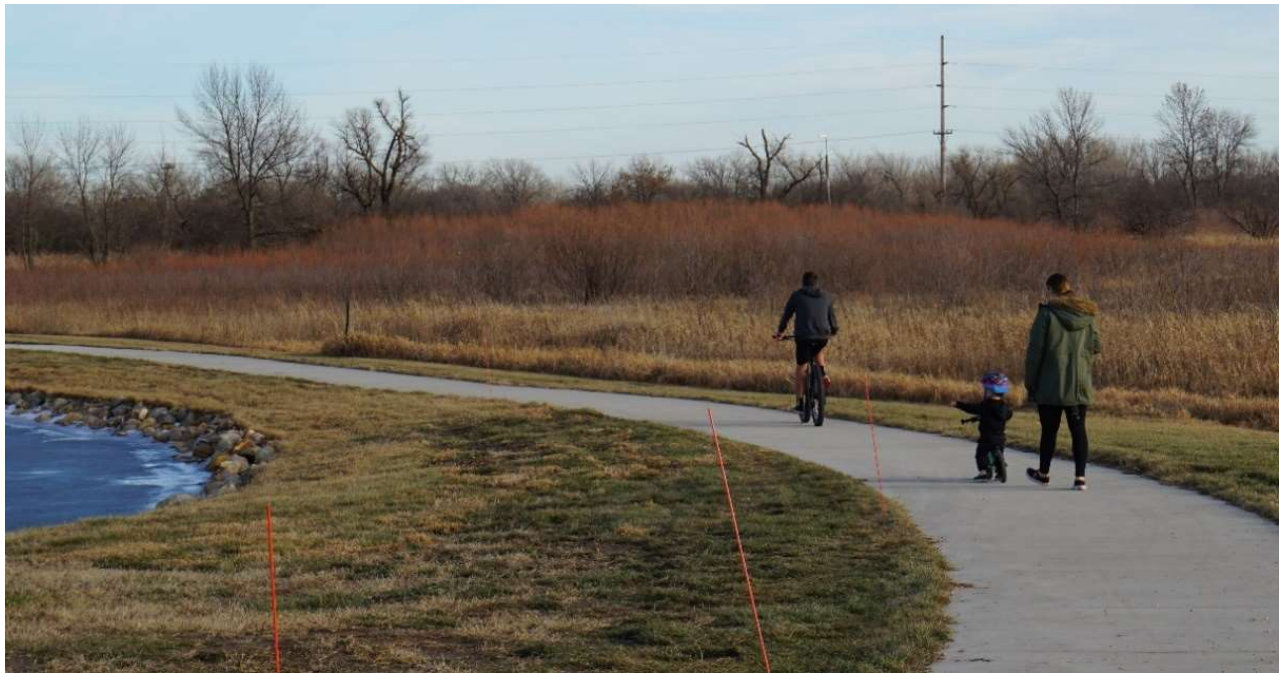


# South Dakota

## RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM Grant Application Manual 2025



Administered by:  
South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks  
523 E. Capital Ave  
Pierre, SD 57501-3182  
(605) 773-5490



U.S. Department of Transportation  
**Federal Highway  
Administration**



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# RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a federal aid assistance program to help states and maintain recreational trails for both motorized and non-motorized use. The program provides up to 80 percent reimbursement funds for all kinds of recreational trail uses including, but not limited to:

- Pedestrian use
- Bicycling
- In-line skating
- Equestrian use
- Cross-country skiing
- Off-road motorcycling
- All-terrain vehicle riding
- Four wheeling
- Snowmobiling

The RTP encourages all kinds of trail enthusiasts to work together to provide a variety of recreational trail opportunities. In South Dakota, the Department of Game, Fish and Parks administers the RTP with guidance from the RTP Advisory Council.



Crooks Trail System

## 1.1 Apportionment to the States

The RTP exists because of fuel tax revenue generated by snowmobiles, off-highway motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles, off-highway light trucks and other motorized trail uses. Each state receives a different apportionment of RTP funds, of which one-half is based on an estimate of non-highway recreational fuel use within each state. Individual grants generally range between \$40,000 and \$200,000. Individual grants may be awarded for larger amounts based on the merit of the proposed project and available funding.

## 1.2 30-30-40 Requirement

The RTP legislation requires states to use 30 percent of funds for motorized recreation, 30 percent for non-motorized recreation and 40 percent apportioned in a fiscal year for diverse recreational use. Diversified projects may include motorized and non-motorized uses or a combination of uses from either category. Diversified projects that include both motorized and non-motorized uses generally score higher than other projects.

## 1.3 RTP Advisory Council

South Dakota has a five-person RTP Advisory Council that represents both motorized and non-motorized recreational trail users. The council is appointed by the governor and meets a minimum of once each fiscal year. Current Advisory Council members include:

- Kitty Kinsman, Rapid City
- Dave Sweet, Sioux Falls
- Mel Fish, Yankton
- Sam Greear, Whitewood
- [vacant]

The RTP Advisory Council makes recommendations on project funding. These recommendations are based upon a scoring system and staff recommendations from the Department of Game, Fish and Parks' Division of Parks and Recreation. The group generally meets during the month of June.

## 1.4 Sponsor Eligibility

The RTP is intended to be a program through which states provide grants to trail project sponsors through an open competition process based on the merit of project proposals. The State of South Dakota will award grants to private, non-profit organizations, municipal agencies, state agencies, federal agencies and other governmental entities. Examples are:

### Private, Non-Profit Organizations

- Youth conservations corps
- Youth or civic clubs
- Conservation organizations
- Land Trusts
- Trail clubs or associations
- Police athletic leagues
- Utilities
- Private School

It is the intention that non-profit RTP sponsors maintain non-profit status throughout the duration of a project. Since this is not always possible, a successor organization must agree, in writing, to complete all RTP project responsibilities required by the contract if the original organization's status changes. The responsibilities are identified in the RTP Project Agreement (contract). A qualified successor is any party that meets the eligibility criteria to apply for RTP funds and is capable of complying with all Project Agreement responsibilities. The Division of Parks and Recreation recommends, whenever possible, a public agency be sought as a successor.

**Municipal Agencies**

- Cities, counties and towns
- Townships
- Public schools
- Regional parks or forests
- Public utilities
- Public housing agencies

**State Agencies**

- State park agencies
- State game agencies
- State education institutes
- State housing agencies

**Federal Agencies**

- USDA – Forest Service
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- National Park Service
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Military installations

A federal agency may provide its own funds toward RTP projects as additional federal share up to 95 percent of the project cost. The 5 percent balance must come from non-federal sources.

**Other Government Entities**

- Tribal governments
- Multi-state public agencies
- Public transit operators

**1.5 Public Benefit**

Federal aid projects must have a public benefit. Where private investments or joint use activities are part of a project proposal, the federal funds are limited to the portions of the project that primarily benefit the public interest. Because South Dakota's share of the RTP fund is relatively small, preference is given to projects that provide the greatest public benefit. Here are a few things to consider:

- Projects using RTP funds must be accessible, open and available to the general public, or targeted to a broad segment of the general public.
- The facility cannot be restricted only to particular residents or only to members of specific organizations or clubs.
- RTP funds cannot be used for projects that have such limited capacity that only a few paying (or potentially paying) guests have access. The portions of a project using RTP funds must be open for general public use at times when visitors are likely.
- Where private investment or joint use activities are part of a project proposal, or where access is restricted only to a few paying (or potentially paying) guests, the RTP funds are limited to the portions of the project that primarily benefit the public interest.
- Nothing in the RTP legislation prohibits project sponsors from charging fees for use. Before the project is approved, however, the sponsor and the state should reach a clear agreement on which areas or activities will have a fee, and how income generated will be used.
- The fee must be "reasonable" which should be determined between the state, the RTP Advisory Council and the project sponsor. The fee should not be set so high as to restrict general public access.
- It may be appropriate for club members to receive a discount, since a portion of their membership may be counted toward use of the area, but the price differential should not be set so high as to restrict general public access.
- A maintenance plan should include reserves for long-term maintenance and periodic repair. Part or all of the fees generated should be a component of the maintenance plan.
- **NOTE:** Charging a fee to use a recreation facility may eliminate landowner liability protection offered under state recreational use statutes.

**1.6 Project Eligibility**

The RTP will fund a variety of trail projects from the following eight categories:

**1. Maintenance and Restoration**

This category broadly authorizes any kind of trail maintenance, restoration, rehabilitation, or relocation, including trail bridges and signs.

## 2. **Trailside and Trailhead Facilities**

This category broadly authorizes the development or rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities. “Rehabilitation” means extensive repair needed to bring a facility up to standards suitable for public use, not routine maintenance. Trailside and trailhead facilities should have a direct relationship with a recreational trail. For example, a highway rest area or visitor center is not an appropriate use of RTP funds.

## 3. **Trail Construction Equipment**

This category broadly authorizes the purchase and lease of trail construction, maintenance, or assessment equipment including lawn mowers and trail grooming machines. The equipment must be used primarily to construct, maintain, or assess recreational trails. This provision does not authorize equipment for purposes unrelated to trails. For example, a lawn mower purchased under the RTP must be used primarily for trail and trailside maintenance, not to maintain open lawn areas or sport fields.

Title 23, Code of Federal Regulations 635.410 requires that steel or iron materials (including protective coatings) that will be permanently incorporated in a Federal-aid project must be domestically manufactured (commonly referred to as “Buy America”). All steel and iron must be produced within the United States from initial melting, mixing, bending and coating. This requirement applies to equipment that is purchased through the Recreational Trails Program. To be eligible for Federal Recreational Trails Program funding manufactures of equipment must be able to certify that all iron and steel used in the equipment was domestically manufactured from the point of initial melting, mixing, bending and coating. In addition to equipment meeting the domestic steel and iron requirements it also must be assembled in the United States. Therefore, only equipment that can meet this certification requirement are eligible for Recreational Trail Program funding. The vendors producing trail equipment that meets these requirements must provide written certification that the piece of equipment being proposed for RTP grant assistance meets these Buy America requirements.

## 4. **Waver of Buy America Requirements**

The total amount of Federal financial assistance applied to the project, through awards or subawards, is below \$250,000, the Buy America requirements for iron, steel, manufactured product, and construction materials is waived. The waiver is applicable only to awards that are obligated or subawards that are made on or after the effective August 16, 2023.

## 5. **New Recreational Trail Construction**

This category broadly authorizes any kind of new trail construction, including trail bridges and signs, except for limits on new trails located on federal lands. For projects on federal lands, the most important requirement is that the federal agency land manager must approve the project in accordance with other applicable federal laws and regulations.

## 6. **Land or Easement Acquisition**

This category authorizes purchases of trail easements across private property and property acquisition for trail corridors or trail systems, including areas intended for future trail development. Acquisition may include purchase and relocation of old road or railroad bridges. Easements or property acquired should correspond to the land necessary for a useful trail corridor or trail system. RTP funds should not be used to acquire easements or land for parks or conservation areas that will not have recreational trails.

The program prohibits condemnation of any kind of interest in property under the principles of eminent domain. Acquisition of any kind of interest in property must be from a willing landowner or seller.

## 7. **Trail Accessibility Assessment**

This category authorizes specific projects to assess trails to determine the level of accessibility for people who have disabilities, to develop programs to provide trail access information, and to assess trails for current or future maintenance needs.

## 8. **Educational Projects**

This category authorizes development and dissemination of publications and operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection. Typical education projects may include: trail safety education programs; trail-related environmental education programs; training on trail accessibility and sustainability; trail-related educational materials; trail patrols (non-law enforcement); training that promotes safety or environmental protection related to recreational trails.

Some materials are only partially educational. For example, a trail system map generally is not an educational project. However, if one side of a map is dedicated to trail safety and environmental protection education, educational funds may be used to fund one half of the map’s cost.

### **Projects Not Eligible for Funding**

- Sidewalks
- Condemned Land
- Campgrounds
- Feasibility Studies
- Insurance
- Law Enforcement
- Legal Fees
- Picnic Facilities
- Playground Equipment
- Promotional Items
- Roads
- Skateboard Parks

## 1.7 Control and Tenure

Applicants must establish adequate control over any land (public or private) to be improved/developed with RTP grant funds. This must include documentation of:

- Fee title
- Lease
- Easement
- Use agreement

The application must identify all outstanding rights or interests held by others on land upon which the project is proposed.

## 1.8 Environmental Requirements

Federal RTP guidance requires documentation of compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other federal environmental laws, regulations and executive orders as part of an authorized project. **Your application will not be reviewed if your environmental documentation is not complete and included in your application.** Compliance with NEPA is required regardless of project sponsorship.

Each project that is selected for funding is required by the FHWA and GF&P to hire an archeologist to complete a Level III Archeological Survey of the project site. A copy of the completed report will need to be submitted to this office. We will forward this report to FHWA for their approval. You should plan to include \$3,000 in your project proposal to cover your expense of hiring an archeologist and having the report completed. No earth disturbing activities may be conducted until the Game, Fish and Parks Department informs you that these clearances have been secured. In some cases it may take several months to secure the needed clearances. A Social, Economic and Environmental Impact Form is provided as part of the application packet and must be completed by all project applicants.



Crooks Trail System

Each project that is selected for funding is required by the FHWA and GF&P to hire an archeologist to complete a Level III Archeological Survey of the project site. A copy of the completed report will need to be submitted to this office. We will forward this report to FHWA for their approval. You should plan to include \$3,000 in your project proposal to cover your expense of hiring an archeologist and having the report completed. No earth disturbing activities may be conducted until the Game, Fish and Parks Department informs you that these clearances have been secured. In some cases it may take several months to secure the needed clearances. A Social, Economic and Environmental Impact Form is provided as part of the application packet and must be completed by all project applicants.

## 1.9 Match Requirement

RTP grant funds will not exceed 80 percent of a project's total cost. Sponsors must provide at least 20 percent of a project's cost. The "match" may include:

- Cash
- The value of volunteer labor, equipment and materials. Donated labor, equipment, and materials should be based on fair market value. This means that services should be valued at a rate that would ordinarily be paid for similar work. The IRS publishes many of the rates.
- Federal, state, and local grants (If other grants are used as a match, the other grant must be approved before it can be allowed as a match).

Federal Matching Share: In some cases, RTP grant funds may be matched with funds from other federal programs. They may be credited as the non-federal share if expended on an eligible project in accordance with the requirements of that particular federal program. In cases where federal funds are pledged as the RTP project match the combined total of RTP grant funds requested and other federal matching share may not exceed 95 percent of the total project costs. **A minimum of 5 percent of the project cost must come from state, local or private cosponsors.**

## 1.10 Reimbursement Process:

Payment takes place on a reimbursement basis: the project sponsor must incur costs for work completed, and then submit reimbursement request form and supporting documentation to the grants coordinator for payment. Reimbursement is not normally permitted for work that takes place prior to project approval. However, working capital advances may be permitted on a case-by-case basis. Prior planning and environmental assessment costs may be credited toward the non-federal share. This is limited to costs incurred less than 18 months prior to project approval.

# APPLICATION PROCESS

## 2.1 Application Form Definitions and Instructions

1. **Project Information:** Name of your project
2. **Project Sponsor:**
  - a. **Name of Political Unit:** Agency or organization requesting RTP project funding
  - b. **Type of Political Unit:** Type or political unit referenced above that is requesting funding.
  - c. **Primary Contact:**
    - The primary contact is the person responsible to carry out the RTP project. This person is authorized to make decisions regarding the project, including contracts and agreements.
    - Address, telephone number, email where the responsible person can be contacted during normal working hours regarding application questions.
  - d. **Grantee:** EUI: Unique Entity Identification Number
  - e. **Census Population:** population at the last census
3. **Project Location.**
  - **Project Location:** Project location should include legal description, county, city or town and any other descriptive reference useful to accurately determine the project location. (Maps provided must be on 8.5x11-inch, or 11x17-inch paper and printed in color). Include the Section, Township and Range of your projection location.
  - **Project Ownership:** Provide the information of trail corridor or trail-related property ownership and duration of any leases, easements, and time remaining.
4. **Recreational Trail Project Categories:**
  - a. **User Type:** Indicate the type of users of the proposed project (ex. hikers, bicyclists, cross-country skiers, snowmobilers, ATV riders, horseback riders, etc).
  - b. **RTP Project Category:** what is the category that best fits your projected situation, If the project does not clearly fit into one of the identified categories, it is probably not eligible.
  - c. **Description:** Summarize the proposed project.
5. **Culture and History:** List any instances of culture or historical property either on the property of adjacent to that may be affected by the project.
6. **Project Budget & Funding:**
  - a. **Budget:** Enter the estimated total cost of the entire project and then enter the Federal funds requested, not to exceed 80% of the total project cost.
  - b. **Status of Funding:** grantee funding budgeted, secured and currently available, as well as the amount remaining to be raised or secured to complete the project.
  - c. **Other Sources of Grant Funding:** State or local governments may provide some matching funds, but the project sponsor often has to provide most, or all of the match. Indicate any additional funding opportunities.
7. **Social, Economic & Environment Assessment Checklist:** complete the checklist and indicate the amount of impact the project may have on the various categories.

## 2.2 Project Funding Information

Complete the source of funding worksheet. Provide a narrative regarding donated labor, materials, equipment and land or property that is included in your match. Be sure to include the who is donating, the time, materials, or equipment and the number of hours, type of material, or equipment. Matching funds plus RTP funds should add up to the total project cost. Be sure to include \$3,000 in your total project cost for environmental and cultural clearances.

## 2.3 Project Narrative:

The project narrative should describe all elements of the proposed project and the need for assistance. The narrative should be clear and concise. The RTP provides funding in an open and highly competitive process. The RTP Council's funding decisions rely almost entirely upon the information provided in the application. The project narrative should provide information on the subjects listed below.

**Project Description:** Describe the proposed work. If the project involves partnerships or other funding sources, clearly identify which portion of the work will be completed with the requested RTP funds. It is important to be specific when defining the scope of work to be completed with RTP funds and include information like surface material, trail length, trail width, etc.

**Long-term Commitment:** Describe how you will provide for long-term management and maintenance of the completed project. Attach copies of signed agreements if parties other than the applicant are responsible for any part of this management or maintenance obligation.

**Selection Criteria:** Explain how the project addresses the selection criteria shared in this manual. The first selection's criteria relates to the Division of Parks and Recreation's staff assessment of the completeness of the application packet and past grant history and does not require any narrative response. If you feel information provided in your response to any of the above subjects adequately covers the selection criteria, it is not necessary to repeat the information.

## 2.4 Attachments

- Vicinity Map:** Submit a map identifying the location of the project within a region of the state. GIS maps are preferred.
- Site Location Map:** Submit a map indicating the specific site location of the existing or proposed trail or trail facility. This map must clearly depict the project location in relation to roads, trails, rivers/streams and any other geographic features that will aid in identifying the project's precise location. GIS maps are preferred.
- Staging area** should be included on a map
- Project and Site Plans and Other visuals:** submit project-related design documents if pertinent to the application.
- Written estimates** provided on vendor letterhead for trail work or trail equipment to be purchased.
- Provide a typical cross section of the proposed trail.
- Documented Proof of Control of Property:** Submit copies of title, lease easements, use agreement, maintenance agreement, etc.
- Environmental Documentation:** All project sponsors must complete and sign the included Social, Economic and Environmental Impact Form portion of the application and provide all other environmental documentation necessary to determine the project's compliance with state and federal requirements.

## 2.5 What to Send

Mail 6 copies of your application packet – including:

1. **A Letter of Intent:** all potential applicants must submit a letter of intent providing a detailed description of the proposed project. Be sure to include all of the pertinent facts including surface material, length, width, etc.
2. **Completed Application:** Includes:
  - Letter of Intent.
  - A completed RTP Project application form. The application must be signed and dated.
  - Maps (vicinity map and site location map), on 8.5x11-inch paper or 11x17-inch paper.
  - RTP Project Funding worksheet.
  - Project narrative.
  - Environmental documentation (NEPA decision notice, Social, Economic and Environmental Impact Form, or other documentation necessary to establish compliance with environmental regulations).
  - Documentation of Control and Tenure.
  - Other information that will strengthen the application such as; maintenance agreements, resolutions of support, letters of support, etc.
  - For equipment purchases, vendor needs to certify product meets "Buy America" standards. See section 1.7 for information.
3. **Format:** The digital application is a fillable document
  - Paper: Submit materials on a 8.5x11-inch paper or 11x17-inch paper for maps and plans.
  - Font: must be no smaller than 11-point computer font.
  - Copies: Submit six color copies of your completed application packet to the address below.
  - Submit all materials together at the same time.
  - Staple in the upper left corner.
  - Do not put applications and materials in notebooks or binders.

**A signed and dated application is required.**

Send to:

Kerri Richards, Grants Coordinator  
SD Game, Fish, and Parks  
523 E. Capitol  
Pierre, SD 57501-3182

**Deadline: April 4, 2025**



## 2.6 Project Selection

### Technical Review

Department staff members review applications for completeness, eligibility, sponsor's current grant status, match, property ownership, local/regional/federal approval, etc. Staff will score and forward eligible applications to the Recreational Trails Program Advisory Council for further consideration. Ineligible or substantially incomplete applications will be returned to the applicant.

### Committee Review

The Recreational Trails Program Advisory Council reviews applications and establishes funding priorities. The council ultimately awards all grants

### Selection Criteria

Applications will be scored on completeness of the application packet. A letter of intent is required for a complete application. The Recreational Trails Program Advisory Council will score and rank the project applications based on the Evaluation Form found at the end of this RTP Application Manual.



Bear Butte Trail System

## Tips for Project Sponsors:

- Prepare a project development plan. Identify the issues and steps that are critical to the project development process. What are the trail needs? What can you do realistically?
- What are the planning requirements? Does your project meet the goals of a statewide or metropolitan transportation plan and/or a statewide or community trail plan?
- Develop a workable project that meets the program requirements and eligible categories.
- Secure public support for the project. How does the project benefit the community? Are there other potential project sponsors?
- Find other funding sources. Some state or local governments may provide some matching funds, but the project sponsor often must provide most, or all of the match.
- Consider donations of materials and services, including volunteer labor.
- Consider training and skill needs for staff, volunteers, youth corps, contractors, or others.
- Develop a good project design, keeping safety and security in mind.
- Consider the natural environment in which the project is located.
- Consider community benefits.
- Consider user needs and desires, including use by people with disabilities.
- Consider potential problems:
  - Environmental impacts – these must be minimized and mitigated.
  - Possible opposition – some people may oppose a project for various reasons.
- Complete the grant application:
  - Make sure you fill it out completely,
  - Make sure you fill it out clearly – exactly what are you going to do?
  - Make sure you fill it out accurately – make sure the numbers add up.
  - Don't ask for funds for ineligible items – you risk the rest of your project.
  - Don't add information that is not necessary – it may confuse your application.
  - Sign and date the application.
  - Include all supporting documentation.
- If your project is approved, get to work!

### Mail six copies of the completed application packet to:

Kerri Richards, Grants Coordinator  
South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks  
523 E. Capitol Ave.  
Pierre, SD 57501-3182

**Application deadline: Postmarked April 4, 2025**

**Project**

Sponsor: \_\_\_\_\_

Requested Funds: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Project Cost \_\_\_\_\_ % RTP Funds Requested \_\_\_\_\_

User Groups:  Motorized  Non-Motorized  Diversified

Project Type:  Development  Maintenance  Equipment

Trail Width:  <8'  8-10'  >10'

Surface:  Concrete  Asphalt  Non-Paved

**Project Submission – Maximum 5 points each**

Proposal submitted on or before deadline \_\_\_\_\_

Six (6) copies of proposal submitted \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed submitted in proper format \_\_\_\_\_

Proposal included minimum requirements \_\_\_\_\_

Proposal adequately describes proposed work \_\_\_\_\_

**Section Total: /25**

**Project Viability – Maximum 5 points each**

Sponsor has secured matching funds \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor has a maintenance plan \_\_\_\_\_

Proposal will connect/enhance existing trails \_\_\_\_\_

Proposal will connect/enhance existing park area \_\_\_\_\_

Proposal has aesthetic value and utilizes natural settings \_\_\_\_\_

Cost estimates are within logical parameters \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor has control of land and it is open to the public \_\_\_\_\_

**Section Total: /35**

**Project Components – Maximum 5 points each**

Project will provide for motorized & non-motorized users \_\_\_\_\_

Project will provide for more than 1 type of users \_\_\_\_\_

Project site is free of environmental concerns \_\_\_\_\_

Project site is free of cultural concerns \_\_\_\_\_

Previous archeological surveys have been completed \_\_\_\_\_

**Section Total: /25**

**Miscellaneous Concerns – Maximum 5 points each**

Proposal includes letter of support \_\_\_\_\_

Maps clearly illustrate proposed project area \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor has positive previous experience with RTP \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor’s overall readiness to begin the project \_\_\_\_\_

**Section Total: /20**

**Matching Shares – Maximum 5 points**

To what extent will the applicant match the RTP grant with its own resources?

- 20 - 25 % of project total value (0 points) \_\_\_\_\_
- 25.1 - 30% of project total value (1 point) \_\_\_\_\_
- 30.1 - 35% of project total value (2 points) \_\_\_\_\_
- 35.1 - 40% of project total value (3 points) \_\_\_\_\_
- 40.1 - 45% of project total value (4 points) \_\_\_\_\_
- Over 45% of project total value (5 points) \_\_\_\_\_

**Section Total:** \_\_\_\_\_ /5

**Additional Comments – Maximum 1 point each**

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**Section Total:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Final Score and Funding Recommendation**

**Total Score** \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendation: .....

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