

2026 Community Impact 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.

This grant program is funded through the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2) and the Environmental Stewardship Fund. SMP, with support from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, applies for funding each year as one of eight Conservation Landscapes in PA, and administers the Community Impact Grant Program. Additional grants are available through the SMP [Flex Grants Program](#). Please join us at southmountainpartnership.org

Community Impact Program At A Glance

- New name, same grant program! Our Community Impact Grant (formally known as Mini-Grants) is a single-year grant for projects or work from September 2026 to December 2027, ranging from \$2,500 to \$15,000. Projects exceeding \$15,000 and up to \$25,000 may be considered in special circumstances. The maximum eligible total project cost is \$50,000. **NEW IN 2026: the minimum match required is 25% of the grant request.**
- Eligible applicants include authorized 501(c)(3) non-profits, municipalities, counties, authorities, and academic institutions. Projects must occur within Cumberland, Adams, Franklin, or York County.
- Pre-applications are due by April 30, 2026. Approved pre-applicants will be invited to submit a final application in May 2026, due by June 26, 2026. Grant award decisions will be made in August 2026, and grant awards will be celebrated on October 2, 2026.

Deadlines

Pre-Application Deadline: April 30, 2026
Notification of Acceptance of Pre-Application: May 2026
Final Application Deadline (if invited): June 26, 2026
Grant Award Decisions: Aug 2026
Project Takes Place: Sept 2026–Nov 2027
Formal Grant Awards: October 2, 2026
Project Formally Closed Out: By December 31, 2027

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

Program Goals and Funding Priorities

Purpose

SMP's Community Impact 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)
- BONUS: Economic Impact (landscape resources' impact on the economy)

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.



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 shared 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 Community Impact 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.

We are prioritizing Community Impact Grant projects that directly help advance the State of the Region. In your final application, you will be asked to share how your project improves metrics and addresses regional challenges.

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. Scoring priority will 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 25% [new in 2026] of the grant request with additional funding and/or eligible non-cash (in-kind) services. Ex. a \$10,000 grant request would require a minimum \$2,500 match. Eligible costs include professional services, in-house professional services, and direct costs. Please note tools and supplies are only eligible for SMP Community Impact 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 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 Community Impact Grant Program. Pre-applications are reviewed by staff for eligibility and appropriateness for SMP's Community Impact 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 eligible 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 April 30th @ 4 PM](#)

Final 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 list the direct deliverables of the project. 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 2024) identified for each step. To receive full points, the project SOW should also be consistent with the proposed budget/cost estimate and be feasible within the allotted time frame. If successfully funded, this section will be used to draft your contract scope steps in the grant agreement (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.

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. COUNTY or MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (S): Briefly explain where your project aligns with your County or Municipal Plan [\[find list of plans here\]](#) (100 word limit)
3. PRIORITY COMMUNITY: Use the [Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Priority Communities Analysis maps](#) to find your U.S. Census block group. In 2022, DCNR updated and expanded that analysis to examine the entire state at the U.S. Census block group level. This improved "Priority Communities Analysis" layers park and trail access with socioeconomic, health, and other key factors.
How does DCNR rate need in your project area? (low/medium/high)
4. NEW PARTNER: Has your organization received funding from SMP's Community Impact 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 QUESTIONS:

1. How does your project conserve the resources that define the South Mountain landscape? (100 word limit)
2. Will this project increase public awareness of the resources that define the South Mountain landscape? (100 word limit)
3. Is your project occurring in the core South Mountain Region? You can confirm this by checking out [our map here](#). (yes/no)

SCORING INFORMATION: 15 points - State of the Region Consistency- The grant review committee will score your project on its relation to the State of the Region.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which metrics from the State of the Region could be improved by your project? [review metrics here]
2. What regional challenge(s) does this project address [check list]
 - Sustainable Development – balancing growth with preservation of resources and quality of life
 - Water Quality and Quantity – including water quality for consumption and habitat and stormwater management
 - Loss of resources – including farmland, forest, history and culture, and habitat
 - Public health – including physical and mental health
 - Recreation – including location, access, demand/supply, maintenance, and sustainability

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. (1-2 sentences PER RESOURCE, ONLY respond to the resources you feel your project addresses.
 - 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?
 - How does your project address the Economic Impact of landscape resources?

Partner Collaboration

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. Who are the partners on this project? Format as a list.
2. How will participating partners contribute to the project?.(200-word limit)
3. General Partners: LOS not required, but encouraged.
4. Financial Partners: LOS of support required detailing confirmed financial support [in kind, or cash match] 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.

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; Stewardship: Applicant demonstrates a strong plan for ensuring the stewardship 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. All Community Impact Grants require a 25% match of the grant request [NEW in 2026]. For example, a \$10,000 grant request would require a minimum match of \$2,500 for total project costs of \$12,500. Total project cost cannot exceed \$50,000.

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

Questions? Contact Julia Chain jchain@appalachiantrail.org

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.

A budget template will be provided to you.

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 Community Impact 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 2026

- 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 2026

- Applicants submit full application.

July 2026

- Community Impact Grant committee reviews applications.

August 2026

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

August – September 2026

- 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 2026 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, 2027).
- 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

Community Impact Mini- Grant FAQs

SMP Community Impact Grant is intended to catalyze on-the-ground projects that align with SMP's goals. The Community Impact 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 Community Impact Grant application look like?

The Community Impact 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 Community Impact 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 2026 grant cycle take place between September 2026 and December 2027 and must be formally closed by the Grantee by December 1, 2027. Please note: The Community Impact Grant is intended to be project-specific; applications should be for concrete, defined projects that have clear objectives,

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outcomes, and deliverables. The Community Impact 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 Community Impact 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 Community Impact 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 25% 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 Community Impact Grant to a DCNR grant?

No. The Community Impact 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 Community Impact 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 Community Impact Grant?

Community Impact 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.](#)



**SOUTH MOUNTAIN
PARTNERSHIP**
CONSERVATION NETWORK

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