

Community Forest Program - Forest Legacy Grant Opportunity

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, State and Private Forestry, Cooperative Forestry staff, is providing grant funding for Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (Community Forest Program). This is a competitive grant program whereby local governments, qualified nonprofit organizations and Indian tribes are eligible to apply for grants to establish community forests through fee simple acquisition of private forestlands.

The purpose of the program is to establish community forests by protecting forestland from conversion to non-forest uses and provide community benefits, which include sustainable forest management, clean air, water, wildlife habitat, forest-based education and recreation. Qualified properties include private forestland that is 5 acres or more, suitable to sustain natural vegetation, and at least 75 percent forested.

This is a cost share program with a maximum grant award of \$400,000; this grant program requires a 50 percent match of the total project cost. The match can include cash, in-kind services, or donations, which must be from a non-Federal source. All interested organizations should work with the State Forester's office to submit an application. The application period will begin in July. Applicants are encouraged to contact and work with the Forest Service Region and State Forester's office in developing their proposal.

Application Process

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, State and Private Forestry, Cooperative Forestry staff, requests applications for the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (Community Forest Program or CFP). This is a competitive grant program whereby local governments, qualified nonprofit organizations, and Indian tribes are eligible to apply for grants to establish community forests through fee simple acquisition of private forest land from a willing seller.

The purpose of the program is to establish community forests by protecting forest land from conversion to non-forest uses and provide community benefits. Some of these benefits must include:

- sustainable forest management;
- clean air,
- water,
- wildlife habitat,
- forest-based educational programs;
- service as models of effective forest stewardship; and
- recreational benefits secured with public access.

Qualified Properties: Private forest land that is at **least five acres** in size, suitable to sustain natural vegetation, and at least 75 percent forested is considered eligible lands for grants funded

under this program. The lands must also be threatened by conversion to non-forest use, must be offered for sale by a willing seller, and if acquired by an eligible entity, must provide defined community benefits under Community Forest Program and allow public access.

Application overview: All local government and qualified nonprofit organization applications must be submitted to the State Forester. Applicants are encouraged to contact and work with the Forest Service Region and State Forester in developing their proposal. The Nebraska Forest Service will help you with this process.

Grant Application Requirements

1. Eligibility Information

a. *Eligible Applicants.* A local governmental entity or qualified nonprofit organization that are qualified to acquire and manage land.

b. *Cost Sharing (Matching Requirement).* All applicants must demonstrate a 50 percent match of the total project cost. The match can include cash, in-kind services, or donations, which shall be from a non- Federal source.

c. *DUNS Number.* All applicants shall include a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number in their application.

2. Award Information

The fund awarded by the CFP was \$4.0 million for FY18. Individual grant applications may not exceed \$400,000, which does not include technical assistance requests.

3. Application Information

Application submission. All local governments and qualified nonprofit organizations' applications must be submitted to the State. Applications may be submitted either electronic or hardcopy to the appropriate official.

All applicants must also send an email to communityforest@fs.fed.us to confirm an application has been submitted for funding consideration.

4. Application Requirements

The following section outlines grant application requirements:

- a. Contact your state forester for assistance with the application process.
- b. The application can be **no more than eight pages** long, plus no more than two maps (eight and half inches by eleven inches in size), the grant forms specified in (c), and the draft Community Forest Plan specified in (e).
- c. The following grant forms and supporting materials must be included in the application:
 - (1) An Application for Federal
 - (2) Assistance (Standard Form 424);

- (3) (2) Budget information (Standard
 - (4) Form SF 424c—Construction Programs); and
 - (5) Assurances of compliance with all applicable Federal laws, regulations, and policies (Standard Form 424d— Construction Programs).
- d. Documentation to verify the applicant is an eligible entity and that the land proposed for acquisition is eligible (see 36 CFR 230.2).
- e. Applications must include the following, regarding the property proposed for acquisition:
- (1) A description of the property, including acreage and county location;
 - (2) A description of current land uses, including improvements;
 - (3) A description of forest type and vegetative cover;
 - (4) A map of sufficient scale to show the location of the property in relation to roads and other improvements as well as parks, refuges, or other protected lands in the vicinity;
 - (5) A description of applicable zoning and other land use regulations affecting the property;
 - (6) A description of the type and extent of community benefits, including to underserved communities (see selection criteria);
 - (7) A description of relationship of the property within and its contributions to a landscape conservation initiative; and
 - (8) A description of any threats of conversion to non-forest uses, including any encumbrances on the property that prevent conversion to non- forest uses.
- e. Information regarding the proposed establishment of a community forest, including:
- (1) A description of the benefiting community, including demographics, and the associated benefits provided by the proposed land acquisition;
 - (2) A description of community involvement to-date in the planning of the community forest acquisition and of community involvement anticipated long-term management;
 - (3) An identification of persons and organizations that support the project and their specific role in establishing and managing the community forest; and
 - (4) A draft Community Forest Plan. The eligible entity is encouraged to work with the State Forester or equivalent Tribal government official for technical assistance when developing or updating the Community Forest Plan. In addition, the eligible entity is encouraged to work with technical specialists, such as professional foresters, recreation specialists, wildlife biologists, or outdoor education specialists, when developing the Community Forest Plan.
- f. Information regarding the proposed land acquisition, including:
- (1) A proposed project budget not exceeding \$400,000 and technical assistance needs as coordinated with the State Forester or equivalent Tribal government official. (36 CFR 230.6);
 - (2) The status of due diligence, including signed option or purchase and sale agreement, title search, minerals determination, and appraisal;

- (3) Description and status of cost share (secure, pending, commitment letter, etc.) (36 CFR 230.6);
- (4) The status of negotiations with participating landowner(s) including purchase options, contracts, and other terms and conditions of sale;
- (5) The proposed timeline for completing the acquisition and establishing the community forest; and
- (6) Long term management costs and funding source(s).

g. Applications must comply with the Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations (7 CFR part 3015).

h. Applications must also include the forms required to process a Federal grant. Section 230.7 references the grant forms that must be included in the application and the specific administrative requirements that apply to the type of Federal grant used for this program.

5. Forest Service's Project Selection Criteria

- a. Using the criteria described below, to the extent practicable, the Forest Service will give priority to applications that maximize the delivery of community benefits.
- b. The Forest Service will evaluate all applications received by the State Foresters or equivalent Tribal government officials and award grants based on the following criteria:
- c. Type and extent of community benefits provided, including to underserved communities. Community benefits are defined in the final program rule as:
 - a. Economic benefits such as timber and non-timber products;
 - b. Environmental benefits, including clean air and water, storm water management, and wildlife habitat;
 - c. Benefits from forest-based experiential learning, including K–12 conservation education programs; vocational education programs in disciplines such as forestry and environmental biology; and environmental education through individual study or voluntary participation in programs offered by organizations such as 4–H, Boy or Girl Scouts, Master Gardeners, etc;
 - d. Benefits from serving as replicable models of effective forest stewardship for private landowners; and
 - e. Recreational benefits such as hiking, hunting and fishing secured through public access.
- d. Extent and nature of community engagement in the establishment and long-term management of the community forest;
- e. Amount of cost share leveraged;
- f. Extent to which the community forest contributes to a landscape conservation initiative;

- g. Extent of due diligence completed on the project, including cost share committed and status of appraisal;
- h. Likelihood that, unprotected, the property would be converted to non-forest uses; and
- i. Costs to the Federal Government.

6. Grant Requirements

- a. Once an application is selected, funding will be obligated to the through a grant.
- b. Local government should refer to 2 CFR part 225, Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments (OMB Circular A-87) and 7 CFR part 3016, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments for directions.
- c. Non-profit organizations should refer to 2 CFR part 215, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Other Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals and Other Nonprofit Organizations (OMB Circular A-110) and 7 CFR part 3019 Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and other Non-profit Organizations for directions.
- d. The Forest Service must approve any amendments to a proposal or request to reallocate funding within a grant proposal. If negotiations on a selected project fail, the applicant cannot substitute an alternative site. e. The grant recipient must comply with the requirements in 36 CFR 230.8 before funds will be released.
- e. After the project has closed, as a requirement of the grant, grant recipients will be required to provide the Forest Service with a Geographic Information System (GIS) shapefile: A digital, vector-based storage format for storing geometric location and associated attribute information of CFP project tracts and cost share tracts, if applicable.
- f. Any funds not expended within the grant period must be de-obligated and revert to the Forest Service.
- g. All media, press, signage, and other documents discussing the creation of the community forest must reference the partnership and financial assistance by the Forest Service through the CFP.