



Fundamentals of Funding for Local Parks and Greenspace

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About Trust for Public Land

Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit that works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of the outdoors. As a leader in equitable access to the outdoors, TPL works with communities to create parks and protect public land where they are needed most. This report was prepared in partnership between TPL's *10-Minute Walk*[®] Program, Conservation Finance, and Federal Affairs.

The *10-Minute Walk* Program, a Trust for Public Land (TPL) award-winning national program, is engaging city leaders to close the park equity divide so that every resident has access to a quality park or greenspace within a *10-minute walk* of home.

Trust for Public Land's Conservation Finance program serves as a trusted advisor to state and local governments and community leaders on how to design, pass, and implement ballot and legislative measures to fund parks and conservation. Since 1996 we've helped pass 650 measures – 83 percent of those we've worked on – that generated \$93 billion for parks.

Trust for Public Land's Federal Affairs team works in our nation's capital to provide resources and guidance about federal land conservation policy and funding to an array of interested parties, including Congress, the White House, federal agency staff, local and state land trust activists and government officials, and other conservation groups.

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary



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Parks play an essential role in helping communities thrive. When people have access to a high-quality park close-to-home, they experience improved mental health, physical health, and social well-being. But, parks departments across the country face financial challenges that make it difficult to ensure that everyone has access to a high-quality park. For instance, one study found that following the great recession, spending on parks and recreation decreased 21% from 2008 - 2013.¹

While parks have waxed and waned on political agendas, demand hasn't gone down. In fact, we've seen the need for parks as critical civic infrastructure increase, prompted in part by the COVID-19 pandemic. City leaders and parks practitioners are being asked to do more for parks with less. But, they may not always know where to go for funding.

Trust for Public Land's *10-Minute Walk*[®] Program has compiled this report to share common funding mechanisms available for city parks. This report is not intended to be encyclopedic, but rather to outline a wide range of frequently-used funding tools. The table below shares 21 common funding mechanisms for parks, along with a high-level summary of what they can fund.

Funding Mechanism	Capital Costs	Maintenance	Pre-Development ¹	Activations and Programming
LOCAL AND STATE SOURCES FOR PARK FUNDING				
Municipal bonds	✓			
Property taxes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sales and use taxes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Real estate transfer tax	✓	✓	✓	✓
Parkland dedication ordinance	✓		✓	
Developer impact fees	✓		✓	
Business Improvement District	✓	✓	✓	✓
Parks District	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lottery funds	✓	✓	✓	✓
MAJOR FEDERAL SOURCES				
NPS ORLP	✓			
DOT RAISE	✓		✓	
NEA Our Town			✓	✓
EPA Brownfields Program	✓		✓	
DOT Transportation Alternatives	✓		✓	
USFS Urban and Community Forestry		✓	✓	✓
EPA Environmental Justice Programs	✓	✓	✓	✓
DOT Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Program	✓		✓	
NPS LCWF Stateside Assistance Program	✓			
HUD Community Development Block Grants	✓		✓	
PARTNERSHIPS AND PHILANTHROPY				
Park conservancy or foundation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Philanthropies	✓	✓	✓	✓

¹ Planning, design, and community engagement.

Local and State Funding for Parks

Cities generally fund their municipal operations, including their park systems, through the collection of property and sales taxes which are designated as part of a city's "general fund." A city's general fund is often the most flexible source for spending on parks and it can support capital costs, operations and maintenance, predevelopment, as well as activation and programming. One challenge many cities face is weighing how to allocate general fund dollars towards parks versus the many other spending priorities of a city.

However, there are several ways that cities can generate funds specifically for parks, including ballot measures for conservation finance, developer exactions, and local districts.

Since 1996, Trust for Public Land's Conservation Finance team has helped pass nearly 650 ballot measures creating \$93 billion in funding for parks, land conservation, and climate change mitigation, of which over 351 local city or county ballots have generated over \$33 billion in funding for parks and open space. The most common ballot measures passed are for bonds, property taxes, and sales taxes. Each of these mechanisms can be designed to ensure that the funding generated specifically supports a city's parks system. These have been passed in communities of all geographies, sizes, politics, and priorities.

Developer exactions – including parkland dedication ordinances and developer impact fees – are requirements that cities establish as a way to balance development with other city priorities. Developer exactions may be used as a way to create new parks that will serve a development's residents, or to fund other parks within the city that will be accessed by new residents.

In some cities, specialized local districts like Business Improvement Districts or Parks Districts are established to manage local parks. These districts can have the independent authority to generate revenue via taxes, levies, bonds, and private funding.

In addition to funds originating at the city level, some states are exploring funding mechanisms for city parks. Funding from lottery proceeds, bonds, sales tax, and real estate transfer tax are common examples. State taxes on cannabis and sporting goods are also emerging as common funding mechanisms being explored for city parks.

MUNICIPAL BONDS

What it is: A bond is debt issued by a government, territory, or one of its agencies. It is generally used to finance capital projects such as parks, roads, schools, and other public infrastructure or facilities. Bonds are a voter-approved ballot measure that are typically paid for by property owners. Bonds that fund local parks can be issued at the city, county, and state level.

What it funds: Bonds are an effective mechanism for obtaining funds for large-scale capital projects – particularly when funding is needed up-front and all at once. Bonds cannot be used for operations and maintenance.

Scale of funding provided: The scale of funding provided by bonds can range widely, depending on a wide-range of factors including how cities, counties, and states are rated by external bond evaluation organizations. In 2022, TPL helped two municipal governments to develop and pass bond ballot measures - an \$85 million park bond which was passed by the voters of Salt Lake City, UT with 71 percent support and a \$15 million bond in Fort Worth, TX that was approved with 57 percent voter support.

Requirements and restrictions: There are generally no restrictions at the state-wide level that prevent cities and counties from issuing bonds. Most municipal bonds require voter approval.

PROPERTY TAXES

What it is: A property tax or millage is a levy on the value of a property. The tax is levied by the governing authority of the jurisdiction in which the property is located, and multiple jurisdictions may tax the same property. Property taxes fund a variety of public services, including and beyond parks.

What it funds: Property taxes can be used for a wide range of purposes, from land acquisition to capital improvements to operations and maintenance.

Scale of funding provided: The scale of funding provided by property taxes can range widely based on the tax rate levied as well as the value and number of properties being taxed. In 2022, TPL helped nine municipal governments develop property tax ballot measures, and seven of the measures passed. These measures supported by TPL in 2022 included a 1.5 percent tax increase in Worcester, MA for open space, recreation, historical preservation and affordable housing. The funding helps establish the Community Preservation Act in Massachusetts' second largest city.

Requirements and restrictions: Many states have strict limits or caps on the property taxes that can be levied in local jurisdictions. Property tax increases are often voter-approved, but this varies by state.

SALES AND USE TAXES

What it is: A sales tax is paid to a governing authority by a consumer for the purchase of certain goods and services. Sales taxes generally allow a seller to collect the tax from a consumer at the point of purchase. When a tax on goods or services is paid to a governing body directly by a consumer, it is usually called a use tax. Certain goods, such as prescriptions or groceries, are often exempted from these taxes. Sales taxes run the risk of being considered regressive, especially if prescriptions, groceries, or other essential items are included in the tax. Sales taxes can fund a wide range of public services, including parks. Sales taxes that fund local parks can be issued at the local or state level.

What it funds: Sales taxes can be used for a wide range of purposes, from land acquisition to capital improvements to operations and maintenance.

Scale of funding provided: The scale of funding provided by a sales tax can range widely based on the tax rate levied, the goods or services being taxed, and the tax base. In April 2023, TPL supported Colorado Springs, CO as voters overwhelmingly approved a 20-year extension of the existing 0.1% Trails and Open Space (TOPS) sales tax. The measure was approved with 78% support and is expected to generate \$240 million for open space, parks, and trails. The TOPS tax was first approved by voters in 1997.

Requirements and restrictions: In some states, there is enabling legislation required by the state in order for local jurisdictions to levy sales taxes. In these states, there are restrictions governing how or whether sales taxes can be implemented on a local level. There is a wide range of how sales taxes can be implemented, including by ballot measure.

REAL ESTATE TRANSFER TAX

What it is: Real estate transfer taxes are a tax or fee on the transfer of a property's title or deed. The tax is a one-time cost that is typically calculated as a percentage of a property's total sale price. Real estate transfer taxes can fund a variety of public services, including parks, and they can be levied at the state or local level.

What it funds: Real estate transfer taxes can be used for a wide range of purposes from land acquisition to capital improvements to operations and maintenance.

Scale of funding provided: The scale of funding provided by a real estate transfer tax can range widely based on the tax rate levied, the value of properties being transferred within a jurisdiction, and the number of properties being transferred. TPL's Conservation Finance team has helped pass four local real estate transfer taxes that have helped to generate over \$31 million in funding for parks.

Requirements and restrictions: The implementation process of a real estate transfer tax varies from state to state. There is a wide range of how real estate transfer taxes can be implemented, including by ballot measure. In some states, there are restrictions governing how or whether a real estate transfer tax can be implemented at the local level.

PARKLAND DEDICATION ORDINANCE

What it is: A Parkland Dedication Ordinance is a city policy, often enacted through the zoning code or subdivision regulations, that requires a developer to donate land and/or funding for parks. There is a wide range of approaches for how Parkland Dedication Ordinances can be structured, and different approaches can be mixed together. For some cities, the developer is only required to donate land, which the city then improves. In other cities, developers can be credited for building a publicly accessible park. Cities may also offer a "fee-in-lieu of land" option in which a one-time fee is required instead of a land donation. A growing trend is to require both a donation of land as well as a fee to ensure the city is funded to develop that land.

What it funds: When a Parkland Dedication Ordinance only requires a donation of land, no funding is provided to the city. If a fee-in-lieu of land is required, that funding can be used by the city to either develop a new park or improve an existing park that will serve the development's residents.

Scale of funding provided: The scale of funding provided by Parkland Dedication Ordinances ranges depending on how the city's ordinance is structured, as well as the amount of development within a city. Generally, when a fee-in-lieu of land is required, that fee is assessed based on the density of a new development. Parkland Dedication Ordinances may be criticized when they are structured so that the funds raised are outpaced by the cost of land, resulting in an inability by the city to purchase parkland.

Requirements and restrictions: Parkland dedication ordinances can be enacted by cities. There are requirements for an ordinance to define geographic proximity of the dedicated land (or fee expenditure) to the new development, how the new parkland affects current levels of service, and how fees are spent.

DEVELOPER IMPACT FEES

What it is: An impact fee is a fee required of developers to offset the cost of city infrastructure that will need to be built in order to serve that new development. Impact fees are often used to fund traditional infrastructure projects, like roads and sewers. But some cities also use impact fees as a way to fund parks that will be needed by the development's residents.

What it funds: Similar to funds raised through Parkland Dedication Ordinances, impact fees can only be used for park development or capital improvement.

Scale of funding provided: Similar to Parkland Dedication Ordinances, the funding raised by impact fees is dependent on the fee levied by the city, as well as the amount of development in a city.

Requirements and restrictions: Impact fees require enabling legislation at the state level in some states. There is a high-degree of specificity governing how impact fees can – and cannot – be used.

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

What it is: A business improvement district (BID) is a defined geographic location within which businesses are required to pay an additional tax or levy to fund projects within the BID's boundaries. While BIDs are often funded primarily through the tax or levy, they can also draw on other public and private funding. BIDs are generally operated by a non-profit organization with full-time staff and a board of directors.

What it funds: BIDs fund a wide range of activities that support the needs of business owners in a given area from enhanced cleaning to conducting advocacy for members to conducting capital projects. For parks, BIDs may fund areas from the initial capital investment to develop a park to ongoing operations and maintenance to programming.

Scale of funding provided: Funding provided by BIDs ranges widely based on the tax or levy required by businesses within the BID, the number of businesses contributed the tax or levy, and its ability to fundraise additional revenue. New York City, which has the largest number of BIDs in the country,² has BIDs with tax or levy revenue as low as \$75,000³ a year and as high as \$20 million a year.⁴

Requirements and restrictions: BIDs are often a standalone non-profit organization that must be staffed, have a board of directors, and formalized by-laws. Establishing a BID typically requires authorization from the city and support among business owners within its proposed boundaries. There are varying requirements from state-to-state that may govern the implementation of a BID, including enabling legislation. Approximately 40 states have legislation governing BIDs.⁵

PARKS DISTRICT

What it is: A parks district is an autonomous organization that manages parks (and sometimes other civic assets) within a defined geographic location. Park districts are generally funded either by a property tax or by general obligation bonds.

What it funds: Parks districts can fund and lead all aspects of park management from pre-development to development to programming to ongoing operations and maintenance.

Scale of funding provided: Funding provided by parks districts ranges widely based on the tax or levy required of property owners within its geographic bounds, as well as its ability to fundraise through bonds. One of the largest parks districts in the country, the Chicago Park District, had a budget of \$510.9 million for 2022, funded primarily by property taxes.

Requirements and restrictions: There are varying requirements from state-to-state that may govern the establishment of a parks district. Once established, a parks district generally is managed by full-time staff and its work is often overseen by a park board.

STATE LOTTERY FUNDS

What it is: In areas with a state lottery, a portion of the revenue can be allocated towards supporting public goods – including parks.

What it funds: The specific funding allocation from lotteries varies from state-by-state. One of the most prominent lotteries that funds environmental protection is the Colorado lottery. In Colorado, 40% of the lottery's profits fund the Conservation Trust Fund, which specifically supports local governments.⁶ Funding from the Conservation Trust Fund can be used for park land acquisition, capital improvement, and maintenance. In 2021, the Conservation Trust Fund distributed over \$70 million to local communities across the state.⁷

Scale of funding provided: The scale of funding provided by lotteries ranges widely based on lottery revenue as well as requirements for how that revenue must be disbursed. For example, Minnesota's state legislation requires that the lottery provide no less than 40% of its net proceeds towards the state's environmental and natural resources trust fund through 2025. The trust fund then receives and evaluates a number of proposals for how that funding can be used. A reauthorization of the use of lottery funds for conservation is on the ballot in Minnesota for 2024. If approved, a portion of lottery revenue would continue to be dedicated towards conservation until 2050.

Requirements and restrictions: Rules governing a state lottery – including how its revenue is distributed – are generally made at the state-level and codified in state legislation. For example, both Colorado and Minnesota have specific legislation requirements around the usage of lottery revenue. In Colorado, the breakdown of how lottery revenue is spent was decided via a ballot measure.

Major Federal Funding Sources

The past decade has seen an unprecedented level of investment in parks and recreation from the Great American Outdoors Act, which created a permanent source of funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act, which are expected to infuse billions of dollars into city parks across the country. Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) program is the only federal grant that is specifically designed to support the acquisition and development of city parks. But, other federal programs – including and beyond those listed below – can fund parks as part of a city's broader transportation, climate, and cultural infrastructure.

NPS OUTDOOR RECREATION LEGACY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (ORLP)

What it is: The ORLP Program is the most significant federal grant for city parks, and it is specifically focused on increasing access to outdoor recreation in economically disadvantaged areas with a park equity gap. ORLP is administered by the National Park Service and funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. It is an annual grant that was established in 2014. Since its inception, ORLP has provided over \$100 million dollars to fund nearly 100 projects in cities across the country.

What it funds: ORLP funds both land acquisition and the development and renovation of a wide range of types of parks and outdoor recreation facilities.

Scale of funding provided: The 2022 round of the ORLP program was funded at \$192 million. Grants made to applicants can range from \$300,000 to \$10 million. The funds that the federal government provides through ORLP must be matched at a 1:1 ratio by non-federal sources.⁸

Requirements and restrictions: ORLP is the most significant grant funding the development of local parks and the program is carefully designed to ensure specific criteria are met by applicants, including:

- **Applicant:** The applicant for ORLP must be a state's lead agency for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Local communities can submit their proposals to their state's lead agency for consideration and inclusion in the national competition.
- **Who is served:** ORLP projects must serve the needs of an economically disadvantaged area that is located in a park desert (e.g., lacks walkable, publicly accessible, parks).
- **Strategic alignment:** The proposed project must meet or align with at least one recreation goal of the State's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).

DOT Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE)

What it is: RAISE is a federal grant program – previously known as BUILD and TIGER – administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). The program was initiated as part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. While primarily focused on transportation, some groups have secured RAISE funding for city trails and greenways. For example, in fiscal year 2021, the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission received over \$17 million to complete 20 miles of construction for the Marquette Greenway – a 60-mile multi-use path that cuts through nine municipalities along Lake Michigan.⁹

What it funds: In fiscal year 2023, RAISE funds were allocated for both capital and planning projects. There are a wide range of eligible projects. Within the capital category, “intermodal projects” are likely the most relevant for parks practitioners. Nearly all of the eligible project types within the planning categories could be relevant for city parks.

Scale of funding provided: Since its inception (including its iterations as BUILD and TIGER), RAISE has provided over \$12.3 billion in funding.¹⁰ \$1.5 billion was allocated for 2023. The funding is split, with half going to projects in rural areas and half going to projects in urban areas. The minimum grant award is \$5 million in urban areas and \$1 million in rural areas. In either case, grants cannot exceed \$25 million.

Requirements and restrictions: RAISE is a major federal grant program. The program is designed with highly-specific requirements to ensure specific criteria are met by applicants. There are restrictions on cost sharing, and federal funding for a project cannot exceed 80% of the total project cost except in limited scenarios.

NEA OUR TOWN

What it is: Our Town is a grant funded by the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) that supports arts engagement, cultural planning, and design projects that represent the distinct character and quality of their communities. Cities across the country have tapped into Our Town to use creative placemaking to elevate and showcase their community’s arts and culture.

What it funds: Through project-based funding, the Our Town program supports activities that integrate arts, culture, and design into local efforts that strengthen communities. Our Town projects advance local economic, physical, or social outcomes in communities, ultimately laying the groundwork for systems change and centering equity. Within the context of parks, Our Town projects are often used for community programming as well as arts and cultural installations. For example, in Wenatchee, Washington, an Our Town grant funded a health and cultural event for an under-served community in a local park. In Bozeman, Montana, Our Town funded arts and cultural installations and programming in Story Mill Community Park.

Scale of funding provided: Our Town grants range from \$25,000 to \$150,000. Grants require a 1:1 match from non-federal sources.

Requirements and restrictions: In addition to the match requirement, Our Town requires a demonstrated partnership between a nonprofit organization and a local government organization, one of which must be a cultural organization. The highest-ranking local government official must submit a letter of support. Our Town grants cannot fund more than 50% of the total project cost.

EPA BROWNFIELDS PROGRAM

What it is: The EPA's Brownfields program is a suite of grants and technical assistance that support re-use of brownfields across the country. The program was established in 1995. Since then, it has supported the clean-up of over 2,400 sites and has made nearly 150,000 acres available for re-use.¹¹ The Bipartisan Infrastructure law is injecting an additional \$1.5 billion of investment into the program.¹²

What it funds: The Brownfields program provides a wide range of grants, loans, and technical assistance for cities to help revitalize brownfields, including:

- Assessment grants that fund inventorying of brownfields, along with planning activities – including community engagement
- Revolving loan funds that provide support for brownfield clean-ups
- Cleanup grants that fund remediation activities at brownfield sites
- Multipurpose grants that fund a range of assessment and clean-up activities within a specific geographic area that has one or more brownfield
- Technical Assistance to Brownfields Communities (TAB) provides support to a third-party organization who can help communities within their region to understand brownfield assessment and clean-up

There are a variety of ways to tap into these programs to promote parks and greenspace. For example, the cities of Ranson and Charles Town, West Virginia, have received multiple grants from the brownfield program to rehabilitate a 1.5 mile strip of brownfields connecting the cities. Part of the rehabilitation has included the development of parks and green space.¹³

Scale of funding provided: Each of the grants within the Brownfields Program has its own range of funding available.

- Assessment grants: Up to \$2 million
- Revolving loan fund: Up to \$1 million
- Brownfield clean-up grants: Up to \$2 million
- Multi-purpose grants: Up to \$800,000

Requirements and restrictions: Each of the grants and technical assistance opportunities within the Brownfields program come with its own set of requirements and restrictions. Restrictions and requirements generally govern

who can apply for a grant, the window of time within which a grant must be spent, match requirements, and the activities allowed under a grant.

DOT TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM (TAP)

What it is: TAP is a federal grant program that funds small-scale, multi-modal transportation projects. States are allocated funding for TAP from the federal government, and are then responsible for administering those funds. There are different requirements for how funds are awarded based on the population of the area in which the funding would be allocated.

What it funds: TAP funds a wide range of transportation-focused projects, including development of multi-modal recreational trails, construction of scenic viewing points, and safe routes to schools projects. In fiscal year 2020, TAP supported nearly 2,000 projects: over 1,000 pedestrian and bicycle trails, 925 recreational trails, 14 historic preservation projects, and seven environmental and wildlife projects.¹⁴ Funding is available for construction, design, and planning.

Scale of funding provided: TAP funding is set-aside from the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program. In fiscal year 2022, TAP was funded at \$1.38 billion dollars, and it's budgeted to increase to \$1.49 billion by fiscal year 2026.¹⁵ Funding for TAP projects flows through block grants to states and is calculated as 10% of the state's allocation for the Surface Transportation Block Grant.¹⁶

Requirements and restrictions: Funding for TAP projects is awarded through competitive processes at the state level, and the process varies from state to state. Areas with a population greater than 200,000 apply for funds through their metropolitan planning organization while populations under 200,000 apply through their state Department of Transportation. There are a limited number of entities that are eligible to receive TAP funding, including local governments, nonprofits, and metropolitan planning organizations. Projects require a 20% match of funds for a project.¹⁷

USFS URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM

What it is: The US Forest Service's Urban & Community Forestry Program (UCFP) is a technical, financial, and educational assistance program. The intent of the program is to deliver nature-based solutions for communities to ensure an equitable and resilient tree canopy in urban spaces where more than 84% of Americans live. Through the Inflation Reduction Act, the program has established a competitive grant process to fund projects that reflect the work of the UCFP.

What it funds: UCFP funds investments at the local, regional, state, or even national level that increase equitable access to urban tree canopy and the associated health, environmental and economic benefits in disadvantaged communities. Projects may seek to broaden community engagement in local urban forest planning, and/or

improve community and urban forest resilience to climate change, pests, and storm events through best management and maintenance practices.

Scale of funding provided: Urban and Community Forestry grants range from \$100,000 - \$50,000,000. Grants require a 1:1 match from non-federal sources. Match may be waived for proposals delivering 100% of the funding/program benefits to disadvantaged communities.

Requirements and restrictions: The scope of eligible entities and land types is very broad under the UCFP, but may not fund projects on federally-owned lands.

EPA ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PROGRAMS

What it is: EPA created two new environmental justice programs in 2023 with an additional program set to be announced the summer of 2023. The EJ Collaborative Problem Solving (EJCPS) and Government to Government (EJG2G) programs announced in January, provide financial assistance to eligible organizations or government entities working to address local environmental or public health issues in their communities. The Environmental and Climate Justice Block Grants will invest a historic sum of \$3 billion in communities when announced later in 2023.

What it funds: Environmental justice programs center community involvement and partnership in all project work. Proposals must demonstrate this commitment to partnership and to transforming the environmental and public health of overburdened and underserved communities. Eligible activities include research, community planning and/or public education activities as well as site-based interventions like green infrastructure projects. Eligibility is broad so long as it contributes to program goals. Differences between the EJCPS and EJG2G projects are primarily matters of scale rather than type.

Scale of funding provided: EJCPS funds up to \$500,000 for qualifying projects while EJG2G funds up to \$1,000,000.

Requirements and restrictions: There are not cost share or matching requirements for either program. EJCPS does require the use of the [EPA's EJ Collaborative Problem Solving model](#) and a logic model illustrating how activities lead to outcomes. EJG2G recipients must also use a logic model and demonstrate an official partnership with a local community-based organization.

DOT RECONNECTING COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS PROGRAM

What it is: This Department of Transportation program aims to fund projects that advance community-centered connection transportation projects, with a priority for projects that benefit disadvantaged communities, by improving access to daily needs such as jobs, education, health care, food, nature and recreation; fostering equitable development and restoration; and reconnecting communities by removing, retrofitting, or mitigating transportation facilities that create barriers to community connectivity, including to mobility, access, or economic development.. In FY 2022, six Capital Construction Grants and 39 Planning Grants were awarded in the first cycle of the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program.

What it funds: The RCN Program provides funding for three types of grants:

Community Planning Grants will award RCP and/or NAE funding for planning activities for future construction projects and allow for innovative community planning to address localized transportation challenges.

Capital Construction Grants will award projects that remove, retrofit, mitigate, or replace an existing eligible dividing transportation facility with a new facility that reconnects communities; mitigates a burdening transportation facility that is a source of air pollution, noise, stormwater, heat, or other burdens; or implement a strategy to reduce environmental harm and/or improve access through transportation improvements.

Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants will award projects led by two or more eligible applicants to address a persistent regional challenge related to equitable access and mobility. Eligible activities for Regional Partnerships Challenge Grants are the same as those listed under Capital Construction and Community Planning Grants but must have a regional focus, and clearly demonstrate regional coordination and leveraging of local, State, and Federal resources and policies.

Scale of funding provided: RCN Planning Grants provide as much as \$50,000,000. The upward range of Capital Grants are flexible within the total funding allotments. Of the three grant types, the Community Planning Grants and the Regional Partnerships Challenge grants require at least 20% of the total project cost to come from non-federal sources. The Capital Construction Grants funded by the IRA Neighborhood Access and Equity program also requires 20% of the total project cost to be matched by non-federal sources.

Requirements and restrictions: In addition to the non-federal cost share requirement, Reconnecting Communities-funded Capital Grants are limited to covering 50% of the total project cost. An additional 30% may come from other federal sources with a 20% non-federal match.

LWCF STATESIDE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

What it is: The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is the largest source of federal money for park, wildlife, and open space land acquisition. No less than 40% of LWCF dollars are given to, and administered by, states as matching grants for park development and land acquisition projects. LWCF funding for states or “stateside” has supported the purchase and protection of 3 million acres of recreation lands and over 29,000 projects to develop basic recreation facilities in every U.S. State and territory.

What it funds: The stateside program can assist in acquiring, preserving, developing, and assuring accessibility to outdoor recreation resources. These mechanisms can apply broadly to open space, parks, trails, wildlife lands and other lands and facilities desirable for outdoor recreation.

Scale of funding provided: LWCF Stateside grants vary widely in size from state to state. From multi-million-dollar land acquisition projects to a \$50,000 park rehabilitation. All LWCF grants require a 1:1 match from non-federal sources.

Requirements and restrictions: In addition to the match requirement, for parks and recreation facilities that receive LWCF funds, the government entity that owns the site must commit to maintaining these sites for the purpose of public outdoor recreation in perpetuity.

HUD COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANTS (CDBG)

What it is: The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) is a flexible program that provides communities with resources to address a wide range of unique community development needs. Beginning in 1974, the CDBG program is one of the longest continuously run programs at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The CDBG program provides annual grants on a formula basis to 1209 general units of local government and states.

What it funds: Through CDBG, activities must meet one of three national objectives: 1) benefits low- and moderate income individuals, 2) aids in the prevention or elimination of slums or blight, or 3) addresses an urgent need that poses a serious and immediate threat to the health or welfare of the community which occurred within the last 18 months and for which other funding is not available. These requirements allow for flexible application of CDBG funds to local projects by state or local agencies. The program has been used widely for park and trail rehabilitation and development where these facilities are a priority at the local level.

Scale of funding provided: Award amounts through CDBG are highly variable from states to cities to municipal governments. The program is currently funded at \$3.3 billion annually. Grants do not require non-federal match.

Requirements and restrictions: CDBG is one of the most flexible sources of federal funding available, and is one of the only federal sources, authorized by its enabling legislation, that allows it to be used as non-federal match for other programs.

Partnerships and Philanthropy

Partnerships and philanthropy enable a city to support parks through non-governmental organizations. These external groups can fund parks operations and maintenance, programming, and capital improvement. Beyond funding, they can also provide full-time staff to deliver park services. While there are a wide range of models that exist, some of the most common are parks conservancies or foundations. The work of these organizations can be funded by private philanthropies. Private philanthropies can also play a larger role in improving park systems.

PARK CONSERVANCY OR FOUNDATION

What it is: A park conservancy or foundation is a non-profit organization that can fundraise and generate revenue to support a wide range of park activities. Conservancies and foundations are generally professionally-staffed organizations that have a formal operating agreement with the city.

What it funds: Conservancies and foundations fund a wide range of park activities from planning to capital improvements to programming to operations and maintenance. Limitations on what a conservancy or foundation can fund are primarily restricted by the organization's bylaws and its operating agreement with the city. Conservancies and foundations can be set up to support a single park, a limited number of parks, or an entire park system.

Scale of funding provided: Funding for a parks conservancy or foundation is only limited by an organization's scope and fundraising ability. In Birmingham, Alabama, the Railroad Park Foundation expended \$1.5 million in 2020. Central Park Conservancy in New York City – the largest of Trust for Public Land's ParkScore cities – spent over \$73 million in the same year.

Requirements and restrictions: There are a wide range of approaches for how to organize a park conservancy or foundation. When conservancies or foundations are structured as not-for-profit organizations (as they typically are), they are subject to all local, state, and federal requirements of non-profits. These requirements vary by city and state.

PRIVATE PHILANTHROPIES

What it is: Private philanthropies play an essential role in supporting the work of parks departments across the country. Philanthropies can play an important and catalytic role in bringing dollars to park development and improvement projects, as well as targeted, system-wide investments in specific cities. Philanthropies are not-for-profit organizations across the country that can fund a wide range of projects, including parks. Funds can be awarded either directly to a city or to a not-for-profit partner.

What it funds: Support of parks varies based on an individual philanthropy's focus. Frequently funded projects include development or improvement of specific parks, funding collective impact or coalition-building for parks, or funding creative place-making interventions for parks.

Scale of funding provided: The scale of funding provided by national philanthropies ranges widely based on a philanthropic program goals and overall investment in parks. For large, national philanthropies, projects can reach hundreds of millions of dollars in investment.

Requirements and restrictions: Different philanthropic organizations have different requirements of grant applicants. In general, for large-scale grants there may be requirements surrounding matching funds, a demonstration of partnership with community organizations, and deep due diligence conducted by the funder.

Conclusion



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Across the country, there is an unprecedented level of investment in parks and recreation. But, gaps remain – particularly for funding park operations and maintenance. The lack of available funding for maintenance can widen the park equity gap by making parks less safe, usable, and attractive, and it contributes to an estimated \$60 billion backlog of deferred maintenance among local parks agencies across the country.¹⁸

Trust for Public Land's *10-Minute Walk*[®] Program is leading research into what other innovative models of funding are available for cities – particularly for under-supported needs like maintenance, community engagement, and programming. To learn more about any of the options outlined in this report and what model might be right for your city, contact the *10-Minute Walk* Program at 10minutewalk@tpl.org.

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