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 due December 1, 2026 at 4:00 PM ET

Eligible Project Locations:

Maryland, state-wide
Land must be zoned for Agricultural use
[see addendum on page 7 for further clarity on eligibility]

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:

The Chesapeake Bay Trust's Awards Portal page: https://cbtrust.org/login/

Contact:

Marylin Veiman Echeverría, Program Officer, (410) 974-2941 ext. 130, mveiman@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 Officer Marylin Veiman Echeverría, at mveiman@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 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 FY27 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. **Please check the zoning of the project site – projects can only take place on land that is zoned for agricultural use [see addendum on page 7 for further clarity on eligibility].** 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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

Online Application Submission Instructions

We have a new award management system! Please login to SmartSimple to access your awards and applications. You can access SmartSimple in two ways:

1. Through our website: https://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-1.smartsimple.com/s_Login.jsp

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

By submitting an application, applicants acknowledge that: 1) they are compliant with federal employment and nondiscrimination laws and 2) they have not been debarred, convicted, charged or had a civil judgment rendered against them for fraud or a related offense by any government agency 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

Applicants must submit applications in the **Chesapeake Bay Trust Online System** by **4:00 PM EST on December 1, 2026**. 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.

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? Is the project site on land that is zoned for agricultural use?	**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 benefits, 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 includes 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	Does the applicant propose a relevant and robust monitoring and maintenance plan that will be used to improve project sustainability in the future? Will the project persist and be well-maintained and not threatened by various types of disturbance, invasive species, or other impacts? Has the applicant addressed the need for ongoing resources in order to maintain the project, if necessary? 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)?	**Scale of 1 to 15**
Budget (15 points total)		
Cost-effectiveness of Budget and Contractual Work	Is the budget appropriate for the work proposed and cost effective for the work compared to other applications? Are the costs per acre to reforest/afforest justified? Is there in-kind and/or cash match? Match is not required in this program but viewed favorably by reviewers.	**Scale of 1 to 15**

	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?	
Impact (5 points total)		
Demonstration Value	Will others be able to take lessons from this project and replicate a similar project in their own communities?	**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 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 this track is 88%.

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 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
- 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
    - Complete the Application Budget in the online system
    - Complete the additional budget justification narrative
- Terms and Conditions tab
- Demographics tab (optional)

Addendum – Track III: Tree Planting on Agricultural Lands

The Chesapeake Bay Trust, in coordination with its funding partners, is issuing this addendum on November 20, 2026 to clarify the eligibility requirements for Track III.

Eligible project locations must be receiving Maryland's **Agricultural Use Assessment**. Applicants should confirm that the proposed project property receives this assessment prior to applying.

For more information about Maryland's Agricultural Use Assessment and property eligibility requirements, please visit the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation website:

https://dat.maryland.gov/realproperty/Pages/The-Agricultural-Use-Assessment.aspx

This clarification supersedes the original RFP language referencing agricultural zoning. All other RFP requirements remain unchanged.