



Richland County Conservation Commission Natural Resource Grants Criteria and Guidelines for FY26-27

Purpose of Grants Program:

To assist community groups and governmental agencies to 1) protect or improve water quality and natural areas; 2) build or enhance trails and develop plans for greenways; 3) plan and implement green infrastructure practices; 4) develop and implement environmental education programs. Grants are available up to \$20,000.

Eligible applicants:

- Community and neighborhood organizations
- Governmental agencies
- Educational institutions
- Non-profit organizations
- Commercial entities

Applicant organizations must have been in existence for at least one (1) year to be eligible.

Grant Process and Timeline:

APPLICATIONS OPEN ON December 1, 2025

DEADLINE for Receipt of Applications is February 1, 2026.

Applications must be received by the deadline; late or incomplete submissions will not be considered. The Conservation Committee will review and rate each application based on the evaluation measures described below. Short presentations will be scheduled for February. Committee recommendations are presented to the Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC) for approval and then submitted to Richland County Council for final approval in the County budget. Recipients will be notified of grant awards in July. Project activities may not begin until grant agreements have been signed in July.

Criteria for Project Eligibility:

Eligible activities include:

- Build or enhance trails
- Design greenway segments
- Develop and implement environmental education programs
- Protect or improve water quality
- Plan and implement green infrastructure practices
- Restore and protect natural resource corridors

Ineligible activities or expenses:

- Recreational equipment
- Routine maintenance
- Debris removal
- Storm water practices required by state or local laws
- Projects on private property with no public access
- Overhead or indirect costs
- Food, travel, or event expenses

Budget:

Community Conservation Grants are an 80% / 20% matching program. Applicants must demonstrate a 20% match for funds received. In-kind services may count toward matching funds; however, rate of pay (i.e. \$/hour) must be specified and reasonable for any in-kind personnel costs. Costs incurred will be reimbursed through invoice to RCCC as work is completed and approved. ***Reimbursements will not be allowed for work completed prior to the signed grant agreement.***

The budget should reflect the actual costs of achieving the objectives of the project proposed in the application narrative. Be specific about expenditures. Budget items should be based on three (3) or more quotes.

Application Evaluation:

Complete, on-time applications will be rated according to these criteria:

- **Project as catalyst** – How will this project create more conservation activity in the community?
- **Public benefit** – How will the public benefit from the project? Will there be public access or usage?
- **Budget** – Detail and reasonableness of budget; proof of match; amount (%) of in-kind vs. cash match; other funding organizations
- **Educational component** – How does the project increase public awareness and involvement in conservation?
- **Qualifications of personnel**– What are the relevant experiences, knowledge, and skills of the people involved in the tasks cited that ensure the tasks can be completed?
- **Partnerships** – What other entities are involved with and support this project?
- **Quality of Proposal** - Organization, feasibility of project activities, and timeline for implementing and conducting major activities
- **Grant History** – If applicable, previous RCCC grant performance.
- **Ongoing effort** – How will the practices/programs be maintained or continued?

Reporting Requirements and Project Deadline:

Quarterly reports are due in October, January, and April. A final report is due upon completion of the project. June 15, 2027 is the deadline for completion of all projects. No extensions beyond June 30, 2027 will be granted.

Acknowledgment:

Property projects – structures, trails, or water quality projects – must have a visible sign acknowledging RCCC funding. Educational projects must acknowledge RCCC funding on written materials, websites, videos, etc.

Freedom of Information Act Notice:

Please be advised that all materials submitted for RCCC grant funding are subject to disclosure consistent with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Applicants who are not a governmental agency, church, or commercial entity must submit a **current Secretary of State Charitable Organization Registration letter**. Call the Secretary of State's Public Charities Division at 734-1790 to determine eligibility. This is **NOT** the IRS 501 (c)(3) letter **NOR** the Secretary of State Certificate of Incorporation. For form go to:
<http://www.sos.sc.gov/forms/Charities/CharitiesRegistrationForm.pdf>

Application Submission:

Applications must be submitted online. Photos must be sent electronically in jpg format. **Late, incomplete, paper or faxed submissions will not be accepted.** Materials and photos will not be returned.

Questions? Contact mckenzie.john@richlandcountysc.gov