

Recreational Trails Grant Application Process

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated April 2017

- **Can I afford to skip over the Application Information and Instruction Manual, and NOT attend trainings? (I'll just figure it out as I go along, I'm good at this kind of thing.)** **No.** Well, of course, you *can* do this, but your chances of putting together a successful application package decrease significantly. This is a complicated and competitive program; we recommend you use all the resources you have available to you to submit a successful package. If you have any questions, please visit <http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/grants/trails.htm> and contact the Trails Program staff.
- **What is a public project?** All projects using federal grant funds must have public benefit, be accessible, open and available to the general public, or targeted to a broad segment of the general public. Federal grant funds should not be used for projects that have such limited capacity that only a few paying (or potentially paying) guests have access to the product of the project. The portions of a project using federal grant funds must be open for general public use or viewing at all times and when visitors are likely.
- **Do I have to fill out an Environmental Review Checklist?** **Yes.** Every applicant must fill out an ERC unless they have a **“categorical exclusion” (see question below)**. This shows the reviewer that the applicant has gone through the process of thinking about the environmental impacts of their proposed project and has contacted all of the necessary agencies and acquired all necessary permits. Some answers on the ERC may be “not applicable” or “no” – this is OK.
- **What is a “categorical exclusion” and how do I know if my project qualifies?** Under “Grant Forms” <http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/grants/trails.htm> on the Trails Program web page, refer to the [CFR 771.117](#), [2 CFR 200](#), and the [Programmatic Agreement](#). If your project qualifies under Stipulation 1 of the Programmatic Agreement **ONLY**, you have a **“categorical exclusion”** and will not need an ERC. If your project qualifies under Stipulations 2 or 3 of the Programmatic Agreement, you must have a completed [ERC](#) to receive grant money. **Do not assume you have a categorical exclusion** before you read the Programmatic Agreement and talk with Trails Program staff. Having to do an ERC after the application deadline may cause delays or disqualify your application.
- **Can I just give a “ballpark” estimate about my project’s schedule? I’m not sure how it’s going to work out.** **No.** The project’s components must be broken down into Tasks or Milestones and numbers of weeks for each, all leading up to a hard-completion date. This date will be on the final federal approval and after that date nothing more may be charged to the project. See the Application Instructions for details and ask Trails Program staff if you have additional questions.
- **Do I need new letters of support if I got them last year?** **Yes.** The circumstances or the stakeholders surrounding your project may have changed and those that supported last year may not support this year. You may have your supporters simply email an updated voice of support that can be attached to last year’s letter.
- **Can I just turn in last year’s application if I change the dates?** **No.** Please use the [new and updated application form](#) from the website available on or after July 15 of the year in which you are applying for funds. We will try to update and improve the application annually.
- **Must I have all my permits and authorizations final and included with my application by the October 15 deadline?** **1.** All land use authorizations or letters of non-objection for land use must be included with the application. If your project doesn’t have permission from the land owner, it cannot move forward.
2. All agency documents such as an Office of History and Archaeology inspection, a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), or Fish Habitat Permit do not necessarily have to be finalized. These permits can cost money or take months to obtain and, 1. If your project doesn’t get approved for funding you will not need, and 2. You must only have them in hand before you break ground for the project.
- **If I include more match than required, does it reflect favorably on my application?** **No,** you will not receive a higher score for having more match than is required. Having more match could cause the federal share to decrease if the Federal Highways Administration determines there is less need based on more than the 10% match requirement. (the amount of donations or volunteers you secure on your own is your business as long as you document in your budget the minimum amount required in the application.)
- **Can my project be mainly for surveying, planning, research, and assessments?** **No.** Recreational Trails Grants are intended to help initiate shovel-ready projects with tangible, on-the-ground results; i.e. a bridge across a creek on a ski trail, a new hiking trail, a bike pump park, motor-cross track improvements, etc.
- **Can my project be for routine maintenance?** **No.** This grant is intended for project initiation, trail or trail facility development, repair or improvement.

- **Will any costs that I incur before the grant agreement is signed be allowable reimbursements?** **No.** See Application Instructions for one exception.
- **Can I just guess at how much it will cost to contract out a service?** **No.** Please contact contractors and collect their professional estimates or bids. Include those with your package.
- **Can I leave the explanation part of the budget sheet blank if I don't know the information?** **Please avoid this.** It will be returned to you and you will need to clearly justify all labor, materials, services, and administrative charges with explanations of hourly /unit/other costs. (Example: If you enter *\$22,000 labor* as a line item with no or little explanation you are guaranteed to have your application returned.) Please see the Application Information and Instruction Manual for further detail.
- **Once the grant agreement is signed, how long does it take for me to get my money?** The Recreational Trails Program is a reimbursable grant. You are expected to buy or pay upfront for services and materials and then submit your receipts with a reimbursement form for payment. There are no advances.
- **(NEW) How do you figure the match percentage?** (NEW match ratio for all applicants is 90/10) \$50,000 requested in grant funds (federal share) will have a total project cost of \$55,556 ($\$50,000/90\% = \$55,556$). To determine the match requirement of 10%, $\$50,000 / 90\% = \$55,556 * 10\% = \$5,556$. Therefore, this project's total project cost = \$55,556, and the match requirement = \$5,556, with grant funds providing \$50,000 of the project.
- **(NEW) How long do I have to complete my project?** Grant agreements may be good for up to two years, **however** you must turn in a reimbursement request within the first 8 months after FHWA approval, **AND** a minimum of twice a year, or risk federal de-obligation of your project. Please plan accordingly and see Application Instruction and Information Manual for more information.
- **How much money is available for one project?** Currently \$50,000 is the maximum award for non-motorized projects and \$100,000 for motorized projects. A motorized project is one where the trail is predominately for motorized recreation. This is not for motorized equipment to be used on a non-motorized trail.
- **Can I have more than one grant open at the same time?** You may have more than one grant open for different projects, and you may have one grant project contain more than one phase, but each phase must be completed before the next one can begin. If you have specific questions, please ask Trails Program staff.
- **Is it useful if I JUST put "RTP grant" in the email subject line when communicating about my project?** **Not really.** Please include the entire name of your project (appropriately abbreviated) in the subject line of every email about your project. We have up to RTP 100 grants open at any one time and this helps us to keep track of each specific grant and backup documentation. If you label your email "RTP grant" it is not specific enough. Please see Application Information and Instruction Manual for more detail.
- **How are awarded projects selected?** Applications submitted on time are initially reviewed by the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, then forwarded to an advisory board (ORTAB) for scoring and recommendation. Once the scores and recommendations are received, the State Parks Director's office selects the grants to be awarded.
- **May I build a trail project on private land?** The public must be assured legal access to trails and trail related facilities developed or maintained with grant funds. If any portion of a trail project is on private land, the applicant must obtain documented permission from the landowner for public access for a minimum of 5 years. Projects on public land must have documented approval from the land manager and access assured for at least 10 years. The grant applicant must obtain these assurances prior to submitting an application. If the project is for winter access or trail grooming only, public access need only be assured for the life of the grant. Applications missing landowner permission to access will be considered incomplete and ineligible.
- **What is the current value of volunteer labor?** For 2016 it was \$27.51 / hr. This will change this summer (2017) and we will update this publication. Until the new amount is released, use this figure.
- **Are there applicant performance standards?** Yes. Please see Application Instruction and Information Manual for more detail.
- **Will my project have to comply with the Buy America provision?** Yes, if the project uses an item containing steel valued at \$2,500 or more. Think: bridges, culverts, machinery, etc. Please see Application Instruction and Information Manual for more detail.
- **I think my project idea might qualify under the Safety, Signing, and Education apportionment. How do I know?** Development and dissemination of publications and operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection related to the use of recreational trails, including supporting non-law enforcement trail safety and trail use monitoring patrol programs, and providing trail-related training (limited to 5 percent of a State's apportionment). These projects must offer training or materials either free to the general public, or at a very minimal cost. All reimbursable expenses must be allocated to educational materials. Also see definition of "public project", and other detail in the Application Instruction and Information Manual.