Community Forestry Catalyst Fund

Request for Proposals

Program Overview

The Community Forestry Catalyst Fund (CF2) is the Maryland Forest Service's statewide grant program for forestry work in communities. It focuses on the places where trees and forests are directly affected by development, infrastructure, public use, and the people who live around them. CF2 gives communities a way to address those conditions with forestry, whether the need is better management of an existing forest resource, stronger local stewardship, or the knowledge and capacity needed to care for it over time.

Applicants bring forward the forestry need or opportunity they want to address rather than selecting among separate state grant programs. The Maryland Forest Service reviews each proposal and determines how available funding can best support selected projects. Applicants may also request support from Maryland's Forestry Boards, whose members bring local forestry, natural resource, and community knowledge. Depending on the project and the Board's capacity, that support may include local context, technical perspective, community connections, or other assistance.

Program Purpose

CF2 is intended to help communities understand their trees and forests, make sound decisions about them, and carry those decisions into practice. The program welcomes proposals that respond to identified forestry needs and create a durable improvement in the way a community understands, manages, restores, or cares for its forest resources.

For CF2, community forestry describes a relationship among the forest resource, the people connected to it, and the benefits produced through its management. It is not limited to a particular kind of site or ownership. Good community forestry may involve hands-on stewardship of trees or forested land, community participation in decisions about those resources, or management that improves the benefits they provide. The strongest work connects those elements rather than treating any one of them as the whole of community forestry.

That creates room for a broad spectrum of proposals. Some communities are ready to carry out work identified in an existing plan. Others first need to understand the condition of their forest resource, build the people or skills needed to manage it, or develop a practical response to a local forestry problem. CF2 is intended to help move that work forward.

At a Glance

Program: Community Forestry Catalyst Fund

Purpose: Support forestry projects that improve the condition, management, stewardship, and long-term sustainability of trees and forests in Maryland communities

Review deadlines: January 15 and July 15; applications accepted year-round.

Standard awards: Generally $1,000–$10,000, depending on project scope and available funding.

Larger awards: If a review cycle includes a funding source that allows awards above $10,000, that opportunity and any additional requirements will be identified in the application.

Eligible locations: Maryland, excluding federal property

Contact: forestry_grants.dnr@maryland.gov

How CF2 Works

CF2 serves as a common application for several urban and community forestry funding sources administered or coordinated by the Maryland Forest Service. These may include recurring U.S. Forest Service urban and community forestry funds, the MDOT Urban Tree Program, Tree-Mendous Maryland, and other compatible funding sources available in a given review cycle.

Applicants do not need to identify the funding source for their project. MFS will make that determination after review based on the proposed work, project location, property ownership, available funding, and any requirements attached to individual funding sources.

The amount of funding available through CF2 may vary by review cycle based on the balances, timing, and restrictions of the funding sources available to the Maryland Forest Service.

CF2 can support both small projects and larger efforts that require more substantial investment, such as site preparation before planting, larger planting projects, or projects that combine several eligible activities. Standard awards generally range from $1,000 to $10,000, depending on project scope and available funding.

CF2 may fund an entire project or a discrete phase or component of a larger effort. Applicants should request the amount needed for the proposed work and may identify other committed or anticipated resources that will help carry

the larger project forward. Depending on available funding, CF2 may make a partial award or support a project in phases.

The application will ask applicants to identify the minimum amount needed for a viable project and whether the project could be phased or scaled if full funding is not available.

Eligible Applicants

CF2 is open to public, nonprofit, and private organizations carrying out eligible urban and community forestry work in Maryland. Eligible applicants include:

- Local governments, including counties and municipalities;
- Nonprofit organizations;
- Schools and school systems;
- Public institutions of higher education;
- Homeowner, neighborhood, and community associations;
- Community-based and civic organizations;
- Forest Conservancy District Boards; and
- Private businesses and other private organizations.

Other organizations may also be eligible if their proposed work fits the purpose of CF2.

Individual residents and landowners are not eligible to receive grants directly, but eligible projects may take place on private property with landowner permission.

Eligible Project Locations

Projects may take place on county, municipal, nonprofit, institutional, association-owned, or other eligible private property in Maryland.

- Landowner permission is required when the applicant does not own or control the project site.
- A formal landowner agreement may also be required before funds are released, depending on the project and the funding source used for an award.
- Federal property is not eligible.

What CF2 Can Fund

CF2 supports a broad range of work that helps communities better understand, manage, restore, establish, and care for their trees and forests.

- **Planning and management.** Projects may support inventories, assessments, management plans, monitoring, or silvicultural work in wooded natural areas when that work helps guide future management.
- **Forest health and stewardship.** Projects may address restoration, invasive species management, regeneration, deer impacts, maintenance, or response to pests, disease, storm damage, and other conditions affecting the long-term health of trees and forests.
- **Education, engagement, and local capacity.** CF2 can support work that builds the people, knowledge, and organizations needed for long-term community forestry, including school-based learning, volunteer stewardship, workforce development, training, and program development.
- **Tree establishment and canopy development.** Projects may include tree planting, pocket forests, site preparation, replacement planting, establishment care, and related work needed to successfully establish new trees or forest cover.
- **Other community forestry approaches.** Urban wood utilization, food forests, pilot projects, cross-jurisdictional work, and other proposals may be considered when they respond to an identified forestry need and fit the purpose of CF2.

These areas describe the range of work CF2 can support. They are not separate funding tracks, and applicants may propose projects that cross more than one area.

Funding Restrictions

CF2 is intended to support voluntary urban and community forestry work. Grant funds may not be used to satisfy work that an applicant or landowner is already required to complete.

CF2 will not fund:

- Required mitigation or compliance work, including planting, restoration, or other activities required by a permit, development approval, regulatory obligation, or enforcement action.
- Land acquisition, including the purchase of real property or conservation easements.
- Direct payments to individual landowners or residents. Eligible organizations may carry out approved work on private property with landowner permission.
- Costs incurred before the project start date established in the award agreement
- General operating expenses that are not directly connected to the proposed project.
- Activities without a clear urban or community forestry purpose.

Because CF2 draws from several funding sources, additional restrictions may apply to particular awards. Some sources may limit costs such as equipment, construction, maintenance, or certain types of work or property. Applicants do not need to determine those restrictions before applying. The Maryland Forest Service will consider the proposed scope and budget against the funding sources available during the award process.

Match and Applicant Commitment

Match is the applicant's or project partners' contribution toward completing the proposed work. It may be financial or in-kind. For CF2, match is important because it shows that the project has resources and commitment beyond the grant itself and can help build the local participation and shared responsibility that are central to community forestry.

All CF2 projects require match, but there is no minimum match amount or percentage. Match may come from the applicant or project partners, and even modest contributions of staff or volunteer time may satisfy the requirement. Match is evaluated based on whether the contribution is credible, documented, and relevant to carrying out the project. A larger match does not automatically make a proposal more competitive.

Match may include:

- Volunteer time may be valued at $36.14 per hour, based on the 2026 Maryland value of volunteer time published by the University of Maryland Do Good Institute.
- Donated professional or technical services.
- Materials, supplies, equipment use, or other donated resources.
- Partner contributions that directly support the proposed work.
- Other documented in-kind support that contributes to successful completion of the project.

Applicants are encouraged to involve local partners where their participation will help the project succeed. This may include local governments, community organizations, schools, nonprofits, businesses, landowners, and volunteers.

Local Forestry Boards may also be able to provide technical or other in-kind support that can count toward match. Applicants do not need an existing relationship with a Forestry Board to request assistance. The application provides an optional opportunity to request Forestry Board support.

Application Requirements

CF2 uses a single application for all proposals. Applicants should provide enough information for reviewers to understand the forestry need, the proposed work, who will carry it out, and how the project will be sustained after the grant period.

Applications should include:

- **Project description.** Explain the forestry need or opportunity, the proposed work, and the expected result.
- **Project location.** Identify where the work will occur and who owns or controls the site.

- **Community connection.** Describe who is connected to the project, how the proposed work responds to local needs or priorities, and how the community will benefit or participate.
- **Project approach and timeline.** Describe the major steps needed to complete the work and the expected schedule.
- **Budget and match.** Provide the amount requested, estimated project costs, and any cash or in-kind contributions supporting the work.
- **Applicant and partner roles.** Identify the people and organizations responsible for carrying out the project and describe the role of any significant partners.
- **Long-term stewardship.** Explain how the value of the project will be maintained after the award period, including any continuing management, maintenance, monitoring, or community involvement that will be needed.

Applicants requesting more than $5,000 should also identify the minimum amount needed for a viable project and describe whether the work could be phased or scaled if full funding is not available.

Additional Information for Certain Projects

Some proposals will require additional information depending on the work proposed. The application will prompt applicants for these materials when relevant.

- **Projects involving tree planting or establishment** should describe site conditions, proposed species or planting approach, establishment care, and responsibility for longer-term maintenance.
- **Projects involving work on property not controlled by the applicant** should provide evidence of landowner support. A formal agreement may be required before funding is released.
- **Projects involving management of wooded natural areas** should explain the condition being addressed and the basis for the proposed management approach. Existing management plans, assessments, or other supporting information should be included when available.
- **Projects involving significant contractual or technical work** should describe the expertise needed and how that work will be procured or managed.
- **Projects that build on an existing plan or adopted priority** should identify the relevant plan, recommendation, or management objective and explain how the proposed work advances it.

The Maryland Forest Service may request clarification or missing information during review when needed to determine project feasibility, funding eligibility, or award conditions. These requests are not an opportunity to materially revise or strengthen the submitted proposal.

Local Support for CF2 Projects

When a CF2 application is submitted, the Forestry Board chair for the project jurisdiction will be automatically notified through Submittable and asked to complete a brief verification before the application advances to competitive review. The chair will confirm whether the project is in or primarily serves the correct jurisdiction, provide any relevant local context, and give an advisory assessment of the proposal. Forestry Board input is not scored and does not determine whether an application is funded.

If a project is selected for funding, the Board may also identify a useful role in supporting implementation based on the needs of the project and the Board's capacity. Board involvement after award is optional.

Maryland's Forestry Boards are part of the State's statutory Forest Conservancy District Board system. Since 1942, they have worked with the Maryland Forest Service to support forest conservation and stewardship across Maryland. Their members bring forestry knowledge, community connections, and long experience working on local natural resource issues.

Evaluation Criteria

CF2 proposals will be reviewed for overall fit with the program, the strength of the proposed work, and the likelihood that the project will produce a useful and lasting forestry outcome.

Reviewers will consider:

- **Community Need and Connection.** Does the proposal clearly identify a forestry need or opportunity, explain why the proposed work is appropriate for the community or site, and demonstrate an appropriate connection to the people or community affected?
- **Project Quality.** Is the proposed approach clear, technically appropriate, sufficiently developed, and realistic for the proposed timeline and budget?
- **Capacity and Long-Term Value.** Does the applicant demonstrate the capacity, partnerships, and resources needed to complete the work, and is there a credible plan for maintaining or carrying forward the project's value after grant-funded work is completed?
- **Budget and Match.** Are the proposed costs reasonable for the scope and scale of the project, and is the required match clearly identified and credible?
- **Program Fit.** How well does the proposed project advance the purposes and priorities of CF2?

Application Review Process

CF2 is a competitive grant program, and submission of an eligible application does not guarantee funding.

Applications will first be reviewed for eligibility and completeness. Eligible applications will then be assigned through Submittable to qualified reviewers, including members of the Maryland Urban and Community Forestry Council and other individuals with relevant urban and community forestry expertise. Reviewers will evaluate proposals using the criteria above and provide recommendations to the Maryland Forest Service.

Forestry Board verification and local input will be provided to reviewers as part of the application record. Forestry Boards do not score applications or make funding decisions.

The Maryland Forest Service makes final award decisions based on the application, reviewer recommendations, available funding, and any requirements attached to the funding source or sources used for the award.

Awards and Project Requirements

Award Decisions and Funding Sources

Applicants will be notified whether their proposal has been approved, partially funded, or declined. Before an award is finalized, the Maryland Forest Service may work with a selected applicant to revise the scope or budget to reflect the amount and type of funding available, including by funding a viable phase or scaled version of the proposed work.

A project may be supported by one funding source or by a combination of sources. Any requirements specific to the funding used for an award will be identified before the award agreement is finalized. Receiving a CF2 award does not prevent an organization from applying again in a later review cycle. Applicants should submit no more than one application per review cycle.

The Maryland Forestry Foundation will administer award agreements, payments, grant records, and closeout requirements. The Maryland Forest Service retains responsibility for program eligibility, funding-source eligibility, and final award decisions.

Payment terms will be established in the award agreement and may vary with the size or funding source of the award. Applicants should review those terms before committing project expenses.

Project Period

CF2 projects will have a 12-month project period beginning on the date established in the award agreement.

Applicants should propose work that can reasonably be completed within that period. If circumstances prevent completion on schedule, the awardee should contact the Maryland Forestry Foundation before the project end date to discuss whether an extension is available.

Award Conditions

Awardees must complete the work described in the approved scope and use grant funds only for approved project costs.

Depending on the project and funding source, an award may also require landowner permission, permits or other approvals, maintenance or stewardship commitments, or other documentation needed before work can begin.

Any conditions specific to the award will be included in the award agreement.

Reporting

A final report will be due within 30 days after the project period ends.

The report should document the work completed, the results of the project, and how grant funds and committed match were used. Awardees should expect to provide:

- A brief description of the completed work and results, including any significant changes from the approved scope;
- Photographs or other project documentation, where appropriate;
- A final accounting of grant expenditures and match; and
- Supporting financial records, such as receipts and invoices for grant-funded costs.

Some projects may have additional reporting requirements based on the work performed or the funding source used. Projects involving tree establishment may require follow-up reporting on tree survival or establishment after the project period.

Awardees with incomplete reporting or unresolved grant requirements may not receive additional CF2 funding until those requirements are satisfied.

How to Apply

CF2 applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Applications received by **January 15** will be considered in the winter review cycle, and applications received by **July 15** will be considered in the summer review cycle. Applications submitted after either deadline will be considered in the next review cycle.

Applications must be submitted online through the CF2 application portal available on the Maryland Forest Service CF2 webpage.

Applicants should review the eligibility, match, and application requirements before submitting. The online application will collect the information needed to evaluate the proposal and determine which available funding source or combination of sources may support the project.

Applicants do not need to identify or apply separately to the individual funding sources available through CF2.

Questions about the application process or project eligibility may be directed to forestry_grants.dnr@maryland.gov.

Maryland Forest Service staff may help prospective applicants understand CF2 requirements, identify relevant technical resources, and discuss forestry considerations related to a proposed project. Applicants remain responsible for preparing and submitting their own applications, and technical assistance does not indicate that a project will be selected for funding.

See the **Application Checklist** for a summary of the information and materials needed to complete an application.

Application Checklist

Before submitting your CF2 application, make sure you have:

Item	What to Have Ready	Required?
Applicant information	Organization name, contact information, and person responsible for the project	Yes
Project location and ownership	Address or site description and property owner, if different from the applicant	Yes
Project description	Forestry need or opportunity, proposed work, and expected result	Yes
Community connection	Who will benefit or participate and relevant community priorities or commitments	Yes
Project timeline	Major steps and expected schedule	Yes
Project budget	Amount requested and major project costs	Yes
Match and in-kind contributions	Cash or in-kind support, including volunteer or staff time, donated	Yes

Item	What to Have Ready	Required?
	services or materials, and partner contributions. There is no minimum match amount or percentage.	
Long-term value or stewardship	How the project's benefits will continue after the grant period, including maintenance or continued care where applicable	Yes
Project partners	Partners and their expected roles	As applicable
Supporting materials	Maps, photographs, management plans, estimates, letters of support, or other useful documentation that helps explain the project	As applicable
Phasing or scaling information	Whether the project could move forward with a smaller award	Requests over $5,000

The application may request additional information depending on the type of project proposed.