

Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside and Recreational Trails Program

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Funding Examples



Source: NPS

Great Smoky Mountains National Park Trail Rehabilitation

In 2011, the NPS and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy collaborated to access Recreational Trails Program funding to hire and equip trail crew members to rehabilitate three miles of the Appalachian Trail in the North Carolina section of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Rehabilitation of the trail allows for easier pedestrian, wheelchair, and equestrian access. RTP covered \$75,000 of the project costs, with a match of \$18,750.

Key Resources and Contacts

- [National Park Service Transportation Branch and regional transportation coordinators](#)
- [State Department of Transportation Contacts](#)
- [Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside](#)
- [State Transportation Alternatives Coordinators](#)
- [Recreational Trails Program](#)
- [State Recreational Trails Program Administrators](#)

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The Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TA Set-Aside) and Recreational Trails Program (RTP) are two important Federal Highway Administration programs that benefit National Park Service (NPS) units and their partners. While both programs have several eligible project types, NPS units typically utilize the TA Set-Aside to fund the construction and rehabilitation of paved, multi-use trails and historic transportation facilities like bridges. The NPS typically uses the RTP to fund the development, maintenance, and restoration of recreational trails, which are usually natural surface. The TA Set-Aside program is administered by state departments of transportation (DOTs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). The RTP is usually administered by state resource agencies. In most states, NPS units can apply directly for the TA Set-Aside and RTP.

How can parks access this funding?

Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside

The TA Set-Aside (formerly known as the Transportation Alternatives Program/Transportation Enhancements) funds the development of facilities for nonmotorized transportation, community improvement activities such as historic preservation and vegetation management, and environmental mitigation related to stormwater and habitat connectivity. Projects are selected through a competitive process administered by state DOTs and MPOs.

Park staff can reach out to state DOTs or MPOs to determine when the next funding call for projects will occur. States and MPOs determine which projects are selected through a competitive process. In most states, NPS units are eligible to sponsor a TA Set-Aside project. To receive these funds, parks must meet individual state requirements and participate in competitive grant rounds that can occur annually, biennially, or when funds are otherwise available.

The TA Set-Aside generally has 80 percent Federal share and 20 percent State or local match. Federal Lands Transportation Program funding may be used to satisfy the local match.

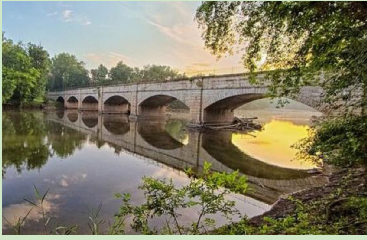
Recreational Trails Program

RTP provides funding to states to create and maintain recreational trails for motorized and nonmotorized trail uses, including hiking, bicycling, in-line skating, equestrian use, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, off-road motorcycling, all-terrain vehicle riding, four-wheel driving, or using other off-road motorized vehicles. In most states, a state resource agency, such as a state parks or natural resources department, administers the program.

NPS units can reach out to RTP State Administrators for guidance on state policies and project eligibility requirements.

Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside and Recreational Trails Program

Funding Examples



Source: NPS

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park (NHP) Aqueduct Rehabilitation

In 2016, the NPS and Maryland Department of Transportation worked together to secure Transportation Alternatives Program funding (a predecessor to the TA Set-Aside) for the rehabilitation of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal NHP Aqueduct in Washington County, Maryland. This project aims to support economic development in the state by enhancing a bicycle and pedestrian trail and restoring the cultural landscape. The project will replace a missing sidewall that was destroyed in 1920, allowing the aqueduct to hold water again, improve structures, repoint existing stonework, and waterproof/extend the Cushwa Basin. This project received matching funding from the Maryland Bikeways Program.

What projects are eligible?

Transportation Alternatives (TA) Set-Aside

Projects eligible for the TA Set-Aside include:

- Construction, planning, and design of on- and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other nonmotorized forms of transportation, including traffic calming, safety-related infrastructure, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance;
- Construction, planning, and design of infrastructure-related projects and systems that will provide safe routes for non-drivers, including children, older adults, and individuals with disabilities, to access daily needs;
- Conversion and use of abandoned railroad corridors to trails for pedestrians, bicyclists, or other nonmotorized transportation users;
- Construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas;
- Community improvement activities, including managing outdoor advertising, preservation of historic transportation facilities, vegetation management, and archaeological activities related to transportation projects; and
- Environmental mitigation activities, including pollution prevention, pollution abatement, and habitat connectivity.

Awarded projects must be listed in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and be consistent with the state's Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the MPO's Metropolitan Transportation Plan where applicable.

Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

Projects eligible for the RTP include:

- Maintenance and restoration of existing recreational trails;
- Development and rehabilitation of trailside facilities and trail linkages for recreational trails;
- Purchase and lease of trail construction and maintenance equipment;
- Construction of new recreational trails;
- Acquisition of easements or property for recreational trails or recreational trail corridors;
- Assessment of trail conditions for accessibility and maintenance; and
- Development and dissemination of publications and operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental projects.

State resource agencies must coordinate with State DOTs to ensure that awarded projects are added to the STIP and applicable MPO TIPs.

NEXT STEPS

Build relationships with state and local governments

Ongoing collaboration with state DOTs and resource agencies, MPOs, and local governments is the best way to remain aware of potential funding opportunities related to the TA Set-Aside, RTP, and other funding programs. Parks and their partners should innovate and develop projects that extend outside of park boundaries to create mutually beneficial connections to surrounding communities.

Identify grant deadlines for TA Set-Aside and RTP

The TA Set-Aside and RTP usually are managed by different state agencies with different application cycles and deadlines. Since application periods can be relatively short, parks should have projects and application materials ready well in advance of grant deadlines. Typically, application requirements do not change considerably from year to year, so materials posted from prior years are a good indication of upcoming grant rounds.