

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources
Small Grants for Community Partnering
2012

BACKGROUND

The Larimer County Small Grants Program is an initiative of the Larimer County Open Lands Program to disperse Help Preserve Open Space sales tax dollars throughout the County for projects related to conservation and enhancement of, and recreation and/or education on, open space on public and private lands. Initiated in 1997 with a trial project (Ptarmigan Run), the program funded six projects the following year.

In 2001 the program was formalized in the *Open Lands Master Plan*, Master Plan Actions, (www.larimer.org/openlands/master_plan.pdf), adopted by the Larimer County Open Lands Advisory Board and the Board of County Commissioners and subsequently incorporated into the Larimer County Land Use Code. In 2006, the small grants subcommittee of the Open Lands Advisory Board formalized grant selection criteria, procedures, and a project score card to help the subcommittee objectively select projects for funding.

In 2009, the Open Lands Program focus was to connect people and communities to the lands that had been successfully conserved and protected: People who are connected to the land care about what happens to it. The Open Lands Advisory Board approved expansion of the Small Grants Program into new areas which promote land connections: “agriculture,” “increased access to open spaces and natural areas,” and “research on Larimer County open spaces.” These were in addition to the original grant category, “protection or enhancement of open space, trails, natural areas, wildlife habitat, river areas, and wetlands on private or public land.” The Small Grants Program was renamed to Small Grants for Community Partnering. Funding was increased from \$10,000 to \$20,000 annually to be awarded for grants up to \$2,000 each.

In 2012, the intent of the program was reaffirmed: to provide citizens with direct access to open spaces sales tax dollars; to allow citizens to leverage dollars with seed money for project implementation; to encourage citizen partnerships; to reach communities with which the program has not historically interacted; and to increase visibility, support, and appreciation for the Open Lands Program.

GRANT SELECTION CRITERIA

The following criteria will be used to determine application retention, rejection, and funding amounts.

A proposed project must meet *all* of the following criteria:

Mission

1. Proposed projects must be in accordance with the mission of the Larimer County Open Lands Program:

“The mission of the Larimer County Open Lands Program is to preserve and protect significant open space, natural areas, and wildlife habitat and develop parks and trails for present and future generations. These open lands provide opportunities for leisure, human renewal and protection of our natural and cultural resources.”

Who can apply?

2. Anyone can apply, with the following exceptions and/or parameters:
 - a) Government agencies already receiving Help Preserve Open Spaces tax dollars may not apply directly.
 - b) For projects on public lands and for government agencies, excluding educational institutions, the applicant must be a 501c3 non-profit or other non-governmental entity with an active, leadership role in the project.
 - c) With the grant application: all affected land owners must agree in writing with the project; Homeowners' and Property Owners' Associations must submit a copy of board meeting minutes approving the project; educational institutions must provide a letter from the appropriate facilities director agreeing to the specific project.

What are the categories?

3. Proposed projects must be in *one or more* of the Small Grants for Community Partnering categories:
 - a) Provides or enhances natural areas, including wildlife habitat, river areas, and wetlands
 - b) Provides linkages with existing open lands (Linkages may be either trails or wildlife habitat.)
 - a) Provides opportunities for environmental education, outdoor recreation, or nature interpretation
 - b) Provides opportunities for people to connect with the land via parks, agriculture, increased access to open spaces and natural areas, or research on Larimer County open spaces
4. Proposed "Agriculture" projects must meet the following criteria:
 - a) Provision of local food production, including community gardens, CSAs, etc., with a preference for projects which:
 - are community minded (connecting a community and its people to an area)
 - are conservation minded, and
 - have local distribution
5. Proposed "Increased Access to Open Spaces and Natural Areas" projects must meet the following criteria:
 - a) Getting people out into designated open spaces or natural areas having a nexus with the open spaces sales tax dollars. Projects may be one or more of the following:
 - nature-based education
 - nature-based health and wellness programs
 - nature-based recreation
 - transportation to open spaces and natural areas
6. Projects on Larimer County properties must be approved through the special event process before funding.

7. Proposed “Research on Larimer County Open Spaces” projects must meet the following criteria:
- a) Provision of new information about or a better understanding of Larimer County Department of Natural Resources’ properties which have a nexus with the open spaces sales tax dollars, or the people who use those properties. Projects should encourage intellectual curiosity about our natural world and/or how people connect to it. Research projects may be:
 - ecological (examples: species, plants, etc.)
 - behavioral (example: relationships of people to open spaces, etc.)
 - cultural (examples: barriers to use of open spaces, historical use of open spaces, etc.)
 - b) Project must be approved through the special event process before funding.

What are funding limitations?

8. Small grant funds are for project implementation only and may not be used for salaries and/or project planning expenses, except for projects categorized as “Research on Larimer County Open Spaces.”
9. Projects that include planting and/or habitat improvement must use native and/or non-invasive, drought-resistant plant species appropriate for the selected environment, except for projects categorized as “Agriculture.”
10. Tools and other equipment (e.g. GPS units, weed sprayers, etc.) may be funded with an acceptable justification of why they are required for the project. A disposition plan following use must be provided. Requests for funds for tools and/or equipment that will be donated to a public agency or organization after the intended use will be looked upon more favorably.
11. Transportation expenses will be funded only for projects categorized as “Increased Access to Open Spaces and Natural Areas” or “Research on Larimer County Open Spaces.”
12. If applicable, a long-term maintenance plan may be required and should be included in the application.

Where can projects be located?

13. Grant dollars will be distributed in Larimer County only, and to the extent possible, throughout the entire county.
14. Projects may be located within city or town limits.
15. Proposed projects must be land or water based with preference to those associated with protected land (e.g., HOA’s covenant-protected lands, neighborhood parks, etc.)
16. Providing public access and/or benefit would be looked upon more highly, but not required.

Other details

17. Projects must have a minimum match of 50% of the requested dollar amount (for example, a \$1,000 request requires a \$500 match). The match may be from in-kind services, volunteer hours, private dollars, and/or other funding sources (e.g. other grants).

18. A multi-phased project may be funded over multiple years. Requests for new funding will be partially dependent on past project accomplishments. If money received in previous funding years has not been spent at the time of the new application, new dollars will not be granted to the project until that money has been spent on its dedicated purpose and a final report submitted. A complete, new application is required during each grant cycle that funds are being requested.
19. If a funded project changes from the initial application and budget, a written change request must be submitted before any dollars are spent. The applicant may be asked to resubmit for another grant year if the project changed enough to affect how it would have been rated when in competition with that year's other applications.
20. A final report is required for all projects.
21. Projects will be monitored up to one (1) year following project initiation; and, some may be monitored further. Multi-year projects will be monitored annually until the final funding year when future monitoring requirements will be determined. If a project is in unsatisfactory condition, the applicant will be ineligible for future grant awards.

INTERNAL POLICIES AND PROCESSES

- A. A Small Grants for Community Partnering subcommittee will be created of Open Lands Advisory Board members and Open Lands Program staff to manage the program.
- B. Subcommittee members will complete the "Project Score Card" to assess each grant application. All scores will be combined to determine the top scoring applications.
- C. Following an initial application screening, a pre-grant selection site visit may be conducted by subcommittee members.
- D. If a subcommittee member is in any way associated with a grant application (e.g. an active member of the organization requesting funding), that member must recuse himself/herself from discussion on that project until a final vote has been made by the other subcommittee members.
- E. The subcommittee will make funding recommendations to the Open Lands Advisory Board for review and approval.
- F. This document is a guiding and working document subject to revision as deemed necessary.