



Acquisition of Land or Conservation Easements Grant Program

Basic Eligibility, Criteria, and Process

Applicants

For Acquisition of Land and Conservation Easements projects, grant applicants must be either:

- A 501(c)3 nonprofit organization; or
- A unit of local government having specific statutory authority to acquire land for public open space purposes (i.e., Forest Preserve Districts, Conservation Districts, Township Open Space Districts, Park Districts, etc.)

Projects

Funds awarded under this program must be used to acquire fee simple land or permanent conservation easements that preserve or enhance the natural habitats and wildlife areas in the state of Illinois. Acquisitions of land or conservation easements that do not result in the protection of natural habitats or wildlife areas will not be funded.

All projects must be wholly in Illinois.

The applicant must commit that the property will be open to the public, within reason, after a period needed to make the property safe for accessibility.

Funding

At least 20% of the purchase price must be provided by the applicant from a source of their choosing as match. Matching funds for the purchase price may be either cash or in-kind.

An appraisal of the property must be commissioned and paid for by the applicant, and the appraiser must be licensed in the state of Illinois.

- The appraisal cannot be more than 12 months old at the time of closing.
- The appraisal must show the “contributory value” of any buildings and improvements on the property.
- The appraisal must follow the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP)

Grant funds shall not be disbursed until a signed purchase contract between buyer and seller, setting a closing date, and the appraisal have been reviewed by PSCC.

For fee simple land acquisition projects, grant funds may not be applied towards the purchase of buildings on the property. Matching funds may be used to acquire buildings on the property

A grant shall not be awarded to support the acquisition of a property or a conservation easement if the purchase price exceeds the appraised value by more than 10%.

In the event the applicant subsequently transfers ownership of the property and is compensated for such transfer of the property, the proceeds shall be used to purchase/acquire other natural habitats and wildlife areas in the state of Illinois. The party to whom the property is transferred shall be either a 501c3 organization whose primary purpose is protecting natural habitats and wildlife areas, or a government agency having specific statutory authority to acquire land for public open space purposes. PSCC must be notified in advance of a proposed transfer, including the name of the party to whom the property is being transferred.

Application and Award Process

To begin the application process, applicants will need to complete a Letter of Intent (LOI).

The following information will be requested for the LOI:

- Basic information about you, the organization you represent, and the project for which you're seeking funding

After PSCC reviews the LOI, an email will be sent with either a link that will allow you to access and submit a full grant proposal or provide you with an explanation for why PSCC is unable to consider your request for funding.

The following information will be required for the full proposal:

- A completed Project Description Form. This includes:
 - Specific information about the natural areas and wildlife habitat on the land to be acquired
 - The project's location in relation to other protected land and how it corresponds to regional and/or statewide conservation plans
 - Transaction information
 - Post acquisition activities (i.e. long-term stewardship and protection, public accessibility, etc.)
- A Project Budget
- Maps showing land to be acquired and location of the property in relation to previously protected natural areas and/or parcels also identified as conservation priorities
- Organizational or departmental operating budgets – one for the most recent fiscal year and one for the upcoming fiscal year, if available
- A financial report for the most recent fiscal year, including Balance Sheet, Income Statement, and any notes to financial statements
- IRS letter confirming EIN
- IRS Tax Status Determination Letter (for 501c3 applicants only)
- Illinois statute that authorizes your organization to acquire land for open space purposes (for governmental applicants only)
- Your organization's most recent Illinois Charitable Organization Annual Report filed with the Illinois Attorney General's Office (for 501c3 applicants only)

- Additional information as may be deemed necessary or requested by PSCC

A confirmation email will be sent after a proposal is received.

PSCC may follow up with additional questions for applicants.

PSCC's full proposal review process can take up to 3 months or longer. The grant award process is competitive. Some projects may be declined and others awarded, but at lower levels than requested.

For more information, or to discuss your project further, please contact Brad Hanzel, Senior Grant Program Officer – bhanzel@prairiestateconservation.org.