



# Maryland's Greenspace Equity Program

## FY 2028

## GRANT PROPOSAL GUIDE

Maryland Department of Natural Resources  
Land Acquisition and Planning  
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Visit our website for more information and up-to-date news:  
<https://dnr.maryland.gov/land/Pages/Greenspace-Equity-Program.aspx>

For general questions or project submissions, please send email to: [laplocalgrants.dnr@maryland.gov](mailto:laplocalgrants.dnr@maryland.gov)

# Greenspace Equity Program Grants Proposal Guide

## A. Program Description and Requirements

### 1. Purpose

The Greenspace Equity Program provides grant funding assistance to eligible applicants for enhancing the public health and livability of overburdened communities and underserved communities by implementing projects to preserve, create, and enhance community greenspace, which includes (i) community gardens; (ii) community gathering open space areas; (iii) community woodlands; (iv) green networks; (v) parks; (vi) trails; and (vii) urban farms.

### 2. Source of Funds

The source of funds for this program is from Program Open Space and may be appropriated each fiscal year per Natural Resources Article §5-903(a)(2)(vi).

### 3. Administration of the Program

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) administers the Greenspace Equity Program per Natural Resources Article §5-9D-02. DNR staff develops and distributes application materials for the program, publicizes the program, provides technical assistance to program applicants, awards grants to eligible applicants, and consults with the Greenspace Equity Advisory Board in the implementation and administration of the program.

### 4. General Requirements

The Greenspace Equity Program provides funding to eligible applicants for community greenspace projects located (i) in an overburdened community; (ii) an underserved community; or (iii) on a property for which an eligible applicant holds a conservation easement or owns the property in fee simple (as demonstrated by legal documentation) and is located in a census tract that is adjacent to an overburdened community or an underserved community. Grants may be for up to 100% of the project cost and are selected on a competitive basis. Projects must be publicly accessible.

Use the [MDEnviroScreen](#) tool to determine whether a property is located in an overburdened community or an underserved community.

### 5. Eligible Applicants

- 1) A Land Trust (as hereinafter defined) located or working in an overburdened community or an underserved community where a project is proposed to be implemented.
- 2) A Nongovernmental Organization located or working in an overburdened community or an underserved community where a project is proposed to be implemented.
- 3) County Government.
- 4) Municipal Government.

### 6. Types of Community Greenspace Projects Funded

Activities eligible for funding include, but are not limited to:

- 1) acquisition of land in fee simple or the acquisition of a perpetual conservation easement to create a new community greenspace; and/or
- 2) stewardship activities (defined as activities to develop a property for public use and improve the conservation value of a property) including development of a community greenspace.

### 7. Specific Project Requirements

- 1) Projects must comply with all applicable Local, State, and Federal laws, statutes, and regulations.
- 2) Projects shall be open for public use at all reasonable hours and times of the year, according to the type of area and facility. Available hours must be posted, e.g., open seven days a week; open dawn to dusk; closed Tuesdays; open for public use when school is not in session (if on school property); etc. Exceptions may be allowable under extenuating

- circumstances, such as those that may impact the safety of the public, such as specific weather events, or major repairs, etc.
- 3) Projects shall be open to entry and use by all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, marital status, sexual orientation, gender, or ancestry or national origin, and shall be operated in compliance with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, P.L. 88-3524 (1964) and its amendments, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, P.L. 101-336 and its amendments, and Section 20-601 et. seq. (Discrimination in Employment) of the State Government Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland (2021 Repl. Vol., as amended.) Entry may not be limited to only residents of a specific community.
  - 4) Projects are within the applicant's jurisdiction or within the service area of a Land Trust or Nongovernmental Organization. For stewardship/development projects, the applicant must hold the rights to develop on the property.
  - 5) Land acquired (fee and easement) under a state grant from the Greenspace Equity Program must be maintained in perpetuity for public use pursuant to Natural Resources Article §5-9D-04(a). Conversion of use of land will require replacement with land of equal or greater recreational use, acreage, and equal or greater appraised value approved by the Greenspace Equity Program.
  - 6) Land developed or improved by a grant awarded under the program must be operated and maintained for public use for **at least 15 years** from the project completion date pursuant to Natural Resources Article §5-9D-04(b).
  - 7) Projects must be properly maintained to be in a safe and usable state for access by all members of the public. If the grantee fails to do so, the grantee, at no expense to the State, will replace the project with a project of equal or greater public recreational/open space and monetary value approved by the Greenspace Equity Program if timely corrective action is not taken.
  - 8) A Greenspace Equity Program funding acknowledgement sign must be installed prior to the completion of the project to be eligible for final reimbursement.

## 8. Additional Considerations

- 1) Under the Greenspace Equity Program, a Land Trust is defined as one of the following:
  - A qualified organization under §170(H)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and any regulations adopted under that section;
  - An organization that has executed a cooperative agreement with the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET); or
  - An organization that is an Affordable Housing Land Trust as defined in §14-501 of the Real Property Article.
- 2) Nongovernmental Organizations that are not Land Trusts are *not* eligible for acquisition projects.
- 3) Land Trusts and Nongovernmental Organizations must be in good standing.
- 4) Land Trusts and Nongovernmental Organizations are encouraged to work with County and/or Municipal governments to implement the project.
- 5) **Site Control and Legal Authority** - Projects must be located within the applicant's jurisdiction or within the service area of a Land Trust or Nongovernmental Organization. Applicants must demonstrate that they have the legal authority to implement the proposed project on the identified property. For stewardship/development projects, the applicant must hold the rights to access and develop the property at the time of application submission. Legal authority may be demonstrated through:
  - a. fee simple ownership;
  - b. a conservation easement;
  - c. a lease, license, or other formal agreement; or
  - d. written permission from the legal property owner authorizing the proposed use and development.
- 6) For acquisition projects, applicants must provide documentation such as a letter of intent with the property owner to purchase the property.
- 7) Development applications that do not demonstrate adequate site control may be considered incomplete or ineligible.
- 8) Applicant demonstrates the capacity to plan, implement and maintain the project (sufficient and qualified staff or contractor, effective administrative procedures and systems, evidence of past success, etc.)

- 9) Applicant is ready to execute the project immediately after Board of Public Works approval and complete the project in a timely manner. For acquisition projects, it is required that the applicant has an accepted offer or agreement with the seller to purchase the property or easement at the time of application submission and can settle after the project is approved. For stewardship/development projects, the applicant is ready to begin design/construction as soon as the project is approved.
- 10) Acquisition costs must be supported by at least two independent appraisals by certified general real estate appraisers with qualifications consistent with industry standards and all applicable Local, State, and Federal statutes and regulations. Narrative reports must meet Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP).
- 11) The amount of land cost eligible for acquisition assistance is the fair market value determined by the average of the two real estate appraisals or the amount actually paid for the land, whichever is less. The high value may be considered in certain limited circumstances. A third appraisal or more may be requested:
  - a. if further evaluation finds that either or both appraisals are not consistent in their evaluation; or
  - b. if the spread between the appraisals exceeds 20%.
- 12) For stewardship/development projects:
  - Project must clearly demonstrate how the proposed greenspace will directly benefit the overburdened or underserved community in which it is located or served. Applicant must describe the intended users, anticipated community benefits, and how the project addresses identified community needs.
  - Project is consistent with National Playground Safety Standards and the Americans with Disabilities Act (<https://www.ada.gov/>.)
  - Project addresses any stormwater drainage issues and discharge requirements.
  - Project considers sustainability and energy efficiency. Any proposed lighting is energy efficient and reduces light spill-over to the maximum extent possible.
  - Projects including playground surfacing materials cannot have more than 90 parts per million (ppm) of lead, or a component product, material, or substance to which PFAs (per- and polyfluoroalkyl) chemicals are added (Environment Article §6–16A–03).
  - Projects cannot have been funded with Program Open Space (POS) Local or Community Parks and Playgrounds (CPP) grants within the last 20 years or a Local Parks and Playgrounds Infrastructure (LPPI) grant within the last 15 years as they need to be operated and maintained accordingly under the requirements of those programs. If unsure of the project's eligibility, please contact the Local Grants Administrator.
- 13) Greenspace Equity funds may be used for administrative costs associated with land acquisition or project stewardship/development. A portion of the grant, not to exceed three percent (3%) of the grant amount requested for the acquisition and/or development, may be used to pay for administrative costs associated with actual time spent working on a project, including negotiating with landowners, site visits to the property, working with title attorneys/appraisers/surveyors/lawyers, preparing documents, and implementing a project, etc.
- 14) Greenspace Equity funds may be used for program compliance costs associated with monitoring easements. A portion of the grant, not to exceed one and a half percent (1.5%) of the grant amount requested for the acquisition, may be used to pay for program costs for monitoring easements. Applicants may contribute all or a portion of these costs as part of their financial support for a project. Easements purchased with grant funds and held in perpetuity by an applicant as a grantee must be administered and enforced by the applicant. Applicants must document that program compliance costs will be placed in an endowment or other special account to be made available only to the grantee and only for the purpose of monitoring the specific easement acquired with Greenspace Equity funds. The program compliance costs for easement monitoring must be invested in a long-term managed investment account, the principal of which may not be withdrawn or used without the approval of DNR. The funds cannot be used as collateral. The interest funds may be used by the grantee to pay for salaries and supplies for monitoring costs. Failure of the grantee to adequately monitor this easement may cause for reassignment to a successor organization to carry out the monitoring responsibilities for the easement, and the repayment and/or transfer of the program compliance fee accordingly.

- 15) Greenspace Equity funds may *not* be used for maintenance cost associated with a project or the operation expenses of the grant recipient. Maintenance is the ongoing work needed to keep the project area in good condition and ensure its safety for public use. This would include mowing established fields, keeping trails passable, making sure any physical structures are functioning as they are intended and fixing as needed, etc. Operating expenses are the ongoing expenses incurred from the normal day-to-day running of an organization.
- 16) It is recommended that Land Trusts co-hold the fee simple deed or perpetual conservation easement with a county or municipal government agency where the project is located. This recommendation is based on practice similar to other state land conservation programs.
- 17) Greenspace Equity funds may *not* be used for business ventures. Any associated income or fees generated from the project must be invested back into maintaining the project.

## **B. Proposal Review and Selection**

Awards will be competitive in nature. DNR staff will review complete applications. Projects will be evaluated based on consistency with Greenspace Equity Program's purpose, eligibility requirements and criteria, the applicant's responses, as well as the status of any previously awarded grants. Pursuant to Natural Resources Article §5-9D-02(e)(5), considerations will include, but not be limited to:

1. The extent to which the applicant demonstrates meaningful community engagement with residents, organizations, and businesses located in the overburdened community or underserved community (i) in which the project will be located; or (ii) will be served by the project, including how community input shaped the project and the strength of documented community support.
2. The extent to which the project represents a new or expanded greenspace investment as demonstrated in the application material. Funding for projects to enhance an existing greenspace must be used toward capital improvements and not routine maintenance responsibilities.
3. The amount of financial or in-kind contributions for implementation of the project, if any.
4. The degree to which the project (i) demonstrates partnerships and collaboration among local governments, land trusts, nongovernmental organizations, and community organizations; and (ii) enhances the public health, livability, and clearly demonstrates direct benefits to the overburdened or underserved community served by the project.
5. The geographic diversity of the State.

The Greenspace Equity Advisory Board will have the opportunity to review and comment on the grant applications. DNR staff will make recommendations for grant selections. Recommended projects will be submitted to the Maryland State Clearinghouse for Intergovernmental Assistance for review and comment prior to being submitted to the Board of Public Works for final approval.

## **C. Notification of Award**

DNR will send a letter of award to the applicant for each grant approved by the Board of Public Works. Approved grant recipients may be required to submit a revised itemized budget if one is requested. Award funds may only be used for the project as submitted and approved by DNR and the Board of Public Works.

## **D. Award Disbursement and Monitoring**

Greenspace Equity is a *reimbursable* grant program. DNR will reimburse the applicant for the approved project costs when proper documentation is provided with the reimbursement request for the completed project elements. Reimbursement for actual project costs will at no time exceed the Board of Public Works approved funding amount. DNR will not reimburse the applicant for costs not associated with the BPW approved project. Costs incurred prior to Board of Public Works approval are *not* eligible for reimbursement, except for certain eligible acquisition planning costs, if those costs are listed in the application and approved. Advance payments toward allowable costs may be considered after BPW approval on a case by case basis. Any funds remaining or not used to execute the awarded project must be returned to the Greenspace Equity Program.

DNR staff will monitor progress in accordance with stated timelines, performance criteria, and goals set forth in each approved project and the standards and policies of the Greenspace Equity Program.

Grant recipients must complete the project as proposed and maintain the land purchased and/or facilities created with a Greenspace Equity grant for public use for the duration required based on the type of project.

## E. Project Proposal and Submission Process

1. *Complete a Greenspace Equity Program Application and Project Agreement* for each project.
2. *Sign and date the Applicant Authorization.*
3. *Assemble all required accompanying documents listed on the Accompanying Document Checklist at the end of the Greenspace Equity Program Application and Project Agreement.*
4. *Contact the Greenspace Equity Program Administrator in advance to review project eligibility and, if needed, to review the required attachments.*
5. **Applications are due on Tuesday, September 1, 2026, by 3:00 p.m. and must be emailed to: [laplocalgrants.dnr@maryland.gov](mailto:laplocalgrants.dnr@maryland.gov).**

*Please be advised that incomplete or late applications may not be considered for funding.*

## F. Grant Workshops

DNR staff will be available virtually via Google Meet on the following date and time to review the grant requirements and answer any questions.

**Wednesday, July 15, 2026 at 4:00 pm**

Google Meet joining info

**Video call link:** <https://meet.google.com/xmi-gbha-ntn>

Or dial: (US) +1 475-221-6233 PIN: 207 744 634#

## F. Anticipated Program Timeline

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>June 2026</b>         | Issue proposal requests.  |
| <b>September 1, 2026</b> | Applications due to DNR by 3:00 p.m.  |
| <b>Sept - Oct 2026</b>   | Review proposed projects.   |
| <b>Sept - Oct 2026</b>   | Share/present projects to Greenspace Equity Advisory Board.                               |
| <b>May/June 2027</b>     | Awards Announced and Notifications Emailed<br>(subject to budget allocation and approval) |

NOTE: This Grant Proposal Guide is not intended to be a complete representation of the Greenspace Equity Program. Interested parties are encouraged to review Section 5-9D-01 et. seq. of the Natural Resource Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland (2023 Replacement Volume, as amended), and any regulations or policies adopted by the Department of Natural Resources to carry out the Greenspace Equity Program.

<http://dnr.maryland.gov>

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