, 2023 if you would like staff to provide comments.

V. COMPETATIVE REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

The program is competitive and requires a review and selection process to make funding determinations and awards. The review and selection process will take place after the application due date, and funding announcements will be made in summer. Completed applications received after the deadline will not be eligible for funding consideration.

Priority for trail project funding will be given to projects that provide significant connectivity. Considerations also include ability to connect people to the outdoors, trail length, expected amount and type of use, and quality and attractiveness of natural and cultural resources.

Selection Priorities:

- Projects that provide connectivity, such as trails connecting where people live (e.g., residential areas within cities, entire communities) and significant public resources (e.g., historical areas, open space, parks and/or other trails).
- Projects that can be expected to have relatively high usage and/or will meet the needs and interests of future generations and diverse communities.
- Projects that provide for a unique and interesting connection to the outdoors, such as trails with scenic views, unique natural and cultural features, and wildlife/nature viewing.

VI. HOW THIS PROGRAM WORKS WITH TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS OR TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM

This program can provide a portion of the local match for Transportation Enhancement Projects that are awarded by MnDOT with Federal Highway Administration funding. However, this program provides reimbursement up to 75 percent, while Enhancements provide up to 80 percent. The grantee must ensure that there is never more than 100 percent reimbursed.

This program can reimburse engineering and design costs associated with these projects, which cannot be reimbursed under the Enhancement program. Engineering and design costs can only be reimbursed up to 75 percent and can only account for up to 20 percent of the total cost of the project (i.e., for a \$100,000 project, the maximum a grantee may request reimbursement for engineering and design costs would be fifty percent of \$20,000).

Typically, only projects that are programmed for funding in the current or upcoming federal fiscal year are eligible to receive funding through the current years' solicitation.

VII. TRAIL DESIGN REQUIREMENTS

All paved multi-use bicycle/pedestrian trails must be 10 feet in width to be considered for funding through this program. Very short distance exceptions might be allowed on a case-by-case basis and limited in distance (i.e., 20-30 feet for example). Do not submit a trail project with the intention that there will be an exception. Make sure your whole paved trail can be 10 feet wide before applying.

With regards to bicycle trails, applicants will be required to conform to recommendations contained within the 2019 [“Federal Highway Administration Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning, Program, and Project Development”](#) developed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation, with the exception that all paved bicycle trails must be 10 feet wide versus the minimum 8 feet wide mentioned in this manual.

For other uses, applicants must follow the *“Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines”* developed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Parks and Trails Division. The guidelines are available at the [Minnesota’s Bookstore](#) or 1-800-657-3757.

Applicants are also encouraged to follow recommendations made in *“Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access, Part II of II: Best Practices Design Guide”* produced by the Federal Highway Administration.

When developing natural surface trails, applicants are encouraged to follow principles outlined in [“Guidelines for a Quality Trail Experience”](#).

Applicants are required to address the American with Disabilities Act under the Evaluation Criteria Section of the application. The *ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas*, and the *ADA and ABA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities* can be found on the Federal Access Board website. Successful applicants are required to design and construct their trail to meet ADA standards.

- The following guidelines will help you design your facilities. Copies can be ordered from the [U.S. Access Board](#) at (800) 872-2253 or downloaded from their website. Below are links directly to specific guidelines:
- [ADA Standards](#) and [ABA Guidelines and Standards](#) (For buildings and certain recreation facilities including playgrounds, recreational boating facilities, and fishing piers).
- [Outdoor Developed Area](#) (For outdoor developed areas such as campgrounds, picnic areas, trails, and beaches).

VIII. LAND ACQUISITION REQUIREMENTS

When applying for a grant for land acquisition or easement, the application requires a reasonable market estimate. A full appraisal is not required to apply for a grant. If your **application is approved for funding** to purchase land or an easement, a full appraisal will then be required and must meet USPAP, DNR and UASFLA standards and pre-approved prior to purchase in order for the purchase to be eligible for reimbursement. Easements must include a term of no less than 20 years in the purchase agreement. This length of time is not negotiable. Any time length less than 20 years will not be reimbursable.

The following is done only if your trail project is awarded a grant and is approved for acquisition or easement purchase:

Prior to contacting and hiring a licensed appraiser to conduct an appraisal of the property, you must contact the DNR Appraisal Management Unit https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lands_minerals/appraisal_mgmt.html to provide assistance. The appraisal will need to be completed to meet USPAP, DNR and UASFLA appraisal standards and the DNR must be named as an intended user of the report. If you are acquiring an easement, the appraiser will also need to be provided a final copy of the easement language you plan to acquire. A State Certified General Real Property Appraiser competent to appraise property to Federal Standards must conduct the appraisal. There are a limited number of appraisers that are certified to conduct appraisals to meet the federal standards. The DNR Appraisal Management Unit can provide you a list of appraisers that have indicated that they are competent to complete these appraisals. The requirements are also located on the [DNR Appraisal Management](#) website.

Once you have received a completed a land appraisal, it must be submitted to the DNR for appraisal review and approval before the land can be purchased with grant funds. The costs associated with a land appraisal are not eligible for reimbursement through the grant program. Therefore, it is important that the land appraisal be done correctly and with a qualified appraiser, to avoid the additional charges that would result if the appraisal were rejected by the DNR. The DNR review of land appraisals are done at no cost to the grantee. Once the DNR has approved the appraisal, grant funds can be reimbursed towards the cost of the land purchased.

Upon the purchase of land, it is required to have a “Twenty-Year Easement for Recreational Trail Purposes” at a minimum that must be attached to the deed (this easement must be the same as the easement provided to the appraiser) for the land and submitted deed documentation to be approved for reimbursement.

IX. MINNESOTA STATUTE 85.019

85.019 LOCAL RECREATION GRANTS.

Subdivision 1. **Definition.** For purposes of this section, "unit of government" means a county, statutory or home rule charter city, or town.

Subd. 2. **Parks and outdoor recreation areas.** (a) The commissioner shall administer a program to provide grants to units of government for up to 50 percent of the costs of acquisition and betterment of public land and improvements needed for parks and other outdoor recreation areas and facilities, including costs to create veterans memorial gardens and parks.

(b) For units of government outside the metropolitan area as defined in section 473.121, subdivision 2, the local match required for a grant to acquire or better a regional park or regional outdoor recreation area is \$2 of nonstate money for each \$3 of state money.

Subd. 3. [Repealed by amendment, 1995 c 220 s 68]

Subd. 4. [Repealed by amendment, 1995 c 220 s 68]

Subd. 4a. **Natural and scenic areas.** The commissioner shall administer a program to provide grants to units of government and school districts for the acquisition and betterment of natural and scenic areas such as blufflands, prairies, shorelands, wetlands, and wooded areas. A grant may not exceed 50 percent or \$500,000, whichever is less, of the costs of acquisition and betterment of land acquired under this subdivision. The commissioner shall make payment to a unit of government upon receiving documentation of reimbursable expenditures.

Subd. 4b. **Regional trails.** The commissioner shall administer a program to provide grants to units of government for acquisition and betterment of public land and improvements needed for trails outside the metropolitan area deemed to be of regional significance according to criteria published by the commissioner. Recipients must provide a nonstate cash match of at least 25 percent of total eligible project costs. If land used for the trails is not in full public ownership, then the recipients must prove it is dedicated to the purposes of the grants for at least 20 years. The commissioner shall make payment to a unit of government upon receiving documentation of reimbursable expenditures. A unit of government may enter into a lease or management agreement for the trail, subject to section 16A.695.

Subd. 4c. **Trail connections.** The commissioner shall administer a program to provide grants to units of government for acquisition and betterment of public land and improvements needed for trails that connect communities, trails, and parks and thereby increase the effective length of trail experiences. Recipients must provide a nonstate cash match of at least 25 percent of total eligible project costs. If land used for the trails is not in full public ownership, then the recipients must prove it is dedicated to the purposes of the grants for at least 20 years. The commissioner shall make payment to a unit of government upon receiving documentation of reimbursable expenditures. A unit of government may enter into a lease or management agreement for the trail, subject to section 16A.695.

Subd. 5. **Powers; rules.** The commissioner has all powers necessary and convenient to implement this section, including the authority to adopt rules for the program under chapter 14.

X. OTHER PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

A. Grants and Public Information

Under [MN Statute 13.599](#), responses to a request for proposal are nonpublic until the application deadline is reached. At that time, the name and address of the grantee, and the amount requested becomes public.

After the application evaluation process is completed, data (except trade secret data) becomes public. Data created during the evaluation process is nonpublic until the negotiation of the grant agreement with the selected grantee(s) is completed.

[MN Statute 13.44](#) categorizes estimated or appraised value of real property prior to purchase and sale as confidential data on individuals or protected nonpublic data. See also Minnesota Government Data Privacy Act for more information. This information, along with corresponding budget information, will be redacted from the applications before making them public.

B. Reporting Requirements

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to monitor progress on state grants by requiring grantees to submit written progress reports at least annually until all grant funds have been expended and all of the terms in the grant agreement have been met. A progress report form will be provided by program staff. Grant payments shall not be made on grants with past due progress reports unless program staff have given the grantee a written extension.

C. Monitoring Requirements

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to conduct at least one monitoring visit per grant period on all state grants of over \$50,000 and to conduct at least annual monitoring visits on grants of over \$250,000.

D. Conflict of Interest

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to work to deliberately avoid actual, potential, and perceived conflict of interests related to grant making at both the individual and organizational levels.

A conflict of interest (actual, potential) occurs when a person has actual or apparent duty or loyalty to more than one organization and the competing duties or loyalties may result in actions which are adverse to one or both parties. A conflict of interest exists even if no unethical, improper, or illegal act results from it.

Actual Conflict of Interest:

An actual conflict of interest occurs when a decision or action would compromise a duty to a party without taking immediate appropriate action to eliminate the conflict. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- One party uses his or her position to obtain special advantage, benefit, or access to the other party's time, services, facilities, equipment, supplies, badge, uniform, prestige, or influence.
- One party receives or accepts money (or anything else of value) from another party or has equity or a financial interest in or partial or whole ownership of the other party's organization.
- One party is an employee, board member or family member of the other party.

Potential Conflict of Interest:

A potential conflict of interest may exist if one party has a relationship, affiliation, or other interest that could create an inappropriate influence if the person is called on to make a decision or recommendation that would affect one or more of those relationships, affiliations, or interests. For example, when one party serves in a volunteer capacity for another party, it has the potential to, but does not necessarily, create a conflict of interest, depending on the nature of the relationship between the two parties. A disclosed potential conflict of interest warrants additional discussion in order to identify the nature of the relationship, affiliation, or other interest and take action to mitigate any potential conflicts.

Organizational Conflict of Interest:

A conflict of interest can also occur with an organization that is a grant applicant or grantee of a state agency. Organizational conflicts of interest occur when:

- A grantee is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice to the State due to competing duties or loyalties
- A grantee's objectivity in carrying out the grant is or might be otherwise impaired due to competing duties or loyalties
- A grantee or potential grantee has an unfair competitive advantage through being furnished unauthorized proprietary information or source selection information that is not available to all competitors.

The Grantee, by signing a grant contract with the State, must certify it has read and understands the Office of Grants Management [Conflict of Interest Policy 08-01](#), will maintain an adequate Conflict of Interest Policy and, throughout the term of the contract, monitor and report any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest to the State.

E. Closeout Procedures

Upon completion of your project, a final billing must be submitted to our office. Program staff may complete a final inspection. The inspection will focus on ensuring that the project was completed in accordance with the grant agreement, that facilities developed are accessible and a funding acknowledgment sign is installed. Prior to final reimbursement of your grant and official closeout notification of your project, any problems that are revealed during the inspection must be corrected and/or all final documentation has been received and approved including a copy of the recorded deed restriction, if applicable.

All expenditures are subject to verification by an independent state audit and, therefore, you must retain all project records for a period of at least six years after you receive the official closeout notification letter.

Periodic post-completion inspections may be conducted to ensure that the site is being properly operated and maintained and that no conversion of use has occurred.

F. Acknowledgement Sign

All projects acquired or developed with assistance from this program must display a state-approved funding acknowledgment sign to be posted at the entrance of the project site, or at an alternative obvious location on the site.

G. Availability of Users

Public property, facilities & programs that receive state assistance and future development of a site that has received state assistance shall be open to entry by all persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, or sex. No person shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in any program or activity receiving state assistance. Finally, discrimination on the basis of residence, including preferential reservation, membership or annual permit systems is prohibited except to the extent that reasonable differences in admission and other fees may be maintained on the basis of residence.