

National Caucus of Environmental Legislators

Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit



NCEL

National Caucus of
Environmental Legislators





Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Resource Overview

Introduction

The goal of this toolkit is to provide state legislators, agency staff, and partners with a framework and resources for establishing state-level outdoor opportunity funds and grant programs. It aims to offer ideas for place-based flexibility acknowledging resource differences among states. The toolkit is intended to be used in conjunction with input from grassroots/local organizations and communities.

Table of Contents

- 1. Outdoor Opportunity Grant Programs Overview p. 3
- 2. Program Structure Considerations p. 5
 - 2.1 Establishment & Communications p. 5
 - 2.2 Program Administrator p. 7
 - 2.3 Grantee Eligibility p. 7
 - 2.4 Advisory Board & Grantee Selection p. 8
 - 2.5 Non-financial benefits p. 9
 - 2.6 Funding Mechanisms p. 10
 - 2.7 Reporting & Metrics p. 11
 - 2.8 Additional “Stretch” Features p. 12
 - 2.9 Common Challenges & Solutions p. 12
- 3. Existing Programs p. 13
- 4. Case Studies p. 15
 - 4.1 New Mexico p. 15
 - 4.2 California p. 17
 - 4.3 Colorado p. 19
 - 4.4 Washington p. 21
 - 4.5 Minnesota p. 23
 - 4.6 Nevada p. 24
 - 4.7 Utah p. 26
- 5. Key Resources p. 28



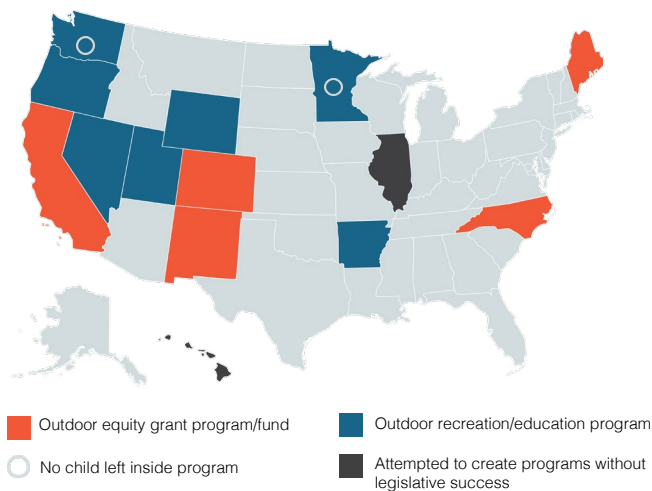
NCEL is grateful for the support, expert knowledge, and partnership of REI in the development of this toolkit resource.

Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Outdoor Opportunity Grant Programs

Overview

Outdoor opportunity grant programs aim to increase access to time outside for underserved youth and their families by reducing the barriers that limit participation in nature's ecological, health, economic, and career-building benefits. These grant programs provide funding for programming, administrative costs for agencies and nonprofits, transportation, gear, and more to community organizations, schools, local governments, tribal nations, and state agencies. They are a tool used in closing [the nature gap](#) – the disparities in access to nature and outdoor spaces that vary among different populations. Depending on the state, outdoor opportunity programs may be called outdoor recreation and education programs, or outdoor equity funds/grant programs, among other names.



Benefits of Time in Nature

The benefits to time outside range from improving [mental, physical, and emotional health](#), to increasing feelings of welcome and belonging in outdoor spaces, to building a talent pipeline for the [growing outdoor industry](#). Existing state outdoor equity funds have granted over \$63 million in funding and served over 40,000 participants in increasing access to the outdoors in the past three years.

Key Points

Outdoor opportunity grant programs are a tool in addressing the nature gap, which is evidenced by outdoor participation and trends. Barriers to outdoor access include income, physical ability, access to gear, lack of familiarity and awareness, discrimination, lack of transportation, and more.

- Approximately [40% of Black Americans](#) participated in outdoor recreation in 2022, compared with 57% of white Americans.
- [One in four adults](#) in the U.S. live with a disability of some kind that impacts their ability to access or enjoy time outside.
- Veterans report [transportation, cost, experience, health challenges and injuries](#), and other barriers that prevent them from experiencing the full benefits of time spent in nature.
- The LGBTQ+ community is [8% more likely](#) to feel unwelcome in the outdoors.

Questions to Consider

If your state is looking to create an outdoor opportunity fund, there are several steps/questions to consider. Best practices for standing up an outdoor opportunity fund were gathered from literature, a legislative review, and 42 interviews with state legislators, nonprofit employees, grant program managers, community leaders, grant program grantees and board members, state agency staff, researchers, and industry and business alliance staff. See below for some initial considerations before moving forward.



Case Study: Coalition Building in Colorado

A coalition of local leaders and organizations is crucial for creation, establishment, and implementation of a program. In Colorado, the driving force behind the outdoor equity grant program was [Next 100 Colorado](#), a state chapter of the [Next 100 Coalition](#), a group of organizations and individuals committed to “ensuring equitable outdoor access for all people.” The coalition worked closely with state legislators to build the outdoor equity program, craft legislation that focuses on underserved populations, and has stayed engaged in continued improvement of the program during implementation.

Initial Questions

To ensure an outdoor opportunity grant program is centered around the communities it intends to serve, the following questions may be used to identify needs and approaches:

- Who is this program intended to support?
- What are their needs?
- What are their limitations?
- What barriers exist – specifically – for those communities?
- What division is the grant program going to live in?
 - » What is the culture? What is the structure? Is the department ready? Are there resources available?
- How do you anticipate and respond to opposition to this?
- How does “equity” stick in your state?

Initial Steps

Prior to beginning the process of establishing an outdoor opportunity grant program, it is recommended that legislators and agency staff consider the following as the start of a pre-session or pre-program establishment checklist:

1. Look at and learn from existing programs in other states.
2. Identify what exists in your own state that may be similar or have overlap with an outdoor opportunity grant program.
3. Connect with the potential administering agency.
4. Identify community partners and coalition members.
5. Identify co-sponsors and other legislative champions.
6. Explore funding sources.

Resources

- [Outdoor F.U.T.U.R.E.](#) national outdoor opportunity fund effort.
- [Physical benefits](#) to walking, hiking, biking, being outside.
- [Mental benefits](#) to being outside – reducing anxiety and stress, improving memory and, cognitive function.
- A [deep connection with nature](#) at a young age can enhance performance in the classroom.



Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Program Structure Considerations

Overview

In developing an outdoor opportunity program, consideration of eight key components that make up the structure of the program can provide a strong foundation and starting point for development. While each of the existing programs varies, many have similarities in the basic structure from the process of establishment and outreach to determining criteria for reporting requirements and metrics.

Establishment & Communications

One of the first steps in establishing and creating an outdoor opportunity grant program requires consideration up front of what the goal of the program will be as well as clear identification of who is involved in the process. While some states have established outdoor opportunity programs on their own, others have established them concurrently with an Office of Outdoor Recreation. However, with both approaches, strong coalitions were formed, legislative relationships were built, and effective outreach and communication to communities were prioritized.

Goal of the Program

Define what success means early on along with what “equity” or “opportunity” will mean and what specific populations the programs will serve. Be sure to ask the following questions:

- Who is not part of the conversation who should be?
- What perspectives might be missing?
- What are the needs of the communities the program aims to serve?

Legislative Relationships & Other Partnerships

When establishing an outdoor opportunity grant program, it is important to consider ways to build support for the program by increasing relevant partnerships and collaboration, such as:

- Find bipartisan and geographically diverse cosponsors who will advocate for and stick with the program throughout the legislative process.
- Identify key committees and relationships to build support for the program.
- Work closely with the state agency that will administer the program.
- Have external champions to rely on for guidance and advice, in addition to or as part of a broad coalition of supporters.
- Utilize community partners who can translate and interpret for the program and process.

Coalition Engagement

Having a coalition involved from the start is key to the ongoing success of the program as well as to ensuring the program is shaped to best serve the intended communities. Coalitions can be involved in the process from establishment through implementation to:

- Collect community input on the needs of the community to inform initial program development and refine the program over time as needs change.
- Lobby for legislative support.
- Solicit applications for an advisory council.
- Spread information about the grant program in underserved communities.
- Collaborate with the administering agency and continue to shape and support the program once it has been established.
- Offer an extended support network to grantees.
- Provide strong public-private partnerships to support funding and donations and connect applicants to other funding sources.

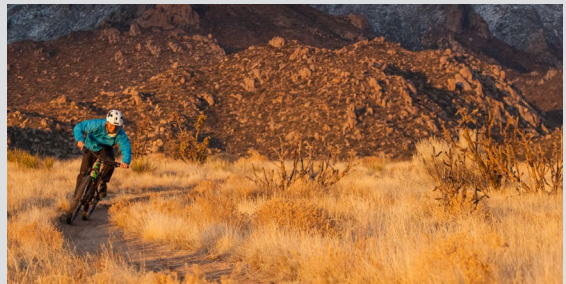


“The state can’t do it alone and the state shouldn’t do it alone.”
-- Axie Navas, *The Wilderness Society (New Mexico)*

Outreach

Effective marketing of outdoor opportunity grant programs is tailored to potential users. Employing a variety of targeted and creative outreach methods will ensure applications reach as many eligible hands as possible.

- Ask potential grantee organizations: “Is this a tool you would use?”
- Use creative methods of communication to reach a broad audience – local media, radio, word-of-mouth, flyers, social media, etc. To share its No Child Left Inside program, Minnesota not only carefully updated the grant page, but also used [local news sources](#), radio communications, and direct word-of-mouth communication to communities. Grant administrators also specifically focused on improving communication of the program to tribal governments.
- Find both legislative and community champions who are familiar with outdoor engagement and connect across political parties and constituencies.



Case Study: New Mexico Establishment Process

In New Mexico, the Outdoor Equity Fund was established simultaneously with a new Outdoor Recreation Division and an outdoor recreation advisory committee to support the division. Establishing these together enabled the Outdoor Equity Fund to be an integral part of New Mexico’s growing outdoor recreation landscape and economy and helped lead to further state funding support later on.

Program Administrator



In most states, outdoor opportunity grant programs are administered by a state agency or office such as the Office of Outdoor Recreation within the Economic Development Department or Parks and Wildlife within the Department of Natural Resources. However, two states, [Maine](#) and [North Carolina](#), have smaller outdoor equity grant programs that are privately funded and run by nonprofit organizations.

Considerations for a State Agency Administrator

The efficacy of a program and certainty of equitable grant administration is reliant on the administering agency. Where the program is housed is also key for determining the scope of grant programming as well. For example, more economic development focus is possible if administered by an office of economic development.

- State-funded programs can provide more sustainable funds and, often, more funding than privately run funds.
- Being housed in an Office of Economic Development allows for a focus on economics and the workforce, which can be beneficial for gaining bipartisan support.
- Using economic opportunities and public health impact can center equity without explicitly using “equity” in the bill text.
- If publicly administered, there is a need to build trust and increase the approachable nature of the administering office, especially within underserved communities.
- A state-administered program can be set up to also accept private contributions.

Key Points

- State grant amounts range from \$4,000 \$700,000 with total annual funding for the programs ranging from \$1.5 million - \$57 million.
- Private grant amounts are currently up to \$10,000 per year for three years with total annual funding for the programs ranging from \$125,000 - \$300,000.

Considerations for a Private Administrator

For a private/nonprofit run program, the characteristics of the administering organization impact the focus, scale, and reach of the program. While these programs can offer more flexibility, assessing the capacity of an organization and understanding the potential scope is important.

- A network of organizations or public-private partnerships can provide developmental support for organizations in addition to financial resources.
- Having a network can draw in nonprofit and/or land trust involvement with grantees and investment in their success.
- The program can be limited to the private organization's focus – this may be beneficial, but can also narrow the scope.
- A private fund can be established faster and with more flexibility but may be limited in size.

Grantee Eligibility



Determining who is eligible for the grant program depends on the defined aim of the program and what populations are intended to be served. However, across the country, there are similar existing criteria for eligibility for grant programs ranging from outdoor equity to No Child Left Inside to outdoor recreation and education. In existing programs, grantee eligibility is almost always written into statute.

Common Applicants

Some of the entities that most frequently apply to outdoor opportunity grant programs include but are not limited to:

- Nonprofits
- Local and state governments
- Tribal governments
- Schools, colleges, and universities
- Workforce development programs

Common Criteria

In order to ensure equitable distribution of funds, the following criteria are often required to be considered when determining a grantee's eligibility for an outdoor opportunity program:

- Age of population served (<18, 26, etc.).
- Type of school and population served, such as Title 1 schools.
- Proportion of students on free and reduced-price lunch.
- Demographics of population served: racial, income, geography, ability/disability, LGBTQ+.
- BIPOC leadership of the organization.
- Rural, urban populations.
- Veterans.

Other Considerations

In addition to defining the scope of grant applicants and criteria, the following can also be considered when determining grantee eligibility:

- Outdoor Opportunity Grant Programs are important for getting people outdoors but they can also be used to support business leaders, workforce development, and entrepreneurship in the outdoor space.
- Have a broad definition of access to the outdoors given that people engage in diverse ways.
- Consider using the Federal Justice40 criteria ([mapping tool](#)) to help identify underserved communities



“What communities are we going to reach that we haven’t been able to reach [already] with this funding?” - Caroline Weiler, Division of OREC (Utah)

Advisory Board & Grantee Selection



Existing grant programs each have some form of advisory board that takes part in or completes grantee selection entirely. The most representative advisory board is found as part of [Colorado's Outdoor Equity Grant Program](#), with the board structure written into the program statute. The advisory board plays a key role in the function of the program and ensures that funding is equitably distributed and reaches the communities the program intends to serve.

Statute Best Practices

Existing programs have specific details about the advisory board written into statute to ensure consistency and diversity on the grant board.

- To build a diverse council for decision making, create criteria for who is in each seat, considering factors such as geography within the state, youth, racial representation, industry/work experience, etc., and have term limits.
- Have rural and urban representation – ensure that people on the board come from the communities that are being served.
- Provide stipends for board members.
- Have a dedicated staff member to administer the program, support the advisory board, and offer technical assistance to applicants.

Implementation Best Practices

While not written into statute, the following considerations around the advisory board and grantee selection could be made when implementing the program:

- Aim for a participatory grantmaking process in addition to community-driven development of the grant program.
- Can't necessarily rely on state governments to conduct extensive outreach, so having a broad coalition committed to the fund can enable better reach and representation for board recruitment.
- Include more individuals with programmatic implementation experience on the board.

Implementation Best Practices for Grantee Solicitation, Application, and Selection

After the establishment of an advisory board and during program implementation, the following practices can help ensure an equitable grantmaking process:

- Go on a “grant tour” to help small communities learn about and apply to the program.
- Hold office hours at different times of day to be more accessible to all applicants.
- Be willing to adapt – use a trust-based philanthropy model and minimize the barriers to application.
- Consider offering technical assistance and funding for the application process.
- Allow for video applications and applications in languages other than English.
- Establish set evaluation frameworks that are clear and understandable for applicants.
- Offer grantees who don't get selected the opportunity to receive feedback.
- Offer to also connect grantees to different funding sources.

Non-Financial Benefits



Additional features of the grant program may include non-financial benefits for grantees. These features can be included during the implementation process and may take the form of:

- State outdoor business alliance membership.
- Organizational development support.
- Networking opportunities within the state outdoor recreation industry.
- Employee and job training.
- Grant writing support and technical assistance.
- Connections to other nonprofit organizations and networks for organizational support.



Case Study: Maine's Outdoor Equity Fund

Maine's Outdoor Equity Fund provides grantees with membership to the state outdoor business alliance along with a support network of existing nonprofits who are willing to provide assistance and advice.

Funding Mechanisms



Securing long-term, sustainable funding for a new grant program is a main challenge for establishing an outdoor opportunity program. Existing programs are each funded in ways unique to the states they are in, ranging from general fund appropriations to lottery proceeds to private donations. Potential funding sources include, but are not limited to:

- School construction funds
- Local bond measures
- Out of school time funding
- 21st century community learning centers
- Park fees
- Real estate taxes
- Second home / rental taxes
- Lottery dollars
- Federal funds
- Funding for mental health programs or other public good

Structural Recommendations

Ensuring long-term, sustainable funding for an outdoor opportunity program can be made more likely by considering the following recommendations:

- Look at existing outdoor recreation programs and how taxes and fees are collected to replicate existing models or carve out available funds from existing collections.
- Shorten collection intervals of taxes to allow for increased interest earned on ongoing investments. For example, in Colorado, the [severance tax](#) on oil and gas production was collected quarterly. By changing to a [monthly collection](#), the tax income was able to be invested and earned more in interest over time.
- Don't supplant – avoid taking money away from existing programs and look to expand funding.
- Provide administrator and/or committee authority to determine grant amounts, match, and selection process.
- Consider public-private partnerships for increasing funding – be able to accept gifts, grants, and donations with the goal of making them tax deductible.
- If initial, long-term funding is not available, try a pilot program and use proof of concept 1-2 years later to secure sustained funding.
- Consider the creation of a BIPOC-led foundation or endowment funded through the state legislature.
- Provide funds that are given upfront rather than set up for reimbursement.

Implementation Best Practices

Interviewees noted a number of best practices when implementing outdoor opportunity grant programs. See below for a number of considerations and questions to ask at this stage.

- Will there be a required match? If so, how much? Consider a sliding scale based on need and/or meeting of specific criteria such as community income levels, proportion of students on free or reduced lunch, etc.
- Minimum, maximum award amount – what type of programs is the fund looking to support?
- Pull in stakeholders who can advocate for and create innovative opportunities for growing funding.
- Be aware of the timeline for grantees. Eighteen months or more can be beneficial so there is flexibility in spending if anything changes for the organization.

Specific Examples

- [Oregon's 2019-2023 SCORP](#) outlines potential funding mechanisms for non-motorized trails (Alternative Funding Sources, page 158)
- NCSL: [State Funding for Outdoor Recreation](#)
- The Trust for Public Land: [Technical assistance](#) with ballot measures and funding
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife: [Long-Term Funding Plan](#) (Table 4, page 42)



As more programs are established, states are working together to create a standardized list of metrics to collect from grantees, creating the basis of reporting for each grant program. By collecting these metrics, the impact can be shared and communicated in the same way across states and regions. Those standardized metrics include:

- Total number of youth participating in the program.
- Breakdown of age/grade of the total number of participants.
- Breakdown of demographics.
- Geographic regions reached.

Implementation – Standardized Metrics to be Added by Agency or Grant Board

While there are varied approaches to reporting requirements and caution taken to prevent overwhelming grantees with metric collection, additional metrics that have been used include:

- Estimated number of hours each participant spent outdoors.
- What types of lands were utilized for the programming? (State Parks, BLM, Forest Service, private, etc.)
- How many jobs (approx.) were supported through this programming?

Implementation – Aspirational Metrics

Once up and running, the following metrics can be implemented to improve accountability and reporting.

- Number of new organizations engaged; number of repeat participants.
- Long-term impact rather than year-over-year.
- Miles of trail restored or created; number of facilities built.
- How are programs culturally relevant?
- Partnership accomplishments and lessons learned.
- Educational goals achieved.
- Unforeseen challenges and recommended solutions.
- Is this leading to an outdoor recreation workforce that is more diverse?
- Is this increasing sense of belonging in the outdoors?

Implementation Best Practices

A number of best practices were outlined by interviewees regarding implementing an equitable reporting process for applicants.

- Simplify the process with an eye towards reducing the burden on applicants – evaluate to learn.
- Aim for relational conversations rather than evaluative ones.
- Take away the fear of failure and/or evaluation, and allow for storytelling
- Reduce costs of reporting.
- Ask directive questions to support grantee work.
- Be flexible with organizations on how they report – always give options for organizations to say they don't collect certain information.
- Limit written reporting.
- In order to be more dynamic and gain a fuller perspective, have metrics that get at the different levels of success from the individual, to program, to park/area, to system level.

Additional “Stretch” Features

The following features either already exist in a current program or were noted as aspirational features to include in the ideal outdoor opportunity grant program. Depending on program support, resources, and goals, some of these may fit better than others into program development.

- Create a side-by-side nonprofit or partnership with an existing nonprofit so donations are tax deductible.
- Have grantmaking decision sessions in person. Doing so offers a level of dialogue and connection that would be difficult to do online.
- Tie into outdoor classroom bills and promote coordination across state agencies.
- Have graduated funds with increasing funding each year (e.g., Colorado) on top of reliable and long-term funding.
- State gear share program and support for gear libraries by making them eligible for grants.
- Consider incorporating broader issues that tie into equity and outdoor recreation such as transportation, housing, immigration, etc.
- Add focus on expanding BIPOC leadership within organizations and increasing engagement of young BIPOC folks in the industry to foster permanent employment and growth in the workforce.
- Workforce support – connect the program to workforce and professional development within the industry.

Common Challenges & Solutions

While each state faces different challenges and has different resources to draw on, programs across the country have faced common challenges. Below are some of these challenges with recommended solutions shared by practitioners.

- **Government grant program structure favors previously funded or established organizations familiar with application processes.**
 - » Potential solution: Washington’s Recreation & Conservation Office changed the timing of office hours for applicants and tracks the number of new organizations reached to ensure broader grantee diversity.
- **Achieving diversity and representative nature of the grant advisory board.**
 - » Potential solution: Include community coalition in building a representative board, write into statute, and continue asking “who should be at the table who isn’t?”
- **Securing permanent, long-term program funding.**
 - » Potential solution: Explore state funding first for creative funding options, but consider a pilot year to have a proof of concept if initial long-term funding isn’t available.
- **Agency capacity to administer new grant programs.**
 - » Potential solution: Aim to add a grant program manager and/or build in additional resources to support the program, not just grant funding.
- **Aligning grant cycle, reporting, and program structure to best serve intended communities.**
 - » Potential solution: Be intentional about grant cycle timing – ensure community feedback continues to shape and improve the program. For example, many organizations run their programs in the summer so a grant deadline mid-summer will conflict with the work of increasing access and getting more youth outdoors.
- **Political viability of “equity” in legislation versus considering other terminology for programs focused on the same outcomes.**
 - » Potential solution: Consider other names or ways to promote the idea - using names such as “opportunity” fund, taking an approach through workforce development, communicating the shared benefits of increased outdoor access, etc.

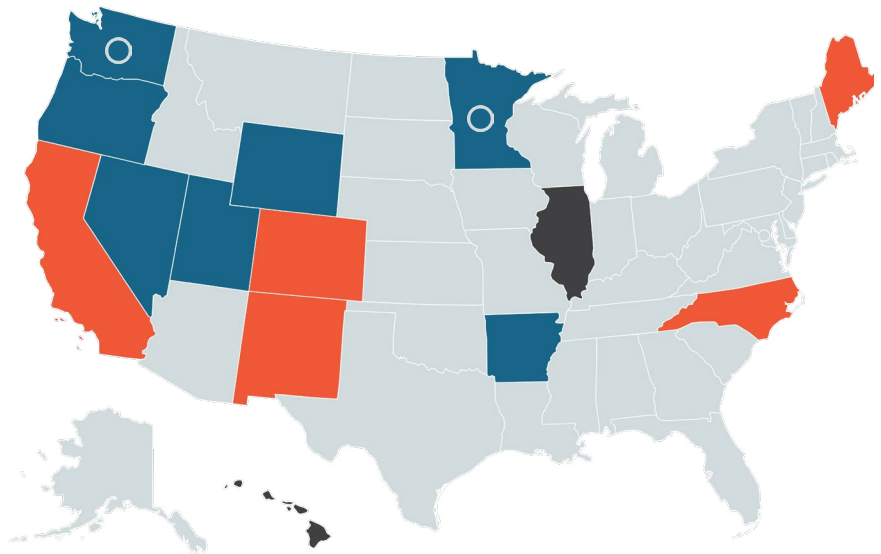
Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Existing Programs

Existing Outdoor Equity Funds or Similar Programs

The following states have outdoor equity funds or similar programs. The chart below breaks down each program's scope, approach, and funding.

- Outdoor equity grant program/fund
- Outdoor recreation/education program
- No child left inside program
- Attempted to create programs without legislative success



State	Year Established	Administrator	Funding Mechanism	Match Required?	Eligible Entities	Mandatory Advisory Board Make-up	Key Metrics Used
California (Outdoor Equity Fund (OEF))	2020	Parks & Rec - DNR	General fund; private donations	No	Nonprofit, public agency, tribal government; youth serving	No	# of communities & organizations funded; partnerships
Colorado (OEF)	2021	Parks & Wildlife - DNR	Redistribution of lottery money earmarked for general fund	No	Government entities, non-profits; participants <26 y.o.	Yes	# of participants accessing outdoors; # of counties
New Mexico (OEF)	2019	OREC - EDD	General fund; State conservation fund (2023); private donations	2:1; match waivers if applicant meets criteria	Tribes, Pueblos, Nations, municipalities, counties, non-profits, schools; participants <18 y.o. ; 40% low-income	No	# of kids with improved access to the outdoors

Minnesota (No Child Left Inside (NCLI))	2019	DNR	General fund		Schools, local agencies, tribes, nonprofits, private entities & veteran organizations. 40% FRPL & demographics.	No	# of kids provided with increased outdoor access
Washington (NCLI)	2007	Rec & Conservation Office	General fund	Depends on tier – 25% match or none	Community-based programs, schools serving at risk / underrepresented students	No	# of kids provided with increased outdoor access
Maine (Private OEF)	2023	Non-profit	Private donations	No	BIPOC-led and serving organizations	Yes	Relational reporting – other metrics not defined
Western North Carolina (Private OEF)	2023	Non-profit	Regional Commission; Private donations	No	Non-profits, for-profits, community groups, sole proprietors	No	In progress
Nevada (Outdoor Ed & Rec)	2019	DCNR – Division of Outdoor Recreation	General fund; private donations	No	Students on free and reduced-priced lunch, at risk of failing or dropping out of school	Yes	# of students; summary of accomplishments; counties; # of hours outdoors; jobs supported; sites used
Utah (Outdoor Ed & Rec)	2016	OREC – Governor's Office of ED	General fund; private donations	Yes, 20-50% by tier	Local or tribal governments, nonprofits serving underserved communities	No	# of children brought outside
Montana (Affinity program)	2002	Fish, Wildlife & Parks	National initiative-variable funding	No	Women (18+) are residents of Montana	No	# of women supported in increasing outdoors skills
Hawaii (NCLI)	Attempted 2020	Board of Land & Natural Resources	General fund; private donations	No	Schools	Yes	Not defined
Illinois (OEF)	Attempted 2020	DNR	General fund; private donations	No	Local governments, state agencies, non-profits	No	# children who were and could have been served; total # and types of entities that received grants; partnerships formed; educational objectives achieved; # of applications;

Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Case Study: New Mexico

Outdoor Equity Fund - Est. 2019

Overview

As the first state outdoor opportunity grant program, New Mexico leads the way in building equitable outdoor access. The program continues to change and grow and the state recently created a permanent funding source, bringing increased and reliable support for outdoor equity programs in New Mexico.

Program Mission: “To support outdoor recreation and learning programming specifically for individuals from historically underrepresented backgrounds.”

Program Funding

Total 2023 Funding: \$400,000 initially + private donations and newly established state funds through [S.B.9](#) (2023), that creates the Land of Enchantment Fund to permanently fund the Outdoor Equity Fund as part of a \$100 million investment in conservation and recreation.

Grant Amount & Structure: \$5,000 - \$40,000, generally unrestricted. Match is variable if applicants meet specific criteria.

Funding Source: Appropriations and direct donations to grant fund and/or endowment fund donations. S.B.9 established permanent funding creating the Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund.

Impact



\$3 Million
awarded by
the fund thus
far.



+30,000
youth
brought
outdoors.



130
organizations
supported

Metrics of Impact

- Total number of youth participating in the program.
- Breakdown of age/grade of the total number of participants.
- Breakdown of demographics.
- Geographic regions reached.
- Estimated number of hours each participant spent outdoors.
- What types of lands were utilized for the programming? (State Parks, BLM, Forest Service, private, etc.)
- How many jobs (approx.) were supported through programming?

Best Practices

- Combination of state and private funding.
- Match waiver.
- Grant funding paid upfront.
- Continuous improvement from community feedback.

Administrative

Administrator: Outdoor Recreation Division, Economic Development Department.

Eligible Applicants: “At least 40% of the population served by the applicant must be low-income youth, the applicant must have a well-developed, written plan to engage low-income youth in outdoor recreation activities, and the applicant must have an educational plan to educate youth about climate and the environment as part of its outdoor recreation program. At least 30% of grants each year must be awarded to nonprofit organizations, and half of grants will be awarded in urban areas, 25% in rural areas and 25% in tribal areas.”

Challenges

- Growing funding.
- Agency capacity to manage program (no specific grant administrator).

Legislative Notes

New Mexico [S.B.462](#) (enacted 2019): Established both the Office of Outdoor Recreation and the Outdoor Equity Grant program. The bill also outlined the duties of the Outdoor Recreation Division (OREC) director and created the Outdoor Recreation Advisory Committee – 15 members with specific roles, to support the OREC office (per diem).

- Legislative Vote Record: Senate: 38 - 0; House: 52 - 14.

Additional Resources

- [S.B.462](#) Legislative Text
- [2022 Grant Program Report](#) | *New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division*
- [New Mexico Establishes Permanent Funds for Conservation and Outdoor Recreation](#) | *NCEL*
- [2023 Outdoor Equity Fund Program Guide](#) | *New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division*



Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Case Study: California

Outdoor Equity Grants Program - Est. 2020

Overview

California's outdoor equity grants program is unique in its scale and impact. This program established a concept of Community Home Base as a way to determine geographic eligibility for programming.

Program Mission: "Funds services/program operations including activities in a community and trips to natural areas throughout California. Focuses on delivering environmental education and outdoor recreational activities, service learning, career pathways, and leadership opportunities through activities in the community and trips to natural areas that strengthen a connection to the natural world."

Program Funding

Total 2023 funding (Phase 1): \$57,000,000

Grant Amount & Structure: Up to \$700,000 for 3-year grant period. No match.

Funding Source: State general fund and private contributions.

Administrative

Administrator: Director of Parks & Recreation – CA State Parks, Natural Resources Agency

Eligible Applicants: Nonprofit, Public Agency, Tribal Government. Serving students on free or reduced-price meals, foster youth, and pupils of limited English proficiency.

Impact



125 low-income rural and urban communities

received [\\$57 million](#) from California State Parks to expand outdoor access in 2022.

Metrics of Impact

- Number of youth served.
- Partnership accomplishments and lessons learned.
- Educational goals achieved.
- Unforeseen challenges and recommended solutions.

Best Practices

- Organizations can secure \$700K per application rather than one grant per cycle.
- Established the concept of Community Home Base. Applicants have to identify a specific geographic area that is eligible.
- Funds internships and stipends for nature-based careers.
- Demographics and geographic eligibility make up 20% of the overall scoring points.
- Have hired neighborhood youth to help with outreach and running of grantee programs.

Challenges

- Community Home Base idea had push back, especially when organizations have ongoing operations and serve an eligible population but aren't based in the community.
- Challenge of defining "community", use "geographic community."
- Difficulty in attracting participants (post-grant award) who lack trust and are weary of government-funded programs.
- Added criteria for the second grant cycle: grantees must have an outreach plan for driving community participation.

Legislative Notes

California [A.B.209](#) (Enacted 2019): Increased ability of underserved and at-risk youth populations to participate in outdoor environmental education experiences. The Administrator is responsible for developing criteria, procedures, and accountability measures and providing additional priority criteria, especially for outdoor education programs. The bill also established the Outdoor Equity Grants Program (OEGP) and the CA Outdoor Equity Account within the program.

- Legislative Vote Record: Senate: 34 - 3, 3 abstain; House: 72 - 1, 6 abstain.

Additional Resources

- [A.B.209](#) Legislative text
- [Outdoor Equity Grants Program Webpage](#) | *California Department of Parks and Recreation*
- [Overview of grantees and projects \(filter for OEP\)](#) | *California Department of Parks and Recreation*



Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Case Study: Colorado

Outdoor Equity Grants Program - Est. 2021

Overview

Following the establishment of Outdoor Equity Funds in New Mexico and California, Colorado set out to create its own. Led by a strong coalition of community leaders and nonprofits, alongside legislative champion, Representative Leslie Herod, the program was established in 2021.

Program Mission: Funding for “outdoor organizations focused on creating opportunities for youth and their families from communities who have been historically excluded, so that they have equitable opportunities to get involved in recreational activities and experiencing Colorado’s open spaces, state parks, public lands and other outdoor areas.”

Program Funding

Total 2023 Funding: \$2,250,000

Grant Amount & Structure: \$4,000 - \$150,000, generally unrestricted. No match.

Funding Source: Redistribution of lottery money earmarked for general fund.

Administrative

Administrator: Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources

Eligible Applicants: Governmental entities, nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, or federally recognized tribes located within Colorado that will directly utilize the funds to engage youth(<26 years) and their families in the outdoors through education, conservation, or recreation may apply for the grant program.

Impact



Over \$3 Million
awarded by the fund
thus far.



7,498 participants
supported in accessing
outdoor programming.



Organizations from
34 Counties
in Colorado served.

Metrics of Impact

- Number of participants supported in accessing outdoor programming.
- Number of counties.
- Demographics of populations served.
- Additional metrics determined by the grant committee.

Best Practices

- Dedicated grant manager.
- Coalition engaged from creation through implementation – has supported and continued to provide feedback.
- Representative grant advisory board, runs effectively and provides stipends.

Challenges in Colorado

- Ensuring diversity on the grant board, especially around Indigenous perspectives and rural/urban distribution.

Legislative Notes

Colorado [H.B.21-1318](#) (Enacted 2021): Defined the problem: “A clear lack of equity exists for low-income (defined as <200% of poverty-line), inner-city, rural, racially, and ethnically diverse youth, for youth who are LGBT or queer or questioning, for Native American or Indigenous youth, and for youth with disabilities to engage in meaningful outdoor experiences and nature-based education.”

- The bill outlined program funding over 3-year timeframe, and was prescriptive about advisory board- members and roles by identity and expertise.
- Legislative Vote Record: Senate: 24 - 11; House: 43 - 22.

Additional Resources

- [H.B.1318](#) Legislative text
- [2023 Grant Program Report](#) | *Colorado Parks and Wildlife*



Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Case Study: Washington

No Child Left Inside Grant Program - Est. 2007

Overview

Washington created the No Child Left Inside Grant Program to ensure under-served youth had quality opportunities to experience the natural world. The program, established in 2007, has been a model for others around the country.

Program Mission: Serving students at risk of failing or dropping out of school, underrepresented learners, and children facing social, behavior, economic, and health barriers, and helping them improve overall academic performance, self-esteem, personal responsibility, community involvement, personal health, and understanding of nature.

Program Funding

Total 2023 Funding: \$4,500,000

Grant Amount & Structure: \$5,000 - \$150,000, generally unrestricted. Match is dependent - 25% for Tier 2 & 3 projects. No match for Tier 1 projects. Three-tiered program of grant levels (\$5k - \$25k, \$25k - \$75k, \$75 - \$150k); Funding every other year.

Funding Source: General fund.

Administrative

Administrator: Recreation and Conservation Office

Eligible Applicants: Community-based programs, formal school programs, informal after-school programs, local agencies, Native American tribes, nonprofit organizations, private entities including individuals and businesses, special purpose districts (i.e., park and recreation districts), and veteran organizations.

Impact

 **+135,000 youth served**

- 57% youth of color.
- 21% youth with disabilities.
- 17% English language learners.

+4.6 million hours of outdoor experiences [supported](#).

Metrics of Impact

- Number of kids provided with increased outdoor access.
- Evaluation scores with point ranges for each of the following categories: program, youth, partnerships, sustainability of program, state parks and public lands.

Best Practices

- Reporting and data collection.
- Looking to measure the number of new partnerships built.
- Continuous improvement and review of the program.

Challenges in Washington

- Representation on grant advisory boards.
- Reaching new communities.

Legislative Notes

Washington [H.B.1677](#) (Enacted 2007): The program administrator has the authority to shape the program and prioritize criteria including maximum number of participants; use of state parks and personnel; ability of a program to commit matching funds, including using public-private partnerships.

- Legislative Vote Record: All votes unanimous.

Additional Resources

- [H.B.1677](#) Legislative text
- [Washington No Child Left Inside Grant Program Webpage](#) | *Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office*



Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Case Study: Minnesota

No Child Left Inside Grant Program - Est. 2019

Overview

This program has continued to gain bipartisan support, emphasizes the use of state park lands and resources, and sets an important example for providing program information in multiple languages.

Program Mission: “Supporting outdoor experiences in both formal and informal education settings, with an emphasis on traditional outdoor activities, natural resource education, and disadvantaged youth.”

Program Funding

Total 2023 Funding: \$1,000,000

Grant Amount & Structure: \$5,000 - \$50,000, generally unrestricted. No match.

Funding Source: 15% general budget, 85% game & fishing fund + private donations.

Administrative

Administrator: Department of Natural Resources

Eligible Applicants: Public entity or private nonprofit organization with a mission or educational purpose that supports natural resource education and/or outdoor recreation.


Legislative Notes

Minnesota [H.F. 133](#) (Enacted 2019): Gives program administrator the authority to shape the program and prioritize criteria including Maximum number of participants; use of state parks and personnel; ability of a program to commit matching funds, including using public-private partnerships.

- [Legislative Vote Record](#): Passed in an environment & natural resources finance bill (Senate: 61 - 5; House: 84 - 43).

Impact

\$1.9 million
in [215 grants](#)
awarded by the
program since
its inception.

125 
communities
positively
impacted by the
grant program.

Metrics of Impact

- Number of kids supported in accessing the outdoors.

Best Practices

- Grants awarded in phases and in three categories: Natural resources education & outdoor recreation, fishing, hunting & shooting sports programs.
- Dual language publicity campaigns.

Challenges

- Growing funding and securing long-term, sustainable funding.

Additional Resources

- [H.F.133](#) Legislative text
- [Minnesota No Child Left Inside Grant Program Page](#) | *Minnesota Department of Natural Resources*



Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Case Study: Nevada

Outdoor Education & Recreation Grant Program - Est. 2019

Overview

While not an explicit outdoor equity program, this program determines eligibility with related indicators such as free and reduced-price lunch. The program has been challenged with receiving long-term funding and is in its first grant cycle (2023).

Program Mission: “The Nevada Outdoor Education and Recreation Grant Program (NOER) seeks to provide quality opportunities for Nevada students to experience the outdoors.”

Program Funding

Total 2023 Funding: \$250,000

Grant Amount & Structure: \$5,000 - \$50,000, generally unrestricted. No match. Two-tier program with Tier 1 for grants under \$5,000 and Tier 2 for requests between \$5,001 and \$50,000. Eligible costs include education and recreation programming, and associated transportation, materials, and labor costs.

Funding Source: General fund appropriations and private donations.

Administrative

Administrator: Division of Outdoor Recreation, Department of Natural Resources.

Eligible Applicants: Economically disadvantaged (free and reduced-price lunch), at risk of academic failure, and students facing barriers to outdoor recreation.

Impact



While established in 2019, the program did not receive funding until 2023 and is currently in its **first grant cycle**

Metrics of Impact

- Number of students (broken down by age group).
- Summary of accomplishments, counties.
- Number of hours outdoors.
- Jobs supported.
- Sites used.

Best Practices

- The advisory committee receives a stipend, per diem, and includes a range of representatives, including participants of grant-funded programs.
- Endowment fund for any outside contributions.

Challenges

- Legislation passed and the program was created without funding. The program did not get funded until 2023.
- Did not have a coalition of outside organizations involved in program development.

Legislative Notes

Nevada [A.B.331](#) (Enacted 2019): The program administrator has the authority to develop and administer the program with certain criteria including: “Be primarily focused on pupils who are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (free or reduced-price lunch) or at risk of failing academically or dropping out of school.”

- [Legislative Vote Record](#): Constitutional majority in both chambers.

Additional Resources

- [A.B.331](#) Legislative text
- [A.B.128](#) (2023 funding) Legislative text
- [Nevada Outdoor Education and Recreation Grant Program Webpage](#) | *Nevada Department of Conservation & Natural Resources*



Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Case Study: Utah

Children’s Outdoor Recreation and Education Grant Program - Est. 2019

Overview

While the Utah program has struggled with securing long-term funding, it has elevated the need to provide outdoor opportunities for all children around the state and offers an example of connecting and working with the disability community in the state.

Program Mission: To provide high-quality, outdoor-focused learning experiences to youth ages 6-18 and teach them the physical skills that can make outdoor recreation part of a healthy and active lifestyle.

Program Funding

Total 2023 Funding: \$200,000

Grant Amount & Structure: \$500 - \$7,000. Match scaled from 50%-20% depending on grant type and need.

Funding Source: General fund and private donations.

Administrative

Administrator: Division of Outdoor Recreation, Department of Natural Resources

Eligible Applicants: Local governments, tribal governments, and nonprofits serving children between 6 - 18 years old.

Impact



Since its inception in 2019, the program has funded **24 programs in 17 counties** with a total of \$100,000.

The program received sustained funding in 2023 and will enter a new grant cycle in September 2023.

Metrics of Impact

- Number of children brought outside.

Best Practices

- Creating a youth-specific outdoor recreation and education program enables focus on underserved youth in addition to a broader state outdoor recreation grant program.
- Grant tour to assist small communities with applications.
- Connection with the disability community.

Challenges

- Had initial one-time funding, attempted to fund with a hotel room tax, which was strongly opposed. Continuing to work on sustained funding - secured \$200,000 for 2023.
- Engaging tribes and tribal governments, and building broader grantee bases.

Legislative Notes

Utah [S.B.222](#) (Enacted 2019): Created the grant program and associated fund. Defined communities served as “underserved or underprivileged” in terms as economically disadvantaged with limited access to recreational infrastructure as well as eligible youth in that community with limited access to outdoor recreation or education programs. The bill also gave the outdoor recreation office the authority to administer the program and determine eligibility and evaluation criteria.

- [Legislative Vote Record](#): Senate: 28 - 0, 1 abstain; House: 62 - 7, 6 abstain.

Additional Resources

- [S.B.222](#) Legislative text
- [Utah Children’s Outdoor Recreation and Education Grant Program Webpage](#) | *Utah Department of Natural Resources*



Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

Key Resources

NCEL Resources

1. [Outdoor Engagement Issue Page](#)
2. [Outdoors as a Climate Solution Briefing Book](#)

Additional Resources

1. [The Youth Outdoor Policy Playbook](#) | *Youth Outdoor Policy Partnership*

Youth outdoor policy background, bill tracking, and case studies with comprehensive policy resources and infographics.

2. [Equity in State-Based Outdoor Recreation and Education Programs: Analysis of Eight Western States](#) | *CU Boulder MENV Graduate Program, WRA, TPL, CWP, Rising Routes*

Outdoor equity background, state policies, case studies, and talking points. Review of outdoor recreation, education, and equity programs in Western states and recommendations for improvement.

3. [Education Session: State-Based Equity Funds](#) | *Outdoor Retailer, OIA*

Panel discussion on key learnings from establishing outdoor equity funds with nonprofit leaders in the outdoor equity space.

4. [Inspiring the Future Outdoor Recreation Economy](#) | *State Outdoor Business Alliance Network*

Report on the economic impact of outdoor recreation across the country, definitions of outdoor recreation, and talking points for the value of outdoor recreation.

5. [Inclusivity in the Outdoors Report](#) | *Merrell*

Report on the barriers faced by many communities in accessing and enjoying time outside. Metrics and talking points for disparities in access to the outdoors.

6. [Outdoor Policy Guide](#) | *Nature Based Education Consortium*

Updated to December 2021, the guide highlights state and local policies that “are intended to build opportunities for youth learning and recreation in and about the outdoors through a wide range of approaches.”

7. [Five Ways to Make the Outdoors More Inclusive](#) | *REI, The Atlantic*

An overview and description of five key ideas for increasing access to time outside generated by panelists and experts in outdoor recreation and access.

8. [Best Practices for Meaningful Community Engagement](#) | *Groundwork USA*

Outline of practices and questions to ask when looking to engage with historically underrepresented populations.

9. [Hello Insight](#)

Tools for measuring social and emotional learning and quantitative impact.

Outdoor Opportunity Legislative Toolkit

202.744.1006 • www.nceleviro.org • 1100 H St NW, Suite 600 • Washington, DC 20005