



National Trails Training Partnership

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Federal Programs and Legislation

How the Recreational Trails Program Works

See below for [Use of funds from the Recreational Trails Program](#)

By Christopher B. Douwes, Federal Highway Administration
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The premise of the RTP is to give states federal money in relation to fuel taxes generated within each state. This fuel tax money, when given to the states, is then used to fund trail programs.

Each state is responsible for administering the RTP within its state. Each state manages the program within the same general guidelines, but the details of when project applications are considered, and how projects are approved varies from state to state. The information in this overview is a general explanation to give you the tools you need to work within your state to implement a motorized trail project using RTP funds. When actually implementing your project you will find it very helpful to refer directly to the USDOT/FHWA manual.

PROJECTS

The first thing to understand is what types of projects the RTP will help fund. Forty percent (40%) of state RTP funds must be used for diverse recreational uses, 30% must be used for non-motorized uses, and 30% must be used for motorized uses.

If your motorized trail project offers trail opportunities to a diverse group of motorized, or motorized and non-motorized, users, you may be able to access 70% of your states RTP dollars. A project is considered to be a diverse motorized use if it benefits more than one form of motorized use, such as four-wheel driving, ATVs, or motorcycles. A project is considered to be a diverse project if it benefits motorized as well as non-motorized uses, such as four-wheel driving and equestrian use where both share the same trail head.

Your State Recreational Trail Advisory Committee determines which projects will receive grant awards based upon predetermined eligibility criteria.

MONEY

The next thing to understand is what amount of assistance this grant program will give for your total project. This grant program does not fund 100% of the project. Instead it permits 80% of the project to be funded by RTP money and then the other 20% must be funded by a non-federal source. This non-federal source can be through private donations, corporate sponsorship, volunteer hours, or in some cases, through local and state government assistance. The RTP is a reimbursement program. Therefore, you will be responsible for securing money to fund portions of the project up front and then receive reimbursement from the RTP. Check with your State Trails Administrator regarding the reimbursement conditions for the grants in your state because TEA-21 does authorize working capital (up-front money) advances from the federal government to the State for situations where your projects do not have sufficient working capital.

PROCESS

This is the outline of how the program works:

- You contact your State Trails Administrator to notify them of your interest



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- State Trails Adm. sends you RTP grant application
- You develop trail project and fill out grant application
- State RTP advisory committee awards grants to various deserving projects
- State Trails Adm. notifies you if your project is given award
- You implement your project
- State Trails Adm. coordinates reimbursement up to federal share amount

Use of funds from the Recreational Trails Program

Recreational Trails Program funds may be used for:

- a) maintenance and restoration of existing trails;
- b) development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities and trail linkages;
- c) purchase and lease of trail construction and maintenance equipment;
- d) construction of new trails (with restrictions for new trails on Federal lands);
- e) acquisition of easements or property for trails;
- f) state administrative costs related to this program (limited to 7 percent of a State's funds); and
- g) operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection related to trails (limited to 5 percent of a State's funds).

States must use 30 percent of their funds for motorized trail uses, 30 percent for non-motorized trail uses, and 40 percent for diverse trail uses. Diverse motorized projects (such as both snowmobile and motorcycle) or diverse non-motorized projects (such as both pedestrian and equestrian) may satisfy two of these categories at the same time. States are encouraged to consider projects that benefit both motorized and non-motorized users, such as common trailhead facilities. Many states give extra credit in their selection criteria to projects that benefit multiple trail uses.

Recreational Trails Program funds may NOT be used for:

- a) property condemnation (eminent domain);
- b) constructing new trails for motorized use on National Forest or Bureau of Land Management lands unless the project is consistent with resource management plans; or
- c) facilitating motorized access on otherwise non-motorized trails.

These funds are intended for recreational trails; they may not be used to improve roads for general passenger vehicle use or to provide shoulders or sidewalks along roads. Also, a project proposal solely for trail planning would not be eligible (except a State may use its administrative funds for statewide trail planning.) However, some project development costs may be allowable if they are a relatively small part of a particular trail maintenance project, facility development, or construction project.

States may make grants to private organizations, or to municipal, county, state, or federal government agencies. Some states, by policy, do not provide funds to private organizations. Projects may be on public or private land, but projects on private land must provide written assurances of public access. States are encouraged to use qualified youth conservation or service corps for construction and maintenance of recreational trails under this program.

Project amounts vary by state, but most range in value from \$2,000 to \$50,000. Some states set minimum or maximum allowable dollar values. In general, the maximum federal share for each project from Recreational Trails Program funds is 80 percent. A federal agency project sponsor may provide additional federal funds, provided the total federal share does not exceed 95 percent. The non-federal match must come from project sponsors or other fund sources.

Funds from any other federal program may be used for the non-federal match if the project also is eligible under the other program. States also may allow a programmatic match: if some project sponsors in a state provide more match funds than required, other sponsors in the state may provide less. Some in-kind materials and services may be credited toward the project match.

Usually, project payment takes place on a reimbursement basis: the project sponsor must incur costs for work actually completed, and then submit vouchers to the state for payment. Reimbursement is not normally permitted for work that takes place prior to project approval. However, working capital advances may be permitted on a case-by-case basis, and some project development costs may be reimbursable.

Each state has its own procedures to solicit and select recreational trails projects for funding. A project sponsor should develop its proposal sufficiently so that the project may move quickly into implementation after project approval. For more information on the Recreational Trails Program, [see the state contact list](#).

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