Natural Areas
Community Stewardship Challenge Grant Program

Frequently Asked Questions
Government-owned Sites

Definitions

Eligible property is a natural area in Illinois that is open to the public and cared for by a 501c3 not-for-profit organization with help of volunteers.

Stewardship is the physical care of the eligible property's natural habitat.

New dollars/donations raised are contributions that are above and beyond the annual membership dues or an individual or business supporter's annual donation. The Foundation does not wish to support the redirection of donations that participating organizations normally receive each year to finance their general operations and/or build a land acquisition fund. Rather, the program aims to help grantees establish relationships with **new donors** and/or to raise **new support** that can be directed towards stewardship.

The **Grant period** is 12 months. All matching contributions under Cash Donations and Volunteer Hours must occur within the grant period. Additionally, all payments must be requested within the grant period.

General Questions

1. **Can I apply for this program under a single category of funding?** ANSWER: No. You must apply to all categories of funding.

2. **Are contributions that have been received or expended before the grant has been awarded acceptable as match?** ANSWER: No. All match contribution activity—cash donated and volunteer hours—must occur within the 12-month grant period to be eligible for payment.

3. **Is it required that all the funds under the grant program are spent within the 12-month grant period?** ANSWER: It is <u>encouraged</u> that all the funds are spent during the grant period. Foundation match funds can be expended after the grant period, but a detailed post-grant budget must be submitted with the final report and the Grantee must demonstrate that any funds remaining will be set aside to care for habitat at the Eligible Property.

4. **Can a "friends of" group reimburse a government landowner for contractors hired to complete restoration work at the project site?** ANSWER: Yes. While the Foundation typically requires that the grantee hire and pay all contractors for the project, exceptions can be made for non-profit partners supporting the care of habitat at government-owned sites.

5. **Can I use the funds that my organization receives from the Foundation under Cash Donations or Volunteer Hours towards equipment?** ANSWER: No.

6. **Can I use the funds that my organization receives from the Foundation under Cash Donations to cover staff time?** ANSWER: For the most part, no. Grantees can use up to 10% of grant payment under both the Cash Donations Category and Volunteer Hours Category to cover cost of staff oversight of the project. Note that the grant payment (and therefore amount eligible for staff oversight) is entirely dependent upon the amount of funds raised from local supporters under Cash Donations and the volunteer hours logged under the Volunteer Hours category (400 hours minimum for habitat care and/or 100 hours minimum for social media).

7. **What <u>can</u> Foundation grant funds be used for?** ANSWER: Grant funds received under Cash Donations and Volunteer Hours can only be used on activities that directly improve the natural habitat. Examples of such activity include: payment for contractors to conduct a prescribed burn, engineering work and hydrological improvements, removal of invasive species, and/or creation of burn breaks; purchase of plant materials including seed, trees, plants; purchase of supplies including gasoline, herbicide, gloves, goggles, tree protectors, nomex suits, etc.; purchase of monitoring equipment such as magnifying glasses and nets; purchase of bat or bird houses. Grantees may spend up to $1,000 of the Cash Donation Payment on hand tools and up to $1,000 of the Volunteer Hours Payment on hand tools. Beginning with CS grants awarded in 2021, eligible "hand tools" are tools that are held and powered by hand rather than **a motor, engine, or other power source)**. This can include backpack sprayers, loppers, hand saws, rakes, Pulaski axes, etc. Grantees may spend a total of $1,000 of the dollars received from the Foundation on the purchase of interpretive signage if the signage highlights the stewardship work and the grant.

8. **When should I take the before and after pictures required by the grant?** During the growing season. If awarded a grant, take your first set of photos soon after signing the

grant agreement and before work is underway at your site. Take another set during the growing season preceding the end of your grant and submit both the "before" and "after" photos with your final report. For more information, please see the Foundation Photo Monitoring Guidelines.

9. **What is the purpose of establishing Photo Points?** Before and after photographs help to document changes to the habitat over time due to the grant project. Repeated observations - photographs taken from the same spot, at the same distance, facing the same direction, at the same time of year – will show changes best. Choose your two photo points based on two of the habitat objectives you are seeking to achieve through your project.

10. **Will Extensions be issued for this grant?** Most likely not. New CS applicants and current CS grantees should plan to complete all fundraising and log all volunteer hours **within the 12-month grant period**. Grantees are encouraged to discuss special circumstances and concerns with the Foundation early on. An extension may be recommended as a last resort if the grantee demonstrates a good faith effort to completing the requirements despite factors outside of its control. It is strongly encouraged, but not required, that you complete all spending on habitat improvements within the grant period. If you are unable to spend the grant funds within the 12-month grant period, your final report must provide a workplan and timeline for use of the funds remaining and describe how your organization will restrict the use of the remaining funds to ensure they are used for habitat improvements at the Project Site.

Cash Donations Category Questions

What must be submitted to receive payment for the Cash Donations category? ANSWER: Documentation that **new dollars** have been raised as match in the form of a list of donors and donations that is signed by an officer or director of the organization. This documentation should only count NET donations. No fees, fundraising costs, or service charges can be counted toward the $7,000 fundraising goal. The grant does not match donations considered as membership fees and is intended to encourage existing donors to give over and above any standing, yearly donations.

2. **Who determines whether donations are considered "new dollars"? ANSWER:** The grantee organization. The grantee submits a table of donations, net of fees (see answer 3 below) to be matched by the Foundation at the time of a payment request. A director or officer from the grantee organization certifies the contributions as being new dollars

received from local supporters specifically for the grant project by signing the list of donations. The Foundation trusts its CS grantees to act in good faith while soliciting donations that meet the spirit of the grant program.

3. **What activities are allowed under Fundraising?** ANSWER: While the Foundation recognizes there are many ways to raise funds, it prefers that grantees of this program use direct appeals that publicize the 3-to-1 match. If you plan additional fundraising activities (i.e. hosting an event, recognizing donors on a bench, selling native plants, etc.) be sure to subtract the costs of such activities and only report **net proceeds**.

4. **When can payment from the Foundation be requested?** ANSWER: No more frequently than once every six months (specific payment request due dates will be listed in the grant agreement) until the organization receives the maximum total payment according to the grant agreement.

5. **Do all funds under the Cash Donations category need to be raised during the 12-month grant period?** ANSWER: Yes. It is preferred that they are raised early in the grant project. This would allow the grantee to receive payment and use some of the grant funds to improve the site's natural habitat during the grant period.

6. **What are the restrictions on the use of the matching funds raised by my organization***?* ANSWER: In accepting a grant, organizations will commit to using funds raised under this project to benefit habitat on the eligible property.

7. **Who counts as "community" when making a cash donation?** ANSWER: Individuals, local businesses, community-based organizations and small foundations that respond to the fundraising appeal on this grant project can all be considered part of the "community of supporters." So too can members of the organization, including those who serve on its Board and/or otherwise volunteer. Grant funds awarded through other private or government-based grant programs are **NOT** eligible to submit as match under this program.

8. **What counts as "cash"?** ANSWER: Actual cash contributions drawn from third-party accounts. In-kind (non-cash) donations of goods and services *cannot* be reported as match under the Cash Donations category. Hours spent providing in-kind services to improve the habitat or maintain social media accounts may be reported under the Volunteer Labor category and counted towards the required match hours. Additionally,

no fees or service charges can be counted toward the $7,000 fundraising goal. Only NET donations will be matched by the Foundation.

Volunteer Labor Category Questions

1. **What must be submitted to receive payment for the Volunteer Labor category?** ANSWER: A volunteer sign-in sheet or sheets documenting the hours completed on the eligible property during the grant period. A separate section or tally should be submitted to document the 100 hours spent on maintaining social media accounts. <u>A staff member or board member from the organization must either sign off on each sign-in sheet or sign off on a summary table that combines the information reported from all of the separate sign-in sheets submitted.</u>

2. **When can payment be requested?** ANSWER: Once the organization has reached the total amount of hours of volunteer labor required (400 for a $4,000 payment and 100 hours on social media for a $2,000 payment), payment can be requested on the next request date outlined in the grant agreement.

3. **Can volunteer hours spent on improving the habitat of other natural areas that the grantee organization owns or manages, that were not specified in the grant application, be counted?** ANSWER: No for the 400 hours. The 400 hours for a $4,000 payment requirement can only be met with volunteer hours logged while caring for habitat on the eligible property as outlined in the grant agreement. For the additional $2,000 payment, the Foundation understands that the 100 hours volunteers spend on social media accounts will impact more than just the Project Area.

4. **Can one volunteer donate all the hours required for payment?** ANSWER: No for the 400 hours of stewardship and yes for 100 hours of maintaining social media accounts. The grant program's intent is to increase community involvement.

5. **Does my organization have to apply for both the stewardship and social media hours payment under Volunteer Hours?** ANSWER: No. Grantees may submit volunteer hours and request payment for the stewardship related work only.