

What is the Small Water System Readiness Program?

The Small Water System Readiness Program supports eligible applicants to strengthen operational sustainability and preparedness for emergencies, wildfire, and extreme weather events through water system FireSmart upgrades, equipment and records preservation.

This Program aligns with the Trust's focus on supporting communities facing risks like wildfire, extreme weather, drought and lack of access to water and ensuring access to fresh, safe and healthy water for current and future generations as outlined in the [Columbia Basin Management Plan: Strategic Priorities 2024–2034](#).

Who can apply?

Eligible applicants include community-owned and managed small water systems including Improvement Districts, Water User Communities and registered non-profit societies owning a registered water utility in the Columbia Basin Trust region (ourtrust.org/map). Eligible applicants must have a valid operating permit if they supply drinking water and all water systems must have a valid water license.

Privately owned and non-registered water systems are not eligible to apply.

When is the application deadline?

November 25, 2026 at 2:00 p.m. PT / 3:00 p.m. MT.

What types of projects are eligible?

Eligible projects include:

Wildfire Resilient Improvements

- FireSmarting water system structures (e.g. well and/or pump houses, equipment storage, treatment building, etc.) including:
 - installing fire resistant materials such as siding, trim, roofing, fascias, soffits, windows and doors;
 - installing roof-mounted sprinkler systems; and
 - removing combustible materials and highly flammable vegetation within a 10-meter perimeter.
- Requests must align with the [British Columbia FireSmart™ guidelines](#).
- Requests must relate to above-ground infrastructure on land owned and/or leased on a long-term basis by the water system.

Small Equipment

- Purchasing small equipment and/or devices that improve the water system's operational sustainability and resiliency to extreme weather events through:
 - improving response time to emergencies through installation of sensors and alarms;
 - improving the monitoring and measurement of water flow and quality; and
 - contributing to water conservation.

Program Guide

- Equipment must be stored or installed on land owned and/or leased on a long-term basis by the water system.

Power Source

- Purchasing and installing equipment that improves reliable access to power such as off-grid and/or backup power sources.
- Equipment must be stored or installed on land owned and/or leased on a long-term basis by the water system.

Digitizing Records

- Engaging a professional digitization service to assist in converting the water system's paper and/or knowledge based records to electronic versions to reduce the risk of loss of information during an emergency and improve operational sustainability by preparing for succession.

What types of costs are not eligible?

Ineligible costs include:

- costs incurred prior to receiving project approval;
- costs that are not directly relevant to the water system;
- routine maintenance or administrative costs;
- the replacement of the existing core infrastructure of the water system, including but not limited to, water pipes, wells, pumps, intakes, valves, fittings, treatment systems, tanks and ponds;
- wildfire resiliency upgrade activities that do not follow the BC FireSmart guidelines;
- activities on private land unless it is clearly designated through lease or agreement for the function of the community water system;
- activities that are legally required of the water system as a condition of their operating permit;
- advocacy and/or lobbying; or
- costs that primarily benefit an individual user or small subset of users of the water system and not the broader community of the water system.

How much will the Trust fund?

Up to 90 per cent of total project costs can be requested from the Trust. It is expected that the cumulative maximum amount of Trust funding for any one project is \$60,000.

Projects showing broad community support and confirmed cash contributions from additional sources are more likely to receive funding.

How does the Trust select projects for funding?

The Trust use(s) the following selection criteria to prioritize funding.

- The organization and project demonstrate it meets the program eligibility listed above.
- The project will benefit the broad community of the water system.
- The project shows it is ready to move forward in the stated timelines.
- The project demonstrates it will strengthen the emergency preparedness and operational sustainability of the community water system.
- The organization demonstrates an understanding of the need to maintain the results

of the project long-term; this can be shown by a long-term budget or an asset management plan for ongoing and scheduled maintenance or repairs.

- The Trust strives to distribute program funds across communities, organizations and project types and will consider this as part of the adjudication process.

When will organizations hear the results?

The review process usually takes up to eight weeks. Trust staff may request additional information during the evaluation phase.

Organizations will be contacted by email, at the address provided on the application form, to confirm if the project application has been approved for funding.

If you are approved for funding, both parties will sign a Contribution Agreement. Funds will be received after both parties sign the Agreement.

When can a project begin?

Funds can only be used for approved project expenses that occur after Trust approval of funding has been received and the Contribution Agreement has been signed.

How long can a project be?

Projects must be completed within 18 months of signing the Contribution Agreement.

What else to keep in mind?

Trust staff are available to discuss your project idea and help you navigate the application process. Reach out to the Trust at water@ourtrust.org.

Even if a project meets eligibility criteria, it may not be selected for funding as the Trust often receives requests for more funding than what is available. The Trust retains the right to determine project eligibility and the amount of funding allocated to each project; this may be all or part of what was requested.

Depending on the nature of the project, applicants may have to obtain specific permits and approvals prior to receiving Trust funds.

Ready to apply?

1. Reach out to the Trust at water@ourtrust.org to discuss your Project idea and ask questions about the Program and application process (optional).
2. Review the Program Guide.
3. Use the [Application Worksheet](#) to develop the application offline, if preferred.
4. Complete the online application form at [Small Water System Readiness Program](#).