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Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 9, 2025

METRO EAST PARK AND RECREATION DISTRICT UNVEILS FY26 GRANT CYCLE OFFERING \$6.43 MILLION FOR LOCAL PARKS, TRAILS, AND REGIONAL CONNECTIONS

\$6.43M in available grant funding will support park and trail development, community master planning, local recreation events, and a new Priority Path Initiative to create key trail connections throughout Madison and St. Clair Counties, IL.

MADISON AND ST. CLAIR COUNTIES, IL – The Metro East Park and Recreation District (MEPRD) is pleased to announce the launch of its Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) grant cycle, making a total of **\$6.43 million** available to support the development and enhancement of public parks, trails, and recreation facilities in Madison and St. Clair Counties, Illinois.

This year’s cycle introduces the new **Priority Paths Grant Program**, a significant initiative aimed at funding the construction of critical trail connections between the two counties, with the ultimate goal of creating a bi-county loop, unifying the Madison County and St. Clair County trail systems.

Available grant opportunities under the FY26 cycle include:

- **Park and Trail Grant Program** (\$3,000,000)
- **Community Planning Grant Program** (\$400,000)
- **Event Sponsorship Grant Program** (\$30,000)
- **Priority Path Grant Program** (\$3,000,000)

Applications open **July 9, 2025**, and will be accepted on a rolling basis through **May 29, 2026**, or until funds are exhausted.

“We’re excited to launch this year’s grant cycle and continue working with our local partners to enhance quality of life through parks, trails, and natural spaces,” said Cole Preston, MEPRD Grant Coordinator. “From expanding recreational access to strengthening local trail connections, each project supported by MEPRD contributes toward a more accessible, vibrant, and connected Metro East. And with the introduction of our new Priority Paths initiative, MEPRD is placing an even stronger focus on regional connectivity for the FY26 Cycle, helping to bridge the gap between these two already incredible trail systems,” continued Preston.

Since its formation in 2000, MEPRD has committed more than \$43 million to support **297** local projects across Madison and St. Clair Counties, including **238** completed and **59** ongoing initiatives. These grants play an important role in advancing MEPRD's mission to develop and maintain a public system of interconnecting parks and trails by partnering with local communities and agencies, benefiting local communities and bolstering recreational opportunities across the Metro East region.

Overview of MEPRD FY26 Grant Programs

The **MEPRD Park and Trail Grant Program** (FY26) provides funding for the acquisition, development, and improvement of public parks, trails, and recreation facilities. Eligible applicants include municipalities, townships, counties, park districts, transit districts, universities, and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations within Madison and St. Clair Counties. To learn more, visit: meprd.org/park-trail-grant.

- **Total Program Budget:** \$3,000,000
- **Grant Award:** Up to \$300,000 or 40% of eligible costs for qualifying trail projects; or up to \$150,000 or 40% of eligible costs for all other eligible park and recreation projects.
- **Eligible Projects:** Acquisition, improvements, and/or development of public parks, trails, and related recreation facilities.
- **[Details & Application »](#)**

The **MEPRD Community Planning Grant Program** (FY26) supports jurisdiction-wide master planning for parks, bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure, and—new for this year—Forestry, Natural Habitat, and Water Quality Management planning. Eligible applicants include public agencies with statutory authority to acquire and develop lands for public parks, trails, recreation, and/or bicycle-pedestrian infrastructure in Madison and/or St. Clair County, IL, including municipalities, townships, counties, and park/transit districts. To learn more, visit: meprd.org/planning-grant.

- **Total Program Budget:** \$400,000
- **Grant Award:** Up to \$40,000 or 40% of eligible costs, whichever is less.
- **Eligible Projects:** Jurisdiction-wide planning for ^[1] Parks, Open Space, and Recreation; ^[2] Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure; and/or ^[3] Forestry, Natural Habitat, and Water Quality Management.
- **[Details & Application »](#)**

The **MEPRD Event Sponsorship Grant Program** (FY26) supports public events that make use of, or promote the use of, public parks or trails in Madison and St. Clair Counties. Eligible events include those involving physical activity (e.g., walking/biking events) and events that benefit the natural environment (e.g., educational and volunteer events). To learn more, visit: meprd.org/event-sponsorship.

- **Total Program Budget:** \$30,000
- **Grant Award:** Up to \$2,500 or 40% of eligible event costs, whichever is less.
- **Eligible Events:** Must involve physical activity (e.g., walking and biking events, 5K, Biathlon) or environmental stewardship/restoration in public spaces (e.g., educational and volunteer events).
- **[Details & Application »](#)**

The new **MEPRD Priority Paths Grant Program** (FY26) is designed to fund the development of AASHTO-compliant Class I Bikeways that bridge critical gaps, as determined by MEPRD, between the Madison County and St. Clair County trail systems. Eligible applicants are Madison County Transit and St. Clair County Transit District for their respective "Priority Path Zones." To learn more, visit: meprd.org/priority-paths-grant.

- **Total Program Budget:** \$3,000,000
- **Grant Award:** Up to \$1,500,000 or 40% of total project costs, whichever is less.
- **Eligible Projects:** Development of a direct trail corridor from the interconnected trail network found within Madison County to the MCT Confluence Trail; and a direct trail corridor from the interconnected trail network found within St. Clair County to the southern terminus of the MCT Goshen Trail at Kyle Road in O'Fallon, IL.
- **Details & Application »**

HOW TO APPLY

All FY26 grant applications will be available online beginning July 9, 2025. Applications are accepted from eligible applicants located within Madison and St. Clair Counties. Qualifying applicants may receive **one award per program per fiscal year**, and grants are awarded on a **first-come, first-served basis**.

Full program guidelines and application materials are available at www.meprd.org/funding. For questions or assistance, contact MEPRD Grant Coordinator Cole Preston at (618) 346-4905 or cpreston@meprd.org.

LET'S CONTINUE BUILDING A GREENER, HEALTHIER, AND BETTER-CONNECTED METRO EAST

MEPRD encourages you to visit your local park or trail and take a moment to appreciate the value it adds to your life and those around you. To see a full list of the ongoing and completed projects funded in part by MEPRD, go to www.meprd.org/projects.

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The Metro East Park and Recreation District (MEPRD) was established by the voters of Madison and St. Clair Counties, Illinois, in November 2000. MEPRD collaborates with local governments, special districts, and other jurisdictions to develop and improve parks, recreational facilities, and trails throughout the two-county area. Additionally, MEPRD works to increase awareness and utilization of these amenities by providing related maps, data, statistics, and marketing materials.

For more information, visit www.meprd.org.