

Electronic Submission Deadlines

Round 1: December 12, 2016 at 11:59 pm MST

ATTENTION

This Request for Proposals (RFP) contains important information about Ski Conservation Fund requirements and the application process. Starting this year, the RFP contains an *Application Guidance* appendix, which lists instructions, advice, and evaluation criteria, and will be very valuable as you complete your application. Be sure you have reviewed and fully understand this document before continuing with the application process.

Save this RFP and refer to it as your organization completes the online application.

The 2017 grant rounds will be especially competitive. The NFF will only fund projects that align exceptionally with programmatic criteria.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL FOREST FOUNDATION

The National Forest Foundation (NFF), a private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization chartered by Congress, engages America in community-based and national programs that promote the health and public enjoyment of the 193-million-acre National Forest System, and administers private gifts of funds and land for the benefit of the National Forests. The NFF believes that communities should play a significant role in determining the future of National Forests and Grasslands.

INTRODUCTION

In partnership with Vail Resorts Management Company, Copper Mountain Resort, and Arapahoe Basin Ski and Snowboard Area, the NFF is currently soliciting proposals for its Ski Conservation Fund™ (SCF) grant program on the White River National Forest. SCF combines Federal funds provided through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Forest Service with individual donations voluntarily made by guests of partner resorts. This leveraged funding measurably multiplies the resources available for nonprofit partners to implement projects that directly benefit the White River National Forest.

A common thread connecting NFF program areas is an interest in results-oriented projects that enhance the viability of natural resources while benefitting and directly engaging surrounding communities. The NFF accepts applications from non-governmental, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations and Native American tribes working on or adjacent to National

Forests and Grasslands throughout the United States¹. Through SCF, organizations completing on-the-ground conservation work can apply for matching funds up to once a year, though only one competitive SCF award may be active at any time. SCF funding is available to support specific conservation and restoration *projects* and does not provide programmatic support. *Please note this distinction.*

SCF project selection occurs twice each year through a single-stage proposal process. In each round, the NFF evaluates submitted proposals, and provides funding to a subset. The process from proposal submission to notification of funding generally takes about three months.

All SCF awards require a 50% nonfederal cash or in-kind match. Federal funds are not eligible to serve as match, but should be noted to show project leverage. Award recipients cannot provide SCF funds to the U.S. Forest Service or any other federal entity. Project completion must occur within one year of the project award date, which typically begins within about 1 month of award notification. Successful applicants will have the opportunity to choose from a few pre-selected grant start dates.

PROGRAM AREAS

The current NFF strategic plan focuses on the Program Areas of Outdoor Experiences and Forest Health. Organizations may self-select into one of the Program Areas defined below, or choose to submit a proposal that cohesively integrates the two Program Areas. Projects that strongly integrate the program areas are highly encouraged. The NFF does not have funding targets for the Program Areas, and strongly encourages applicants to integrate the programs areas cohesively in their proposals.

Outdoor Experiences Program Area

The NFF supports results-oriented, on-the-ground, projects that improve the quality, condition, and care of Outdoor Experiences on National Forests by:

- Improving, or maintaining recreation resource connectivity including, and similar to: trail maintenance, bridge and crossing construction or repair, and installation of trail drainage structures; and/or
- Engaging youth, volunteers, or diverse, underserved or under-engaged populations in hands-on stewardship activities; and/or
- Employing youth and/or veterans crews to implement on-the-ground conservation, stewardship and/or restoration work.

Projects should generate tangible conservation outcomes or enhance high quality recreational experiences for the users of the National Forest System. Funds cannot support improvements of hardened facilities including, and similar to: campgrounds, parking lots, restrooms, visitor centers, and major signage.

Forest Health Program Area

The NFF supports results-oriented, on-the-ground, citizen-involved projects that maintain and/or restore ecosystem resiliency on National Forests by:

- Promoting ecosystem structure, function and diversity; and/or
- Promoting forest health through the removal or control of non-native invasive species, and/or reintroduction of native plants and trees.

¹ Although they are technically eligible for funding, the NFF currently funds very few projects that do not physically occur on National Forest System lands.

Projects should be consistent with or supportive of identified large-scale conservation initiatives. The NFF will only consider monitoring projects focused on determining the long-term effectiveness of NFF funded on-the-ground work.

Integrated Projects

The NFF encourages projects that cohesively integrate Outdoor Experiences and Forest Health program areas. Ideal projects will have a strong connection to each of the individual program areas, and effectively integrate both in a clear, direct manner.

Examples of integrated projects include, but are not limited to the following:

- Engaging community volunteers to complete riparian plantings as part of a watershed-scale restoration project;
- Utilizing youth crews from underserved communities to complete habitat stewardship work and forest stand treatments.

The most compelling projects will strongly integrate the Outdoor Experiences and Forest Health Program Areas, and will receive a weighted advantage in evaluation. A project will not be eligible for full weighted advantage if it does not cohesively integrate the two program areas, or only does so nominally.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In addition to focusing on the above Program Areas, SCF requires projects show a strong commitment to civic engagement and community involvement through direct public involvement. In order to be eligible for SCF funding, projects must contain significant, legitimate community involvement or civic engagement in the pre-implementation, implementation, or post-implementation phase. Typically, this involves the use of volunteers in project implementation, or the implementation of projects selected as an outcome of a formal collaborative-planning process. Note that the community engagement portion of the project does not necessarily have to occur in the portion of the project receiving SCF funding, although the project narrative must clearly describe the community engagement component. The standard public involvement component of the NEPA process is insufficient to meet this requirement.

EDUCATION / INTERPRETATION AND INVENTORY / MONITORING PROJECTS

Education, interpretation, inventory, and monitoring are not priorities for the use of SCF funds.

- Education and interpretation may only receive consideration as minor components of otherwise well-aligned larger projects.
- Projects with inventory or monitoring components may only receive consideration if those components focus on determining the long-term effectiveness of previous NFF funded on-the-ground work.

The NFF encourages applicants to use funding from other sources (including project match) for any portion of a project focused on education, interpretation, inventory, or monitoring.

PROJECT TIMING

Once selected for funding, SCF projects have one-year to complete. Grants approved this round will likely commence in March or April 2017 and run for one calendar year. Successful applicants in either round will have the opportunity to choose from a few pre-selected award period start dates within a 6-week window. If project completion cannot confidently occur within the period specified above, please contact the NFF well in advance of the deadline to discuss the merits of applying.

Applicants must consider foreseeable delays before submitting a proposal. This includes potential delays such as those related to NEPA and other environmental compliance. Proposals are not eligible for consideration unless all environmental compliance work is complete at time of application. **No Exceptions.**

ELIGIBILITY

501(c)(3) nonprofits, universities, and Native American tribes are eligible to receive SCF 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 will not consider SCF applications from the following:

- Federal agencies;
- Regional, state or local governmental entities;
- For-profit organizations;
- Consultants;
- Educational and research organizations proposing projects that do not show tangible, on-the-ground benefit;
- Organizations seeking general operating or programmatic support;
- Organizations seeking funding for litigation or advocacy;
- Organizations that cannot produce 50% cash match of non-federal, project-directed funds or in-kind contributions.
- Organizations considering submitting a proposal for a work over a timeline longer than one-year.

MATCH AND FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

All SCF awards require a 50% nonfederal cash or in-kind match. Federal funds are not eligible to serve as match, but should be noted to show project leverage.

SCF funds:

- Cannot support general administrative purposes beyond recovered indirect costs;
- Cannot support litigation or advocacy;
- Cannot be directed to the U.S. Forest Service or any other federal entity;
- Cannot meet the matching requirements of any other federal funding program.

FOREST SERVICE LETTERS OF SUPPORT

All applications must include a letter of support from the District Ranger for each Ranger District included in a proposal. Support letters should be no more than a few months old, and addressed either to the National Forest Foundation Ski Conservation Fund or to a representative of your organization. Do not submit any additional letters of support.

If not uploaded with the proposal, email letters of support to zmaumenee@nationalforests.org or fax them to (406) 830-3383 within 3 business days of the grant deadline. Do not submit letters of support via more than one method.

PERTINENT POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

Prior to submission of a SCF application, applicants should review and understand the following documents:

- [NFF Indirect Cost Rate Policy](#)
- [NFF Definitions of Funding Sources and Expense Categories](#)
- [NFF Policy on Fiscal Sponsorship](#) (as applicable)

APPLICATION GUIDANCE

The appendix to this request for proposal contains application components, instruction, advice, and evaluation criteria for SCF. Review this section thoroughly, as it is key to submitting a successful proposal.

TO APPLY

1. Visit the NFF [Online Grant System](#) and either:
 - a. Log on with an existing account; or
 - b. Click [Create New Account](#) and follow the steps to create a new account.
Tip: You are required to create a new account if you have not previously applied for an NFF grant through [this](#) online system.
2. Once logged in, click [Apply](#) and enter the access code below.
Access code: **rutabaga**
3. Click on [2017 Ski Conservation Fund – White River NF](#)
4. Follow the instructions provided on the online form.

Online Application Tips:

- *SAVE THIS RFP AND APPENDIX. The online form does not list all program requirements described herein. Be sure you review this RFP occasionally while completing your organization's application.*
- *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.*

PROGRAM RESOURCES

The NFF has developed [Conservation Connect](#) to provide tools needed for engaging in collaborative, community-based stewardship on our National Forests and Grasslands. Conservation Connect follows the NFF's peer learning philosophy of creating opportunities for practitioners on the ground to share their successes and challenges and to learn from the experiences of others. Conservation Connect hosts peer-learning teleconferences and offers mentoring, access to coaches, a resource library with best practices and tools, and a variety of information on emerging topics of interest.

The Forest Service and the NFF have also jointly developed the online [Partnership Resource Center](#), an excellent resource for community groups that focus on natural resource management issues.

Resources for grant seekers offering tips and best practices for writing successful proposals are widely available on the internet. The NFF has compiled a list of [some good starting places](#).

NFF staff is available to respond to questions about the application process; receiving help will not affect an organization's competitiveness for the program.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Please contact the NFF with additional questions regarding SCF or the grant application process. Seeking help will not affect an organization's competitiveness for the program.

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**APPENDIX:
SKI CONSERVATION FUND APPLICATION GUIDANCE**

This appendix details application components, instructions, advice, and evaluation criteria for the Ski Conservation Fund. **Please review it thoroughly.**

Components and instructions are in black text, **advice is in red text**, and **evaluation criteria are in orange text**. Items marked with an asterisk are required. In this guidance document, evaluation criteria are with the individual applications components they best fit with, but evaluation of each criterion takes information located elsewhere in the proposal into consideration.

Fiscal Sponsorship

Fiscal Sponsor Status*

Advice:

Indicate whether your organization will utilize a fiscal sponsor for this grant. If your organization does not have IRS 501(c)(3) status, you must utilize a fiscal sponsor. Be sure you understand the [NFF Policy on Fiscal Sponsorship](#).

Fiscal Sponsor Name

Advice:

Complete the remainder of the Fiscal Sponsor section only if your organization will utilize a fiscal sponsor for this grant.

Fiscal Sponsor Mailing Address

Fiscal Sponsor City

Fiscal Sponsor State

Fiscal Sponsor Zip

Fiscal Sponsor Chief Executive First Name

Fiscal Sponsor Chief Executive Last Name

Fiscal Sponsor Chief Executive Email

Fiscal Sponsor Chief Executive Phone

Project Information

Project Name*

Advice:

Provide a concise, descriptive name for the proposed project.

Amount Requested*

Advice:

Indicate the amount you are requesting in NFF funds for this project.

Congressional District of Organization

Advice:

List the Congressional District of the primary applicant organization using the information provided at <http://www.census.gov/mycd/>. If your organization uses a fiscal sponsor, list the Congressional District of the fiscal sponsor. Use the format [AZ-01](#) or [MT-At Large](#).

Congressional District(s) of Project

Advice:

List the Congressional District(s) that the project will occur in using the information provided at <http://www.census.gov/mycd/>. Use the format AZ-01 or MT-At Large, and separate multiple Congressional Districts with commas.

Project Overview

Forest Service Region*

Advice:

Indicate the [National Forest System region](#) of your project. If the project is in multiple regions, select "Multiple Regions"

National Forests or Grasslands Impacted*

Advice:

List the units of the National Forest System the project benefits. Please include full National Forest name. Do not include Ranger Districts. (For Example: "Wallowa-Whitman National Forest," or "Green Mountain and White Mountain National Forests.")

Project Description* (250 Characters)

Advice:

Provide a 1-2 sentence summary of the project. While not required, we encourage you to start this section with the word "To", followed by a descriptive verb.

Anticipated Start Date*

Advice:

Indicate the approximate date that the NFF-funded portion of the project will commence.

Anticipated Completion Date*

Advice:

Indicate the approximate date the NFF-funded portion of the project will finish. Ensure that this time is within the window identified in the RFP.

Project Narrative

Executive Summary* (1,500 Characters)

In about a paragraph, provide an abridged version of narrative below.

Advice:

This is a brief summary of overall proposal, including the need, goals, methods, and outcomes. Nothing should be included in the executive summary that is not in the rest of the proposal. You may prefer to wait to write this section until after the rest of the proposal is complete.

Project Need* (2,000 Characters)

Instruction:

In brief narrative form, succinctly and persuasively describe the need for the project, including the broader ecological, social, and/or economic issues the project will address. Indicate the National Forest System management issues involved and alignment with broader-scale conservation initiatives, if any.

Advice:

This section asks you to respond to the *WHY* of the project. Make a compelling case for what is wrong, before you describe later in this proposal the specific steps that you will take to fix it.

Goals and Objectives* (2,000 Characters)

Instruction:

In brief, bulleted sentences, list the specific goals and objectives the project will accomplish and detail where it is located within the National Forest System.

Advice:

This section asks you to respond *WHAT* you plan to accomplish in the project and *WHERE* you plan to accomplish it. Succinctly describe the work you plan to accomplish. Describe specific location(s) of the project, and do not generalize. We encourage you to use [SMART](#) criteria in your goals and objectives.

Evaluation:

The extent to which project goals and objectives are specific, consistent with the identified need, and clearly articulated.

Methods* (5,000 Characters)

Instruction:

In a succinct narrative or bulleted-paragraph format, describe the specific steps you will take to achieve each individual goal or objective. Include an implementation timeline that details discrete tasks and the individuals responsible for conducting each. Describe how the project engages other partner organizations.

Advice:

This section asks you to respond to the *HOW* of the project. Clearly describe the individual actions that your organization will complete to advance each goal or objective. The timeline should be monthly or quarterly and indicate staffing. Include detail on the role that other organizations will play in the project.

Evaluation:

The extent to which the NFF-funded portion of the project can reasonably be accomplished within one year.

Specific Outcomes* (3,000 Characters)

Instruction:

Indicate the projected outcomes of the project. In bulleted format, quantify tangible outcomes in units such as the number of miles maintained, acres treated, trees planted, or volunteers engaged. Include a narrative portion to describe specific qualitative environmental or social impacts.

Advice:

This section asks you to detail the anticipated quantitative and qualitative outcomes of the project. Be specific, and describe what the accomplishments will be. If you are tracking something easily countable, like the number of miles of trail maintained or the number of hours a youth crew will work on a project, put it in bulleted list or in brief bulleted sentences. If you are also tracking something harder to quantify like the change in user behavior, or increased social license because of a completed project, describe that in brief narrative format. Be as specific as you can, and do not generalize.

Evaluation:

The extent to which the project improves conditions of National Forest System resources in a measurable, on-the-ground manner.

Program Area Alignment* (1,500 Characters)

Instruction:

In brief narrative format, describe how the project aligns with the NFF Outdoor Experiences or Forest Health Program Areas.

Advice:

This section asks you to explain explicitly how the project is consistent with the NFF Outdoor Experiences or Forest Health Program Areas described in the RFP. Describe which components of the project fit with the components of program area. Be honest. Don't make it a stretch.

Evaluation:

The extent to which the project is highly aligned with the either the Outdoor Experiences or Forest Health Program Areas.

Integrated Approach (Optional) (1,500 Characters)

Instruction:

If the project will cohesively integrate the Outdoor Experiences and Forest Health Program Areas, in brief narrative form, describe how it effectively ties the two Program Areas together.

Advice:

This optional section asks you to describe the extent to which the project strongly integrates the two NFF program areas. The most successful projects will seamlessly integrate the two program areas and receive weighted advantage. Projects that only nominally integrate the focus areas will not receive the weighted advantage. Be honest. Don't make it a stretch.

Evaluation:

The extent to which the project cohesively integrates the Outdoor Experiences and Forest Health Program Areas.

Evaluation, Monitoring, and Dissemination* (2,000 Characters)

Instruction:

In brief narrative format, describe the following:

- The metrics used to determine whether the project achieved the goals and objectives set out, and who will determine it;
- The type of monitoring, if any, that will occur to know that the project was demonstrably effective over the short, medium, and long term, as well as how monitoring results will be incorporated in future work;
- How the organization will broadly communicate the project successes and challenges once work is completed.

Advice:

This section asks you to identify how you will know that you had an impact and accomplished your goals, as well as how you will share your successes and lessons learned.

For evaluation, how will you determine whether the goals and objectives were completed, and how will you assess the quality of the work?

For monitoring, in this context, the NFF is interested in three primary types of monitoring: baseline, implementation, and effectiveness. Describe how your project utilizes any or all of these.

For dissemination, describe how you will communicate the project outcomes internally and externally. Are you only posting a photo on Facebook, or are you presenting at a workshop or preparing an instructional handbook?

Evaluation:

The extent to which the means of evaluating and monitoring project outcomes are well defined and appropriate for the stated project goals.

The extent to which the project is readily and effectively transfers best practices or shares lessons learned.

Civic Engagement* (1,500 Characters)

Instruction:

In brief narrative format, describe the extent to which the community is directly engaged in the planning, implementation, and/or monitoring phases of the project. Identify the role, if any, that volunteers play in the project, and interest groups involved, with the role each plays.

Advice:

This section asks you to explain the role that the community plays in the implementation of your project. If your project uses volunteers, identify the roles they play. If your project uses youth crews, identify your organization's approach to working with youth crews. If your project involves the implementation of a project developed by a collaborative group, describe the role that the collaborative played. If your project directly engages underserved communities, describe the communities and the roles they play.

Evaluation:

The extent to which the project clearly enhances local understanding of natural resource issues, and increases local capacity for participation and engagement.

The extent to which the project directly engages diverse or new stakeholders in the pre-implementation, implementation, or post-implementation phase.

Environmental Compliance

Environmental Compliance*

Advice:

Indicate whether the project requires any environmental permitting or compliance work, including under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Compliance Verification*

Advice:

If required, indicate whether the compliance is complete.

Impediments to Implementation*

Indicate whether there are likely issues to delay the grant's completion within the timeline indicated in the RFP.

Impediments to Implementation Explained

Advice:

If there are any likely issues that would delay grant completion, describe them here.

Project Documents

Budget Narrative* (5,000 Characters)

Advice:

Provide a Budget Narrative that briefly summarizes your financial plan in bulleted narrative form. For each expense category, specifically describe how the project will spend NFF funds if awarded. Typically, two or three sentences for each expense category are sufficient

Financial Plan Form* (Upload)

Advice:

Upload a completed [NFF Financial Plan form](#) showing the budget for the project on the top half of the form, and what funds you plan to use as match on the bottom half of the form. 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. Do not use financial plan forms from other sources.

Be sure you understand and follow the [Definitions of Expense Categories and Funding Sources](#) and the [NFF Indirect Cost Rate Policy](#).

Evaluation:

The extent to which the amount requested is appropriate, cost-effective, and commensurate with project needs.

The extent to which the project meets an anticipated 50% cash or in-kind.

Expanded Budget Form* (Upload)

Advice:

Upload the [NFF Expanded Budget form](#) to detail to provide detail on the budget categories from the financial plan form. 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. Do not use expanded budget forms from other sources.

Project Area SCF* (Upload)

Advice:

Upload a SCF of the project area to help reviewers locate it within the National Forest System and identify its proximity to other relevant locations. If the SCF consists of several documents, combine them into a PDF and upload a single file.

Forest Service Letter of Support (Upload)

Advice:

Upload a letter of support from the District Ranger of each Ranger District included in a proposal. Do not submit letters any additional letters of support.

If not uploaded with the proposal, email letters of support to zmaumenee@nationalforests.org or fax it to (406) 830-3383 within 3 days of the grant deadline.

Organization Background

Organizational Background* (1,500 Characters)

Advice:

In brief narrative format, provide an overview of the history, mission, and goals of your organization. What are organization's program priorities and the constituency and geographic area that you serve?

Biographical Sketch of Professional Staff Involved in the Project* (2,000 Characters)

Advice:

In narrative format, provide a description of the professional staff engaged in project implementation and their relevant skills. Please only list those that work for your organization or as contractors. You do not need to complete this section for Forest Service Staff involved in the project.

List of Board Members* (Upload or 5,000 Characters)

Advice:

Include a list of your organization's board of directors and their relevant affiliations.

Organizational Financials* (Upload)

Advice:

Upload financial statements for the most recently completed fiscal year of your organization, or your organization's fiscal sponsor. If professionally prepared, this must include an audited, reviewed or compiled financial report. If self-prepared, this should include a recent profit/loss statement and budget-to-actual statement. Do not include a copy of your organization's IRS form 990. If the financials consists of several documents, combine them into a PDF and upload a single file.

NICRA

Advice:

If your organization has a federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (NICRA), upload a copy. Note that the uploaded NICRA must be current through the start of the NFF grant, or your organization can only recover indirects at a *de Minimis* rate. Be sure you understand and follow the [NFF Indirect Cost Rate Policy](#).