Forest Legacy Program
FY2028 LWCF Submission and Scoring Guidance
Questions & Answers

Questions	Responses
When is the national due date for Project Proposals?	State applicants should upload project information (proposals) into Grants.gov **by 11:59pm ET on September 11th** in alignment with the FY2028 Notice of Funding Opportunity. Any applicant experiencing difficulties navigating the submission process through Grants.gov should reach out to the Forest Legacy Shared Inbox for assistance at: sm.fs.flp@usda.gov
What limits exist on the amount of funding a state can request and/or proposals it can submit this year?	States can submit up to ***five*** projects for funding consideration, not to exceed a total state request of $30 million, with each project not exceeding $20 million. There is no separate allocation for “resubmissions” as existed in previous years.
What has changed in this year’s submission and evaluation process?	• Applications submitted through Grants.gov, not the Forest Legacy Information System (FLIS), including an SF-424/424C • Increased State Funding Request Cap of $30M (up from $20M) • Added emphasis on proximity to critical wood products infrastructure • Added emphasis on state and local support – A Governor’s letter is encouraged (not required) • Added emphasis on cost-share above the required 25%, with documented source(s) • Continued emphasis on public access • Clarification that project modifications must be approved prior to additional funding requests • Clarification on Market Analyses and State Roles, including a new Market Analysis Guide
How will projects be scored and ranked by the National Review Panel?	The National Review Panel will be comprised of 12 people (6 state and 6 federal participants). Reviewers look at the totality of the project elements and consider each proposal. First, projects are scored on their own merits by individual review panelists using National Core Criteria without consideration of their size/funding level. Panelists consider how each project: (1) contributes to defined environmental, social and economic benefits (Importance); (2) contributes to conservation initiatives, protected land, and landscape objectives (Strategic); (3) estimates likelihood of conversion to non-forest uses (Threat). Panelist scores are then submitted and normalized by a statistician. Finally, the National Review Panel convenes as a group to discuss projects and develop a recommended ranked project list, using each project’s normalized mean score as the *starting point* and incorporating the Additional Considerations outlined on page 17 of the Scoring Guidance.

What is a market analysis? Why is it required? What documentation is required to support the market analysis? Does it have to be submitted in Grants.gov?	A market analysis provides an informed estimate of value for the proposed project. It's an evaluation based on data. A market analysis is not the same as an appraisal and does not need to be conducted by a qualified appraiser. The key expectation is that the state conducts an analysis that compiles and synthesizes data to inform the estimate of value and documents the reasoning behind the state's valuation. The analysis should be done by someone with real estate experience (depending on the degree of experience this could be the State Program Manager) and with knowledge of transactions in the area. A partner can conduct the analysis, but the State as the applicant should review and verify the information. FLP does not want to underfund projects, which may affect project viability. The program also does not want to overfund projects, as this reduces the amount available for other projects. States are encouraged to utilize the new Market Analysis Guide as a resource. The Market Analysis documentation does not need to be provided at the time of application in Grants.gov but should be made available upon Forest Service request.
Is Public Access required for projects submitted for funding consideration in FY2028?	Public access is not required, but it is scored as an attribute under the Important Section and weighed by the panel as an Additional Consideration.
How is project readiness considered in the scoring process? How quickly are projects expected to close?	Project readiness is considered by the panel as an Additional Consideration when making funding and ranking decisions. Readiness is considered alongside state performance, as some states may have a strong track record of completing timely projects even when the proposal has a low readiness score. The intent of the readiness consideration is to evaluate the likelihood of the project being completed within the expected timeframes as well as project viability and eligibility. Funded projects are expected to close within 2 years. This performance period can be extended with approval based on extenuating circumstances, but the general expectation is that all projects proposed are sufficiently ready to close within 2 years of grant award (which is usually 3 years or more from date of proposal).
What are the readiness expectations for multi-tract projects?	The readiness score identified for a multi-tract project should reflect the readiness tasks completed for *the majority of* the tracts being proposed.
What level of funding is considered "significant" as outlined in the additional considerations? In light of the increased funding awarded to states through IRA, is this higher than previous years?	The Scoring Guidance places more emphasis on age of unspent funding in each state rather than amount of funding. IRA offered the opportunity to award higher funding amounts than historically possible for the program, and we recognize this has affected many states' unspent balances. Unspent funding is one consideration, among many others. State performance, core criteria narratives, readiness, etc. will all be considered by the National Review Panel.

Should landowners be mentioned and named in the project brief? How frequently?	The best practice is that the brief should focus on the land being proposed for conservation and the values and public benefits conservation would provide. Certain National Core Criteria—such as Important and Strategic—lend themselves to attributes that focus largely on the property to be conserved, not the landowner. Whereas the Threatened section offers the opportunity to address landowner circumstances. While there may be appropriate places in briefs to discuss the landowner, applicants are encouraged to write a brief through the lens of the public benefits and values to be provided.
Can landowners provide letters of support and be listed as supporting parties on project briefs?	Letters can be provided by landowners, but they may not weigh as heavily as other letters. Each panel is different, but panelists historically will not give a landowner's letter the same weight as a third-party which does not stand to directly benefit from the acquisition. However, States should ensure all landowners are aware of and support the proposal to ensure they are a *willing seller*. This does not need to be documented specifically as a letter to the panel, but the State should have this assurance as part of their standard due diligence that the landowner is supportive of their lands being included in the application.
Who is the appropriate addressee/ recipient of a project's letters of support?	Letters of support are most appropriately addressed to the State Forester/Director or to the Regional Forester. Letters from the Governor, Congressional members, or Tribes are appropriately sent to the US Forest Service Chief (Tom Schultz), but all other letters can be addressed to the State or Region. If a partner wants to send to the national level, sending to the Chief is most appropriate – but is not required or necessary. The Region is responsible for working with States to ensure there is documentation for all supporting parties listed in the proposal, therefore it is more efficient to send Letters of Support to the Region. Letters sent to the Chief should be addressed to: USDA Forest Service, Office of the Chief 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-003
Do readiness documents or Letters of Support need to be attached in Grants.gov, or uploaded into Pinyon Box? Can this documentation be provided after the September 11 deadline as updates come in? What if a support letter, concurrence letter, or readiness documentation comes in after the deadline?	The only documentation required to be uploaded into Grants.gov are Letters of Concurrence, if applicable. All other documentation does *not* need to be uploaded through Grants.gov and should instead be provided to the Forest Service *upon request*. Regional program staff may request this documentation prior to or during internal review. The National Review Panel may also request this documentation during deliberations. If a support or concurrence letter comes in after the Grants.gov application deadline, notify your Regional program manager. States will not be allowed to update their project narratives to reflect this new information, but these updates may be provided to the National Review Panel as applicable to inform deliberations. Readiness information provided in the project narrative should reflect the status as of *the date of submission*. The readiness score will not be updated after the date of submission.

Can you add details on the Governor's Letter? Is there a certain level to which the Governor's office can delegate the letter/signature and still have it counted as a "Governor's Letter"? To whom should the letter be addressed?	A letter from the Governor of the State/Territory is encouraged but not required. This letter should be issued by the Governor's office, not by the State Lead Agency, to demonstrate top level political support for the project. Ideally this letter will also confirm that the state has coordinated with local governments providing for appropriate notice and local input. A State can also choose to submit county/township letters to demonstrate local support. These letters may be considered by the National Review Panel when making ranking decisions as part of the evaluation of State and Local Support under Additional Considerations. The Forest Service will also share the Governor's letters with agency and department leadership during the clearance process.
Is there a tool States can use to evaluate a project's proximity to mill facilities identified in the FIA data?	FIA Timber Products Output data is available within the Forest Service Research & Development website. This site provides state-level data on the number and types of facilities, as well as county-level data on product types and volume. Applicants are encouraged to also use local and state sources of information when describing the relevance of a given project to nearby timber mills and other wood product facilities.
Are the *Recommendations for Project Maps* and *Threatened and Endangered Species Glossary* still accessible?	Both resources were removed from the Scoring Guidance as "appendices" to reduce length and simplify the document. These resources are still available as stand-alone documents on the Grants.gov NOFO listing.
How can a state incorporate The Nature Conservancy's Resilient Land Mapping Tool into the project brief, given the category has been removed from the Important Section?	The *Other Landscape Scale Goals & Public Benefits* attribute under "Strategic" is provided to explain a project's contributions to the advancement of other large-scale conservation goals and public benefits, which could include a project's contribution to forest and habitat resilience, as evidenced by the Resilient Land Mapping tool, or other data tools.
Can administrative funds be used to pay for expenses related to project development and readiness?	Yes. Administrative funds can be used to meet readiness criteria (such as market analysis) but make sure you are communicating with your Regional Program Manager on how the funds are being used to avoid ineligible costs. The uses need to be allowed by both the Program and be in the grant budget. See pages 36-39 in Implementation Guidance (2017) for allowable uses.
Why are we no longer using FLIS for submissions?	At this time FLIS has not been reviewed and approved by OMB under the Paperwork Reduction Act for the purpose of accepting applications for federal financial assistance. We will seek to meet this legal requirement before next year's application process.
Will States still have access to the Forest Legacy Information System (FLIS)? What are the benefits of choosing to use FLIS during the application process?	Yes. Users will still have access to the FLIS and may continue to use it as a resource, though applications should be submitted through Grants.gov. States can choose to use FLIS to generate project narratives and upload a copy of the system generated pdf into grants.gov to meet the "Project Narrative" requirement. Using FLIS to generate the project brief will ensure required formatting and character limits are met as specified in the NOFO. Inputting data into FLIS at the application stage will also reduce workload if the project is funded. Once projects are funded, projects must be input into FLIS as part of the grant reporting requirements.

If we choose to submit an application using our own format (e.g. using Word instead of FLIS), can we tell a broader story? What happens to the application if we submit more bullets or characters than allowed?	No. The NOFO specifies how many bullets, characters, pages, photos, and maps can be submitted in the application, as well as the minimum font and margin sizes. These specifications ensure all applications include the same amount of information, whether generated in FLIS or through other software. If an application is submitted that does not meet the specifications outlined in the NOFO, we will notify the applicant and request that the application be corrected and re-submitted within 48 hours. If an application is not corrected within this timeframe, or the resubmission again does not meet the requirements, it will be removed from funding consideration.
The NOFO states that *"Eligible land for grants funded under this program is privately owned forest land that provides public benefits…"* What is meant by "privately owned"? Are state-held trust lands eligible?	Typically, all lands or interests acquired under Forest Legacy are owned by private individuals, families, non-profit organizations, or corporations. Private lands must also be at risk of conversion to non-forest uses. Private lands already encumbered with conservation easements or deed restrictions may not be eligible. In limited circumstances, the program has accepted lands that are currently held in state ownership but are still subject to sale and conversion under state law with a mandate to maximize revenues for beneficiaries, such as school or mental health trust lands.
Do we *really* have to submit an SF-424 with our project brief? Will the state be able to update these grant forms before executing the final award? What dates should we list on this form for execution and expiration?	Yes. The SF-424 and SF-424C forms are a required part of the application and must be completed within Grants.gov. Do not fill those forms out and save to your computer—complete and save the forms in Grants.gov. The State should complete these forms using current estimated costs, including identifying how much funding is projected for acquisition versus due diligence costs. If a project is selected for funding, then the agency will work with the State to update the forms before final grant award. We recommend using October 1, 2027 as the anticipated execution date and then September 30, 2029 as the anticipated expiration date (2-year performance period from time of award).
The NOFO requires applicants to submit shapefiles with tract boundaries. How do we provide this data?	States can either submit shapefile data through Grants.gov or upload into FLIS under Tract details. Currently there are technical issues with uploading into FLIS that we will work to remedy before the application deadline.
Is there anyone available to confirm if we have submitted our information correctly, if we turned everything in a couple of days early in Grants.gov?	If you would like confirmation that your application has been received in Grants.gov, please contact Cassie Adams (cassie.adams@usda.gov) ahead of the September 11 deadline. The Forest Service will also notify applicants after the deadline if there are issues with the submitted documents and will work with the State to remedy the issue, as needed.
Can applicants utilize hyperlinks in project narratives/briefs?	Applicants should not include links to information outside of the project narrative. The Forest Service typically provides hard-copy materials to panelists for review and scoring purposes and panelists are instructed to review and score the project based on the information provided by the applicant within the four corners of the project narrative.