

Dane County Conservation Fund Grant Program

2026 Guidelines and Application Materials



Table of Contents

Conservation Fund Grant Program Guidelines.....	2
Application Checklist and Instructions.....	5
Application Form.....	6
Conservation Fund Evaluation and Ranking Questions.....	9
Sample Resolution.....	14
Preliminary Environmental Questionnaire.....	15

Dane County Conservation Fund Grant Program Guidelines

Background and Funding Sources

The Dane County Conservation Fund (DCCF) was established in 1990 to annually earmark monies from the Dane County Parks budget to preserve natural, recreational, and cultural resource lands in Dane County. This fund began with \$500,000 in 1990 and through 1999 averaged \$1 million annually. Through the years, allocation amounts for the Conservation Fund which are determined annually through the County budget approval process, have steadily increased with a \$10,000,000 allocation in FY 2026.

Recognizing the power of partnerships in leveraging County dollars and accelerating the purchase of properties, the DCCF is also used to offer grants to non-profit organizations and local governmental units for the purchase of land or land interests identified in the Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan or for lands in buffer areas immediately adjacent to park lands.

Project Eligibility

Grants made through the DCCF must be used by non-profit organizations and local governmental units to buy land or interests in lands identified in the 2025 - 2030 Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan (POSP). In addition, the program may provide grants to purchase land or land interests in buffer areas immediately adjacent to properties currently owned or purchased pursuant to the POSP. The 2025 - 2030 POSP can be viewed online at: <https://www.danecountyparks.com/openspaceplan>

Eligible Applicants

To apply to the Conservation Fund Grant Program, an organization should be one of the following: (these classifications may be more or less limited due to the sources of Conservation Fund money and an analysis and determination by Dane County Department of Administration).

- Towns, villages, or cities in Dane County.
- Non-profit organizations with 501(c)(3) status
- Other governmental units in Dane County (school districts, lake districts, native American governments)

The participation of other Dane County organizations in park and open space acquisition efforts is welcomed and encouraged, including collaboration and partnerships with Dane County, or other eligible organizations where legal considerations have been met.

- Non-profit organizations that are not 501(c)(3) organizations
- Conservation groups
- Lakes and Watershed Associations
- Other private organizations

Application, Selection and Timelines

Prior to submitting a grant application, please contact Sharene Smith, Real Estate Coordinator, to discuss the project and if it is eligible for a grant. The 2026 grant cycle will have two application deadlines on **April 1st** and **September 1st**.

Grant applications are evaluated and selected based on the project narrative. Projects are rated and ranked using the evaluation and ranking questions included in the application. Grant applicants will be required to attend at least one Park Commission or County

committee meeting to provide an overview of their grant application and answer any questions. 2026 Park Commission meeting dates are **May 27th** if applying by April 1st and **October 14th** if applying by September 1st.

If selected by the Park Commission, the project will go through the Dane County Board approval process. County funds for the project will be tentatively reserved until the next application deadline. Projects that have not advanced by the next application deadline will be re-ranked with the current application cycle.

Once the applicant has an accepted offer to purchase and has secured matching funding, a resolution will be introduced to the County Board for approval. This approval process may take 2 – 3 months. Upon approval by the County Board and County Executive, the project has 1 year to close. If it does not close within 1 year, the application must be updated and resubmitted for the next grant cycle.

Grant Award Amounts

2026 standard grant awards are based on 75% of the project costs. The project costs consist of the appraised property value plus the costs of appraisal(s), title insurance, closing fees, survey, environmental inspection, attorney fees, recording fees, and relocation payments. If a DNR Stewardship grant is involved, the grant award is based on the DNR certified appraised value. For acquisitions that do not involve a DNR Stewardship grant, the grant award is based on the appraised value as reviewed and verified by staff or a Certified Review Appraiser (if deemed necessary by staff).

Grant requests for more than the standard grant amount will be considered and reviewed on a case by case basis.

Match Requirements

Standard grant awards require a match by the sponsor of not less than 25% of the project costs. Funding sources for the sponsor's match may include: state or federal grants, private donations, project partnership contributions (i.e. cities, villages, or towns), and bargain sales. Grant awards for land purchases that involve bargain sales may not exceed 75% of the purchase price or the amount of cash that the sponsor needs to purchase the property.

Dane County Continuous Cover Program

Current enrollment in the County's Continuous Cover Program (CCP) does not make a property ineligible for a grant award. In a fee simple acquisition, the sponsor must take title subject to the CCP contract and abide by the contract throughout the remaining term. If a conservation easement acquisition, the CCP payment already received by the landowner will be multiplied by the remaining years of the contract and will be deducted from the final grant award.

Acceptance of a grant award does not make a project ineligible for future CCP however, payment will be determined at the time of the CCP application.

Grant Award Acceptance and Distribution

Non-profits and local governments must sign a County Conservation Fund grant agreement that outlines the responsibilities of the grant recipient in carrying out the project. In addition, a "Declaration of Easement" must be signed and recorded against the property

that confirms the County's investment in the project and its enforcement responsibilities. In the case of conservation easements, the County must be a co-holder to the easement. Samples of grant agreements and "Declaration of Easements" are available upon request.

Grants may be distributed on or after the closing date. Grant sponsors are required to complete a disbursement request worksheet prior to distribution of funds. A sample reimbursement request worksheet is available upon request.

Reporting and Monitoring

Progress reports may be requested from grant sponsors on an annual basis to monitor the status of projects. Baseline documentation and annual monitoring is required for all conservation easements funded through the grant program. Baseline documents and monitoring reports should be submitted to the Real Estate Coordinator.

Property Signage

Grant recipients are required to include the Dane County Conservation Logo on any property signs for land purchased with assistance from the grant program. Please contact the Real Estate Coordinator to receive a digital version of the Dane County Conservation Fund Logo.

Conservation Fund Grant Program Contact

All questions and submission of grant materials should be directed to:
Sharene Smith, Real Estate Coordinator
Dane County Land & Water Resources
Department 5201 Fen Oak Drive #208
Madison, WI 53718
Office: (608) 224-3761 / Cell: 608-576-4485
Email: smith.sharene@danecounty.gov

The 2025 – 2030 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan is available at:

<https://www.danecountyparks.com/openspaceplan>

Application Checklist and Instructions

1. Application Form

- ✓ MUST be completed
- ✓ Signed by both parties if a partnership application

2. Resolution

- ✓ MUST include resolutions from both parties if a partnership application
- ✓ May, but not required, use sample resolution included in this packet (pg. 14)

3. Letter of 501(c)(3) Status

- ✓ ONLY if applicant is a non-profit organization

4. Project Maps

- ✓ MUST clearly show the proposed location and boundary and adjoining/surrounding lands owned by applicant, Dane County lands or other public lands
- ✓ Aerial map highlighting the property, topographic map and wetland map are required, other maps are welcome

5. Property Data

- ✓ Name of property owner
- ✓ Exact location and legal description of property if available
- ✓ Physical property description, features, characteristics (e.g. wooded slopes, wetland, improvements)
- ✓ Any known encumbrances including state or federal programs (e.g. easements, deed restrictions)
- ✓ Any other relevant information

6. Narrative

- ✓ Projects are evaluated based on the narrative. The narrative should describe how the property contributes toward the overall goals and priorities of the 2025 – 2030 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan.
- ✓ Refer to the Evaluation & Ranking Questions section on page 9 as a guide. Applicants may follow the evaluation questions and generally answer each question or specifically address each question by referencing section and number.

7. Management Plan

- ✓ Should include an indication of the ability of the applicant to oversee the long-term management and oversight of the property, experience with management and enforcement, and specify any fund that will be established for the long-term management of the property.
- ✓ Should address the recreation and or conservation goals that the property will be managed for.
- ✓ For easements, the plan should also include an indication of the ability and experience of the applicant to monitor and enforce the easement, and specify whether a fund has been established for this purpose.

8. Preliminary Environmental Questionnaire

- ✓ MUST use questionnaire included in this application packet on page 15 or WI DNR's Environmental Hazards Assessment Form.

9. Letter of Interest from Landowner OR Offer or Option to Purchase

- ✓ Contact the Real Estate Coordinator if there are circumstances that make it difficult to obtain either a letter of interest or an offer or option to purchase.

10. Appraisal

- ✓ MUST comply with the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice, the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition, and the statutory rules governing the determination of just compensation (Chapter 32, Wis. Stats.).

11. For Conservation Easement acquisitions:

- ✓ Draft of the proposed conservation easement



GRANT APPLICATION

Important! Prior to submitting your application you **MUST** meet with the Real Estate Coordinator, to discuss your project. Please contact Sharene Smith at (608) 224-3761 or smith.sharene@danecounty.gov to set up a meeting. Applications will not be processed until such meeting has occurred.

Applicant <i>(Partner #1)</i>		
Contact Name & Title		
Address		
Phone	Fax	E-mail

Co-Applicant <i>(Partner #2)</i>		
Contact Name & Title		
Address		
Phone	Fax	E-mail

Project Area <i>(refer to 2025-2030 POSP for project areas)</i>		Landowner Name	
Project Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Fee Title <input type="checkbox"/> Easement	Project Size (acres)	Ultimate Title or Easement Holder <input type="checkbox"/> Applicant (Partner #1) <input type="checkbox"/> Partner #2 <input type="checkbox"/> Other:
Project Location (Township, Range, Section)			
Parcel Identification Number(s):			

I certify that the information in this application and supporting materials is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.		
Signature (Partner #1)	Printed Name & Title	Date
Signature (Partner #2 – if applicable)	Printed Name & Title	Date

Estimated Project Costs		
	Your Costs	Example Budget
Appraised Value of land to be acquired	\$	\$ 500,000
Purchase Price	\$	\$ 520,000
Appraisal(s)	\$	\$ 3,000
Survey	\$	\$ 2,500
Title Insurance	\$	\$ 1,000
Closing fees	\$	\$ 500
Environmental Inspections (will require final approval by Dane County Parks)	\$	\$ 2500
Recording Fees	\$	\$ 60
Attorney Fees	\$	\$ 800
Total Project Costs (use appraised value*)	\$	\$ 510,360
Estimate of Conservation Fund Grant Award (75% of Total Project Costs)	\$	\$ 382,770
State or Federal Grant <input type="checkbox"/> Pending <input type="checkbox"/> Committed	\$	\$ 0
Other Match	\$	\$ 20,000
Applicant's share of project costs	\$	\$ 117,230
*Grant Awards for a bargain sale will be based on the actual purchase price, instead of the appraised value.		

Estimated Project Timeline		
Item	Check applicable boxes	Date
Appraisal	<input type="checkbox"/> Effective date of the appraisal <input type="checkbox"/> Estimated completion date	
State or Federal Grant	<input type="checkbox"/> Date on which you received a grant contract <input type="checkbox"/> Date by which you expect to receive a grant contract <input type="checkbox"/> Other governmental grants not anticipated.	
Signed Option to Purchase	<input type="checkbox"/> Date option was signed <input type="checkbox"/> Date you expect to have a signed option <input type="checkbox"/> Option expiration date	
Offer to Purchase	<input type="checkbox"/> Date of Accepted Offer Date <input type="checkbox"/> Estimated date of Offer submission	
Closing Date	<input type="checkbox"/> Approximate closing timeframe <input type="checkbox"/> Scheduled closing date	
Grant funding	<input type="checkbox"/> At closing <input type="checkbox"/> Post-closing reimbursement	

Required Application Attachments	
<input type="checkbox"/> Application Form	<input type="checkbox"/> Project Narrative
<input type="checkbox"/> Resolution (one from each partner)	<input type="checkbox"/> Management Plan
<input type="checkbox"/> Letter of 501 (c)(3) status (if applicable)	<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Questionnaire
<input type="checkbox"/> Maps	<input type="checkbox"/> Letter of Interest OR Option /Offer to Purchase
<input type="checkbox"/> Property Data	<input type="checkbox"/> Appraisal

EVALUATION FACTORS & NARRATIVE GUIDE

The Dane County Conservation Fund Grant Program Evaluation and Ranking questions provide a method for evaluating and guiding the selection of real estate acquisition projects presented by local governmental units and non-profit organizations for competitive matching grants. The questions evaluate each project against the overall goals and priorities of the 2025 – 2030 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan. In addition, they evaluate other planning and project considerations that play an important part in the viability of the proposals to result in a desirable and completed transaction.

Applicants shall answer each question and provide a point value based on the answer given. Dane County staff will evaluate the answers and also provide a point value based on the answers and the project narrative.

Overall goals of the Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan:

1. Provide sufficient park land and recreation facilities to meet the demand of Dane County residents without adversely affecting existing natural resources.
2. Preserve for posterity the characteristics and diversity of the natural, cultural and historical resources of Dane County.
3. Preserve large tracts of natural and agricultural rural landscapes at urban fringe areas that will provide regional resource protection and recreation benefits.
4. Provide volunteer opportunities and stewardship education to all county residents.
5. Protect lakes, rivers and streams, including shorelines, wetlands, high infiltration areas and associated vegetative buffers to maintain high water quality, manage water quantity and sustain water-related recreation throughout Dane County.
6. Provide an inclusive parks system for all Dane County residents, regardless of age, race, gender, or gender identity, national origin, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, political affiliation, place of residence, veteran status, physical ability, cognitive capacity, or family, marital, or economic status.

Dane County Conservation Fund Grant Program Evaluation and Ranking Questions

Part A	Project Eligibility and Details (No Points Available)	Yes	No
1.	Is the property within a project area identified in the 2025-2030 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan?		
2.	Is the property is outside of a project area identified in the 2025-2030 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan; is it adjacent to other County owned land or other public land? Name of Project: _____ Project Acres: _____		
3.	Has the Landowner owned the property for more than 3 years?		
4.	Describe current use of the property:		
5.	Are there buildings or other improvements on the property? a. Describe plans for the buildings/improvements:		
6.	Describe the current access to the property:		
7.	Is the property currently leased? a. Term of lease:		
8.	Are there plans to donate the property to another entity after acquisition?		
9.	Property currently enrolled in any state or federal programs that will continue after acquisition a. Describe:		
9.	Do you anticipate applying for Dane County's Continuous Cover Program in the future?		
10.	Estimated closing date: a. Do you anticipate needing grant funds at closing or a reimbursement post-closing?		

Part B	Project Considerations	Available Points	Sponsor Score	County Score
1.	Appraisal completed.	1		
2.	Signed option or accepted offer to purchase received from landowner.	1		
3.	Project has support from the town, village or city that the property is located within (as documented by a resolution or letter of support from a majority of the elected officials).	2		

3.	First time applicant for a Dane County Conservation Fund grant or applicant has not received a grant in the past 10 years.	2		
4.	Matching funds have been committed for sponsor's share. (Provide award letter or grant contract)	2		
5.	Landowner has committed to a bargain sale of 10% or greater from lowest appraised value. Percentage _____	2		
6.	Grant request is for 50% or less of the purchase price (separate from other project costs). Percentage _____	3		
Total		13		

Part C	Resource Evaluation	Available Points	Sponsor Score	County Score
1.	Property implements a plan or program in regional or local comprehensive or recreational plans other than the Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan? (Provide documentation)	2		
2.	Property is identified in a master plan or defined project area boundary other than in the Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan? (Provide documentation)	2		
3.	Property is located in an environmental corridor? a. Describe:	1		
4.	Property contains or is immediately adjacent to surface water or wetlands.	1		
5.	Property includes lands within 33 feet on one or both sides of a stream? a. Length of protected shoreline:	2		
6.	Property is immediately adjacent to existing protected land.	1		
7.	Property will block in and connect existing protected lands.	1		
8.	Any surface water or wetlands protected through the proposed acquisition either has or will have a minimum buffer of 50 feet. For this question, buffer means lands prohibited from development and drain tile. Points will be given for buffers created by the proposed property acquisition or on adjacent protected lands (e.g. the proposed acquisition is upland and it is adjacent to previously protected wetlands that did not have a buffer). Points are not awarded if surface water or wetlands on adjoining protected land already have a buffer.	1		
9.	Property contains identified rare, endangered or threatened plant, animal or natural communities or is immediately adjacent to protected lands where they are located. a. Describe:	2		

10.	Property contains identified geologic or glacial features or is immediately adjacent to protected lands where they are located. a. Describe:	1		
11.	Property contains identified archaeological or historic features or is immediately adjacent to lands where they are located. a. Describe and provide documentation:	1		
12.	There is a threat of conversion of property to uses inconsistent with conservation and/or public recreation within 2 years.	1		
13.	Property contains lands that serve as a natural filtration of urban or rural runoff sources that will protect water quality of lakes, streams or wetlands?	1		
14.	Property contains soils with high infiltration rates (ground water recharge) as mapped by the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey: https://carpc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f8591950c8a541a2b2ab60823b6c0b65	1		
Total		18		

Part D	Recreation and Public Access	Available Points	Sponsor Score	County Score
1.	Property provides year-round public access.	1		
2.	Property provides both passive (eg. hiking, bird watching) and active recreational opportunities (eg. hunting, disc-golf, soccer)? a. Describe:	2		
3.	Property enhances or provides water based recreational opportunities?	1		
4.	Property provides direct access to surface water where access did not previously exist?	2		
5.	Property offers or improves multi-use bicycle/pedestrian trail opportunities?	2		
6.	Property provides or significantly improves safe and legal parking and access parcels that have limited access?	1		
7.	Property provides accessible recreation opportunities (i.e. accessible fishing pier, boardwalk, etc.)	2		
8.	Are there planned improvements to encourage public access and recreational use? (ie. trails, kiosks, benches, etc.)	1		
9.	Property offers public environmental education or interpretive opportunities?	2		
Total		14		

Total of Parts B, C & D should be greater than 12 to proceed to Part E

Part E	Property Management	Available Points	Sponsor Score	County Score
1.	Sponsor has the ability to own and manage property as demonstrated by ownership of existing lands or the preparation of a land management plan reviewed by Land & Water Resources Department staff.	1		
2.	Sponsor has local organizations, partners or Friends groups that will assist in management activities?	1		
3.	Sponsor has or will secure an endowment that will fund management activities?	2		
	Total	4		

Part F	Restoration	Available Points	Sponsor Score	County Score
1.	Sponsor has viable plan to restore property within 5 years and reasonable justification for property not planned for restoration (e.g. community gardens)	1		
2.	Project will implement recommendations described in an approved resource protection plan. (provide documentation)	3		
3.	Plans include restoration of eroded sections of stream bank.	2		
4.	Plans include removal of impervious surfaces.	2		
	Total	8		

Conservation Easement applicants must also complete Part G. A draft Conservation Easement should also be included in the application packet.

Part G	Conservation Easement Considerations (Required for Easement Acquisitions only)	Available Points	Sponsor Score	County Score
1.	Project is in compliance with current zoning uses and does not have legal non-conforming uses.	1		
2.	Project is in compliance with agricultural performance standards and prohibitions in Chapter 49, Dane County Code of Ordinances.	1		
3.	Project is in compliance with permitting and certificate of use requirements related to manure storage in Chapter 49, Dane County Code of Ordinances.	1		
3.	There is an existing Nutrient Management Plan that meets 590 standard and A2809 UW recommendations.	2		
4.	Project is in compliance with stormwater and erosion control requirements in Chapter 14, Dane County Code of Ordinances.	1		
5.	All intermittent and perennial streams and constructed drainages have a minimum 30 foot buffer.	2		
6.	Wetlands on property have a minimum 50 foot buffer.	2		
7.	Sponsor has an endowment or other funding available for easement monitoring and enforcement.	2		

8.	No significant junk piles on the property (e.g. abandoned vehicles, appliances, garbage in wooded areas)	1		
9.	No current cropping in wetlands as defined by Dane County.	1		
10.	No drain tile in wetlands as defined by Dane County.	1		
Total		16		

	Project Scores	Total Available	Sponsor	County
Part B	Project Considerations	13		
Part C	Resource Evaluation	18		
Part D	Recreation and Public Access	14		
Part E	Property Management	4		
Part F	Restoration	8		
	Fee Simple Acquisition Total	57		
Part G	Conservation Easement Considerations	16		
	Conservation Easement Total	16		

RESOLUTION

Requesting a Dane County Conservation Fund Grant

RESOLVED, that the _____
(Board of Directors or other authorized governing unit)

of the _____
(Name of Organization)

headquartered at _____
(Address)

HEREBY AUTHORIZES _____
(Name and Title)

to act on its behalf to submit an application for financial assistance to the County of Dane under the Dane County Conservation Fund Grant Program for the acquisition of property or for other qualified conservation purposes described below; to sign documents; and to take action necessary to undertake, direct, and complete an approved Dane County Conservation Fund grant project:

(Description of grant proposal project)

BE IF FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE _____
(Name of Organization)

recognizes and acknowledges the long-term ownership and management responsibilities (when applicable) associated with this Dane County Conservation Fund Grant Program, and will meet its obligations under the Grant and Management Contract for the project.

Adopted this _____ day of _____, 20_____.

I hereby certify that the foregoing resolution was duly adopted by

_____ at a legal meeting

held on the _____ day of _____, 20_____.

Authorized signature: _____ Date: _____

Printed/Typed name: _____

Title: _____

PRELIMINARY ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

GENERAL PROPERTY/ OWNERSHIP INFORMATION

Please type or print all responses.

1. Current Owner(s) Name: _____
2. Address or Property: _____
3. Legal Description:

4. Current use of property:

5. Known past uses of property since 1900:

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY & PROPERTY CONDITIONS

(Please attach additional pages if needed for more detailed answers)

1. Are (or were) any environmental permits from any governmental agency in effect, or being sought, with respect to any activities on the property? Yes No
If yes, explain:
2. Are there any past, pending, or threatened governmental or private environmental investigations, administrative proceedings, lawsuits, judgments, or liens involving this Property or the Current Owner? Yes No
If yes, explain:
3. Are there any regulatory investigations, inquiries, actions or hazardous substances usage reports which may indicate environmental concerns? Yes No
If yes, explain:
4. Has the Owner entered into any environmental settlement agreements, consent decrees or orders with any government or private parties? Yes No
If yes, explain:
5. Is the Owner presently, or in the past, required to repair or install, pollution control or monitoring devices to comply with legal or regulatory requirements? Yes No
If yes, explain:
6. Has the Property or adjoining properties been used as a gasoline station, commercial motor repair facility, printing facility, dry cleaner, photo developing lab, junkyard or landfill, waste burning or incineration, waste water treatment, storage, disposal, processing or recycling facility?
If checked, explain:

7. Has fill material, sludge or soil been brought onto the Property? Yes No
If yes, explain location, type, content and origin of material:
8. Are there currently or have there been mounded or hummocked areas, depressed land, pits, artificial ponds, natural ponds, streams, lakes, wetlands lagoons, discolored/stained soil or pavement, noxious odors/foul smelling water, abandoned containers/barrels located on or adjacent to the Property? If checked, describe:
9. Are there now or were there any under-ground or above-ground storage tanks or piping for products or substances other than for irrigation or potable water on the Property?
 Yes No
If yes, provide type, size, use, installation/ removal dates, leakage, testing dates and results. Are tanks and pipes now in compliance with governmental regulations? What corrective and remedial action was taken if leakage occurred?
10. Has the soil or groundwater on the property, including but not limited to a private well or nonpublic water system, been tested for contamination? Yes No
If yes, disclose results:
11. Are there now or have there ever been any waste, pollutants, biological materials or agents, hazardous substances or chemicals, petroleum products, tires, automotive or industrial batteries or any waste materials stored or disposed of (including in drums), spilled, buried, burned or otherwise located on the Property? Yes No
If yes, explain:
12. Is asbestos or asbestos containing material present on the Property or in buildings located on the Property? Yes No
If yes, describe type, location and any action to mitigate this hazard:
13. Identify and describe any environmental testing of soil, water, emissions, PCBs [polychlorinated biphenyls], or sewerage sludge or effluent relating to the Property or buildings located on the Property:
14. Does the Property or adjacent properties, contain railroad tracks or drainage tiles?
15. Is the Property within 1000 feet of a known environmental hazard such as gas station, landfill, dump, closed factory; or within two (2) miles of an environmental hazard identified by a governmental agency, or within five (5) miles of a site on the Federal "Superfund" list? If checked, explain:

