Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Mini Grant Program

FY27 Request for Proposals

Chesapeake Conservation & Climate Corps

Chesapeake Bay Trust | 108 Severn Avenue, Annapolis, MD 21403
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At A Glance

The Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Mini Grant Program is designed to fund projects and programs managed by Corps Members that improve and protect the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers through environmental restoration, environmental education, and outreach and community engagement activities.

Eligible Applicants:

This program funds projects led by 2026-2027 Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Members.

Eligible Project Locations:

Projects will be located throughout the state of Maryland.

Deadline:

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until Friday March 26th, 2027, at 4:00 PM EST.

Request Amounts:

Requests up to $1,250.

Submit Your Application:

Follow the instructions online at https://chesapeakebaytrust.us

Contact:

Sydney Tolliver, Program Officer,
410-974-2941 ext. 137,
stolliver@cbtrust.org

Introduction and Program Goals

Through the Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Mini Grant Program, the Trust seeks to increase ecological uplift and community health in areas served by the Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Members (Corps Members) during their year of service at their respective Host Organizations. This Program was established to provide accessible funds to Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Host Organizations or relevant partner organizations, so Corps member can lead projects that:

- Educate students and community members about the Chesapeake Bay and their local environment.
- Engage students and community members in restoration and protection projects and programs that benefit their local environment.
- Accomplish conservation and restoration projects that will result in improvements in the health of a local natural resource.
- Increase the impact and/or efficacy of the Host Organization where a Corps Member is placed for the year.
- Provide grant writing and project management experience for Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Members.

The Trust recognizes that application processes can be complicated and time-consuming; the Trust continues to work to simplify our application processes where possible. New applicants, new organizations, small organizations, or any group that is experiencing capacity challenges or other barriers to applying, is eligible to receive guidance on the application process. Please contact the Program Manager, Sydney Tolliver, for assistance.
Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Trust staff to discuss applications *at least* two weeks prior to the deadline. The Trust cannot guarantee availability of site visits or project development assistance within two weeks of the deadline.

About the Trust

The Chesapeake Bay Trust (The Trust) is a nonprofit, grant making organization dedicated to improving the bay's streams, rivers, forests, parks, and other natural resources of our local systems, from the Chesapeake to the Coastal Bays to the Youghiogheny River. The Trust, supported in large part by Maryland's Chesapeake Bay License Plate and partnerships with other regional funders, engages and empowers diverse groups to take action that enrich natural resources and local communities of the Chesapeake Bay region. Since 1985, the Trust has awarded over $190 million in grants to municipalities, nonprofit organizations, schools, and public agencies throughout the Chesapeake Watershed.

The Trust has a mission to empower all people to participate in the restoration and protection of our region's natural resources through its award-making. As a result, the Trust strongly encourages applications directly from or that engage communities underrepresented in the environmental space. For more about the Trust's commitment to engage underrepresented groups, see our strategic plan at www.cbtrust.org/strategic-plan and https://cbtrust.org/diversity-inclusion/.

Eligible Projects

This program funds a wide range of activities and is intended to support a Corps Member's Capstone Project or other project in their work plan. The following is a list of example projects that can be supported through the Corps Mini Grant Program:

- Stream or watershed clean ups
- Storm drain stenciling
- Workshops or events promoting restoration, energy, agricultural, and forestry best practices
- Environmental education programs
- Water quality monitoring projects
- Materials promoting environmental awareness, action, or behavior change
- Installation of rain gardens, rain barrels, streamside forest buffers, native meadows, or pollinator gardens
- Stormwater enhancements
- Schoolyard habitat, nature play spaces, and/or outdoor classroom installations
- Invasive removal projects
- Green Schools projects
- Energy efficiency projects, including audits and energy conservation implementation
- Sustainable agriculture or agricultural stewardship projects
- Community outreach campaigns (door-to-door, social media, newsletters, messaging during community events/fairs/festivals)
- GIS projects
- Research projects investigating a specific protocol, methodology, equipment, or hypothesis.

This is not an exhaustive list. If you have a project idea that is not listed above but meets the goals of the Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Mini Grant Program, please contact Sydney Tolliver (410-974-2941 x 137 or stolliver@cbtrust.org) to discuss your idea before applying.

Eligible Applicants

The Trust welcomes requests from the following organizations:

- Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Host Organizations
- Relevant Partner Organizations*

* If the Corps Host Organization is unable to be the lead applicant, please contact Sydney Tolliver to discuss the appropriate organization to apply through.

Funding Availability & Timeline

Availability: For the FY27 Corps Mini Grant Program, the Trust anticipates funding availability to support requests up to $1,250.

Project Timeline: Projects must be completed within the Corps Member's year of service OR prior to the Corps Member's departure from the program.

Deadline

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis beginning at the start of the Corps Program year until the deadline on March 26, 2027. The Trust recommends that all proposals are submitted **at least eight weeks prior** to the start of the proposed project.

Applicants must submit applications in the Chesapeake Bay Trust Online System by 4:00 PM EST on Friday, March 26, 2027. Late applications will not be accepted, and the online funding opportunity will close automatically and promptly at 4 PM EST. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit at least a few days prior to the deadline given potential for high website traffic on the due date. The Trust cannot guarantee availability of technical assistance for our online system on the deadline date. The Trust must receive all proposals at least eight weeks prior to the start of the proposed project. The Trust cannot make exceptions to this policy nor provide reimbursement funding for already completed projects.

Online Application Submission Instructions

The Trust has new online award management system, hosted by SmartSimple! The Trust uses this online system for the application process, and if awarded, project management. **Please login to SmartSimple to access your awards and applications.**

If you have applied to the Trust in the past, your profile and award data have been migrated to our new system. You can access the new system by entering the same email you used in our former system (Blackbaud), click 'forgot password', and follow the prompts to create a new password. If you are a new applicant, click the blue "Register" button on the landing page and follow the instructions.

You can access SmartSimple in two ways:

1. Go to our website: http://www.cbtrust.org/login and clicking the link "Log In to the Bay Trust Awards Portal", **or**
2. The Chesapeake Bay Trust's SmartSimple page: https://chesapeakebaytrust.us
    a. Please use your existing username and password, the same used to access your other Corps Program requirements
        i. If you have forgotten either of these use the 'forgot password' feature

See https://cbtrust.org/login for help setting up your account and finding funding opportunities

By submitting an application to this program, applicants acknowledge that: 1) they are compliant with federal employment and non-discrimination laws and 2) they have not been debarred, convicted, charged or had a civil judgment rendered against them for fraud or related offense by any government agency (federal, state or local) or been terminated for cause or default by any government agency (federal, state, or local). In addition, all final products will be provided to the funding partners for use and distribution at the sole discretion of the funding partners.

Online Application Form

You will be asked to provide the following information on the online application form. Some items are required in order to submit your application. Refer to the online application for details.

- **Eligibility Quiz (Required):** This three-question quiz is meant to assist you in determining if your project meets the requirements of this award program and that your staff/organizational structure best supports a successful application.

- **Applicant Information Tab (Required):** Provide the organization's name, mailing address, phone number, organization type, mission, EIN number, and SAM UEI number. Provide the Executive Officer and Project Leader's name, title, address, phone, and email address.

    - Both an Executive Officer and a Project Leader, two separate individuals, must be identified for all applications.

    - The Executive Officer and Project Leader must both be able to make decisions on behalf of the organization either as a board member, an employee, or other approved position recognized by the organization but not a contractor of the application.

    - To avoid conflict of interest issues, individuals associated with for-profit entities to be engaged in the project cannot serve in either role.

- **Project Information Tab (Required):** Provide a project title; project abstract; project start and end dates; the watershed, county, and legislative district in which the project is located; and the latitude and longitude coordinates of the project location.

- **Timeline Tab (Required):** Provide a project timeline that includes major tasks and their associated start and end dates.

- **Deliverables Tab (Required):** Provide estimated metrics for your proposed project such as project participants and outreach and restoration outcomes.

- **Volunteers Tab (Optional):** Provide a description of volunteer activities, the number of volunteers, and total number of volunteer hours.

- **Project Partnerships (Optional):** Provide a list of project partner organizations or contractors, individuals, their areas of expertise, and their role(s) in your project.
    - o Applicants are encouraged to upload a Letter of Commitment for the project from each partner describing in detail the partner's role or contribution to the project. Applications including strong Letter(s) of Commitment often receive higher scores. If not submitted with the application, Letter(s) of Commitment may be required prior to the release of any awarded funding. To better understand the Trust's definition of and policy on Letter(s) of Commitment, visit our Forms and Policies webpage: https://cbtrust.org/grants/applicant-resources-formspolicies/.

Narrative Questions & Supporting Documents Tab (Required)**:** You will download the "Narrative Questions" document and answer these questions to tell us about your project. The narrative questions template can be found at: https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/Corps-Mini-Grant-Narrative-Questions-FY27.docx

Upload a Microsoft Word or PDF file that contains your answers to the narrative questions and upload additional supporting documents if needed/required.

- **Budget Tab:** You will be asked to enter items into the various budget categories. Totals will be automatically calculated on the page. Additional guidance on the budget can be found at https://cbtrust.org/login. You will be asked to provide a descriptive budget narrative to justify and explain costs. If the success of the work is contingent upon award of other funds, make this clear in your budget justification.

- **Terms and Conditions Tab:** Agree to the specified terms and conditions for the program for which you are applying.

Watch our video on how to apply and how to submit an application using our online system at https://cbtrust.org/grants/.

Definitions

The Executive Officer is the individual that oversees the organization (e.g., Executive Director, Chief Executive Officer, Mayor, President or Vice President, Principal (for schools), etc.) and has the authority to sign/execute award agreements on behalf of the organization. The Executive Officer information is tied directly to all the organization's applications and should not vary from application to application. If the Executive Officer could be listed as the Project Leader in a future proposal, we recommend listing a Board Member or other higher-ranking position of the organization as the Executive Officer in order to reduce the variation in the Executive Officer across applications.

The Project Leader will be responsible for all project coordination and correspondence with the Trust for the duration of the project and therefore, the email address used to submit the application via the online system must be that of the Project Leader. If at any time the Project Leader cannot continue in the position, the organization must contact the Trust and assign a new qualified Project Leader.

- **Demographics Tab (optional):** Provide voluntary demographic information. Provide information about your organization's current diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) efforts and future goals. Additionally, provide voluntary feedback on the application process.

Evaluation Criteria

The following criteria will be used to by internal expert reviewers to evaluate applications under the Corps Mini Grant Program:

Most Important Criteria:

- Consistency with Request for Proposal (RFP): Is the project proposed consistent with the intent of the program? Are all required application components included for sound evaluation of the application.
- Cost Effectiveness /Budget: Is the budget appropriate and cost effective? Are the line items budgeted justified in the project narrative? In-kind and cash match is not required but will be viewed favorably.
- Likelihood of Project Success: What is the likelihood of success if this project were to move forward? Are methodologies sound and consistent with best practices?

Important Criteria:

- Demonstration Value: Will others be able to take lessons from this project, and perhaps replicate it in their own communities?
- Long-term Sustainability: Is the project designed to last for a long time or otherwise have lasting impact? Will additional resources be needed to maintain the value of the project, and if so, has that issue been addressed in the proposal?
- Partnerships and Community: Are any key partnerships required, and if so, are the selected partnerships appropriate? Are any partners missing that should have been engaged? Is the community to be served involved appropriately in the project, i.e., was community buy-in obtained, were community needs and desires assessed, and are there individual(s) in the community committed to serving as community leads? If the lead applicant is not a member of the community served by the grant (e.g., an external nonprofit doing work on land owned by another entity, such as a house of worship), is a transfer of "ownership" to the community built into the project and the ability of the community to carry the work forward developed?

Also to be Considered:

- General Quality of Application: What is the level of completeness and attention to detail?
- Supporting Documents: Does the application include appropriate additional attachments? For on-the-ground projects, are a site plan, site photos, a native plant list, and a maintenance plan included?

The *Criteria for Specific Project Types* is available in Appendix A. Please review the criteria if you are submitting a grant application for one of the following project types:

- Greening/Gardening Projects
- Publication, Print or Electronic Media Projects
- Workshops and Trainings

- Water Quality Monitoring

Review Process and Notifications

Review Process: All submitted applications are scored by technical experts. Reviewers score all applications based on the evaluation criteria listed in the "Evaluation Criteria" section above.

The funding partners reserve the right to fund projects and budget items that advance their missions and meet specific funding priorities and criteria.

Notifications: All applicants will receive a letter stating the Trust's decision. An application may be declined, partially awarded, or fully awarded. If awarded, the Trust will send an award agreement with award conditions and due date of final reports. The Trust will mail the full award payment to the requesting organization following: satisfaction of any award contingencies, including upload of the signed award agreement. In cases where the awardee fails to submit a final report by the due date, the Trust reserves the right to terminate the award agreement and require a refund of funds already transferred to the awardee.

> When the project is complete, awardees are required to complete final reports and submit final products and supporting materials for the project. Organizations with outstanding final, progress, or status reports will not be awarded additional grants.

Appendix A: Guidelines for Project Types

Please review the guidelines for specific project types below as you prepare a Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Mini Grant application:

Greening/Garden Projects

- All planting projects must include a plant list, site plan, project design, photo of the planting/restoration site, and a detailed maintenance plan.
- List plants that will be used in the planting/restoration project in the application. For non-edible projects, only native plants may be used. Funds may be requested for native plant species only.
- Projects can be completed on public property, property owned by non-profit organizations, community owned property, and other property with conservation easements or signed long-term protection agreements.
- For projects planned on properties other than that of the applicant and/or private property, attach a letter of commitment stating that permission has been granted by the entity owning the land on which the project will be completed. Applications that demonstrate long-term commitment to upkeep, manage, and maintain the project will receive more favorable review. Projects planned on private property must have a high demonstration value for the site to be a fit into the Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps Mini Grant Program
- Requests for invasive vegetation removal as part of site preparation for native planting projects are permitted.

Publication, Printing, and Electronic Media Projects

- Publication projects supporting the full scope of the Trust's activities are welcome. The ultimate project goal must be to help individuals take actions that can benefit the environment, community health, and rivers and streams. The message should be consistent with the mission of the requesting organization.

- Applicants must explain how the project and materials fulfill an unmet need for information that does not duplicate existing materials. Include a review of existing similar types of publications and explain what is new about your materials and associated communications campaign. Applications that do not place a project in the context of existing materials will not be considered.
- The priority audience must be clearly defined, and how the audience is expected to use the information must be articulated.
- The publication's distribution plan must be completed before the application is submitted and included with the application. This plan should include information such as:
    - Why the specific medium (web, print, other) was chosen to reach the priority audience; o The number of copies to be produced (or web hits to be generated);
    - How the product will be advertised to the target audience (for example, if a new resource will be posted on your website, explain the plan to drive the target audience to the website); and
    - Fees that may be involved (applicant is not permitted to charge for project components funded by the Trust, such as charging for a publication that Trust resources are supporting).
- Applicants proposing print media are strongly encouraged to make an electronic copy of the publication available on a public website.
- For web-distributed footage, applicants must secure all required digital distribution rights.

Workshops and Trainings

- Applicants must describe the knowledge objectives for project participants as it relates to natural resources.
- A priority audience and number of attendees must be identified in the application, as well as a recruitment strategy based on assessment of the priority audience identified.
- A list of speakers, their qualifications, and a draft agenda should be provided in the application. If unknown at the time of application, submission of these supporting documents will be a contingency of an award.
- The Trust will consider speaker fees on a case-by-case basis. Applicants should clearly identify the speaker(s) for which funds are requested and list a rate per hour for the speaker in the budget.
- The Trust encourages applicants holding workshops or trainings to evaluate audience knowledge and self-efficacy with a combination of survey or other similar tools. The grantee must share results of the evaluation with the Trust and outline next steps resulting from the workshop or training in the final report.

Water Quality Monitoring Projects

The Trust will consider monitoring projects in certain cases: (a) when data will be used to target future restoration projects; (b) when data will be used to increase public awareness of watershed issues, for example, in a "State of the Watershed" report; (c) when monitoring data will be used to help create or refine a watershed management plan; (d) when data will be used to address land use issues on a large-scale, in a way that will help local governments advance best management practices. In the latter case, letters of commitment from local governments are required. For all cases:

- Identify the purpose of the monitoring (i.e., which of the above four cases apply to your project).
- Describe who will use the data and how it will be used.
- Describe the monitoring protocol to be followed, including how sites were or will be selected for monitoring, what parameters will be measured, the methods and equipment for sampling, and the frequency of monitoring.
- Explain how the monitoring project provides new data or information not already understood. Put the project in the context of any existing state or federal monitoring programs.
- Preference will be given to monitoring projects that engage volunteers.

- We strongly recommend that water quality monitoring, Watershed Report Card, and State of the River Report projects follow water quality monitoring methodology recommendations established by the Mid Atlantic Tributary Assessment Coalition (MTAC) led by the University of Maryland. Contact the Trust for more information or to obtain a copy of the monitoring protocol document.