# Community Engagement and Restoration

# Mini Grant Program

# FY26 Request for Proposals

## Introduction

The [Chesapeake Bay Trust](https://cbtrust.org/) (Trust) ([https://cbtrust.org/](https://cbtrust.org/)) is a nonprofit, grant-making organization dedicated to improving the bays, 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 and Coastal Bays License Plate, and partnerships with other regional funders, engages and empowers diverse groups to take actions that enrich natural resources and local communities of the Chesapeake Bay region.

This grant program is a partnership between the Trust and West Virginia's Department of Environmental Protection (WV DEP).

## Program Goals and Importance of Diversity and Inclusion

Through this funding opportunity, the funding partners want to engage new applicants and organizations from diverse communities in small-scale projects that enhance communities, engage residents, and, ultimately, improve natural resources.

Among the Trust's core values are diversity and inclusion: We feel that a broad range of communities can benefit from healthy natural resources, even if their primary focus is on other issues. Human health, the economy, jobs, community livability, education and our children are all connected with a healthy environment. **As a result, we are investing in grants primarily to new applicants who have yet to frequently receive grants.** Our goals are to:

1. Provide funding to groups that have traditionally been under-engaged with environmental issues, but who have a project idea that benefits both their communities and natural resources, such as native wildlife (birds, pollinators, and other species), greenery in local parks, rural or urban forests, streams, rivers, and other natural spaces;
2. Engage residents in community-based environmental restoration; and
3. Introduce the grant process to applicants who may not be experienced in applying for grants and managing the awards.

The Trust is committed to the advancement of diversity and inclusion in its award-making and environmental work. As a result, the Trust strongly encourages applications directly from underrepresented groups, and for projects that increase awareness and participation of communities that are traditionally underrepresented, such as communities of color. For a full description of the Trust's efforts to engage under-engaged groups, see our strategic plan at [www.cbtrust.org/strategic-plan](www.cbtrust.org/strategic-plan) and [https://cbtrust.org/diversity-inclusion/](https://cbtrust.org/diversity-inclusion/).

## At A Glance

Program Summary:

This grant program is designed to engage diverse organizations in activities in Maryland and in West Virginia that both benefit communities and raise public awareness of and engagement in natural resources issues.

Deadline:

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis (all year) until funds for the year (starting July 1 and ending June 30) are exhausted. **Applications must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to the proposed start date.**

Eligible Project Locations: Maryland and the West Virginia portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed

Request Amounts: Up to $5,000

Submit Your Application: Follow the instructions online at [https://cbtrust.org/grants/community-engagement/](https://cbtrust.org/grants/community-engagement/)

Contact:

- For Maryland projects: Sadie Friesen; [sfriesen@cbtrust.org](sfriesen@cbtrust.org); (410) 974-2941 x150
- For West Virginia projects: Kayleigh Katzenberger; [kkatzenberger@cbtrust.org](kkatzenberger@cbtrust.org); (410) 974-2941 x127

## Eligible Applicants

In an effort to provide funding to diverse groups that have traditionally been under-engaged with environmental issues or are new to applying for and managing grants, this program is open to applicants that have received less than four awards (i.e., received three or fewer awards) from the Trust. *Applicants who have received four or more awards from the Trust, but are re-applying to the Trust for the first time in eight or more years are eligible to apply. Sponsorships and Chesapeake Conservation Corps awards are not counted toward the eligibility cap.* First time applicants are strongly encouraged to apply.

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We welcome requests from the following organizations:

- ♦ Nonprofits;
- ♦ Faith-based;
- ♦ Community and Homeowners Associations;
- ♦ Service, Youth, and Civic Groups; and/or
- ♦ Municipal, County, Regional, State, Federal Public Agencies.

## Eligible Project Locations and Funding Availability

**Eligible Project Locations:** All communities in Maryland and in the Chesapeake Bay watershed portion of West Virginia are eligible. To determine if a project site is eligible, see our online map here: https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/WAGP-Project-Eligiblity-Map_8.23.23.pdf.

The Trust recognizes that application processes can be complicated and time-consuming. We continue to simplify our application processes where possible. If you are experiencing any challenges or barriers to applying, please contact the Program Managers, Sadie Friesen; sfriesen@cbtrust.org; (410) 974-2941 x150 for Maryland projects and Kayleigh Katzenberger; kkatzenberger@cbtrust.org; (410) 974-2941 x127 for West Virginia Projects, for assistance.

**Want a mentor to help you with this application?** We offer mentors to help all eligible applicants. Contact the Trust and we will connect you with mentor who will assist you with the application process.

See a description of the mentorship opportunity, a list mentors, and a description of how the mentor can help you with this application at https://cbtrust.org/grants/community-engagement/mentorship-program/.
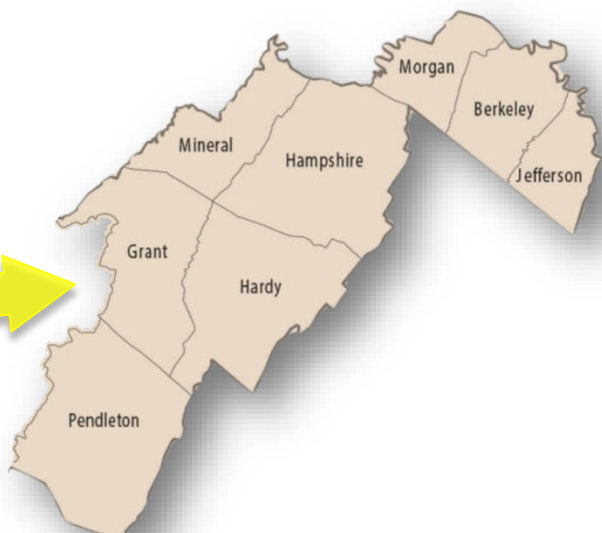
**Funding Availability:** The funding partners anticipate funding levels this year (July 1 to June 30) at:

- Approximately $180,000 available for Maryland projects
- Approximately $30,000 available for West Virginia projects

## Example Eligible Project Types

We encourage projects that accomplish multiple benefits, such as meeting community goals and improving environmental health. We aim to fund community engagement and/or restoration projects that support goals such as:

- Connecting community members to natural resources such as wildlife, nearby water bodies, local parks and trails, and trees;
- Involving new to environmental work or historically under-engaged groups to build knowledge and connect their goals to natural resource protection/improvement and beautification through restoration, such as native plants that bloom in spring;
- Engaging residents in community-based restoration projects and encouraging behavior changes that benefit environmental health;
- Educating communities about the connection between human health and being outdoors; and/or
- Promoting community engagement among multiple partners, particularly those whose primary focus is outside the environmental field.

Here are a few example projects from past awardees:

- Projects that capture rainwater and improve wildlife habitat such as pollinator habitat plantings and rain gardens;
- Greening projects, to plant trees in a community-owned space (we know trees can beautify communities, provide shade during hot days, clean the air, reduce crime, and clean water running off roads);
- Trash clean-ups that benefit both communities and local waterways and include education on litter impacts;
- Food gardens that grow food and provide lessons about local, sustainable food sources and healthy cooking options;
- Community workshops that educate and train residents on what actions they can take at their home or business, such as rain barrel installations or native plantings, to protect natural resources;
- Using art to increase awareness of stormwater issues, such as storm drain stenciling or rain barrel installations; and/or
- Getting people outdoors, which we know can improve our health.

This program cannot fund projects that:

- Are led by for-profit organizations;
- Better align with other Trust grant programs (e.g., Youth Environmental Education, Prince George's County Community Gardens, etc.). Please reach out to the Chesapeake Bay Trust if you have any questions about which grant program is best for your project;
- Are sponsorship requests. Requests for sponsorships are submitted at https://cbtrust.org/grants/sponsorship-program/; and

- Are required by a Federal, state, or locally issued permit, decree, mitigation, or enforcement action. In some cases, the Trust may elect to fund optional portions of required projects that go "above and beyond" the regulatory requirements.

## Project Timeline

Projects should be completed within 12 months upon receipt of the award. Requests to extend the project completion period will be reviewed and considered on a case-by-case basis. When a project is complete, grantees are required to submit a final report and include supporting materials/products.

## Online Application Submission Instructions

We use an online system for the application process, and if awarded, project management. To apply for an award, go to https://cbtrust.org/grants/community-engagement/ and click on "Get Started" to begin a new application. This will open a new window asking you to log in or create an account on our online system. If you have applied in the past, use your existing username and password (if you have forgotten either of these use the 'forgot password' feature). If you have not used our online system before, click on "New Applicant" and follow the instructions.

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.

## Deadline

Proposals are accepted on an on-going basis until funds are fully used for that year; check our website and sign up for our grantee newsletter (https://cbtrust.org/newsletters/) for the most up to date information about the status of this rolling program (available all year until all funds are committed to projects). **Applications must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to the proposed start date.**

Watch our video on how to apply and how to submit an application using our online system at https://cbtrust.org/grants/.
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## 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 Program Leader** will be responsible for all project coordination and correspondence with the Trust for the duration of the project. The email address entered here MUST be the same as the email address you used to log in to the online system. The Project Leader is the primary point of contact for the application, and the email address used to submit the application via the online system must be that of the Project Leader. Applications in which the email address associated with the Project Leader in the applicant information tab of the online opportunity does not match the email address used to submit the application will not be considered for funding. The Trust cannot conduct any official correspondence with contractors or other project partners. 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.

# 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:** 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:** Provide the organization's name, mailing address, phone number, organization type, mission, EIN number, and SAM UEI number (if applying for a project in West Virginia)**.** 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 cannot serve in either role, but can be engaged in the project as contractors or partners.

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

**Timeline Tab:** Add the project start and end date. Provide a project timeline that includes major tasks and their associated start and end dates.

**Deliverables Tab**: Provide estimated metrics for your proposed project such as project participants and outreach and restoration outcomes. Disregard deliverables that do not apply to your project.

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

**Project Partnerships:** Provide a list of project partner organizations or contractors, individuals, their areas of expertise, and their role(s) in your project.

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-forms-policies/.

**Narrative & Supporting Documents Tab:** Download the "Narrative Questions" document and answer these questions to tell us about your project https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/Mini-CER-Narrative-Qs-FY26.docx. Upload the completed document (your answers) as a Microsoft Word or PDF file into the online application form.

Review the Supporting Documents Checklist to ensure you have all the required items to submit with your project at https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/MiniCERSupportingDocumentsChecklist.pdf.

**Budget Tab:**

1. **Financial Management Spreadsheet – Application Budget Upload -** You will be asked to upload your budget using the "Application Budget" worksheet of the Chesapeake Bay Trust's **Financial Management Spreadsheet** (FMS), an excel file template. The template can be found by visiting https://cbtrust.org/grants/applicant-resources-forms-policies/ where you can watch a video with instructions on how to complete the FMS.
2. **Financial Management Spreadsheet – Application Budget Information -** This online application will ask you to enter budget category and request totals. These totals will be automatically calculated in the FMS Application Budget, so you only need to copy the values from the FMS to the Online Application.
3. **Additional Budget Justification (optional) -** This online application will ask you to provide a descriptive budget narrative to justify and explain costs. If the success of the work depends on award of other funds, make this clear in your budget justification section.

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

**Demographics Tab and Survey 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 by internal expert reviewers to evaluate applications for this grant program:

**Most Important Criteria:**

- **Consistency with program goals**: Is the project proposed consistent with the goals of the grant program?
- **Cost Effectiveness/Budget**: 1) Is the budget appropriate (at or below $5,000 requested) and cost effective? and 2) Are the budget line items justified in the proposed project? In-kind and cash match are not required.
- **Likelihood of Immediate Project Success**: 1) Are the methods likely to accomplish this type of project? and 2) Does the application include the required items for a successful project? For on-the-ground, restoration projects (tree planting, rain garden), did you tell us where the project is (including photos), who owns the property (and if not you, did you provide proof the owner approves of the project); did you provide a site plan with a native plant list; and did you provide a maintenance plan? For outreach projects, did you provide a list of knowledge objectives or an evaluation plan to show beginning and end knowledge change or if a workshop was planned, did you provide a draft agenda?

**Important Criteria:**
- **Demonstration Value**: 1) Could others take lessons from this project and perhaps replicate it in their neighborhood? and 2) For on-the-ground, restoration projects, how visible and impactful will the project be?
- **Likelihood of Long-term Project Success**: 1) Will the project last for a long time (five to ten years) or otherwise have lasting impact? and 2) If additional resources are needed to maintain the value of the project, has that been explained in the proposal?
- **Partnerships and Community**: 1) Are the people and groups needed to do this work included in and supportive of the project (e.g., landowner and/or neighbors)? and 2) If any partnerships are required, are they included in and supportive of the project? and 3) If the lead applicant is not a member of the

community served by the project (e.g., an external non-profit doing work on land owned by another group), is a transfer of project stewardship/ownership to the community built into the project?

## Application Review Process

All projects are evaluated by technical experts. The Trust reserves the right to fund projects and budget items that advance our mission and meet specific funding priorities and criteria. To allow applicants to set expectations prior to investing time in an application, the Trust provides historical application approval rates for the same or similar programs. **The average approval rate from the last three rounds (years) in this grant program is 95%; this includes both fully and partially funded applications**.

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

## Awards and Notifications

All applicants will receive a letter stating the funding partnership's decision. An application may be declined, partially awarded, or fully awarded. If approved, the Trust will send an award agreement with award conditions and due dates of status, progress, and final reports. The Trust will release the award payment to the requesting organization following: satisfaction of any phase one payment award contingencies, including upload of the signed award agreement. In cases where the awardee fails to submit a status report, progress report, final report, or other requirement 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.

For West Virginia projects, a final report will include but is not limited to submission of all receipts for supplies, invoices for subcontractors/contractors, and copies of timesheets for personnel time used (timesheets must include date, name, time worked per day, and coding to tie the time worked to the award). All financial back-up documentation will be grouped and numbered to correspond to the budget line item reported as spent. Organizations with outstanding final, progress, or status reports will not be awarded additional grants.

## Additional Resources

**Appendices A & B - Guidance for New Applicants & Project Types:**
https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/AppendixAandB.pdf

**Narrative Questions:** Download the "Narrative Questions" document and answer these questions to tell us about your project at https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/Mini-CER-Narrative-Qs-FY26.docx. Upload the completed document (your answers) as a Microsoft Word or PDF file into the online application form.

**Supporting Documents Checklist:** To ensure you have all the required items to submit with your project at: https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/MiniCERSupportingDocumentsChecklist.pdf.

**Eligible Project Locations Map:** All communities in Maryland and in the Chesapeake Bay watershed portion of West Virginia are eligible. To determine if a project site is eligible, see our online map here: https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/WAGP-Project-Eligiblity-Map_8.23.23.pdf.