



Cumberland Forest Community Fund 2024 Grant Program and Application Guidelines - Tennessee

Application Deadline: June 19, 2026

I. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of the Cumberland Forest Community Fund is to enable the design, implementation, and management of a competitive local grant program to support nature-based economic and community development in five counties in Tennessee (Campbell, Claiborne, Grainger, Hancock, and Union). The program will solicit proposals, review applications, and select and provide funding to projects and initiatives that produce “triple bottom line outcomes.” Triple bottom line outcomes include tangible contributions to: (1) local economic development (e.g., jobs, visitor spending, lodging taxes, etc.), (2) increased community capacity (e.g., green infrastructure investments, outdoor recreation/tourism capacity building, strategic planning, creation of local policies/conditions that enable nature-based economic development, etc.), and (3) enhanced environmental quality (e.g., benefits to land, water, and air quality).

Funding for this program is provided to Clinch-Powell Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc. (hereinafter referred to as “Clinch-Powell”) by a grant from the Cumberland Forest Limited Partnership (managed by The Nature Conservancy).

II. GENERAL GUIDELINES

Projects must be consistent with the program goals and objectives outlined herein. The Clinch-Powell Cumberland Forest Community Fund Grant Committee (hereinafter referred to as “the Grant Committee”) reserves the right to deny applications, request additional information, and/or suggest edits or enhancements to proposals at its discretion. All eligible applications received by the deadline will be reviewed by the Grant Committee, but there is no guarantee funds will be awarded if proposals do not meet the criteria and/or quality standards required. Decisions are at the discretion of the Grant Committee.

Program Eligibility

The grant program is open to individuals, for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations and municipalities that have or intend to have a significant operating presence in one or more of the following Tennessee counties: Campbell, Claiborne, Grainger, Hancock & Union. Eligible applicants must provide a form W-9 and valid federal ID number. Not-for-profits must provide a copy of their IRS Tax Exempt Determination Letter. The project idea may be an original business concept or an extension of a current business activity, product, service, community capacity building program, or social venture. Additional information or documentation may be requested.

Partnerships and Collaborations

Partnership projects are encouraged between eligible applicants. However, there can only be one designated project applicant named on the grant application. If the designated project applicant ultimately receives a grant award, that applicant alone will be required to assume the responsibility for entering into a contract with Clinch-Powell and will be responsible for any subcontracting associated with the project. A list of project collaborators and roles, as well as any other commitments of support for the project (financial or otherwise) should be provided on the application. Demonstrating multiple collaborators and partners in the community is not required, but may strengthen the application. However, applications for projects that are contingent on other entities, approvals, processes, funding, etc. that are not fully committed will require additional documentation of deliverables and/or outcomes to be considered for funding.

Available Funding

For this particular grant period, an anticipated \$85,000, received as a grant from the Cumberland Forest Limited Partnership, will be made available to eligible applicants. Individual awards will be no less than \$5,000 and no more than \$25,000. Total project budget can surpass the maximum, but applicants must request funding within this range.

This grant does not require the applicant to provide matching funds. The grant award may fund up to 100% of a project's costs, but applicants may also use additional funding sources to accomplish project goals (see Grant Selection Criteria). If the project is dependent or heavily reliant on other funding sources that are not secure at the time of application, further investigation and discussion will be required to be considered for funding.

Eligible Project Expenses

The following costs are eligible for reimbursement from this grant:

1. Direct salary costs for applicant employees while working directly on awarded project, including personal service salaries and fringe benefits. Fringe benefits are limited to 15% of direct salary costs for applicant employees while working directly on an awarded project. Salary costs must be backed up by timesheets reflecting actual time spent on the project.
2. Direct non-salary costs, including costs for printing, photocopying, travel, materials, supplies, equipment (including rental), consultant, and contractual services, legal, and other goods and services directly associated with the project.

An itemized list of expenses in the following categories is required on the application:

- Staff Salaries - *Limitations apply*
- Supplies - *Individual items valued below \$5,000 each*
- Equipment - *Individual item valued at \$5,000 or above*
- Travel - *Directly related to the project with documentation provided*
- Contracted Services - *Directly related to the project with documentation provided*
- Other

Funds will be disbursed on a reimbursement basis. No advance payments will be made.

Ineligible Project Expenses

The following costs are ineligible for reimbursement from this grant:

1. Indirect or overhead costs, such as rent, telephone service, and general administrative support.
2. Salaries and other expenses of government employees and/or elected officials, whether incurred for purposes of project direction, execution, or legislation.
3. Costs of preparing the grant application.
4. Costs associated with planning and design not integral to project implementation.
5. Any cost incurred before or after the grant contract start date and end date.
6. Any cost not in the approved contract budget.

Recognition of Funding

Grant recipients will be required to communicate that project funding was provided through the Cumberland Forest Community Fund, supported by Clinch-Powell and The Nature Conservancy. Materials and requirements for appropriate acknowledgement will be provided by Clinch-Powell upon award notification and required in any communication with the public, plans presented to the public, press releases, social media, onsite signage, and any other digital or physical media associated with the grant.

Award Notification

Recipients of grant funding will be notified of an official grant award via email by Clinch-Powell. An award agreement (grant contract) must then be finalized between the grantee and Clinch-Powell. Awards are expected to be announced to grantees in **July 2026**, with public announcements in **August 2026**.

Grantee Orientation & Celebration

Representatives from funded organizations will attend grantee orientation, followed by a casual evening gathering with funders, past awardees, and community partners invited to celebrate the award announcements. This will be a required component of the process, so please save the tentative date of **August 4, 2026**. This will take place in Rutledge, TN, from approximately 4pm-7pm.

Project Timeline

Work on the awarded grant project may begin no earlier than **September 2026**, and a fully executed grant agreement must be on file on or before projects can begin. The application submitted will be the basis of the grant contract, and the timeline submitted (once finalized) will be binding. Costs incurred by an applicant outside of the project window will not be eligible for reimbursement. The project window for this grant is expected to be **September 1, 2026 - August 31, 2027**. Exact dates are subject to change at the discretion of the Grant Committee.

Accessibility

Projects must comply with applicable laws requiring accessibility, e.g., State and Federal laws, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines, and ABA Accessibility Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas (36 CFR Part 1195).

Nondiscrimination

Clinch-Powell is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender. Discrimination is prohibited by Federal law. Clinch-Powell Resource Conservation and Development Council is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All programs of the RC&D are available without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted, or because the applicant has in good faith exercised any right under the Consumer Credit Protection act.

The federal agencies that administer compliance with these laws are:

- U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530-000
- Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C.

Photo and Media Release

The Grantee understands that the submission of photos, videos, and other media for project reports is a required component of participation in the Cumberland Forest Community Fund program. The Grantee gives full permission to The Nature Conservancy and Clinch-Powell RC&D for the utilization of photographs and videos for media release (newspaper, television, online social media, website, newsletters, printed material, etc.) for reporting and marketing purposes. The Grantee waives all claims for compensation for such use and any right to inspect or approve the finished product or the written copy that may be used in connection with such photographs or articles. The Grantee should have internal media policies in place for

the protection of youth and other vulnerable populations and the use of professional photography and assumes all responsibility for submitted media.

Ground or Waterway Disturbance

If applicable to the project, applicants must determine to what extent, if any, ground or waterway disturbance will be involved in the proposed project (such as for clearing, grading, installation of underground utilities, etc.). Submit any maps or site plans that show the areas to be disturbed, along with a description of applicable best management practices that will be used to minimize environmental impact. Additionally, provide details on any required local, state, or federal permits, including a status update on the project's efforts to obtain those permits.

Ownership

If the applicant or a partner is not the owner of property involved in the proposed project, the applicant must secure the landowner(s) support. The landowner must stipulate that he/she will enter into a legally binding agreement (e.g., public easement or signage easement) with the applicant if there is not one already in place, if necessary, to ensure access to improve or maintain the property throughout the life of the project. The application must be accompanied by either a letter of support from the landowner or a copy of said legally binding agreement. The applicant may be required to enter into a legally binding agreement with the landowner before entering into a contract with the Clinch-Powell.

Additional Requirements

All projects must comply with the Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code, the State Labor Law, and the Workers' Compensation Law and any other applicable State, Federal or Local laws.

III. ESTIMATED TIMELINE OF KEY DATES

May 15, 2026 — Applications Open

June 19, 2026 — Applications Due

July 2026 — Awardees Notified

August 4, 2026 — Awardee Orientation & Banquet (SAVE THE DATE)

September 2026 — Projects begin

August 2026 – Projects end

September 2026 – Final report due

IV. APPLICATION SUBMISSION & INSTRUCTIONS

Eligible applicants will submit an *electronic application* located on Clinch-Powell's website: clinchpowell.net/conservation

Applications are due June 19, 2026 by 11:59pm EDT.

The following information is required on the application. Please obtain all supporting documents and relevant details prior to starting the application form:

1. Applicant/Organization Information - This includes assigning a Point of Contact for grant communication.
2. Form W-9 - Required for all applicants.
3. IRS Tax Exempt Determination Letter (not-for-profits) OR Business License(s) (for profit businesses) - Additional documentation may be required based on applicant type (e.g. start-ups or municipalities)
4. Project Overview & Description - Including an executive summary, detailed description, funding request, timeline, milestones, demonstration that the project meets "triple bottom line" as described in the previous section (local economic development, increased community capacity, and enhanced environmental quality), proposed outcomes, metrics, and identified project partners or collaborators.

5. Project Budget - Including an itemized report of anticipated expenditures in the categories listed under “eligible costs reimbursement”, additional expected financial contributions and revenue to support the project, and sustainability plan.
6. Certification - The individual submitting the application (ideally the same as the Point of Contact) must have the necessary authorization to request these funds on behalf of a business or organization. By submitting the application, the applicant agrees to these grant guidelines and confirms release of all relevant information needed for the purposes of applying for these funds.

Note: Additional information, plans, permits, resolutions, documentation, etc., may be required upon request from the Grant Committee based on applicant type and project description.

Questions about the application or submission process may be directed to stephani@clinchpowell.net.

V. PROCESS FOR REVIEW AND SELECTION OF PROJECTS

Pre-Review

All applications will first be reviewed according to the following:

1. The application is complete and received by the deadline.
2. The application presents a nature-based economic and community development project or initiative that produces a “triple bottom line outcome.” Triple bottom line outcomes are tangible contributions that: Improve local economic development (e.g., jobs, visitor spending, lodging taxes, etc.); Increase community capacity (e.g., green infrastructure investments, leadership development, outdoor recreation/tourism capacity building, strategic planning, creation of local policies/conditions that enable nature-based economic development, marketing and promotion, etc.); and Enhance environmental quality (e.g., benefits to land, water, and air resource quality)
3. The applicant meets the requirements for eligibility, as stated in Section II of these guidelines under “Program Eligibility”, and required documentation has been provided, including Form W-9, federal ID number, business license, tax exempt status, etc., as applicable.
4. The project is located wholly within the geographic boundaries of the eligible Tennessee counties: Campbell, Claiborne, Grainger, Hancock, and/or Union.

If the application fails to meet the pre-review requirements listed above, the application will not be considered eligible for further review or evaluation.

Review and Scoring

If the application meets eligibility criteria in the pre-review process, it will be further evaluated and scored by a review panel using the grant selection criteria identified in the next section.

Grant Selection Criteria & Scoring Process

While a proposal must meet all criteria of the pre-review, a successful proposal is not expected to meet all of the following grant selection criteria. Each element will be evaluated to assess the degree to which the application meets the grant selection criteria and effectively meets the goals of the grant program. Scores will be assigned for competency in each section.

- *Economic Impact* - How does the project generate a positive economic impact (e.g., increased revenue, tax base, jobs, etc.) in the grant-eligible counties?
- *Community Impact* - To what extent does the project increase community capacity for supporting the expansion of natural asset-based economies (e.g., green infrastructure investments, outdoor recreation/tourism capacity building, strategic planning, creation of local policies/conditions that enable nature-based economic development, etc.)?
- *Environmental Impact* - How does the project enhance the condition of land and water resources; promote sustainable use or enjoyment of natural resources, scenic aspects; and/or promote outdoor assets within the grant-eligible counties?
- *Regional Partnerships* - Does the project promote regionalism and strengthen collaboration

between eligible counties?

- *Local Partnerships* - Does the project have one or more partners (municipalities, businesses, not-for-profit or volunteer organizations) with skills and capabilities that will contribute to and improve the final product?
- *Program Demand/Need* - Is demand for the project backed up by data in the application?
- *Budget/Match* - Is the project budget cost effective, accurate, well-balanced, and reasonable? Does it leverage other private and public sources of money (not required)?
- *Milestones & Deliverables* - Does the application demonstrate a strong plan for tracking progress and outcomes, as well as quantifiable metrics?
- *Capacity to Execute* - Does the application demonstrate the ability/capacity of the organization to meet the proposal's objectives and fiscal management responsibilities?
- *Sustainability* - What is the life of the project past the grant period, and how will it be maintained?

VI. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Projects will be completed in a 12-month term between **September 2026 and August 2027** (specific dates are subject to change). Additional requirements, invoicing procedures, etc., will be included in the grant contract once awarded.

Deliverables

The application and grant contract will guide the scope of work, goals and deliverables for the Project. Grantees agree to complete the deliverables set forth in the grant contract, both general and project-specific. General deliverables include timely completion of the project and milestones established in the application, recognition of funders and program support in all publications and media coverage of the project, and project reports at intervals established by Clinch-Powell, and demonstration of community impact and support.

Reporting

Project status reports will be required with each invoice submission (no more than monthly), at the midway point, and upon completion of the project, at minimum. Additional project reports may be required. Site visits may be required at the discretion of Clinch-Powell and TNC.

Completion of Project

All agreed upon tasks, deliverables and goals will be met, unless otherwise amended or revised by both parties during the implementation period, no later than the final date in the grant term, but projects may complete earlier than the grant end date. All outstanding invoices will be submitted, and a final report will be due no later than 30 days after project completion. In addition to outlining the project accomplishments, benchmarks, final budget, partnerships, etc., a narrative section describing the community impact of the project will be required. A site visit will be conducted to review the final project.

VII. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUNDS

The mission of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. The vision of TNC is a world where the diversity of life thrives, and people act to conserve nature for its own sake and its ability to fulfill our needs and enrich our lives. TNC works in all 50 states and more than 35 countries—protecting habitats from grasslands to coral reefs. TNC is guided by science and addresses threats to conservation involving climate change, fresh water, oceans, and conservation lands. TNC pursues non-confrontational, pragmatic solutions to conservation challenges, partnering with communities, businesses, governments, multilateral institutions, and other non-profits. TNC's Clinch Valley Program, established in 1990, works collaboratively with local communities to support sustainable economic development and recreational opportunities that are consistent with protecting the region's lands, waters, and way of life. NatureVest is the in-house impact investing team at TNC, working with colleagues and conservation collaborators around the world to source and structure investment products that support

TNC's mission at scale.

In 2019, TNC and NatureVest announced the formation of the Cumberland Forest Project and the acquisition of more than 250,000 acres in the Central Appalachian Coalfields. The Cumberland Forest Limited Partnership owns the land, while TNC serves as the manager of the lands and the Limited Partnership. To support economic diversification in the Coalfields region, the Cumberland Forest Community Fund has been established as a new grant program designed to provide resources to compelling local projects that support economic diversification, community development, and environmental stewardship.

The mission of Clinch-Powell Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc., is to build strong, sustainable communities by investing in people, housing, ecotourism and conservation of natural resources. Clinch-Powell has been actively serving our communities since 1989. While we continue in our efforts to conserve local resources and protect the environment around us, we also recognize that the needs of our communities are as diverse and evolving as the ecosystems we strive to preserve. As a sustainable community development organization, we help communities grow, provide small businesses with affordable capital needs, and support other nonprofits, landowners, and ecotourism endeavors throughout the region.

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