

Program Summary

The National Forest Foundation (NFF) Matching Awards Program (MAP) is a competitive grant program that has provided funding to benefit U.S. Forest Service lands for decades.

Starting in spring 2023, the program is shifting its funding criteria to focus on projects that involve the public in hands-on service to National Forests and Grasslands. Starting in Round 2, projects funded under MAP must inspire participants to get personally involved in caring for their public lands, and take place on Forest Service lands.

The changes described below take effect in Round 2 of the 2023 Matching Awards Program and full details will be released in the Round 2 RFP in March 2023, in advance of the round's May 18, 2023 application deadline. Proposals submitted in advance of the January 23, 2023 Round 1 application deadline will be evaluated under the existing funding criteria.

Eligibility Criteria

The following are requirements of all project proposals:

- Applicant:** 501(c)(3) nonprofit, university, or federally recognized Native American tribe
- Engagement:** Project must focus on engagement of the public, and should build on previous engagement of the population(s) it seeks to benefit
- Service:** Project must include an on-the-ground service component
- Location:** Project must take place on Forest Service lands
- Match:** 1:1 nonfederal cash match
- Environmental Compliance:** Any environmental permitting or compliance required for the proposed project activities must be complete at time of application
- Letter of Support:** Required from applicable Forest Service District Ranger or Forest Supervisor(s)

Required Focus Areas

The new hands-on engagement orientation of the Matching Awards Program includes two required focus areas: Community Engagement and Service Activities. Proposed projects must align with both areas.

1) Community Engagement

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

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
- Trail or site ambassadors

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.

In addition to involving people in project implementation, projects should include leadership or involvement of the populations they will benefit in design and planning stages. Proposals should specify the populations they aim to engage in the opportunity, and how the opportunity was designed to benefit them. Applicants should demonstrate knowledge of and existing relationships with the populations. The selection committee will prioritize projects led by marginalized communities or that meaningfully engage these communities and foster their connection to National Forests in proposal evaluation.

2) Service Activities

Service-oriented activities must be the **secondary** component of every project proposed to the Matching Awards Program. Eligible service-oriented activities must be completed by the participants and result in benefits to Forest Service lands. Benefits may be direct, such as trail maintenance or trash cleanup, or indirect, such as collecting monitoring data that will be used to benefit management decisions or education of trail users to prevent damage. The NFF recognizes that different activities are appropriate for different types of participants, therefore a variety of service actions are allowed, including both large- and small-scale stewardship activities.

Eligible activities include, but are not limited to:

- Recreation area cleanup
- Native trees and shrub planting
- Trail maintenance
- Invasive species control
- Forest and watershed restoration
- Hazardous fuels reduction
- Ecological or social monitoring to inform management decisions
- Education about sustainable recreation principles

Proposed activities will be evaluated in part on their ability to connect the particular population(s) the project is seeking to engage to public lands, not only on their scale of impact on the ground.

Evaluation Criteria

The selection committee will evaluate proposals using criteria under the following categories:

- Strength and appropriateness of public engagement outcomes
- Strength and appropriateness of service outcomes
- Strength of applicant's connection to community engaged
- Degree of meaningful involvement of individuals from marginalized communities
- Feasibility of proposed project