



Nature in the City Grants Step by Step Application Guide

Dream it Up: Planning Grant Application Process

Thank you for your interest in the Nature in the City Grants program. Nature in the City (NIC) seeks to connect Fort Collins residents to nature while also protecting and enhancing habitat for native plants and animals. This document provides step by step guidance to the grant application process. We recommend you read the full document before beginning the application process. You can find a “Key Terms and Definitions” glossary included on the final pages of this document.

The Nature in the City Grants program supports projects that create or improve natural spaces in your neighborhood and community. Projects within the Fort Collins City Limits and the [Growth Management Area](#) are eligible and encouraged to apply. Top priorities for funding will be projects that demonstrate strong alignment with the Nature in the City program goals.

Planning Grants are intended for projects that need support during the idea phase, meaning that assessments, designs, and community outreach have not yet been completed. Funds can be used towards planning a project to be installed later. Up to 15% of your grant funds can go towards funding staff and outreach costs, collectively. Funds cannot be used for programming, events, or on-going maintenance due to Nature in the City’s funding source ([Community Capital Improvement Program](#)).

Review the Frequently Asked Questions on our [website](#) to see if you think your project is a good fit.

Grant Application Process

Proposals for project funding must be submitted through the [grant application portal](#) between **September 1, 2024 and 11:59 PM on October 20, 2024**.

- **Application** – Questions ask for detailed responses outlining the vision, plans for, and intended impact of your project. The application is divided into four categories: Administrative Questions, General Questions, Funding Questions, and Attachments.
- **Required Attachments** – In order to complete the application process, you will be required to submit supporting documentation including:
 - Project budget worksheet (budget template provided)
 - Photos of your potential site
 - A drawing of your initial concepts (an example provided).

Applications will be reviewed by the Grant Review Committee in November with awardees announced in mid-December 2024. All grant recipients will be required to submit a final design and report upon completion of their planning project.

Nature in the City Program Goals

Nature in the City’s vision is a connected open space network accessible to the entire community that provides a variety of experiences and functional habitat for people, plants, and wildlife. The grants program seeks projects that help achieve one or more Nature in the City program goals:

- **CONNECTIVITY** across high quality natural spaces through enhancement of urban lands that provide diverse social and ecological opportunities.



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- ACCESS to nature by ensuring every resident can easily experience nature from they live, work and play.
- STEWARDSHIP of the naturalized landscape by shifting the urban landscape aesthetic to more diverse forms that support healthy environments for people and wildlife.

You can learn more about NIC goals in the [Strategic Plan](#).

Funding Available for 2025

Dream it Up: Planning Grants

Planning Grants will be awarded for planning projects that improve urban habitat and connect people to nature. Planning grants are a good fit for projects that need initial support for early outcomes including setting project priorities through community engagement and meetings, work with a landscape designer to draft a landscape plan, or work through the City's minor amendment process. Planning grants provide up to \$7,500 to specifically support these early project efforts. Projects that receive planning grants are eligible to apply for a Make it Happen: Implement Grant in the fall of 2025 to be funded in 2026. However, receipt of a planning grant does not guarantee future NIC funding.

Residential Projects

Note, Nature in the City supports individual residential projects through the [Xeriscape Incentive Program](#) and encourages you to participate in that program if you want to do a project on an individual lot. As such, Nature in the City Grants will not supporting individual residential properties (i.e. front or backyard conversions).

Implementation Projects

Nature in the City is not accepting implementation grant applications this cycle; these will be offered in the fall of 2025 for funding in 2026. Implementation Grants are intended for projects that are "shovel ready", meaning that plans, designs, community outreach has been completed and the project is ready to be installed.

Application Guidance

Please reference the following guidance to help answer any questions you have while working through the grant application process. Please note that "proposed project" refers to the project you want to implement after the "planning phase". The "planning phase" is what you are requesting funds for in the application. If you need additional assistance during the grant application process, please contact [Nature in the City](#) staff. Please note, staff will reply to your inquiry within 3 business days.

1. **Start the grant application process** by accessing the [Nature in the City Grants portal](#). If you have previously applied for a grant using the ZoomGrants site (i.e. Nature in the City Grants, XIP Grants for HOAs and Commercial Properties) please login using your existing account information. If this is the first time you have applied for a grant using ZoomGrants you will need to create a new account.
2. **Navigate around the application site** (screenshot below) by beginning with the **Apply Now/Start an Application** button on the middle, right side of the first screen. After you've started your application, you can navigate through the different steps using either the tabs on the left side of



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this main screen for **Summary, Application Questions, and Required Attachments** or after completing one section, navigate to the next section by clicking Next at the bottom of the page.

A screenshot of the application interface for the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department. The page title is "2021 NIC Dream it Up: Planning Grants" and it shows a "CLOSED Deadline 11/2/2020" status. The "Applicant View" section includes a navigation menu with "Summary", "Application Questions", and "Documents" tabs. The "Summary" tab is highlighted in yellow. Below the navigation, there is a "Use Report Tab ->" button and "Report" and "Report Totals" buttons. A red circle highlights the "Application Status: Not Submitted" and "Apply Now/Start Application" button. The "Summary" section contains form fields for "Project Name", "Amount Requested" (with a "Max. \$5,000 request" note), "Applicant Information" (with "First Name" and "Last Name" fields), and a note that "answers are saved automatically when you move to another field".

3. **Summary** information provides basic background information about you and your organization. Please include email addresses for all on your team who you wish to receive communications about the grant review process.
4. **Legal Agreement** will need to be signed and executed upon award of grant funding. Please review the sample [Nature in the City Grant Agreement](#) and confirm that you and/or your organization will be able to enter into such an agreement with the City of Fort Collins.
 - a. If you are representing a school in the **Poudre School District (PSD)**, please contact PSD Facilities Services to discuss and get approval for your project. PSD schools awarded grant funding will fall under an umbrella agreement between PSD and the City of Fort Collins, and **will need to be signed by PSD Facilities Service Staff**.
5. **Application questions** are broken into themes as explained in the following instruction steps. Application questions and an example application can be accessed here if you'd like to preview it prior to setting up an account. [Application Questions](#) and [Example Application](#).
6. **Administrative Questions** help us determine if we can legally support your project. All projects must be within the City of Fort Collins [Growth Management Area](#) and need to be supported by the property owner. Successful applicants will need the property owner to sign a legal agreement with the City of Fort Collins for funds to be distributed.
7. **General Questions** will help provide an overview of your project and the intended impact. In our experience, having a strong project team is a key to success. In addition, we want to know how your project will support NIC objectives and goals (listed in the previous section). Finally, starting to think early about what your challenges might be moving forward, will help you overcome them down the road.



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- Funding Questions** will clarify your expected costs and funding sources. We recommend completing the [budget worksheet](#) before answering questions 11 & 12. Funding Questions should also identify other sources of funding if applicable. Matching funds are not required, however, projects that leverage additional contributions score higher on the evaluation. Receiving funds from other programs, (including these City programs: [Xeriscape Incentive Program](#), or [Utilities Water Allotment Management Program](#)), is allowed and viewed as a positive.
- Required Attachments** must be complete and uploaded before submitting your application, including the budget worksheet, project site photos, and concept plan. Please download and use the provided template for your budget. There is also an example concept plan you can download and view. Your landscape plan and project site photos must be uploaded as either a PDF or JPEG.

Budget worksheet (template provided) must detail all anticipated expenses related to completing your planning project. Each item should include a quick description (column A), the anticipated total cost (column B), the amount requested from the grant (column C), and funding from other sources (column D). [Example budget](#).

As a reminder, NIC Grants cannot be used for overhead or maintenance costs. However, 15% of your grant funds can go towards funding staff and outreach costs, collectively. Also, while a specific percentage of the project budget does not need to be matched by other funding sources, we encourage applicants to identify and reflect additional funding sources in the total project budget. Staff time and sweat equity count as match.

Concept plan – illustration of the project space with a conceptual sketch of your proposed project. This can be a first draft sketch of preliminary ideas, both electronic and hand drawn will be accepted. It does not need to be detailed and can change during the planning phase. The concept plan should convey that you have some ideas about what you want to do and the space you have to work with. Please view the example provided [here](#) or on the ZoomGrants platform for a sense of the level of detail requested.

Potential Outcomes of a Planning Grant

A planning grant might result in a professional, community-approved native plant landscape plan. Some other examples of planning grant outcomes include:

- Construction ready documents, plant list and project budget for your proposed project
- Community survey to help you understand the wants and needs of your community in regard to an outdoor space to connect with nature
- A feasibility study that explores the possibility and costs of different options
- Completion of a minor amendment
- An irrigation plan for your project

Expectations if Awarded a Grant

If you are awarded a grant, the next steps will include:

- An initial meeting to review the project agreement and sign it.
- You will receive a portion of your grant funds after all signatures and forms are complete.



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- Up to three meetings with NIC staff including at least one site visit.
- After all final documents (receipts and project evaluation report) are received, you will receive the final portion of your funding.

Key Terms and Definitions

Biodiversity – quantifiable measure of the variety of life in a habitat or ecosystem.

Hardscape – the rock or man-made features in the landscape such as gravel, boulders, pavers, walls, paths, etc.

Landscape plan – a technical drawing that details the natural elements like flowers, trees, and grass as well as hardscapes and built structures. The plan should have a scale, north arrow, plant list, and estimated square footage of project.

Minor Amendment – changes to a property's approved landscape plan must receive a Minor Amendment before the beginning of a project. This process ensures the proposed landscape and irrigation plan changes are reviewed by the appropriate City staff and conform to City codes. For questions about whether or not your project will need a [Minor Amendment](#), please email [Zoning](#) or call 970.416.2745.

Native species – plants or animals that have evolved with the Colorado ecosystem over a long period of time and formed essential and complex relationships with other species and the physical environment.

Nature – places that support plants, animals, and natural processes.

Natural Area – land acquired by the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department that provides residents access to open space and protects important habitat.

Natural space – public or private land that provides residents access to nature and creates important habitat for diverse plants and animals.

Project budget – total cost to complete the project outlined in the landscape plan; this should include all expenses you hope will be covered by a Nature in the City Grant, as well as those expenses that will be funded through other sources.

Sweat equity – the value of volunteer labor contributed to the completion of your project.