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Rails to Trails Conservancy Grants Underscore an Urgent Truth: Demand for Safe Spaces to Walk and Bike Outpaces Available Funding Nationwide

RTC received applications from more than 170 organizations totaling over \$3.1 million in 2026. Since 2008, RTC has distributed more than \$4.5 million in grants, helping communities nationwide build, advocate for and activate essential trail network infrastructure.

WASHINGTON—Rails to Trails Conservancy today announced it awarded more than \$435,000 in funding through its 2026 Trail Grants program to over 35 community organizations and public agencies advancing the construction, land acquisition and activation needed to build out America's trail networks in rural, suburban and urban communities.

"RTC's Trail Grants underscore the profound effect trails have on communities of every size, and on people's everyday lives," said Liz Thorstensen, RTC's vice president of trail development. "These projects help close critical gaps in trail networks and create more opportunities for people to safely walk, bike and spend time outdoors. Whether it's improving connectivity, supporting local economies or bringing people together, these investments help turn community vision into lasting impact."

RTC's 2026 grantees highlight the urgent need for sustained funding of trail infrastructure. Applications from more than 170 organizations totaled over \$3.1 million, demonstrating this infrastructure is essential to people and places – not a nice-to-have amenity.

"The response to this year's Trail Grants program sends a clear message: Communities across the country are asking for more safe places to walk, bike and connect with one another," said Thorstensen. "With requests totaling more than \$3.1 million, demand far exceeds what philanthropy alone can provide. While RTC's investment of more than \$435,000 will help unlock over \$5.5 million in additional state and federal funding, sustained public investment is essential if we are going to meet the scale of need and deliver the trail infrastructure communities are telling us they want."

There are more than 150 trail networks in development across the country, with projects developing in every state. This year's grant recipients show what targeted investment can accomplish on the ground. The 2026 grantees include:

- **Friends of the Lowline** (South Carolina): Supporting Phase 1 construction of the Lowcountry Lowline, which will convert a historic rail corridor into a 1.7-mile linear park through the Charleston peninsula.
- **Equiticity** (Northeastern Illinois): Enabling a Phase I feasibility study to explore converting the Altenheim Line into a multi-use trail, part of the Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways & Trails Plan.
- **Iron County** (Wisconsin): Supporting acquisition of the Hurley to Montreal Trail corridor from Canadian National, which will connect to the existing Iron Bell Trail across the state line in Michigan.
- **Building Community Together (Altadena CoLab)** (California): Conducting a mapping and connectivity analysis for the Altadena Town Trail & Greenway to strengthen trail connections across the community.
- **Casco Bay Trail Alliance** (Maine): Providing matching funds for a preliminary engineering study of the Portland to Yarmouth segment of the Casco Bay Trail.
- **Special Olympics** (regional chapters): Supporting on-trail activation, outdoor camps and trail kits for athletes to encourage community independence and physical activity.

This year's grantees also include members of the TrailNation Accelerator, RTC's program that helps rural and small-town communities plan, connect and activate trail networks that serve people and places equitably. Supported by the REI Cooperative Action Fund, the year-long cohort experience brings local leaders and trail champions together to learn, plan and take action. This year's Trail Grants funding gives those same communities a critical boost as they work to turn visions into reality.

"Every one of this year's grantees is doing extraordinary work to make their community more connected and more vibrant," said Thorstensen. "At its core, this is about something simple but essential: Everyone deserves a safe place to walk, bike and be active outside, close to home. We're proud to stand behind these organizations and the communities they serve, and we look forward to seeing the impact these projects will have for years to come."

The 2026 Trail Grants are part of RTC's longstanding program, which has distributed more than \$4.5 million across more than 480 grants to over 310 organizations. Learn more about the program and the full list of 2026 RTC Trail Grant recipients at railstotrails.org/grants.

Rails to Trails Conservancy is the nation's largest trails organization—with a grassroots community more than 1 million strong—dedicated to building a nation connected by trails, reimagining public spaces to create safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors. RTC's flagship initiatives, the Great American Rail-Trail®, TrailNation™ and TrailLink make possible a future where trails connect everyone, everywhere by advocating, building infrastructure, securing investments, and telling the story of America's trails. Connect with RTC at railstotrails.org and @railstotrails on social media. Use TrailLink, RTC's trail-finder website and app, to get maps, guides, photos, reviews and navigation for more than 40,000 miles of multiuse trails.