



Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG) 2025 Guidelines and Frequently Asked Questions

INTRODUCTION

The Urban Green and Community Garden Grant Program (UGCG) is a competitive subset of funding through the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (DEEP) Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program to create, improve, or expand community green spaces. Funding is often used to install new plantings, community gardens, and pathways or construct rain gardens, bioswales, and other climate adaptation features. Funding is available to municipalities and non-profit organizations for projects in distressed municipalities, targeted investment communities, and environmental justice communities.

UGCG has funded projects large and small, from a \$500,000 award for multi-use trail enhancements to a \$10,000 award to replace planter boxes at a 0.25-acre community garden. UGCG recognizes the positive impacts of small and local community-based non-profits who may find themselves discouraged from applying to other grant programs due to their administrative complexity. To that end, the UGCG grant process, from application to post-award compliance, has been made as accessible as possible. Applicants are encouraged to contact Steven.Perry@ct.gov to discuss potential projects.

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must be either a:

- (1) Municipality; or
- (2) Non-profit Organization properly registered with the Secretary of the State.
Applicants may check their filing status by clicking here.

Project Site must be located within a/an:

- (1) Distressed Municipality;
- (2) Targeted Investment Community; or
- (3) Environmental Justice Community.

Q: How do I know if a municipality is a “Distressed Municipality” or “Targeted Investment Community”?

A: [Click here to view the most recent list of Distressed Municipalities, and Municipalities with remaining eligibility.](#)

Targeted Investment Communities:

Bridgeport	Middletown	Stamford
Bristol	New Britain	Thomaston
East Hartford	New Haven	Waterbury
Groton	New London	West Haven
Hamden	Norwalk	Windham
Hartford	Norwich	
Meriden	Southington	

Q: How do I know if the property where I am interested in completing a project is located within an Environmental Justice Community?

A: An Environmental Justice Community is defined by the Connecticut General Statutes as:

- A distressed municipality (see above); OR
- Defined census block groups where 30% of the population is living below 200% of the federal poverty level.

You can review [this map](#) for the 2024 Environmental Justice Census Block Groups. This map also includes the 2024/2025 list of distressed municipalities referenced above. More information on this map and CT Environmental Justice Communities can be found by clicking [here](#).

STRUCTURE OF GRANT AGREEMENTS

Pursuant to Public Act No. 24-69, as of May 30, 2024, DEEP may enter into UGCG grant contracts with non-profits properly registered with the Secretary of the State, for projects which are proposed at a property located within an Environmental Justice Community, Targeted Investment Community, and/or Distressed Municipality.

- For projects proposed at eligible properties that are owned by a non-profit organization, if selected for funding, DEEP enters into a UGCG grant contract with the non-profit.
- Municipalities often coordinate with non-profits to manage projects proposed on municipally owned lands. For projects proposed at property owned by a municipality, DEEP can enter into a grant contract with either the municipality or non-profit. **UGCG grant contracts will not be awarded to two parties or structured as a pass-through agreement.** For example, if the grant contract is awarded to a municipality, reimbursement from DEEP will only be released to the municipality; a non-profit must then coordinate to receive those funds from the municipality.
- Non-profits conducting a project on behalf of a municipality must include a project management agreement or other documentation signed by the Chief Elected Official with their application that authorizes the non-profit to conduct activities included.

Q: If my application is awarded, when and how will I receive funding?

A: Applicants will typically receive funding decisions in late spring/early summer. DEEP may choose to award the full request, or a partial amount. The length of the contracting process varies based on the complexity of individual applicants. The period of performance for UGCG grant contracts is 5 years, by which grantees are expected to complete all approved work.

UGCG is a reimbursement-based grant program. Once a grant contract is signed, applicants may submit requests for reimbursement, which must include a narrative of what expenses were incurred, photographs of completed work, and proof of paid invoices.

DEEP will not reimburse expenses incurred before a grant agreement is fully executed.

COMPATIBLE EXPENSES, REQUIRED MATCH & SAMPLE BUDGET TABLE

Q: What percentage of costs do grant funds cover?

A: UGCG is a reimbursement matching program; grant funds can cover up to 50% of the total project cost. For example, if the total cost of a project is \$50,000, then the State will fund \$25,000, and the applying Municipality or Non-profit Organization must demonstrate match for \$25,000. The easiest way to think about this requirement is that a project's total amount of matching funds must be equal to or greater than the amount of requested UGCG funding.

Q: What expenses are eligible for grant funding?

A: UGCG can fund entire projects if all expenses are compatible or compatible portions of larger projects. Examples of projects or project portions that typically get funded through UGCG are green infrastructure including rain gardens and bioswales, native plantings or gardens, community gardens and walking pathways. Eligible expenses generally cover materials, professional services, minor structures such as tool sheds, tools, and rental equipment.

- **Materials:**

Such as lumber, soil, mulch, fencing, crushed stone dust, signage and hand tools. Funds can be used to purchase native perennial flowers, shrubs, and shade trees. Grant funds cannot be used to purchase plants that are on the University of Connecticut's invasive plant species list.

- **Professional Services:**

Funding may be used to hire professional architects and engineers. Please note that any contract for construction, reconstruction, alteration, remodeling, repair or demolition of any public building or any other public work by a public agency (municipality) funded in whole or in part by UGCG funds which contract is estimated to cost more than \$1 million must be awarded to a DAS-prequalified bidder. Applications requesting funding for only design or professional services will not be considered.

- **Structures:**
The UGCG grant program aims to promote urban gardens and passive recreational green spaces. Grant funding may be used to purchase minor outdoor structures. Acceptable structures may include small garden sheds, picnic tables, and benches. Funds cannot be used to purchase enclosed structures such as offices, indoor classrooms, wash/pack facilities, or indoor recreation facilities. Funds cannot be used to purchase park amenities such as playscapes, splash pads, barbecues, agility courses, or sports equipment.
- **Non-powered Hand Tools:**
Grant funding may be used to purchase hand tools only, such as shovels, rakes, and irrigation materials. Funding cannot be used to purchase power tools or motorized equipment such as rototillers or motorized yard carts and wagons.
- **Construction / Maintenance Equipment Rental:**
Grant funds may be used to rent equipment for the construction or maintenance of a project.
- **Green and Climate Adaptation Features:**
Grant funds may be used to purchase or install green infrastructure and climate adaptation features, including rain barrels, rain gardens, pervious surfaces, and bioswales. Funding may not be used to repair, replace, or install major subsurface or overhead infrastructure, such as connecting to municipal water or sewer systems, though such activities would count as matching funds.

Q: What are eligible sources of matching funds?

A: DEEP is flexible with expenses that satisfy the 50% match requirement. UGCG allows both direct monetary, including other State and Federal grants, and in-kind matching sources, including donations, donated professional services, municipal labor, and volunteer labor at an hourly rate of \$33.49 per hour. Funds secured or expended before submission of an application, so long as they support the overall project count towards the match requirement.

- **State Sources:** Other State awarded funding can be used to assist with project costs, however, UGCG cannot fund project components that are already being covered or accounted for under any other State grant award and active State grant contract. For example, applicants will not be awarded UGCG funding to plant trees if they have already received a state grant that covered 100% of the estimated installation cost for said trees.
- **Federal Sources:** Funding from federal grant programs which are administered directly by a Federal agency or through the State may count towards the match requirement. For examples, the US Department of Agriculture; US Department of the Interior; US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and US Environmental Protection Agency.
- **Private Sources:** Other privately sourced funding derived from private foundations or organizations, corporations, businesses, or other programs not managed or funded by the State of Connecticut or Federal Government can be used to assist with project costs.

An Example of Matching Funds:

If an applicant has a larger overall project involving infrastructure or ineligible expenses that UGCG cannot fund, DEEP may accept those expenses as match funding. In this scenario, if a municipality proposes installing a basketball court and splash pad at one portion of the project site and wishes to apply UGCG funding to plant native trees and shrubs or install a stormwater quality rain garden at another part of the site, the expenses and labor related to the basketball court and splash pad might be accounted as match if the overall project goal is for public outdoor access and green space enhancement.

IMPORTANT: Applicants should be prepared to evidence stated matching funds in their application, such as proof of private donations, or commitment letters from state or federal grants. However, DEEP understands that applicants may be waiting on receipt or confirmation of matching funds. In this case, applicants should submit any documentation available, such as a letter of intent, or confirmation of a grant application submission. Applications will be evaluated under the assumption that match amounts and sources are accurate. If selected for UGCG funding, and matching sources are not evidenced to the satisfaction of DEEP staff, awards may be withdrawn or funding withheld until applicants secure a new source of matching funds.

Example Budget Table with Required Match

Project Expenses	Cost	DEEP UGCG Grant Funds	Match Share	Match Source (ex. Municipality; Federal Funding; etc.)
Hand tools	\$500	\$400	\$100	Municipality
Compost	\$1,200	\$1,200		
Mulch	\$500	\$500		
Lumber and hardware for raised beds	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	Municipality
Perennial plants for pollinator garden	\$300	\$300		
Fencing	\$5,000	\$5,000		
Crushed stone for ADA accessible path	\$1,000		\$1,000	Municipality
Water irrigation service	\$1,000		\$1,000	Municipality
Irrigation equipment	\$700		\$700	Municipality
3 picnic tables	\$1,300	\$1,300		
4 benches	\$800		\$800	Municipality
Signage	\$500	\$300	\$200	Private Source
Stone path construction (by Department of Public Works)	\$2,000		\$2,000	Municipality
2 Volunteers (7 hours @ \$28.54/hr)	\$400		\$400	Private Source
Grounds Manager (100 hours @ \$30.00/hr)	\$3,000		\$3,000	Private Source
Total Costs	\$20,200	\$10,000.00	\$10,200	

EXISTING PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

Q: Where can I get a copy of the current deed for the parcel or lot which is the subject of my proposed project?

A: Town or City Clerk's Offices have public computers you can use to search electronic databases for copies of property cards and property deeds. You can also visit your municipal Assessor's Office in person and ask for the property tax field card(s). Look on the tax field card for the parcel or lot's most current deed book volume(s) and page number(s). Then, go to the Town or City Clerk's Office to retrieve a copy the deed(s). Some Municipalities also have land records information online at [Search IQS](#) or [Record Hub](#).

Q: **I am a non-profit applying for a project on municipally owned land. How do I demonstrate my organization's permission to conduct this project?**

A: Non-profits must demonstrate access to the parcel and the ability to conduct the proposed project on municipally owned lands. This documentation is typically a lease or other legal authorization approved by the Town/City Counsel and signed by the Chief Elected Official or Town Manager. The legal authorization must be in effect throughout the proposed project's duration. If the existing legal approval will expire before such time, applicants are encouraged to submit a letter from the municipality stating their intent to renew the lease or equivalent.

ACCESSIBILITY, COMMUNITY NEED & CONSISTENCY WITH OTHER PLANS

Q: **Where do I find resources for making an environment accessible to people with disabilities?**

A: The United States Department of Agriculture [Accessibility Guidebook for Outdoor Recreation and Trails](#) includes the federal standards for creating comprehensive accessibility in outdoor environments. The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) does not include trail standards, but does include standards for outdoor recreation, including some associated with passive recreation. (Entities obligated under the ADA, for example, local governments and private non-profits, apply relevant federal standards to fulfill the ADA's mandate of equal opportunity when the ADA itself does not offer the applicable guidelines.) The Land Trust Alliance guide, "[Open to All](#)," goes beyond the standards to provide information on the principles of inclusion and the creation of community-based open space projects.

Q: **Where can I find materials which support my project purpose statement?**

- [The State Conservation and Development Policies Plan](#)
- **Municipal Plans of Conservation and Development** are typically available online or at your Town or City Hall. Please note that these plans now need to be less than ten years old to be "current" – if a municipality submits a proposal and their C&D plan is not current, that project will not be evaluated for funding
- **Regional Councils of Government (COGs)** provide environmental, transportation, and land use planning and technical assistance to every municipality in Connecticut. COGs often publish a series of comprehensive plan mapping that may be helpful in developing your project. [Click here for a list of municipal membership and contact information.](#)
- **Other Frequently Cited Plans:**

- [Connecticut's 2016-2020 Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Plan \(The Green Plan\)](#)
- [Connecticut's Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy \(The Wildlife Action Plan\)](#)
- [Connecticut's 2020 Forest Action Plan](#)
- [GC3 Working and Natural Lands Recommendations in the Near-Term Actions Report, January 2021](#)
- [Connecticut Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(SCORP\)](#)

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Q: Where can I get the required letters of support for my project?

A: Applicants must demonstrate through letters of support from community organizations, municipal boards and departments, and regional governmental planning councils that they performed local public outreach and received meaningful community input on the proposed project need and design.

For municipal letters of support, contact your local Departments, such as Planning and Zoning, and boards and/or commissions, such as Board of Education or Conservation Commission. For regional (RPO/COG) letters of support, contact the relevant [Council of Government](#). For local community support, solicit feedback from local organizations. Learn what they want/need and focus project outcomes on those needs/wants to ensure the project will be successful once funded. Host community meetings, reach out to local non-profit organizations, youth groups, etc.

PAST GRANT COMPLIANCE

Q: Where can I get information on the State Single Audit Requirements?

A: [State Single Audit or Exemption Form](#) information can be found on the Office of Policy and Management's website.

ANY OTHER QUESTIONS?

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