

Richard
King
Mellon
Foundation

Invasive Plant Species as a Threat to Native Biodiversity

Request for Proposals

Application Deadline

Friday, September 9, 2022. Noon (12:00 PM). Eastern Standard Time.

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Introduction to the Richard King Mellon Foundation

The Richard King Mellon Foundation's mission is to improve the competitive position of the region; strengthen the vitality of southwestern Pennsylvania, particularly the City of Pittsburgh and its neighborhoods; and protect important habitats and amenities in western Pennsylvania and other key landscapes across the nation. Founded in 1947, the Foundation is the largest foundation in southwestern Pennsylvania, and one of the 50 largest in the world. The Foundation's 2021 year-end net assets were \$3.4 billion, and its Trustees in 2021 disbursed \$152 million in grants and program-related investments. The Foundation focuses its funding on six mutually reinforcing funding programs, delineated in [its 2021-2030 Strategic Plan](#). These funding programs are Conservation; Economic Development; Economic Mobility; Health and Well-Being; Organizational Effectiveness; and Social-Impact Investments. All six programs invest in bold, evidence-informed solutions that align with the Foundation's mission and contribute to positive change.

Foundation's Commitment to Conservation

Over 75 years the Richard King Mellon Foundation has committed approximately \$1 billion to conserve and restore critical habitats in Pennsylvania and nationally, to promote sustainable economic development, and to create livable communities. In the process, the Foundation has protected more than 4.5 million acres of land in all 50 states with a particular focus on increasing public access.

Conservation is one of the six programs defined in the Foundation's 2021-2030 strategic plan. The program addresses the needs of communities and habitats in Western Pennsylvania as well as habitat conservation and stewardship issues nationally. The Foundation organizes its Conservation program into four categories: Habitat Conservation, Stewardship, Activation, and Sustainable Communities. Each investment area contains priorities and outcomes that further describe the Foundation's funding interests and the changes that the Foundation hopes to create.

Background: Invasive Plant Species as a Threat to Native Biodiversity

Invasive plants are threatening the ecological integrity of many of these natural lands and waters and undermining the conservation value of important habitats, including those with high biodiversity value. The Richard King Mellon Foundation is issuing a request for proposals (RFP) aimed at stopping or slowing the spread of such harmful, non-native plant species. This new initiative is aligned with the *Stewardship* area of the Foundation's *Conservation* funding program. Applicants responding to the RFP should apply through the Foundation's standard application process noting the program categories listed above.

Biodiversity is in decline across the United States and invasive species are among the leading factors in those declines. Invasive non-native plants are a particular problem, outcompeting many native plant species, altering and degrading food webs, and at times transforming entire ecosystems. The spread and proliferation of invasive plants in natural ecosystems is undermining the value of important habitats and compromising the integrity of conserved and protected lands and waters. Invasive plants also can degrade the services these ecosystems provide to people and communities, such as clean-water supply, flood protection, and carbon uptake and storage. Compounding these problems, climate change is increasing the pace of invasions and worsening the impacts of some invasive species. Addressing the problem of invasive species is crucial to the Foundation's interests in conserving important habitats with high biodiversity and promoting effective and forward-looking stewardship of the nation's conserved lands and waters.

Tackling the challenge of invasive species can range from programs and activities to prevent the arrival and introduction of new invasives; early detection and rapid response efforts to stop the establishment or spread of invaders; and control and management activities to address established invasions. Preventing the arrival or establishment of new invaders and stopping or slowing the spread of existing invaders is widely viewed as more effective and economical than attempting to reverse already well-entrenched invasions. For this reason, disrupting key pathways for the transport and spread of invasive plants is key to protecting natural ecosystems and conserved areas from additional harm from invasive plant species.

Invasive plants spread through a variety of pathways, and researchers have identified the horticulture industry and nursery trade as one of the most significant pathways of spread. Additional pathways include outdoor recreation and travel activities, and the movement of work equipment used in construction, firefighting, disaster response, and ecological restoration activities. Changing climatic conditions also are enabling some invasive plants to expand their ranges, for instance by allowing certain more southerly species to move into more northerly states and regions.

Requests for Proposals

To address the threats that invasive plants pose to the nation's natural lands and waters, the Foundation has a particular interest in advancing three approaches to slowing or stopping the spread of invasive plants.

1. Strengthening Programs Limiting Invasive Plants in the Nursery Trade and Retail Outlets

Programs that prohibit or restrict the spread of harmful invasive plants have been shown to be an effective means of reducing the spread of such species. Accordingly, the Foundation is interested in strengthening the coverage, consistency, and proactivity of programs and policies that prohibit or limit the sale or planting of species that pose invasion risks to natural ecosystems and conservation are:

- **Coverage:** Enhancing the coverage of such programs includes expanding the number of states or other jurisdictions with effective restrictions on the sale or planting of high-risk invasive plants. Even where such programs are in place, lists of prohibited species are often limited or incomplete. For that reason, there is also a need to enhance coverage by incorporating a broader suite of invasive species that pose risks to natural areas in the jurisdiction.
- **Consistency:** Invasive plants do not respect political boundaries. Banning the sale or planting of harmful invasives in one state can be undermined if the same invasive plants are readily available for sale in adjacent states. For this reason, regional coordination and cooperation in the development and enforcement of programs, including lists of prohibited species, is key to improving cross-state consistency and closing such gaps in coverage and protection.
- **Proactivity:** Lists of prohibited plants often only include those species already found in the state or area. As climate change and other factors allow invasive plant species to expand their ranges, however, it will be increasingly important for invasive plant programs to become more proactive by including species not yet present in an area but that may pose an invasion threat in the foreseeable future. Indeed, preventing the arrival of new invaders through the proactive restrictions on such species is one of the most effective means for avoiding their establishment, spread, and subsequent need for expensive on-the-ground control efforts.

2. Promoting Voluntary Efforts Through Outreach and Education

Promoting responsible, voluntary behaviors that can slow the spread of harmful invasive plants is an important complement to legal restrictions. Outreach and education initiatives targeting both consumers and producers of nursery plants can play a role in reducing the demand as well as supply of harmful invasive plants, even where it is legal for these species to be sold and planted. Outreach and education

initiatives also can help to reduce the spread of invasive plants through other key pathways and vectors, such as through the unintentional transport of seeds or plant fragments on outdoor recreational equipment (boots, mountain bikes, watercraft, etc.) or construction and work equipment. Finally, outreach and education programs engaging members of the public in surveillance and detection of invasive plants in natural areas can both raise community awareness of the issue and contribute to effective early detection/rapid response efforts.

3. Integrating Warming Temperatures and Climate Change into Prevention and Early Detection/Rapid Response

A third area of interest for the Foundation is promoting the broader application of climate change information and climate-informed watch lists in efforts to stop or slow the spread of invasive plants, particularly through prevention and early detection/rapid response efforts. A variety of methods are now available for assessing how projected climatic changes may affect the future distribution of invasive plant species. There is a need, however, to develop more effective models for applying such climate-informed assessments or watchlists into regulatory processes, early detection and rapid response efforts, and other efforts to control the spread and growth of invasive plant populations in natural areas.

Eligibility Criteria:

Eligible institutions include nonprofit and public sector organizations, including those operating at local, state, Tribal, regional, and national scales. The Foundation encourages partnerships and collaborations, including with the for-profit sector, to help develop and implement programs.

We encourage applications from local and state-based organizations/agencies as well as regional invasive species collaboratives. We also encourage applications from organizations and agencies led by, representing, and/or serving diverse constituencies or communities over-burdened by environmental stressors. An important note -- the Foundation does not support lobbying activities.

Details on the Foundation's basic eligibility criteria can be found on the [Apply](#) page of our website.

Funding Guidelines:

The Foundation invites proposals that focus on one or more of the following categories with a particular focus on landscapes of special concern due to unique biodiversity (described in more detail above). Note: because this program seeks to stop or slow the spread of invasive plants, proposals focused on the control and management of established invasive plants are less likely to be funded unless the program has a direct tie to the Foundation's Western Pennsylvania Business Plan for Conservation and has the potential for broader ramifications.

1. Strengthening programs for restricting the distribution and sale of invasive plants in the nursery trade by improving the coverage, consistency, and proactivity of such policies.
 - This can include outreach efforts by non-governmental entities designed to promote the adoption of new programs at state or other levels of government, or to expand or improve existing programs.
 - This can include the work of state, Tribal, or local governments to implement new policies or enhance the effectiveness of existing rules.
 - Although efforts to restrict the sale of broader suites of harmful invasive plants are preferred, this can also include campaigns focused on prohibiting and/or limiting the sale or distribution of particular harmful but widely planted species.

2. Promoting voluntary actions to reduce the spread of invasive plants through targeted education and outreach campaigns.
 - Campaigns must address key pathways of spread, such as the sale or planting of harmful invasive plants through the nursery trade, or the unintentional transport of invasive plants through outdoor recreation or work-related activities.
 - Proposals can include education and outreach efforts focused on public engagement in the surveillance and detection of new invaders or infestations in natural areas, as part of early detection/rapid response programs.
 - Education and outreach proposals must specify the target audience, desired behavior changes, and expected outcomes.
 - Proposals should specify the areas likely to benefit from these efforts and their ecological and conservation significance.
 - Proposals can build on existing education and outreach programs or involve the development and implementation of new approaches and campaigns.

3. Applying climate change considerations into efforts to stop or slow the spread of invasive plants.
 - Proposals in this area should have a primary focus on the application of climate change-related information and climate-informed watchlists, rather than mostly involve the development, refinement, or maintenance of such climate assessments and lists.
 - Proposals should specify the mechanism by which climate-related information is expected to improve the effectiveness of prevention and/or early detection and rapid response efforts at state, Tribal, or local levels, or for specific high-priority conservation areas.
 - Proposals should specify the areas likely to benefit from these efforts and their ecological and conservation significance.

In addition to the criteria and considerations described above under each of the three funding categories, the following general design considerations apply to proposals under this program:

- The effort has been designed specifically to address and disrupt key pathways for the spread of harmful invasive plant species.
- The effort is expected to provide protective benefits to natural ecosystems, important habitats, and/or conserved areas.
- Efforts can be focused at local, state, Tribal, regional, or national scales and can address terrestrial and/or aquatic systems.
- Targeted natural ecosystems and conserved areas can be located in remote wildlands, rural areas, or in more heavily populated suburban and urban areas.
- Proposed projects should accomplish one or more of the following:
 - Enhance the ecological value and/or conservation of natural ecosystems
 - Increase the capacity of communities overburdened with environmental stressors to address the impacts of invasive plant species
 - Demonstrate innovative approaches or techniques in policy advocacy, education and outreach, or in the incorporation of climate change considerations in invasive species prevention efforts

The Foundation is committed to promoting evidence-based conservation and proposals should specify metrics that would be used to evaluate successful outcomes. Given the range of different approaches that are eligible for funding under this program, there is a recognition that appropriate metrics will vary among proposed efforts. For this reason, proposals should describe a “theory of change” for how the project is expected to make a difference in disrupting key pathways for the spread of invasive plants. This should include specifying the intended goals and outcomes for the effort, the actions expected to produce those outcomes, and potential metrics for evaluating progress towards those outcomes and goals. Given the inherent challenge of tracking progress toward preventing or slowing the spread of such species (that is, documenting something that does *not* happen), proposals should suggest approaches for using counterfactuals as the basis for measuring progress, or for measuring intermediate progress indicators (for instance, metrics for key actions or outputs).

What the Foundation Will Not Fund

The Foundation will not fund the following through this RFP:

- Endowments
- Advocacy, political causes, or related events
- Existing deficits or retroactive funding
- Event sponsorships

Application Timeline

Proposals should be submitted directly through our online application by noon on September 9, 2022.

Applications received after this deadline will not be considered at this time. The Foundation does not expect that more than \$250,000 will be available per proposal. However, if a proposal is truly exceptional and reflects a broad partnership, the Foundation may consider providing more than \$250,000. If funded, projects must be implemented within 12 to 18 months. The Foundation reserves the right to request more information or to work with applicants to improve their proposals for future consideration.

Funding is expected to be awarded in December 2022.

Schedule	
Friday, September 9, 2022. Noon (12:00 PM) EST.	Applications submitted. https://www.grantrequest.com/SID_5499?SA=SNA&FID=35046
September – November 2022	Proposals Evaluated
December 2022	Funds Issued for Awarded Grants

Inquiries

Please contact Nikki Pirain (npirain@rkmf.org) at the Foundation to discuss questions regarding this RFP. However, a discussion is discretionary and not a requirement.