

The Horizon Foundation Guidelines and LOI for Land Acquisition Funding

The Horizon Foundation is a private, charitable foundation committed to ensuring that Texas' iconic landscapes and natural resources remain for future generations. In order to achieve this mission, The Foundation has created a \$20 million conservation land protection fund that will be distributed to qualified non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other qualified entities for the purposes of further land protection efforts in the state of Texas (both in fee simple acquisitions and through permanent conservation easements). Prior to discussing a potential project with The Horizon Foundation, we ask potential partners to review the below criteria and fill out the attached questionnaire.

Note: Conservation Land Protection Fund Letters of Intent (LOI) should be sent to land@thehorizonfdn.org. Your organization will be contacted within 45 days of LOI being submitted to confirm you are invited to submit a full proposal. If you do not receive an email, your LOI has not been invited to submit a full proposal.

General Criteria

When evaluating any potential conservation project, the following criteria will be considered:

1. Importance to water resources;
2. Size – bigger is better;
3. Intactness – Maintaining and protecting existing wild or natural areas is preferred to restoring degraded and highly fragmented areas; and
4. Relative lack of human development and influence.

When evaluating potential land protection projects specifically, how well the project meets the following criteria will be considered:

1. Leveraging larger conservation on the landscape (i.e., bringing considerable acreage into conservation ownership/management, linking existing tracts of public or otherwise protected ownership together, or making permanent protection for adjacent conservation lands easier);
2. Leveraging other public or private funding sources;
3. Engaging partners with a solid track record of completing land acquisition deals; and
4. Having a solid long-term protection plan.

Additional Guidance

1. **Funding.** Funding is for fee simple and permanent conservation easement capital acquisition costs. These costs should be supported by a third-party appraisal in most circumstances. Applicants may ask for up to five percent (5%) of total project costs for overhead, staff, due diligence, and other related projects costs.
2. **Leverage.** Projects that leverage other funding sources will be given priority. Leverage may come from bargain sales, in-kind donations, or other grant programs (private donations, public funds, etc.).

3. **Minerals.** Whenever possible, the mineral (subsurface) estate should be acquired, or surface use restrictions placed on the mineral estate holder to limit future surface disturbance.
4. **Geography.** All geographies in Texas will be considered, and projects that expand existing protected areas (public lands, non-profit conservation lands protected with conservation easements) will be given priority.
5. **Natural Resources.** Natural resource values include the property's endemic flora, fauna, invertebrates, geology, water, and other native attributes. Properties with Endangered Species, Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), migratory, grassland, or shorebird populations, or other attributes of unique significance will be given priority.
6. **Disposition of Acquired Property/Exit Plan.** Applicants must clearly demonstrate that there will be a legally enforceable mechanism to guarantee the permanent protection of all acquired property.
7. **Grant/Credit Agreement and Due Diligence.** Once a potential project is approved, The Horizon Foundation and the applicant will enter into a grant or credit agreement. Further, prior to the release of funds for each individual closing, The Horizon Foundation will conduct a due diligence review that will include a review of the partner group's financial situation as well as documentation surrounding the specific property including title, environmental and conservation values, other funding that will be used to acquire the property, and, when applicable, final disposition plans. Site visits will be required.

Questionnaire

After reviewing the information provided above, we ask that prospective applicants fill out the below questionnaire and return it to The Horizon Foundation. This will be considered your Letter of Intent (LOI). All LOI's will be reviewed, and you will be notified within 90 days if you meet the criteria to be invited to submit a full proposal for funding.

Organization Requesting Funding:

Project Name:

Project Goal:

Please provide a brief description stating the overarching goal of the project (e.g., connect a landscape, prevent development in a critical wildlife corridor, prevent mineral development to protect a watershed, etc.). Please also identify whether or not the project will require multiple acquisitions and how certain you are that these acquisitions will close if funding is secured.

Size & Location:

1. What is the total project size (in acres to be acquired)?
2. If Horizon funds requested would be used for a subset of a larger project, please indicate how many acres would be directly acquired using awarded Horizon funds and list the names and amounts of the project's other funding sources.
3. Where is the project located?
4. Please list any federal, state, or protected areas adjacent or nearby.

5. Please provide a map that clearly shows: the property(ies) to be acquired, nearby protected land (distinguished by managing agency/partner's name with the public land unit's official name).

Acquisition Type:

What acquisition type will the project consist of (e.g., fee simple, conservation easement, combination fee/easement)?

Funding:

Please include a detailed budget of all project costs, including:

1. Total capital cost for the project.
2. Amount requested from The Horizon Foundation.
3. Total funding amount required to complete the project, total funding raised to-date, and other sources committed/secured.

4. Fundraising plan for yet-to-be secured funds from other sources beyond The Horizon Foundation.

Conservation Values:

1. What are the general conservation values of the property(ies) and surrounding lands?
2. Of the general conservation values, what values make this area a high priority for protection? For example, if not acquired, the property(ies) will be sold for residential development, a public funding source will expire soon, etc.

Disposition Plan:

1. Who will be the final holder of the property(ies) or easement(s)?
2. What permanent protections will be in place upon transfer of the property(ies)(e.g., inclusion in new or existing public land, conservation easement, reserved interest deed)?
3. How will the property(ies) be used or managed upon disposition to ensure the conservation values remain?

Timeline:

What is the general timeline for the project? Please provide your best estimate for the month/quarter and year for individual closings, transfers/outsales to the final holder of the property(ies), and the fundraising needed through the end of the acquisition process. Please include a projected date for project completion.

Challenges:

What potential obstacles do you expect over the course of the project? Examples include uncertainty of state or federal funding, legal uncertainties around an untested method of permanent protection, and/or landowners deciding not to sell properties.