

Natural and Scenic Areas Grant Program

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the purpose of the program?

To increase, protect and enhance natural and scenic areas. This program is established by the Minnesota Legislature in [Minnesota Statutes 85.019](#).

How does this grant program work?

Provides matching grants to local units of government and school districts for up to 50% of the cost of acquisition of natural and scenic areas. That is, you can apply for half of the total project cost, up to a maximum of \$500,000.

What are the ongoing grant requirements of this program, “strings attached”?

All parks or natural and scenic areas that receive funds under this program must be operated and maintained for public outdoor natural and scenic opportunities into perpetuity. The recipient will be required to file a deed restriction on all land within the park or natural and scenic area, committing to this requirement. The intent of this program is to expand the outdoor recreation system throughout the state for permanent close-to-home recreation and/or natural and scenic area opportunities.

What kinds of projects are eligible?

Park acquisition and minimal betterment activities are eligible as part of an acquisition project including site surveying, boundary signing, and immediate measures needed to stabilize the site and ensure the safety of users and active restoration efforts that would significantly improve the site’s natural resource values.

How much money can I apply for? Is there a minimum amount?

Our smallest grant is \$10,000 for a total project cost of \$20,000. Our maximum grant is \$500,000 for a total project cost of at least \$1,000,000.

How do I apply? Where do I get the application form?

Applications and program information are available on our [program webpage](#). Information for each new application round is posted in December with applications due in late March of each year.

What is the application deadline? How will I know you’ve received my application?

April 1st. We will send a confirmation email to you, acknowledging receipt and that we were able to open and view your application.

Who can apply?

Cities, counties, townships and school districts.

I am a local nonprofit with facilities open to the general public. Can I apply?

No. Only cities, townships, counties and school districts can apply.

Could staff come out and look at the natural area or talk to applicants prior to the application deadline?

Because of time constraints, staff will not be able to come out and look at the site(s). You may email or call them. You may send them your draft application.

Could staff give us feedback on our application prior to the deadline?

Yes, if you submit your draft application by February 29, staff can give you feedback on it. We highly encourage this as it helps your application be as competitive as possible.

Can I apply for more than one natural area/park in one grant cycle? Can I be awarded more than one grant in one grant cycle?

Yes. You need to fill out a different application for each natural area/park. Yes, you can be awarded more than one grant in one grant cycle.

If I already have an active grant with your program, can I apply for another grant?

Yes. Significant progress must be completed on active projects before an additional proposal may be submitted.

Why do you require that applicants commit to, at least, 50% of the project costs?

The match amount is required under state statute and federal law.

What is the local share?

The local share is what you will be committing to the project. It has to be, at least, 50% of the total project costs. It can consist of cash or the value of materials, labor and equipment usage by the local sponsor or by donations or any combination thereof.

For donated service, how do I figure out how much it is?

The value of donated services or materials can be the rate charged by a qualified contractor, equipment rental or retail purchase. For these donations, a receipt or invoice from the company showing the donation and value is needed. All general volunteer labor for this program is valued at \$31.80. This might be community volunteers helping plant trees, removing exotic species, etc.

If the landowner is willing to sell the property for less than the certified appraised amount, can this be eligible for a match?

Yes, a landowner can donate a portion of the appraised value for the project and this would be eligible for local match. For example, the property is appraised at \$100,000 and the landowner agrees to sell the property for \$80,000. The \$20,000 value can count toward the local match.

In terms of the match amount, how much money do I have to in hand by the time of the application? Does it have to be all cash?

Your project will be more competitive if you have or can commit to the required match and/or full project funding at the time of the application. With the short grant period, we are looking for projects that are ready to go.

No, it does not have to be all cash. It could be a combination of donations and the value of materials, labor, or equipment usage. You can still accept donations or volunteer services as the project moves forward.

Can I use other state or federal funds as part of my match?

No.

Do we need a current appraisal if the landowner has indicated how much he is willing to sell the property for or can we use the county assessed value?

Yes, the application must include an appraisal report by a general real property appraiser licensed by the State of MN and meet the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition (UASFLA). The appraisal must include the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the National Park Service as intended users and the landowner or designated representative must be given an opportunity to accompany the appraiser during the inspection of the property. Appraisals must have an effective date within 13 months of the application deadline.

When will we find out if we've been awarded the grant?

Preliminary grant awards will be announced in the summer.

When will I receive my grant award?

You will receive your grant award as reimbursements. You have to pay for expenses and then submit invoices and copies of checks written to get reimbursed.

We are ready to acquire this summer. Why are contract start dates not until fall?

Although preliminary awards are announced in the summer, contracts will not be ready before the fall of the application year or later. There are many additional requirements and approvals relating to environmental resources, historical and archeological resources, and federal approval, if applicable. Grantees should focus on projects that will be completed primarily during the next year.

If we don't finish the project by the grant end date, can we get an extension?

All work must be completed by the grant deadline. Most of our funding does not allow for a project extension beyond this date.

What are the funding priorities for this program?

The [2020-2024 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(SCORP\)](#) is Minnesota's outdoor recreation policy plan. It establishes outdoor recreation priorities for Minnesota to assist outdoor recreation and natural resource managers, the state legislature, and the executive branch in decision-making about the state's outdoor recreation system.

Who should fill out the Environmental Screening Form (ESF)? Do we need to hire an "expert" or can we fill it out ourselves?

You don't need to hire an expert to fill out the ESF. You can fill it out with input from resource experts and in consultation with relevant local, state, tribal governments, as applicable.

Do we really need to conduct a site inspection to verify field conditions?

Yes. It's important that you are aware of the current field condition of the parkland or recreational area that you're applying for. If your project is funded, staff may conduct a site inspection to verify field conditions.

What are some ways we can notify the public about our project?

You may do this through public meetings, announcements in the newspaper, letters or flyers, newsletters, announcements on your website, emails, face-to-face meetings or any combination of these things.

How long should we wait for the public to comment on our project?

Thirty days is a good rule of thumb.

I am going to have to hire someone to create the Site Map for me. Could I get reimbursed for this cost?

No. Expenses incurred prior to the start of the grant are not eligible expenses.

How favorably do you consider letters of support from individuals or organizations?

Although community involvement is important, we do not consider letters of support in the scoring criteria.

How and who will you review or score my grant?

A majority of the review and selection process will focus on guidelines outlined in the 2020-2024 SCORP. Additional review components will assess the natural and scenic qualities of the site. The project design should be compatible with the natural and scenic characteristics of the site, consistent with generally accepted design and restoration standards, in accordance with accessibility standards and minimize risk to the health and safety of users. Program staff will review and score all applications. Please note that if your project advances to final selection review, financial documentation will need to be provided including recent financial statements and audit as well as a statement of financial position.

What if I still have questions? Who can I call?

Email or call the two staff below.

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