

A couple is walking away from the camera on a paved trail. The man is on the left, wearing a red and blue plaid shirt and blue jeans. The woman is on the right, wearing a white and blue striped shirt and blue jeans. They are holding hands. The trail is surrounded by green grass and trees with some autumn-colored leaves. In the background, there are more trees and a clear sky.

NextLevel TRAILS

Grantee Handbook

Next Level Trails Grant Process

Applicants will be notified whether their projects have been selected for Next Level Trails funding after all applications in a given round have been reviewed and evaluated. Each Grantee will be responsible for developing and maintaining the project site as outlined in the State Grant Agreement and all documents incorporated therein.

This Handbook outlines procedures regarding the State Grant Agreement and related items, development guidelines, payment information, and post-completion responsibilities. It also includes a Grant Process Checklist to ensure that appropriate steps are followed. For questions regarding land acquisition procedures, please refer to the [NLT Real Estate Guidelines & Procedures Handbook](#).

STATE GRANT AGREEMENT

The Grantee will be sent an electronic State Grant Agreement for signature. This Agreement will provide information for project correspondence and will describe the responsibilities of the State and of the Grantee. It will include:

1. The organization with whom the Agreement was made.
2. A project number given for identification purposes.
3. The project name to be used on all project correspondence.
4. The dates of Grant Agreement commencement and expiration—this period will reflect the timeline identified in the NLT grant application.
5. The project scope (Exhibit A: Project Narrative & Timeline), which identifies the elements included in the project proposal as approved. Only those items will be eligible for grant assistance. If the Grantee needs to make revisions, the Grantee's assigned DNR grant coordinator should be contacted before those revisions are made.
6. The total cost of the project (Exhibit B: Project Budget), including the NLT share and the Grantee's match, as well as details regarding funding phases (see below). The NLT share will not exceed 80% of the total project cost and will be limited to a maximum to \$5 million (regionally significant) or \$2 million (locally significant).
7. Specific elements incorporated into the project agreement, such as provisions outlined by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources or Indiana Department of Administration and applicable State laws.

The Grant Agreement must be electronically signed by an authorized representative of the Grantee and internally at the State by the director of the Department of Natural Resources, the head of the Department of Administration, the head of the State Budget Agency, and the Attorney General. Please consult the Indiana Department of Administration's instructions for [Electronically Signing Contracts](#) for guidance on e-signing the State Grant Agreement.

PHASED FUNDING

Funding for a Next Level Trails project will be provided upfront to the Grantee in phases. Funding for the first phase will be transferred once the State Grant Agreement has been signed by all parties. Funding for any later phase will be transferred upon approved completion of the previous project milestone.

A single phase may include funding for Design & Engineering, Land Acquisition, and/or Trail Construction. The number of funding phases will vary depending on the needs of each individual project. DNR will work with each Grantee prior to executing the State Grant Agreement to determine the appropriate number of funding phases for each project in order to complete the project in a timely manner while protecting the State's financial interests.

PROGRESS UPDATES

Throughout the course of the grant, the Grantee must submit to its assigned DNR grant coordinator quarterly progress updates. These updates should be submitted via email and should detail the latest developments in the project. Progress updates must provide an accounting of grant funds spent on the project up to the date of submission.

Grantees are encouraged, but not required to submit photographs and/or any video of construction of the trail or special events, such as ground breaking ceremonies or dedications. All photographs or videos will become the property of the DNR. It may be used for promotion of the Next Level Trail program and by the State of Indiana in general. This includes social media. These will not be used in for-profit publications outside of the DNR or State of Indiana. By voluntarily submitting any photographs or video in your progress update, you agree that your NLT project can be used for Next Level Trails promotion, Next Level Connections initiatives, etc.

AMENDMENTS

During the project period, various situations may result in changes to or deviations from the original State Grant Agreement. An amendment is necessary to add to or alter the signed Agreement. Amendments are used to cover items that could not be anticipated in the original project. **It is essential that amendment requests be kept to a minimum.** It is the responsibility of the Grantee to determine the scope of the project prior to submitting an application and, upon approval, carry through with that project.

Changes that may necessitate an amendment include major project-scope changes or an extension of the project period. **Increases to the original grant award will not be considered under any circumstance.** All changes should be in accordance with the intent of the original application and must be justifiable.

The Grantee should contact their assigned DNR grant coordinator prior to the submission of an amendment request in order to determine whether the request is feasible. If it is determined that the request is feasible, the Grantee then submits the request to the grant coordinator. This request should include all project revisions desired, including cost estimates, design plans, or maps, as well as justification of the need for the changes. DNR reserves the right to deny an amendment request.

Major Project Scope Changes

Due to unforeseen changes in project costs or revisions in design plans for the project, certain items may have to be added or deleted from the project after it is approved. In the case of adding an item to the project, construction on that item cannot begin until an amendment is approved. In the case of removing an item from the project, the Grantee should first make every effort to fulfill the original scope of the project as outlined in the State Grant Agreement. Minor project-scope changes, such as removing a bench or reducing parking spaces, may not require an amendment.

DNR will evaluate all requests for changes in project scope on a case-by-case basis.

Project Period Extensions

All work in a given project must be completed within the period identified in the State Grant Agreement. If the project cannot be completed during the period identified on the State Grant Agreement, the Grantee may submit a request for a time extension. The request must justify why the project cannot be completed on schedule and should include a time schedule for completing the remaining items. An amendment for an extension of time must be submitted as soon as the Grantee is aware of the need for an extension and no later than 60 days before the project is scheduled to expire.

As a reminder, DNR reserves the right to terminate the State Grant Agreement for any project that experiences unreasonable delays or periods of inactivity.

DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

A development project may consist of new construction or upgrading of existing trail surfacing to provide enhanced opportunities to trail users. Development should meet the needs of all citizens and be attractive, safe, and compatible with the site's natural features. Once developed, a project must remain in public trail use for the useful life of the trail and related amenities, which is expected to be a minimum of 25 years.

Professional Services

Grantees are not required to hire consultants under the NLT program. However, if a Grantee chooses to hire a consultant to perform work not already completed prior to the NLT grant application, the DNR recommends that the consultant be on the [Indiana Department of Transportation \(INDOT\) prequalified list](#). Pre-qualification is an INDOT policy; NLT projects are not subject to INDOT requirements, but DNR recommends selecting a pre-qualified firm primarily as a simple vetting measure. This recommendation should not be interpreted to mean that NLT projects must be treated as a federal project with all of the associated overhead.

Typical eligible consultant costs include environmental coordination, development of construction plans and specifications, and project management. Costs incurred for designing facilities not developed in the project are ineligible for grant assistance. Previously incurred design and engineering expenses related to the project may be eligible as match credit, subject to DNR review. These costs should be identified in the grant application. Grantees or their consultants should contact the DNR for questions regarding the eligibility of certain costs for grant assistance or match credit.

Environmental Compliance

All Next Level Trails applicants must initiate DNR Early Coordination/Environmental Assessment process before applying. Grantees must provide a copy of the final DNR Early Coordination/Environmental Assessment response letter to their DNR grant coordinator before the State Grant Agreement can be signed. If the Grantee makes any significant changes to their project scope that warrants a new DNR Early Coordination/Environmental Assessment, the Grantee must submit a copy of the new response letter to their assigned DNR grant coordinator.

It is the Grantee's responsibility to ensure that all needed permits or clearances are obtained prior to construction. Copies of all permits, clearances, and any mandatory environmental documents must be provided to their assigned DNR grant coordinator.

Plan Review

All development plans must be reviewed by the project's assigned DNR grant coordinator prior to bidding and construction for safety, accessibility (where applicable), and sustainability. The plans will also be reviewed for compliance with the scope of the project as written in the NLT grant application and State Grant Agreement. Plans that have already been created should be submitted with the grant application for review. Any comments made by the DNR grant coordinator must be addressed prior to submitting the plans for permits (if required) and/or bidding.

Plans may also be subject to review by additional agencies, including (but not limited to) the DNR Division of Water, Indiana Department of Environmental Management, Indiana Department of Homeland Security, Indiana State Department of Health, Indiana Department of Transportation, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Plans must also be submitted for local permits as required by local regulations.

Bidding & Purchasing

All Grantees must follow all applicable State laws concerning competitive bidding and purchasing procedures. State bidding and purchasing procedures apply to both local units of government and non-profit organizations. Grantees should consult with their attorneys regarding bidding and purchasing requirements. Please note that some laws can periodically change and requirements may vary.

In general, a scope of services desired by the Grantee should be prepared and normal advertisement procedures followed. Hiring the lowest bidder is not required; however, a written explanation justifying the process used in hiring a contractor that is not the lowest bidder must be submitted to the project's assigned DNR grant coordinator. During the negotiation process, all bidders must be treated equally and given the same opportunities to revise their bids.

Copies of the bid tabulation sheet and the bid award summary should be submitted to the project's assigned DNR grant coordinator within 30 days of contract award. Most purchases, especially large-scale construction contracts, should be done through a competitive bidding process. Any questions about exceptions to bidding and other state purchasing laws should first be directed to the Grantee's attorney. If questions persist, Grantees should then contact their project's assigned DNR grant coordinator.

Construction

Allowable construction costs include all necessary construction activities from site preparation (clearing, excavation, grading, etc.) to the completion of a trail and related amenities. Construction may be carried out through a contract with a private firm, by use of the Grantee's own personnel and equipment (force account), by donated labor, or by a combination of these, subject to State law (see additional force account and in-kind information in *Payment Information* section).

As a State program, the NLT program is not subject to the Davis-Bacon Act, so contractors are not bound to construction wage rates established by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Construction Contracts

If a Grantee elects to construct the trail and related amenities through a contract with a private firm, contracts must be written in such a way that the construction specifications, including any State provisions, are incorporated into the scope of the contract. Change orders to the contract that substantially affect the scope of the project must receive DNR approval before the change order is negotiated. An amendment to the State Grant Agreement may be required in this case.

The contract should be awarded to the individual or firm whose bid is most advantageous to the Grantee. Contracts must be awarded to responsible contractors or suppliers who have the ability to perform successfully under the terms and conditions of the contract. Consideration should be given to such matters as contractor integrity, record of past performances, financial and technical capability, and access to necessary resources.

When the Grantee considers the lowest bidder unqualified, incapable, or not responsible, the next lowest bidder may be awarded the contract. If a contract is awarded to other than the lowest bidder, a letter of justification for this action must be sent to the DNR grant coordinator with the bid tabulation summary. DNR approval must be obtained prior to awarding the contract in this case.

PAYMENT INFORMATION

As noted above, funding for a given project will be provided up front, according to the phases outlined in the State Grant Agreement. Costs must be incurred within the project period to be eligible for grant funding. Costs incurred after the project has expired are ineligible for grant funding or as match. Items added to a project by a change in scope amendment must be approved before costs may be incurred for the items.

If there are remaining unexpended grant funds at the end of a project, the Grantee must transfer those funds back to the State so that they may be placed back into the program. No additional funds will be awarded beyond the original grant award in the State Grant Agreement.

Once a given phase has been completed, Grantees will be required to submit documentation to account for **all expenses and donations (including match)** in order to reconcile NLT funding expenditures. With this in mind, the Grantee should keep all appropriate documentation related to project expenses. All claims should be accompanied by a completed Claim Summary Document (see [Attachment 1](#)), which must be signed by the authorized representative, as well as corresponding invoices, claim vouchers and canceled checks. Additional documentation could include closing statements, force-account records, in-kind contribution records, etc.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list; additional documentation may be required for certain expenses. Grantees should consult with their assigned DNR grant coordinator to determine when additional documentation is required.

Complete payment documentation for each phase should be submitted after the completion of that phase. Please allow six to eight weeks for the Grantee to receive approval and payment for the next funding phase.

Final payment documentation for work done during the project period must be submitted no later than 60 days after the State Grant Agreement has expired. This documentation should specify that the work had been completed before the project expired.

Force Account

If a Grantee plans to claim force-account costs, this intent must be stated in the grant application and in the explanation of any later project amendment requests. The DNR uses a Force Account Labor Form, which is completed by the laborer and signed by their supervisor or project manager, to certify the rate and number of hours the laborer worked on the project. This form should be submitted along with a copy of the employee payroll or similar documentation.

The name of the program on the form should be Next Level Trails (NLT). Other column headings are self-explanatory.

Overtime pay is normally ineligible unless a written justification accompanies the force-account documentation. The justification should explain the circumstances surrounding the additional time needed to complete the work. Overtime pay will be considered only when an employee is working full time for a period of several days or weeks at the project site.

In-Kind Contributions (Match Only)

Facilities may also be developed by in-kind contributions, which might consist of labor, equipment, materials, or supplies donated to a Grantee by private organizations or individuals. In-kind contributions will be credited as part of the Grantee's match.

Grantees must submit a commitment letter or affidavit from each partner providing in-kind contributions with the NLT grant application. This document should detail the extent of the partner's commitment, be on appropriate letterhead, and be signed by an authorized representative of the organization. The DNR must agree on the valuation of in-kind contributions of goods and services before the NLT grant commencement date for such contributions to be considered as match. Unexpected contributions that occur after the NLT grant commencement date may be credited as match if agreed to by the DNR. In this case, the Grantee must still provide documentation detailing the partner's level of commitment.

The procedures for determining the value of in-kind contributions from other sources are as follows:

- 1. Valuation of Volunteer Services:** Volunteer services may be contributed by professional and technical personnel, consultants, and skilled or unskilled labor. Each hour of volunteered service may be counted as part of the Grantee's matching share if the service is an integral and necessary part of an approved project. The records of in-kind contributions of personnel services must include timesheets containing the signature of the person whose time is contributed as well as the signature of the person's supervisor to verify the record is accurate. The DNR Donated Labor Form may be used for this purpose.

The value of donated or volunteer services is \$10 for unskilled general labor and \$20 (with documentation) for supervisory/skilled trail building personnel. If a volunteer is professionally skilled in the trade or service to be provided, such as an electrician installing wiring or a plumber connecting the water supply, the rate this individual is normally paid for performing this trade may be used. A letter from the donor's employer on company letterhead must document this rate.

- 2. Valuation of Donated Supplies, Materials, and Equipment:** The value of donated supplies, materials, and equipment that are permanently acquired should be reasonable and not exceed the current market prices at the time they are purchased for the project. Records of in-kind contributions of supplies and materials must indicate the fair-market value by listing the comparable prices from other vendors.
- 3. Valuation of Loaned Equipment:** Occasionally, equipment used in the construction of a trail will be loaned to the Grantee. The Grantee may claim the value of the equipment use as an in-kind contribution to the Grantee's share of project costs. The computation of equipment-use rates can be based on the rates of local suppliers. These rates must be documented on company letterhead. In order to receive reimbursement, Grantees must supply documentation signed by the donor stating the date(s), number of hours used per date, the type and model number of the equipment used, price per hour or day, and total cost claimed as a donation.
- 4. Valuation of Other Donations:** Other donations received specifically for and in direct benefit to the project may be accepted as part of a Grantee's matching share, provided that the value of these donations are adequately supported and permissible under the law. Such donations must be reasonable and properly justifiable.

POST-COMPLETION RESPONSIBILITIES

Final Inspection

Upon notification of project completion, DNR staff will conduct a final inspection to ensure the project has been completed in accordance with the State Grant Agreement. Once this inspection has been completed and the Grantee has addressed any outstanding concerns, the Grantee must provide an “as-built” site plan that clearly delineates the completion date, property dimensions, trail mileage, and location of the NLT scope items and/or parcels of land acquired. This site plan will serve as a part of the permanent record of NLT assistance for the project. In some cases, there may be no changes from the plan previously submitted with the grant application other than labeling it with a completion date.

Grantees are encouraged to hold ceremonial events to mark the opening of the project to the public. Please keep DNR apprised of plans for any ribbon-cuttings, trail dedications, etc.

NLT Sign

A Next Level Trails sign must be permanently displayed at all project sites upon project completion. This sign indicates that the project was funded in part by the Next Level Trails program. The DNR will provide a sign for each project funded through NLT after the final inspection. The sign should be placed at a trailhead or another visible location along the trail. The costs of posts and related hardware for installing the sign are the sole responsibility of the Grantee.

Grantees may provide additional signage to recognize other agencies involved in the acquisition or development of a particular site. The cost for this additional signage is not eligible for grant funding or as match.

Trail Counters

Trail counters are an eligible cost under the NLT program and grantees are encouraged to install trail counters at all trails funded by the NLT program. Trail counters are an instrument to track trail traffic and can help inform local decision-making regarding trails. Any Grantee installing a trail counter as part of an NLT project will be responsible for supplying trail-use data to the DNR upon request.

Operation & Maintenance

Property acquired or developed with NLT assistance must be properly operated and maintained for general public trail use. The site should appear attractive and inviting to the public. The Grantee should manage the project site in accordance with the Summary Management and Maintenance Plan submitted with the original NLT grant application.

All sites acquired with NLT assistance in fee simple must remain in public trail use in perpetuity. Surface easements should be in perpetuity or a minimum of 25 years. All trails funded with NLT assistance must remain open to the public for the useful life of the trail and related amenities, which is expected to be a minimum of 25 years.

Audits & Record Retention

In accordance with the State Grant Agreement, the Grantee shall submit to an audit of funds paid through the Next Level Trails program and shall make all books, accounting records, and other documents available at all reasonable times during the term of the Grant Agreement and for a period of three (3) years after final inspection by the DNR. Copies shall be furnished to the State at no cost. Additionally, records regarding acquisition projects, particularly a history of negotiations with landowner(s), should be maintained by the Grantee.

If the Grantee is a non-governmental unit, the Grantee shall file the Form E-1 annual financial report required by IC § 5-11-1-4 for each year in which it receives NLT funding. The E-1 entity annual financial report will be used to determine audit requirements applicable to non-governmental units under IC § 5-11-1-9. Audits required under this section must comply with the State Board of Accounts *Uniform Compliance Guidelines for Examination of Entities Receiving Financial Assistance from Governmental Sources*.

Next Level Trails Grant Process Checklist

This checklist outlines the items that must be completed as part of the NLT grant process. Completing these items in a timely manner will help avoid unnecessary delays and ensure that the project is completed on schedule.

NOTE: This checklist is intended to serve as a general guide for project completion. Additional items may also need to be completed, depending on the project.

**Refer to Land Acquisition Checklist in NLT Real Estate Guidelines & Procedures Handbook*

State Grant Agreement

- ___ Sign State Grant Agreement after reviewing document thoroughly. State Grant Agreement must be signed electronically by authorized representative.
- ___ Submit Quarterly Progress Updates to grant coordinator every quarter. This should include an outline latest developments in project and estimated expenditures up to the date of submission.

Design & Engineering

- ___ Submit a copy of DNR Early Coordination/Environmental Assessment response letter to DNR grant coordinator.
- ___ Submit detailed engineering plans for all development for review and approval by DNR grant coordinator **prior** to submitting for any needed permits or clearances.
- ___ Obtain all needed permits and/or clearances from applicable agencies prior to construction and submit copies to DNR grant coordinator.

Land Acquisition*

- ___ Submit recorded deed(s) and/or easement(s) with NLT protection language to grant coordinator (see NLT Real Estate Guidelines & Procedures Handbook).

Trail Construction

- ___ Follow all State bidding and purchasing regulations.
- ___ Submit Bid Tabulation Sheet & Award Summary to DNR grant coordinator within 30 days of contract award.

Payment

- ___ Submit Claim Summary Document at the completion of every phase to DNR grant coordinator along with all corresponding invoices, vouchers, canceled checks, or any other documentation necessary for phase.

Close-Out

- ___ Schedule a final inspection to be completed by DNR.
- ___ Submit the as-built Site Plan to DNR grant coordinator.
- ___ Post NLT sign at trailhead or other appropriate site on trail.

ATTACHMENT 1

Sample Summary Document



NAME OF PROGRAM : Next Level Trails (NLT)				
1. Name of NLT project Hoosierburg Trail - Hoosier County Greenway Connector			2. NLT project number NLT-1-99	
3. Name of applicant City of Hoosierburg		4. Telephone number (812) 555-5555	5. Type of request (check one) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partial <input type="checkbox"/> Final	
6. Billing number 1	7. Period covered From: 05/01/19 To: 10/31/19		8. Page number 1 of 1	
9. Name of vendor 321 Engineering	10. Check number 001, 002, 003	11. Total claim paid or donated amount \$50,000.00	12. Amount eligible \$50,000.00	13. Specific explanation of purchase Environmental review, Design plans for trail
14. Total amount eligible \$ 50,000.00			(LEAVE BLANK)	
I certify that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the above costs are in compliance with the terms of the project and that the claim represents the project costs which have not been previously submitted and that all work meets the terms of the grant.				
15. Signature of agency president or designee / grantee			16. Date (month, day, year) 11-30-19	

Interactive form available at: www.IN.gov/dnr/outdoor/files/or-NextLevelTrails-Claim_Summary_Document.pdf

One signed copy of the grant Claim Summary Document must be submitted with payment documentation to reconcile NLT project expenditures. Instructions for the completing the form are as follows:

- 1-4. Self-explanatory (Project number must be the NLT project number – e.g., NLT-1-01).
5. Check “partial” unless this is the final claim.
6. Note the appropriate number for this claim (1, 2, 3, etc.)
7. Indicate the period that is covered by the work incurred for this claim. For example: From: May 1, 2019 to October 31, 2019 or 05/01/19 to 10/31/19.
8. If more than one Claim Summary Document is used, mark each consecutively and note the total number of pages. For example: Page 1 of 2.
9. Indicate the name of the vendor, individual, or contractor to whom payment was made or force account was used. In the case of donations, identify the donor.

10. Provide the number from the check that was used to pay the vendor in column #9. You can enter multiple check numbers here for the same vendor to keep everything on one line and reduce the number of Claim Summary Documents. In the case of donations, indicate by the word “donation.”
11. Fill in the total dollar amount as written on the check(s) or the full value of the donation.
12. Indicate the amount of the figure in column #11 that is eligible for payment. This amount is usually the same as that in column #11 except when items that are ineligible have been included on the same check. For example: If six benches were purchased but only two were used for the NLT project, then the price of the two benches should be indicated in column 12 and noted in the accompanying documentation.
13. Describe exactly what was purchased for each item so that the grant coordinator can determine the eligibility of the item. For example: Two benches to place along trail, 10 acres acquired in fee, total force account labor for trail clearing, etc.
14. Add all of the figures in column 12 and list the sum here.
15. The authorized representative responsible for project administration must certify to the accuracy of the request.
16. Fill in the current date.