

Introduction and Program Goals

The [Chesapeake Bay Trust](#) (Trust) 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 Bay 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.

[Maryland Department of Agriculture](#) (MDA) funds the Chesapeake Bay Trust to implement the Keep Maryland Beautiful program.

MDA works to achieve excellence in programs and in services that preserve and protect agricultural resources and the environment, promote profitable agriculture and consumer confidence, and enhance the quality of life for all Marylanders.

MDA's vision is to provide leadership and support to agriculture and the residents of Maryland by conducting regulatory, service, and educational activities that assure consumer confidence, protect the environment, and promote agriculture.

The source of funds for Keep Maryland Beautiful: Tree Planting on Agricultural Lands is MDA.

The Keep Maryland Beautiful program provides crucial funding to nonprofits working to protect Maryland's natural resources and enhance community well-being. Over the past three decades, this partnership has invested over a million dollars in projects that address critical environmental issues while building stronger, more resilient communities. By supporting tree planting initiatives on agricultural lands, Keep Maryland Beautiful grants are fostering a healthier, greener, and more sustainable future for generations to come.

At A Glance

Program Summary:

The Keep Maryland Beautiful Program is designed to engage diverse organizations in activities in Maryland that both improve natural resources and benefit communities. Track 3: Tree Planting on Agricultural Lands seeks to increase the number of acres of forested agricultural land in Maryland.

Deadline:

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until funds for this fiscal year are exhausted. The Trust must receive all applications a minimum of eight weeks prior to the start of the proposed project.

Eligible Project Locations:

Maryland, state-wide

Request Amounts:

Tree Planting on up to 2 acres, up to \$10,000

Tree Planting on greater than 2 acres, up to \$50,000

Submit Your Application:

Follow the instructions online at <https://us.grantrequest.com/application.aspx?sid=1520&fid=35821>

Contact:

Dede Lawal, Program Coordinator, (410) 974-2941 ext. 161, dlawal@cbtrust.org

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, younger 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 Program Coordinator Dede Lawal at dlawal@cbtrust.org.

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 underrepresented. For a full description of the Trust’s efforts to engage under-engaged groups, see our strategic plan at <http://www.cbtrust.org/strategic-plan> and <https://cbtrust.org/diversity-inclusion/>.

Eligible Applicants

MDA and the Trust welcome requests from the following organizations in the state of Maryland:

- Nonprofits;
- Land Trusts; *
- Community and Homeowners Associations;
- Service, Youth, and Civic Groups; and/or
- Municipal, County, Regional, State, and Federal Public Agencies.

* Land trusts are required to have a current Cooperative Agreement with MET (dated on or after November 2, 2020).

Eligible applicants will be in good standing with the state of Maryland and will be able to provide a Certificate of Good Standing. Governmental agencies who are ineligible for a Certificate of Good Standing are exempt from this requirement.

Certificates of Good Standing can be obtained for free at <https://egov.maryland.gov/BusinessExpress/EntitySearch>. A step-by-step guide on how to obtain a Certificate of Good Standing is available at <https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/KMB-GoodStandingTutorial-FY26.pdf>. Applicants do not need to order a certificate. Instead, please upload a screenshot of your organization's SDAT page, including the date, to verify good standing status.

Funding Availability

MDA has approximately \$230,000 available in FY26 for Tree Planting Projects on Agricultural Lands.

Eligible Project Types

Tree Planting projects will implement cost-effective reforestation or afforestation projects on qualifying agricultural land to support the state’s efforts in planting and maintaining 5 million sustainable trees native to Maryland by 2031. In addition, these projects will increase tree canopy, create forest habitat, provide livestock shade, improve water quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. By increasing tree cover and expanding green areas, erosion can be reduced, water and soil quality can be improved, airborne pollutants such as particulates, nitrogen oxide and carbon monoxide can be filtered, and summer temperatures and resulting ozone pollution and energy use can be decreased.

We encourage small-scale planting projects on agricultural lands of up to 2 acres for a maximum request of \$10,000. For large-scale planting projects on agricultural lands greater than 2 acres the maximum request amount is \$50,000.

DEFINITIONS

Afforestation is planting trees on land that previously has not been covered in forest or has not been forested in a long time.

Reforestation is planting trees on land with existing forest.

Forest is a biological community dominated by trees and other woody plants covering a land area of 10,000 square feet or greater and that have at least 100 trees per acre.

Projects on individual private, commercial private, community-owned, nonprofit, and government-owned property are eligible for funding.

Successful applicants will be obligated to complete the following project phases:

- 1) Develop a planting design and plan;
- 2) Obtain any required permits;
- 3) Provide planting activities, including procuring contractual or volunteer services;
- 4) Provide monitoring and maintenance in the first two years to ensure a survivorship rate consistent with guidelines in [Maryland State Forest Conservation Technical Manual Third Edition of 1997](#).

Examples of project types include but are not limited to:

- Tree planting and reforestation projects;
- Establishing, enhancing and/or preserving riparian buffers; and/or
- Creating, enhancing and/or preserving larger contiguous tracts of forest.

Eligible Budget Items

Funding is strictly limited to the following reforestation/afforestation project costs:

- **Site preparation:** Soil amendment, invasive species removal, herbicide application.
- **Plant material:** Trees, shrubs, and mulch.
- **Planting:** Labor and equipment costs.
- **Tree protection:** Tree shelters or other protective measures.
- **Maintenance:** Three-year post-planting care.
- **Project management:** Oversight and administration.
- **Landowner incentives:** Up to \$1,000 per acre of trees planted on agricultural land.

Project Timeline

Project Timeline: Projects must be completed within 36 months upon receipt of the award. Requests to extend the project completion period will be reviewed and considered on a case-by-case basis.

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 Program Leader is the individual 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 Submission Instructions

The Trust uses an online system for the application process, and if awarded, project management. To apply for an award, go to <https://us.grantrequest.com/application.aspx?sid=1520&fid=35821> 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). We need a few weeks to review your application, work together on any missing items, and draft the award agreement, so please send your application to us at least eight weeks before your project starts.

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 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 another 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: 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. Applicants are not required to provide metrics for all categories. Please leave any inapplicable fields blank.

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. For guidance on this, see the [Trust's Letter of Commitment and Guidance Policy](#).

Narrative & Supporting Documents Tab: Use the links below to download the **required** narrative questions template for the track you are applying to. Complete all questions and upload the completed document as a Microsoft Word or PDF file. You will also upload supporting documents using this tab.

- [Track 3: Tree Planting on Agricultural Lands](#)

Certificate of Good Standing

- Upload of a Certificate of Good Standing is required. Applicants do not need to order a certificate. Instead, please upload a screenshot of your organization's SDAT page, including the date, to verify good standing status.

Budget Tab

- 1. Financial Management Spreadsheet – Application Budget Upload**
 - a. 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/forms-policies/> where you can watch a video with instructions on how to complete the FMS.
- 2. Financial Management Spreadsheet – Application Budget Information**
 - a. This online application component will ask you to enter budget category and request totals. These totals will be automatically calculated in the FMS Application Budget, so you will only need to copy and paste the values from the FMS to the Online Application.
- 3. Additional Budget Justification**
 - a. This online application component will ask you 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 section.

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

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 by technical expert reviewers to evaluate your proposal:

Scoring Criteria	Description and Scoring Guidance	Scoring
Consistency with RFP (10 points total)		
Program Goal	Does the project propose to create new forests by planting on previously unforested agricultural lands and/or does the project propose to plant trees in areas on agricultural lands with already existing forest?	10 points, if yes.
Completeness of Application (5 points total)		
Application Components	Were all questions answered? Were appropriate supporting documents, such as photos and maps of the site and planting plans or species lists, included in the application?	Scale of 1 to 5
Project Context and Need (20 points total)		
Project Goals and Justification	Was the purpose and goal of the project clearly communicated? Does the applicant justify the need for the project? Does the project provide potential high ecological benefit, such as promoting biodiversity and providing water quality benefits?	Scale of 1 to 20
Likelihood of Project Success (30 points total)		
Applicant Qualifications and Partnerships	Does the applicant have the necessary qualifications to conduct the work that include a history of successfully completing similar projects? Are the selected partnerships appropriate? If needed, are technical experts included in the project team? Partnering with other organizations to leverage organizational strengths and enhance project outcomes is strongly encouraged. If an organization does not possess the technical expertise in an area needed for the project, qualified technical experts, agencies, or organizations must be identified as partners or contractors.	Scale of 1 to 10
Methodology	Does the planting project methodology, including timeline, site preparation, planting method, planting plan, species list (native species only), and procurement process make sense for the project area? Has the applicant procured landowner permission through a letter of commitment, if necessary? What is the likelihood of project success? Success is defined as the accomplishment of outcomes proposed.	Scale of 1 to 20
Long-Term Sustainability (15 points total)		

Monitoring, Maintenance, and Consideration of Future Threats	<p>Does the applicant propose a relevant and robust monitoring and maintenance plan that will be used to improve the project sustainability in the future?</p> <p>Will the project persist and be well-maintained and not threatened by various types of disturbance, invasive species, or other impacts?</p> <p>Has the applicant addressed the need for ongoing resources in order to maintain the project, if necessary?</p> <p>Will future threats such as changes in public interest, changes in rainfall, or sea level rise associated with climate change, change in land use, etc. impact the project? If so, has the application addressed the impact(s)?</p>	Scale of 1 to 15
Budget (15 points total)		
Cost-effectiveness of Budget and Contractual Work	<p>Is the budget appropriate for the work proposed and cost effective for the work compared to other applications?</p> <p>Are the costs per acre to reforest/afforest justified?</p> <p>Is there in-kind and/or cash match? Match is not required in this program but viewed favorably by reviewers.</p> <p>For work involving contractors, were estimates or quotes from at least three contractors considered or was the work put out for bid? If not, will this be done or was the process to secure contractors justified in the application?</p>	Scale of 1 to 15
Impact (5 points total)		
Demonstration Value	<p>Will others be able to take lessons from this project and replicate a similar project in their own communities?</p>	Scale of 1 to 5
TOTAL POSSIBLE SCORE		100

We recommend reviewing your proposal or having a colleague review your proposal against these criteria before you finalize it to ensure that you have addressed all the relevant criteria.

Application Review Process

Applications will be reviewed by a Technical Review Committee (TRC), composed of individuals who are experts in the fields supported by this RFP and represent communities served by projects funded by this RFP. The TRC ranks and scores all applications based on the criteria listed in the “Evaluation Criteria” section above, then meets to discuss the application merits. The TRC then recommends a suite of applications to the Trust’s Board of Trustees.

The funding partner reserves the right to fund projects and budget items that advance its mission and meets specific funding priorities and criteria.

To allow applicants to set expectations prior to investing time in application, the Trust provides historical application approval rates for the same or similar programs. The average approval rate from the last two years for this track is 88%.

Awards and Notifications

The FY26 Keep Maryland Beautiful awards will be announced March 20, 2026. 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 mail the first award payment to the requesting organization following: satisfaction of any phase 1 payment award contingencies, including upload of the signed award agreement. Ten percent of the total award will be held until the final report is submitted and approved. 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 that may include but are 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.

Appendix A: Application Components Checklist

Complete all fields in the online application:

- Eligibility quiz
- Applicant Information tab
- Project Information tab
- Timeline tab
- Deliverables tab
- Volunteers tab
- Project Partnerships tab
 - Upload letters of commitment if applicable
- Narrative and Supporting Documents tab
 - Upload a Project Narrative:
 - Use the downloadable Narrative Template that corresponds to the track you are applying for
 - Complete all questions
 - Upload Certificate of Good Standing
 - Upload supporting documents
- Budget Tab
 - Upload a completed Financial Management Spreadsheet (FMS)
 - Complete the Application Budget in the online system (should match total from the FMS)
 - Complete the additional budget justification narrative