



TrailNation Accelerator Program Application

About the TrailNation Accelerator Program

The TrailNation™ Accelerator is part of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's (RTC) national commitment to advancing trail network development across the country. As an extension of RTC's support for the broader trails movement, the Accelerator builds on the organization's signature TrailNation projects, the TrailNation Playbook, and the TrailNation Collaborative. Together, these initiatives help communities plan, connect, and activate trail networks that serve people and places equitably.

Made possible with generous support from the REI Cooperative Action Fund, the TrailNation Accelerator focuses specifically on rural and small-town communities, offering targeted support to help local leaders and organizations bring their trail visions to life. Drawing on RTC's 40+ years of experience in trail planning, development, programming, and promotion, the Accelerator provides participants with the tools, strategies, and relationships they need to move from vision to action.

Through the Accelerator, participants will:

- Receive customized support and guidance shaped by RTC's decades of leadership in the trails field, with technical assistance grounded in the TrailNation Playbook and tailored to each community's unique goals and context.
- Engage in peer learning with other communities facing similar opportunities and challenges.
- Participate in strategy coaching to strengthen local capacity and coalition-building.
- Take part in hands-on convenings and field visits to see trail development strategies in real-world settings.
- Build stronger relationships and a professional network of peers, mentors, and national experts.

The Accelerator program is an 18-month learning and support experience beginning late 2025. It will bring together 2-3 person teams from up to 10 communities to participate in a mix of virtual and in-person activities. Teams will connect regularly with each other, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) staff, and TrailNation Collaborative partners through monthly online sessions and occasional in-person convenings. **Participants can expect to spend approximately 2-4 hours per month engaging in peer learning, strategic coaching, and tailored technical assistance.** The program is designed to be flexible and manageable for busy local leaders, while offering meaningful support to help advance trail network planning and coalition-building efforts.

There is no cost to join the program, and financial assistance for travel to in-person convening(s) will be provided. To get the most out of the program, participants should expect to engage with RTC and the Accelerator cohort an average of 2-4 hours per month for the duration of the 18-month program.

DEADLINE: Applications are due on **Friday, October 3, 2025 at 8:00pm EST.**

Before you begin completing this application, please review the full list of questions. We recommend that you prepare your answers in a separate document and copy/paste the information in this form.

Questions? Contact Kelly Pack at kellyp@railstotrails.org.

Please click on the "Next" button to review and confirm program eligibility.



TrailNation Accelerator Program Application

Eligibility

Eligible applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Be a rural or small-town community, or small city (generally under 50,000 population).
- Form a team of 2-3 individuals representing local government, nonprofits, trail advocates, planners, or other relevant stakeholders. The inclusion of a regional planning organization, governmental council, or similar is strongly encouraged due to their important role in trail network implementation.
- Demonstrate commitment to fully engage in the 18-month program, with at least one team member actively participating in all core program activities, averaging 2-4 hours a month.
- Exhibit a desire to collaborate and learn.

Special consideration will be given to communities that:

- Are located in or serve historically disadvantaged or under-resourced areas.
- Have limited access to professional services or dedicated staff capacity to advance trail development
- Do not yet have a fully established trail network plan or framework.

* Confirmation of Eligibility

- ☐ By checking this box, I confirm eligibility in the Accelerator program and agree to receive updates from RTC about this application and to subscribe to the TrailNation Collaborative newsletter.

Click on the "Next" button to begin the application.



TrailNation Accelerator Program Application

Your Team

This program is designed for communities that are in the early stages of trail planning, visioning, or coalition building. Each application should include a team of 2-3 individuals representing local government, nonprofits, trail advocates, planners, or other relevant stakeholders. Complementary team members could also include economic development leaders, town managers, tourism professionals, etc. The inclusion of a regional planning organization, governmental council, or similar is strongly encouraged due to their important role in regional planning and trail network implementation.

We understand that applicants may not yet have a fully developed trail plan or finalized team. Applicants are encouraged to describe the types of team members they plan to recruit, even if specific individuals have not yet been confirmed.

* Team Member #1 (Primary Applicant)

First name

Last name

* Email

* Phone

* Organization/Affiliation

* Role/Title

* Representing as:

- ☐ Regional planning organization (e.g., Metropolitan Planning Organization, Council of Governments, Regional Development Council)
- ☐ Local government entity (e.g., public agencies, city council/county commission, city manager's office, parks and recreation department, planning department)
- ☐ Community-based or Nonprofit organization
- ☐ Economic Development or Tourism (e.g., Destination Management Organization, Economic Development Authority)
- ☐ Anchor Institutions (e.g., hospital, university, church, cultural institution)
- ☐ Other governmental entity (state, federal)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* Address

Street address

City

State

Zip code



TrailNation Accelerator Program Application

Your Team (continued)

Include information about additional team members below. We understand that applicants may not yet have a fully developed trail plan or finalized team. If you do not have other team members identified, please use the comment box at the end of this page to describe the types of team members you plan to recruit, even if specific individuals have not yet been confirmed.

Team Member #2 (Secondary Applicant)

First name

Last name

Email

Phone

Organization/Affiliation

Role/Title

Representing as:

- ☐ Regional planning organization (e.g., Metropolitan Planning Organization, Council of Governments, Regional Development Council)
- ☐ Local government entity (e.g., public agencies, city council/county commission, city manager’s office, parks and recreation department, planning department)
- ☐ Community-based or Nonprofit organization
- ☐ Economic Development or Tourism (e.g., Destination Management Organization, Economic Development Authority)
- ☐ Anchor Institutions (e.g., hospital, university, church, cultural institution)
- ☐ Other governmental entity (state, federal)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Team Member #3 (Optional)

First name

Last name

Email

Phone

Organization/Affiliation

Role/Title

Representing as:

- ☐ Regional planning organization (e.g., Metropolitan Planning Organization, Council of Governments, Regional Development Council)
- ☐ Local government entity (e.g., public agencies, city council/county commission, city manager's office, parks and recreation department, planning department)
- ☐ Community-based or Nonprofit organization
- ☐ Economic Development or Tourism (e.g., Destination Management Organization, Economic Development Authority)
- ☐ Anchor Institutions (e.g., hospital, university, church, cultural institution)
- ☐ Other governmental entity (state, federal)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Additional Team Member(s) Not Yet Identified

If additional team members are not currently identified, please describe the types of team members you plan to recruit.



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About Your Project and Community

* Geographic Scope

What is the approximate geographic scope of the trail network project you hope to accelerate?

For example: Is it county-wide? Does it serve a full tribe? Does it connect a few small towns or span multiple counties? [Up to 50 words]

* Project Location

Please provide the specific location(s) where your priority trail network effort will take place:

Town, City, or Tribal
Community:

County (or Counties):

State(s):

* The Accelerator program is designed to support efforts in rural and small-town communities, or small cities (generally under 50,000 population). Briefly describe how your project aligns with this focus. [Up to 150 words]

* What stage is your project currently in?

- ☐ Early concept/idea phase
- ☐ Project vision is established
- ☐ Feasibility or other planning underway
- ☐ Stakeholders and partners engaged through a formalized coalition

Provide comment if necessary

Core Questions

* 1. How did the trail network idea that your team hopes to accelerate come to be (for example, as part of a broader comprehensive planning effort or community needs assessment)? Briefly describe [up to 250 words]

OPTIONAL: Briefly describe any actions you are already taking to advance your trail network idea? Are there elements of the [TrailNation Playbook](#) that you are already implementing? [up to 250 words]

* 2. Regional planning organizations (e.g., Metropolitan Planning Organization, Council of Governments, Regional Development Council) play an important role in trail network development. How is your regional planning organization currently engaged with the trail project or vision? How would you like to increase their engagement if they are not currently involved? [up to 250 words]

* 3. With a focus on rural, tribal, or small-town communities, the Accelerator Program will also prioritize communities and projects that:

- Are located in or serve historically disadvantaged or under-resourced areas
- Have limited access to professional services or dedicated staff capacity to advance trail development
- Do not yet have a fully established trail network plan or framework

Briefly describe how your project location and team could benefit from the Accelerator program based on these important factors. [up to 250 words]

* 4. What outcomes do you hope to achieve over the course of the program?

Topics of Interest

* 5. Which elements of the TrailNation Playbook are you most interested in exploring as part of this program?

* 6. Considering broader community leadership topics (e.g., public communication, relationship building, facilitation skills, equity and inclusion, advocacy skills, project management, etc.) what is your team most interested in learning as part of this program?

Other

* 7. How did you hear about this opportunity?

- ☐ In the TrailNation Collaborative newsletter, or other RTC e-news
- ☐ On the RTC website
- ☐ From RTC staff
- ☐ From a colleague or friend
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Optional: Additional comments or thoughts you'd like to share about your trail network project or team.

Thank you for completing the application! Please click on the "Done" button to submit.