



MWCD Connecting Communities Grants

Connecting Communities through Recreation

Program Overview

The Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD) Connecting Communities Grant supports capital projects that expand public access to outdoor recreation throughout the following counties served by MWCD: **Ashland, Belmont, Carroll, Coshocton, Guernsey, Harrison, Holmes, Knox, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Richland, Stark, Tuscarawas, Washington, and Wayne.**

Recreation has always been a core component of MWCD's mission. Through our parks, marinas, trails, and public facilities, we have long invested in outdoor access to enhance the quality of life across the watershed. This program builds on that experience by extending recreation investment beyond MWCD-owned facilities and into local communities.

Through this initiative, MWCD invests in tangible, high-impact recreational infrastructure that enhances quality of life and strengthens the long-term vitality of our communities. Outdoor recreation is a vital part of what makes our region vibrant and welcoming. It encourages local investment, supports thriving towns, and contributes to sustainable economic growth across the watershed. Projects funded through this program must demonstrate clear public benefit, measurable and sustained use, and meaningful connections to the outdoors, whether through expanded opportunities for outdoor play, improved accessibility, or enhancements that promote physical and mental well-being.

This program is limited to capital outdoor recreation infrastructure projects that provide permanent public benefit.

Funding Parameters

For the 2026 pilot year, MWCD has allocated \$1,000,000 for the Connecting Communities Grant Program. As we build experience, additional dollars and counties may be added.

Grant requests must be at least \$25,000. While no maximum award amount is established, MWCD intends to fund multiple projects within the available program budget. Applicants are encouraged to request only the amount necessary to complete the project and demonstrate efficient use of MWCD funds.

Applicants are required to provide a minimum of ten percent (10%) project funding match. Projects that demonstrate higher levels of financial leverage and local investment will receive additional consideration and score more competitively under the Financial Leverage & Partnerships evaluation criteria. Grant funds will be provided on a reimbursement basis. Projects should be completed within 12 months of award unless otherwise approved. Each eligible entity may submit one application per funding cycle.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include political subdivisions of the State of Ohio, such as municipalities, townships, counties, and park districts, as well as IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations located within Ohio's counties that contain MWCD's jurisdiction.

Improvements should be designed to serve the broader community and support public recreation opportunities. MWCD's investment is intended to provide long-term public benefit and sustained community access.

Public Access and Site Control

Projects funded through this program must provide reasonable and consistent public access. Improvements should be designed to serve the broader community and support long-term public benefit, consistent with the program's intent. Site control documentation is not required at the time of application. However, before execution of a grant agreement, successful applicants must demonstrate long-term authority to develop and maintain the project site.

Acceptable documentation upon award may include proof of ownership, a recorded deed restriction or covenant, an executed Memorandum of Understanding, or a long-term lease agreement.

Eligible Projects

The Connecting Communities Grant supports permanent, capital outdoor recreation infrastructure. Examples include trail construction or expansion, playground installation, ADA accessibility improvements, waterfront access infrastructure such as docks or launches, permanent park facility improvements, regional trail connectivity projects, and land acquisition intended for public outdoor recreation development.

Projects that improve access to waterways, strengthen connections to regional recreation systems, or enhance the use of MWCD-managed lands and facilities are encouraged and will be viewed favorably during the evaluation process.

Land acquisition projects must demonstrate a clear plan for the development of public recreation infrastructure and must include appropriate documentation, including appraisal and environmental due diligence, before reimbursement.

Ineligible Expenses

This program does not fund programming, events, general operations, staff salaries, routine maintenance, maintenance equipment, temporary equipment, or projects that do not result in permanent public recreation improvements.

Application Requirements

Applicants must submit a complete application that clearly outlines the project scope, the community need, the anticipated public benefit, and the implementation timeline. A detailed project budget must include the total cost, the grant request amount, and any additional funding sources.

Supporting documentation may include site maps, conceptual plans or drawings, governing resolutions for public entities, IRS determination letters for nonprofit

organizations, and letters of community support.

Strong applications will demonstrate readiness to proceed, measurable public impact, and a clear plan for long-term sustainability.

Evaluation Process

Applications will be reviewed and scored based on several key factors. Primary consideration will be given to the project's ability to expand public access and deliver measurable community impact. Project readiness and feasibility, community and economic vitality impact, financial leverage, partnership strength, and long-term sustainability will also be considered.

Shovel-ready projects that demonstrate clear local support, expand access to underserved populations, and connect communities through recreation infrastructure will be viewed favorably.

Reimbursement and Reporting

Grant funds will be distributed on a reimbursement basis upon submission of appropriate documentation, including paid invoices and proof of payment. Multiple reimbursement requests may be submitted throughout the project period. A final reimbursement request must be clearly identified as final.

All successful applicants will enter into a formal grant agreement with MWCD. A final report documenting project completion, including photographs and projected usage, will be required. Interim updates may be requested as needed.

Branding and Acknowledgment

All funded projects must acknowledge MWCD support. This includes installing MWCD recognition signage and appropriately acknowledging MWCD in press releases and public communications.

Small Opportunity Grant

In addition to the primary competitive grant program, MWCD will offer a Small Opportunity Grant to address time-sensitive or lower-cost outdoor recreation infrastructure needs that provide immediate community benefit. This funding option is intended to support smaller, opportunity-driven capital projects that to expand public access to outdoor recreation.

Awards:

Small Opportunity Grants will range from \$5,000 to \$25,000. MWCD intends to limit annual Small Opportunity Grant funding to approximately ten percent (10%) of the total program. However, if presented with impactful Small Opportunity projects, MWCD may extend funding. Funding is limited to capital outdoor recreation improvements only. Programmatic activities, events, and operational expenses are not eligible.

Eligible Projects:

Projects must include permanent outdoor recreation infrastructure, provide public access, and demonstrate community benefit. Projects should be smaller in scale,

time-sensitive or opportunity-driven, and quick to implement. Applicants are required to provide a minimum of ten percent (10%) project funding match.

Application and Review:

Applications will follow a simplified format and may be submitted on a rolling basis. Requests will be reviewed administratively based on readiness, public benefit, alignment with program goals, and timing considerations. Projects better suited for the primary competitive grant program may be directed to apply through that process.