

ComEd Green Region Grant Program: Building Climate Resiliency through Local Stewardship

2026 PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Purpose

The Chicago metropolitan region is rich in diversity – both in our landscapes that include native prairies, wetlands, woodlands, and a vast network of streams and rivers, as well as in the 10 million people who call this region home.

Recognizing that open space in our communities is crucial to the quality of our lives, ComEd and Openlands have committed to supporting non-profit organizations*, schools*, school districts*, housing authorities*, townships, counties, park districts, conservation districts, forest preserve districts, and municipalities-including municipal entities such as water reclamation districts- in northern Illinois with their ongoing efforts to protect or improve public spaces for the benefit of all. ComEd designed the [ComEd Green Region Grant Program](#) in partnership with Openlands to assist local communities in these efforts by providing funding for some expenses towards these goals.

*Continuing in 2026: Non-profit organizations, schools, school districts, and housing authorities may apply with a letter of support from their township, county, park district, conservation district, forest preserve district, or municipality-including municipal entities such as their water reclamation district.

Underlying the grant is ComEd's endorsement of deliberate planning for open space protection to encourage the wisest use of scarce resources.

Using this Document

These Program Guidelines, along with the [Program FAQ](#) available at www.openlands.org/greenregion, are intended to be a comprehensive resource for both prospective and current grantees of the ComEd Green Region Grant Program. It is the responsibility of all applicants and grantees to review and utilize the information in the Program Guidelines and the FAQ. Please reach out to Openlands, the Green Region Grant Administrator, at greenregion@openlands.org if you have any questions.

Key Dates

Grant Cycle Opens: January 12, 2026, 9:00 a.m. Central
Application Deadline: March 13, 2026, 5:00 p.m. Central
Notification to all applicants: June
Grant Acceptance Deadline: July

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2026 Special Grant Focus

Climate Resiliency and Pollinator Conservation



Since 2017, ComEd has emphasized the importance of pollinator conservation within the Green Region Grant Program. From 2021 the special focus has expanded to include additional climate resiliency projects. Special consideration will be given to project applications supporting nature-based solutions that help the region prepare for, recover from, and adapt to climate change.

ComEd and Openlands are committed to Pollinator Conservation

Three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and about 35 percent of global food crops depend on animal pollinators – such as bees, butterflies, moths, birds, bats, beetles, and other insects – to thrive. In fact, some scientists estimate that one out of every three bites of food that we eat exists because of pollinators. Threats posed by habitat loss, disease, parasites, climate change, and environmental contaminants have all contributed to the global decline of many pollinator species.

For the ComEd Green Region Grant Program, a pollinator conservation project is one that shows a ***demonstrable benefit to the pollinator population***.

Examples of demonstrable benefits for local pollinator populations include, but are not limited to, projects that:

- 1) Establish or enhance pollinator habitat-see the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) pollinator guidance and Xerces pollinator plant list below on how to make the most impact.
- 2) Create educational signage highlighting natural features or educating the public about habitats.

NFWF Pollinator Habitat Improvement Guidance and Xerces Pollinator Plant List:

- At least three nectar plants that bloom during the following periods when monarchs are present. Spring (March 20 to June 1), Summer (June 2 – August 15), and Fall (August 16 – October 30) to meet the nutrition needs of breeding and migrating pollinators.

- Ample milkweed, including at least one regionally native species.
- Plantings that protect and enhance overwintering habitats.
- [Xerces Pollinator Plant List](#)

Sources: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

ComEd and Openlands are committed to building climate resiliency through local stewardship.

Recent international research and reports on climate change tell us that we are at a tipping point and action must be taken to ensure a sustainable future.

Examples of nature-based resiliency projects include, but are not limited to projects that:

- Increase biodiversity and create habitat for wetlands and grasslands systems of concern. Examples: restore wetlands, savanna ecosystems, or prairies; plant pollinator gardens; install bug hotels; install proper landscape structure (over story canopy, shrub layer, and native plants).
- Protect water quality and manage water where it falls. Examples: build rain gardens, bioswales, or underground cisterns and french drains; plant climate resistant trees; replace non-porous surfaces with permeable surfaces.
- Build healthy soil. Examples: plant deep rooted, climate resilient prairie species to sequester carbon; promote mycorrhizal and macroinvertebrate development within the soil for proper structure, composition.
- Your project: you tell us how you can support climate resiliency through conservation, restoration and improved land management actions with a nature-based solution in your community's public, open space.

Please note that 2026 grant cycle applications are not required to have a climate resiliency focus supporting nature-based solutions or pollinator habitats. However, all applicants are encouraged to consider how elements of climate resilience are supported by their project. Eligible applications for projects that meet regular Program Guidelines will still be accepted for consideration, regardless of whether they focus on pollinators or climate resiliency.

For more information, visit www.openlands.org/planning/greenregion/focus.

Eligibility

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations, schools, school districts, and housing authorities with a letter of support (see below), townships, counties, park districts, conservation districts, forest preserve districts, and municipalities-including municipal entities such as water reclamation districts- within ComEd's service territory ([please see map](#)) in the following counties: Boone, Bureau, Carroll, Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Ford, Grundy, Henry, Iroquois, Jo Daviess, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, LaSalle, Lee, Livingston, Marshall, McHenry, Ogle, Rock Island, Stephenson, Whiteside, Will, Winnebago and Woodford.

Non-profit organizations, schools, school districts, and housing authorities need a letter of support meeting these criteria to apply. A sample letter of support can be found in the [Program FAQ](#).

- On the letterhead of your township, county, park district, conservation district, forest preserve district, or municipality—including municipal entities such as water reclamation districts—providing the letter of support.
- State that the government agency has reviewed your ComEd Green Region project proposal and finds it satisfies the Program Guidelines.
- State that the project would benefit public open space and the government agency fully supports your application for the ComEd Green Grant.
- Signed by an authorized agent of the government agency providing the letter of support.
- NOTE: If a non-profit is applying for a project on land they do not own, their letter of support must be from the landowning entity.

Before applying, please check ComEd's [service territory map](#) to ensure your proposed project is located within the service territory boundaries and that you are a ComEd customer. ComEd is unable to fund projects that are located outside the service territory boundaries. For more information, please contact greenregion@openlands.org.

Past grantees are eligible to reapply only if they have fully completed their grant requirements, including, but not limited to, submitting their final grant report with all required attachments (resolution, expense reports, etc.). Preference will be given to projects that have not previously received funding. To that end, past grantees will *not* be eligible if they have won grants in the last two of three or the last three of four cycles that they were eligible for. For example, if an applicant had won grants in 2020, 2022, and 2024, they would not be eligible for this year's cycle. The year immediately following a grant award is not considered an eligible cycle for a grantee because of the 18 months given to grantees to complete their final report.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

As of 2024: Phase 2 projects are now eligible

Applicants are now able to apply to follow-up on previously funded projects. Before this year, the Green Region grant restricted grantees from applying to work on projects funded by a prior Green Region grant. Starting this year, the restriction is no longer in place. Applicants can now apply for funds to follow up on projects funded in previous grant cycles.

Please see the [Program FAQ](#) for answers to some common questions about eligibility.

Eligible Applicants must be in good standing with ComEd related to provision of utilities.

Eligible Activities

Priority is given to projects that demonstrate a) significant impact on the surrounding community by increasing the public's access to open space and encouraging their engagement with the project; and b) active partnerships within the community. Additional preference may be given to projects that support a special focus area that has been designated for the grant cycle. Eligible activities include:

- **Developing or updating open space plans.** Expenses may include consultant fees, costs associated with obtaining public input (hall rental, advertising, etc.), and publication costs.
- **Improving applicant-owned open spaces, including planning costs.** Funds may be used for habitat improvements such as installing or improving natural areas such as prairies, woodlands, wetlands, associated buffers, and other native natural communities. **The plans also may include the installation of capital improvements for passive recreation**, such as trails, boardwalks, kiosks, and observation platforms. Parking lots are not eligible for funding. Expenses related to capital improvements may include consultant fees for landscape architects, park designers, botanists, restoration specialists, engineers, etc.
- **Acquisition (by purchase or donation) of parcels of land to be used for open space.** Expenses may include land cost, legal or consultant fees, survey, environmental assessments, appraisals, etc.
- **Acquisition (by purchase or donation) of conservation easements** (also known as “development rights”) on parcels of land to be used for open space. Eligible expenses include legal costs to purchase development rights, consultant fees, survey, environmental assessments, appraisals, etc.

Ineligible Activities

- **Staff time and ancillary expenses for applicant's employees or interns, for any aspect of the project.** To avoid your application being marked as ineligible, please clearly describe any contractor expenses involved in your project, both in the application form and your budget attachments, to show these are not staff or intern expenses.
- **Relocation of owner or tenant, condemnation, or building repair or demolition.**
- **Expenses not directly related to the use of land for open space and/or passive recreation.** For example, construction of a parking lot or a public works garage on municipal parkland would not be considered an eligible expense.
- **Active recreation amenities** such as ball fields, golf courses, tennis courts, playgrounds, swimming pools, etc.
- **Any activities that are required in connection with regulatory compliance.**

Grant Amounts, Timing, and Conditions

Grant Amounts

Grants will be for amounts up to \$10,000 and **may be used to pay for up to *two-thirds* of eligible activities.**

Applicants are required to have cash matching funds equal to at least 50% of the amount of funds requested in the application. For instance, if you apply for the full \$10,000 grant award, you will need to provide at least \$5,000 in matching funds. In-kind services cannot be submitted as match. **The cash matching funds must be secured at the time of application.**

Continuing in 2026: This is a reduction in the amount of matching funds required. Previous years required a 1:1 matching funds ratio. The grant award to matching funds ratio is now 1:0.5.

Grant Timing

The online application system will open at 9:00 a.m. Central Time on January 12, 2026, and close at 5:00 p.m. Central Time on March 13, 2026. **Incomplete or late applications will not be considered.**

Grants will be awarded in June each year. To avoid delays in notification, contact greenregion@openlands.org if any applicant contact information changes.

Applicants awarded funds **must submit a Receipt of Funds Letter and resolution in July before they can begin their project.** The resolution shows that elected officials of the grantee approved the project and the expenditure of funds necessary for its success. Board meeting minutes are not a substitute for a resolution. Samples of both can be found [here](#).

Applicants awarded funds for their projects will be expected to expend the grant award in full within 18 months of its receipt. **A final grant report is due within two months of the full expenditure of funds.** Please see the section “Final Grant Report” for more information about the final grant report.

Grant Conditions

The facility or property where the project is located must be open to the public on a regular basis.

During the grant period, award recipients will agree to participate in press conferences or events, to be quoted in ComEd literature describing the ComEd Green Region Grant Program, and to identify ComEd as a funder in any materials produced to explain or promote the funded project.

Recipients will agree to acknowledge the use of ComEd Green Region Grant Program funds for the project, either through signage for capital projects or written acknowledgement in documents. Signage language must read: “This project is supported by generous funding from ComEd and Openlands” and must be approved by ComEd and Openlands prior to placement. Please contact greenregion@openlands.org for Openlands and ComEd logos and for signage approval.

Awards are made based on the project presented in the application. Any major changes to the scope of a project must first be approved by ComEd and Openlands to avoid forfeiting the grant award. Contact greenregion@openlands.org if you anticipate there will be a major change to your project scope.

Retroactive reimbursement for costs accrued between the application deadline and the grant award may be allowed on a case-by-case basis. All requests for such reimbursement must be made in writing to greenregion@openlands.org. It is not guaranteed that such requests will be approved.

If grant funds are used for acquisition of an interest in land, the applicant must demonstrate that a restrictive covenant, deed restriction, or similar instrument will be recorded against the property, stating that the property must be held in perpetuity for open space purposes. If the property is diverted from open space use, the grant recipient shall return to ComEd all Green Region Grant funds received.

Final Grant Report

Within two months of the final expenditure of grant funds, the applicant must submit a final report summarizing the work accomplished with the grant. A final grant report template can be found here: [Resources for Current Grantees - Openlands](#).

The report must also include an explanation of accounting justifying the use of the grant funds, such as documentation of invoices, cancelled checks, recorded deeds, settlement sheets, etc., as necessary for the project. The final report also includes photographs or other documentation for the project.

Failure to submit a final grant report with all the required attachments by the posted deadline may prohibit applicants from participating in any future grant cycles. If you have questions about the final grant report and its attachments, please reach out to the Green Region Grant Administrator at greenregion@openlands.org.

Application and Review Process

How to Apply

Before applying, please review these guidelines in full, as well as the [Program FAQ](#). Applications are accepted on-line via <http://openlands.submittable.com/submit>. You will be asked to create a free profile to begin the submission process. Upon submission of your application, you will receive a receipt confirming that your application has been successfully submitted.

The online application is the primary method for submissions. If you are unable to submit your application online, please contact the Green Region Grant Administrator at greenregion@openlands.org.

Advisory Committee

Completed and eligible applications will be reviewed and ranked by a geographically diverse advisory committee composed of county government officials and members of the region's non-profit conservation community. Final decisions on award recipients and amounts are at the discretion of ComEd.

Administrator Contact Info

The administrator of the ComEd Green Region Grant Program is Openlands, a non-profit conservation land trust protecting open space in the greater Chicago region for over 60 years.

We encourage you to review all available information for the 2026 grant cycle at <https://openlands.org/programs/comed-green-region-grant/> before starting your application. If you are unable to locate an answer to your question on the website, please reach out to the Green Region Grant Administrator at greenregion@openlands.org.