

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

2021 Trail Access Grants Manual

Summary Information

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased awareness of the importance of access to quality outdoor recreation opportunities for the health and well-being of all. Every Virginian should have the opportunity to benefit from spending time outdoors. Unfortunately, people with disabilities are too often excluded from outdoor opportunities, due to physical barriers, lack of understanding of diverse needs and experiences, or funding shortfalls.

In response to this, DCR will award 4-6 100% reimbursement grants for projects that increase access for people with disabilities to existing land and water trails and trail features in 2021.

Source Funds: Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund (approx. \$128,000 available). These funds come from Virginian's donations of all or portions of their state tax return to benefit outdoor recreation and conservation in the Commonwealth.

Award Amounts and Project Types: \$20,000 – \$50,000. DCR hopes to award one grant in each of the following areas: 1. Tactile signage and/or audio description project; 2. Trailhead project; 3. Water trail project; 4. Land trail project

Application Deadline and Notification: June 30th, 2021; awards announced August 2021

Eligible Entities: County, city, and local governments and recreation departments, tribes, and recreation authorities

Eligible Projects:

- Must be fee-free and open to the public.
- Must be on existing land or water trails (trails currently being built are ineligible).
- Right of way must be held by the applicant through direct ownership, lease, or easement. The preference is for leases and easements to be in perpetuity, but they must, at a minimum, extend for the usable lifespan of the funded element.
- Must be for a shovel-ready improvement or purchase-ready addition that provides greater access to the trail experience for people with disabilities.
- Must result in an on-the-ground, installed or constructed, usable feature or upgrade (design only projects are ineligible).
- Must meet all applicable standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and outdoor developed area standards of the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA).
- Specific projects could include, but are not limited to:
 - installation of tactile wayfinding or interpretive signage,
 - waysides with audio description, or an audio described tour
 - the purchase and installation of accessible watercraft launches,
 - installation of trailhead information signs,
 - accessibility improvements to trailhead restrooms, parking, and picnic areas,
 - costs to remove tread obstacles and reduce surface slope,
 - cost of materials to create firm and stable tread surfaces.

Ineligible Projects and Expenses:

- Projects on sections of trails currently being built.
- Replacement of existing accessible features necessary due to lack of adequate maintenance or because feature has reached the end of useable lifespan.
- Costs to return a project or feature back to its condition at the time of construction or installation.
- Administrative, engineering, or in-house labor costs.

Awarded Projects:

- Will enter into a signed grant agreement between DCR and the entity. This agreement will authorize funding amount, outline project scope of work, and address legal requirements.
- Must complete a level of environmental review based on the size and scope of the project. DCR staff will contact all selected projects to outline specific review requirements prior to authorization.
- Must submit project designs, cut sheets, and/or specifications to DCR for review prior to construction, purchase, and/or installation.
- Must follow all local and state procurement requirements.
- Must ensure there are no significant barriers between the trail access point (trailhead, parking lot, etc.) and the new feature/ improvement to ensure the full entry to exit experience is accessible for the greatest number of users.
- Must be inspected on-site by DCR after installation to verify as-built product meets the agreed upon scope and design standards before receiving reimbursement.
- Will be reimbursed up to the amount authorized in the project agreement *after* site inspection and upon receipt of all documentation to include: signed letter summarizing work completed and requesting the amount for reimbursement, proof of purchase, and payment verification.

Resources:

- The **Questions & Answers** section on the following pages provides answers to key program, eligibility, and procedural questions.
- The **Accessibility Resources** section on the following pages provides guidance on accessibility standards and best practices.
- Information on the Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund can be found at <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/checkoff>.

All applications are due via email to recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov by Wednesday, June 30, 2021 at 4:00 pm.

Please email questions to recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov.

Questions & Answers

How many awards will be given?

DCR would like to award one project in each of the four categories: 1. Tactile wayfinding/ audio description project, 2. Trailhead project, 3. Land Trail project, 4. Water Trail project. A total of approximately \$128,000 is available for these grants, so the final number of awards will be determined based on the number of applications received per category and the size of the requests.

Can my entity submit more than one application or project?

No. Due to the limited funding available and desire to geographically disburse the funds, entities can only submit one application/project for this Trail Access Grant round.

Why are trails under construction ineligible?

The purpose of these grants are to help entities upgrade existing trails and trail features so that everyone can benefit from the local trail experiences already available to some. Under the ADA, projects under construction are already required to meet these obligations.

Why are non-profit organizations, state agencies, and federal agencies ineligible?

A percentage of contributions to the Virginia Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund must be used to provide grants to *local public bodies*. These funds have come from that percentage.

A non-profit organization may join or partner with an eligible public entity, as long as the eligible entity is the primary applicant and contact to DCR. This is in line with the requirements of some of our other grant programs.

What is the length of the grant?

All grants agreements will be issued for 12 months. Reimbursement request and DCR site inspection must be completed with enough time for the reimbursement to be processed within the 12 month period. Generally, this means DCR should receive notification that the project is ready for inspection by the 10-month mark. Exceptions may be considered on a case by case basis.

What is the reimbursement process?

Reimbursement will be disbursed upon completion of two events: grantee submission of reimbursement documentation and DCR site inspection.

Reimbursement documentation must include: a signed letter summarizing the work completed and requesting the reimbursement, the entity's W-9, proof of purchase or expenditure, and payment verification.

Once the entity has notified DCR that the project is complete, DCR will conduct a site inspection to verify as-built project/item meets the agreed upon scope and was installed according to the agreed upon standards.

Reimbursement may be withheld if the project/item does not meet the applicable ADA or ABA accessibility standards, the project/item was not construction to the standards outlined in the scope of work, or the surrounding site/ access routes do not meet the applicable standards. In these cases, the entity will be given the opportunity to correct the deficiencies and resubmit for reimbursement. DCR will make no more than two site inspections. If the project is deemed ineligible for reimbursement after the second site inspection, no reimbursement will be paid and the funds will be redistributed to other grant opportunities.

Once approved, reimbursements can be sent via check or direct deposit. Reimbursements will not exceed the awarded amount in the grant agreement.

What level of environmental review is required?

Environmental Review requirements are largely based on the scope of work being planned and the natural habitat of the area. Upon recommendation for funding, DCR Grant staff will communicate directly with the applicant about potential environmental review requirements. All projects must comply with local and state environmental review and permitting requirements. Please contact your local permitting office to confirm any county/city/agency requirements as soon as possible to determine what processes may be involved. Any permits and agency coordination obtained for the project should be provided to DCR for project records. Construction of the project cannot begin until due diligence of this coordination is completed and submitted to DCR Grants staff.

DCR's Division of Natural Heritage must be given opportunity to review projects funded by DCR. Please see the DCR Natural Heritage Environmental Review Information Order Form at <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/nhserviceform/>. Natural Heritage review can take up to 30 days for completion – please account for this in your timeline.

If there are any potential impacts to wetlands or state waters contact your local wetlands board and the Virginia Marine Resource Commission <https://mrc.virginia.gov/hmac/hmoverview.shtm>. It is recommended to complete a Standard Joint Permit Application early in the planning process to ensure all entities (USACE, VMRC, and DEQ) are properly notified and have opportunity to comment.

Can I submit an application for this grant and the Recreational Trails Program?

An entity can submit applications for both opportunities but they must be for separate projects. Projects on past/complete RTP funded trails are eligible for this grant, but RTP funded projects in progress or new RTP project applications are ineligible.

Can this grant be used as the applicant match for RTP or other grants?

This grant cannot be used as applicant match for RTP projects. Applicants should consult with the awarding agency to determine whether it can be used as match for other grants.

Will this grant opportunity be available in the future?

At this time, this is a one-time grant opportunity. However, if funding is available it may be offered again in the future.

Accessibility Resources

The following resources may aid entities in planning for inclusive trail experiences and understanding legal obligations. As you plan your trail project, consider how your entity will provide equitable experiences for all users, including people with mobility, sensory, cognitive, and mental health disabilities.

2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design <https://www.access-board.gov/ada/>

Full text of the technical standards that apply to state and local governments, non-profits, and businesses.

ABA Accessibility Standards <https://www.access-board.gov/aba/>

Full text of the technical standards that apply to federal government agencies and some recipients of federal funds.

U.S. Access Board Guide to the ABA Accessibility Standards (Outdoor)

<https://www.access-board.gov/aba/guides/chapter-10-outdoor/>

Illustrated guide to the technical requirements of the ABA Outdoor Developed Area standards, which include trails, viewing areas, picnic areas and camping areas.

U.S. Forest Service Accessibility Resources Website

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/national-forests-grasslands/accessibility/resources>

Contains links to numerous documents, including the Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines, and other guides, summaries, and best practices.

American Trails Accessible Trail Resources Library

<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/query/?trails%5B%5D=665>

Summary collection of accessible land and water trail articles, webinars, guides, bulletins from a variety of sources.

AccessibilityOnline Webinar Archives

<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/query/?trails%5B%5D=665>

Archive of recorded webinars presented by the U.S. Access Board on ADA and ABA standards, including Recreation Facilities and Outdoor Developed Areas.

Massachusetts Audubon Accessible Trails Manual

<https://www.massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/accessibility/accessible-projects-and-partners/accessible-trails-manual>

Summary and recommendations from Mass Audubon detailing their experiences in creating multisensory and inclusive trail environments.

Universal Access Trails and Shared Use Paths: Design, Management, Ethical, and Legal Considerations

<https://conservationtools.org/guides/115>

Guide from the PA Land Trust Association with overview of legal requirements and summary of best practices.

Application Procedures

1. Read this summary manual and guide in its entirety.
2. Download the Trail Access Grants application via the DCR website at <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/grants>. The application is a fillable portable document file (PDF). Questions are answered by checking the appropriate box or in narrative form.

If you are unable to download or use a fillable PDF, please contact recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov or 804-786-1119 to obtain an alternative format of the application.

3. Complete the application. All questions should be answered in the designated space and not exceed the stated word count limits. Only attach documents when instructed to do so. You may wish to type the questions in a word processing application first and copy and paste into the form. The form will automatically resize text that does not fit into the box.
4. Submit the application as a single PDF (max file size 25 MB) via email to recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov by Wednesday, June 30, 2021 at 4:00 pm.

If your file exceeds 25 MB, contact recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov at least two business days prior to the deadline to discuss using an alternative submission method.

If you do not receive a reply acknowledging receipt of your electronic submission within one business day of submission, please contact DCR at the email or phone number listed above to ensure your application was received.

Selection Process

1. Applications received by the deadline undergo a preliminary review by DCR Recreation Grants staff to verify application completeness and project eligibility.
2. All eligible and complete applications will then be reviewed and scored by a committee of 3-5 DCR staff members based on the posted scoring criteria.
3. The committee will meet to review the scores and recommend projects for funding.
4. Applicants of projects recommended for funding will be contacted by DCR Recreation Grants staff and DCR will coordinate with the applicant to prepare and sign the necessary grant agreement forms.
 - a. Once all recommended projects have expressed their commitment to receiving the grant, notifications will be sent to applicants not recommended for funding.
5. Grant agreements will be valid for 12 months from the date the agreement is signed by all parties. All reimbursements must be distributed by this date.

Scoring Criteria

1. Project Need and Service Area Population: 0-10 points

- Level of need
- Access that considers multiple types of disability
- Service area population demographics

2. Public Involvement: 0-5 points

- Demonstrated public involvement or input
- Involvement of people with disabilities or their advocates

3. Design Standards and Best Practices: 0-10 points

- Level to which project meets or exceeds standards and/or best practices
- All project elements are identified and described

4. Entry to Exit Experience: 0-5 points

- Condition and design standards of other site elements that are part of the trail experience
- All relevant site elements are identified and described

5. Installation and Site Work: 0-5 points

- Knowledge and experience to successfully install the item
- Thoroughness of permitting considerations

6. Maintenance and Upkeep: 0-5 points

- Length of lifespan for the funded item/feature
- Demonstrated ability to maintain funded item/feature

7. Commitment to Inclusion: 0-10 points

- Entity's commitment to equitable recreation opportunities
- Entity's progress and achievements to date
- Entity's long-term plans