



Florida Department of Environmental Protection Application Instructions Guide for

Florida Communities Trust Parks and Open Space Grant

What is the Florida Communities Trust Parks and Open Space Program?

Florida Communities Trust (FCT) Parks and Open Space Florida Forever grant program is a state land acquisition grant program that provides funding to Local Governments and eligible Nonprofit Environmental Organizations for acquisition of community-based parks, open spaces, and greenways that further outdoor recreation and natural resource protection needs identified in Local Government comprehensive plans. The program was created by statutory authority in Chapter 380, Florida Statutes (F.S.) and is governed by Chapters 62-818 and 62-819, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.).

Pursuant to the above referenced Florida Statutes and Florida Administrative Codes, along with, Chapter 2020-111, Section 5, Laws of Florida, the Florida Legislature intends that FCT emphasize funding projects in low-income or otherwise disadvantaged communities and projects that provide areas for direct water access and water-dependent facilities that are open to the public and offer public access by vessels to waters of the state, including boat ramps and associated parking and other support facilities. Also emphasized is the acquisition of lands for recreational trail systems.

The FCT Application, Resources, Rules and Statutes are available for download at <https://floridadep.gov/lands/land-and-recreation-grants/content/parks-and-open-space-florida-forever-grant-program>.

Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Funding

A total of \$6.8 million is available in funding for this application cycle. Under the provisions of subsection 62-818.003(7), F.A.C., the total amount of any award or combination of awards applied for by any local government or nonprofit environmental organization under any application(s) or partnership application(s) for any project(s) shall not exceed five million dollars during any one cycle.

Awards requested in a partnership application are divided equally among the partners for the purposes of calculating individual applicant limits. However, the project will not be funded if the Applicant has three or more active Grant Agreements at the time of project selection. The Applicant may close out active Grant Agreements prior to project selection to regain eligibility pursuant to subsection 62-818.003(5), F.A.C.

The application submission period is from Nov. 3, 2025 – Jan. 19, 2026.

Who may apply for FCT Parks and Open Space funds?

Eligible applicants for the FCT Parks and Open Space Florida Forever grant program include:

- Local Governments,
- Eligible Nonprofit Environmental Organizations, or
- A partnership between a Local Government and Nonprofit Environmental Organization.

Ineligible Applicants

If any applicant has three or more active Grant Agreements at the time of the project selection meeting, the Applicant is not eligible for additional grant Applications until the Applicant has closed out one or more of the active Grant Agreements so there are no more than two active Grant Agreements.

The Governing Board will not consider any applications submitted by an Applicant with an overdue stewardship report. A stewardship report is considered overdue when it has not been received or approved by the Trust within the one-year period immediately preceding the grant application deadline. Applicants may cure the overdue status if the overdue stewardship report is received and approved by the Trust at least 21 days prior to the scheduled Trust Governing Board project selection meeting.

How do I apply?

Applications for funding must be made on Application Form (Form FCT-5) following procedures outlined in subsection 62-818.003(1), F.A.C. This Guide contains instructions for completing Form FCT-5. Please review all instructions before preparing the application. Do not alter the application's original language or format. Do not separate pages. Type responses directly on the form using "insert" mode to prevent lines from shifting.

Applicants must submit two (2) complete copies of application materials, containing original text and non-text items. One application shall be submitted in a three-ring binder (soft or hard covered) with all exhibits labeled and tabbed. The second copy shall be submitted on a USB drive.

Applicants must submit the completed application and all supporting documents during the announced submission period of Nov. 3, 2025 – Jan. 19, 2026. Applications must be received on or before the published application deadline, **BUT NO LATER THAN Jan. 19, 2026, at 5 p.m. (EST)**. Applications received after the published deadline will not be considered by the Trust.

Address for Application Submittal:

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
LAND AND RECREATION GRANTS SECTION
3900 COMMONWEALTH BOULEVARD, MAIL STATION 115
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399-3000

For More Information

For additional questions or concerns not addressed in this guide, please contact FCT staff via email at FloridaCommunitiesTrust@FloridaDEP.gov, by phone 850-245-2501, or by mail to the Department of Environmental Protection, Land and Recreation Grants Program, 3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, Mail Station 115, Tallahassee, Florida 32399.

Application Requirements and Supporting Documentation

Cover Letter – Front Cover, Required – Tab A

The application must be transmitted with an original signature cover letter on Local Government or Nonprofit Environmental Organization letterhead that binds the applicant to fulfill commitments made in the application and identifies a key contact person. All partners to the application are required to provide an original signature letter including the binding statement.

The cover letter must include the following information:

1. Key contact person including contact number and email address.
2. The address and driving directions to the project site.
3. A statement binding the applicant to fulfill all the commitments made in the application.
4. Applicant's FEID Number and MFMP Vendor Sequence Number (SEQ).
5. Mailing Address for reimbursement; this address must match the active account in My Florida Market Place. <https://vendor.myfloridamarketplace.com/>

General maps and Exhibits – Required – Tab A

1. United States Geological Survey 7 1/2-minute quadrangle map with the boundary of the Project Site clearly delineated. Maximum size 11x17.
2. County Property Appraiser's Tax Map – Clearly delineate the Project Site boundary, easements, access points, and names of property owners, parcel tax identification numbers, road names and ownership boundaries using an appropriate scale.
3. Aerial photograph (1 inch = 2,000 feet or greater detail) with the Project Site boundary clearly delineated. Maximum size 11x17.
4. Natural Communities map of an appropriate scale that depicts the Natural Communities on the Project Site, utilizing the Florida Natural Areas Inventory or other appropriate classification system, such as the Florida Land Use, Cover and Forms Classification System, and providing the approximate acreage of the various Natural Communities with the Project Site boundary clearly delineated.
5. Physical improvements map of an appropriate scale that clearly delineates all existing physical improvements, alterations, or disturbances occurring on the Project Site, and including all cleared areas, buildings, roads, fences, docks, power lines, billboards, borrow pits, manmade lakes and excavations, and known easements and rights-of-ways, and the approximate acreage of the foregoing with the Project Site boundary clearly delineated.
6. Future Land Use Map covering the Project Site and surrounding area that indicates future land use designations and which clearly delineates the Project Site boundaries.
7. Resource conservation, open space, and outdoor recreation map that identifies the Project Site and surrounding lands in a three-mile radius that are used for natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation and including all parks, preserves, wildlife management areas, greenways, trails, linkages and designated outdoor recreation areas.
8. Map depicting any applicable 100-year floodplain or coastal high-hazard area within the boundary of the Project Site clearly delineated.

Photographs – Required – Tab A

Provide one set of labeled photographs of the Project Site that documents on-site features including existing structures, disturbed areas, Natural Communities, and historical or

archaeological features. Include a legend that identifies the site location and subject matter of each photograph. Provide sufficient photographs to support all application responses. Consider providing at least 12 photographs for small projects and 24 photographs for medium and large projects. Please provide photographs of all existing structures or facilities, sidewalks, trail connections, disturbed areas, upland/wetland planting areas, etc. When providing photographs for certain criteria please label as such (i.e. Exhibit I1, Exhibit I2, etc.).

Applicant: Nonprofit Environmental Organization - Form FCT-5, page 1 – Tab B

If the Applicant is a Non-profit Environmental Organization, provide evidence of status of the organization, including documentation from the Internal Revenue Service that the organization is recognized as a 501(c)(3) organization, a copy of the Bylaws, and a copy of the Articles of Incorporation. The required documentation is available online from the Department of State, Division of Corporations- <http://dos.myflorida.com/sunbiz/>. **Label Exhibit B1**

If the Applicant is a Non-profit Environmental Organization which anticipates being designated as the management entity, the Non-profit Environmental Organization shall provide documentation that they have funds on hand, or letters of commitment to provide the funds prior to closing on the Project Site. The amount equal to ten percent of the Project Cost is to be set aside as a management endowment fund for the Project Site. **Label Exhibit B2**

The Non-profit Environmental Organization shall provide a guaranty or pledge by a Local Government, the Water Management District, the Florida Division of Forestry, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, or the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to act as a backup manager to take over the responsibility for management of the Project Site in the event the Non-profit Environmental Organization is unable to manage. **Label Exhibit B3**

Acquisition Types: – Form FCT-5, page 2

Pre-acquired: Check this block if the entire Project Site has been acquired by the Applicant through a voluntarily negotiated transaction within 24 months prior to the application deadline. Provide copies of signed closing statements and recorded deed(s) for each parcel on page 4. If a closing statement is not available by the application deadline, include a copy of the contract for each parcel. FCT must receive copies of closing statements within 14 days after the application deadline.

Partial Pre-acquired: Check this block if a portion of the Project Site has been acquired by the Applicant through a voluntarily negotiated transaction within 24 months prior to the application deadline. Provide copies of signed closing statements and recorded deed(s) for each parcel on page 4. If a closing statement is not available by the application deadline, include a copy of the contract for each parcel. FCT must receive copies of closing statements within 14 days after the application deadline pursuant to subsection 62-818.004(7)(p), F.A.C. If you check this block, please remember to check either the reimbursement or joint acquisition blocks depending on how the rest of the Project Site will be acquired. Provide a letter from the owner(s) of each parcel(s), as identified in the Application, indicating their willingness to consider an offer.

Reimbursement Acquisition: Check this block if the entire Project Site or remaining portion of the Project Site will be acquired by the Applicant through a voluntarily negotiated transaction after the application deadline and will request reimbursement from FCT after the acquisition is completed. Provide a letter from the owner(s) of each parcel(s), as identified in the Application, indicating their willingness to consider an offer.

Joint: Check this block if the entire Project Site or remaining un-acquired parcel(s) will be acquired by the Applicant and FCT together through a voluntarily negotiated transaction and provide the number of separate ownerships within the Project Site. Subsection 62-818.003(10)(b), F.A.C. requires the Applicant to act as the party responsible for acquisition activities for Project Sites that consist of 11 or more ownerships to be jointly acquired with FCT. Provide a letter from the owner(s) of each parcel(s), as identified in the Application, indicating their willingness to consider an offer.

Estimated Project Costs – Form FCT-5, page 2

Identify the eligible costs associated with acquiring the Project Site as defined in subsection 62-818.002(33), F.A.C. While these costs may be estimates in some instances, they are the basis for the requested grant award amount and should be as realistic as possible. Consult with FCT staff or other knowledgeable people for help with estimating these costs.

1. Land purchase price: This is the actual or estimated purchase price for the site. FCT does not encourage an appraisal of joint acquisition project types at the time the application is submitted. Possible sources for this price include the local property appraiser's office, the applicant's acquisition staff, local appraisers or other real estate professionals. The final negotiated purchase price of non-pre-acquired will be based on market value appraisals.
2. Acquisition costs:
 - a. Cost of certified surveys: Sources of information for non-pre-acquired property include local surveyors, engineers, or applicant staff.
 - b. Cost of appraisal(s): Sources of information for non-acquired property include the Property Appraiser's Office or local appraisers. In addition, two appraisals are required if a parcel has a value equal to or greater than \$1,000,000.
 - c. Cost of title report(s), title insurance commitment(s) and policy(ies): Sources of information for non-pre-acquired property include local title companies, a Local Government's real estate department or real estate professionals/attorneys. This estimate should be the promulgated title insurance rate based on the estimated purchase price of all parcels.
 - d. Cost of environmental audit(s): Sources of information for non-pre-acquired property include environmental site assessment companies and engineers.
 - e. Acquisition agent fees or commissions: Reasonable acquisition fees and commissions, not to exceed \$10,000, paid by the applicant are eligible project costs. Obtain estimates or information for non-pre-acquired property for these expected costs from real estate professionals.
3. Total Project Costs: Add the land purchase price and acquisition costs to obtain the total project costs.

Award Amount and Match – Form FCT-5, page 2

The total amount of any Award or combination of Awards applied for by any Local Government(s) or Nonprofit Environmental Organization(s) under any Application(s) or Partnership Application(s) for any project(s) shall not exceed five million dollars (\$5,000,000.00) during any one cycle.

A 25% minimum Match is required except for Awards to counties with a population of 75,000 or fewer, municipalities with a population of 10,000 or fewer, and qualified Nonprofit Environmental Organizations. Florida Forever Funds cannot be used as Match.

FCT grant award amount: That portion of the total project costs requested from FCT (provide both the dollar amount and the percentage of total project costs). To calculate the percentage, divide the award amount requested from FCT by the total project costs. Carry out and round down to two decimal places.

Total Project Costs: Add the FCT award amount to the match amount. This total must equal 100%. The maximum reimbursement amount cannot exceed the highest appraised value of the property. Percentages should be round numbers, adjust the total project costs to eliminate fractional percentages.

Source(s) of Match – Form FCT-5, page 3 – Tab C

Eligible sources of match, as defined by subsection 62-818.003(9), F.A.C., include funds from Local Governments, Nonprofit Environmental Organizations, state or federal grants, private cash donations, environmental mitigation funds, or value of real property donated by the landowner provided the property has been acquired in a documented bargain sale or by a Donation agreement.

Value of Real Property - Any real property used as match must be included as part of the Project Site and will be subject to the same conditions as the entire Project Site at the time the FCT grant is awarded. Provide a copy of the Donation agreement.

Other Funding Sources - Indicate whether the applicant has applied, or plans to apply, to other federal, state, regional, county, or municipal land acquisition programs to buy land within the Project Site. Identify the date of application, the name of the land acquisition program, and whether the Project Site has been selected for funding, if applicable. Outline the actual or estimated project funds provided by the applicant, funds provided by other sources and the appraised value, if known. If applicable, provide a letter from the agency clearly committing to the funds. Note some sources of funding have restrictions on commingling of funds. Applicants may not use funds from the Florida Forever Trust Fund for any part of the Match.

OWNERSHIP AND ACQUISITION PLAN - Form FCT-5, page 4 – Tab D

Willing Owner Letter(s) – Required for unacquired parcels

If the application type is Partial Pre-Acquired, Reimbursement or Joint Acquisition, provide a letter from the owner(s) of each parcel(s), as identified in the Application, indicating their willingness to consider an offer. If a portion of the property is proposed for acquisition under a conservation easement, provide a letter from the owner stating their willingness to consider an offer for the sale of a conservation easement.

If the Project Site is acquired via less-than-fee or through a donation, the willing owner letter should state so clearly and should include a percentage and amount.

Due Diligence Products – Required for Pre-Acquired Acquisition

For all acquired parcels provide a copy of the closing statements labeled Exhibit D1 in the application materials. The remaining due diligence products may be provided on a USB drive.

1. Copy of all closing statements. **Label Exhibit D1**
2. Copy of all recorded deeds. **Label Exhibit D2**
3. Copy of all title insurance commitments, including supporting documents; and title insurance policies, including any endorsements. **Label Exhibit D3**

4. Copy of a Certified Survey for each parcel, dated within ninety (90) days of the date of acquisition of the parcel. **Label Exhibit D4.**
5. Copy of all appraisals (or two appraisals if the value is over \$1 million). Appraisals must be completed by a DEP Division of State Lands' approved appraiser. **Label Exhibit D5.** The Approved Appraiser List can be found at <https://qlik.dep.state.fl.us/anon/sense/app/b8065621-0e91-45a4-aa36-d1e9da42abda/sheet/e8e3c2c9-6713-47d0-a7cd-8ac15d76a605/state/analysis>.
6. Copy of an environmental site assessment of the parcel certified to the Recipient, dated within ninety (90) days of the date of acquisition of the parcel. **Label Exhibit D6**
7. Provide a statement that neither condemnation nor the threat of condemnation was used in the purchase of the property. **Label Exhibit D7**

Project Evaluation Criteria - Form FCT-5, page 6

The evaluation of applications is based on the criteria set forth in the application form. Staff will utilize the information contained in the application including required exhibits for scoring recommendations to the Governing Board. An application shall receive all the points assigned to a particular criterion if the criterion is met. No partial scores will be awarded for a criterion. If a criterion does not apply to the proposed Project Site, the applicant should answer "No" in the response to the criterion.

Outdoor, Recreation, Natural and Cultural Resources Section - Form FCT-5, page 8

Provide a conceptual site plan that clearly delineates the Project Site boundary and shows the approximate location of all proposed site improvements as identified within this section, **Label Exhibit F1**. Points will be awarded based on the response to the criterion and clearly labeled on the conceptual site plan. Where descriptions are required, provide a response that addresses the specific criterion to receive points. Ensure that all exhibits and supporting documentation are labeled appropriately to receive points.

Community Planning Section – Form FCT-5, page 14

Acquisition of the Project Site will assist the Local Government in furthering the Local Comprehensive Plan directives. When used in this part, the term "furthered" means that proposed project(s) will assist the Local Government in realizing the objectives or policies of the Local Comprehensive Plan. For each criterion that is furthered by an objective or policy of the Local Comprehensive Plan, the objective or policy number is to be cited in response to the criterion and a copy of the objective or policy, and any associated exhibits or documents, shall be included as an exhibit. If the Project Site is located entirely in one jurisdiction, the Local Comprehensive Plan of the jurisdiction shall be evaluated for scoring purposes. If the Project Site is in two or more jurisdictions, the Local Comprehensive Plan of either jurisdiction shall be compared for compatibility and evaluated for scoring purposes and if either jurisdiction's Local Comprehensive Plan is furthered then points shall be awarded

Project Excellence Section – Form FCT-5, page 18

The project excellence section provides the Applicant with an opportunity to further describe the project excellence based on matters not adequately addressed by the evaluation criteria, such as whether the proposed project exhibits strong community-based support, possesses exemplary characteristics, highlights regional coordination in the protection of natural resources, assists an otherwise disadvantaged community, or voluntarily helps resolve land use conflicts. Include documentation in Exhibit P if needed.

Final Application Review

Review all responses and make sure that descriptions are provided to be eligible for points. Partial points will not be awarded for incomplete responses.

Required exhibits and documentation are referenced within the application and must be submitted with the grant application to receive points for the Project Evaluation Criteria. Provide Tabs for each section and label each exhibit. Ensure that all exhibits are legible and of an appropriate scale. If two or more exhibits are consolidated, make sure this is reflected on the exhibit label. Include the exhibits behind the project evaluation criteria section of the application.

Tab A	Cover Letter, General Maps, Photographs, Application
Tab B	Nonprofit Environmental Organization
Tab C	Source of Match
Tab D	Ownership and Acquisition Plan
Tab E	General Criteria Section
Tab F	Conceptual Site Plan
Tab G	Urban Service Area
Tab H	Connectivity
Tab I	Educational Opportunities
Tab J	Natural and Biological Resources
Tab K	Water Quality
Tab L	Historical Resources
Tab M	Community Planning Section
Tab N	Hazard Mitigation
Tab O	Priority Investment Areas and Special State-Designated Areas
Tab P	Project Excellence