The Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation

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Land and Easement Acquisition Program (LEAP)

FY2028 Guidelines

LEAP Background

The Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation's (PCLB) Outdoors Program seeks to increase the pace of land conservation, protect critical habitat, contribute to climate resilience, and connect people to nature. To advance these goals, PCLB established the Land and Easement Acquisition Program (LEAP) to provide grants for land conservation organizations to complete projects in the Hudson River and Lake Champlain watersheds in New York, across Connecticut, and in select watersheds in Maine. LEAP grants are intended to address funding gaps for active projects that are otherwise ready to close. Funds can be used to acquire land or conservation easements.

Priority will be given to projects that:

- Interconnect open space.
- Promote biodiversity.
- Address climate resilience.
- Protect high-quality water resources.
- Provide meaningful public access opportunities.

Submissions are limited to **one project per organization per year**. Exceptions may be possible at the discretion of PCLB program staff.

LEAP grants **CAN** be used for:

- Acquisition of land in fee or conservation easements.
- Transaction costs limited to appraisals, title binders, environmental assessments, surveys, legal fees, recording fees, transfer fees, and property taxes to year end.

LEAP grants **CANNOT** be used for:

- Staff costs and organizational overhead.
- Stewardship endowments.
- Repayment of loans.
- Projects that are not ready to close.

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Eligibility

- The applicant must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.
- The applicant must be a member of the Land Trust Alliance and accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, or be on the path to accreditation within two years.
- The applicant may partner with local governments, tribes, or community-based organizations on the project. However, all grant funds would go to the applicant.
- The project must be located predominantly (minimum 50% of land area) within the eligible project areas (*see pages 4-5 for maps; click to download GIS shape files for New York or Maine*). The entire state of Connecticut is an eligible project area.
- The project must result in the permanent protection of land through: acquisition and retention by the applicant; pass-through to a partner entity with a mission to permanently protect land (e.g., a state agency); or a permanent conservation easement held by the applicant or partner.
- The project must be under contract or option to purchase and be supported by at least one appraisal by April 30, 2027.
- The project must close by June 30, 2028.

LEAP Grant Process

1. **Express interest.** Organizations email PCLB (*contact info page 3*) to introduce eligible projects.
2. **Attend follow-up meeting.** Eligible organizations will be invited to a follow-up meeting to review projects in more detail. At this meeting, the organization should be prepared to discuss as much of the Required Project Information (*page 3*) as available. The follow-up meeting must be completed by April 15, 2027.
3. **INVITATION ONLY: Submit required project information for pre-application.** If a project aligns with LEAP's goals, the organization will be invited to submit as much of the Required Project Information (*page 3*) available at that time. This information will be used to evaluate and compare projects across interested organizations. The pre-application materials must be submitted by April 30, 2027.
4. **INVITATION ONLY: Submit formal application.** A limited number of organizations will be invited to submit a formal application to PCLB in early August 2027. Formal applications, including all Required Project Information, are due by the end of August 2027. Funding is not guaranteed for any project.
5. Pending PCLB Board approval, grant funds will be awarded in December 2027.
6. Grant recipients must notify PCLB of project closing by June 30, 2028. A final project report and financial accounting will be due in late August 2028.

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Required Project Information

The information and documents outlined below will initially be discussed during the follow-up meeting. Organizations invited for pre-application will submit as much of the information as is available by April 30. Applicants invited for formal application will submit all the required documents and information, along with a brief narrative application, by the end of August.

- An overview of your project (e.g., physical attributes, unique ecological characteristics, planned restoration activities, known issues that could impede project completion).
- Proof of any matching funds secured.
- A total project score (*see page 4 for reference*).
- A context map showing the project's location at a scale of 1:24,000.
- A site-specific project map displaying ecologically important areas, areas of terrestrial resilience, streams, surface water bodies, and wetlands. The map(s) may be on a topographic or photographic base, depending on which is more useful in understanding the project.
- GIS shape files.
- Project budget with an itemized list of all project costs, sources of funding, status of funding sources, and the project's unfunded need.
- Appraisal requirements:
    - Land value ≤ $500,000 = one appraisal.
    - Land value > $500,000 and < $1 million = one appraisal and a review appraisal.
    - Land value ≥ $1 million = two appraisals.
- Any environmental assessments performed.
- Title commitment.
- Signed purchase agreement (can be a purchase contract, contingency contract, or option agreement).

Projects will be evaluated based on their score, along with other relevant factors such as readiness, cost-share, public benefit, and the applicant's capacity to complete the acquisition and proposed post-closing management. The PCLB Foundation is the final arbiter of project eligibility.

The PCLB Foundation Contact Information

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Table 1 – Project Scoring Sheet

Project Characteristics	Qualifying Criteria	Additional Instructions	Score
Project size		Project > 200 acres - Project = 50 to 200 acres - Project < 50 acres -	3 2 1
Proximity to other conserved land	The site is adjacent to or near other conserved land.	Adjoins open space - Across a road - Within ½ mile -	3 2 1
Recognized biodiversity *(use **one** of the three options below)*	If TNC (option 1) excludes the site, state data (option 2) can be used. If state data excludes the site, site-specific data (option 3) can be used.	Use **one** of the three scoring options below.	
Option 1: Nationally designated biodiversity	The site includes biodiversity value in TNC's Resilient Land Mapping Tool	TNC Resilient Land Mapping Tool	3
Option 2: State designated biodiversity	The site contains a CT important natural community, NYS Significant Natural Community, or ME Focus Area of Ecological Statewide Significance.	CT Natural Diversity Data Base NYS Significant Natural Community ME Focus Area of Ecological Statewide Significance	2
Option 3: Site-specific evidence of important natural community	Applicants may submit a narrative and any data to demonstrate that it has site-specific data indicating presence of rare communities.	Submit separate documentation.	1
Public access	Project will provide public access for passive recreation.	Describe in project narrative.	2
Water quality protection	The site includes CT Class AA or A inland surface waters and/or Class SA coastal/marine surface waters; NYS Class N, AA-S, A-S, AA, or A fresh surface waters; or ME Class AA or A fresh surface waters and/or Class SA estuarine and marine waters.	CT Water Classifications NYS Water Classifications ME Water Classifications	2
Drinking water protection	The site borders a drinking water reservoir.		1
Development threat	There is a formal or active proposal to develop the property for residential or commercial use.	Provide site plan(s).	1
Restoration	A plan is in place to restore the site or areas of the site to enhance its ecological value.	Describe any such plan(s) in project narrative.	1
		Total Score	

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Appendix A – Map of Eligible Project Area in New York

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Appendix B – Map of Eligible Project Area in Maine