

OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

STATE OF OKLAHOMA

OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

In compliance with the National Park Service Land and Water
Conservation Fund Manual

Prepared by:

The Grants-in-Aid Section

Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department

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The National Park Service requires each state to develop an Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) by which Land and Water Conservation Fund ("LWCF") grant project proposals are prioritized and recommended for funding. Oklahoma's OPSP has been designed to accomplish the following federally required goals:

- a. Provide public knowledge of and participation in the formulation and application of the project selection process used by the State in allocating LWCF assistance.
- b. Ensure all potential state and local applicants are aware of the availability and process for obtaining LWCF assistance and provide opportunities for all eligible agencies to submit project applications and have them considered on an equitable basis.
- c. Provide a measurable link, through published selection criteria, to the specific outdoor recreation needs and priorities identified in Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan ("SCORP") policies and implementation programs; and
- d. Assure the distribution of LWCF assistance is accomplished in a non-discriminatory manner and ensure a fair and equitable evaluation of all applications for LWCF assistance.
- e. Support locally led and locally designed conservation efforts.
- f. Create more parks in underserved communities.
- g. Honor Tribal sovereignty and support the priorities of Federally Recognized Tribes

APPLICANT NOTIFICATION

To ensure all eligible applicants are informed of the availability of federal funding assistance, OTRD provides an active annual outreach to the public via the OTRD website, multiple social media platforms, and email notification to the Oklahoma Council of Governments. The information posted includes a description of the LWCF program, how to apply for the grant, eligibility requirements, and the most current SCORP.

PROGRAM ASSISTANCE

In addition to the instructions included in the application instructions, the OTRD Grants-in-Aid Section offers technical assistance upon request to aid applicants in the application process. Applicants are encouraged to submit their applications before the final submission deadline if they are seeking guidance for application improvement.

Deficiencies that require correction will be communicated to the local applicant to allow revisions or modifications to be made before final submission to OTRD.

PRIORITY RANKING

Oklahoma has adopted a scoring system to rank projects for funding, which uses criteria, rating factors, and points to ensure that projects funded contribute to the accomplishment of SCORP recommendations. The purpose of the Priority Rating System is to allow for a fair and equitable evaluation of all LWCF grant applications. A Project Priority Rating System is made a part of this OPSP. The Rating System has been designed to include the various elements and issues on recreation identified in the current SCORP.

Each project proposal is rated not only by the given recreation recommendations as identified in the SCORP but also by the basic merit of how the project will satisfy a local need documented through public surveys, meetings, and master plans. Each proposal must also interface needs with recreational demand and/or trends. OTRD staff identifies the suitability of each proposal in meeting the need/demand factors of location, design and recreational opportunity.

Projects must meet a minimum score of **50** to be considered for funding. Sponsor applicants whose project evaluations result in an unacceptable scoring total and are not selected for current available funding may request an application review and submit the project in the next funding cycle.

Priority Rating System

Qualifying Questions: Must meet all criteria in this section to qualify.	Yes	No
A.) Does the applicant have a history of not completing projects within a reasonable time frame, not adequately maintaining, or not resolving compliance issues in the last five years?		
B.) Does the applicant document public support for the project by including letters of support, for example, social media surveys, or a citizen signature list in support of the project?		
C.) Does the project include recreational features identified in local master plans and/or SCORP recommendations?		
D.) Does the project include at least 90% of what was asked to be placed within the application? (Budget, Scope, Narrative, 5-year Maintenance plan, etc.)		
E.) Does the project sponsor demonstrate secure funding through budget resolution, grant project agreements, letters of commitment for donations, and/or other verifiable funding statements for 50% of total project costs?		
F.) For development projects, has the project sponsor demonstrated proof of ownership through a deed or title?		
Section 1. Project Narrative	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
A.) Is the project scope, timeline, and proposed developments clearly defined and feasible?	0	5
B.) Does the project application narrative provide a clear explanation of how local citizens have had the opportunity to participate in the selections and planning for outdoor recreation acquisitions and development?	0	5
C.) Does the project scope include elements that would help to project the environment?	0	5
D.) Does the project provide a recreational opportunity not presently available, or provide additional opportunities to popular recreation activities?	0	5
E.) Does the project create partnerships at the local level?	0	5
F.) Does the project preserve or enhance a natural, cultural, and/or historic feature?	0	5
G.) Does the project include elements that would reduce or eliminate the potential for vandalism?	0	5
H.) Does the project either add or already provide lighting for nighttime use as well as daytime?	0	5
I.) Does the project include elements that would lower long-term maintenance costs or provide ease of maintenance?	0	5

J.) Does the project restore or enhance previously funded Land and Water Conservation Fund property?	0	5
Section 2. Financial Profile	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
A.) Will some of the applicants' matching funds come from private donations and/or volunteer labor?	0	5
B.) Are accessibility features included in the cost estimate?	0	5
C.) Does the application include a five-year maintenance plan with a budget?	0	5
Section 3. Property Information	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
A.) Does the project acquire property or include acquiring property that is not currently part of Oklahoma's public recreation estate?	0	10
B.) Does this project include Acquisition & Development (Great) - Renovation & Development (Good)- Development only (Fair)?	1	5
C.) Does the project sponsor clearly illustrate all ADA/ABA-compliant elements in the site development plan and relevant floor plans?	0	5
D.) Do the project location map, site map, and boundary map contain all the required information outlined in the application guide?	0	10
E.) Does the project enhance, restore, or create wetlands in conjunction with Oklahoma's protection goals?	0	10
F.) Did the project sponsor complete the required Form 10-904, with sufficient detail to clearly define the overall project narrative?	0	5
Minimum score required for consideration	50	
Total Maximum Points		115

PROJECT RATING

Qualifying Questions

All questions in this section will determine if the project qualifies for scoring or is disqualified based on the following criteria.

Question **A** reflects the applicant's history with LWCF projects. If the applicant has failed to complete LWCF projects, applied for multiple project extensions, or has failed to address maintenance or compliance issues in the last five years, the applicant may be disqualified from receiving grant priority.

Question **B** addresses the need for public support as outlined in the LWCF Manual, chapter 2, section B, subsection 3a2. If the applicant has documented public support through letters of support, social media surveys, or public signature campaigns, the applicant will be determined qualified.

Question **C** relates the applicant's proposed project to a specific section of the **SCORP** that can be found on pages **40-42**. For example, topic **#1** on page **40** states, "Maintain, upgrade, update, and enhance existing spaces/areas/facilities utilized for outdoor recreation." Additionally, under topic **#1**, the **SCORP** lists priorities ranked **HIGH** for local and state LWCF projects such as "Upgrade bathrooms." Projects can also qualify if the proposed project meets specific goals in local plans.

Question **D** determines whether the applicant has completed at least 90% of the application requirements. There are 25 checklist items that can be found on page 42 of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant Application and Guide. Applicants should have at least 23 of these criteria completed before submission.

Question **E** confirms whether the sponsor's proposed matching funds are secure. Due to increased scrutiny of federal grants, OTRD requires additional verification to ensure the sponsor can fully fund the project. Acceptable verification includes signed budget resolutions and funding statements demonstrating the sponsor's commitment to obligate funds. Additionally, sponsors using state grants or private donations must provide signed project agreements and letters of commitment from funding sources.

Question **F** is based on the 6(f)(3) regulation, which ensures that the project sponsor has ownership of the property receiving federal assistance and commits to maintaining it in perpetuity. If the property is leased, the lease must have a minimum term of 25 years remaining to be considered eligible for selection.

Section I. Project Narrative

Possible Points: 50

Question **A** assesses whether the project's scope is logical and comprehensive. The applicant should clearly outline the overall project goals in an understandable manner. Additionally, proposed developments must be reasonable based on the available funding and project timeline.

Scoring Criteria:

0 Points: No project timeline provided; developments and scope are unclear, undefined, or infeasible.

1 Point: No project timeline provided; developments and scope are feasible but not well-defined or clearly presented.

2 Points: No project timeline provided, but the project scope is well defined and feasible.

3 Points: Project timeline provided; scope and developments are feasible but lack clear definition.

4 Points: Project timeline is provided and reasonable; scope and developments are well-defined.

5 Points: Project sponsor presents a reasonable timeline with measurable goals; scope and developments are clearly defined and achievable within the project timeframe.

Question **B** awards points based on the applicant's demonstration of public participation. To earn points, the applicant must show that a public quorum was held, such as a public meeting or social media surveys regarding the proposed project. Meeting minutes should be accurately recorded, including attendance, and the applicant must verify citizen support and input. Sponsors are encouraged to use public input for the development of the overall site plan.

Scoring Criteria:

0 Points (Disqualified): No public participation documented.

1 Point: Minimal attempts at public participation; little to no public feedback recorded.

2 Points: At least one attempt to gather public input with minimal participation.

3 Points: Evidence of public support with a moderate level of response.

4 Points: Multiple efforts to collect public feedback; documented support with some project elements influenced by public input.

5 Points: Extensive public engagement, incorporating feedback from multiple sources (e.g., online surveys, public meetings, town halls, social media), with most project elements shaped by public input.

Question **C** allows project sponsors to earn points based on the project's commitment to environmental protection.

Scoring Criteria

0 Points: The project does not incorporate any environmental protection elements.

1 Point: The project includes at least one environmental protection element.

2 Points: The project includes two environmental protection elements.

3 Points: The project includes three environmental protection elements.

4 Points: The project includes four environmental protection elements.

5 Points: The entire project is designed with environmental protection as a core focus, in addition to its recreational benefits.

Examples of qualifying elements include: permeable paving, elevated trails, sustainable trail design, dark sky lighting, native plant landscaping, riparian buffers, reforestation, eco-friendly restrooms, etc.

Question **D** awards points to projects that provide recreational opportunities that are unique, rare, or of a high priority based on public input.

Scoring Criteria

0 Points: Project developments provide opportunities that are common within the community.

1 Point: The Project provides a recreational opportunity that is limited in the community.

3 Points: Project provides a recreational opportunity that is presently available in the community, but an additional opportunity is necessary due to the high demand for this amenity, as documented via ample public support.

5 Points: Project provides a unique recreational amenity that is not available to the community or surrounding areas.

Question **E** aligns with **Topic #3** on pages **41–42** of the **SCORP**. A key priority of the statewide recreation plan is to encourage projects that foster partnerships with community organizations such as the YMCA/YWCA, Boys & Girls Clubs, Oklahoma Recreation and Park Society, and the Oklahoma Municipal League. These partnerships help maximize opportunities for citizens to participate in outdoor recreation.

Scoring Criteria:

0 Points: The project does not establish any local partnerships.

3 Points: The project establishes at least one local partnership.

5 Points: The project establishes multiple local partnerships.

Question **F** awards points if the project demonstrates a way to preserve or enhance a natural, cultural, and/or historic feature. For example, if the project provides signage offering information about a historical feature at the project site, it may be awarded priority points.

Scoring Criteria

0 Points: Project does not preserve or enhance a natural, cultural, or historic feature.

3 Points: Project preserves or enhances at least 1 natural, cultural, or historic feature.

5 Points: Project preserves or enhances more than 1 natural, cultural, or historic feature.

Question **G** evaluates whether the applicant has considered the risk of vandalism at the project site and taken steps to prevent or mitigate its impact through design or restoration efforts.

Scoring Criteria

0 Points: The project does not include any features to reduce or prevent vandalism.

3 Points: The project incorporates at least one element aimed at reducing or preventing vandalism.

5 Points: The project includes multiple elements designed to significantly reduce or eliminate the potential for vandalism.

Examples of qualifying elements include: Security features, lighting, strategic facility placement, anti-graffiti coating, vandal-resistant materials, etc.

Question **H** awards points based on the inclusion of lighting to enhance nighttime use of the project area, in alignment with the SCORP. Specific goals for lighting and safety features can be found in **Topic #4** on page **42** of the **SCORP**.

Scoring Criteria

0 Points: The project site does not currently have lighting, and the proposed developments do not include lighting.

3 Points: The project site already has lighting for nighttime use.

5 Points: The project site already has lighting, and the proposed developments include additional lighting for nighttime use.

Question **I** awards points based on whether the project includes elements designed to ease maintenance and reduce long-term costs. Features such as durable construction materials and minimalistic design can help lower upkeep expenses over time.

Scoring Criteria:

0 Points: The project does not include any elements that reduce maintenance costs.

3 Points: The project includes at least one element aimed at reducing long-term maintenance costs.

5 Points: The project includes multiple elements that contribute to reducing long-term maintenance costs.

Examples of qualifying elements include: artificial turf to minimize mowing, automated watering systems for landscaping, community partnerships for volunteer maintenance, crushed stone or stabilized gravel trails, digital or QR code-based signage, and self-closing trash/recycling bins.

Question **J** awards points to project sponsors who prioritize sites that have previously received LWCF assistance. This encourages the long-term stewardship of LWCF sites, helping to expand and preserve Oklahoma's outdoor recreation resources for future generations.

Scoring Criteria

0 Points: The project site is not located at a previously funded LWCF site.

3 Points: The project restores or adds elements to an existing LWCF property.

5 Points: The project restores old amenities, adds new amenities, or increases the acreage of an existing LWCF site.

Section II. Financial Profile

Possible Points: 20

Question **A** awards points if the applicant has demonstrated they have garnered volunteer or private donor support for the proposed project. Criteria for the valuation of volunteer services and donations can be found in the LWCF manual, Chapter 5, Section B, subsection 2a-h.

Scoring Criteria

0 Points: No private donations or volunteer labor.

1 Point: Less than 10% of matching funds come from private donations or volunteer labor.

2 Points: 10-20% of matching funds come from private donations or volunteer labor.

3 Points: 20-30% of matching funds from private donations or volunteer labor.

4 Points: 30-40% of matching funds from private donations or volunteer labor.

5 Points: More than 40% of matching funds come from private donations or volunteer labor.

Note: Does not include funds from other grants or state agencies

Question **B** awards points if the project includes accessibility features in the cost estimate and site map. The purpose of question D stems from topics #1 and 4 of the **SCORP** page 40-42 regarding enhanced accessibility so that citizens of all abilities can participate in outdoor recreation.

Question **C** awards points if the project sponsor has provided a detailed 5-year maintenance plan with a budget.

Scoring Criteria

0 Points: No maintenance plan provided.

1 Point: Maintenance plan is included, but the project sponsor does not provide a budget.

5 Points: Project sponsor includes a detailed maintenance plan with a budget.

Question **D** aims to minimize or eliminate the need for amending project agreements due to additional costs. Given the limited federal staff, it's crucial to ensure that cost estimates are as accurate as possible. Projects with verified, accurate cost estimates will be prioritized.

Scoring Criteria:

0 Points: The project sponsor does not provide evidence of a reasonable cost estimate.

5 Points: The project sponsor provides evidence from a professional (e.g., engineer or construction project manager) verifying the validity of the cost estimate.

Section III. Property Information

Possible Points: 45

Question **A** awards 10 points if the project involves the acquisition of property that is not currently part of Oklahoma's public recreation estate. Question **A** comes from topic #2 of the **SCORP** page 41, as the acquisition of new public land has been determined as a high priority.

Question **B** evaluates the scope of the project regarding acquisition, development, and renovation. If the project scope involves both the acquisition and development of public land, 5 points will be awarded. If the Scope of the project involves the renovation or development of existing public land, 3 points will be awarded. If the goal of the project is to simply develop existing public estate, 1 point will be awarded.

Question **C** awards 5 points if the project clearly defines and illustrates all ADA/ABA compliant elements in the site development plan and relevant floor plans.

Question **D** awards up to 10 points based on the project sponsor's ability to follow the guidelines in the application guide for developing the project site map, boundary map, and location map as outlined on page 15 of the guide.

Scoring Criteria

0 Points: The site map, location map, and boundary map lack sufficient information to define the project scope and do not follow the guidelines.

2 Points: All maps contain less than 50% of the required information as outlined in the application guide.

4 Points: All maps contain 50-60% of the required information.

6 Points: All maps contain 60-70% of the required information.

8 Points: All maps contain 80-90% of the required information, requiring only minor modifications before submission to NPS.

10 Points: The site map, boundary map, and location map meet all required content criteria, making them ready for submission to NPS.

Question **E** directly relates to the prioritization of projects that protect, enhance, or restore wetlands, as defined in the **SCORP** on pages 12 and 13. Up to ten priority points will be awarded to projects that directly preserve wetlands identified in the US Fish and Wildlife Service wetlands mapping tool.

Scoring Criteria

0 Points: Project has no positive effect on Oklahoma wetlands.

5 Points: Project has a tangible net positive effect on Oklahoma wetlands.

10 Points: Project directly restores or preserves Oklahoma wetlands with no detrimental effects.

Question **F** awards points based on the level of detail and completeness of the Form 10-98a provided in the application guide, as part of the application process.

Scoring Criteria

0 Points: The form is incomplete or lacks significant detail.

3 Points: The form is complete, with most questions answered with sufficient detail.

5 Points: The form is complete, with well-written answers and excellent detail.

PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

Following review, scoring, and evaluation of all eligible applications using the project priority ranking system, the Grants Staff of the Tourism and Recreation Department will submit selected projects to the OTRD Executive Director for formal consideration and approval. Once approved, project sponsors will be notified via email that they have been tentatively selected, and OTRD will initiate the Section 106 and NEPA review. Project sponsors will be required to complete a notification of intent (NOI) that OTRD will distribute to relevant agencies, such as the State Historic Preservation Office, Oklahoma Archeological Society, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. After these agencies have evaluated the projects, NPS will consult with relevant Tribal Historic Preservation Offices. Project sponsors will at no point initiate contact with reviewing agencies or tribal offices. **All correspondence will remain between OTRD and the Project Sponsor.** A breach in this conduct may result in disqualification from the grant program. Please note that the section 106 and NEPA review process may take 120 days or more to complete.

FEDERAL REVIEW

When projects have cleared Section 106/NEPA reviews, the State Liaison Officer will submit the projects to the National Park Service, which will render the final decision on approval of all grants funded under the LWCF program. When a formal project agreement has been executed by the NPS, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, and the project sponsor shall enter into a project agreement which stipulates the responsibilities of each concerning grant administration.

DUAL SELECTION PROCESS

Under the allowable guidelines contained in Chapter 2 B. 3b of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Manual, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department elects to exclude its Division of State Parks, Resorts, and Golf from direct project selection competition with local community program applicants. This election is based on the fact

that the State Parks system serves a multi-regional and interstate recreational constituency and is comprised of multiple distinct parks and recreation areas. There exists a continuing annual need for LWCF support funding to accommodate the heavy demand for recreational development within the State Parks system. The State Parks capital improvement program is based upon an eight-year plan that addresses the more critical demands for recreational development reflected by use, renovation needs, facilities replacement, and recreationists' preferences. The eight-year capital development plan receives its financial support from annual legislative appropriations, plus the "leverage" provided by the Land and Water Conservation Fund and other federal funding programs. The capital improvement program is the integral annual selection portion of the capital development plan (the 8-year document). Annually funded state projects are listed (after the selection process) as priorities within the capital improvements program. The 8-year plan priorities may be realigned based on factors of need, critical condition, recreational use, and demand, etc. The project selection process for the State Parks' needs is based on an "internal" competition among its various operating units. The department is responsible for developing an eight-year plan, and projects that qualify for LWCF funding will be selected. Cost overruns may be addressed at any time during project development and finalization.