Boulder County Grey to Green Fund: Program Description and Application Instruction Packet

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Background and Program Introduction

In 2024 and 2025, Boulder County collaborated with Superbloom, a Colorado-based landscape architecture firm, and local municipalities to create Designing Resilient Urban Landscapes: A Nature-based Solutions Toolkit for Local Governments. This toolkit offers Boulder County and its municipalities a range of nature-based solutions (NBS) policies and programs designed to advance climate action and resilience through sustainable, ecosystem-based approaches tailored to our region.

The 2026 Grey to Green Fund is offered by Boulder County's Office of Sustainability, Climate Action, and Resilience (OSCAR), providing funding to help implement recommendations from the toolkit. The Grey to Green Fund offers $100,000 in available funds. The program supports projects that replace impervious 'grey' features (e.g., parking lots, streets, rooftops, nonfunctional turf) with 'green' features that deliver ecological benefits and resilience. Eligible project categories include: (1) Green Roofs, (2) Raingardens and Bioswales, (3) Converting Non-Functional Turf to Native Landscapes, (4) Miyawaki or Micro-forests, (5) Urban Agriculture, and (6) Impervious to Pervious Surface.

Timeline

The timeline for the announcement of awards and other milestones are an estimate.

- **Program Launch:** Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2025
- **Informational Webinar:** Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2025 from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Register for the informational webinar online. The webinar will be recorded.
- **Application Deadline:** 11:59 p.m. MST on Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026
- **Award Notifications**: Applicants will be notified of funding decisions by April 2026.
- **Project Start Date:** May 2026
- **Awardees Receive First Funding Check (50% of Total Award):** May 2026
- **Awardees Receive Second Funding Check (50% of Total Award):** November 2026
- **Project End Date: October** 2027
    - Awarded funding must be spent by the contract end date in October 2027.

Goals

- Direct resources to Boulder County municipalities and other entities to implement nature-based solutions from the Urban Landscape Toolkit.
- Reduce impervious surfaces and non-functional turf in Boulder County.
- Expand green spaces to enhance resilience to climate impacts (extreme heat, drought, flooding, biodiversity loss).
- Support ecological performance by improving stormwater management, infiltration, carbon sequestration, cleaner air, and urban cooling.
- Advance climate equity by directing resources and benefits to disproportionately impacted communities as defined by Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE).
- Create replicable and scalable models of resilient urban landscapes.

Importance and Impact

The Grey to Green Fund aims to tackle persistent challenges resulting from the prevalence of grey features and climate change. An abundance of impervious surfaces contributes to issues such as urban heat, increased flood risks, degraded water quality, and reduced biodiversity. Below are key statistics highlighting both the urgency of climate threats and the value of NBS in addressing them:

- Boulder County is expected to experience approximately 43 days per year with temperatures exceeding 92.5ºF.
- Urban and suburban areas are most susceptible to increased warming, as sparse vegetation, concrete, and asphalt create urban heat islands. Studies in Denver show that neighborhoods with more trees can be up to 9°F cooler than surrounding areas.
- Bouder County's Urban Tree Canopy Assessment by PlanIT Geo revealed that the average impervious surface in urbanized areas of Boulder County is 31%, while EnviroScreen Disproportionately impacted census blocks in the county average 48%.
- In Boulder, lawns account for up to 40% of annual water use, largely due to the dominance of water-intensive bluegrass, which requires 24–75% more water than native grasses.
- A green roof's vegetation and substrate absorb water, which is used for evaporative cooling. 35 gallons of water evaporated provides cooling relevant to melting 2,000 pounds of ice.
- Dispersed green features distributed across both private and public land create a network of ecological resilience and collective community benefits, from improving the strain on stormwater systems to improving public health.

Total Funding Available

- In 2026, a total of $100,000 is available for awards.
- Per project funding will range from $20,000 to $50,000.

Eligibility

Eligible Applicants

- Funding is available to municipalities, businesses, non-profit organizations, schools, and Homeowner Associations (HOAs).
- Applicants must be formally registered entities (e.g., business, non-profit, HOA, educational institution, or government).
- For projects at multifamily units or manufactured home parks, an eligible organization must apply on behalf of the property with the property owner's permission.
- Business applicants must have been in operation for at least one year.
- Projects located on private single-family residential properties are not eligible.
- Public-private and intergovernmental partnerships are encouraged.

Lead Applicants and Partner Roles

If multiple organizations are collaborating on a project, one must serve as the Lead Applicant.

- The Lead Applicant must be an eligible organization, and will be responsible for submitting the application, serving as the main point of contact, and—if awarded—entering into the funding agreement with Boulder County.
- The project does not need to be located at the Lead Applicant's property or facility, but the Lead Applicant must have the necessary permissions to carry out the work.
- The Lead Applicant will be legally and financially responsible for all grant requirements, including reporting and invoicing.
- Partner organizations may assist with project design, outreach, or implementation but will not have a direct contract with Boulder County.
- Partners may receive funds only through a subcontract or agreement with the Lead Applicant.
- All partners should be clearly identified in the application, with defined roles and responsibilities.

Geographic Requirements

- All projects must be implemented within the boundaries of Boulder County.
- Applicants must ensure projects must follow all federal, state/local land use regulations and permit requirements. The applicant is responsible for researching and complying with all such rules, regulations, and permits.

Eligible Use of Funds

Costs directly associated with the design, planning, and implementation of a grey to green project, including but not limited to:

- Site preparation
- Purchase and installation of materials
- Design and engineering services
- Contractor and labor specific to project installation
- Equipment rentals and tools necessary for project implementation
- Permitting fees required for project execution
- Irrigation
- Community engagement (up to 10% of budget)

Ineligible Use of Funds

- Repayment of existing debt, or pre-existing tax liens or obligations
- Payment of organizational overhead exceeding 15% of proposed project budget
- Legal fees
- Loan or bank fees
- Subsidization of existing contracts
- Funds for start-up business
- Labor for existing programs
- Travel
- Maintenance

Application Details

Applicants must submit materials through the Grey to Green Fund online application. Applicants will be asked questions on the following topics:

- Project title
- Lead applicant information
- Funding amount requested
- Project partners and their roles
- Total funding amount request
- Selected project category (e.g., green roof, raingarden/bioswale, turf conversion, micro-forest, urban agriculture, impervious to pervious conversion).
- 1-2 sentence project description
- Percent of impervious surface in the census block group where the proposed project is located.
- If the proposed project is located in a disproportionately impacted census block (using the Colorado EnviroScreen Map).
- How the project will benefit disproportionately impacted communities as defined by CDPHE (see links below).
- Full project narrative including how the outcomes will improve ecological performance and climate resilience.
- If ecological performance will be measured.
- Who will lead design and construction and their qualifications (including any consultants/contractors).
- Estimated size of the grey to green conversion (sq ft).
- Planned plant/tree species.
- Optional picture, hand-drawing, or blueprint of proposed site design.
- Anticipated project timeline.
- Post-implementation maintenance plan, including watering, weeding/pruning, responsible parties, frequency, and budget for maintenance.
- Line-item budget covering site preparation, materials, design/engineering, labor, equipment/tools, permitting, maintenance, and any matching funds

Definitions

- **Impervious surfaces**: Any material that prevents the infiltration of water into the ground.
- **Pervious surfaces**: Any surface material that allows water to infiltrate into the ground.
- **Green features**: Actions and strategies (individual or collective) that leverage natural or semi-natural processes and features to provide environmental, social, and economic benefits. It focuses on managing water, improving air quality, reducing urban heat, enhancing biodiversity, and building climate resilience in urban and rural areas. Examples of green features include:
    - Bioswales
    - Raingardens
    - Micro-forests
    - Green roofs
    - Parks and greenways
    - Urban gardens
    - Native plants
    - Colorado native grasses
    - Other pervious surfaces
- **Unproductive green features**: Green spaces that provide little to no ecosystem benefits, such as high maintenance turfgrass or abandoned lots. These areas can contribute to urban heat, poor water management, and biodiversity loss, making them as harmful as grey features.
- **Grey features**: Traditional, human-engineered systems designed to provide services such as transportation, water management, and energy supply. These systems are typically constructed using materials like concrete, steel, and asphalt. Examples of grey features include:
    - Standard concrete or asphalt for surfaces such as roofs, sidewalks, parking lots, and road medians.
    - Rock or compacted gravel without drainage design
    - Nonfunctional or artificial turf
    - Other impervious surfaces
- **Functional turf**: Turfgrass that serves a specific, practical purpose, such as recreational use or community activities. This includes areas like a sports field, playgrounds, and other spaces regularly used for civic, community, or recreational purposes.
- **Non-functional turf**: Turfgrass that does not serve a practical or active purpose and is primarily ornamental. This includes areas such as turf in street medians, parking lots, narrow sidewalk strips, and lawns that are not regularly used for civic, community, or recreational activities. Non-functional turf is most often composed of non-native, high-water-use species such as Kentucky bluegrass, which require significant irrigation, mowing, and fertilization to maintain.

Eligible Project Categories

The Grey to Green Fund supports projects that convert impervious surfaces (e.g. concrete, asphalt, turfgrass) into green features, enhancing climate resilience, stormwater management, and biodiversity for the surrounding community. The following are eligible project categories and types. However, additional project ideas that align with the program's goals may also be considered.

1. **Green Roofs**: Transforming traditional roofs into vegetated spaces.
2. **Raingardens and Bioswales**: Installing features that capture and filter stormwater.
3. **Converting Non-Functional or Artificial Turf to Native Landscapes**: Replacing non-functional turfgrass with native grasses or plants.
4. **Miyawaki or Micro-forests**: Establishing dense, native plantings in urban areas.
5. **Urban Agriculture**: Creating community gardens, urban farms or orchards.
6. **Impervious to Pervious Surface**: Transforming concrete-dominated surfaces into permeable, vegetated areas.

Detailed Project Types and Examples

Green Roofs

Description

Green roofs (also known as living roofs) integrate vegetation into the tops of buildings and typically consist of a waterproof barrier, drainage, filtration components, a growing medium or soil, and plants selected to reflect the local ecology.

Primary Benefits

- Urban heat mitigation and stormwater management.
- Community benefit: Green roofs on private buildings can lower surface air temperature for surrounding areas, reducing urban heat island effect at the neighborhood level.

Geographic Requirements

Green roof projects will be prioritized in areas where the urban heat island is most significant.

Example Installation Sites and Projects

- Multifamily buildings, commercial buildings, parking garages, bus shelters.
- Retrofitting a parking garage with a green roof to cool surrounding areas and reduce runoff.
- Implementing a green roof on a new construction multi-family building.

Resources and Case Studies

- Design Guidelines and Maintenance Manual for Green Roofs in the Semi-Arid and Arid West
- Boulder County BuildSmart
- Denver Green Roof Initiative
- Denver's New Green Roof Law has Some Surprising Implications for Water

Raingarden and Bioswales

Description

- While both raingardens and bioswales are landscaping features used to slow, collect, infiltrate, and filter stormwater, they differ in their design and applicability.
- Raingardens are small, shallow, sunken areas with plants that collect stormwater runoff and filter it through a mixture of soil, sand, and gravel. Raingardens collect and soak up rainwater, serving as an alternative to a storm drain.
- Bioswales are vegetated, mulched, or xeriscaped linear channels that provide treatment and retention as they move stormwater from one place to another. Bioswales convey stormwater runoff (i.e. carrying stormwater from a road or parking lot to a stream or pond).

Primary Benefits

- Enhanced water quality, groundwater recharge, flood mitigation, and habitat creation.
- Community benefit: Adding raingardens and bioswales to single properties can improve water quality and reduce downstream flood risks for surrounding areas.

Example Sites and Projects

- Road medians, parking lots, and school campuses.
- Creating a raingarden in a shared outdoor area of a multifamily unit or HOA property that experiences pooling water.
- Installing a bioswale along a roadway.

Resources and Case Studies

- Colorado State University Stormwater Center
- American Society of Civil Engineers
- San Francisco Estuary Institute

Converting Nonfunctional Turf to Native Landscapes

Description

Converting nonfunctional and traditional turfgrass—such as Kentucky bluegrass—with drought-tolerant plants, shrubs, or native Colorado grasses.

Primary Benefits

- Water conservation and increased biodiversity.
- Community benefit: Increased green spaces and native vegetation can enhance air quality and pollinator habitats, helping ecological health at a community scale.

Example Sites and Projects

- HOA common areas, manufactured home park shared grounds, school campuses.
- Removing artificial turf on a multifamily property and installing a native, ecologically functional landscape.
- Replacing unused turf on a school campus with a native habitat garden.

Resources and Case Studies

- Wild Ones Native Plants Toolkit
- Colorado Native Grass Guide
- Gardening with Native Plants
- Butterfly Pavillion Pollinator Planting Guide
- Fort Collins Garden Tour

Miyawaki or Micro-forests

Description

Dense, native plantings that mimic natural forests, enhancing urban biodiversity.

Primary Benefits

- Urban heat mitigation/cooling, community utilization, and biodiversity.
- Community benefit: Dense plantings create cooler microclimates that can benefit any resident in the immediate area, in addition to contributing to collective city-wide urban heat mitigation.

Example Sites and Projects

- Parking lots, abandoned lots, schoolyards, city parks, and corporate campuses.
- Establishing a micro-forest in a public or institutional open space to provide shade and habitat.
- Creating a Miyawaki forest on a former paved area.

Resources and Case Studies

- From Parking Lot and Lawn to Miyawaki Forests: Transforming Worcester, MA
- Berkeley schools' 'pocket forests' are taking root

Urban Agriculture

Description

Developing spaces for community gardening, farming, or orchards in urban settings.

Primary Benefits

- Local food production, community building, and green space creation.
- Community benefit: Urban agriculture can enhance food security and community resilience, while also providing environmental benefits through increased biodiversity.

Example Sites and Projects

- Vacant lots, rooftops, and school grounds.
- Converting an unused lot into a community vegetable garden to increase food access and community resilience.
- Developing a shared orchard near an underserved neighborhood.

Resources and Case Studies

- FruiTrees New York
- Lufa Farms

Impervious to Pervious Conversions

Description

Replacing concrete-dominated or other hard, non-absorptive surfaces with permeable, vegetated, or ecologically beneficial areas alternatives. This category is broad and can include elements not fully captured elsewhere, such as converting a concrete road median into a native pollinator garden.

Primary Benefits

- Improved stormwater management, increased air quality, urban cooling, biodiversity, and increased ecological and social value of previously underutilized spaces.
- Community benefit: Creating pervious surfaces on properties allows for greater infiltration of stormwater and can alleviate stress on water drainage systems downhill from implementation sites.

Example Sites and Projects

- Parking lots, sidewalks, courtyards, road medians, other paved areas.
- Transforming a paved courtyard into a vegetated gathering space to cool the area and enhance stormwater performance.
- Replacing a section of concrete or asphalt with permeable pavement.

Resources and Case Studies

- Denver Green Continuum Street Guidelines

Maintenance and Technical Guidelines

Maintenance Guidelines

Applicants will be required to provide a maintenance plan. This plan should include details such as 1) who is responsible for maintenance; 2) type of maintenance tasks that will be completed; 3) frequency or calendar of maintenance tasks, and 4) budget for maintenance.

Technical Guidelines

- Drought-resistant and fire-resistant tree and plant species should be prioritized. Please see the City of Boulder's Plant List for recommendations.
- If you plan to apply for a Green Roof project, please read the Green Roof Technical Document, developed for the Grey to Green Fund by the Superbloom Landscape Architecture firm.

Important Geographic and Environmental Maps

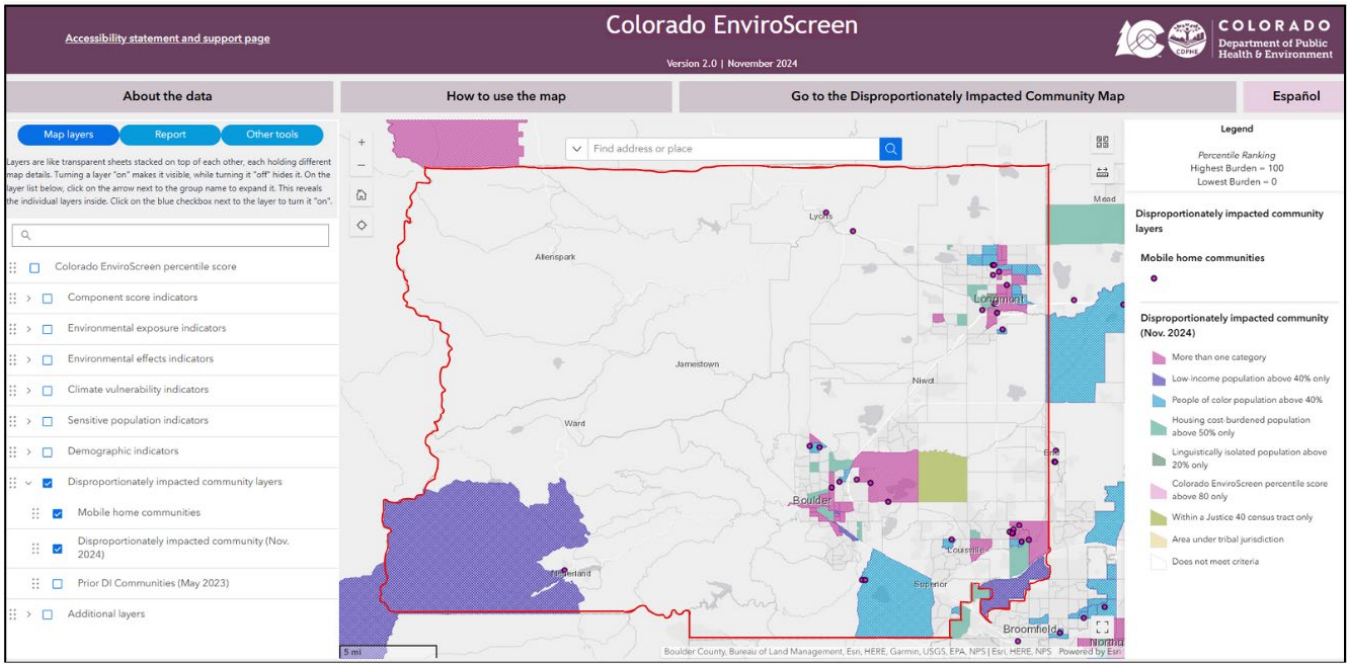
1: Colorado EnviroScreen Map

OSCAR utilizes the State of Colorado's definition of disproportionately impacted (DI) communities and Colorado EnviroScreen, an environmental justice mapping tool hosted by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) to identify and direct resources to DI neighborhoods in Boulder County. According to the CDPHE definition, DI communities include low-income communities, communities of color, housing cost-burdened communities, linguistically isolated communities, historically marginalized communities, tribal lands, mobile home communities, and communities with environmental and socioeconomic impacts. In 2023, Governor Polis officially signed this definition of the disproportionately impacted communities into law.

This application includes a question asking whether the proposed project would be implemented in an EnviroScreen Census Block. Please utilize the Colorado EnviroScreen Map to determine if your proposed project is located in a disproportionately impacted area within Boulder County. Projects located within Colorado EnviroScreen DI census blocks will receive higher scores. To access and utilize the Colorado EnviroScreen map, please follow these instructions:

1. Go to the Colorado EnviroScreen Map 2.0 website.
2. On the left side of the screen, locate the list of map layers.
3. Uncheck all layers except "Disproportionately Impacted Community Layers."
4. Click the dropdown arrow next to "Disproportionately Impacted Community" and ensure that **only** the following two options are selected:
    - Mobile Home Communities
    - Disproportionately Impacted Community (Nov. 2024)
5. Once these filters are placed, any area that appears in a highlighted color or has a pink dot is considered a DI location.
6. Scroll and zoom in over Boulder County to determine whether your project location falls within a DI census block.

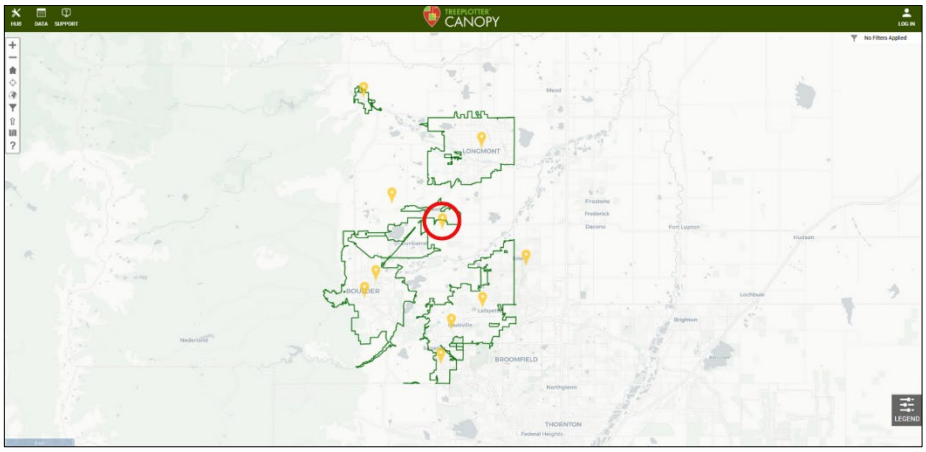
7. Optional Address Lookup: If you would like to jump directly to your site, use the address search bar at the top of the map. Type in your project address and press Enter. The map will zoom to that location so you can easily verify whether it falls within a DI census block.



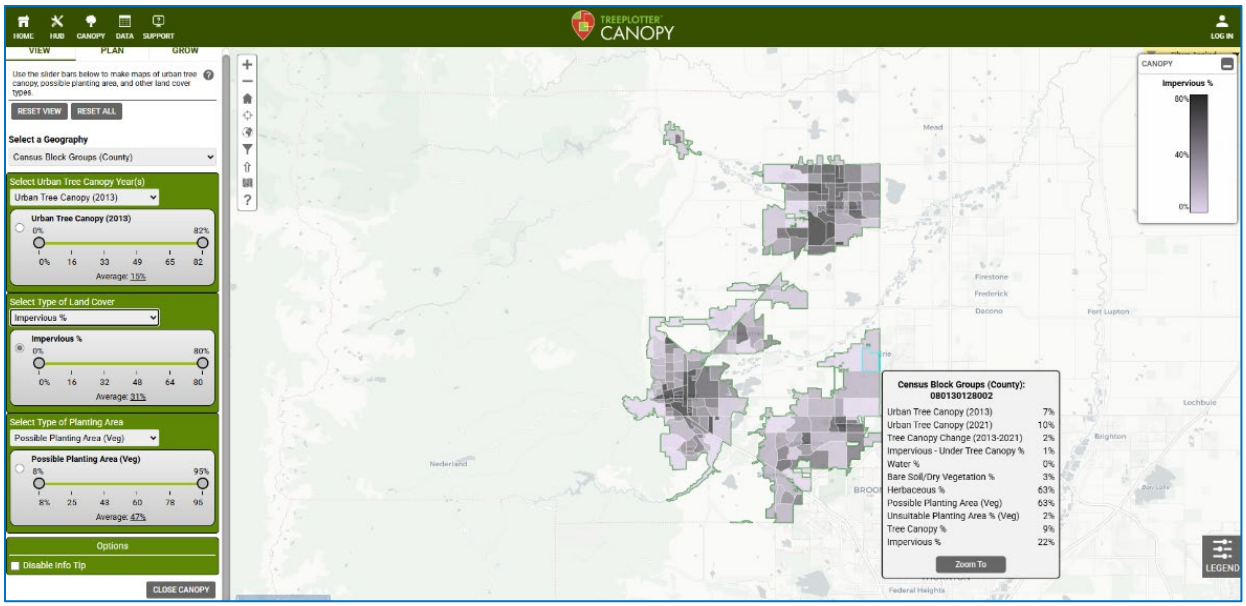
2: Impervious Surfaces Map

This application asks applicants to report the percentage of impervious surface in the Census Block Group where the proposed project would be located. Please use the PlanIT Geo CANOPY Software and follow the instructions below to identify this percentage. Please note: This map only provides data for the urbanized areas of Boulder County. If your proposed project is located inside Boulder County but outside of the map boundary, please skip this question and write “N/A” in the response field.

1. Go to the PlanIT Geo CANOPY Software website.
2. Click the yellow location icon closest to Niwot and click the “Canopy” button. The entity should be Boulder County.



3. Select the ‘Launch View Tool’ button.
4. In the drop-down option under ‘Select a Geography,’ choose the ‘Census Block Groups (County)’ option.
5. In the drop-down option under ‘Select Type of Land Cover,’ choose the ‘Impervious - %’ option.
6. Hover your mouse over the census block group in which your proposed project is located. You will see a list of various data points, including the 'Impervious %.’ Please make sure you do not confuse this with the ‘Impervious - Under Tree Canopy %’ data point.
7. To locate your specific project site, you may also click the globe icon at the top left of the map and type in the project address. After the map goes to that location, zoom out until the Census Block Group boundary is visible, making sure all filters are still set as described above.



This image shows the result of following all the steps listed above to get the percent of impervious surface of a particular census block. You can see that if you hover over a certain census block (like the one outlined in blue on the map) with your mouse, a list of data points appears.

Scoring Criteria and Review Committee

Scoring Criteria

Applicants will be scored on the following categories:

- Number of Project Partnerships
- Percent of Impervious Surface
- If Project is Located in a Colorado EnviroScreen Census Block
- Benefit to Disproportionately Impacted Communities as defined by CDPHE
- Project Narrative and Ecological Performance
- Size of Grey to Green Conversion
- Project Design Lead Experience and Plant List
- Timeline and Maintenance Plan
- Budget

Scoring Committee Members

Scoring Committee members will be comprised of three internal and three external experts in urban landscape NBS. In 2025, this includes the following seats:

- Natural Climate Solutions Specialist, OSCAR, Boulder County
- Climate Equity Specialist, OSCAR, Boulder County
- Senior Sustainability Strategist and Regenerative Agriculture Expert, OSCAR, Boulder County
- Stormwater Specialist, Boulder County
- Landscape Architect, City of Boulder
- Horticulturist and Green Roof Expert, Colorado State University

Water Rights and Property Ownership

Water rights are critical considerations for projects involving the use of water resources, especially in regions like Boulder County where water availability is a finite and regulated resource. Water rights are legally recognized property rights that grant the use of a specific amount of water from a designated source, with a priority date confirmed by water court. These rights can be conditional or absolute.

Applicants should be aware that any project involving water use must comply with local water rights laws. It is essential to verify water rights to ensure the project does not conflict with existing allocations. Consulting with local agencies or water authorities is recommended to ensure compliance and feasibility.

Additionally, applicants must confirm they have the necessary property rights or permission to undertake projects on the land where the work will occur. Public-private partnerships are encouraged, and applicants are advised to explore opportunities for collaboration where applicable.

General Conditions

All materials submitted will become the property of Boulder County and will not be returned. Funds awarded are public funds and any information submitted or generated is subject to public disclosure requirements.

The county reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to waive minor irregularities in submittal requirements, to request modifications of the application, to accept or reject any or all applications received, to grant full or partial funding of any request, and/or to cancel all or part of this solicitation at any time prior to awarding funds. Funds are awarded on a competitive basis, and no requests will be considered outside the standardized application and review process. There is *no appeals process* for applications not accepted for funding.

Grant Agreement, Disbursement Schedule, and Compliance

All applicants will be notified of the results of the review process. For successful applicants, funds will be available for expenditure only after a funding agreement between Boulder County and the applicant is signed and executed.

50% of the grant award will be disbursed upfront in May 2026. The remaining 50% will be distributed six months later in November 2026, contingent upon the following:

- A 500-word progress summary describing work completed to date.
- A 30-minute check-in meeting with Grey to Green Program Manager to verify progress and discuss any challenges.
- A line-item expense report detailing all expenditures made to date.
- Submission of an invoice requesting the remaining 50% disbursement.

The county has a right to request invoices and supporting documentation if the expense report does not align with the funding agreement scope of work. If no meaningful progress has been made or the expense report does not align, the remaining 50% will not be disbursed, and the county may withdraw previously disbursed funds.

Boulder County will not be liable for any costs incurred prior to the legal execution of the funding agreement, unless mutually agreed upon in writing. Unused funds are not available for other uses. Funds must be expended during the grant period of 16 months. Boulder County will not be liable for any project.

Boulder County reserves the right to revoke any funding award for which a funding agreement is not carried out, due to delays on the part of the applicant, within two (2) months of the award. Funded programs/projects must be initiated within three (3) months of execution of the agreement, or funds may be withdrawn, unless specific written approval is granted for delays due to extenuating circumstances.

Funds will be reimbursed based on proper documentation of receipts and invoices billed specifically to the individual or organization that is listed within the signed funding agreement. Typically, reimbursement checks take 4-6 weeks to arrive to the grantee. Funds must be used in accordance with the final budget upon which the application was based. All publicity or promotional materials concerning the project must recognize boulder county funding including news releases, feature stories, public service announcements, brochures and product literature produced during the term of this Agreement.

Monitoring and Reporting

Boulder County reserves the right to monitor funded projects and to receive timely and pertinent information on status and progress. A schedule for report submittals or other necessary documentation will be established in consultation with Boulder County staff. Failure to submit reports shall invalidate the applicant for further funding requests for three years and may result in withdrawal of current funds.

All grantees must attend a mandatory Welcome Webinar in May 2026 and will meet with the Grey to Green Project Manager 1-2 times per year for check-ins to discuss progress, share photos, and resolve any challenges. Following the 16-month award period, the Project Manager will conduct site walkthroughs to observe implementation, and a final written report will be required. Walk-throughs will occur after project completion.

Questions?

If you have any questions regarding the Grey to Green Fund, please first look at the FAQ document available on the program webpage and watch Boulder County's informational webinar.

If you still have questions after reading through the Q and A document and attending or watching the webinar, please reach out to Deandra Croissant at dcroissant@bouldercounty.gov. Please be aware there may be a high volume of requests and response may be slow. Thank you for your patience!