

2026 Funding Application Guidelines



Section I

Introduction

The following document outlines the Commission's funding goals/considerations, application requirements, criteria, and eligible expense lists. Only facilities designated as Regionally Significant by the Commission are eligible for funding. Applications must be completed online in the [Data Management System Portal](#). Applicants are encouraged to contact the System Plan Coordinator at coordinator@gmrptcommission.org prior to application.

APPLICATION NOTES FOR 2026: Applicants should review this entire packet for changes, including:

- **The requirement that local matches must be secured at time of application has been clarified.**
- **Match requirements for Environmental/Archeological grants have been removed but are still encouraged.**
- **Non-permanent skateboard ramps and equipment are now allowed.**

Grant Opportunity Summaries

The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission offers grant opportunities to further its goals under the Legacy Amendment. The following brief descriptions outline each grant opportunity. More complete descriptions and application guidance are provided in Section II. Only facilities designated as Regionally Significant by the GMRPTC with a current and qualified Master Plan as determined by the Commission are eligible for funding.

1. Legacy Development and Acquisition Grants

This is the primary, Legacy Amendment funded, grant opportunity administered by the GMRPTC. Examples include major infrastructure development for day use areas or buildings, trail construction or re-construction, land or easement acquisition, campgrounds, nature trails in parks, etc. There is a minimum grant request of \$25,000. Applications open at the beginning of April and close at the end of July. For 2026 (Fiscal Year 2028), the anticipated funding available equals approximately \$12,500,000. A match is not required but is encouraged.

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2. Connect People and the Outdoors (CPO) Grants

This is another major funding category for Legacy Amendment grants through the GMRPTC. Examples include non-infrastructure projects such as new, innovative outdoor recreation programs, recreation equipment, or projects that improve access to underserved communities. There is a minimum grant request of \$25,000. Applications open at the beginning of April and close at the end of July, unless a special secondary application period is designated by the Commission. For 2026 (Fiscal Year 2028), the anticipated funding available is within the approximately \$12,500,000 available for Greater Minnesota Legacy. A match is not required but is encouraged.

3. Environmental/Archeological Grants

This grant category is earmarked for environmental/archeological review projects, prior to the application and funding for Legacy Development and Acquisition grants. Examples include EAW or Phase I EIS projects, archeological studies, or other work related to pre-project development (not including design work). Funding amounts will be determined by the Commission annually, typically \$100,000-250,000. The application deadline is a rolling basis; there is no set deadline for application. Grant awards have a cap of \$50,000 with no required match, although a match is encouraged.

4. Access and Inclusion Grants

This grant category is designed to improve accessibility and inclusivity for the widest ranges of users of all abilities and ages. Inclusion provides equal access to recreation opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or intellectual disabilities. A grant to improve access helps remove the physical barriers to gain access to a facility through universal access design and correcting barriers in existing buildings. Funding amounts will be determined by the Commission annually, typically \$100,000-250,000. The application deadline is a rolling basis; there is no set deadline for applications. Grant awards have a cap of \$100,000 with no required match, although a match is encouraged.

5. Emerging Opportunity Grants

From time to time, the Commission may have unutilized or unawarded funds leftover from other grant categories. In such cases, the Commission may announce a secondary Greater Minnesota Legacy grant application cycle, typically with near-immediate availability of funds. Funding application timelines, funding and award amounts, and project focus will be announced as a part of the opportunity.

Section II

Application Guidance

The following guidance articulates the goals for each Greater Minnesota Legacy grant program. Applicants should be sure to address each item in the program specific guidance in their online application. All eligible and ineligible items listed in Section V of this guidance apply to all grant categories, unless specifically excluded. Additional details for the applications, including mapping, design, implementation, and reporting requirements can be found in the Funding Application Portal Instructions or appropriate policy documents.

Legacy Development and Acquisition Grants

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 and the Outdoors; Acquire Land, Create Opportunities; Take Care of What We Have; and 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 and viability of preliminary design, implementation plan, budget, and sustainability plan. Inclusivity is a mandatory component of all Legacy funded projects and project areas, or explained if an exception exists.
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.

Connect People and the Outdoors Grants

*Connect People and the Outdoors (CPO) funding is available to cities, counties, and tribal governments for **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 are subject to the ongoing management/reporting, data collection and project reviews as defined in policy.

Environmental/Archeological Grants

This grant category is earmarked for environmental/archeological review projects, prior to application and funding for Legacy Development grants. Development projects already funded by Greater Minnesota Legacy are not eligible for this grant. Applicants should address the following in their Environmental/Archeological application:

1. The proposed review work has clearly defined goals for the review project, including scope of survey or field work, specific regulatory documentation, and other requirements of DNR and SHPO pre-contract deliverables.
2. Is tied to a project that completes a regionally substantial component of the Master Plan.
3. Includes appropriate scoping developed with the assistance of state-approved archeologists, environmental consultants and/or SHPO.
4. Considers alternative development project sites or designs, should the preliminary proposed site or design encounter unanticipated restrictions or impacts. Site maps should meet application standards and include archeological and architectural data from the SHPO system.

Review the [GMRPTC Policy for Environmental/Archeological Review Funding](#) in the application toolbox for more information.

Accessibility Grants

This grant category is earmarked for accessibility improvement projects that meet or exceed the minimum requirements in the 2010 ADA Standard for Accessible Design and are outside the scope of traditional Legacy Development projects. Projects that solve immediate barriers to access are the intended scope of this category. Applicants should address the following in their Accessibility application:

1. The proposed work meets, and ideally exceeds, the minimum accessibility requirements in the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design.
2. Is tied to a feature or group of features that completes a regionally substantial component of the Master Plan.
3. Priority consideration will be given for projects that are tied to a professional accessibility audit.
4. Are designed with input from local individuals or groups including persons with and without disabilities and persons of all ages. Projects should, where appropriate, include signage and other information about the improvements designed to meet the needs of users of all abilities.

Emerging Opportunity Grants

From time to time, the Commission may have unutilized or unawarded funds leftover from other grant categories. In such cases, the Commission may announce a secondary Greater Minnesota Legacy grant application cycle, typically with nearly immediate availability of funds. Emerging Opportunity grants typically have a stated focus or objective designed to further Legacy in Greater Minnesota. Applicants should address the following, as well as any additional published guidance, in their Emerging Opportunity application.

1. The proposed project meets the stated purpose of the grant opportunity published by the GMRPTC.
2. The project is tied to a specific regionally significant component or outcome of the Master Plan.
3. The application meets all guidelines and components for the relevant associated grant category, i.e. it meets all of the CPO or Legacy Development and Acquisition grant application guidelines and requirements, if required.
4. Typically, Emerging Opportunity grants are made available to take advantage of special opportunities, address specific challenges or encourage unique prototype projects outside the normal scope of projects. If that is the case, the applicant should be very clear as to the purpose and expected outcomes of the project.

Section III

How to Apply

All GMRPTC applications must be completed and submitted using the Data Management System (DMS) online application portal. Select the grant program that best fits your project needs, then complete the application requirements using the guidance for your chosen program in the online

portal. A printable version of the application contents, video tutorials, and other relevant information is available in the online [application toolbox](#). Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Commission staff for guidance early in the application process. All submitted applications will require a visit by Commission staff, either in-person for Development projects or virtual for CPO or Environmental projects.

Application Requirements

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

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.

- I. Explain how the project fulfills any relevant Pillars from the Legacy Plan. See application Instructions for further definition.
 - a. Connect People and the Outdoors
 - b. Acquire Land, Create Opportunities
 - c. Take Care of What We Have
 - d. Coordinate Among Partners

- II. The project budget and implementation must detail:
 - a. The full cost of the project and budget line items
 - b. Grant request funds
 - c. Secured 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
 - i. Project Lead

- III. 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.
- ✓ Local match confirmation from each project partner. Match must be secured, non-state funds that will be spent on the project only after GMRPTC grant agreement is finalized. Unsecured fundraising goals and campaigns do not qualify.

- ✓ 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 spreadsheet, using the template provided in the online application, in .xls or .csv format.
- ✓ 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.

Minimum Accessibility Requirements

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 supporting elements and spaces must be made accessible if newly constructed or altered even if they are not part of this proposal. Supporting elements and spaces can include accessible car and van parking, accessible toilet and bathing facilities, drinking fountains and at least one accessible route connecting all elements, spaces and facilities. This program requires all exterior site accessible routes to be a minimum of 5 feet wide.

- Minimum design requirements and technical assistance available through the provided links.
- 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, 2010 (For local and state government facilities covered by Title II including recreation facilities such as playgrounds, recreational boating facilities, fishing piers and platforms).
- ADA technical guides on the minimum requirements.
- The Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards (ABAAS) for Outdoor Developed Areas, 2015, (re minimum requirements for federal sites and serve as a best practice for state and local government facilities such as campgrounds, picnic areas, pedestrian trails, beach access routes, and viewing areas).
- ABA technical assistance guide for outdoor developed areas.
- ADA and ABA Accessibility Guidelines for the Public Right of Way address the minimum requirements for shared use paths. Those routes are intended for bicycles and pedestrians.
- Technical assistance is available from the U.S. Access Board at 202-272-0800 or ta@access-board.gov.
- Technical assistance is available from the Department of Justice at 800-514-0301 or www.ada.gov.

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

Depending on the project, the following may be required for parks and trails development projects. Find more information on each item in the Grants Management section of the Application Toolbox, document [DNR Pre-Contract Checklist](#).

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:

- ✓ Provide required documents for the pre-award risk assessment.
- ✓ Pre-review of the project from the Minnesota State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO).
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Consultation with relevant Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPO) to assess cultural resources on site is highly recommended.
- ✓ 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 now owned by applicant.
- ✓ Campground Plan approval through Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).

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

- ✓ Applicant has confirmed acceptance of the [GMRPTC Grant Awardee Obligations](#).
- ✓ 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

Section IV

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, Access/Inclusion or Environmental Archeological projects may be less.
- Accessibility improvement projects are now available as a stand-alone grant application. See Funding Application Guidelines or contact Commission staff for details on all Commission grant programs.
- Contingency funds are 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 Items

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:

- Construction expenses; the agency Highway or Engineering Department may invoice for these costs for services provided
- Design, engineering and construction management costs, provided they do not exceed 20% of the construction cost of the trail project or 10% of the construction cost of the park project; the agency Highway or Engineering Department may invoice for these costs for services provided.
- 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 and Accessibility 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 and other powered or unpowered mobility devices
- Secure storage for programming and accessibility equipment
- Permanent accessibility information signage and devices

Ineligible Items

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 25-year lease agreement
- ❖ Construction of ballfields, rinks, swimming 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
- ❖ 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
- ❖ 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 non-park 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

Section V

Scoring Criteria

Each application will be evaluated and scored based on the following criteria. Parks, Trails and Connect People and the Outdoors (CPO) Programming applications will be evaluated based on their respective criteria and guidance. Other grant categories will be scored based on the most appropriate criteria in the chart. For projects that contain components of more than one category, the most relevant category will be selected for evaluation of specific project components.

1. (Parks and Trails): Completes a regionally substantial component of the applicants Master Plan. (CPO) Supports the programming and marketing components in the applicant’s Master Plan.		
Parks: 10 points	Trails: 10 points	CPO: 10 points
2. (Parks and CPO) Fills a gap and provides an outdoor recreation benefit of regional significance. (Trails) 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.		
Parks: 10 points	Trails: 10 points	CPO: 10 points
3. (Parks) Provides access to quality natural and cultural resources within the District. (Trails add’l) 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? (CPO) Provides significant and locally sustainable recruitment, retention or reactivation of outdoor recreation participation.		
Parks: 10 points	Trails: 15 points	CPO: 25 points
4. Is a critical acquisition or critical rehabilitation and repair of a park facility or feature, trail, trailhead facility or trail feature. (CPO) Provides access for underserved populations to quality natural and cultural resources within the district.		
Parks: 15 points	Trails: 10 points	CPO: 10 points
5. Is significantly linked to one or more of the four Pillars in the Legacy Plan. (CPO) Is significantly linked to the Connecting People to the Outdoors Pillar objectives as well as additional Pillars in the Legacy Plan.		
Parks: 20 points	Trails: 20 points	CPO: 15 points
6. Has a secured 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.		
Parks: 20 points	Trails: 20 points	CPO: 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		