

## Funding Opportunities for Vacant Lots

Transforming a vacant lot into something useable, affordable and open to everyone can have a compelling impact on the health and vibrancy of a community. Organizations and community members take on an essential role as stewards of the community to foster new, environmentally friendly spaces for everyone to enjoy.

Projects that seek to develop vacant lots require two levels of funding: 1) Project Funds and 2) Maintenance Funds.

1. **Project Funds** are one-time funding sources that provide financial or in-kind support for a project. These funds support materials and staff to implement or develop the project.
2. **Maintenance Funds** are ongoing, stable funds that provide the organization with financial support for maintaining the project. Gas for equipment, staff, new materials are examples of items that require continual funding

As a community organization, a variety of funding sources will help fulfill project goals. The following provides information about potential funding sources for vacant lot projects in the community. This is not a comprehensive list. Other grant opportunities may be available in your area. By following the links, online readers can explore funding options further.

## Grants

Grants make funding available for a specific purpose. Some grants are available for projects that protect or enhance quality of life for community members. Other grants are available for projects that protect or enhance natural resources.

The most important thing you can do when writing a grant is to do your research. The more you know about the organization you are applying to, the better you will be able to explain how your project will help them fulfill their mission and goals. Reaching out to a staff member to gain insight about the organization will help identify where your project and their mission align. Then be sure to bring that out in the application. The staff member may also be able to speak to new or arising interests the organization may have that could give an added boost to your application.

## Federal Grants

### Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Entitlement Program | \$10,000 - \$750,000

The [CDBG Entitlement Program](#) provides entitled communities with resources to develop viable urban communities that include decent housing, a suitable living environment, and economic opportunities. Activities must meet national objectives. Funds may be used for property acquisition, construction or improvement of public facilities (water, wastewater, streets, etc.) CDBG projects are encouraged to incorporate green infrastructure into design and construction.

#### CASE STUDY

##### Youngstown, Ohio

Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation (YNDC) partnered with the City of Youngstown and the Raymond John Wean Foundation to implement a vacant lot reuse strategy in neighborhoods across the City. Community gardens, native plants and side-yard expansions were some of the funded projects.

Funding is provided through Community Development Block Grants.

YNDC, public contractors and residents perform maintenance and repairs.

YNDC's [2014 Impact Statement](#) provides overviews of their many projects.

### Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Urban Waters Small Grants | \$60,000

The EPA [Urban Waters Program](#) is helping grow local businesses and enhancing educational, recreational, social, and employment opportunities by investing in healthy and accessible urban waters. Funds community engagement, education, restoration projects, studies, planning and citizen science.

Environmental Justice Small Grants | \$30,000

The EPA provides [Environmental Justice Small Grant](#) funding to community organizations and tribes to build partnerships and to work on projects to address environmental and/or public health issues in their community using the "Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Model." Funds partnership building, public education, demonstration projects, and planning for local environmental or public health issues. Healthy watershed opportunities presented by Environmental Justice Small Grants are projects that engage the community around flood risk or water quality including sampling, stormwater, green infrastructure, emergency preparedness, disaster resiliency, environmental job training and youth development.

## National Park Service (NPS)

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) | Max \$250,000

The [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#) is intended to create and maintain high-quality outdoor recreation areas. Funds are available to cities, counties and school districts. Project require a 50% match and must be maintain in perpetuity for public outdoor recreational purposes. Funding is available for picnic areas, playgrounds, trails, etc.

## Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)

Recreational Trails Program (RTP) | Max \$250,000

The [Recreational Trails Program](#) provides funding to local and state governments, school districts and for-profit and non-profit organizations for the purpose of creating and promoting recreational trails. Eligible projects include new recreational trails, maintenance of existing recreational trails, acquiring land for recreational trails and purchasing/leasing equipment for trail maintenance equipment. Recipients must contribute a minimum 20% match and the project must be open to the public.

## CASE STUDY

### Cleveland, Ohio

The Cleveland Botanical Garden (CBG) is engaged in vacant lot greening, such as Green Corps and Vacant to Vibrant programs. Various vacant lots were leveled and native gardens and low mow meadows were planted.

Funding was provided through the US EPA Urban Waters Small Grant, the Northeast Ohio Regional sewer district, the Cleveland Cuyahoga County Port Authority, and the Ingalls Foundation.

Partnerships included CBG, local, state, and federal partners, the Slavic Village Department and the local community.

## State Grants & Programs

### Missouri Department of Conservation

Community Conservation Cost Share | \$15,000, plus more if population is over 100,000  
[MDC's Community Conservation Cost Share program](#) promotes sustainable development practices and the establishment of natural resource conservation practices in urban and developing areas. Funding may go toward urban green space planning, engineering, native prairie restorations, forest management, invasive species control, and more. Local governments, schools and nonprofits are eligible.

Tree Resource Improvement and Maintenance (TRIM) Grant | \$1,000 - \$25,000  
The [TRIM program](#) is designed to help Missouri communities initiate and improve their efforts to care for publicly owned trees. State and local governments, nonprofits and schools are eligible for projects that include tree projects on publicly owned land – tree planting, care, inventory, plan development, removal or pruning, volunteer and staff training and outreach.

### Missouri Department of Agriculture

Urban Agriculture Matching Grant Program | \$7,500  
The [Urban Agriculture Matching Grant Program](#) awards grants for reimbursement of expenses associated with urban agriculture. Urban agriculture can include introducing a new crop or project to an area, expanding the use of agricultural projects and other urban agricultural programs. Funds are available to develop small agribusinesses and implement production infrastructure, provide training, and develop skills for agricultural business sustainability.

### Missouri Department of Economic Development

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) | \$10,000 - \$750,000  
HUD provides funds through [The State of Missouri's Community Development Block Grant](#) to help communities with resources to address a wide range of community development needs in unique ways that fit each community. CDBG strives to ensure affordable and safe housing, provide services to the most vulnerable in each community, and create jobs. Most CDBG projects present opportunities to incorporate healthy watershed projects like floodplain restoration, open-space preservation, bioretention and other green infrastructure.

## Non-Governmental Organization Grants & Programs

### Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation (MCHF)

Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation | \$500 - \$5,000

The [Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation](#) provides funding for projects that meet conservation and outdoor recreation goals of the organization. Funds projects which promote conservation including species and

### National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)

Monarch Butterfly and Pollinators Conservation Fund | \$50,000 - \$300,000

The [Monarch Butterfly and Pollinators Conservation Fund](#) supports projects that benefit monarch butterflies and one or more federally listed, candidate or proposed native insect pollinator species. Funded projects included floodplain or wetland restoration, removal of invasive species, restoration planning/design/permitting and bioretention.

Five-Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grants | \$20,000 - \$50,000

[Five-Star Grants](#) focus on stewardship and restoration of wetland and riparian ecosystems. Local and state governments, tribal governments, nonprofits and universities/colleges are eligible to apply. Funding priorities include habitat restoration, meaningful education, measurable benefits and partnerships.

### Wells Fargo & NFWF

Resilient Communities Program | \$200,000 - \$500,000

Wells Fargo and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation have partnered to provide [Resilient Communities](#) funding to help communities: prepare for future impacts of sea-level rise, sustain water quality and quantity, and enhance forest conservation. Local governments, nonprofits and tribes are eligible. Funding can cover green infrastructure, bioretention, urban tree canopy, invasive species management, stream buffer enhancements and more.

### The Scherman Foundation Fund

Rosin Funds' Environment Program | \$100,000 - \$250,000

The Scherman Foundation provides grant funds to nonprofit organizations, through the Rosin Funds' [Environmental Program](#), for innovative projects that have a transformative impact on a critical environmental issue. Nonprofits are eligible to apply with innovative, short-term and high-impact projects, including green infrastructure and open space, that address critical environmental issues.

## Walmart Foundation

Walmart Community Grant | \$250 - \$5,000

The [Walmart Community Grant](#) awards funds to non-profit organizations, churches or other faith-based organization, educational institutions, and government entities in various areas of community development and enrichment, specifically in low-income, underserved communities. Areas of focus include public safety, community and economic development, environmental sustainability, etc.

## Lowe's Foundation

Lowe's Small Grants Program

The [Lowe's Small Grants Program](#) awards funds for small projects for non-educational organizations. Lowe's also has a variety of other grant programs for sustainability projects, education, and community partnerships. Currently, the application process is invitation only. Contact your local Lowe's to begin the process.

## US Bank

US Bank Community Possible Grant Program

The [US Bank Community Possible Grant Program](#) awards funds to non-profit organizations that align with US Bank's focus areas. The Home and Play focus areas emphasize neighborhood stability and revitalization and arts, culture, and play areas. There are 3 possible funding programs: program/project grants, operating grants and capital grants. Each has specific guidelines for eligibility.

## Greening Forward

Greening Forward Grant Program

[Greening Forward](#) provides financial assistance to youth and youth groups associated with schools or nonprofit organizations that seek to propose a new project or enhance an existing project that focuses on the environment in their community. Community beautification, environmental education, green space creation, urban farming, etc. are eligible activities. Applicants must be between the ages of 5-25.

## Wild Ones

Seeds for Education (SFE) | \$100-\$500

Wild Ones' [Seeds for Education](#) grant program provides funds to school groups, nature center or youth group to develop a native garden. The funds are for native plants and seeds for outdoor areas. Areas can include a pollinator garden, rain garden, native plant monarch garden, etc. Education must be an element of the program.

## Scott's Miracle-Gro

Variety | Various

[Scott's Miracle-Gro Social Commitment](#) provides a variety of funding for schools, youth groups, nature centers and other non-profit organizations. Community gardens, education spaces, community beautification and more have opportunities to receive funding. Visit each opportunity for more information.

## Public – Private Partnership

Public-Private Partnership | variety

A Public-Private Partnership allows businesses to fund public projects that help them meet their social or environmental goals to ensure a future that is financially sustainable. Eligible projects include planning, development, construction, acquisition, operation as well as a full range of healthy watershed activities. There are also "[project banks](#)" that allow communities to advertise projects to potential private partners for funding.

### CASE STUDY

#### Grand Rapids, Michigan

A parking lot, owned by Kent County, was converted into a 2.3 acre public park that features native plants, low mow ground cover, a rain garden and 37 trees.

The City of Grand Rapids partnered with the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks, Heritage Hill Neighborhood Association, South Hill Neighborhood Association and Residents

Funds were provided by federal, state, and local government sources as well as fundraising through neighborhood associations and the creation of a special assessment district.

## Revenue that Builds a Dedicated Funding Source

The development of a dedicated vacant lot project fund provides a secure funding source for planned projects, operations, maintenance, and could be a useful source to leverage local matching funds. There are several methods that can be used to develop the capital for a dedicated project fund. Community organizers can work with elected officials to develop these funds for the future needs of the project.

### Community Improvement District

A [Community Improvement District](#) is a special purpose district whose property owners voluntarily tax themselves to fund public improvements or services to support the community and promote economic development. This allows local residents to obtain the expanded services they want at a price they are willing to pay.

### Neighborhood Improvement District

A [Neighborhood Improvement District](#) is a special taxing district whose property owners voluntarily tax themselves to fund public improvements or services to support the community. Eligible improvements include stormwater projects, engineering, gutters, parks, property acquisition, sidewalks, signage and more.

### On-Bill Donations

On-Bill Donations are voluntary payments from utility customers to a dedicated fund, foundation or trust that uses funds for specified projects. When implementing this type of program, be sure to show your community how these donations help to meet your community or utility's mission. Basic level-of-service should be funded by rates, fees and taxes – no donations.

## Materials and Services Resources

Communities can also access technical assistance, materials and other services that could help implement ecofriendly projects more cost effectively and with more input from experts. These resources could also help leverage other types of funding, and act as match.

### Technical Assistance

Greening America's Communities – technical assistance

Each year, through the [Greening America's Communities](#) program, the EPA helps 3-4 cities and towns develop an implementable vision of environmentally friendly neighborhoods that incorporate innovative green infrastructure and other sustainable design strategies. Local governments, cities, counties and nonprofits partnering with a city or county are eligible to apply.

Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program – technical assistance

The National Parks Service's [River, Trails and Conservation Assistance](#) program supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the nation by providing a wide range of services and skills. Projects that may align with healthy watershed opportunities are: improved access to outdoor recreation and parks; conservation and stewardship of public lands, waterways and wildlife habitat; connecting young people to the outdoors; and strengthening community partnerships.

Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities – technical assistance

Each year, through the [Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities](#) program, the EPA provides technical assistance to a few communities, delivered by a team of experts, with experience in an area of need, that helps to address the threats of natural disasters. The experts provide tools and guidance to the community in order to protect the people, economy and quality of life in the community.

### Materials

Forest ReLeaf of Missouri Grants | Trees

[Forest ReLeaf of Missouri](#) provides trees to communities in order to restore and sustain urban forests. The Priority ReLeaf program can fund up to 300 trees per season (spring and fall) and provides trees post-disaster. With the help of thousands of volunteers, Forest ReLeaf has planted over 200,000 trees throughout Missouri and Illinois, improving thousands of communities.

Home Depot Community Impact Grants | up to \$5,000

[Home Depot Community Impact Grants](#) are awarded to non-profit organizations and government-funded organizations in the form of Home Depot gift cards for the purchase of tools, materials or services. The project must be completed within 6 months of approval. The grants have a focus on impacting veterans or other underserved populations.

## Other

Campus RainWorks Challenge – outreach, education, demonstration

The [Campus RainWorks Challenge](#) is a green infrastructure design competition, through the EPA, for colleges and universities. Student groups can develop a plan for a green infrastructure project or implement a demonstration project. Working with a local college or university is a positive and fun way to educate and engage the community.