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Connecting Constituents with Federal Programs for Public Parks

Congress has established programs to assist constituents—including individuals, organizations, tribes, and state and local governments—with projects to establish or upgrade public parks and related outdoor recreation facilities. These parks and facilities include athletic fields, courts, trails, playgrounds, community buildings, and others.

Federal programs provide support for parks and related outdoor recreation facilities in a variety of contexts. Some programs specifically focus on outdoor recreation, while others address park and recreation projects within the context of community planning and development. Other programs may focus on conservation or environmental restoration initiatives that could affect recreation opportunities for communities. This In Focus provides examples of various federal programs that may provide funding for parks and related outdoor recreation facilities. The following programs vary in scope and purpose and do not represent a comprehensive list of all potentially relevant programs for a given park or outdoor recreation project. For instance, this In Focus does not seek to include all programs to conserve lands, although, in some cases, such programs may provide for uses including outdoor recreation.

Most federal grant funds go to state and local governments, which in turn may issue sub-awards to other entities. Interested applicants are encouraged to contact federal agencies, state agencies, or both for information on eligibility, the application process, award cycles, and funding availability. Funding levels for the programs listed below vary, and funding availability depends on appropriations. Where applicable, program websites and Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) numbers are provided to assist constituents with accessing more information about each program. CFDA numbers can be used to search for and identify potential funding opportunities at <https://grants.gov>.

Since January 2025, President Trump has issued certain executive orders (E.O.s) addressing the use of federal funds in various areas. Several of these E.O.s, aspects of which are subject to litigation, direct relevant agencies to pause certain grant-related and other funding activities and thus may affect the resources discussed below.

National Park Service Programs

The National Park Service (NPS) receives appropriations for several programs to support the establishment or expansion of public outdoor recreation areas, such as parks.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Two types of grants are available under the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF): the formula-based State and

Local Assistance Program and the nationally competitive Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) grants program.

By law, only state LWCF lead agencies may apply for these funds. Under both the formula and competitive grant programs, state lead agencies may “sub-award” grants to state agencies, local units of government, and federally recognized tribes. Nonprofits and other private organizations, though not eligible for a subgrant, are encouraged to collaborate with an eligible sub-recipient in developing projects.

State and Local Assistance Program

Under the formula-based State and Local Assistance Program, the Secretary of the Interior (acting through NPS) apportions funds to states. States then award funding to local units of government and federally recognized tribes for projects that acquire lands and waters for parks and other public outdoor recreation purposes, as well as develop new or renovate existing outdoor recreation facilities.

CFDA no. 15.916

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/stateside.htm>

Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership

Under the nationally competitive ORLP program, NPS awards discretionary grants to communities meeting certain eligibility criteria. ORLP funds may be used for the development or renovation of public parks and other outdoor recreation areas.

CFDA no. 15.916

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/orlp.htm>

Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance

The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program (RTCA) is a nonmonetary program that provides technical assistance to communities seeking to accomplish conservation and outdoor recreation goals. RTCA assists communities and public land managers in developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as creating outdoor recreation opportunities. Project applicants may be state or local agencies, tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, or citizen groups. NPS and other federal agencies may apply in partnership with local organizations.

CFDA no. 15.921

<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/index.htm>

Groundwork

This program, provided in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, supports the creation of locally based nonprofit organizations (“Groundwork Trusts”) and their activities to transform brownfields and neglected lands and waters into parks, trails, natural areas, and greenspace.

CFDA no. 15.965

<https://home.nps.gov/orgs/1973/index.htm>

American Battlefield Protection Program

Many public parks preserve the sites of historic battles. The American Battlefield Protection Program offers four competitive grants to support the preservation and interpretation of these spaces. *Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants* may be used to purchase or conserve parcels of battlefield land. *Battlefield Restoration Grants* may be used to undertake activities that restore park land to day of battle conditions. *Battlefield Interpretation Grants* may be used to fund projects that connect visitors to the story of the battlefield. *Preservation Planning Grants* may be used to fund a variety of activities, including but not limited to public programs, signage, planning studies, surveys, and historical documentation. Nonprofit organizations, colleges and universities, and tribal, local, and state government entities are eligible to apply for Battlefield Restoration Grants, Battlefield Interpretation Grants, and Preservation Planning Grants. Only state or local entities are eligible to apply for Battlefield Land Acquisition grants, although nonprofit organizations can assist with the application.

CFDA no. 15.926 <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/2287/index.htm>

Selected Other Federal Programs

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Community Facilities Grants

Community Facilities Grants support projects to construct or improve community facilities providing essential services to rural residents. Recreational facilities may be eligible for these grants in limited circumstances. Eligible recipients include public bodies, federally recognized tribes, and community-based nonprofits.

CFDA no. 10.766

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program>

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program

This program provides financial assistance to establish community forests. The purchased lands must be managed for public economic, recreational, environmental, or

educational benefits to communities and provide public access. The program may fund up to 50% of project costs. Community forests can be owned by local governments, tribal governments, and qualified nonprofit entities.

CFDA no. 10.689

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/private-land/community-forest/program>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Community Development Block Grant Program

This program provides flexible federal funding to states and localities to support a wide variety of economic and community development activities. Public outdoor recreation, greenspace, and community facilities projects may be eligible for funding.

CFDA no. 14.218

<https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg/>

U.S. Department of Transportation, Recreational Trails Program

This program provides funding to states to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational users. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58) authorized appropriations for this program through FY2026.

CFDA no. 20.205

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/

Additional Resources

CRS has other products available related to grants work, many of which are listed on the Grants and Federal Assistance page of the CRS website.

The Federal Assistance page on SAM.gov is the primary source of information on grants and other assistance programs. The listings include information on eligibility, how to apply, and matching requirements. Actual funding of specific grant programs depends on annual congressional budget appropriations.

Grants.gov provides grant seekers with information on competitive federal grant opportunities and how to apply for them.

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