**PRIVATE AND PUBLIC FUNDING SOURCES FOR TRAILS**

**Revised: 2/11/2020**

1. **FEDERAL PUBLIC FUNDING SOURCES:**

[Federal Recreational Trails Program Grants](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/funding/):

The Recreational Trails Grant Program (RTP) is a federal assistance program of the United States Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), administered in our state through “MassTrails”. It provides funding for the development and maintenance of recreational trail projects. All questions concerning this grant program should be addressed to Amanda Lewis,, MassTrails Program Manager, who can be contacted at [amanda.lewis@mass.gov](mailto:amanda.lewis@mass.gov) , or called at 413-387-4333 or written to at 136 Damon Road, Northampton, MA 01060.

The RTP Grant Program is a primary funder of trail maintenance and development grants in the United States and in Massachusetts. It is a competitive, cost-sharing, reimbursement grant program that provides up to 80% of the total cost of the project with 20% provided in match by the applicant. RTP grants can range up to $100K if they meet certain criteria, but generally the awards are in the $50K range. There is now a $10K minimum limit for RTP trail grants. The match can be in volunteer time or services, material donations, or equipment rentals. These grants can be put towards the repair and management of existing trails as well as the development of new ones, including the acquisition of critical trail corridors. Additionally, there is an educational component to the programs that provides grants up to $10K for approved grants. In Massachusetts, projects that use youth conservation crews or focus on handicapped accessible issues receive greater consideration in funding. Projects that provide greater than 20% match also receive higher consideration. Private organizations are generally eligible if they are 501(C)-(3) organizations or have fiscal agents that are qualified charities or state or local government entities.

By federal regulation, the program must distribute 30% of its funding to motorized trail projects, 30% to non-motorized trail projects, and the remaining 40% to mixed use trail projects. In Massachusetts, only projects on trails that are open to the public for a minimum of 10 years are eligible for consideration. Massachusetts RTP grant applications are usually due on February 1st of each year. The grant application can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/guides/masstrails-grants> on the states MassTrails Program website. RTP grants are reviewed by the Massachusetts Recreational Trails Advisory Board (MARTAB) which provides DCR’s Commissioner with a list of recommended grant applications for funding. Applicants are notified of their grant’s acceptance in late summer or early fall.

Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

The Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program is a technical assistance arm of the National Park Service dedicated to helping local groups and communities preserve and develop open space, trails and greenways. RTCA is an important resource center for many trail builders in urban, rural and suburban areas. While **RTCA does not give out grants or loans**, the program “supplies technical assistance in the form of a staff person with experience in community-based outdoor recreation, conservation, and trails to work with partners” on the ground.

To apply for technical assistance from the RTCA, follow their application instructions located at <http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/program/rtca/contactus/cu_apply>. The northeast region program manager is Helen Mahan who can be reached at [ner\_rtca@nps.gov](mailto:ner_rtca@nps.gov)

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Stateside Program

The [Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWC)](http://www.nps.gov/lwcf/) is a 50/50 matching grant program that is administered by the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services (DCS) in cooperation with the National Park Service. Program funds are intended for the acquisition and development of outdoor recreation areas; trails are one priority of this program. In particular, funds “target projects that would enhance urban parks and community green spaces,” with a focus on “developing blueways and public access to water resources and conserving large landscapes.” Melissa Cryan from DCS is the contact person @ 617-626-1171

Parkland Acquisitions & Renovations for Communities (PARC) Grant Program

The Parkland Acquisitions & Renovations for Communities (PARC) Grant Program is designed to assist municipalities in acquiring, developing or renovating parkland. To be eligible, a community must have an approved, current Open Space and Recreation Plan. The maximum award is $400K with reimbursement rates of 52-70%. Communities must commit the full project amount before receiving an award. The deadline for applying is 7/11/20 at 3 pm. Awards are usually made within 120 of applying. Contact Melissa Cryan @ 617-626-1171 for more information or go on the Mass. Division of Conservation’s website.

Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)

Providing annual grants on a formula basis to local governments and states for a wide range of community planning initiatives,[Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)](http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/)funds are intended for activities that benefit low- and moderate-income persons, prevent or eliminate slums or blight, and address urgent community development needs. In the past, CDBG funds have been used for trail construction.

Urban and Community Forestry (UCF)

A program of the U.S. Forest Service, [Urban and Community Forestry (UCF)](http://www.fs.fed.us/ucf/) “provides technical, financial, research and educational services to local government, nonprofit organizations, community groups, educational institutions and tribal governments.” Trails and greenways are a key part of the program, which is administered by [forestry agencies in each state](http://www.fs.fed.us/ucf/contact_state.shtml).

Economic Development Administration (EDA)

Among the [various programs](http://www.eda.gov/about/investment-programs.htm) administered by the [Economic Development Administration](http://www.eda.gov/) (EDA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce is the Public Works program. The investment program provides funding with the goal of empowering “distressed communities to revitalize, expand and upgrade their physical infrastructure.” Among other uses, EDA Public Works funds can help redevelop brownfield sites and increase eco-industrial development. The EDA also offers limited local technical assistance to distressed areas in times of need.

Historic Preservation Funding Sources

Many trail corridors contain historic structures, which are often of regional or national significance. Administered by the National Park Service, the [Historic Preservation Fund](http://www.nps.gov/orgs/1623/index.htm) awards matching grants to state and tribal historic preservation offices for the restoration of properties that are on the National Register of Historic Places. To look up your state or territorial state historic preservation officer (SHPO), visit the [National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers](http://www.ncshpo.org/). For information on the National Register of Historic Places and the process to get a property listed, visit [National Register of Historic Places website](http://www.nps.gov/nr/).

Environmental Contamination Cleanup Funding Sources

Many rail corridors are contaminated from years of industrial use. To remediate this environmental pollution, there are many federal and state funding sources from which trails can benefit. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has devoted a [section of its website](http://epa.gov/brownfields/grant_info/index.htm) to funding and financing for brownfields, which are former industrial sites where contaminants or pollutants may be present. Many trails have taken advantage of brownfield funding, including the [Assabet River Rail Trail](http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/1999+press+releases/84320c6aee5fb54c852574b2004ed180?opendocument) in Massachusetts. A 2011 [article from the Trust for Public Land](http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/ccpe-brownfield-article-2012.pdf) shows examples of brownfields converted to parkland.

The EPA also administers Superfund, the federal government's program to clean up some of the nation's worst uncontrolled hazardous waste sites. More information about Superfund Redevelopment, an effort to return these hazardous sites to safe and productive use, is available on the [EPA website](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/programs/recycle/activities/organizations.html). Specific information about [rail-trails on or near Superfund sites](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/programs/recycle/activities/rails.html) is also available.

Wetlands Restoration Funding Sources

Related funding sources include the [Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership](http://www.cwrp.org/)—an innovative private-public partnership that provides money for wetlands restoration—and the [Natural Resources Conservation Service](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/) of the Department of Agriculture, which offers technical and financial assistance programs to restore and protect natural resources and wildlife. The Environmental Protection Agency offers a [full list of federal funding sources for watershed protection](http://cfpub.epa.gov/fedfund/list.cfm).

1. **STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING**

Although federal programs can provide many sources of funding for rail-trail acquisition and development, it is often necessary to obtain local financial support to provide matching funds for federal or state grants, or in case federal or state funding is not available. Cuts in federal spending combined with increased concern by citizens for protecting land have spurred cities and counties to take on a larger role in conservation funding. Funding through state and local governments can often be found in the departments of health, parks, conservation and transportation.

State Funding

Massachusetts’ funding for trail development most often is administered through the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) or through DCR’s MASSTRAILS Program. A variety of programs are available, including those that provide grants, matching funds and low-interest or interest-free loans.

MASS TRAILS PROGRAM:

# MassTrails Grants

MassTrails provides matching grants to communities, public entities and non-profit organizations to design, create, and maintain the Commonwealth’s diverse network of trails and trails experiences. Applications are accepted annually on February 1st. Mass trails focus is on making strategic connections between shared use paths and rail trails and places a priority on long distance trails. This program has a lower grant limit of $10K and an upper limit of $300K and a 20% matching component. This is a reimbursement program just like the RTP trail grant program. Grants are reviewed and recommendations made by the Executive Trails Team which consists of members of the Governor’s Office, EOEEA staff, MA DOT representatives, DCR staff and others. Unlike the RTP grant program, this grant program does fund feasibility studies and conceptual planning and design. It also pays for engineering plans and drawings as well as construction costs on new trails, existing trails, or new structures on trails. <https://www.mass.gov/welcome-to-masstrails>. Generally, planning and design grants will have one year to spend the grant funds, where construction grants can have up to 2 years to expend the funds.

Massachusetts Department of Transportation

MA DOT funds rail trail projects through the Transportation Improvement Plan throughout the state The Twin Cities Rail Trail project is an example of a MA DOT funded trail project in our region

Municipal Allocations

The most common sources of funding at the municipal and county level include allocations from a specific department, such as the park and recreation department, or a line item in a consolidated capital improvement program (CIP) budget. In some localities, a portion of an increase in the sales tax will be set aside for recreational trail or other conservation funding. Rarely, new taxes will be levied to exclusively support active transportation projects. Some examples include the following:

Bond Issues

Local revenues may also be raised through bond issues. Mounting a successful bond campaign is like running any other campaign: you need strong citizen support, participation by local officials and business leaders and hard work. As evidenced above, some communities have also passed referenda to specifically fund trail and greenway projects. The Trust for Public Land maintains [LandVote](https://www.quickbase.com/db/bbqna2qct?a=dbpage&pageID=10), a database of these local and state referenda.

Heritage Trusts

Many states have set up heritage trusts as funding sources to protect land. For example, the [North Carolina Natural Heritage Trust Fund](http://www.ncnhtf.org/), which is supported in part by fees for vanity license plates, awards funds for conservation and recreation, including trail projects, to state agencies. The [Indiana Heritage Trust](http://www.in.gov/dnr/heritage/index.htm) likewise places a priority on greenway acquisition. Many of these trusts focus primarily on land conservation, so a rail-trail by itself is often not enough to justify funding.

Impact Fees

Regulated by county and municipal subdivision policies, impact fees require residential, industrial and commercial development project leaders to provide sites, improvements and/or funds to support public amenities such as open space and trails. Impact fees may be allocated to a particular trail from land development projects if the fund is a dedicated set-aside account established to help develop a countywide or citywide system of trail projects. Contact your county or city planner to find out more about impact fees for your area.

Growth impact ordinances are enforced by counties and cities to estimate the impact of all residential, industrial and commercial development on public parks and recreational facilities within a development project's local and regional service zones. The ordinance makes provisions whereby the project developer will set aside the lands or monies necessary to offset the project's specific park and recreational impacts. Another method of raising funds is through a direct property tax. Again, contact your county or city planner for more information.

**Grants for Trails and Greenways – Planning, Design, and/or Trail Construction**

[American Hiking Society’s National Trails Fund](http://www.americanhiking.org/national-trails-fund/)

The National Trails Fund is reserved for organizations in the Hiking Alliance that are also 501(c)(3) certified nonprofits. Members that lack that accreditation do have the opportunity to use a fiscal agent. Through this fund, the American Hiking Society has given over $560,000 to 182 trail projects. It is the only privately funded national grants program that gives solely to the building and protecting of hiking trails.

[Kodak American Greenways Grant](http://rlch.org/funding/kodak-american-greenways-grants)

The Kodak American Greenways Awards Program is a partnership project of the Eastman Kodak Company, National Geographic and the Conservation Fund that gives a series of small grants ($500 to $2500) for the planning, design and implementation of greenways. Public agencies may apply, but nonprofits are given preference.

[Alta Planning & Design Grants](http://www.altaplanning.com/funding.aspx)

Though reserved for their clients, Alta Planning has grant specialists on staff and has leveraged over $95 million in grants for bicycle, pedestrian and trail projects. While not giving grants directly, they have a history of success in acquiring large amounts of funding from state, national and local sources, both public and private, for their clients’ projects.

[Conservation Alliance Grants](http://www.conservationalliance.com/grants)

From 1989 to 2013, the Conservation Alliance has given over $12 million in grants to protect and preserve wild areas across North America, both for their habitat and for recreational purposes. These grants are for registered 501(c)(3) organizations that meet their criteria. While these funds are often for protecting land, they have been utilized for providing pedestrian access to wild lands, which includes trail development.

Bottom line: there *are*environmental grants out there for your trail and greenway projects

**Revenue from the Corridor Itself**

Salvaging Material

The rails, ties, ballast and other improvements made to the corridor have salvage value and should not be overlooked. Revenue generated from the selling of these items varies widely, depending on local markets, the length of the corridor and the quantity of salvageable materials. Nebraska's [Cowboy Trail](http://www.outdoornebraska.ne.gov/trails/cowboy_trail/cowboy.asp), for example, helped fund the purchase of its corridor by selling salvageable material. However, salvageable materials often have been sold—legally by the railroad or illegally by waste pickers or adjacent landowners—by the time a trail corridor is in public ownership. For more information on salvaged materials as a source of revenue, look in the [Salvaging Material](https://www.railstotrails.org/build-trails/trail-building-toolbox/funding/acquisition-funding/) section of the Trail-Building Toolbox.

Leasing to Utilities

A growing source of trail development funds is coming from the leasing of subsurface rights for fiber-optic cables and other utilities. Compatible co-uses of a rail-trail corridor include sewer, water and natural gas. Occasionally, above-ground utilities such as telephone and overhead electric lines can successfully share a corridor with a rail-trail. In the past, utility companies have also bought abandoned corridors and then donated the land for trail use. Abandoned corridors can provide key links for utility use, so working cooperatively with local utilities can help pay for your trail. For more information on this type of co-use, look in the [Utilities](https://www.railstotrails.org/build-trails/trail-building-toolbox/basics/utilities/) section of the Trail-Building Toolbox.

**Private Funding Sources**

Funds can be attained from private sources in countless ways—from holding bake sales to soliciting foundation grants. But when fundraising, be sure to have a specific goal in mind. As one contributor to the RTC Listserv notes, “It is always easier to raise money when you have a specific operational purpose (e.g., land acquisition or land management) as opposed to general organizational needs.” Of all the potential types of funding, private funding sources provide trail builders with the greatest amount of flexibility and opportunity for creative approaches.

Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts (CFNCM)

Established to fund charitable causes throughout the North Central Massachusetts region. CFNCM has 4 focus areas for grants including Environmental Preservation, Community Enrichment and Critical Community needs. The Environmental Preservation focus accepts applications annually in January. The others also on an annual basis at other times during the year. CFNCM has funded trail construction, trail organization capacity building, and strategic planning. Contact: Linda Mack @ 978-345-8383. Grants generally for $25K or less.

Campaigns and Donations

Communities across the country have raised money for the development and maintenance of their trails and greenways through various fundraising campaigns. Some groups have “sold” pieces of trail, providing each donor with a “deed” for their segment of the trail. Other groups have also sold trail amenities, such as benches and trees. But donations can be creative; use whatever resources you have! For example, RTC worked with Bob Whittaker, who manages the tours of the rock group REM, to advance the progress of Washington's [Ferry County Rail Trail](http://www.ferrycountyrailtrail.com/). As part of his fundraising effort, Whittaker asked the band for an [autographed guitar to auction off](http://remhq.com/news_story.php?id=1370) for the trail. The subsequent sale on eBay earned about $1,500 for trail development.

[Crowdfunding for Communities | Fund your neighborhood project‎](https://www.google.com/aclk?sa=L&ai=DChcSEwjV-Mzu04nfAhULGAwKHUQjDkMYABAKGgJxYg&sig=AOD64_3bE2g1AYH_0t_yzClsooRfr8SocQ&q=&ved=2ahUKEwiwjsfu04nfAhVjRN8KHTPcDEoQ0Qx6BAgHEAE&adurl=)

[Adwww.ioby.org/‎](https://www.google.com/aclk?sa=L&ai=DChcSEwjV-Mzu04nfAhULGAwKHUQjDkMYABAKGgJxYg&sig=AOD64_3bE2g1AYH_0t_yzClsooRfr8SocQ&q=&ved=2ahUKEwiwjsfu04nfAhVjRN8KHTPcDEoQ0Qx6BAgHEAE&adurl=)

Raise money, find **resources**, make connections, bring your great idea to reality. keep what you raise. among the lowest fees. community of changemakers. tailored trainings. Amenities: Fiscal sponsorship, Fundraising help, Lowest fees.

Trust Funds or Endowments

These sources can be set up to aid funding for acquisition, construction or maintenance, and can be administered by a nonprofit group or local commission. Funds can be contributed to a trust fund from government sources, private grants and gifts. One contributor to the RTC Listserv notes that transparency is important with a trust fund, stating, “If you do set up a dedicated endowment for land management, I would recommend keeping the endowment's books open to the public and [providing] members and donors with annual financial reports for the endowment.”

Foundation and Company Grants

Many foundations and companies provide grants for trail and greenway projects, open space preservation, community development and community health. To obtain larger contributions from foundations or corporations, you will need a full-fledged funding proposal that illustrates the communitywide value of the trail and describes how it will be developed and maintained. Here are just a few examples of grants from private sources that can be used for trail-building:

* Community Foundation-United Way
* The [PeopleForBikes Community Grant Program](http://www.peopleforbikes.org/pages/community-grants) provides funding to bike advocacy and facility-building projects.
* The Conservation Fund’s [Land Conservation Loan Program](http://www.conservationfund.org/our-conservation-strategy/major-programs/land-conservation-loan-program/) provides loans to quickly purchase high-priority lands.
* The American Hiking Society awards grants from its [National Trails Fund](http://www.americanhiking.org/national-trails-fund/) for the establishment, protection and maintenance of trails in the United States.
* The outdoor goods store REI invites nonprofits nominated by its employees to submit proposals for funding. The company [offers grants](http://www.rei.com/stewardship/community.html) to support efforts “to care for public lands, natural areas, trails and waterways.” A recent recipient of an REI grant was Friends of the Wissahickon's [Sustainable Trails Initiative](http://fow.org/conservation-restoration/sustainable-trails-initiative).
* The [Conservation Alliance](http://www.conservationalliance.com/), a group of more than 180 outdoor businesses, including Patagonia, The North Face, and Kelty, disbursed $1.65 million worth of grants in 2014, with a focus on habitat conservation and recreation.
* The [Walmart Foundation](http://walmartstores.com/CommunityGiving/238.aspx) provides grants to local communities and nonprofit organizations. These grants range from $250 to $2,500 and are awarded through each Walmart and Sam's Club store.

**Be Creative!**

You don't need to fill out a grant application every time you need funding. From partnering with local businesses to holding a large event, there are many ways to think outside the box while raising money and awareness.

Partnerships

Explore the possibility of creating partnerships to build and maintain your trail or greenway, potentially through an “Adopt-a-Trail” program. These can be important for not only constructing and maintaining your project, but also building community pride. Try contacting businesses in your area to see if they offer any kind of community support programs. Whole Foods Market, for example, hosts several five percent [Community Giving Days](http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/mission-values/caring-communities/community-giving) at each store annually to support the work of community nonprofits.

Don't be shy about appealing to local clubs for volunteer assistance. The Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Sierra Club, biking and trail clubs, birding clubs and local civic clubs are all potential sources of help.

Events

Who doesn't enjoy good music, food and company? In June 2008, the [Lassen Land and Trails Trust](http://lassenlandandtrailstrust.org/) put on Bridgefest, a two-day music festival in Susanville, Calif. The proceeds were donated to the trust's Trails Endowment Fund, which worked to raise money to rebuild a bridge along the [Bizz Johnson Trail](https://www.traillink.com/trail/bizz-johnson-national-recreation-trail.aspx), which burned in a 2000 wildfire. Trail builders and managers can organize fundraising events such as dinners, parties, festivals, fairs, raffles or concerts to raise funds near the trail. Or try events along the trail route itself, such as a hike-a-thon, walk-a-thon, bike race or foot race.

One creative RTC Listserv contributor suggested holding a “poker run” along the length of the trail, where trail supporters collect cards along the way and the finisher with the best hand wins a prize.

Volunteer Opportunities

Military units with construction expertise are sometimes willing to assist with construction of trails on federal land. One RTC Listserv contributor worked with the Washington Air National Guard and the 864th Engineering Battalion to completely refurbish railroad bridges along the [Foothills Trail](http://www.traillink.com/trail/foothills-trail.aspx) in Pierce County, Wash. While not a source of funding, this resource could be helpful for some trail projects.

The [Take Pride in America](http://www.takepride.gov/index.html) program, operated by the U.S. Department of the Interior, serves to mobilize civilian volunteers to help improve federal lands. The [Corporation for National and Community Service](http://www.nationalservice.gov/) runs numerous volunteer programs, including AmeriCorps, which could provide useful labor for your trail. Many national parks and other federally managed lands also operate [Youth Conservation Corps](http://www.nps.gov/gettinginvolved/youthprograms/ycc.htm) programs, which could likewise provide labor for your trail project.

Public Art Funding Sources

Many trails feature art as a core component, such as along the [Steel Valley Trail](http://www.steelvalleytrail.org/projects.htm) section of the Great Allegheny Passage near Pittsburgh. Funding sources for public art can often be found at the state level; the [Maryland State Arts Council](http://www.msac.org/papg), for example, offers a grant program for public art. The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies can guide you to your state's arts agency with their [national directory](http://www.nasaa-arts.org/About/State-Arts-Agency-Directory.php). On the federal level, one of the most well-known resources is the [National Endowment for the Arts](http://arts.gov/grants), which operates numerous grant programs supporting public art. The National Trails Training Partnership features a [section on art for trails and greenways](http://www.americantrails.org/resources/art/index.html).

Still looking for more fundraising possibilities? The National Trails Training Partnership has a list of [96 innovative funding ideas](http://www.americantrails.org/resources/funding/TipsFund.html) to keep your creative juices flowing.

For information on funding options for ongoing rail-trail maintenance, please visit our [Management and Maintenance: Financing/Funding](https://www.railstotrails.org/build-trails/trail-building-toolbox/funding/maintenance-funding/) Toolbox page.