Frequently Asked Question
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Below you will find answers to Frequently Asked Questions about the New York State Conservation Partnership Program (CPP).

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Applying for a Conservation Partnership Program Grant

1. **What materials should I review before applying for a grant? Where can I find more information about the Conservation Partnership Program?**

- Request for Applications – includes descriptions of each of the grant categories, eligibility requirements and description of eligible costs, maximum award amounts, matching requirements, grant periods and reporting requirements.

- Evaluation Criteria – includes primary and secondary evaluation criteria used by the review committee when making grant award decisions.

- Roundtables and Informational Calls – all interested applicants are strongly encouraged to attend one or more of these meetings and/or calls.

- CPP Website – website includes all the above documents as well as links to summaries of previously funded projects and resources like the New York State Open Space Plan that applicants may want to review and reference in their project narratives.

2. **What are the matching requirements and how do I calculate match?**

The Conservation Partnership Program is a cost-sharing program, meaning up to 75% of the total project budget can be covered by the grant, while the land trust provides at least the remaining 25% as match. While all Conservation Partnership Program Grants require a minimum 25% match, each grant category has slightly different requirements, some allowing a portion of the match to be in-kind and others requiring all cash. Please refer to the Request for Applications for grant category specifics.

There are three simple ways to determine the size of the grant you can ask for and the minimum match required.

a. **If you know the total estimated project budget, calculate %'s:**

Total Project Budget = $25,000
Maximum Grant Request = $18,750 (75% of $25,000)
Minimum Match Requirement = $6,250 (25% of $25,000)

b. **If you know how much match your land trust can put forward, multiply by 3:**

Matching Funds Available = $4,000
Maximum Grant Request = $4,000 x 3 = $12,000
Total Project Budget = $4,000 (match) + $12,000 (grant) = $16,000

c. **If you know how much grant funding you intend to request, divide by 3:**

Maximum Grant Request = $42,000
Minimum Match Requirement = $42,000 / 3 = $14,000
Total Project Budget = $42,000 (grant) + $14,000 (match) = $56,000

3. What is the difference between cash and in-kind match?

Cash Match

Actual cash contributions from non-state sources, i.e. the applicant's operating or reserve fund, private foundation grants, individual donors and Federal and local grants. Applicants are encouraged to identify and leverage new sources of funding for their cash match whenever possible. If operating or reserve funds are to be used as cash match, applicants must submit a board-approved statement indicating that these specific funds are available and authorized to be dedicated for the required match.

Staff hours dedicated to the implementation of a grant funded project are considered part of the land trust's cash match, but need to be documented by title, hourly cost of employment, and number of hours worked.

In-kind Match

Contributions in the form of the value of donated goods (food and beverage, meeting space, supplies) and services (pro bono legal counsel, contractor hours). Volunteer hours worked also qualify as services towards in-kind match. As a guide for valuing volunteer contributions, applicants should adhere to Independent Sector's estimated national value of each volunteer hour.

Volunteer time does not include board members participating in regular ongoing board activities. Regular activities include helping with fundraising, participating in strategic planning processes and attending meetings. However, if a board member contributes professional services above and beyond his or her regular board activities, or if a board member contributes as a volunteer to perform above and beyond grant-related work (e.g. trail construction, stewardship activities, office support), this can count as in-kind match. The Alliance may request a copy of the organization's policies on volunteer services and standard board member responsibilities.

In the case of projects that involve multiple partners, in-kind match does not include goods or services donated by one partner to another partner that is not the grantee organization. For example, your organization applies for a Catalyst Grant to work with three other organizations on a study about regional migration patterns. Organization A is the grant applicant. Organization B purchases and donates trail cameras to Organizations A, C and D. Only the value of the camera donated to Organization A, the grant recipient, is eligible as in-kind match.

Grantees are required to document and substantiate all match contributions, cash and in-kind.

4. How much funding can my organization apply for?

Each grant category has a cap, or maximum amount that can be awarded. For example, Capacity and Excellence Grants can provide up to $50,000 while Stewardship and Resource Management Grants can provide up to $100,000. See the Request for Applications for details on each grant category. Organizations can apply for as many grants as they like including more than one per category and there is no cap on the total amount a given organization can request or receive. That said, there are reasons why this is not the most compelling strategy, and it is recommended that organizations have a conversation with Alliance staff to determine the best approach.

5. What if my organization has active grants from previous rounds?

Having open and active grants from previous grant rounds does not prohibit an organization from applying for and receiving additional grant funds if all the required paperwork for open grants, i.e. interim reports or extension requests have been submitted. Additionally, the grants review committee only evaluates the current round of applications and the amount of funding a land trust has received in previous, open grants are not factored in.

6. How will my application be evaluated?

Proposals are reviewed by a committee comprised of representatives from the Land Trust Alliance, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, individuals with expertise in New York's land trust community and the foundation/grant-making sector. The review committee utilizes primary and secondary criteria to guide the decision-making process. Please see the Evaluation Criteria document for more details. All decisions of the review committee are final.

Applicants are encouraged to discuss proposed projects ahead of time with Alliance staff. Alliance staff may offer advice and coaching for projects but are unable to review draft applications before they are submitted.

7. When will my land trust receive notice of an award and when will we receive our funding?

Specific award amounts will not be released until the grants award announcement in late April, usually during the state's Earth Week celebration. The announcement includes a press event which all grantee land trusts (staff/ board members) are encouraged to attend.

Once the announcement has been made, grantees will receive an email indicating that a grant agreement has been posted and is ready to review and complete. All grant agreements must be submitted through the online application and reporting system. Grant funds can take up to four weeks to be processed and mailed after the completed grant agreement has been received by the Alliance.

- Payment for **Capacity & Excellence and Stewardship & Resource Management** grants will be released upon receipt of the signed grant agreement.

- **Conservation Catalyst** grant payments are released in two equal installments. Initial payments will be sent once the signed grant agreement has been received. The second installment is released with receipt of a satisfactory interim report showing that the grantee has made progress on grant deliverables and spending on grant and matching funds. This means that the grantee must be able to show that at least 50% of the project funds have been expended before the second installment is released.

- **Professional Development** grant payments are released in two or three equal installments depending on if the grantee has chosen the "two-year" or "three-year" grant period option. Initial payments will be sent once the signed grant agreement has been received. Subsequent installments are released with receipt of a satisfactory interim report showing that the grantee has made progress on grant deliverables and spending of grant and matching funds.

For example, for a project with a two-year grant period, the grantee must show a full 12 months of employment (does not need to be consecutive) and that at least 50% of the project funds have been expended before the second installment will be released.

- Payment for **Transaction** grants will be released upon receipt of the signed grant agreement and proof that the transaction(s) has closed. This means if the application includes multiple parcels, or a fee simple and conservation easement as part of the transaction, all must be closed and proof submitted before payment will be made.

Using the Online Application and Reporting System

1. How do I fill out an application or complete a report?

Conservation Partnership Program grant applications and reports are to be completed through our online grant portal. If you have applied for an CPP grant in the past, then you probably already have an account. If you do not remember if you have an account, or if you have forgotten your username or password, please contact the Alliance. Click here to access the CPP Grants Portal.

2. Do I have access to previous applications and reports my land trust has submitted?

If you have an account in the system and have used it to submit a previous application or report, then you still have access to those documents when you log in. The system is organized by user accounts, not organization accounts which means that while you will be able to view everything the organization has submitted, you will only be able to make edits or submit reports for applications you have completed under your user account.

3. How often do I need to save a document I am working on? Does the system time out?

Yes, the online application and reporting system does time out. We strongly recommend that you save your work at least every 15 minutes. The save button is at the bottom of the screen, next to the submit button.

4. I want to work on my application or report offline. Can I download the questions?

Grant application questions can be downloaded and saved as a PDF by clicking on the words "Question List" next to the PDF icon at the top of the application form. If you work on the application or report offline in a Word document, you can then copy and paste your application information directly into the online system.

5. What if I upload the wrong attachment? Can I change it?

Yes, click on upload again and select the new file. The original attachment will be replaced. You can also click on delete and then upload to select a new file.

6. What if I need to upload more than one document to answer a particular question?

For questions that are likely to require multiple document uploads, more than one upload box will be provided. If you find you have more documents than upload boxes available, you will need to merge documents together and then upload as one attachment, as only one file can be attached per upload box. If you try to upload more than one document per upload box, the first document will simply be replaced by the second one you try to upload.

If you are unsure how to combine documents into one file, there are several ways to do this:

- Print out all the documents you wish to attach, then scan them together into one document (Word/PDF)

- If you have Adobe Acrobat, you can merge your documents together (PDF)

Please do NOT use zip files as the documents will not display correctly when downloaded to a PDF.

For assistance with large file document uploads please contact the Alliance.

7. Where is the submit button?

It is at the very end of the online application page (scroll all the way down). Once you submit your final application, further edits cannot be made. If you have submitted your document in error, please contact the Alliance to have it sent back to draft for additional edits.

8. How do I print a copy of my application or report?

Click on "Application Packet" at the top of the screen. Be sure to save a copy of this PDF for your files! This is also a good way to confirm that the documents you have uploaded have been formatted and uploaded correctly before you hit submit.

Reporting, Scope of Work Changes and Extensions

1. When are grant reports due?

All final reports are due 30 days after the end of the grant period. Please note, all grant funds and match must be expended before the end of the grant period and not during the 30-day reporting period. Catalyst and Professional Development Grants also require interim reports. Please refer to the Request for Proposals and your projects Grant Agreement (received when a grant has been awarded) for more information on reporting deadlines.

2. Can I submit an interim report or final report before the due date?

The short answer is yes, if your project is completed ahead of time, you are more than welcome to submit your final report ahead of time if all funding has been spent.

For multi-year project, Catalyst Grants and Professional Development Grants, the same is true with some exceptions:

> Catalyst Grants – interim reports may be submitted earlier than the deadline, however, since interim reports trigger the second installment of the grant, the land trust must be able to show that a minimum of 50% of the budget has been spent down.
>
> Professional Development Grants – again, interim reports can be submitted early, but payments will only be made if the land trust can show a full 24 months of employment ("2-Year Grants") or a full 36 months of employment ("3-Year Grants) as well as the spending on 50% or 75% of the budget respectively.

3. What do I need to include as documentation for deliverables?

Deliverable documentation will vary depending on the grant project being funded and the deliverables being produced. As a general rule of thumb, grantees should submit a maximum of 2-3 documents that reflect the work that has been completed. For example, if the main deliverable of the project was to develop a strategic plan, submit a copy of that plan. If the main deliverable was to hold a conference, submit copies of materials from the event such as flyers, programs, etc.

In the case of a project with multiple deliverables, or sizeable deliverables, such as multiple baseline reports or large scientific studies, just submit one as an example and/or a portion of the document, such as an executive summary and table of contents. If you are unsure what type of documentation to include for your project, please contact the Alliance.

4. What do I need to include as documentation of expenses?

All final reports require documentation of expenses. A template for the Final Expense Report can be found in the final report form itself, along with a sample on how to complete the form. The Final Expense Report requires the grantee to compare estimated and actual expenses for the project. All expenses must be accompanied by invoices, receipts or calculation details in the case of items like staff time, travel and volunteer time.

We do not accept printouts from accounting software or credit card bills as documentation. The actual receipt and/or invoice is required. For in-kind donations that are not volunteer time, grantees should obtain an invoice from the individual that has donated their services. Please do not upload cancelled checks unless they are the only source of documentation you have. If you do upload a cancelled check, make sure it has been redacted. Including proof of payment alongside receipts and invoices is also not required.

5. Is it important to submit grant reports when they are due? Can incomplete or missing reports impact my land trust's ability to receive future grants?

YES. It is very important that reports be complete, accurate and submitted on time. If the project is taking longer than expected and additional time is required to complete the deliverables and/or spend the grant and matching funds, an extension may be needed. See below for how to go about requesting an extension. Late, missing or incomplete reports may impact your land trust's eligibility to receive Conservation Partnership Program grants in the future.

6. Can I make changes to my original proposal after it has been funded?

In certain circumstances the Alliance may consider allowing changes to the scope of work of a project as long as the changes are consistent with the original intent of the grant funded project. Grant funds may not be transferred to an alternate project. If you anticipate needing to alter your scope of work, please contact the Alliance as soon as possible. Scope of work changes require Alliance (and in certain cases, New York State) approval.

7. What if the project cannot be completed or my land trust cannot spend all the grant money awarded?

The Alliance recognizes that projects may come under budget or be unable to be completed due to unforeseen circumstances. If this is the case for a project your land trust has received funding for, please contact the Alliance immediately and we will work with you on a case-by-case basis to either re-allocate or return funds if needed. **Please DO NOT return unspent grant funds without contacting the Alliance first.**

8. How do I ask for an extension and when should I ask for an extension?

To request an extension, please contact the Alliance to have an Extension Request Form assigned to you. Please do not send a formal email or letter describing the details and reasons for the extension request – this will be asked in the form you are assigned which will be in the grants portal.

Extensions should be requested towards the end of the grant period for a particular project, but grantees are encouraged to be proactive and not wait until just before the reporting deadline or after the reporting deadline to make this request.

An extension request is only required if the project deliverables have not been completed or if grant/matching funds have not been spent by the end of the stated grant period. If extra time is needed to complete an interim or final report due to unforeseen circumstances, please contact the Alliance.

9. **How long of an extension should I ask for?**

Extensions are granted for 3, 6, 9 or 12 months. Projects can take longer than expected so we encourage grantees to be conservative in estimating the additional time that will be required. Subsequent extensions are discouraged and in the rare circumstances they are approved, may come with consequences such as a request to return all awarded grant funds at the end of the second extension period if the project is still not complete.

10. **Do extensions impact my land trust's ability to apply for future grants?**

A documented extension request will not negatively impact a land trust's standing for future Conservation Partnership Program funding. However, unauthorized delays without extension requests may impact eligibility for future funding. As well, the Alliance tracks the year-to-year performance of grantee land trusts – it is advantageous to complete projects in a timely fashion because past grant performance is considered in the evaluation process.

Put simply, if your grant funded project is taking longer than expected, it is the grantee's responsibility to communicate that to the Alliance and to request an extension.