

CONNECTICUT
Land Conservation Council

**Climate Smart Land Stewardship Grant Program
Request for Proposals & Grant Guidance**

2024 Application Deadlines:

March 1, May 1, August 1, November 1

Applications are due by 5:00pm.



Funding for this grant program was paid for by the Climate Smart Farming: Agriculture and Forestry Grant. Funding awarded and administered by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) is pleased to announce that it is accepting applications for its first round of Climate Smart Land Stewardship Grants for land trusts. By funding both planning and implementation of climate smart land stewardship practices on protected land, this grant program will increase the number of acres in Connecticut managed using climate smart stewardship practices and encourage future use of climate smart practices among Connecticut's land trusts.

Connecticut's ~120 land trusts have collectively conserved more than 200,000 acres of land. These lands represent a vital component of the natural climate solutions required to combat the climate crisis. Through careful and well-planned stewardship, these protected lands have the potential to provide even greater climate benefits. This grant program will elevate the role of conserved lands in providing natural climate solutions by integrating climate mitigation, resilience, and adaptation into the stewardship of conserved lands throughout the state.

This program will award \$500,000 over multiple years. In 2024, grants will be awarded quarterly. Information on how to apply is provided in this guidance document and will be explained in an informational webinar and an accompanying FAQ document available on the [program web page](#).

Interested organizations are encouraged to contact Ricky Bentley at rbentley@ctconservation.org or 860-852-5512 with any questions.

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Important Dates

In 2024, applications will be reviewed quarterly. Submission deadlines are:

- March 1, 2024
- May 1, 2024
- August 1, 2024
- November 1, 2024

Applications are due by 5:00pm on the deadline date.

Funding decisions are anticipated approximately six weeks after application deadlines.

Grant Program Purpose

The purpose of the Climate Smart Land Stewardship Grant Program is to increase the number of acres in Connecticut that are managed using climate smart land stewardship practices and encourage the future use of climate smart practices among Connecticut's land trusts.

Climate smart land stewardship practices are a collection of strategies and practices that increase the ability of land to sequester and store carbon, provide additional ecosystem services, withstand disturbances and adapt to changing conditions.

Examples of projects that may be funded through the Climate Smart Land Stewardship Grant Program include, but are not limited to:

- Developing plans for climate smart land stewardship projects, including forest management plans;
- Establishing pollinator habitat, including pollinator gardens and meadows;
- Managing invasive species, followed by native tree and shrub planting;
- Managing forests to improve wildlife habitat, create structural diversity, and facilitate oak regeneration;
- Establishing wildlife corridors to provide habitat continuity;
- Increasing riparian forest buffers;
- Implementing agricultural practices that improve water quality and/or soil health.

CLCC looks forward to considering applications from a diversity of landscapes and a variety of spatial scales. We welcome urban, suburban and rural projects on protected parcels of varying sizes. Priority will be given to projects in [CT Environmental Justice Communities](#). For ideas about possible climate smart agriculture and forestry practices, potential applicants may wish to consult [the list of Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Mitigation Activities](#), developed by the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

Potential applicants with questions about whether a project idea would qualify for funding are encouraged to reach out to Ricky Bentley at rbentley@ctconservation.org or 860-852-5512 prior to application to discuss.

Eligible Applicants

- Applicant is a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code.
- Applicant's mission is dedicated to land conservation and/or stewardship of conserved lands.
- Applicant's service area is located within or includes the State of Connecticut.
- Applicant is a current member of CLCC.

Eligible Locations

Eligible projects are located within the state of Connecticut on land owned in fee by the applicant, or on conservation easements held by the applicant on municipal or other publicly owned and/or accessible property. For Implementation Projects, proposed activities must be consistent with any restrictions on the land.

Funding Tiers

Funding is available for two types of grants:

- **Planning Grants – Maximum award \$8,000**

These grants are designed for organizations in the early stages of developing a climate smart land stewardship project. They can fund the background research and plan development needed to implement a climate smart project in the future. Note: Recipients of Planning Grants may (and are encouraged to) apply for Implementation Grants in future rounds. Federal funding for implementation (e.g. through [Natural Resource Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#)) may also be available.

- **Implementation Grants – Maximum award \$50,000**

These grants are designed for organizations with a well-developed plan for a climate smart land stewardship project. They fund activities related to the on-the-ground implementation of climate smart practices. These grants may fund the initiation of new projects and/or the continuation of projects that have already been initiated with funding awarded through this grant program or other programs such as Natural Resource Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Note that Planning Grants and Implementation Grants have separate application forms.

Eligible & Ineligible Expenses

The following are **eligible expenses** that can be funded, provided that they directly relate to the climate smart project for which funding is awarded:

- Consultant or contractor costs for planning and/or implementation;
- Tool and equipment purchases or rentals;
- Materials;
- Permit fees.

Consultant costs must be based on an estimate or quote from a qualified consultant dated within 90 days of application.

Other project-related costs such as staff costs, administrative costs, overhead, printing/ mailing and training/conference fees are not eligible to be covered by grant funds but may be used as a match.

The following are **ineligible expenses** that will not be funded and cannot be used as match:

- Expenses incurred prior to grant award and contract execution;
- Costs related to land acquisition;
- Any services or supplies not directly related to the climate smart project for which funding is awarded.

Matching Funds

Matching funds can help demonstrate organizational commitment to a project and ability to carry it out successfully.

Planning Grants require a 25% cash match. Match may be retroactively reimbursed after project completion if an applicant is awarded an Implementation Grant in a subsequent funding round. Match must be included in the Budget Worksheet.

Applicants for whom this match requirement presents a hardship, please contact Ricky Bentley at rbentley@ctconservation.org or 860-852-5512 prior to application to discuss.

Implementation Grants have no match requirement, but matching funds can help demonstrate an applicant's commitment to the project. If an applicant chooses to contribute cash and/or in-kind matching funds, they are encouraged to include this information in their Budget Worksheet.

Payment Process

Planning Grants will be paid in two installments:

- 25% upon contract signing with CLCC
- 75% upon receipt of final report and completed plan

Implementation Grant payment schedules will be project-specific. An initial payment will be made upon contract signing, with subsequent payments based on documentation of satisfactory progress toward identified Key Project Milestones.

If an applicant anticipates that this payment schedule will create a hardship for their project or organization, please contact Ricky Bentley at rbentley@ctconservation.org or 860-852-5512 prior to application to discuss.

Project Duration

Planning Grants must be completed **within 12 months** of the contract start date.

Implementation Grants must be completed **no later than April 30, 2027**. Applicants should align their proposed project timeline with the needs of their project and are strongly encouraged to present a realistic, well-supported rationale for the project duration they propose. Applicants anticipating the need for multi-year grants are encouraged to apply as soon as possible.

If an applicant anticipates that this project duration will be problematic for their project, please contact Ricky Bentley at rbentley@ctconservation.org or 860-852-5512 prior to application to discuss.

Post-Award Requirements

Applicants of awarded projects will be responsible for:

- Signing a contract with CLCC in a form that is compliant with the requirements of the State of Connecticut Department of Agriculture;
- Providing a Certificate of Insurance listing CLCC as an additional insured on the grantee's liability insurance policy;
- Completing the contract within the specified timeframe;
- Submitting project reports in the required format per the executed contract;
- At CLCC's request, permitting site inspections of the project site;
- Other requirements as outlined in the grant contract.

Reporting

All awarded recipients will be required to submit:

- Semi-annual progress reports throughout the contracted project duration, by dates specified in the grant contract.
- One final report at the conclusion of the contracted project duration, by a date specified in the grant contract.

Semi-annual progress reports and final reports will include the following information:

- Documentation of expenditures;
- Explanation of variations from budget;
- Explanation of changes to the project and/or timeline;
- Progress & plans;
- Challenges & lessons learned;
- Outreach/engagement activities conducted;
- Project outcomes and impacts (quantitative and qualitative).

CLCC will work directly with grantees to share stories of successes and impacts to inspire and accelerate the adoption of climate smart land stewardship practices throughout Connecticut and beyond.

How to Apply

Please visit our Climate Smart Grant [program webpage](#), and click the link for the fillable application form. Please ensure that you submit the necessary additional materials with your application.

Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated on the following criteria:

Primary Criteria

- Project will contribute to climate mitigation, resilience and/or adaptation;
- Deliverables, budget and timeline are realistic;
- Organization and proposed project team have the capacity to execute the project.

Secondary Criteria

- Project is located in a [CT Environmental Justice Community](#);
- Project outcomes are clearly articulated and measurable;
- Project will be leveraged to have additional impacts beyond the immediate project area;
- Applicant demonstrates organizational commitment to climate change;
- Applicant demonstrates intention and capacity to sustain the project after the grant period has ended;
- Applicant provides a strong rationale for the approach they propose; (IMPLEMENTATION ONLY)
- Project includes a plan for measurement and evaluation of implemented actions.
(IMPLEMENTATION ONLY)

Bonus Criteria

- Project includes partnerships and/or evidence of landscape-level planning;
- Project demonstrates a high degree of innovation and/or creativity;
- Project includes matching funds beyond what is required and/or leverages state/federal funding sources such as Natural Resource Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).