

Region of Waterloo

Community Environmental

Fund



2026 Application Guideline

The **Community Environmental Fund** was established in 2011 to provide an integrated funding program to support community-based environmental initiatives that will benefit current and future generations. The Fund assists community members and organizations to carry out projects that promote environmental sustainability, stewardship, climate resilience, and protect and enhance our natural environment.

Region of Waterloo Strategic Plan Key Areas (2023-2027) - Climate Aligned Growth

- Use a climate adaptation lens to re-imagine infrastructure, land and services for growth: Using a climate mitigation and adaptation lens, we will work collaboratively with TransformWR, area municipalities, businesses and community partners to integrate infrastructure planning and adaptation.
- Foster car-alternative options through complete streets and extended alternative transportation networks: By expanding equitable public and active transportation networks across the region, we will make it easier for people to get around and make climate-friendly choices.
- Steward our natural environment and shared resources as we grow: We will work to protect the region's natural environment, biodiversity, trees, and water

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1.0 Funding Goals and Objectives

The Community Environmental Fund is intended to support environmental projects and initiatives by community members that propose to achieve the following goals:

- Provide a positive and lasting environmental return,
- Engage citizens and encourage collaboration,
- Seek innovative solutions and/or increase knowledge, and
- Produce measurable and achievable outcomes.

Requests for funding typically range from \$1,000 to \$10,000 per project. Additional detail on funding availability is included under section 8.0 Grant Limitations.

This is an annual funding opportunity that is dependant on funds being approved in the Regional Council annual budget. In addition, all projects require formal approval by Regional Council and/or Regional Staff (as determined by Regional Grants Policies).

Please note that applicants that are successful and receive a grant will be required to enter into an agreement with the Region of Waterloo with terms and conditions which may include the requirement to submit a satisfactory certificate of insurance for public liability and property damage. The requirement for an acceptable / satisfactory certificate of insurance will be determined on a case-by-case basis for identified 'higher risk' projects.

2.0 Granting Streams

The Community Environmental Fund program contains two granting streams:

Stewardship grants are for:

1. Enhancement and restoration of natural areas
2. Naturalization of landscapes
3. Acquisition of ecologically significant natural areas
4. Public education/awareness initiatives related to environmental stewardship, circular economy, or climate resilience principles
5. Research related to environmental stewardship, circular economy, or climate resilience principles

Sustainability grants are for:

1. Demonstration Projects that:
 - Reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) and/or air emissions
 - Increase energy conservation or efficiency and/or
 - Reduce or divert waste
2. Public education/awareness initiatives which promote long term behavioural change related to environmental sustainability, circular economy, or climate resilience principles
3. Research related to environmental sustainability, circular economy, or climate resilience principles

3.0 Project Eligibility

To be eligible for consideration, a project proposal to the Community Environmental Fund must:

- a) Be implemented within the Waterloo Region,
- b) Fall within at least one of the Project Categories listed below, and
- c) Satisfy at least two of both the Project (category) Specific Criteria and the Additional Criteria (Section 5)

Note: The Region will not fund projects that generate profit for an individual/organization, or activities that are political or discriminatory in nature.

4.0 Project Categories

Stewardship Grants

1. Enhancement and restoration of natural areas

Objective: To restore the ecological quality of natural areas which have been degraded or damaged. Property must be within a Landscape Level Feature, Core Environmental Feature, or Supporting Feature as identified in an Area Municipal Official Plan.

Criteria: Supported projects will:

- Create new linkages or corridors among natural features or enhances existing ones;
- Improve aquatic habitat within watercourses, wetlands or ponds;
- Create eco-passages that facilitate wildlife movement beneath roads to reduce roadkill and/or reduce hazards to drivers; and/or
- Control invasive non-native species.

2. Naturalization of landscapes

Objective: To establish, enhance or restore local indigenous vegetation along roadsides, trails, the grounds of educational facilities, or other publicly owned (or accessible) lands.

Criteria: Supported projects will:

- Be in proximity to existing natural features or Major Urban Greenspaces;
- Use low-maintenance, drought-tolerant native species; and/or
- Create habitat or attract native pollinators.

Note: Naturalization projects may not be part of an ongoing public infrastructure project.

3. Acquisition of ecologically significant natural areas

Objective: To bring high quality natural areas into the ownership of a “conservation body” as defined by the Conservation Lands Act, or an established land trust.

Criteria: The property must:

- Be within an Environmentally Sensitive Landscape, a Core Environmental Feature, or a Supporting Environmental Feature designated in an Area Municipal Official Plan;
- Be adjacent to a Regional Forest, Conservation Area, or Area Municipal parkland;
- Serve a linkage function between high quality natural areas; and/or
- Contain rare habitat or significant species.

Note: Acquisition projects must not require substantial future outlays for remediation or stewardship.

4. Public education and awareness initiatives to promote environmental stewardship, circular economy, or climate resilience principles in Waterloo Region

Objective: To increase public awareness and understanding of the value of environmental stewardship, circular economy, or climate resilience principles within Waterloo Region.

Criteria: Supported projects will:

- Have the potential to reach and/or involve significant numbers of the region's citizens;
- Promote better stewardship of Landscape Level Features or Core Environmental Features or Supporting Environmental Features designated in Area Municipal Official Plans;
- Contribute to building community capacity with respect to local environmental stewardship, circular economy, or climate resilience principles; and/or
- Incorporate an evaluation component to identify the effectiveness of the initiative (i.e. measuring raised awareness or monitoring behavioural change actually occurring).

5. Environmental stewardship-related research

Objective: To increase knowledge of environmental stewardship issues, circular economy or climate resilience principles relevant to Waterloo Region.

Criteria: Supported research will:

- Contribute to building community capacity with respect to local environmental stewardship, circular economy, or climate resilience principles; and/or
- Create opportunities for the enhancement of natural habitat or local production of food using sustainable methods.

Note: Research projects must be carried out by a student(s) at a high school or post-secondary institution or by a member(s) of a recognized naturalist, agricultural, or environmental organization within Waterloo Region.

Sustainability Grants

1. Sustainability demonstration projects

Objective: To implement tangible projects that: reduce greenhouse gases or air emissions; improve energy/fuel/water/other resource conservation or efficiency; reduce/divert/reuse/remanufacture waste and other materials; and/or anticipate and manage risks and adapt to new climatic conditions

Criteria: Supported projects will:

- Develop or evaluate a new environmental technology or sustainability practice;
- Act as a catalyst in advancing the adoption of cost effective new technologies or processes;
- Provide concrete measurable and achievable results;
- Incorporate public communication of the results to community stakeholders; and/or
- Have the potential to be implemented on a broader scale in the future.

2. Public education and awareness initiatives to promote long term behavioural changes related to environmental sustainability, circular economy, or climate resilience principles.

Objective: To promote long term behavioural change and awareness on aspects of environmental sustainability, circular economy, or climate resilience principles, with particular relevance to reducing GHG emissions and other air pollutants.

Criteria: Supported projects will:

- Influence community stakeholder adoption of environmentally beneficial actions;
- Have the potential to reach and/or involve significant numbers of the Region's citizens;
- Increase the accessibility of relevant environmental information, resources, or services to the diverse population of the Region of Waterloo; and/or
- Incorporate an evaluation component to identify the effectiveness of the initiative (i.e. measuring raised awareness or monitoring behavioural change actually occurring).

3. Environmental sustainability-based research

Objective: to increase knowledge of and solutions for environmental sustainability, circular economy, or climate resilience matters within Waterloo Region by undertaking a scoped research project.

Criteria: Supported research will:

- Have potential to be applied in the future to achieve results within the Region (e.g. reduction of greenhouse gases or other air emissions; reduction of energy/fuel consumption or fuel switching to reduce GHG emissions; waste reduction/diversion; community adaptation / preparedness to climate change; etc.);
- Provide opportunities for increasing local knowledge and expertise of environmental sustainability, circular economy, or climate resilience principles; and/or
- Encourage community members to adopt environmentally beneficial actions.

Note: Research projects must be carried out at a high school or post-secondary institution or by a member(s) of a recognized naturalist, agricultural, or environmental organization within Waterloo Region.

5.0 Additional Criteria

In addition to the project specific criteria, applicants are encouraged to:

- **Involve community interest holders**, such as youth, schools, community/neighbourhood associations, service clubs, or naturalist groups.
- **Provide opportunities for public education and/or research**, to increase local knowledge and expertise of environmental stewardship, naturalization, sustainability, circular economy, or climate resilience principles.
- **Seek endorsement and/or support** from community groups such as: an Environmental Advisory Committee, an Environmentally Sensitive Landscape Public Liaison Committee, the Kissing Bridge Trailway Advisory Board and/or an Area Municipal trail advisory committee.
- **Attract matching funds** from other funding organizations or in-kind contributions from partners.

6.0 Applicant Eligibility

All projects and/or applicants must be located within Waterloo Region. Please refer to Grant Limitations section below for additional detail.

Stewardship and Sustainability Grants are available for:

- Charitable or non-profit organizations (clubs, associations, land trusts)
- Neighbourhood associations and other unincorporated community-based groups (must have a documented Terms of Reference)
- Co-operative corporations
- Schools, school boards, universities, colleges, hospitals, library or other public institutions
- Individuals/students with a documented collaborative agreement with an eligible applicant. A sample letter of collaborative agreement is available from staff upon request.

Stewardship Grants are also available for:

- Private landowners (including commercial or business owners who provide matching funds)
- Area Municipalities, the Grand River Conservation Authority or Regional departments

7.0 Eligible Expenditures

All eligible expenditures must be supported by documentation (i.e. invoices or receipts).

Eligible Costs – Costs that are directly linked to, and are essential for, undertaking the proposed initiative.

For example:

- Purchase of goods, services or land essential for carrying out the project
- Fees for professionals, consultants, and contractors performing work specifically for the project
- Advertising to inform public of the project activity and promotional items for participants
- Rental or purchase of equipment essential for conducting the project

- Related costs for meetings held to obtain public consultation and gather feedback from project stakeholders

Note: Tangible items or goods purchased for a project (i.e. tools, equipment) must be dedicated to the project for a minimum agreed upon term, failing which, all or part of the grant funding may be deemed repayable to the Region.

Ineligible Costs – Costs that are associated with ongoing business activity and not a specific requirement of the proposed initiative.

For example:

- Scholarships
- Retroactive fees
- Ordinary office supplies, office furniture
- Monthly telephone fees
- Utilities
- In-kind donations or volunteer time
- Salaries of existing staff
- Advertising that is a result of ongoing business activity
- Travel and accommodation costs to attend conferences

8.0 Grant Limitations

All applications are subject to Regional Council approval and/or Regional Staff (as determined by Regional Grants Policies) and will be awarded only after the Community Environmental Fund (CEF) is approved as part of the annual Region of Waterloo Budget process.

- Maximum request of \$10,000 per project, and \$5,000 for research and education projects.
- Each applicant is only able to submit one grant application per funding cycle.
- Multi-year grants may be considered when there is a direct benefit associated with using that funding approach. A single application may be used to request more than one year of funding, and may result in a staff recommendation for funding that will be carried over into the next year/granting cycle(s). The availability of funds for each year would continue to be dependent on Council approval of the annual budget, as well as Council approval of the annual allotment of funds as part of the annual Community Environmental Fund Grants review process.
- Grant recipients interested in applying for another grant must first complete their initial project, with a final report submitted to and approved by the Region, before reapplying.
- Projects dependent on additional funding from other sources must provide proof of approval from those sources prior to the Region's disbursement of an approved CEF grant.

Special Instructions for School Ground Greening Projects

- The maximum grant request for a school ground greening projects is \$5,000. Schools with a comprehensive multi-year plan, with phased implementation, may apply for a second grant in a

subsequent year, to a maximum of \$3,000. The second grant must be for different elements of the project, and not just “more of the same.”

- Project funding is contingent upon financial support from at least two other sources (e.g. other funding organizations, school community, or in-kind donations from community members).
- Funding cannot be applied to curriculum development or curriculum delivery except where the spending supports the environmental stewardship, ecological restoration, and broader public education goals of the Community Environmental Fund or other environmental initiatives supported by the Region.
- The following maximum cost formula will apply to the most common components of school ground greening projects:
 - \$400 each - Large caliper trees (50 to 70 mm in diameter)
 - \$150 each - Armour-stone rock (approx. 2’x2’x3’)
 - \$50/yd³ or \$65.40/m³- Mulch and soil
- Component costs higher than those specified above must be justified.
- Tree planting should preferably be done to implement the results of a shade audit of the school grounds.

9.0 How to Apply

Due Date - To be considered, the completed application form must be submitted no later than **4:30 p.m., March 13, 2026.**

1. **Find the on-line application at** <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/environmental-sustainability.aspx>

2. Complete the application

- Questions regarding the application process and guidelines can be directed to the designated staff contact below. Staff are available to discuss your project and assist with applying for funding. In some cases, a site visit with staff may be recommended.

Peter Ellis, MES (he/him)
Environmental Sustainability Specialist
Growth, Development and Sustainability Services
Region of Waterloo
150 Frederick St, 8th Floor
Kitchener, ON N2G 4J3
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3. **Remember to attach all relevant and required documentation before you submit your completed application**
4. **Alternative application formats are available** by contacting sustainability@regionofwaterloo.ca. These applications can be submitted by e-mail to sustainability@regionofwaterloo.ca with “CEF Application” as the email subject line.

10.0 Review and Selection Process

1. **Application submission** – The application deadline is **March 13, 2026 at 4:30 p.m.**
Where appropriate, applicants should attach plans, drawings, letters of funding commitment from other funding sources, and other relevant information. These can all be uploaded using the on-line application form.
2. **Application review and evaluation – March 16 – April 17, 2026**
Applications will be reviewed by designated staff. The Region of Waterloo reserves the right to reject or decline any or all applications. Applicants may be contacted to provide clarification or additional information if necessary.

Note that due to the high intake volume, even highly scored applications may not receive their full requested amount.

3. **Recommendations of approved projects to Regional Council and/or Staff Confirmation of Awarded Projects – May 2026**
Sustainability staff will review and make recommendations to Regional Council and/or Senior Leadership for final approval (as determined by Regional Grants Policies). All applications are subject to Regional Council or Senior Leadership approval and funding availability.
4. **Notification of application status – May/June, 2026**
All applicants will be contacted regarding the status of their applications. A staff contact person will be assigned to each approved application.
5. **Release of initial funding to successful applicants – June/July/August 2026**
First time “vendors” (i.e. funding recipients) are required to submit Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) forms to Region.

6. Agreement Signing - Successful applicants will be required to sign a formal agreement with the Region of Waterloo with terms and conditions which may include the requirement to submit a satisfactory certificate of insurance for public liability and property damage. The requirement for an acceptable / satisfactory certificate of insurance will be determined on a case-by-case basis for identified 'higher risk' projects. The legal agreement will also outline the scope of the project, the responsibilities of the applicant in completing the project, and the details of the funding disbursement.

11.0 Fund Disbursement and Reporting

Payments – As part of the approval process, Regional staff will advise on how funds will be distributed. For the majority of projects, a lump sum (75%) will be provided upfront, with the remainder (25%) provided upon successful completion of the project, submission of a final report, pictures, and receipt and approval of all required documentation (i.e. final report, including a final budget with attached invoices and receipts).

Timing – Projects must be completed within one calendar year from the date of approval. Extensions may be considered based on the project timeline in the application or under extenuating circumstances. Any extensions must be requested by the applicant in writing at least one month prior to the lapsing of the approval. Extensions must be approved by the designated staff person.

Project Scope Change – If any significant component of the original project proposal cannot be carried out as approved, the applicant will submit, for staff approval, a brief report outlining the difficulties and any required scope changes, which must not exceed the original funding allocation.

Expense Documentation – To be eligible for final payment, expenses must be supported by documentation (i.e. invoices or receipts). Invoices must be clearly invoiced to the Community Environmental Fund recipient and include proof of payment.

Project Completion – When an approved project is completed, applicants shall notify their designated staff contact. Depending on the nature of the project, a site visit or follow-up meeting may be required to confirm that the project has been completed as originally approved.

Final Report – All projects must provide a final report within 30 days of the project completion date, showing results of the project before any final payments are made. This will assist staff in reporting back to Council and the public on the implementation of the Fund.

The following must be included in the final report:

- Results of the project - quantitative and qualitative
- Project Learnings - successes and challenges in achieving project goals
- Final Budget with proof of payments - receipts, invoices

- Maximum page limit: 4 single-sided pages excluding appendices

An on-line form is available at <https://forms.regionofwaterloo.ca/Planning-and-Economic-Development/Community-Environmental-fund/CEF-Final-Report>

For larger or longer duration projects, the applicant may be required to submit a one-page interim report to the designated Regional staff contact in the first half of implementing the project. The interim report will outline the project's progress, challenges and responses as well as remaining future steps.