



ARAPAHOE COUNTY
OPEN SPACES

2026 Open Space Grant Application Instructions

Important Dates:

Application Available:	January 14, 2026
Draft Review Deadline:	March 20, 2026
Completed Applications Due:	April 10, 2026
Awards Announced:	August 3, 2026*

** Target date for announcement is in late July, but actual date may change due to BoCC meeting schedules.*

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General Information

Grant Program Information:

The Arapahoe County Open Space Resolution states that 12% of annual Open Space Sales and Use Tax revenue shall be invested in communities throughout Arapahoe County through a grants program. The goal is to fund eligible projects that address local needs for open space, parks, and trails.

Since 2005, Arapahoe County has invested more than \$67 million in more than 300 projects, in partnership with 26 communities across the County to expand and improve trails, open spaces, and parks.

2026 Grant Cycle¹:

Arapahoe County Open Spaces (ACOS) has allocated \$5.5 million for a single grant cycle in 2026, to be awarded in three categories:

- **\$4,000,000 for Standard Grants:** grants of \$150,001 to \$600,000, requiring a minimum of 25% total project cost cash match
- **Up to \$750,000 for Small Grants:** grants of \$1,000 to \$150,000, requiring a minimum of 10% total project cost cash match
- **Up to \$750,000 for Planning Grants:** grants of \$1,000 to \$150,000, requiring a minimum of 10% total project cost cash match

An eligible agency may submit up to three applications for the 2026 grant cycle (including no more than two Standard Grant applications).

Application Due Date:

Applications must be RECEIVED by ACOS by 11:59 PM on Friday, April 10, 2026. You are encouraged to contact Grants Program staff to confirm eligibility for your proposed project before applying.

Application Format and Submission:

Applications must be submitted through the [ACOS Online Grant Portal](#). Several required forms are available on the [ACOS website](#) and must be uploaded as attachments to the grant application. Please note allowable file formats, file size limits, and recommended file names for attachments, as well as character limits for narrative questions. Specific requirements are provided in the application.

Draft Application Review:

You are encouraged to submit a draft of your application for review by March 20, 2026. Complete drafts are preferred. A review does not guarantee that the project will be funded.

Applications will be reviewed by Grants Program staff in the order in which they are received. Draft applications submitted after this deadline may be reviewed as staff time allows.

Draft applications should be emailed to sbottoms@arapahoegov.com. You can download a PDF of your draft application in the online system by clicking the Application Packet button at the top right of the application screen. Do not submit your application in the online system until it is ready for final submission.

¹ Grant cycle funding is pending BoCC approval

Minimum Qualifications and Eligibility

Eligibility Criteria:

Your agency and project must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for grant funding.

Eligible Applicants:

Entities in Arapahoe County that are eligible to apply for open space grant funds are:

- Incorporated municipalities
- Recreation districts
- Special districts which provide recreational services or amenities

Eligible Project Types:

- **Site Improvement Projects:** New construction, improvement, repair, or replacement of eligible outdoor recreation facilities and amenities (such as playgrounds, shelters, sports fields and courts, restrooms, landscaping, and interior trail segments/connections)
- **Trail Projects:** Trail/trailhead construction or improvement, including stream/road crossings and trailhead amenities (such as parking and shelters); on-street trails and sidepaths for the purposes of (a) connecting an isolated neighborhood or activity center to a park, trail, open space, or school, and (b) connecting to a trail system included in a regional, County, or special district planning document
- **Environmental/Cultural Education Projects:** Environmental/cultural education and interpretation outreach materials (such as printed materials, video, and displays), installations (such as signage and conservation demonstration projects), and associated outdoor amenities (such as shelters and native landscaping)
- **Planning Projects:** Plans for a system (such as a trail system or park system), a defined site (such as a park, historic site, or trailhead), or an agency (such as a departmental strategic plan or maintenance plan)
- **Acquisition Projects:** Eligible projects include fee simple acquisition of land for public open space, parks, and trails; acquisition of buffer land; acquisition of a conservation easement or trail easement; and acquisition of water rights (*additional application materials are required - contact Grants Program staff if you are considering an acquisition project*)
- **Other Projects:** Other allowable projects include stream/habitat restoration and natural re-vegetation (*contact Grants Program staff to confirm eligibility*)

Minimum Qualifications:

- Applicants must be in good standing with ACOS based on current and past grant performance (factors include timely reporting, project completion, maintenance of completed projects, good communication with ACOS staff, appropriate acknowledgement of County funding, etc.)
- Applicants must discuss how project aligns with Arapahoe County Open Spaces Master Plan (*note: new master plan adopted in June 2021*); Arapahoe County Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan; agency master plan; or other approved planning documents. ACOS plans are available on the [Planning Documents](#) page of the ACOS website.
- Applicants must discuss how project addresses specific objectives set forth in the [County Open Space Resolution](#) #21-263 (*note: new resolution authorized in 2021*).
- All projects funded through the ACOS Grants Program must be open to the public or serve a public purpose upon completion.

Budget, Eligible Expenses, and Matching Requirements

Applicants must provide a Budget Narrative and Budget Forms:

- The Budget Narrative should be clear and concise. Include details about expenses in each budget category, justification for any unusual line items, and an explanation of how you arrived at cost estimates. Discuss sources of cash/in-kind match.
- Budget Forms include the **Summary Budget Form** and the **Detailed Expense Budget Form**. Budget Forms are available on the ACOS website. Completed forms must be uploaded as a single PDF document. Budget Forms must include grant funds and cash match (including applicant and partner cash match). Please do not include in-kind match on the Budget Forms.
 - The Summary Budget Form provides an overview of funding sources and calculates the total project cost (grant funds plus cash match) and cash match percentage.
 - The Detailed Expense Budget Form is a line-item budget for the project. Expenses should be grouped into categories, then broken down into the detailed use of funds within each category.

Allowable Uses of Grant Funds:

Uses of grant funds must meet the guidelines set forth in the [County Open Space Resolution](#) #21-263. If you are unsure whether a potential project or element of a project is consistent with the Resolution, please contact ACOS Grants Program staff. Do not include ineligible costs in the Budget Forms, even as matching funds.

Ineligible Costs Include (but are not limited to):

- Outdoor performance venues and amphitheaters
- Concession stands and storage buildings
- Indoor facilities (such as community centers, recreation centers, and sports domes)
- Pools
- Purchase of non-fixed assets (such as lawn mowers, snow blowers, and weed eaters)
- Applicant and partner staff time (not including project management or other work completed by a consultant or contractor for specific components of the grant)
- Work completed prior to grant award and entrance into an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA)
- Administrative costs (photocopies, mileage, food, grand opening costs, grant writing, legal fees, etc.)
- Parking lots, roundabouts, sidewalks, and other amenities NOT directly associated with an eligible outdoor recreation project
- Contingency funds

Minimum Cash Match Requirements:

All applicants must provide a minimum percentage of cash match. Match requirements are calculated based on the total project cost, not the grant request amount.

- **Standard Grants:** minimum of 25% total project cost cash match
 - Example: Total project cost \$800,000 = \$600,000 grant request + \$200,000 cash match
- **Small Grants and Planning Grants:** minimum of 10% total project cost cash match
 - Example: Total project cost \$100,000 = \$90,000 grant request + \$10,000 cash match

Matching Funds:

Matching funds include cash match from the applicant and project partners. Include amounts and sources of cash match on the Budget Forms. Cash match from partners must be documented with an official letter of support.

Funds from another ACOS grant or joint project may not be used as match. Open Space shareback funds may be used as match.

If you are awaiting results from another grant source to count as match, clearly document the funding source, anticipated amount, and expected notification date in the application, and contact Grants Program staff upon receiving notification from the funding source. If successful, you must provide a copy of the award letter to Grants Program staff. Awards of ACOS grant funds will be contingent upon the contribution of matching funds, and projects are expected to be completed in accordance with the project scope presented in the application.

In-Kind Match:

In-kind match is welcome but cannot be counted toward the minimum match requirement. Do not include in-kind match in the Total Project Cost or Budget Forms. You may describe in-kind match in the Budget Narrative and Project Narrative sections of the application.

Direct Costs Associated with Preplanning:

If you have incurred direct costs associated with the project for design and planning, you may request that those costs incurred within 6 months of the application deadline be applied toward your cash match requirement. Additionally, you may request that planning costs incurred after the application deadline but before an IGA is executed (such as finalizing construction documents or acquiring permits) be counted toward the cash match requirement. Such requests must be approved by ACOS Grants Program staff prior to applying. You may not include staff time or overhead costs.

Contingency and Cost Overruns:

All cost overruns are the responsibility of the Grantee. We recommend that applicants plan for increasing costs and budget accordingly. Additionally, we recommend that applicants set aside contingency funds for potential overages. Contingency funds cannot be charged to the ACOS grant and cannot count toward the minimum match requirement. Please do not include a contingency line item in your budget.

Cost Underruns:

If a grant project is under budget, excess ACOS grant funds will be forfeited, and the proportion of grant funds to matching funds presented in the application will be upheld (e.g., grant funds will not cover more than 75% of the total project cost for Standard Grants).

Additional Requirements

Project Scope, Location, and Readiness:

Each application should focus on one project and one location/site. Proposals for multi-site projects (for example, updating signage throughout a park system) should be discussed with ACOS Grants Program staff prior to applying. Provide the project site address and GPS coordinates. [ArapaMAP](#) or Google Maps may be used to find GPS coordinates.

Projects should be ready to start upon award notification and must be completed within two years. A complex project that can be reasonably expected to take more than two years to complete should be broken into phases, with ACOS funds requested for one phase at a time. If an application is for a single phase of a larger project, applicants should briefly discuss past/future phases in the proposal. Grant funding is not guaranteed for future phases of the project.

Note: If a construction project is not “ready” from a planning perspective, the applicant should consider applying for a Planning Grant or delay the application until the planning process is complete. Projects that are not well-planned (including a realistic timeline or budget) may be disqualified from the competitive evaluation process.

User Groups and Inclusivity:

The Project Narrative should describe the community served by the project, including the estimated number of users annually. Applicants should describe how the project will reasonably accommodate users with disabilities.

Timeline:

Applicants are required to submit a Project Timeline Form with their application. The timeline should be detailed, realistic, and correlate to the Project Narrative.

The proposed timeline should allow 30-60 days after the grant is awarded for an IGA to be executed. Grantees may not spend any grant funds until the IGA is fully executed. Grantees are allowed two years to complete the project.

Capacity:

Applicants must demonstrate capacity to manage, implement, and maintain the project. The Certification and Authorized Signature Form includes a statement of commitment to complete and maintain the project.

Evidence of Support from Highest Authority in the Agency:

An official resolution or letter from the highest authority in the agency (mayor, board chair, etc.) is required. The resolution or letter must be dated within the last 6 months. At a minimum, this document must include:

- Project title;
- Amount of grant funds requested;
- Statement that matching funds are secured and/or efforts to secure funds are underway (include the amount of matching funds committed);
- Certification that the project will be open to the public or serve a public purpose upon completion

Public Input, Community Support, and Opposition:

The applicant should demonstrate one or more efforts to gather public input (e.g., open houses, pop-up events, public meetings, surveys) prior to submitting a grant proposal. These efforts should be discussed in detail in the

Project Narrative. Please note that some jurisdictions may have specific public outreach requirements for land use approvals.

Support letters from users, working groups, community members, volunteers, schools, etc. are encouraged and should be dated within the past 6 months.

Any known objections, opposition, or controversy related to the project must be disclosed fully in the application. Include any evidence of opposition to the project, such as letters, petitions, or news articles, in the Attachments section of the application.

Project Partners:

If applicable, discuss project-related partnerships in the Project Narrative and attach evidence of commitment from project partners (such as commitment to provide matching funds or maintenance agreement) in the Attachments section. Partner letters must be dated within the last 6 months and be specific to the proposed project. Partners may include municipalities and special districts, recreation and conservation groups, schools, businesses, homeowners' associations, etc.

Photos and Maps:

Applicants must provide photos of existing conditions at the project site. Please upload one high-quality "before" JPG photo that you feel best represents the project as a whole – this photo will be used by ACOS for presentations and publications related to the grant. Please use a photo without any text or graphics. Upload additional photos (include captions) as a single PDF document.

Additionally, applicants must provide maps of the project site. Please include a site map and a vicinity map as a single PDF in the Attachments section of the application.

Property Ownership, Legal Access, and Public Purpose:

Properties on which Open Space grant-funded projects are located must be owned by or under control of the applicant. Applicant is required to provide evidence of ownership or legal access.

If the property is owned by a third party, a current agreement between the applicant and the property owner is required at the time of application to provide assurance that the property will be open to the public for the useful life of the proposed improvements. Other scenarios must be approved by ACOS Grants Program staff before submitting your application.

All projects funded through the ACOS Grants Program must be open to the public or serve a public purpose upon completion.

Encumbrances at Project Site:

Applicant is responsible for conducting pre-submittal research to identify any encumbrances or obstacles which could prevent a project from moving forward in a timely fashion, such as easements, floodplain status, use restrictions, zoning, permitting, utilities, liens, hazards, and third-party control/interest in the project site. Grants Program staff may request additional information related to encumbrances.

Evidence of Pre-Submittal Planning Process and Budgeting:

Applicant should have the details of this project internally vetted, approved, and budgeted, with matching funds committed by the applicant prior to requesting ACOS grant funds. For construction projects, applicants are

encouraged to have the project initially reviewed by the governing jurisdiction's planning department before applying for grant funding.

Applicants should describe any planning completed prior to submitting the proposal in the Project Narrative and itemize anticipated costs for fees, permits, etc. on the Budget Forms. Examples include:

- Planning/engineering review
- Building permits
- Surveying or mapping
- Environmental assessment
- Site cleanup or remediation
- Consulting fees
- Utility fees
- Grading, drainage, erosion, and sediment control plans/fees

Projects in unincorporated Arapahoe County may require an approved location and extent plan with the County's Public Works Department prior to construction. Fees charged by the County for planning/engineering review or permits may be included in the grant request or as match.

Evaluation Process

Applications are screened for eligibility and minimum qualifications by Grants Program staff. If all requirements are met, then the grant application will be evaluated in the competitive process. Evaluators include County staff and members of the Open Space and Trails Advisory Board (OSTAB).

The grant evaluation team will conduct site visits to proposed project sites approximately 4-6 weeks after the grant application deadline. Applicants will receive notification of their scheduled site visit date and time approximately 1-2 weeks after the application deadline. Applicants will have approximately 20 minutes to meet with evaluators at the project site and answer any evaluator questions. Applicants may provide a brief project summary handout to evaluators during the site visit (handouts are not required). The applicant will be notified of any follow-up questions or requests for additional information.

Proposals are evaluated and ranked based on the merits of the project. The evaluation process considers the scope of the project; need, urgency, and anticipated usage; leveraging dollars/cash match committed; the applicant's ability to achieve the proposed results according to the budget, timeline, and supporting documentation; and the applicant's capacity to complete the project and maintain the project site.

Standard, Small, and Planning Grant requests will be ranked separately. Projects will be recommended for funding in order of rank in each category until allocated funds for the grant cycle have been expended. ACOS staff will present award recommendations to OSTAB in June and to the Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) in July. Funding announcements will be made following BoCC approval.

Post-Award Requirements

Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA):

Grant awards are subject to execution of an IGA between the County and the Grantee. ACOS will provide IGAs to Grantees within one week of the grant award. IGAs must be signed by the person(s) with appropriate signature authority for the Grantee and returned to ACOS within 60 days for the County's execution. Projects must be completed by the deadline stated in the IGA, unless the County agrees in writing to allow an extension of time.

The County may include additional conditions in the IGA based on project details or the Grantee's history with the ACOS Grants Program.

Project Start Date:

The project start date is the date the IGA is fully executed. Grant funds may not be spent before this date. Matching funds spent before this date must be pre-approved by Grants Program staff, in accordance with the section titled Direct Costs Associated with Preplanning, and identified in the budget.

Grant Funds Disbursement:

Grant payments are made by ACH transfer. All grant awards will be paid on a reimbursement basis unless otherwise specified in the IGA. Requests for other payment arrangements will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Grantees may request a partial reimbursement with any Progress Report; however, a minimum of 25% of grant funds will be held until the project is closed out.

Reporting Requirements:

Grantees must submit Progress Reports through the online grant portal twice per year for the duration of the project. Reports are due annually on January 31 (covering the preceding July 1 – December 31) and July 31 (covering the preceding January 1 – June 30).

Partial reimbursement may be requested with any Progress Report. No more than 75% of grant funds may be reimbursed prior to closing out the project.

Grantees must submit a Final Report, including a final request for reimbursement, through the online grant portal within 60 days of completing the project. ACOS Grants Program staff may require a final site inspection.

Grantees must submit proof of grant and match expenditures (e.g., invoices) with any request for a reimbursement.

Acknowledgement Requirements:

Grantees are required to install an approved sign at the project site which acknowledges support from the Arapahoe County Open Space Sales and Use Tax. ACOS offers a standard sign to grant recipients at no cost. If the Grantee prefers to install a custom sign, then associated costs may be included in the project budget. Custom signage must be reviewed and approved by ACOS Grants Program and Communications staff before it is fabricated and installed.

Planning projects, environmental education projects, and other projects that do not lend themselves to installation of grant signage may acknowledge Arapahoe County Open Space Sales and Use Tax funding in other ways, such as in final printed or multi-media materials, as approved by ACOS staff.

In addition to signage, acknowledgement of County support must be included in all publications, news releases, ribbon cutting/grand opening announcements, and other publicity issued by the Grantee related to the project.

Logos:

If you need a County logo for any reason related to your grant project (e.g., acknowledgement signage, project website, grand opening announcement), contact Grants Program staff.

Time Extension and Modification Requests:

ACOS understands that unforeseen circumstances may interfere with a Grantee's ability to complete a project according to the timeline, scope of work, and/or budget presented in its original grant request. Please contact Grants Program staff if you believe a time extension or modification may be necessary for your project.

Time extension and modification requests will be reviewed by Grants Program staff. Staff may approve time extensions of up to one year and minor project modifications. Extension requests beyond one year and substantial project modification requests must be presented to OSTAB. Please consult with Grants Program staff regarding appropriate timing for these requests.

Failure to complete a project by the approved completion date or within the approved scope of work and budget may result in a termination of the grant, reduction of grant amount, and/or a suspension from applying for future grant cycles.

Project Closeout:

Grant projects will be fully reimbursed and closed out after the following requirements are met:

- Successful project completion according to scope of work and budget
- Acknowledgement signage installation at project site (or other acknowledgment of County support as approved by ACOS staff)
- Final report approval by ACOS staff
- Final site inspection completed by ACOS staff