The Forest Service is authorized to provide financial assistance grants to local governments, federally recognized Indian tribes, and qualified nonprofit organizations (including land trusts) to establish community forests that provide defined benefits.

# Who is eligible?

* **Local governments**: Any municipal, county or local government with jurisdiction over local land use decisions.
* **Qualified nonprofit organizations**: Consistent with Section 170(h) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code and operates with one or more of the conservation purposes.
* **Indian Tribes**: Federally recognized Indian tribes and Alaska Native Corporations.

# Eligible Land:

* Private forest lands that are threatened by conversion to nonforest uses, are not lands held in trust by the United States, and can provide defined community benefits and allow public access
* Forest lands: Lands that are at least five acres in size, suitable to sustain natural vegetation, and at least 75 percent forested. Forests are determined by both the presence of trees and the absence of non-forest uses.

# Application Timeline:

* Tribal applications must be sent to the Tribal Official responsible for making Tribal decisions by **January 11, 2021.**
* After reviewed by the appropriate Tribal Official, applications must be forwarded to the Forest Service by **February 8, 2021**.
* Please see the Request for Applications for the name and address of the Forest Service Regional Manager for your area.

# Program Specifics:

* Requires a 50 percent non-federal match.
* Requires public access, which may be limited to protect resources or public health and safety.
* Requires involving the community when establishing the community forest, developing the community forest plan, and deciding on long-term management needs.
* Land acquisitions through this program cannot enter Trust status.
* Focuses on community benefit, including economic benefits resulting from sustainable forest management, recreational benefits secured with public access, natural resource protection, forest- based experiential learning, and replicable models of effective forest stewardship.

# Tribal application process

* Visit the Community Forest Program website for the [applications requirements](https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/private-land/community-forest)
* Tribal applications go to the Tribal Government official who oversees decisions regarding natural resources and forestry for approval.
* Applicants will notify the Forest Service when submitting an application to the Tribal Government official.
* The Tribal Government official will forward all applications to the Forest Service, and, as time and resources allow will:
	1. Provide a review of each application to help the Forest Service determine that the applicant is an eligible entity, that the land is eligible, and whether the project contributes to a landscape conservation initiative.
	2. Confirm that the proposed project has not been submitted for funding consideration under the Forest Legacy Program.
	3. Describe what technical assistance they may render in support of implementing the proposed community forest project and an estimate of needed financial assistance.

# How will applications be evaluated?

1. Type and extent of community benefits provided.
2. Extent and nature of community engagement in the establishment and long-term management.
3. Amount of cost share leveraged.
4. Extent to which the community forest contributes to a landscape conservation initiative.
5. Extent of due diligence completed on the project.
6. Likelihood that, unprotected, the property would be converted to non-forest uses.
7. Costs to the Federal government.

# What is required if we win a grant?

1. Complete an appraisal following the Federal appraisal standards via the U.S. Government Accounting Office [Yellow Book](http://www.gao.gov/yellowbook/overview).
2. Notify the landowner in writing prior to closing of the appraised value and that the sale is voluntary.
3. Ensure that title is not subject to encumbrances that would be contrary to program purposes.
4. Purchase all surface and subsurface mineral rights, whenever possible or, determine that the likelihood of extraction is so remote as to be negligible.
5. Record a Notice of Grant Requirement.
6. Complete the final community forest plan within 120 days.
7. Provide appropriate public access.
8. Submit every 5 years a self-certifying statement that the property has not been sold or converted.
9. Be subject to a spot check conducted to verify that the community forest has not been sold or converted.

**Contact**: Scott Stewart, 202-205-1618, scott.stewart@usda.gov <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/private-land/community-forest>