



# Keep Maryland Beautiful FY26 Request for Proposals Tracks 1 and 2



## CHESAPEAKE BAY TRUST

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## 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 Environmental Trust](#) (MET) and [The Maryland Department of Transportation](#) (MDOT) fund the Chesapeake Bay Trust to implement the Keep Maryland Beautiful program.

MET, a unit of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, serves as Maryland's statewide land trust. Created by the state legislature in 1967, it is one of the oldest and most successful land trusts in the country. MET holds more than 1,100 conservation easements preserving over 140,000 acres statewide. From the Chesapeake Bay to the mountains of Garrett County, their Land Conservation, Easement Stewardship, and Land Trust Assistance Programs promote the protection of open land.

MDOT is a customer-driven leader delivering safe, sustainable, equitable, intelligent, exceptional and inclusive transportation solutions to connect our customers to life's opportunities. MDOT is comprised of five modes and one authority: State Highway Administration, Maryland Transit Administration, Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration, Maryland Port Administration, Maryland Aviation Administration and the Maryland Transportation Authority. This unique approach provides the state's leadership with the ability to develop a coordinated, balanced and multi-modal approach to transportation.

The sources of funds for this award program are MDOT and MET.

## 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 1: Community Stewardship supports small-scale projects that directly benefit local environments and residents and Track 2: Land Trust Assistance strengthens land trusts to expand their conservation efforts and impact.

### Deadline:

December 1, 2025, at 4:00PM

### Eligible Project Locations:

Maryland, state-wide

### Request Amounts:

Community Stewardship, up to \$5,000

Land Trust Assistance, up to \$10,000

### Submit Your Application:

Follow the instructions online at <https://us.grantrequest.com/application.aspx?sid=1520&fid=35915>

### Contact:

Kacey Wetzel, Vice President of Programs, Outreach and Education, 410-974-2941 ext. 104, [kwetzel@cbtrust.org](mailto:kwetzel@cbtrust.org)

This Request for Proposals was released on 9/15/2025.

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 Vice President of Programs, Outreach and Education, Kacey Wetzel at [kwetzel@cbtrust.org](mailto:kwetzel@cbtrust.org)

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 project development assistance within two weeks of the deadline.

The Keep Maryland Beautiful program provides crucial funding to nonprofits, communities, and land trusts 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 strengthening land trusts, fostering civic engagement, and promoting environmental education, Keep Maryland Beautiful grants are empowering Marylanders to create a healthier, more sustainable future for generations to come.

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

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Funding Partners 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). Funds under the Land Trust Assistance track are only available to Maryland land trusts.

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>. 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. 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>.

## Funding Availability

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The funding partners have \$102,000 available in FY26, including:

- ◆ Approximately \$47,000 for Community Stewardship.
- ◆ Approximately \$55,000 available for Land Trust Assistance.

## Eligible Project Types

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Applicants can request funds from one of the following tracks:

## Track 1: Community Stewardship (up to \$5,000)

Honoring the legacies of Bill James and Margaret Rosch Jones, this track supports community-driven projects that enhance Maryland's environment and inspire stewardship.

Eligible projects can include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ Community Engagement: Actively involving residents, particularly youth, in project planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- ◆ Environmental Education: Increasing public awareness of environmental challenges such as litter, stormwater pollution, and climate change.
- ◆ Problem-Solving: Identifying and addressing the root causes of local environmental issues.
- ◆ Hands-on Stewardship: Implementing tangible, measurable projects that improve the environment.
- ◆ Place-based Learning: Fostering a deep connection to the local community and its natural resources.

**Example projects can include (but are not limited to):**

- Transforming a vacant lot or underutilized space into a community-driven green space through tree planting, native plantings, and educational programming.
- Developing and implementing engaging environmental education programs for residents of all ages, focusing on topics like climate resilience, water quality, or wildlife conservation.
- Protecting and enhancing natural areas through activities such as ecosystem restoration, habitat creation, invasive species removal, and woodland stewardship.
- Empowering young people to identify and address local environmental challenges through hands-on projects such as rain garden installation, litter clean-ups, or stormwater management initiatives.

For youth environmental education projects, applicants are encouraged to align their projects with the Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (MWEE) framework. The MWEE framework focuses on youth investigating local environmental issues and then taking informed action to address the issues they have identified. This framework has been proven to assist in the delivery of high-quality outdoor education. Resources for developing a robust MWEE can be found [here](#) and, specifically, in the [Educator's Guide to the MWEE](#). For questions regarding the MWEE framework, please contact Jaren Baluyot, [jbaluyot@cbtrust.org](mailto:jbaluyot@cbtrust.org).

## Track 2: Land Trust Assistance (up to \$10,000)

In honor of Janice Hollmann, a visionary leader in Maryland land conservation, this grant supports projects that strengthen land trusts and enhance their ability to protect and steward our state's natural heritage.

### Grant Purpose

To build sustainable land trusts by increasing organizational capacity, implementing Standards and Practices, fostering public support for conservation, and supporting the long-term stewardship of permanently protected lands.

### Eligible Project Categories

1. **Land Conservation:** Support planning and conservation of new lands, either held solely or jointly held between land trusts.
2. **Monitoring and Stewardship:** Projects should support stewardship programs or enhance a land trust's capacity to monitor and/or manage its portfolio of protected lands.
3. **Organizational Support:** Build strong, effective land trusts through organizational support and capacity building initiatives.

Please see [Appendix B](#) below for a list of example project types.

### Grant Restrictions

- While land trusts may request funding for staff time and other costs related to the research and preparation of acquiring easements, funds cannot be used for the purchase of an easement itself.
- Land trusts are required to have a current Cooperative Agreement with MET (dated on or after November 2, 2020).
- Funds are only available to Maryland land trusts.

### Project Timeline

**Project Timeline:** Projects must 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.

### 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=35915> 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.

Applicants must submit applications in the **Chesapeake Bay Trust Online System** by **4:00 pm on December 1, 2025**. Late applications will not be accepted, and the online funding opportunity will close promptly at 4:00 pm.

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** is the individual who 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.

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

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Applicants must submit applications in the **Chesapeake Bay Trust Online System** by **4:00 PM EST on December 1, 2025**. 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 the potential for high website traffic on the due date. The Trust cannot guarantee the availability of technical assistance for our online system on the deadline date.

## Online Application Form

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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 1: Community Stewardship](#)
- [Track 2: Land Trust Assistance](#)

#### **Certificate of Good Standing**

- Upload of a Certificate of Good Standing is required.
  - Governmental agencies who are ineligible for a Certificate of Good Standing are exempt from this requirement.

#### **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
<b>Project Goals and Need</b>		
Program Goal	Do the project goals align with the goals of the RFP? Is the project proposed consistent with the intent of the track selected?	Scale of 1 to 10
Justification	Does the applicant justify the need for the proposed activities? Does the applicant clearly identify how funding is essential to advance their work? Does the proposed project support the broader goals of the applicant organization and/or other existing community efforts? Track 1: Does the proposal effectively describe how the project meets the needs of the community chosen in the project? Track 2: Will the proposed activities strengthen the land trust and make it more sustainable, thereby increasing its ability to accomplish its mission?	Scale of 1 to 20
<b>Who is Engaged</b>		
Priority Audience	Track 1: Based on applicant provided information, is the audience being engaged in the project, or the community served by the project, identified as under-engaged or underserved? Track 2: Does the applicant have a demonstrable focus within their mission and/or strategic plan to engage under-engaged or underserved communities? <i>Definition:</i> Under-engaged or under-served can be determined through indicators such as, but not limited to, socioeconomic status (communities in which 20% or more of the population is living below the poverty level ( <a href="#">EDA-Census Poverty Status Viewer</a> )?)	Scale of 1 to 10
<b>Likelihood of Project Success</b>		
Likelihood of Project Success	Track 1: How substantial is the impact of the project on: water quality, land conservation, natural resources, community needs? Track 2: How substantial is the impact of the project on increasing organizational capacity, strengthening programs, developing accountability or enhancing the land trust's ability to fully implement S&Ps?	Scale of 1 to 20
<b>Impact</b>		
Impact	Track 1: How substantial is the impact of the project on: water quality, land conservation, natural resources, community needs? Track 2: How substantial is the impact of the project on increasing organizational capacity, strengthening programs, developing accountability or enhancing the land trust's ability to fully implement S&Ps?	Scale of 1 to 20
Sustainability	Will the impacts of the work be felt after the grant period has ended? Will additional resources be needed to maintain the value of the project, and if so, has that issue been addressed in the proposal? Track 1: If the lead applicant is not a member of the community impacted by the project (e.g., an external non-profit doing work on land owned by another entity), does the community have the ability to carry the project forward and is a transfer of "ownership" built into the project design?	Scale of 1 to 10
<b>Budget</b>		
Cost Effectiveness / Budget	Is the budget appropriate and cost effective? Are the line items budgeted (e.g., personnel costs) justified in the application? If partners are included, are they being resourced appropriately?	Scale of 1 to 10
<b>Total Score Possible</b>		<b>100</b>

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

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Grants are selected on a competitive basis. Applications will be scored by technical experts in the field supported by this RFP and discussed by a review committee. 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.

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 Community Stewardship is 20%, and for Land Trust Assistance is 61%; this includes both fully and partially funded applications.

## Awards and Notifications

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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. The funding partners aim to fully fund as many projects as possible. 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

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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

## Appendix B: Additional Examples of Track 2 Project Types – Land Trust Assistance

**The following list of project types is intended to provide examples and is not exhaustive.** If a project cost you are considering is not listed in one of the project categories below, or you are unsure if it is covered by the descriptions below, please contact the Trust for clarification.

### Land Conservation

1. Developing a strategic land conservation plan that identifies criteria and maps land that should be prioritized for conservation.
2. Working collaboratively with regional conservation partnerships to protect signature landscapes. Projects should demonstrate innovative partnerships and a clear alignment with local, regional or statewide conservation priorities.
3. Staff or contractual time dedicated to easement work, included but not limited to the following: land parcel targeting, identification of easement donor prospects, outreach initiatives, solicitation, processing and negotiation of easements, deed drafting, and baseline documentation.
4. *Note: While land trusts may request funding for staff time and other costs related to the research and preparation of acquiring easements, funds cannot be used for the purchase of an easement itself.*

### Monitoring and Stewardship

1. Staff time dedicated to improving its recordkeeping program, organizational policies and procedures, and/or implementing Land Trust Standards and Practices.
2. Develop, enhance, or sustain the management of easement records.
3. Staff or contractual time dedicated to monitoring or stewardship visits, production of current condition reports or volunteer monitoring training.
4. Innovative tools and technology to address the “stewardship gap.”
5. Development of mapping and GIS capabilities and services.
6. Technology costs for GIS software and equipment or other software for baseline documentation and monitoring.
7. Software/CRM to manage organizational, easement and stewardship records and contact information.

### Organizational Support

1. Organizational assessment.

2. Marketing and/or communications.
3. Fundraising plan.
4. Board development.
5. Community planning and community engagement.
6. Succession planning.
7. A multi-year strategic plan.
8. Staff training / professional development.

*Note: Eligible costs are limited to registration fees, meals and travel within Maryland. Costs of overnight accommodations and travel beyond Maryland are not eligible.*

9. Other operations and development expenses, including land trust insurance.