

MAP 2024: Connecting People to Forests Round 2 Request for Proposals

April 19, 2024

Recent Program Adjustment: In 2023, the National Forest Foundation (NFF) released changes to its Matching Awards Program (MAP). The changes were the result of over two years of work by NFF staff, Board, and advisors to collect feedback from past and potential applicants and align the program with current National Forest System needs and the NFF strategic plan. The resulting program, MAP: Connecting People to Forests, focuses primarily on community engagement. Program goals are to create lasting change that will allow all communities, especially underserved communities, opportunities to benefit from activities on National Forest System lands or adjacent public lands. The MAP program's longstanding support of stewardship continues through this programmatic shift. While engagement is now the primary focus of the program, stewardship activities are also a requirement for all proposed projects.

Key Information

- Geographic Restrictions:** Projects must take place on U.S. National Forests or Grasslands or adjacent public lands and demonstrate benefit to National Forest System lands.
- Application Deadline:** June 21, 2024 at 11:59 pm MDT
- Funding Type:** Federal Funds in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service (Federal Assistance Listing 10.682)
- Eligible Organizations:** Nonprofit organizations, Tribal governments and organizations, and universities.
- Matching Requirements:** 1:1 cash match of nonfederal cash funds directly received by the applicant organization. Award Recipient must expend match within the NFF grant performance period and for completion of the same project. In-kind contributions are not considered.
- Performance Period:** Projects funded in this round will begin in September 2024 and may run for up to 18 months.
- Informational Webinar:** May 20, 2024 at 12:00 pm MDT [[Register Here](#)].
- Applicant Resources:** MAP is highly competitive and the NFF only funds projects that align exceptionally well with programmatic criteria. To ensure that the applicant's time is well spent, use all the resources available to determine whether the project is eligible including:
- This Request for Proposals
 - MAP Frequently Asked Questions
 - MAP Application Tips and Financial Plan Guidance Appendices
- Program Contact:** NFF Conservation Awards staff are available to answer questions about eligibility, project scope, or the application process.
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Table of Contents

Overview.....	2	Forest Service Letters of Support	6
About the National Forest Foundation	2	Geographic Restrictions.....	7
MAP – New Program Overview.....	2	Proposal Review Process.....	7
Eligible Project Types	3	Application Review Process	7
Program Focus Areas	3	Evaluation Criteria.....	7
Ineligible Activities	5	How to Apply.....	8
Funding and Match Requirements.....	5	How to Start a New Application	8
Project Administrative Considerations.....	5	How to Return to Application Started	9
Applicant Eligibility.....	5	Proposal Attachment Forms.....	9
Project Timing.....	5	Applicant Resources	9
Award Size.....	6	Pertinent Policies and Documents.....	9
Funding Overlap Restrictions.....	6	Informational Webinar.....	10
Environmental Compliance.....	6	Program Contact.....	10

Overview

ABOUT THE NATIONAL FOREST FOUNDATION

The National Forest Foundation is the leading organization inspiring personal and meaningful connections to our National Forests, the centerpiece of America’s public lands.

Working on behalf of the American public, the NFF leads forest conservation efforts and promotes responsible recreation. We believe these lands, and all they provide, are an American treasure and are vital to the health of our communities.

MAP – PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Through MAP, the NFF provides funds for projects that directly benefit America’s National Forests and Grasslands. MAP pairs federal funds provided through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Forest Service with non-federal dollars raised by award recipients, multiplying the resources available to benefit the National Forest System.

Building from applicant feedback and changes to the NFF strategic plan, the NFF shifted the focus of MAP in April 2023. Read more about the process in [this NFF News Release](#). The NFF is proud of the results that partners have accomplished through the MAP program over the last 30 years and is eager to see how those results deepen and change as a result of this shift.

Updated MAP funding criteria focus on projects that inspire participants to get personally involved in caring for their public lands. Projects funded under MAP must involve the public through in-person engagement and provide benefit to the National Forest System. This refocus on engagement as a central component is intended to ensure that a diversity of communities have access to funding and the many benefits of public lands and are actively engaged in their care.

Through the program changes, some work that was previously eligible for funding under MAP, including stewardship efforts completed primarily by for-profit contractors, is now ineligible for MAP funding. The NFF continues to support these kinds of professional restoration and stewardship efforts through its other funding programs. Full detail about eligibility is described below.

Eligible Project Types

PROGRAM FOCUS AREAS

The NFF requires that all projects proposed for funding must include community involvement and hands-on stewardship activities that are completed by project participants, and benefit the [National Forest System](#).

Community Engagement

Community engagement, defined as in-person involvement of the public, must be the primary focus of every project funded under MAP. The National Forest Foundation recognizes that communities across the country have varied histories and experiences with public lands and expects that effective and appropriate engagement experiences will vary.

Eligible occasions for community engagement in public lands include, but are not limited to:

- Public lands days, cleanup days, and similar events
- Field trips for schools or collaborative groups
- Outdoor skills training
- Indigenous ecological practices
- Ceremonies or celebrations related to natural resources
- Nature-based therapeutic activities
- Trail or site ambassador programs
- Community science projects
- Implementation by community members of natural resource stewardship projects as defined below

Eligible public involvement in those opportunities may be paid or volunteer. Youth conservation corps, other types of paid service crews, event attendees, and volunteer participation are all considered public engagement.

Projects that are the result of, or contribute to, longer term relationships will be prioritized in proposal evaluation. In addition to describing involvement of people in project implementation, proposals should describe whether the project's design and planning stages include leadership or direct involvement of the populations they will benefit. Proposals should specify the populations they aim to engage in the opportunity, and how the opportunity is designed to benefit them. Applicants should demonstrate knowledge of and any existing relationships with the populations.

Stewardship Activities

In addition to a focus on public engagement, stewardship activities must be a component of every project proposed to MAP. Specifically, the participants of the groups engaged must complete eligible stewardship-oriented activities that result in benefits to the National Forest System. Benefits may be direct, such as trail maintenance or trash cleanup, or indirect. Examples of stewardship activities with indirect benefits include collecting monitoring data which the Forest Service or other public entities will use to inform management decisions, or educating other trail users to prevent resource damage. The NFF recognizes that different activities are appropriate for different types of participants, therefore a variety of activities are allowed, resulting in either large- or small-scale stewardship benefits.

Eligible participant stewardship activities include, and are not limited to:

- Recreation area cleanup
- Native tree and shrub planting
- Trail maintenance
- Invasive species control
- Forest and watershed restoration
- Hazardous fuels reduction
- Ecological or social monitoring to inform management decisions
- Educating other people using public lands about sustainable recreation principles

The NFF will consider proposed stewardship activities based on the applicant's ability to connect the particular populations the project is seeking to engage to public lands, not only on their scale of impact on the ground.

Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Long-Term Benefit

Through MAP, the NFF is reaffirming its interest in expanding environmental and conservation work and who participates in this work, acknowledging that Tribes and many underserved communities have historically not benefited from investments on public lands. The selection committee will prioritize projects that aim to create opportunities to advance equitability and the diversity of beneficiaries, whether during the MAP-funded performance period or in the future. Projects that are part of a long-term strategy to create or inspire connection to public lands will also receive priority.

Proposals should include a description of the benefits to the community engaged, including whether the project benefits or engages Tribes or underserved communities. For the purposes of MAP, the NFF uses the following definitions which align with the underserved communities identified in the [U.S. Forest Service Equity Action Plan](#):

Underserved Communities: Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life.

Equity: The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

INELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

In line with the MAP focus on community engagement in stewardship, applications are not accepted if the primary costs are for development or improvement of hardened infrastructure via purchases or contractors. This includes development of or major improvements to campgrounds, parking lots, restrooms, or visitor centers. The NFF will consider smaller scale activities at these locations completed as part of community engagement programming and if the majority of the proposed budget is for engagement-related costs. MAP funding is not intended to support wildland firefighting efforts, nor may it be used to support subcontracted stewardship efforts completed primarily by for-profit entities.

Funding and Match Requirements

MAP funds are provided to the NFF by the USDA Forest Service and recipients must treat the funds as Federal Awards under Federal Assistance Listing 10.682. In order to receive MAP funds, an award recipient must raise an equal amount of additional non-federal cash funds as match. In-kind contributions and federal funding are NOT eligible to meet the MAP program's 1:1 cash match requirements.

Both MAP and required cash match funds:

- Must be paid to the applicant organization and deposited in the applicant organization's bank account;
- Must support the same project activities and be expended within the same performance period;
- Must be used to advance the 501(c)(3) exempt mission of the NFF;
- Cannot support litigation or advocacy;
- Cannot support general administrative purposes beyond eligible indirect costs;
- Cannot be directed to the U.S. Forest Service or any other federal entity;
- Cannot be used to meet the matching requirements of any other federal funding program.

Upon selection for funding, award recipients must submit documentation to the NFF showing the receipt of eligible non-federal matching funds.

Project Administrative Considerations

APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Nonprofit organizations, Tribal governments and organizations, and universities are eligible to receive MAP grants. If an organization does not meet this eligibility requirement, it must utilize an eligible fiscal sponsor consistent with the [NFF Policy on Fiscal Sponsorship](#). The NFF does not consider MAP applications from federal or state agencies, local governments, individuals, or for-profit organizations.

PROJECT TIMING

Proposed project periods may be no more than 18 months long. For this round, grant performance periods will begin in September 2024, and extend for 12 or 18 months depending on grantee preference.

All activities directly supported by MAP and the expenditure of associated match must occur within the performance period. If project completion cannot confidently occur within the period specified above, please contact the NFF well in advance of the application deadline to discuss.

AWARD SIZE

There is not an official minimum or maximum award amount for the MAP program and successful proposals vary widely in budget size. In recent years, NFF has considered applications ranging from less than \$5,000 to over \$70,000. The NFF suggests that new MAP applicants submit applications requesting \$35,000 or less.

FUNDING OVERLAP RESTRICTIONS

There are limitations on overlap of MAP and other NFF awards to foster distribution of funds nationwide:

- A single organization may not reapply to MAP until any previous MAP grant has been fully closed.
- A single project, as defined by its location, goals, and objectives, may have only one active NFF grant at a time.
 - When multiple organizations are partnering on the same project, they must coordinate to submit only one application.
 - A project that is receiving funding from another NFF funding program may not receive MAP funding covering all or part of the same performance period.

Independently operating chapters of a national or regional organization are recognized as distinct organizations for the purpose of applying to MAP.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

The NFF will not consider proposals unless all environmental compliance work is complete at the time of application. This includes, but is not limited to, NEPA decisions and categorical exclusions, archaeological clearances, and any other mandatory Tribal, federal, state, or local clearances. No exceptions.

FOREST SERVICE LETTERS OF SUPPORT

All applications must include a letter of support from the District Ranger of each National Forest or Grassland District included in a proposal. Tribal entities are encouraged to contact the NFF in advance to discuss alternative options for letters of support.

- Applicants must upload letters of support with their online grant proposal when possible.
- In cases where the applicant does not receive their letter(s) of support prior to the application deadline, applicants may email letters of support to grants@nationalforests.org promptly.
- Proposals that include activities in multiple districts on one National Forest System unit may choose to obtain a single letter of support from the Forest Supervisor rather than a letter from each District Ranger. Similarly, proposals that include activities on multiple National Forest System units within any Forest Service Region may choose to obtain a letter of support from the Regional Forester rather than each Forest Supervisor.

- Support letters should be no more than a few months old and addressed either to the National Forest Foundation Matching Awards Program or to the applicant organization.
- Do not send letters of support via hard copy, fax, or any method other than direct upload or email.
- Do not submit any additional letters of support.

GEOGRAPHIC RESTRICTIONS

MAP funding is available for projects that take place on [U.S. National Forests and Grasslands](#). Additionally, projects taking place on public lands adjacent to National Forests and Grasslands, and that can demonstrate clear National Forest benefit, are eligible. Work that does not physically take place on National Forest System lands or adjacent public lands is ineligible for funding.

Proposal Review Process

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

A committee of National Forest Foundation staff, Board, and U.S. Forest Service representatives reviews proposals and makes funding recommendations. The review process is usually complete within two months of the application deadline. Due to differences in budget allocations, proposals for projects that are directly linked to NFF-initiated work planned for implementation in the NFF 2024 or 2025 Fiscal Year are evaluated separately from projects that are fully independent of NFF-initiated work.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each member of the MAP review committee quantitatively evaluates applications based on the following criteria. Applications that receive funding generally receive high scores on every individual criterion.

Strength of Engagement

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the engagement activities proposed, the population the project seeks to engage, and how the activities were designed:

- The extent to which the project increases capacity for participation and engagement in a measurable, active manner.
- The extent to which the population engaged had a voice and/or a leadership role in designing the program.
- The extent to which the engagement opportunity is well aligned with the population the applicant seeks to engage.

Potential for Diversifying Beneficiaries

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the groups of people that currently benefit from public lands, and whether the proposed project will advance that diversity. A project may advance diversity through the participants engaged during the project period, for example by supporting an affinity-based conservation crew for neurodivergent youth. Additionally, it may advance diversity because of the outcomes of the project activities, for example completion of an ADA-accessible trail. The criteria are:

- The extent to which the participants engaged in the proposed activities diversify the populations benefiting from public lands.
- The extent to which the proposed activities create opportunities or increase accessibility to diversify future beneficiaries of public lands.

Stewardship Benefit

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the stewardship activities that will be completed by the project participants, and the relevance and outcomes of those activities:

- The extent to which the proposed stewardship activities are well aligned with the described conservation or management needs.
- The extent to which the proposed stewardship activities provide measurable benefit to the National Forest System or adjacent public lands.

Potential for Long-term Impact

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the methods for understanding and sharing the project results, and the degree to which those results may have long-term impact:

- The extent to which the project readily and effectively transfers wise practices or shares lessons learned.
- The extent to which the project encourages, connects, or inspires participants to be personally involved in the National Forest System or adjacent public lands resources.
- The extent to which the means of evaluating and monitoring project outcomes are well defined and appropriate for the stated project goals.

Feasibility and Strength of Proposal

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the planning elements of the proposal, whether a project is logistically possible, and whether it is responsive to the stated needs:

- The extent to which the NFF-funded portion of the project can reasonably be accomplished within the proposed timeframe.
- The extent to which project goals and objectives are consistent with the identified needs.
- The extent to which the amount requested is appropriate.

How to Apply

Applicants complete and submit MAP applications through an online application platform. Refer to this RFP document and the following appendices as you complete the online form.

HOW TO START A NEW APPLICATION

1. Use this link <https://form.typeform.com/to/ybBIRAnT> to complete an approximately 10-question quiz that ensures the project and organization are eligible to receive MAP funding.
2. Upon successful completion of the eligibility quiz, you will receive an email with an access code and instructions that will allow you to initiate an application.

HOW TO RETURN TO THE APPLICATION YOU STARTED

If you have already completed the eligibility quiz and initiated an application, you can return to the application form by following these steps:

1. Go to the application login page at <https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=nationalforests>
2. Log in with your existing account
3. Click "Edit Application" to the right of the name of your saved application

PROPOSAL ATTACHMENT FORMS

The NFF regularly updates its standard forms and applicants must download and use the current forms each grant round. Do not re-use NFF forms saved on your computer from previous rounds.

- [NFF Master Financial Plan form](#)
- [NFF Expanded Budget form](#)

Applicant Resources

MAP is highly competitive and the NFF only funds projects that align exceptionally with programmatic criteria. Applicants report spending an average of 34 hours on the completion of a MAP application. To ensure that your time is well spent, use all the resources available to determine whether your project is eligible, and make sure you have fully addressed the application requirements.

PERTINENT POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

Prior to developing a MAP application, applicants should review and understand this RFP and the following policies:

- [NFF Indirect Cost Rate Policy](#)
- [NFF Policy on Fiscal Sponsorship](#) (if applicable)

Additional guidance on how to complete the NFF MAP application and budget forms are provided in these documents:

- [MAP Application Tips](#) – This document contains detailed guidance on certain application questions and components including instructions, tips, and checklists. This section is intended to help applicants develop and submit a competitive proposal.
- [How to Complete the NFF Master Financial Plan](#) – This document covers definitions of expense categories and match sources, and provides detailed examples of both the Master Financial Plan and Expanded Budget forms.
- [Guidance on Forest Service Letters of Support](#) – This document provides guidance on obtaining a USFS a Letter of Support.
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#) – This document includes answers to potential questions you may have. It answers eligibility questions, what expenses may be covered under the grant, and more.

INFORMATIONAL WEBINAR

An informational webinar regarding MAP proposal requirements and the submission process will take place May 20, 2024 at 12:00 pm MDT. Register in advance [here](#). The webinar will be recorded and posted on the NFF's MAP webpage.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AND PROGRAM CONTACT

NFF Conservation Awards staff are available to answer questions about eligibility, project scope, or the application process. If you have read through the resources listed above and have additional questions regarding MAP or the grant application process, you are encouraged to reach out to NFF staff for guidance.

Requesting and receiving help will not affect an organization's competitiveness for the program.

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