

Know Before You GOCO

LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM GUIDANCE

Welcome! We're so glad you're here. Please read the following information carefully for the best chance at GOCO funding. Contact your GOCO program officer with any questions.

The Land Acquisition Program supports land conservation projects that protect natural resources and wildlife habitat and/or migration corridors, connect to adjacent landscapes, enhance climate resilience, strengthen local economies, and provide scenic views and public outdoor access. This includes unique open spaces, natural areas, and agricultural lands with significant conservation values.

Priority will go to lands facing urgent threats, such as a significant land use change or other factors that will impair a property's conservation or community values. In addition, GOCO prioritizes fee simple land acquisitions with public access and considers conservation easements when tax credits are financially insufficient or impractical.

Grant Awards and Loans

Competitive proposals are generally up to \$3 million per project. However, GOCO may consider more significant investments in high-impact projects when funding is available. We may suggest a revised request amount, as needed. GOCO loans and reimbursement opportunities may also be available to support acquisitions.

Timeline

1-3 years for project completion, with flexibility based on deliverables

Grant Process

- 1) Explore grant programs and requirements.
- 2) Contact your program officer and develop a concept. (3+ months)
- 3) Submit a concept paper.
- 4) If invited, submit an application.
- 5) If awarded, complete your project.
- 6) Submit final documentation for funding reimbursement.

Note that some projects may experience several rounds of feedback from GOCO staff prior to and during concept paper submission. Once a concept paper is submitted, award decisions are announced six months later at a GOCO board meeting.

Eligibility

Eligible Organizations

- Colorado cities, towns, and counties
- Title 32 special districts eligible to receive Conservation Trust Fund distributions
- Land conservation organizations that support open space and natural area acquisitions
- Political subdivisions of the State of Colorado whose missions are to identify, manage, or acquire open space and natural areas
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Eligible Grant Expenses

- Land acquisition costs at fair market value
- Transaction and due diligence costs, including staff time and capacity needed to complete the acquisition
- Site specific master and management plans, including community planning and engagement
- Immediate habitat restoration opportunities that protect or enhance ecological function on the acquired property, or immediate recreation asset development
- Up to 50% of the value of a conservation easement (this does not apply to fee simple acquisitions)

The following expenses **will not** be covered:

- Acquisition costs associated with existing buildings and other structures
- Project contingency

This list is not exhaustive. Contact your GOCO program officer to confirm eligible expenses.

Loan Opportunity

Under certain circumstances and based on funding availability, GOCO may offer limited low- and no-interest loans to support complex land conservation projects that demonstrate significant financial need and cannot move forward without short-term financing.

Match Requirements

GOCO does not have a set match requirement for our funding opportunities, though competitive proposals often reflect strategic project partnerships, resources, and complementary funding sources. Your program officer can also provide guidance. Match can include the donative component and conservation easement tax credit. Your program officer can provide additional guidance regarding match.

Payment & Reimbursement

GOCO prefers to disburse funds for the acquisition and its transaction costs as a single payment at closing. For any additional project components, grantees may request one progress payment of up to 75% of the grant amount prior to project completion with the remaining 25% paid upon project completion. If this approach creates a barrier to completing your project, contact the GOCO grants officer to discuss alternatives, including advanced and partial payments.

Other Requirements

Property Ownership

Applicants seeking funding for projects involving federal land must discuss the proposal with GOCO staff prior to submitting a concept paper or application. GOCO cannot participate in property acquisitions involving condemnation or the threat of condemnation.

Timeline for Completion

Due diligence review will take a minimum of 60 days following the grant award notice. Multi-parcel transactions or other factors may lengthen the timeline.

Land Acquisition Procedures and Conservation Easement

Prior to submitting a concept paper, applicants and landowners should review the [forms and guidance documents](#) for the Land Acquisition Program. This includes GOCO's [Appraisal Guidelines](#) and [Land Acquisition Procedures](#) for the due diligence documentation required before funds will be released.

GOCO recommends applicants and landowners review GOCO's Model Conservation Easement, prior to submitting an application. Applicants seeking funding for a fee title acquisition must discuss their plan to protect the property from present and future development with their GOCO regional program officer.

Wildlife Review

Applicants will work with their GOCO regional program officer and the local Colorado Parks & Wildlife Area Wildlife Manager (AWM) to understand, document, and mitigate any impacts to wildlife habitat. Projects invited to the application phase will be required to submit the wildlife review form. Please contact the AWM well in advance of the application deadline.

How Proposals are Assessed

Alignment with GOCO's Program Values

- *Resource conservation* – We value strategic land conservation and resource protection work.
- *Outdoor stewardship* – We support sustainability of and improvements to the state's natural and recreational resources.
- *Community vitality* – We invest in conservation and outdoor recreation efforts that support communities and quality of life.
- *Equitable access* – We partner with communities to break down barriers to the outdoors.
- *Youth connections* – We believe children and their families deserve opportunities to get outside and experience all the benefits of doing so.

Additional Considerations

- *Urgency* – Priority goes to projects with significant natural resources and community benefits under threat of conversion, or projects that address time-sensitive issues. The applicant has undertaken negotiations with the landowner, with purchase of property rights occurring in the near future.
- *Need* – We consider funding conservation easements where tax credits are financially insufficient or impractical. Priority goes to projects that will benefit most from GOCO funding, whether there are few other funding options or GOCO's contribution will help leverage a match from another organization or the community. We aim to equitably distribute funding throughout the state. We also consider the scale of impact relative to GOCO's investment.
- *Outcomes* – We consider how projects provide or protect passive public recreation access; essential wildlife habitat and migration corridors; critical watersheds, waterways, and riparian ecosystems; scenic viewsheds and greenways; cultural resources; and new parks and open spaces benefiting disproportionately impacted communities. Priority goes to fee simple land acquisitions that provide public access. Where possible, projects should consider community-centered approaches where residents and partners are represented and meaningfully involved.
- *Advancing relevant plans and resources* – We consider how projects align with local, regional, or statewide efforts such as the Keep it Colorado Conserving Colorado Roadmap, CPW State Wildlife Action Plan, TNC Resilient and Connected Network, Colorado's Outdoors Strategy, Regional Partnerships Initiative priorities, watershed plans, etc. Projects should also consider impacts to other community priorities such as affordable housing and the need for outdoor recreation access.

Submitting a Proposal

Concept Paper

Applicants should work with their GOCO program officer to develop a concept paper. Drafts are accepted on a rolling basis. Program officers ask follow-up questions as needed and provide feedback. GOCO staff collectively reviews concepts and identifies the most competitive proposals to invite to the full application. All applicants receive feedback from their program officer.

Site Visits

GOCO staff may request a project site visit. Any requests will be made to project leads identified in the concept paper or application.

Application Review

Invited applications are reviewed by GOCO staff and peer reviewers from relevant conservation and recreation organizations. Reviewers assess the merit of each application, including any supplemental information provided by the applicant, based on various factors (listed under 'How proposals are assessed' above). Peer reviewers and GOCO staff then meet to discuss their reflections. GOCO staff recommend projects to GOCO's board of trustees for consideration during the Programs Committee Meeting. The board then approves final grant awards at the following board meeting. All applicants receive feedback from their program officer.

Committee Presentation and Board Acknowledgment

Representatives from projects recommended for funding may have the opportunity to speak briefly at GOCO's Programs Committee meeting. Projects and partners will also be recognized at the following board meeting where final awards are made. Dates will be confirmed with your program officer.

LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM CONCEPT PAPER

Submit materials through the website form by no later than 5 pm on the concept paper deadline. Text documents should use 11 pt font or larger and have 1-inch margins. Please submit materials in plain text (no letterhead or logos). Submit individual documents for each category; for example, the narrative should be submitted as a single document and the maps can be compiled and submitted as a single document. Each individual document submitted must be 30 MB or less.

- ☐ Narrative – *submit file in doc or docx*
- ☐ Budget – *available on Land Acquisition Web page; submit file in xls or xlsx*
- ☐ [Optional] Budget narrative
- ☐ Transaction and Due Diligence information
- ☐ Project Maps
- ☐ Project Photos

Project Summary

Be prepared to provide the following information when submitting your concept paper through the form on the webpage:

- Project name
- Your name and contact information
- Applicant organization(s)
- Applicant name(s)
- Partner organization and name (if applicable)
- County/Counties/Statewide
- Grant request amount
- Total project amount (this should match the total source of funds field in your budget)
- Grant time period
- Brief project description (50 words or less; 3-4 sentences)

Concept Narrative

Write a short narrative (up to 2 pages; 11 pt font or larger; 1-inch margins) in response to the following prompts. Responses do not need to follow the formatting below.

- Describe the proposed project: the landscape, context, and what makes the opportunity unique; its location and size; current and future ownership status; transaction structure; and timeline for acquisition.

- Discuss how this project addresses the community’s conservation and recreation priorities, including its alignment with state, regional, and local planning efforts.
- Explain how the project will support climate resilience, equitable access to the outdoors, and/or wildlife protection.
- Explain existing threats to the property’s conservation values and public benefits, and why it is critical to complete the project at this moment in time (including information related to project readiness). Discuss how these threats could result in land use that substantially impairs its conservation or community values.
- If applicable, discuss any current or future efforts to involve community members and relevant partner organizations in the project, including underrepresented community members.

Budget Form

In the form, a high-level budget should provide sufficient details that reflect project readiness, partnerships, and matching resources. Consider how your budget reflects areas outlined in the ‘How proposals are assessed’ section above. Round figures to the nearest dollar. If a grant is awarded, the budget will be included in the final grant agreement as the budget and match funding committed to the project and used to track project outcomes and expenses for reimbursement. You will be asked to provide the following:

- *Scope of Work* – Identifies the project elements outlined in the Concept Narrative.
- *[Optional] Leveraged Resources* – Includes any recent investments beyond those outlined in the Scope of Work that will support, or have already supported, this project. For example, the cost of acquiring an adjacent parcel recently, previous due diligence, etc. You may also use this space to reflect time or resources that have been used as match in other grant applications to avoid allocating donated time or other resources to more than one grant (also known as “double-dipping”). Instances of time or resources may only be counted once in the budget, whether they’re included in the Scope of Work or Leveraged Resources.

[Optional] Budget Narrative

If you feel it will be helpful to proposal reviewers, explain estimated costs or matching funds in one page or less. Narratives should be written so that a reader who is not familiar with the project can understand what expenses are anticipated and why. Do not write a narrative for every expense; rather, provide higher-level budget categories and how they will help accomplish objectives. Do not include information already included in the Concept Narrative.

Examples:

- Due Diligence (\$85,000 GOCO) – This line item includes appraisal, baseline, environmental assessment, mineral survey, legal services, property survey, closing costs, and stewardship endowment (\$15,000).
- Pending Match Funding (\$200,000) – An application was submitted to <insert source> in early February, with an update on recommended projects in early April and a final award decision by May 6th. If not awarded, our back up plan is to <insert funding sources>.

Transaction and Due Diligence Information

If any of these circumstances apply to your project, provide information as an attachment.

- Do any known boundary disputes or encumbrances exist (ex: utility or access easements, leases, or liens)?
- Do any development or reserved rights exist or are they planned (ex: building envelopes, subdivisions, proposed activities/uses)?
- Is there water associated with the property? What water rights exist? Will they be acquired or tied to the property in the conservation easement?
- Are any mineral rights or energy resources held by a third party?
- Does mining exist or has it historically taken place on the property?
- Are there any known hazardous materials or uses associated with the property?
- If the property does not offer physical and legal right of access for proposed uses, please outline steps anticipated for securing access.

Required Attachments

- Transaction and Due Diligence information
- Maps (up to two pages) - We recommend a context map showing surrounding land uses and a detailed/schematic map.
- Up to two pages of photos, links to property footage, or other assets that display the property.

Looking Ahead: Final Application

Those invited to complete the application will have approximately one month to develop the following application materials. Please plan accordingly.

- ☐ Responses to Proposal Narrative prompts (up to five pages)
- ☐ Transaction and Due Diligence information
- ☐ Budget and Optional Budget Narrative
- ☐ Maps or diagrams (up to two pages)

- ☐ Photos (up to two pages)
- ☐ Resolution from the applicant's governing body (your resolution must meet GOCO's resolution requirements)
- ☐ Wildlife review and completed Wildlife Review Form
- ☐ Indication of support (up to five; may include letters of support from partners, community members, volunteers; a summary of media articles, broadcasts, testimonials, etc.)
- ☐ [Optional] Planning documents (up to two pages; examples include infographics, process outlines, comments, data)
- ☐ [Optional] Timeline