

Frequently Asked Questions: People's Garden Project

Conservation Districts vs. NRCS

Where do I send my proposal?

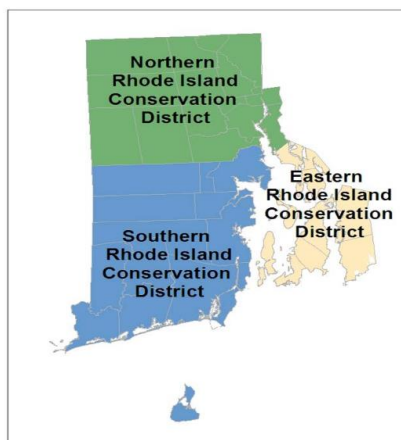
- a. There are three Conservation Districts in the State of Rhode Island; Eastern, Southern, and Northern Districts. Each district has received a portion of the People's Garden Project funding from the U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA): Natural Resource and Conservation Services (NRCS) to allocate the funding to eligible organizations and entities that are developing new projects within new or existing community gardens to support local food access. Please note that the Conservation Districts are not part of NRCS, but rather quasi-public organizations that assist NRCS, and other federal, state, local, and private organizations and entities with agriculture, water conservation, forest management, and environmental conservation practices on a local level.
- b. When you are applying for the People's Garden Project, apply to the Conservation District where your project will be located. To see which district your project proposal is located in, refer to the map below.
- c. Contacts:
 - i. Eastern Conservation District:

Sara Churgin (Bristol and Newport County applicants): schurgin.ericd@gmail.com
 - ii. Southern Conservation District:

Gina Fuller (Kent and Washington County applicants): gfuller@sracd.org
 - iii. Northern Conservation District:

Gennifer Keller (Providence County applicants): gkeller.nricd@gmail.com
- d. RI Conservation District Map:





1. Will there be future People’s Garden Project funding available?

- a. The Conservation Districts and NRCS have a 5 year grant agreement for the People’s Garden Project. We anticipate that some funding will be available every year from 2019-2024, but as with all federally funded projects, this is subject to change.

1. How will my proposal be evaluated?

- a. For the 2022 People’s Garden Project proposals, proposals will be evaluated on a first come first serve basis at the opening of the application date and time until all the funding is allocated out. Priority will be given to 1) qualified proposals that were not selected during the 2020 and 2021 program year 2) Eligible new applicants. Proposals received on the same day will be assigned a random number from a number generator and evaluated in that order. Proposals must meet the requirements of the RFP to qualify for funding. Proposals and budgets will be evaluated and approved by NRCS to ensure that they follow NRCS guidelines and you will be able to start your project. Note, if you are selected to receive funding, NRCS and NRICD may require edits to your budget before an agreement form is signed to receive funding based on NRCS guidelines.

The Proposal:

1) Do I need to fill out the People's Garden Project Application and submit a proposal?

- (a) No, you can either complete the application form or submit your own proposal that includes similar information. If you have questions or need assistance with filling out the People’s Garden Project Application, reach out to your local Conservation District for assistance.

2) I applied to the People's Garden Project in the past. Can I apply again? If so, can I apply for the same project?

- (a) Everyone is welcome to apply for the People’s Garden Project.



- (b) If you have previously applied to the project and your project was not selected for funding, you may apply again for the same project. It is suggested that you re-evaluate your budget based on any changes you plan to make from your previous application. Applicants that have previously applied to the People's Garden Project and did not receive funding in 2020 and 2021, will be given priority funding for the current application window (2022).
- (c) If you have previously applied for the project and have previously received funding, you are unable to apply for further funding for that particular project. You can apply for the People's Garden Project again if you are applying to do a completely different project.
- (d) Eligible applicants that have received funding in the past will be evaluated on a first come first serve basis during the application window, after all new applicants have been funded.

3) Does the 3-page proposal or application need to include our letter from the Departments/Organization/Business authorizing us to use the land or would that be an attachment?

- (a) You do not need to include the letter in your three pages of proposal. This document authorizing the use of the land for this organization and this particular project proposed can be an attachment.

4) If there are two organizations that want to partner together for the project, should they apply jointly or should one be a partner organization? (One of us owns the land.)

- (a) It is advised that one organization should take the lead. Whichever one you want to receive the reimbursement checks should apply for the grant. The second organization could still contribute match, use grant funds provided by the lead organization, etc.

5) Does the match count for the entire 18 month maintenance period or just building/planting the garden? Just wondering about including volunteer maintenance hours.

- (a) Yes, you'd have the full 18 months to supply the match, including volunteer hours.

6) Our organization is functioning as a not-for-profit but we do not have a 501c3. We have a bank account under an individual's name, not the organization. What type of organization should we call ourselves?

- (a) Since this funding opportunity is not limited to 501c3s, simply provide a brief description of the nature of the organization. Keep in mind, the Conservation District will need to have a W9 from the group/individual receiving the funds.

Use Of Funding To Purchase Items:

1. What tools can I purchase for this project that would fall under NRCS grant funding requirements?



- a. Funding can be spent on items such as tools, soil, seed, fertilizer, soil additives, irrigation materials, garden materials, lumber, high tunnels, pollinator plants, etc.

2. Are there any items that we have restricted purchase amounts based on NRCS funding guidelines?

- a. Each installed garden must have an irrigation system. It need not be complex; an outdoor spigot with a hose would qualify. Agreement funds may be used for the installation of the system. A maximum of \$500 for small projects or \$1000 for larger projects should be budgeted for a combination of irrigation and fencing. For example; \$500 for irrigation and \$500 for fencing, to total \$1,000.

Irrigation:

3. If we have a current garden and would like to set up new raised garden beds, can we use the irrigation funding for a new irrigation system, or do we have to use irrigation funds to build off of the current existing irrigation system to support the new beds?

- a. You can only use the irrigation cost for putting in a new irrigation system.

High Tunnel, Greenhouse, Hoop House etc.:

4. The RFP mentions beds and hoop houses. Would a small greenhouse qualify as well?

- a. No; only temporary growing structures (high tunnels) can be paid for by the funding. This is a common NRCS policy for many projects. The high tunnel/hoop house would also need to meet NRCS specifications (mainly a gothic-style roof).

Soil Remediation:

5. Does funding cover soil remediation costs?

- a. The use of raised beds and imported soil is required for sites where soil is contaminated. Raised beds may also be used to increase accessibility. Agreement funds may be used to pay for these costs.

Signage:

1. What are the requirements for posting a sign at the garden?

- a. The People's Garden Project grant recipient must install a sign at the garden or high tunnel site acknowledging NRCS along with partnering organizations (your Conservation District, RISCC, and your project partners) who provided support for the project. Your Conservation District will provide you with their logo and NRCS's logo versions for you to pick and put on the sign. District staff are also available to assist with the creation of the signage. NRCS requires the recipient to have USDA's non-discrimination statement on the sign ("USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender").



- b. Signage is required to be made/printed on vinyl or another weather resistant material.

2. Can budget costs cover the signage required by the grant?

- a. Agreement funds may be used for the purchase and installation of signage and needs to be budgeted in your project if you plan on seeking funding for the sign.

Reimbursement:

6. How does the reimbursement process work?

- a. Once you are approved for funding and sign an agreement with your Conservation District, you are able to start your project. Your organization is responsible for the purchasing of everything in your budget proposal. Keep track of all recipes, expenses, invoices, etc. for your project. Your Conservation District will provide you with an easy fillable form to help keep track of expenses, if you so chose to use it. Once you have paid for your project expenses you can send your expense and invoicing copies to your Conservation District, who will then reimburse your organization for those expenses. Reimbursements of any expenses not on your project's agreed upon budget will not be reimbursed. If project and budget changes are required, you MUST seek approval for project changes prior to making or purchasing any changes.
- b. You may submit project reimbursements as frequent or infrequent as your project may require.

7. What is required as documentation of expenses for reimbursement?

- a. You will need to submit two forms of documentation to your Conservation District:
 - i. First you will need to submit a documented list of purchases made for the project that are approved for reimbursement. This list should include item purchased, cost, supplier/vendor, type of documentation (receipt, cancelled check and invoice, paid invoice from vendor, etc.), and purpose/relation to the project category in your approved budget. At the bottom of this list provide a total cost of the items to be reimbursed and the name and address the reimbursement will be going to. Reimbursements will be sent to the same group/individual for each submitted reimbursement. Your Conservation District will provide you with a reimbursement template that you can choose to use or submit your own form with the same information on it.
 - ii. The second form of documentation you will need to provide is a copy of the proof of purchase. Proof of purchase is the type of documentation you included in your list of purchases (first documentation form). This documentation is crucial to you receiving reimbursement. If you are purchasing any of your project items with cash, you MUST provide a receipt, copy of paid invoice from the vendor. If you do not provide proof of purchase through a copy of the purchase documentation you will NOT be reimbursed for your purchase.



Match:

What is Match?

- (a) Match is the amount, calculated by cash or in-kind contributions, including donations, additional grant funding, labor, or additional purchases provided/associated with the project separate from the requested funding from a grant or funding source. Cash match or in-kind match is NOT additional reimbursements or funding costs received by the grant or funding source. It is provided to the project as a separate supporting source to the project. Match shares project costs and promotes sustainability of projects and programs outside of the grant or funding source. Keep in mind every grant's match requirements might be different.
- (b) People's Garden Project match requires cash or in-kind contributions of a \$1:\$1 ratio - meaning for every \$1 of funding requested, the applicant (individual, group, or entity) must provide \$1 of match contributions to the project. In-kind match contributions can be labor costs from staff time or volunteer time, either calculated at an individual's rate of pay or the current volunteer rate. Cash match is additional purchases to support the project. Both cash and in-kind match for the People's Garden Project CAN NOT be supported by separate federal funds. Additional match provided to the project over the required amount will not be reimbursed for the difference. Match for a project should be properly documented and tracked. A documentation template for Match tracking and submission will be provided to grantees.

2) What is the current volunteer rate?

- a) As of April 1, 2021 the current volunteer rate is \$28.54/hr.

3) Can I use a staff's rate of pay instead of the volunteer rate of pay for that individual's time on the project as a match, if the staff personnel has a higher rate for their time?

- a) Yes, you may use your staff's rate of pay as their match rate instead of the volunteer rate, if their rate of pay is higher and they are acting in their job capacity (i.e. a heavy equipment operator moving mulch). Someone acting outside of their normal field of work (i.e. an attorney helping to plant seedlings) would be counted at the volunteer rate.

Project Components:

3. Are we required to do anything at the garden or report anything specific at the garden throughout the project?

- a. Yes. You are required to submit:
- b. Reporting:
 - i. Two written stories about the garden project at the end of each growing season.



- ii. Include five photos showing progression/installation of the project. Awardee must provide on-camera release forms for any people in the photos. Photos will be shared and may be used by USDA NRCS. The Conservation Districts may provide release forms for recipients to use.
- iii. Check-in with your Conservation District frequently throughout the duration of your project to let them know how your project is progressing, provide them with match and any reimbursement requests you might have. Your Conservation District is there to assist you through the grant funding of your project and will be available to provide limited assistance to grantees. In an effort to maximize the amount of funding given to grantees, we are unable to provide extensive assistance with technical questions about building or operating your garden (though we can refer you to other programs that do offer this support).
- iv. Provide a final report to your Conservation District at the end of your project. The final report must include:
 - Name of People’s Garden Project & the Project Coordinators
 - Project location
 - Project duration
 - Summary of Project budget & match (requested funds, total funds used, match pledged, total match provided)
 - Summary of Project accomplishments and goals met (include stories of the project, and immediate benefits of Project to the community)
 - Five photos showing progression/installation of the project (be sure to provide copies of the photo release forms)
 - At least one photo of the garden sign installed at the project site (be sure to provide copies of the photo release forms)
- c. At the Garden you must:
 - i. Install signage at the garden or high tunnel site acknowledging NRCS, RISCC, your Conservation District, along with other partnering organizations who provided support for the community garden or high tunnel.
 - ii. Host one educational workshop at its garden site.
 - iii. Provide a \$1:\$1 match of requested funding.
 - iv. Complete your project goals and accomplishments.

4. How will we/I be reimbursed for the final time for the Project if we have not completed all the Project deliverables yet?

- a. The final project reimbursement will be reimbursed 50% at the time of submission and 50% at the time of the completion of the project and the deliverables for the project are met.
- b. Your Conservation District will provide you with a project check-list that will help you stay on-track with project deliverables and your final Project report.

