Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

National Park Service

Department of Interior

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This FAQ document provides detailed information about the Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Grant Program, administered by the National Park Service. Information provided includes application procedures, eligibility requirements, and project guidelines. Please contact your State Liaison Office or email ORLP_Inquiries@NPS.gov if you have any questions that are not addressed in this document.

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Application Process

When will the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) be released?

- The Notice of Funding Opportunity was released on May 27, 2026. It is five-year notice, which means the NOFO will be open until 2030, with a single application review period per year.

When are applications due?

- For directly eligible applicants (State and Territorial Lead Agencies, federally recognized Indian Tribes[1], and Alaska Native communities or organizations) - Applications are due to the NPS each year on November 1st, by 11:59 pm ET. Applications are submitted via Grants.gov.
- For eligible sub recipients applying through a state or territorial lead agency (Municipalities, Native Hawaiian communities or organizations) - Each lead agency has their own deadline and process for state-level competition. Be sure to check with your lead agency for full details and deadlines.
- Urban Indian organizations may choose whether to apply through an eligible Tribal government or State and Territorial Lead Agency. In either case, each lead agency and Tribal government may have their own deadline and process for competition. Be sure to check with your lead agency or tribal government for full details and deadlines.

Where and how do I apply?

- If you are applying for a project in Census-Designated Urban Area, as a Political subdivision of a State or Territory, or as Native Hawaiian community or organization you should contact your State or Territorial lead agency, and they will submit your application on your behalf. Applications for projects in Census-Designated Urban Areas that were not submitted through a lead agency are ineligible and will not be considered for funding.
- If you are applying as a federally recognized Indian Tribe, Alaska Native community or organization, you can submit your application directly via the Notice of Funding Opportunity in Grants.gov.
- Urban Indian organizations may choose whether to apply through an eligible Tribal government or State and Territorial Lead Agency.

Who is my State or Territorial lead agency?

- You can find your State or Territorial Lead Agency on the NPS LWCF Contact List. Please reach out to ORLP_Inquiries@NPS.gov if you have questions.

[1] Federal Register :: Indian Entities Recognized by and Eligible To Receive Services From the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs

How are applications reviewed?

- National Park Service staff initially review each application to verify that it meets basic program eligibility requirements. If the application meets these requirements, it is moved forward to merit review. During merit review, an external review team evaluates and scores each application using the criteria in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. Applications are then ranked based on their scores. These rankings help guide which applicants are selected for the ORLP program funding. To learn more about the merit review process, read to the "Merit Review Process" FAQ section.

When are selections announced?

- We anticipate announcing selections each May, following the November 1st deadline.

Eligibility Requirements & Eligible Applicants

What are the eligibility requirements for ORLP funding?

- ORLP only has one eligibility requirement; Projects must be located in a "qualifying area," defined as:
    - An Urban Area with a population of 25,000 or more;
    - OR two or more adjacent Urban Areas with a combined population of 25,000 or more.
- The US Census Bureau maintains a list of all qualifying urban areas in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Insular Areas, which is available here.
- Federally recognized Indian Tribes, and Alaska Native Corporations and Organizations **are NOT** subject to this population requirement and can apply regardless of population.

How do I determine whether my project meets the population requirement?

- To demonstrate that a project is in an Urban Area with a population of at least 25,000, visit the Census Bureau's list of Urban Areas. Your locality must 1) be on this list, and 2) have a population listed above 25,000.
- To demonstrate that a project is eligible under the "two or more adjacent Urban Areas with a combined population of 25,000 or more," option, applicants must:
    - State which adjacent Urban Areas the project qualifies under;
    - Demonstrate the combined population exceeds 25,000;
    - Show where the project is located in relation to the adjacent Urban Areas.

What if the park project is between two cities, can I add together the population of the two cities to meet the population requirement?

- The proposed project must be within a qualifying area. If two cities are combining population to meet the requirement, the project must still be in a qualifying Urban Area or an area administered by a federally recognized Indian Tribe or an Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian community or organization.

What if I do not meet the population requirement?

- Unfortunately, you are not eligible to apply for ORLP. Visit Grants.gov to explore other federal funding opportunities that could be a fit for your project.
- Federally recognized Indian Tribes, and Alaska Native Corporations and Organizations **<u>are NOT</u>** subject to this population requirement and can apply regardless of population.

What types of organizations can apply?

- State agencies, cities, towns, other local units of governments and special purpose districts, urban Indian organizations, Federally Recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations (ANC), Alaska Native Organizations (ANO), Native Hawaiian Communities, and Urban Indian Organizations are eligible to apply for ORLP funding.
- Special purpose districts must be an entity created by a legislative authority with a stated mission that includes acquiring, developing, owning and managing recreation areas. Special Purpose Districts must be able to demonstrate that it can meet the perpetual protection requirement of the LWCF program.

Can a local government agency apply?

- Yes, local government agencies are eligible to apply through their State or Territorial Lead Agency. Contact your Lead Agency for more details and requirements.

Can a Native American Tribal Government or Native American Tribal Organization apply?

- Federally recognized Indian Tribes[2], Alaska Native Corporations (ANC), and Alaska Native Organizations (ANO) can apply directly for ORLP funding through this Notice of Funding Opportunity.
- Native Hawaiian Organizations/Communities and Urban Indian Organizations are eligible subrecipients for ORLP projects.
    - Native Hawaiian Organizations/Communities must apply through a State Lead Agency for funding.
    - Urban Indian Organizations can choose to apply through a directly eligible tribal applicant from the list above, or a State or Territorial Lead Agency.

Can private landowners, for-profit organizations, or businesses apply?

- No, private landowners, for-profit organizations and businesses are ineligible to apply. If you fall into one of these groups and have an idea for a project, collaborate with an eligible applicant, such as a local government, to help support the development of an application. You could also support project development through monetary or in-kind donations.

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[2] Federal Register :: Indian Entities Recognized by and Eligible To Receive Services From the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs

Can non-profit organizations apply?

- No, non-profit organizations are ineligible to apply. Non-profit organizations are encouraged to collaborate with an eligible applicant, such as a local government, to help support the development of an application.

Project Eligibility

What types of projects are eligible?

- ORLP funds land acquisition, site development, and projects that combine acquisition and development. These projects can cater to a diverse range of public outdoor recreation activities and facilities required to enhance the use and enjoyment for the public. These include, and are not limited to:
    - Community Parks
    - Campgrounds
    - Playgrounds
    - Sport fields and Courts
    - Picnic Areas and Open-air Pavilions
    - Trails and Tracks for Hiking, Walking, Skating, or Biking
    - Water based Recreation Facilities for Swimming or Boating
    - Fishing and Hunting Facilities
    - Pools and Splash Pads
    - Publicly Accessible Nature Preserves or Conservation Areas
    - Community Gardens
    - Spectator Facilities such as Amphitheaters or Bandstands
    - Renovations of Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities

What types of projects and costs are ineligible?

- Acquisition of lands, or interests in lands, that completely restrict access to specific persons (e.g., non-residents of a community).
- Acquisition support costs such as appraisals or title work.
- Funding for recreation programs, equipment, team or individual participation fees, or support of any sports leagues are ineligible.
- Indoor facilities such as recreation centers or facilities that support primarily non-outdoor purposes like dining facilities or overnight accommodation (such as a lodge or hotel), nature centers, community centers, or education centers are also ineligible.
- Facilities that support semi-professional or professional athletics such as baseball stadiums or soccer arenas are ineligible.

Are projects on school grounds eligible, e.g. schoolyards?

- Yes—sometimes. Projects on school grounds can receive LWCF funding only if the outdoor recreation area is meant for public use, not just for school programs. Here's what that means:
    - Outdoor areas on school property can be eligible as long as they are public parks or recreation spaces that the community can use.
    - Projects are not eligible if the facilities are only meant to support the school's regular physical education or athletic programs.
    - Schools can reserve certain facilities (like athletic fields, tennis courts, or swimming pools) for classes or competitions at specific times, but public use must remain the main purpose, and the public must have access at least 50% of the time.
    - Applications must include a plan or schedule that demonstrates when the public can use the facility.

Match and Budget

How much funding is available for a project?

- ORLP awards range from $300,000 to $15 million per project. This is just for the amount of federal funding available at award. Total project costs can exceed $15 million.

Will we receive our award funds upfront once the grant agreement is finalized?

- No, ORLP is a reimbursement program. Grant recipients must initially use their own resources to pay for all project costs.
- The grant recipient will then receive reimbursement after they have spent their own funds.

What are the cost sharing requirements for this grant?

- ORLP grants are 50% matching grants.
- For example, if a project has a total cost of $500,000, then ORLP could reimburse up to $250,000 and the applicant would provide the other $250,000 from other sources.
- The applicant's match must come from eligible (typically non-federal) sources.
- American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands **do not** need to provide 50% non-Federal cost share. These areas can receive full (100%) federal funding.

What can be used to meet the cost sharing requirements?

- Projects can combine many sources of funding to meet the 1:1 match requirement, including city, state, private, and/or philanthropic dollars.
- Non-monetary contributions can also count towards a project's total match amount. Examples include land donation or bargain sale, cash, in-kind contributions, and volunteer services.

Can other federal funds be used as the "nonfederal" match?

- Yes, in specific instances. Communities can leverage other federal programs for matching dollars, if a program has the existing legislative authority to do so. Common options include HUD's Community Development Block Grants and Federal Highway Administration's Recreation Trails Program.

Does cost share need to be secured at the time of initial application?

- No, applicants are not expected to have cost share finalized in their initial application. At a minimum, applicants must describe their plan for securing cost share, including the source(s), anticipated amount(s), and status of cost share discussions. Cost share sources must be finalized to receive a grant award.

What should I include in the budget narrative?

- Applicants are encouraged but not required to use the Budget Narrative Template that is published through this Notice of Funding Opportunity.
- Regardless of the format used, all budget narratives must include a description and justification for all costs listed in the budget. The budget narrative should only reflect the costs related to activities to be completed under an ORLP grant and must include total estimated costs, non-Federal cost share, third-party contributions, indirect cost rate (if applicable), and any pre-award costs.

What are the rules around administrative and indirect costs?

- The EXPLORE Act limits ORLP projects' administrative costs to 7% of the total grant awarded. Additionally, the EXPLORE Act specifically excludes acquisition support costs (such as title research and appraisals).
- Indirect Costs – Applicants/Recipients must indicate in the budget how indirect costs will be charged, including the rate to be applied. Any rates that accompany the project budget must meet the requirements of 2 CFR Part 200, Section 200.414 and 2 CFR Part 200, Appendix III through Appendix VII, as applicable.

Merit Review Process

How are applications evaluated?

- The application process for applications submitted by state lead agencies involves two competitive steps: 1) state-level selections, and 2) national competition. Applications must first be selected at the state-level to proceed for national consideration.
- Applications submitted by Federally recognized Indian Tribes[3], Alaska Native Corporations (ANC), and Alaska Native Organizations (ANO) will also be evaluated in the national competition.

[3] Federal Register :: Indian Entities Recognized by and Eligible To Receive Services From the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs

- The initial review will be performed by NPS staff to determine whether: (1) the applicant is eligible for an award; (2) the information required by the NOFO has been submitted; (3) all mandatory requirements of the NOFO are satisfied; (4) the proposed project is responsive to the program objectives of the NOFO (program determination); and (5) the proposed project is in compliance with all applicable executive and secretary orders
- All applications that pass the initial review will be eligible for the comprehensive merit review.
- During the comprehensive merit review, a panel of reviewers will evaluate and score each application for its alignment to the merit review criteria that is described on pages 17 through 21 of the NOFO.

What are the merit review criteria for ORLP applications?

- ORLP projects are evaluated on the extent to which they:
    - Increase Access to Outdoor Recreation Opportunities
    - Align with Community Needs
    - Leverage Resources in Support of Recreation
    - Promote Conservation and Ecological Benefits
    - Demonstrate Feasibility
- Refer to the Notice of Funding Opportunity's "Merit Review Criteria" section for more information.

Who reviews applications?

- ORLP uses external merit review panelists who have subject matter expertise in recreation, development, design, natural resources, etc. Panelists weigh the strengths and weaknesses of each application based on the merit review criteria outlined in the notice of funding opportunity (NOFO).

Can I receive feedback on my application if my project is unsuccessful?

- A summary of the review panel comments can be provided to applicants if requested.

Other

What if I still have questions that have not been addressed?

- Reach out to your State or Territorial Lead Agency or email ORLP_Inquiries@NPS.gov.

Who can I contact if I have questions about Grants.gov functionality or need assistance submitting my application (i.e., creating an account, uploading attachments, etc.)?

- Please contact the Grants.gov Help Center at support@grants.gov or 1-800-518-4726 for assistance with Grants.gov access and functionality.