

Project Advancement Grants for Land Trusts: Round 2 Application Guidelines

Introduction

The [California Council of Land Trusts \(CCLT\)](#) invites proposals from California’s conservation land trusts and their partners for 6-12 month projects that advance the goals of the State of California described in [Pathways to 30x30 \(30x30\)](#) and the [Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy \(NWLCS\)](#).

In this second round of funding, CCLT will award a maximum of \$1.725 million in reimbursable grants to build the capacity of the state’s land trusts and their partners to advance projects towards the goals of 30x30 and NWLCS in three categories:

1. Transaction, Project Development, and Permitting
2. Organizational Capacity Building
3. Building and Sustaining Partnership Projects

Funding for the Project Advancement Grant Program has been provided by the [California Wildlife Conservation Board \(WCB\)](#). In 2024, CCLT awarded approximately \$1.9 million in the first round of funding. Details on funded projects are available [here](#).

Program Timeline¹

May 2, 2025	Grant Applications Open
May 19 – July 31, 2025	Program Director Available for Consultations
June 16, 2025, 1-2pm	Grant informational webinar
August 1, 2025	Applications Due
September 15, 2025	Grant Decisions (<i>estimated</i>)
October 17, 2025	Last Day to execute contracts
November 1, 2025 – October 31, 2026	Potential Grant Period

Contact Information

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Book a meeting:

[Book time with Karin Winters: CCLT Project Advancement Grant Round 2 Discussion](#)

Website: <https://calandtrusts.org/programs-for-land-trusts/>

¹ Proposals submitted in partnership with Tribes, Native-led organizations, and/or underserved community partners must consult with the Program Director by July 18, 2025 to discuss alternative application deadlines, if necessary.

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Purpose of Funding

The purpose of the Project Advancement Grants for Land Trusts is to support conservation land trusts and their partners to advance the goals of California's [Pathways to 30x30](#) (30x30) and the [Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy \(NWLCCS\)](#). Land trusts are uniquely positioned to implement those efforts and, with additional support, have identified over 3.5 million new acres that could be contributed to the goals of 30x30. Through this program, CCLT aims to not only increase the capacity of land trusts but also to build the diversity of partners engaged by land trusts through specific support for partnerships with Tribes, Native-led organizations, and through projects benefiting disadvantaged or underserved communities.

CCLT has the following objectives for the program.

1. Build a pipeline of over 1 million acres of completed or in-progress conservation projects that directly contribute to 30x30 goals and the NWLCCS,
2. Support projects that provide a direct benefit to underserved communities,
3. Support partnerships between land trusts and California Native Tribes or Native-led organizations, and
4. Support land trusts and partners to leverage \$7 million toward projects.

CCLT has set aside a portion of the available funding to support Native-led land trusts and land trusts partnering with Tribes, Native-led organizations, and underserved or Disadvantaged community organizations.

Eligibility Requirements

Proposals for Project Advancement Grants will only be accepted from [California conservation land trusts](#)², and [California conservation land trusts in partnership](#) with Tribes, Native-led organizations, and community-based partners as defined below.

Eligible applicants for Project Advancement Grants include:

- [Conservation land trusts located in and serving California](#) that are tax-exempt organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and in good standing with the California Secretary of State,
- or***
- [Conservation land trusts located in and serving California](#) that are tax-exempt organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code *in partnership with* federal, state, and local government agencies; federally and non-federally recognized California Native Tribes; resource conservation districts; special districts;

² A conservation land trust is a private non-profit corporation whose principal purpose and activity is the direct conservation and/or stewardship of land and/or water resources and/or the preservation, protection, or enhancement of land in its natural, scenic, historical, agricultural, forested, or open-space condition or use. This purpose is reflected in its articles of incorporation, by-laws, and mission/purpose statement. More information about land trusts can be found in [CCLT's Membership Qualifications](#).

universities, colleges, and research institutions; and California 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations.

Applicants do not need to be members of CCLT to apply for or receive grant funding. However, non-member land trusts are encouraged to learn more about the benefits of CCLT membership on our [website](#).

Geographic Scope

The applicant's service area and project site must be located within the State of California. These funds are solely for projects, programs, and activities within the State of California. Attempts will be made to make awards to a diversity of regions throughout the state.

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Rolling Deadline for Partnership Proposals or Proposals from Native-led Land Trusts

Applications from Native-led land trusts, or applications that include partnerships with underserved community organizations, Tribes, or Native-led organizations may be accepted on a rolling deadline. **You must contact the Program Director by July 18, 2025 to discuss.** Regardless of when you submit your application, your grant project must end by October 31, 2026.

Funding

A maximum of \$1.725 million will be awarded through the second round of this Project Advancement Grant Program. **Proposals can range from \$25,000 to \$125,000.** There are no funding targets set for specific Grant Categories.

Funding Reserves

A *minimum* of 40% of funding will be reserved for projects located in or directly benefiting underserved, disadvantaged or Justice Communities or projects partnering with or led by California Native Tribes or Native-led organizations.

If you are partnering with a Tribe, Native-led or underserved organization and need additional time to complete your application due to partner capacity limitations, you must contact the Program Director no later than July 18, 2025 (see [Contact Information on Page 1](#)).

Grant Categories

The Project Advancement Grant Program will award funds that build the capacity of the state's land trusts and their partners **to advance projects** towards the goals of 30x30 and NWLCSS in three categories.

1. Transaction, Project Development, and Permitting
2. Organizational Capacity Building
3. Building and Sustaining Partnership Projects

Eligible entities and partnerships may only submit one application for consideration under this program. The Project Advancement Grant program is targeted towards project development, transactions, and planning.

Note that categories are described only to provide context for program goals and as funding examples. Applicants may formulate projects that align with multiple categories.

Funding can include staff or consultant time or may fund new positions or partner stipends. Applications that advance land trust projects but do not include partnerships or collaborations are welcome and encouraged. Evaluation Criteria are listed in [Appendix A](#).

1. Transaction, Project Development, and Permitting

Transaction, Project Development, and Permitting Grants will cover costs associated with new conservation easement and fee-title acquisition projects that will result in strategic, permanent protection of land that directly contributes to the strategic goals of WCB around Biodiversity, Climate Change, and Access to Nature, as well as the goals of 30x30 and/or the NWLCSS. Projects that align with multiple goals will generally be most competitive. Urban projects should clearly describe the biodiversity benefits of their projects.

Costs may include staff or consultant costs directly tied to completing the project or moving the project toward implementation. Funds are not available for restoration implementation, nor construction. Priority is given to projects that are located within, or directly benefit, underserved communities and/or support Tribal or Native priorities.

Grant funds are intended to cover **indirect** transaction costs and **may not be used** directly for land or easement purchase price. Examples include:

- Project-related staff and/or contractor time
- Legal fees for option or purchase/sale or easement agreements, deed preparation/review, title review, etc.
- Baseline documentation, due diligence, Phase 1, title review and discovery costs³

³ Note that these funds cannot be used to pay for insurance costs, including title insurance, nor to pay taxes, including taxes due at closing through escrow. If your budget includes escrow costs, be sure to exclude typical taxes and insurance escrow items from your budget.

- Other tangible due diligence item that leads to a successful transaction project
- Land appraisals for fee title or easement acquisitions
- Development of baseline, stewardship, or management plans
- Preparing *non-state* grant applications for acquisition or easement projects
- Design of public access improvements associated with acquiring a conservation easement or fee property
- Preparing project plans, specifications, and cost estimates that will result in a specific project
- Acquiring permits for specific, future on-the-ground projects
- Analysis required to support and complete CEQA and/or NEPA documentation for specific projects
- Performing necessary cultural resources, biological, botanical, aquatic, soil, hydrologic, mineral, wildlife, timber, or other studies/survey/mapping; and/or developing necessary project designs related to a specific site or physical project

2. Organizational Capacity Building

Organizational Capacity Building Grants support land trust efforts to increase the pace of land conservation in California. Applications should describe specifically how the grant will assist the organization to increase or strengthen its capacity for new or additional projects related to 30x30 or NWLCCS. Funding is intended to help land trusts build and sustain organizational capacity and effectiveness and develop and enhance community programs and services. Grant projects should be focused on tangible activities and outcomes and grantees should be able to describe the metrics they will use to measure these outcomes. Examples include:

- Developing or refining baseline documentation or management plans, especially related to updating GAP coding
- Developing or refining specific organizational policies or practices related to acquisition or stewardship
- Conservation planning, including integrating climate science into strategic conservation planning and priorities
- Organizational planning such as strategic planning, planning or strategy building for project specific fundraising or grant development
- Developing or expanding a GIS database to support conservation planning
- Accessibility assessments and planning for improvements

3. Building and Sustaining Partnership Projects

Building and Sustaining Partnership Project Grants include projects that will build and sustain partnerships between land trusts and historically underserved community and/or Native partners *and will lead to new conservation projects*. Successful projects should advance all partners' goals and purpose/mission. Letters of Support that demonstrate partner commitment and readiness to participate are required. The partners should submit a joint proposal, with the land trust as the lead applicant. Joint proposals should specify

how grant resources will be shared and help strengthen and/or formalize the partnership. Priority will be given to projects and/or partnerships that are likely to be sustained beyond the grant period. Examples include:

- Establishing and building connections with community-based organizations, Native Tribes or Native-led organizations *to develop a specific project*
- Planning for Indigenous stewardship of conserved lands, planning or providing cultural access, planning for co-stewardship using Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), or planning for ancestral land return/rematriation processes
- Regional conservation collaboration implementation
- Collaborative grant writing for a large-scale protection or restoration initiatives
- Community outreach and/or listening sessions for a specific project. Note that these funds cannot be used for community education or training programs.

Grant Requirements

With the Project Advancement Grants Program, CCLT strives to build a culture of learning, limit the burden of reporting, and meet funder requirements.

Reporting Requirements

Quarterly virtual meetings will be conducted between CCLT and grantee(s) to hear about progress and to provide any support needed. All grantees must submit quarterly invoices that will include a brief written report outlining the tasks and outcomes completed during the quarter, expenses associated with those tasks, and discussion of challenges encountered. A template and training will be provided. Other support is available as necessary or upon request.

A final report summarizing project goals, activities, and outcomes will be due upon completion of the project, though no later than 45 days after the end of the grant period. In addition, all grantees will be required to complete pre and post grant surveys.

Quarterly Cohort Meetings

Quarterly virtual cohort meetings will be conducted with CCLT and grantees to build technical capacity, and for grantees to network and share successes, ask questions, etc. All grantees should include two (2) hours per quarter into their overall budget for their project manager and other appropriate project staff to attend these cohort meetings.

Grant Agreement

If awarded, a grant agreement between CCLT and the grantee will be required. The agreement will impose certain conditions on the grantee per CCLT's contract with WCB. The template for Grant Agreements is provided as [Appendix B](#). You are encouraged to review this template prior to applying.

Payment

In general, projects will be funded in arrears based on quarterly invoices submitted by the grantee to CCLT. There may be a 10% retention until project completion. Projects may be eligible for advance funding of up to 25%. Advance funding will be determined on a case-by-case basis after grants are awarded.

Application Instructions

Applicants will apply using the online application found here:

<https://calandtrusts.org/project-advancement-grants-for-land-trusts/>

A completed application form, Work Plan, and Budget Worksheets A and B must be submitted with the application.

Consultation with Program Staff

The Program Director is available for consultation with potential applicants prior to submittal. It is strongly recommended that prospective applicants schedule time via this link: [Book time with Karin Winters: CCLT Project Advancement Grant Round 2 Discussion](#) or reach out directly (see [Contact Information on Page 1](#)). Staff are also available to assist applicants complete the Application as needed.

Review Process

Applications will go through an administrative review for eligibility.

Eligible applications will then be reviewed by a Grant Review Committee (GRC) composed of representatives from CCLT and other key partners and peers with relevant expertise and experience. The GRC may request applicants to revise and resubmit applications, as necessary. However, applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with the Program Director prior to submitting applications to minimize necessary revisions.

The grant proposals will be scored in accordance with the breakdown per prompt outlined below and as listed in the grant evaluation criteria in [Appendix A](#). Scores will be one of many aspects used to determine final grant decisions, including geography and focus areas, and impact on Native, and/or under resourced, underserved, Disadvantaged and Severely Disadvantaged communities. The GRC may recommend modifications, including recommending partial funding, to meet program priorities, funding targets, and available funding limitations. *Final funding decisions rest solely with CCLT. CCLT's decisions on project funding should not be interpreted as an endorsement or approval of projects for future funding by WCB.* CCLT will notify all applicants of final decisions.

Application

Below are the application questions and prompts found in the [online application](#). A corresponding maximum score will be noted next to the prompt or question, where relevant.

Project Overview

Organization:

Project Name: (Please provide a short descriptive title for the proposed project.)

Total Cost: (includes match or cost share)

Amount requested from Project Advancement Grant Program: (*total grant funds requested*)

Start Date: (no sooner than 11/1/25)

End Date: (no later than 10/31/26)

Project Location

Primary County:

Specific location (Assessor Parcel Number or address if available):

Nearest City (distance and direction):

Latitude (decimal degrees): Longitude (decimal degrees):

Landowner: (if applicable)

State Senate District(s): State Assembly District(s):

Optional: Attach a one-page PDF map or photo(s) of your project (location).

Applicant (lead applicant must be a 501(c)3 conservation land trust)

Organization EIN#:

Organization purpose/mission:

Organization operating budget:

Acres in Org. Project Pipeline:

Primary contact name:

Primary contact title:

Primary contact email:

Phone:

Mailing Address:

Project Summary (word limit: 100)

Please provide a summary of the project in one or two sentences.

Purpose, Need, and Impact (word limit: 500) (20 points)

1. Clearly describe the proposed project, why it is necessary, and how your project will advance the pace and scale of conservation and/or stewardship in your community and/or in California.
2. Describe the specific problems (current conditions, limiting factors, etc.), issues, or unserved needs the project will address. If this project is part of a land protection project, please describe both development threat and biodiversity of the target property.

Advancing California Conservation (word limit: 350) (15 points)

1. Describe how this project will increase the pace of land conservation in California and how it both **quantitatively and qualitatively** supports statewide environmental priorities, including [WCB's strategic goals](#) around Biodiversity, Climate Change, and Access to Nature, the [Pathways to 30x30](#), and/or the [Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy \(NWLCCS\)](#).
2. Please describe how your project has a direct connection to WCB's strategic goals, 30x30 and/or the NWLCCS, referencing specific sections as appropriate. Do you expect your proposal to result in newly protected or stewarded acres? If so, how many acres of land protection or stewardship do you expect your proposal to support?

Advancing Objectives of Project Advancement Grant Program for Land Trusts
(word limit: 300) (15 points)

Describe how the proposed project will **both quantitatively and qualitatively** advance the following objectives of the Project Advancement Grant Program for Land Trusts:

1. Build a pipeline of over 1 million acres of completed or in-progress conservation projects that directly contribute to 30x30 goals and the NWLCCS,
2. Support projects that provide a direct benefit to disadvantaged communities,
3. Support partnerships between land trusts and California Native American tribes or Native-led organizations, and
4. Support land trusts and partners to leverage \$7 million toward projects.

In responding to this question, you should clearly identify the number of acres in your project pipeline, the direct benefits to disadvantaged communities (if applicable), the specific partnerships supported, and the amount of other funding you believe this project will leverage over time.

Project Readiness and Defining Success (word limit: 300) (10 points)

1. Please describe the project status, feasibility, and the preparations undertaken to ensure prompt project completion. If this project is supporting land protection, please clearly describe the current status, including landowner negotiations, if any.
2. Please share what success in this project looks like one year after completion. How will you measure success and what are specific metrics for **both short-term and long-term success**, how can CCLT and our funders measure the success of your project upon completion?
3. What would be the impact of these funds throughout your organization and what is the durability of that impact beyond the grant term?

Community Support (word limit: 150) (5 points)

Describe the specific public and institutional support for the project and any efforts to include the local community and/or Native Tribe or Tribal organization or stakeholders. (Do

not include any support letters unless this is a partnership project, but list project supporters and supporting organizations.)

Disadvantaged/Justice Communities *(word limit: 100) (5 points bonus, if applicable)*

1. If the project provides a direct benefit to a California Disadvantaged or Severely Disadvantaged Community (DAC/SDAC), please provide the location of the project and documentation demonstrating that it is located within or providing direct benefit to the community. Please document by using one of the following tools:
 - Department of Water Resources Disadvantaged Community Mapping Tool (<https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/dacs/>)
 - Cal Enviro Screen 4.0 (<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/6b863505f9454cea802f4be0b4b49d62/>)
 - Or other tool that defines an underserved or disadvantaged community and why this tool is appropriate for your community.
2. Please describe the services and/or benefits provided. Direct benefits may include training, job opportunities, or cultural, recreational, and educational opportunities.

Community Collaboration and Engagement *(word limit: 250) (5 points bonus, if applicable)*

If applying with a community partner, please explain how the organizations will work together, how grant resources will help strengthen and/or formalize the partnership, and how the resources will be allocated between partners. Provide a letter, MOU, or MOA from the partner organization describing your collaboration.

Native Tribe or Native-led organization *(word limit: 250) (5 points bonus, if applicable)*

If applying with a Native Tribe or Native-led organization, describe and provide evidence that this project is engaging authentically with or directly benefiting Native communities, Tribal Nations, Native Tribes (does not need to be federally recognized), or Native-led organizations through an MOU, MOA, or letter of support. Note that if you are partnering with a Native Tribe or Native-led organization, you *must* provide a letter, MOU, or MOA from the Tribe or organization describing your collaboration.

Partner Organization Information *(if applicable)*

- Partner Organization Name
- Focus Area(s)/Purpose/Mission
- Community or Communities Served
- Leader Name, Title, and Contact Information
- Point of Contact Name, Title, and Contact Information (if different than leader)
- *Please upload a Memorandum of Understanding, Memorandum of Agreement, or other letter of understanding or support with the partner organization. This agreement should*

*be signed by an authorized signer and approved by the organization's governing board.
Please note that you MUST upload documentation if you are working with a partner.*

Project Team and Capacity (word limit: 200) (5 points)

Describe the project team and their roles for this project and describe your organizational capacity and commitment to complete and sustain the proposed activities. Specifically discuss the likelihood of project success based on the project team and proposed workplan and timeline. Discuss your team's capacity and commitment to manage this grant and respond to requests in a timely manner.

Project Work Plan (20 points)

List and describe the grant activities by task, with no more than five (5) tasks. Provide a realistic timeline for project activities over the course of the grant period. The grant period may be from 6-12 months long and must conclude no later than October 31, 2026.

(Applicants must use the provided Project Work Plan template.)

Budget (10 points)

Attach completed Budget Worksheets A & B.

Acceptable budgets range from a minimum of \$25,000 to a maximum of \$125,000.

The budget should be sufficiently detailed to describe project costs. The budget should be divided into five (5) or fewer tasks and consistent with the grant activities, project work plan, and schedule. Justification must be provided for costs to ensure that they are cost effective and appropriate to the work proposed. Costs should include project management, which will include responding to requests, quarterly invoice summaries of work completed, quarterly virtual meetings, completing surveys, and a final report. Applicants should also budget 2 hours per quarter for their project manager and/or other appropriate staff to attend virtual cohort meetings.

Please upload a project budget that matches grant activities with associated costs and includes staff time, contractors, direct costs and indirect costs. Applicants must use the Budget Worksheet templates provided.

Applicants can include an indirect/overhead rate of **no more than 10%**. Indirect costs include but are not limited to utilities, office space rental, phone service, and other administrative activities. If a grantee seeks to recover indirect costs, this item should be included as a line item in the approved project budget.

Match or cost share is the direct portion of the project cost not funded by the Grant Program, is provided by the applicant and/or other sources, and can be cash or in/kind, such as staff time to implement the project. Cost share is not required but applications with secured cost share that demonstrate contributions towards total project cost will

score more points. Cost share should be funds that will be used to directly achieve the project objectives and will be spent during the project timeline.

Availability of match will not be used as part of evaluation if the lead applicant is a land trust whose operating budget is less than \$100,000 annually, project is located in or directly benefits a historically underserved community, DAC/SDAC and/or if partnered with a Tribe or Native-led organization.

Ineligible Costs

Grant funding may ***not*** be used for the following.

- all costs incurred outside of the grant agreement term
- general operating support, including rent or other office expenses (unless part of budgeted indirect rate)
- accreditation or membership fees; conference fees
- insurance premiums, including title insurance, property taxes, or other state/local/federal taxes (note that these costs can often be part of “closing costs”)
- land or easement acquisition costs, including option payments
- endowments, legal defense, or reserve funds
- restoration costs and ongoing management/stewardship costs
- projects mandated to address a violation of, or an order to comply with, a law or regulation
- event sponsorship or event fundraising
- travel costs that do not adhere to state [guidelines](#), nor out of state travel costs
- food, beverage, or entertainment costs
- fines, penalties, damages, and other settlements resulting from violations or noncompliance
- buildings and heavy equipment

For More Information

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Appendix A: Grant Evaluation Criteria

Category	Criteria	Max Points
Purpose, Need, Impact	Project clearly addresses a specific problem or need, goals and benefits are clearly described, project aligns with land trust's mission/purpose, goals, and priorities.	20
Advancing California Conservation	Project is aligned with the goals of WCB, California's NWLCCS and/or the Pathways to 30x30 and applicant can qualitatively & quantitatively describe how funding request would support goals and objectives in WCB's strategic plan, the NWLCCS and/or Pathways to 30x30.	15
Advancing Objectives of Project Advancement Grant Program	Project is aligned with the objectives of the Project Advancement Grant Program and applicant can quantitatively & qualitatively describe how funding request would support these goals and objectives around protected acres, disadvantaged communities, partnerships, and leveraged funds.	15
Readiness and Success	Project has well-defined metrics for short- and long-term success. Applicant demonstrates that the project is feasible. Proposal demonstrates that necessary preparations for the project are sufficient for prompt project completion. Proposal describes durability and impact.	10
Community Support	Project has public and institutional support and includes stakeholder, community, and Tribal input as appropriate.	5
Disadvantaged/ Justice Communities	Project is in and/or demonstrates direct benefits to a California underserved or designated Severely Disadvantaged or Disadvantaged Community.	5 (bonus if applicable)
Community Collaboration and Engagement (if applicable)	Project advances broader community needs, programs, and objectives, and demonstrates broad community benefit. Partners are involved in defining the problem and solutions and analysis of relevant data and planning documents.	5 (bonus if applicable)

Tribe or Native-led organization (if applicable)	Project is proposed by Native-led land trust, or on Tribally controlled land or otherwise demonstrates direct benefits to Native communities, with appropriate support documentation from the Tribe or Native organization.	5 (bonus if applicable)
Project Team	Project team demonstrates sufficient organizational capacity to complete and sustain the proposed grant funded activities and the project demonstrates a high likelihood of success.	5
Project Work Plan	Grant tasks and activities are clearly described and appropriate for project goals. Project can be accomplished within the stated grant period of 6-12 months. Proposal demonstrates a reasonable schedule and is consistent with the tasks shown in the project narrative and budget.	20
Budget	Project budget only includes allowable expenses and is within the range of \$25,000-\$125,000 . Proposed budget is appropriate to the work proposed and is consistent with the tasks shown in the project narrative. If applicable: match or cost share is secured and demonstrated (up to 2-point bonus).	10

The grant proposals will be scored in accordance with the breakdown outlined in the grant evaluation criteria in the table above. However, scores will be one of many aspects used to determine final grant decisions, including geography and focus areas, and impact on Tribes or Native-led organizations, Justice, underserved or Disadvantaged and Severely Disadvantaged Communities. CCLT may recommend modifications, including recommending partial funding, to meet program priorities, funding targets, and available funding limitations.

CCLT's decisions on project funding should not be interpreted as an endorsement or approval of projects for future funding by WCB.

Final funding decisions rest solely with CCLT.

Appendix B: Sub-Grant Agreement Template

The draft Sub-Grant Agreement Template can be found at the link below for your reference.

[WCB Sub-Grant Agreement Template](#)