

Funding Guidelines and Criteria



For Fiscal Year 2026/Application Year 2024/Adopted January 24, 2024

Introduction: The following document outlines the Commission’s funding goals/considerations, application requirements, criteria, and eligibility lists. Only facilities designated as Regionally Significant by the Commission are eligible for funding. Applications must be completed online at <http://www.gmrptcommission.org/applications.html>. Applicants are encouraged to contact the System Plan Coordinator at coordinator@gmrptcommission.org.

Considerations for Funding

The following application guidance outlines the Commission’s goals for funded facility projects.

Applicants should address the following in their application.

1. Requests are evaluated based on their ability to provide a high-quality experience, serve a regional population or visitor destination, enhance connectivity, fill a critical gap in a recreational opportunity and complete a regionally substantial component of the Master Plan. Requests are further evaluated based on the applicant’s response to the funding application requirements.
2. Takes advantage of one-time opportunities to expand or enhance an existing park or trail, or opportunities for a critical rehabilitation of an existing facility.
3. The 25-Year Parks and Trails Legacy Plan (Legacy Plan) four strategic directions (Pillars) are given high consideration: Connect People to the Outdoors; Acquire Land, Create Opportunities; Take Care of What We Have; Coordinate Among Partners, i.e. funding matches, cooperative projects. Applications must align and clearly articulate their tie to one or more Pillars.
4. Funding is further evaluated with regard to: Completeness of preliminary design, implementation plan, budget, and sustainability plan
5. Project components that are ineligible costs will not be considered as a part of the funding request or local match.
6. At the Commission’s discretion, projects may be approved for grant funding that do not fit within current grant guidelines; innovation and exploring the potential to expand outdoor recreational user groups will be considered.

APPLICATION NOTES FOR 2024: Applicants should review this entire packet for changes, including:

- **Archeological surveys, SHPO, THPO and other pre-project environmental work is once again fundable as a separate application.**
- **Reporting local match funds on the budget spreadsheet is now simplified.**
- **Additional details describing the “shovel ready” nature of the project (i.e. reasonable scope, cost, timeline, design, etc.) are required and will be reflected in the score.**
- **A goal of no more than 20% seasonal rental facilities is now in place for all campsites or reservable facilities. If this percentage is not met within a facility, then no new Legacy funded seasonal rental facilities are allowable.**
- **Monument signs are now eligible for funding. Traditional playground elements are now eligible for funding as well as naturescape playground elements.**

Application Guidance for Connecting People to the Outdoors Programming and Accessibility Projects

Connecting People to the Outdoors (CPO) funding is available to cities and counties with regionally designated parks and trails. Funds may be used for agencies or contracts to deliver programming and/or improved accessibility to outdoor recreation based out of the regional park or trail. Applicants should address the following items in their CPO application:

1. Has clearly defined, attainable goals and objectives and geographic scope similar to the level of planning detail required for a park or trail project, accompanied by a well-developed outreach and marketing plan.
2. Is deliberate and intentional in inviting, welcoming, and engaging diverse populations, and has a well-developed plan to do so.
3. Utilizes existing program models with a proven record of effectiveness and best practices, or melds successful models into new, innovative, or unique approaches with reasoned justification. Provides for tracking of quantitative and qualitative user data during events or programs for sharing with the Commission.
4. Enlists partners among community groups and recreation industry sectors for mutual benefit, to advance delivery strategies, and to maximize return on public investments.
5. Scale and magnitude is sufficient to affect a significant number of active and potential program participants, park visitors and/or trail users; identifies projected number of active and potential program participants.
6. Identifies all barriers to access, such as cultural, auditory, sight, mobility, and language, and has specific strategies to address the ones viable to this project.
7. Able to provide trained and effective leadership with the proven ability to deliver high-quality outdoor recreation experiences.
8. Demonstrates an enduring impact through short-term, intensive interventions, or has a sustainability plan for ongoing implementation of events or programs (at least 5 years) or maintenance of recreation equipment (at least the first life cycle, typically 10 years) outside of Legacy funding.
9. Does not supplant existing local funding for existing programming.

Refer to the GMRPTC Funded Non-Infrastructure Management Policy for additional guidance.

Programming-based CPO projects will require a final design/work plan to be submitted upon contract execution and is subject to the ongoing management/reporting, data collection and project reviews as defined in policy.

Application Requirements

Applicants must address the following general requirements in their online funding application, as fully detailed in the [GMRPTC Funding Application Portal Instructions](#).

<https://www.gmrptcommission.org/application-toolbox.html>

- I. Describe how the project completes a regionally substantial or impactful component of the Master Plan, including addressing each of the appropriate scoring criteria for the project classification. The project description must include pictures of the proposed project site along with descriptions of what is going to change in those pictures, supported by the required site designs.
- II. Explain how the project fulfills any relevant Pillars from the Legacy Plan. See tutorial for further definition.
 - a. Connect People to the Outdoors
 - b. Acquire Land, Create Opportunities
 - c. Take Care of What We Have
 - d. Coordinate Among Partners
- III. The project budget and implementation must detail:
 - a. The full cost of the project and budget line items
 - b. Grant request funds
 - c. Grant match funds and sources
 - d. Non-eligible project expenses
 - e. Feasibility of timeline, scope, cost, etc.
 - f. Design and accessibility that meets or exceeds all standards
 - g. Availability for public use
 - h. Sustainability *See pg 4 for details
 - i. Project Lead
- IV. Applicants must evaluate the outcomes of the project. What are the specific deliverables? How will the project be evaluated compared to the deliverables, i.e. the number of users who will benefit from this project, the quality of the facility, the impact of the repair or rehabilitation.

Required Attachments

- ✓ All funding applications must include an officially adopted resolution that meets Commission qualifications by their governing body. A qualified resolution template that must be followed is provided in the application toolbox.
- ✓ For acquisitions, appraisals are required and must be performed by a qualified licensed appraiser and meet the [Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice \(USPAP\)](#) and the [DNR Supplemental Appraisal and Appraisal Review Guidelines](#) located at https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lands_minerals/appraisal_mgmt.html
- ✓ A completed budget worksheet, using the template provided in the online application.
- ✓ A site design for the project must be completed and submitted with the application, per directions included under “Map Requirements” and “Site Plan Requirements” in the online application. This includes playgrounds.

Americans with Disabilities Act

Grantees must comply with the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) and the standards and guidelines listed below. The Commission encourages applicants to exceed the minimum ADA standards in design and intent. In addition, all critical components must be made accessible even if they are not part of this proposal. Critical components include parking, restroom, drinking fountains and accessible routes to all facilities. This program requires all facility access routes to be a minimum of 5 feet wide.

The following design standards documents are available at <https://www.access-board.gov/>:
ADA Standards for Accessible Design, 2010 (For local government facilities and certain recreation facilities including playgrounds, recreational boating facilities, and fishing piers)
Final Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas, 2013 (For outdoor developed areas such as campgrounds, picnic areas, trails, and beaches).

****Project Contract Deliverables Note****

Depending on the project, the following may be required:

If funded, the grant contract will be executed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on behalf of the Commission. Therefore, all DNR contract requirements must be fulfilled and include (but not limited to) the following:

- ✓ Completion of an Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS). Review of the project by the DNR's Natural Heritage Information System Review.
- ✓ Compliance with water and wetlands regulations (per DNR grant guidelines).
- ✓ Compliance with Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) Environmental Review rules for trail projects.
- ✓ Pre-review of the project from the Minnesota State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO).
- ✓ Consultation with relevant Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPO) to assess cultural resources on site is highly recommended.

The above items should be initiated upon notification of award, prior to the execution of the grant contract in order to allow for long review times. Check with your DNR contract manager for additional guidance.

- ✓ For trail projects, a Land Approval Certification Form signed by all administrators of public land crossed or utilized by the trail project AND a completed long term or permanent lease/easement on land not owned by applicant.
- ✓ Provide twice per year project status and final project reports (with photos) to the GMRPTC.
- ✓ NO funds nor match may be expended until there is a fully executed contract. Work on the pre-contract items must be completed prior to contract execution per DNR requirements.

More information on post-award requirements can be found at
https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/recreation/pt_legacy.html

Sustainability Plans

Each application for infrastructure or development must include the applicant's plan for sustaining the facility through its full life cycle, including how and when maintenance and refurbishment will be funded. Mountain Bike and other natural surface trails must consider trail reconstruction/refresh needs on a 5-7 year basis to ensure trails are kept in best possible condition. The Commission does not typically fund early-life cycle repair and rehabilitation costs of that nature, particularly if original construction was Legacy funded.

Connecting People to the Outdoors projects are required to submit development and sustainability plans per the GMRPTC Non-Infrastructure Policy, as noted on page 2.

Scoring Criteria

Each application will be evaluated and scored based on the following criteria. Parks, Trails and Programming applications will be evaluated based on their respective criteria and guidance. For projects that contain components of more than one category, the most relevant category will be selected for evaluation of specific project components.

Park Facility Scoring Criteria

Each project funding application for a park-type facility will be evaluated and scored based on the following criteria.

1. Completes a regionally substantial component in the applicants Master Plan.
10 points
2. Fills a gap and provides an outdoor recreation benefit of regional significance.
20 points
3. Provides access to quality natural and cultural resources within the district.
10 points
4. Is a critical acquisition or critical rehabilitation and repair of a park facility or feature.
15 points
5. Is significantly linked to one or more of the four Pillars in the Legacy Plan.
20 points
6. Has a financial match. A higher match will receive greater point awards.

0 – 4%	match = 0 points	
5 – 9%	match = 3 points	
10 – 14%	match = 6 points	
15 – 19%	match = 9 points	
20 – 24%	match = 12 points	
25% and up	match = 15 points	Maximum of 15 points
7. Includes a fully detailed and reasonable budget, scope, implementation timeline, design, and sustainability plan.
10 points

Each item is a maximum of points and may be less depending upon the quality of the application. Top score is 100 points

Trails Scoring Criteria

Each project funding application will be evaluated and scored based on the following criteria.

1. Completes a regionally substantial component in the applicants Master Plan.
10 points
2. Fills a gap and provides connectivity to users. Could also provide connectivity to a larger trail system or provides an outdoor recreation benefit of regional significance.
20 points
3. Provides access to quality natural and cultural resources within the district. Examples are scenic views, wildlife viewing areas, viewshed and natural areas. Take into consideration the differences between districts, i.e. prairie views, tree/woodland views, lakes and streams. What is the expected ridership?
15 points
4. Is a critical acquisition or critical rehabilitation and repair of a trail, trailhead facility or trail feature.

- 10 points
5. Is significantly linked to one or more of the four Pillars in the Legacy Plan.
20 points (up to 5 points per Pillar)
 6. Has a financial match. A higher match will receive greater point awards.

0 – 4%	match = 0 points	
5 – 9%	match = 3 points	
10 – 14%	match = 6 points	
15 – 19%	match = 9 points	
20 – 24%	match = 12 points	
25% and up	match = 15 points	Maximum of 15 points
 7. Includes a fully detailed and reasonable budget, scope, implementation timeline, design, and sustainability plan.
10 points

Each item is a maximum of points and may be less depending upon the quality of the application. Top score is 100 points

Connecting People to the Outdoors Scoring Criteria

Each project funding application for Connecting People to the Outdoors qualified programming and accessibility projects will be evaluated and scored based on the following criteria. Be sure to address the specific Connecting People to the Outdoors Application Guidance.

1. Supports the programming and marketing components in the applicants Master Plan.
10 points
2. Fills a gap and provides a proven outdoor recreation benefit of regional significance.
10 points
3. Provides significant and locally sustainable recruitment, retention or reactivation of outdoor recreation participation.
25 points
4. Provides access for underserved populations to quality natural and cultural resources within the district.
10 points
5. Is significantly linked to the Connecting People to the Outdoors Pillar objectives as well as additional Pillars in the Legacy Plan.
15 points
6. Has a financial match. A higher match will receive greater point awards.

0 – 4%	match = 0 points	
5 – 9%	match = 3 points	
10 – 14%	match = 6 points	
15 – 19%	match = 9 points	
20 – 24%	match = 12 points	
25% and up	match = 15 points	Maximum of 15 points
7. Includes a fully detailed and reasonable budget, scope, implementation timeline, design, and sustainability plan.
15 points

Each item is a maximum of points and may be less depending upon the quality of the application. Top score is 100 points

Project Eligibility Guidelines

The following list of eligible and ineligible project components should guide all project requests. Only eligible components can apply for funding or be included as a match for the project budget. List is subject to change at any time. Contact staff if clarification on any component is needed.

Special Eligibility Notes

- All infrastructure or physical development projects must have a minimum \$25,000 grant request. CPO or Environmental Review projects may be less.
- Archeological Survey, Phase I and II Environmental or other SHPO or state Review, and Tribal Historic Preservation Office collaboration projects are now eligible as a stand-alone, pre-development Environmental Project application. A minimum 20% match is required, with a maximum grant request of \$50,000. All other contract restrictions apply. Contact Commission staff for details.
- Contingency funds are now allowable in project budgets up to 10% of development costs. The contingency must be included in the local match and will not be funded by Legacy. If the proposed project does not use the contingency, the funds must still be spent under the grant contract as mutually agreed to by the applicant and GMRPTC.

Eligible Park Funding Projects

Including, but not limited to:

- Acquisition of land for future development of recreation facilities, protection/preservation of high value land for public use, critical park inholding
- Rehabilitation and redevelopment of existing facilities
- Development of outdoor recreation facilities – except those noted below as ineligible
- Accessibility enhancement
- Connect People to the Outdoors programming, accessibility upgrades, signage and equipment

Eligible Recreation Facilities

Including, but not limited to:

- Water access sites
- Campgrounds and sewer to campsites within park boundaries
- Fishing piers and shore fishing areas
- Nature study, visitor center and observations areas
- Picnic shelters
- Nature scape and/or traditional playgrounds
- Swimming beaches, natural surfaced swimming ponds and splash parks with a regional setting
- Trails within park boundaries
- Shooting ranges

Eligible Recreation Support Facilities

These facilities are eligible for funding as a part of a grant application that includes at least one facility from the above list. Including, but not limited to:

- Changing rooms, restrooms, shower buildings and warming houses
- Fencing, lighting, interpretive signage both cultural and natural, and directional signage, not including off-site directional signs on roadways
- Landscaping within project construction zones
- Park roads and parking areas, but this may not exceed 40% of the total project cost
- Permanent benches, seats, drinking fountains, grills and picnic tables
- Trash receptacles and fire pits
- Walkways

Eligible Trail Funding Projects

Including, but not limited to:

- Land acquisition *refer to acquisition requirements
- Trail development and connections
- Trailhead improvements
- Accessibility enhancement
- Motorized trail development
- Construction of trails on public or private lands where a minimum of a 20-year easement must be obtained
- Restoration of existing trail facilities; resurfacing and trail repair or trailhead restoration
- Construction or restoration of trail bridges
- Landscaping within trail construction zones

Eligible Park and Trail Reimbursement Expenses

Including, but not limited to:

- Materials and supplies
- Design, engineering and construction management costs, provided they do not exceed 20% of the total cost of the trail project or 10% of the cost of the park project
- Construction labor
- Equipment costs related to rental, not purchase of equipment for construction
- Land acquisition, including permanent easements and long-term lease agreements

Eligible Connecting People to the Outdoors Programming Expenses

Including, but not limited to:

- Program instructors and contractors
- Equipment rentals
- Equipment for programming use
- Program materials and supplies
- Advertising and promotion
- User transportation to and from recreation facilities
- Track wheelchairs

Ineligible Park and Trail Projects and Reimbursement Expenses

Ineligible park facilities, amenities and costs are items that may not be funded by a GMRPTC grant or included as part of a local match. Including, but not limited to:

- ❖ Construction of any facility on land not owned. Construction of a trail not having a minimum 20-year lease agreement
- ❖ Construction of ballfields, rinks, pools, courts or soccer fields
- ❖ Construction projects within state parks, state recreation areas and state trails
- ❖ Administration expenses – examples include:
 - Appraisals
 - Closing Costs
 - Boundary Surveys
 - Wetland surveys and wetland credits
- ❖ Design and engineering expense in excess of 10% for park projects and 20% for trail projects
- ❖ Rental facilities (including campsites, camper cabins, boat slips/moorings, etc.) may be no more than 20% seasonal rental. If the facility exceeds 20% overall, no new Legacy-funded amenities of that type may be seasonal.
- ❖ Concession only buildings

- ❖ Decorative fountains, statues and plaques
- ❖ Facilities not available for public use
- ❖ Dredging, water impoundments and dams
- ❖ Golf courses
- ❖ Indoor recreational facilities
- ❖ Acquisition of land already in public ownership
- ❖ Legal fees
- ❖ Non-permanent skate park ramps and equipment
- ❖ Press boxes
- ❖ Memberships
- ❖ Overhead
- ❖ Insurance
- ❖ Fund raising
- ❖ Volunteer or donated labor
- ❖ Bad debt or interest
- ❖ Lobbyists or political contributions
- ❖ Condemnation costs
- ❖ Wages and expenses of grant recipient's employees
- ❖ Entertainment or gifts
- ❖ Advertising expenses for bids and project management
- ❖ Office rental costs and overhead
- ❖ Any expenditure that occurs outside the dates of the grant contract
- ❖ Maintenance equipment
- ❖ Non-permanent infrastructure (i.e. portable snow guns)
- ❖ Improvements to highways or roadways, including but not limited to lighting, striping on street/road routing and shoulder work
- ❖ Invasive species removal, woodland management, or prairie restoration unless incidental to another project component

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