

# Recreational Trails Grant Application Process

## Frequently Asked Questions

Updated December 2015

- **Where can I find more information if my questions are not answered on this sheet?** <http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/grants/trails.htm>
- **What is a public project?** All projects using federal grant funds must have public benefit, be accessible, open and available to the general public, or targeted to a broad segment of the general public. Federal grant funds should not be used for projects that have such limited capacity that only a few paying (or potentially paying) guests have access to the product of the project. The portions of a project using federal grant funds must be open for general public use or viewing at all times and when visitors are likely.
- **Do I have to fill out an Environmental Review Checklist? Yes.** Every applicant must fill out an ERC unless they have a “**categorical exclusion**” (see question below). This shows the reviewer that the applicant has gone through the process of thinking about the environmental impacts of their proposed project and has contacted all of the necessary agencies and acquired all necessary permits. Some answers on the ERC may be “not applicable” or “no” – this is OK.
- **What is a “categorical exclusion” and how do I know if my project qualifies?** Under “Grant Forms” <http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/grants/trails.htm> on the Trails Program web page, refer to both the [CFR 771.117](#) and the [Programmatic Agreement](#) between FHWA and DNR. If your project can be identified under Stipulation 1 **ONLY**, you have a “**categorical exclusion**” and will not need an ERC. If any part of your project qualifies under Stipulations 2 or 3 of the Programmatic Agreement you must have a completed [ERC](#) to receive grant money. All projects that break ground for new trail, trail “widening” or “re-routes” require an ERC. Be careful when using these words in your project description.
- **Do I need new letters of support if I got them last year? Yes.** The circumstances or the stakeholders surrounding your project may have changed and those that supported last year may not support this year. You may have your supporters simply email an updated voice of support that can be attached to last year’s letter.
- **Can I just turn in last year’s application if I change the dates? No.** Please use the [new and updated application form](#) from the website available on or after August 15 of the year in which you are applying for funds. We will try to update and improve the application and associated documents annually.
- **Must I have all my permits and authorizations final and included with my application? 1.** All land use authorizations or letters of non-objection for land use must be included with the application. If your project doesn’t have permission from the land owner, it cannot move forward.  
**2.** All agency documents such as an Office of History and Archaeology inspection, a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), or Fish Habitat Permit do not necessarily have to be finalized. These permits can cost money or take months to obtain and, 1. If your project doesn’t get approved for funding you will not need, and 2. You must only have them in hand before you break ground for the project.
- **If I include more match than required, does it reflect favorably on my application? No,** you will not receive a higher score for having more match than is required. Having more match could cause the federal share to decrease if the Federal Highways Administration determines there is less need based on more than the 20% match requirement. (the amount of donations or volunteers you secure on your own is your business as long as you document in your budget the minimum amount required in the application.)
- **Can my project be mainly for surveying, planning, research and assessments? No.** Recreational Trails Grants are intended to help initiate shovel-ready projects with tangible, on-the-ground results; i.e. a bridge across a creek on a ski trail, a new hiking trail, a bike pump park, motor-cross track improvements, etc.
- **Can my project be for routine maintenance? No.** This grant is intended for project initiation, trail or trail facility development, repair, rehabilitation, or improvement.
- **Will any costs that I incur before the grant agreement is signed be allowable reimbursements? No** in most cases. The exception is permitting that costs money and is essential for project approval, such as a SWPPP, Land Use Permit, or Archaeological survey.

- **Can I just guess at how much it will cost to contract out a service? No.** Please contact contractors and collect their professional estimates or bids. Include those with your package.
- **Can I leave the explanation part of the budget sheet blank if I don't know the information? Please avoid this.** It will be returned to you and you will need to clearly justify all labor, materials and services with explanations of hourly /unit/other costs. (Example: If you enter \$22,000 labor as a line item with no or little explanation you are guaranteed to have your application returned.) Please see the Application Instructions for further detail.
- **Once the grant agreement is signed, how long does it take for me to get my money?** The Recreational Trails Program is a reimbursable grant. You are expected to buy or pay upfront for services and materials and then submit your receipts with a reimbursement form for payment. There are no advances.
- **How do you figure the match percentage?** The Recreational Trails grants require a 20% match from the grantee. However, that percentage is based on the total project cost, not just the federal share. Therefore, the formula for determining match would be (federal share divided by 80%) x 20% = match requirement. An example is a grant that has a \$50,000 federal share would be: \$50,000 divided by 80% times 20% = \$12,500. \$12,500 would be the match requirement. Projects submitted by DPOR use a 90.97/9.03 % ratio.
- **How long do I have to complete my project?** Grant agreements are good for two years, **however**, you must turn in a reimbursement request for within the first 10 months after FHWA approval or risk federal de-obligation of your project. Please plan accordingly and see Instruction and Information Manual for more information.
- **How much money is available for one project?** Currently \$50,000 is the maximum award for non-motorized projects and \$100,000 for motorized projects. A motorized project is one where the trail is predominately for motorized recreation. This is not for purchasing motorized equipment to be used on a non-motorized trail.
- **Can I have more than one grant open at the same time?** You may have more than one grant open for different projects, and you may have one grant project contain more than one phase, but each phase will have to be completed before the next one can begin.
- **How are awarded projects selected?** Applications submitted on time are initially reviewed by the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, then forwarded to the Outdoor Recreational Trails Advisory Board (ORTAB) for scoring and recommendation. Once the scores and recommendations are received, the State Parks Director's office selects the grants to be awarded.
- **Do I have to own the land where the project will take place?** The public must be assured legal access to trails and trail related facilities developed or maintained with grant funds. If any portion of a trail project is on private land, the applicant must obtain documented permission from the landowner for public access for a minimum of 5 years. Projects on public land must have documented approval from the land manager and access assured for at least 10 years. The grant applicant must obtain these assurances prior to submitting an application. If the project is for winter access or trail grooming only, public access need only be assured for the life of the grant. Applications missing landowner permission to access will be considered incomplete and ineligible.
- **What is the current value of volunteer labor?** For 2015 it was \$26.59 / hr. This will change slightly in the summer of 2016 and we will update this publication. Until the new amount is released, use this figure.
- **Are there applicant performance standards? Yes.** Please see Instruction and Information Manual for more detail.
- **I've received this grant several times over many years, it doesn't really matter if my package is neat, organized, professional, and competitive does it? YES** This grant program has become very competitive and very strict. Think of your application package like one you might put together if applying for a job, a house loan, or a scholarship. Your application will be judged and scored based on its overall quality, appearance, accuracy, and detail. If you want to see how you will be scored, we invite you to peruse the score sheet on the trails program web page <http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/grants/trailprojectscoresheetcurrent.pdf> .
- **Will my project have to comply with the Buy America provision? Yes**, if the project uses an item containing steel valued at \$2500 or more. Think: bridges, culverts, grooming drags, metal stairs, machinery, etc. Please see Instruction and Information Manual for more detail and bring it to the attention of the State Trails Program office as soon as possible.
- **I think my project idea might qualify under the Safety, Signing, and Education apportionment. How do I know?** Development and dissemination of publications and operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection related to the use of recreational trails, including supporting non-law

enforcement trail safety and trail use monitoring patrol programs, and providing trail-related training (limited to 5 percent of a State's apportionment). These projects must offer training or materials either free to the general public, or at a very minimal cost. All reimbursable expenses must be allocated to educational materials. Also see definition of "public project". Projects not dominated by administrative or overhead costs, and those that get the most money out to the public are favored. NOTE: This is an optional category, has very limited funding, and is very competitive.

- **I've heard that I will have to choose a fixed project completion date, is this true? YES** Since adoption of the new CFR 200 in December 2014 all projects must have a fixed completion date that is justified and backed up by a project schedule broken into weeks. This requirement improves project planning and encourages the applicant to carefully think about all the details necessary for project completion and any weather or supply chain timing issues. Once this completion date has passed there will not be any more reimbursement of projects costs. Any invoice or receipt dated after the completion date will not be reimbursed. There are no exceptions.
- **Can I extend my project completion date if I foresee the project taking more time than expected? YES** If there are situations out of your control, i.e. flooding, earthquake, huge weather events or health issues, or major supply chain issues, then you may, ahead of the date, request an extension. This will trigger a formal contract amendment and have to be authorized by both FHWA and DNR. There must be a very good reason for the extension and be requested prior to expiration. Having left over money to spend or poor project planning are not reasons your project completion date will be extended.