

LWCF Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Do you always know that Montana will be receiving its Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) apportionment before you announce the grant round and deadline?

A. No. LWCF funding for any year is contingent upon an appropriation from the U.S. Congress. Unfortunately, Congress rarely passes the money bill before the next LWCF grant deadline must be posted.

Q. Do you have confidence that Congress will continue to fund the Land & Water Conservation Fund into the future?

A. No one can be completely confident in continued funding for the state side of the Land & Water Conservation Fund--stateside LWCF is where the local community grants come from.

Q. Has the Congress ever failed to fund the state side of LWCF?

A. Yes. The Congress failed to fund the state side of LWCF in 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999. Despite these dry years, Montana has received over \$37 million for outdoor recreation since the inception of LWCF in 1965.

Q. I am a member of a non-profit organization and we have a community project we'd like to do. Can we apply for an LWCF grant?

A. No. Only an eligible sponsor may submit a project application. An eligible sponsor is any political subdivision of the state or sovereign Indian Nation. This means that incorporated cities, towns, counties, school districts, state agencies, and tribal governments may apply for an LWCF grant.

Q. What's the first thing a person should do when interested in applying for an LWCF grant?

A. Let's say you propose a project in your city. Before you start working on that grant application, be sure that the sponsor (in this case, the city administration) endorses the idea. Read all LWCF rules and regulations thoroughly to be sure everyone understands them. As part of the application, city officials must sign an authorizing resolution. The resolution stipulates that the sponsor accepts the terms and conditions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund grant program and that the sponsor is committed to fund and complete the project before being reimbursed for 50% of eligible costs.

Q. Does a sponsor have to put up some of the money as part of this grant program?

A. Yes. The Land & Water Conservation Fund is a 50/50 matching grant program. Here's how it works. A project sponsor must have total project costs committed at the time of application, as the sponsor must make full payment on all project expenses before being reimbursed for up to 50 percent of allowable costs. In the end, the LWCF grant pays for 50% of the project and the sponsor pays for the other 50% of project costs.

Q. How does the math work on that?

A. Let's say that a sponsor has defined a project that will cost \$100,000. The sponsor requests an LWCF grant in the amount of \$50,000 and is successful in obtaining the grant. The sponsor makes full payment on all project expenses, completes the project, and submits the final billing, which totals at least \$100,000. The billing is reviewed to be sure that all costs are allowable under the LWCF Program. After the project is inspected, the LWCF Program pays \$50,000 to the sponsor. In the end, the sponsor has paid at least \$50,000 of the total project costs.

Q. If we are awarded a grant, will we get the money right away?

A. No. LWCF is a reimbursement program. A project sponsor must have total project costs committed at the time of application, as the sponsor must make full payment on all project expenses before being reimbursed for up to 50 percent of allowable costs.

Q. Suppose that there is an unavoidable hiatus between starting the project and finishing the project. Can we request a partial payment before completion?

A. Yes. More than one reimbursement request may be allowed over the length of the construction process depending on the circumstances, but this is unusual. Most sponsors find it easier to submit one billing for the entire project upon completion.

Q. The County is proposing to develop an outdoor recreation site on private property. The County would lease the site from the landowner, who is committed to outdoor recreation. Can the County apply for an LWCF grant under these circumstances?

A. No. The sponsor must own the project site. In rare cases, grants will be awarded to a sponsor that has effective land control in the form of a long-term lease from the federal government.

Q. Once our administration has endorsed the idea, and the application has been authorized, what are the first steps a sponsor should take in the application process?

A. Both the local recreation survey and the environmental analysis take a bit of time to complete, so the sponsor should begin working on them immediately. If done properly, there are two sections of the LWCF grant application that can be invaluable planning tools.

Q. What exactly is the recreation survey?

A. As part of its application, the sponsor must provide a synopsis of the results of an outdoor recreation survey completed within the last four years that addresses criteria in the Open Project Selection Process. Although conducting a survey sounds like an onerous task, it is not really that difficult if you have help. Because the survey can aid you in selecting your outdoor recreation project, or help fine-tune the scope of work, a sponsor should start on the survey as soon as possible.

Q. Why is the survey required?

A. The spirit of the LWCF Program dictates that money is put on the ground for in-demand outdoor recreation facilities. There are many examples of municipal administrations that have proposed outdoor recreation projects that did not fill an unmet need and did not express the desires of the community. The recreation survey has been used for years in the LWCF Program to help select the best projects for local communities and has done a good job.

Q. Can a sponsor use other survey information to support their project?

A. Yes. However, survey information must be statistically valid. Much of the Open Project Selection process is based upon recreation survey information. The LWCF grant process has become very competitive over the years, and sponsors may be at a competitive disadvantage without solid survey data accompanying their grant application.

As additional supportive information, sponsors may use information gathered at public meetings, long-range planning documents such as park management plans, and the regional data from the BRFSS outdoor recreation survey (see Montana SCORP). However, these kinds of information do not supplant the need for some kind of recreation survey data.

Q. We conducted a recreation survey nine years ago. Can we use it for this grant application?

A. Yes, but a grant applicant with a recent survey would have a competitive advantage during application scoring.

Q. We are planning a very simple project and everyone here feels that we do not need to do an environmental assessment. If this is the case, why should we complete the Environmental Analysis?

A. Regardless of how simple or innocuous a project may seem, sponsors must satisfy both State and Federal laws in order to be eligible for LWCF funding. FWP must ensure that regulations for both the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) have been addressed. In order to do that efficiently, FWP has designed a short, but comprehensive, document that combines both: the Environmental Analysis (EA). Any application that does not include a fully completed EA will be rejected.

Q. There will be a number of different people working on our project. Why do we need to assign one person to be the Project Contact?

A. One of the first things a sponsor should do when writing a grant application is to designate one person as the official LWCF Project Contact. Ideally, this person will be the one and only contact between Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the sponsor. Why is this important? When a number of different people have partial information during the grant process it increases misunderstandings and miscommunication, leading to a waste of resources for both the sponsor and the grant program.