



**SOUTH MOUNTAIN
PARTNERSHIP**
CONSERVATION NETWORK

2025 Mini-Grant Program Overview

About the South Mountain Partnership

The South Mountain Partnership (SMP) is a collaborative network of people and organizations protecting and promoting the agricultural, natural, cultural, and recreational resources in Adams, Cumberland, Franklin, and York counties of south-central Pennsylvania.

SMP is one of eight Conservation Landscapes supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2) and the Environmental Stewardship Fund to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, which administers the Mini-Grant. Additional grants are available through the SMP [Research Corps grants and Flex Grants programs](#). Please join us at southmountainpartnership.org

Mini-Grant Program At A Glance

- Our Mini-Grants are single-year grants for projects or work from September 2025- December 2026, ranging from \$2,500 to \$15,000. A 1:1 match (in-kind or cash) is required. Projects exceeding \$15,000 and up to \$25,000 may be considered if they cover the geographic majority of the South Mountain Region and are in a high funding priority category.
- Eligible applicants include authorized 501(c)(3) non-profits, municipalities, counties, and academic institutions. Projects must occur within Cumberland, Adams, Franklin, or York County.
- Pre-applications are due by April 30, 2025. Accepted pre-applicants will be invited to submit a final application in May 2025, due by June 27, 2025. Grant award decisions will be made in August 2025, and grants will be formally awarded on September 12, 2025.

Deadlines

Pre-Application Deadline: April 30, 2025
Notification of Acceptance of Pre-Application: May 2025
Final Application Deadline (if invited): June 27, 2025
Grant Award Decisions: Aug 2025
Project Takes Place: Sept 2025–Nov 2026
Formal Grant Awards: September 12, 2025
Project Formally Closed Out: By December 31, 2026

Contact:

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Quick Links: [Pre-Application](#) | [Eligibility](#) | [Final Application](#) | [FAQs](#)

Program Goals and Funding Priorities

Purpose

SMP's Mini-Grant is designed to catalyze on-the-ground projects that sustain South Mountain's sense of place through the protection and promotion of SMP's four identified Landscape Resources for all:

- Natural (Environmental resources like plants and animals, as well as streams and forests)
- Cultural (Historic buildings, Cultural history)
- Agricultural (Farming, orchard, gardens and more)
- Recreational (Trails, parks, fishing and hunting, biking)
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Click [here](#) to explore past projects funded under each resource type

SMP highly values interdisciplinary projects, or “nexus projects,” that tend to all of these Landscape Resources, as these Landscape Resources are all interrelated.



Mini-Grant Goals

SMP works to identify projects that strategically benefit the region – be it impacting the resources across the region or by creating a new approach for addressing an issue, with lessons that can be diffused throughout the region. Eligible projects meet these four goals:

- Engage partners new to SMP to advance SMP's mission.
- Implement projects throughout the landscape to protect, promote, and/or build upon the South Mountain region's unique Landscape Resources.
- Integrate thinking and approaches across disciplines; SMP strives to support “nexus projects” that recognize the region's interrelated Landscape Resources.
- Build and strengthen collaboration amongst partners across the landscape.

Funding Priorities

The Mini-Grant program prioritizes work in the spirit of our ongoing [State of the Region Project](#). The State of the Region is the first-ever project that measures public health and environmental health, maps trends and priority conservation areas, and provides recommended actions to address regional challenges. By working with people and organizations to understand the health of our region, we are identifying projects and actions that can make a difference. We have a comprehensive list of recommendations to improve these metrics. With help from core partners, SMP will take on the following recommendations over the next 5 years but there are many more recommendations that we invite any group or individual to take on.

We are prioritizing Mini-Grant projects that directly help advance these recommendations. In your application, please share how your project fits in with the State of the Region. We have identified three priority tiers ([You can review the Action Plan and Recommendations here](#)):

- Tier 1: Projects that directly advance the State of the Region Action Plan top 5 Partnership Priorities
- Tier 2: Projects that support one of the State of the Region 65+ recommendations for the region

→ Tier 3: Projects that do not directly support the State of the Region priorities yet fall within the program goals and purpose.

Eligibility

Who: Non-profit organizations with a tax-exempt status 501(c)(3), municipalities, counties, authorities, and educational institutions are all eligible for the Mini-Grant. Non-profit organizations must provide a Federal 501(c)(3) registration number and a [Pennsylvania Bureau of Charitable Organizations](#) registration number.

Where: All projects must be within Cumberland, Adams, Franklin, or York County and have significant ties to the landscape resources and communities of South Mountain. Priority may be given to projects within the [core geographic boundaries](#) of SMP.

What: Single-year grant requests for a minimum of \$2,500 to a maximum of \$15,000 are considered; at the discretion of the review committee projects exceeding \$15,000 and up to \$25,000 may be considered for projects that have demonstrable regional impact and integrate across multiple priority areas.

Eligible Costs: Applicants must match (at a 1:1 ratio) these funds with additional funding and/or eligible non-cash (in-kind) services. Eligible costs include professional services, in-house professional services, and direct costs. Please note tools and supplies are only eligible for SMP Mini-Grant projects if they are 1) critical for making the project happen, 2) directly used for the scope of work, and 3) will remain on site. Eligible matches include volunteer time, donated costs, and donated professional services. The Mini-Grant is not intended to support general operating or organizational capacity efforts (printing membership brochures or promotional brochures, for instance, or to facilitate fundraising efforts for the organization) but staff time is eligible when used for a specific project.

Please contact Julia Chain at jchain@appalachiantrail.org with any questions on eligibility.

Pre-Application

Pre-Applications are required for the SMP Mini-Grant Program. Pre-applications are reviewed by staff for eligibility and appropriateness for SMP's Mini-Grant and to assist partners in creating strong applications. Pre-application review does not assess or rate how proposals compare to one another. Applicants with strong pre-applications will be invited by mid-May to submit a final application by the end of June.

Applicants should review the Funding Priorities and the Final Application before completing the pre-application to understand how projects will be scored and prioritized.

[**The Pre-Application form can be found HERE and is due**](#)

Apr 30, 2025 4:00 PM

Questions? Contact Julia Chain jchain@appalachiantrail.org

Final Application

Final Application questions and scoring are previewed below. SMP will release a digital format for final submission. **Do not complete a final application until you have been invited to do so after submitting a pre-application.**

Criteria A: Detailed and Complete Project Narrative (15 pts)

SCORING INFORMATION: 15 points - Project description; deliverables, objectives, and timeline/scope-of-work are described with sufficient detail to demonstrate that the project is feasible and ready to go.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. PROJECT SNAPSHOT: Describe the project in 1-2 sentences. (50 word limit)
2. BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION. Briefly (one to two paragraphs) describe the proposed project. (200-word limit)
3. FINAL PROJECT DELIVERABLES and PROJECT OBJECTIVES. Explicitly identify and describe the direct deliverables of the project, as well as how these deliverables advance larger, longer-term objectives of your organization and SMP. Please format as a list. (200-word limit)
4. PROJECT TIMELINE AND SCOPE OF WORK (SOW). Outline the anticipated scope of work for the project in a clear, step-by-step manner. Each step in the scope of work should be listed in chronological order, with a target completion date (month and year, example: May 2026) identified for each step. A thorough timeline and scope of work will clearly communicate that the proposed project is ready to go. To receive full points, the project SOW should also be consistent with the proposed budget/cost estimate. (500 word limit)

Criteria B: Project Need (15 pts)

SCORING INFORMATION: 15 points - Share how this project has been identified as a need in your community. Why is your project needed? How was the need identified? Describe how your project will benefit your community or organization. Use the DCNR Outdoor Recreation Access areas maps to show or highlight if your project addresses a recreation ACCESS need in a medium or high-need area and/or serves an underserved population/area.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. COMMUNITY NEED: Detail the demonstrated need for this project from public processes, cited community plans, or gaps in access. (200 word limit)
2. HIGH ACCESS AREA: How does DCNR rate need in your project area? (low/medium/high)
3. NEW PARTNER: Has your organization received funding from SMP's Mini-Grant program within the last 5 years? (yes/no)

Criteria C: Alignment with SMP's Mission and Goals? (45 pts)

SCORING INFORMATION: 10 points - Advances Mission and Goals; Project advances the Partnership's mission of "conserving Landscape Resources to enrich the quality of life and sense of place of the South Mountain region's citizens and communities," and addresses each one of SMP's goals: Conservation of Landscape Resources

APPLICATION QUESTION: How does your project conserve, preserve, and/or sustain the resources that define the South Mountain landscape and increase public awareness of the resources that define the South Mountain landscape? (300 word limit)

SCORING INFORMATION: 15 points- In your application, please share how your project fits in with the State of the Region. We have identified three priority tiers:

- Tier 1: Projects that directly advance the State of the Region Action Plan top 5 Partnership Priorities
- Tier 2: Projects that support one of the State of the Region 65+ recommendations for the region
- Tier 3: Projects that do not directly support the State of the Region priorities yet fall within the program goals and purpose

APPLICATION QUESTION: Please detail which tier you feel your project fits in, and your project's ability to address a State of the Region Identified Project. [You can review the recommendations here](#) (300 word limit)

SCORING INFORMATION: 10 points- Partner Collaboration - Project builds and sustains collaboration with other organizations and/or partners; more weight will be given to truly collaborative projects that engage diverse partners.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

1. Explain how this project will build and sustain collaborating partnerships; more weight will be given to truly collaborative projects that engage diverse partners. (200 word limit)
2. How will participating partners contribute to the project? Partner actions should be described here in sufficient detail so that we can clearly understand each partner's role in the project in addition to the information presented in the Budget.(200-word limit)
3. Letters of support (PDF required) from each partner should be attached to the end of this application. Support letters should be written on official letterhead and include:
 - a. The main contact person that will be collaborating, including contact information;
 - b. A description of the partner's role and match contribution (cash or in-kind) to the project.
 - c. *Letters are only required from Partners committing a match to the project but more are welcome.*

SCORING INFORMATION: 10 points-Integration – Project benefits multiple types of priority Landscape Resources to become a “nexus project”

APPLICATION QUESTION:

1. How does the project connect with each of the Landscape Resource types (i.e. Natural, Cultural, Recreational, and Agricultural resources)? Projects that take action to address multiple Landscape Resources become a “nexus project” and will receive priority. (300 word limit)
 - How does your project address Agricultural resources?
 - How does your project address Cultural resources?
 - How does your project address Natural resources?
 - How does your project address Recreational resources?

Criteria D: Project Evaluation & Sustainability (10 pts)

SCORING INFORMATION: 5 points - Evaluation; The project incorporates measurable outcomes that will assess the project’s success in achieving its objectives and deliverables in both the short term and long term. Example: quantifiable data.

APPLICATION QUESTION:

1. How will you know if your deliverables are effective? How will you measure the project’s success in achieving its objectives and deliverables, in both the short term and long term? Identify metrics that will assess the effectiveness of the project in both the short and long term. Example: quantifiable data.(200 word limit)

SCORING INFORMATION: 5 points - Sustainability; Applicant demonstrates a strong plan for ensuring the long term up-keep and maintenance of the project and for sustaining partnerships and collaborations. Funding may not be considered for projects that do not clearly address this concern.

APPLICATION QUESTION:

1. Explain the plan for ensuring that this project and the associated partnerships and collaborations will be sustained well into the future. Provide a detailed explanation of the long-term anticipated needs, the estimated costs, and how those costs will be covered. (200 word limit)

Criteria E: Budget (15pts)

SCORING INFORMATION: 15 points- Project budget clearly demonstrates the total project cost, the source(s) of appropriate match, and the requested grant amount and how these funds will be expended. Projects with matching funding that is firmly secured as of the application deadline will rank higher than projects with undetermined or unlikely funding. Volunteer time and labor can be valued up to the amount published by the Independent Sector. Work performed by individuals under the age of 18 will be valued at the Commonwealth’s minimum wage rate. The proposed budget should also be consistent with all scope of work items proposed.

Guidelines:

1. Outline the overall budget for project completion; structure this budget around concrete, defined tasks (which should correspond to the timeline created above), with specific costs and labor inputs identified as line items under each task; include billable rates and time for

any labor costs or in-kind services.

2. List how each line item will be funded.

GRANT FUNDS – Which tasks will be paid by this Mini-Grant if the project is funded?

CASH MATCH – Which tasks will be paid by applicant or partner funds?

NON-CASH MATCH – Which tasks will be covered by donated materials, services, or labor?

3. List the match status and funding source.

MATCH STATUS – List “S” for match that is already secured and list “P” for match that is pending.

FUNDING SOURCE – Name the organization providing the funding for each line item.

4. Show the total cost of each Task.

TOTAL COSTS – Add the line items under each task and display in this column.

Timeline and Checklist

April/May 2025

- Applicants submit DIGITAL pre-application.
- SMP sends letters to applicants.
- Applicants that are invited to submit a full application should schedule a time to meet and plan with SMP for their full application.

June 2025

- Applicants submit full application.

July 2025

- Mini-Grant committee reviews applications.

August 2025

- Final awards are determined and letters are sent to all applicants. Grantees must fill out and promptly submit the New Vendor Form.

August – September 2025

- SMP drafts Grant Agreements based on applications.
- Grantee reviews and makes any needed edits to the contract in coordination with SMP. Grantee confirms that the Grant Agreement budget is correct.
- SMP meets with Grantee to review agreement, explain terms and conditions, and discuss any further concerns.
- SMP finalizes Grant agreements and sends to Grantee.
- Grantee signs the Grant Agreement signature page and sends to SMP
- Grantee must issue a press release about project and copy SMP

September 2025 through Duration of Grant

- Grantee begins implementation of project after the final Grant Agreement is signed by both parties.
- Grantee submits first invoices for 90% of the grant award. Grantee sends periodic updates to SMP.
- Grantee must include Acknowledgment of Assistance language in project materials and these must be approved by SMP before production.
- Grantee maintains records on all invoices and time spent on project, including partner matches.
- Project Close-out (Must occur by December 31, 2026).
- Grantee must coordinate a press release or event upon project completion.
- Grantee must complete and submit as a package these four project close-out items which includes detailed reporting on direct project expenses and time invoices (documents are available for download [here](#)):
 - Project Close-out Form
 - Project Accomplishments Report
 - Success Story Template
 - Final Invoice

Mini-Grant FAQs

SMP Mini-Grant is intended to catalyze on-the-ground projects that align with SMP's goals. The Mini-Grant targets projects that sustain South Mountain's sense of place by protecting and promoting our region's Landscape Resources. The Partnership strives to highlight the interrelated nature of these resources on the South Mountain landscape, and thus prioritizes nexus projects that integrate across resources to produce the greatest benefit. The following offers answers to frequently asked questions about the Mini- Grant:

If you have any questions or we can provide this application in a more accessible format, please reach out to jchain@appalachiantrail.org

What does a strong Mini-Grant application look like?

The Mini-Grant emphasizes collaboration with other organizations and professionals; we believe that such connections have the potential to outlast any specific project and continue to benefit the region into the future. In particular, we aspire to build collaboration across the priority Landscape Resources by targeting "nexus projects" – projects that positively impact multiple Landscape Resources: Natural, Cultural, Agricultural, and Recreational Resources. We see great value in addressing concerns and opportunities in an integrated fashion across the region. SMP identifies projects that strategically benefit the South Mountain region – be it by impacting the resources across the region or by creating an example or innovative approach for addressing challenges and/or opportunities, with lessons that can be diffused throughout the region.

Who can apply?

Municipalities, counties, authorities, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations with a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status are all eligible applicants. Authorized non-profit organizations must be both tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and registered with the PA Department of State Bureau of Charitable Organizations.

When is the deadline for the application?

Please see page 1.

What are the Mini-Grant request limits?

Applicants may submit proposals from a minimum of \$2,500 to a maximum of \$15,000. At the discretion of the review committee, projects exceeding \$15,000 and up to \$25,000 may be considered for projects that have demonstrable regional impact and integrate across multiple priority areas.

What kinds of projects are eligible?

All projects must be within Cumberland, Adams, Franklin, or York counties and have significant ties to the assets of South Mountain, the working lands that surround the mountain, or the communities tied to both. Multi-year funding is not considered within this program; awarded grants close out at the end of the calendar year following the year in which the grant is awarded. Projects funded as part of the 2025 grant cycle take place between September 2025 and December 2026 and must be formally closed by the Grantee by December 1, 2026. Please note: The Mini-Grant is intended to be project-specific; applications should be for concrete, defined projects that have clear objectives,

Questions? Contact Julia Chain jchain@appalachiantrail.org

outcomes, and deliverables. The Mini-Grant is not intended to support organizational capacity efforts (printing membership brochures or promotional brochures, for instance, or to facilitate fundraising efforts for the organization) nor provide general operating support for organizations.

What types of projects have been funded in the past?

Land-use planning efforts at the municipal level (i.e., updating comprehensive plans or drafting zoning or subdivision and land development ordinances) are an acceptable and encouraged use of Mini-Grant funding. Projects are encouraged to seek support and coordination with County Planning Departments. Other examples of past projects include trail and outdoor recreation infrastructure development (including signage); habitat restoration efforts; ecological research projects (targeting specific, defined management challenges); regional resource promotion and guides; resource interpretation; historical preservation; adaptive reuse feasibility studies; education programming and development; and planning and revitalization studies and supportive efforts.

How will you decide what applicants receive funding?

Please see Final Application Review.

Who decides what applications are awarded funding?

A small committee of SMP partners representing diverse interests and geography review and rank the proposals. Participation in the committee is on a voluntary basis, and the committee membership changes yearly. Partners serving on the committee in any given year may not apply for funding in that year's Mini-Grant funding round.

Should I contact the Partnership to let them know I might be interested?

Yes, we encourage you to contact us so we expect your application and can help ensure its completeness. Reach out to Julia Chain at jchain@appalachiantrail.org

Does this Grant program require a match?

Yes. A 1:1 match is required.

When do we have to have the cash match available?

Your cash match should be available when you list this match on your grant application. Your grant application MUST include a support letter from the partner organization(s) that notes the agreed upon donation amount or value. Please also see Criteria E: Budget.

Can a non-cash match be used?

Yes. Non-cash match can include donated materials, professional time, volunteer time, donated land value, and services conducted in-house for which the grantee organization does not receive compensation. Please also see Criteria E: Budget.

Can I match the Mini-Grant to a DCNR grant?

No. The Mini-Grant is funded through a DCNR funding source, and you cannot match DCNR funds to DCNR funds. Please see the PA DCNR Partnerships Eligible and Ineligible Grant Project Activities, Costs, and Match guidelines.

If awarded a Mini-Grant, how much money would we get up front?

Terms can vary, but generally you would receive 90% of the amount through a first invoice and the remaining when the project is closed out.

What are the terms and conditions of the grant agreement if I am awarded a Mini-Grant?

Mini-Grant funds originally come from the PA DCNR as part of the Environmental Stewardship Fund Program. ATC is the grant administrator but requires recipients to comply with the standard DCNR terms and conditions. [See our grant contract here.](#)



The South Mountain Partnership is managed as a public-private partnership by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.



southmountainpartnership.org