

F. M. KIRBY FOUNDATION SOLICITATION EVALUATION FORM

DATE: April 8, 2024
Program Area: Environment/Animals
Grant Type: Board Grant

REQUEST DATE: March 1, 2024

APPLICANT:
Adirondack Council, Inc.
103 Hand Avenue, Suite 3
Elizabethtown, NY 12932-0640

CONTACT: Mr. Rocci Aguirre, Executive Director

AMOUNT REQUESTED: \$100,000
BUDGETED AMOUNT: \$90,000

NATURE OF REQUEST: General Operating Support

GRANT HISTORY

SUPPORT: 1979-2023

OF APPROVED GRANTS: 38

TOTAL DOLLARS: \$1,278,500

LAST GRANT DATE: 05/01/2023

LAST GRANT AMOUNT: \$90,000

FYE DATE: 06/30

AFS DATE: 10/14/2023

Year Approved	Approved Amount	Approval Date	Grant Purpose
2023	\$90,000	05/01/2023	General Operating Support
2022	\$80,000	05/02/2022	Toward continued support to defend clean air rules that protect the Adirondacks from acid rain pollution-\$20,000
2021	\$80,000	05/03/2021	Toward continued support to defend clean air rules that protect the Adirondacks from acid rain pollution-\$20,000
2020	\$65,000	04/30/2020	Toward continued support to defend clean air rules that protect the Adirondacks from acid rain pollution-\$15,000
2019	\$65,000	04/30/2019	Toward actions to advance the goals identified at the 2018 Acid Rain Symposium-\$15,000

LAST SITE VISIT DATE: December 2020

ENDORSEE: N/A

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FINANCIAL ANALYSIS COMMENTS: The 2024 projected budget anticipates a 9% (\$235.5K) decrease in revenue before transfers from the Forever Wild Fund (\$409K) and a 6% (\$173K) decrease in expenses over the prior year's actuals. The 2023 FMKF grant of \$90,000 comprised 32% of Foundation/Corporation revenue and 3% of total revenue. Individual donors comprise the greatest source of revenue for AC, at 74% of total revenue in FY23 (an impressive \$1.96M).

The audited financial statements cover the period from July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023 (fiscal year 2023). The auditors issued an unqualified opinion. The audit reveals a 37% (\$3M) increase in revenue (due to gains on investments) and a 2.5% (\$74K) increase in expenses over the previous fiscal year. Program services comprise 82.4% and personnel costs comprise 66% of the operating budget. Adirondack Council maintains high liquidity, with a CR of 29.42. Total investments stood at \$7.72M at the time of the audit. The Council purchased no carbon credits in 2022 or 2023 but retired 27 credits in FY23 in exchange for \$710 and donated 200 credits to local radio stations. There were no red flags as a result of my review. The Adirondack Council's audit is complete in October, so I am planning on requesting that they submit late December/January for the 2025 grant.

ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION: For almost 50 years, the Adirondack Council has been the largest environmental advocacy group working solely to protect the ecological integrity and wild character of the six-million-acre Adirondack Park and broader North Country region. Based in Elizabethtown, NY (30 miles east of Lake Placid), they champion an Adirondack Park that seamlessly integrates private and public lands, is renowned for its clean water and air and globally significant wilderness areas, is surrounded by working farms and forests, and supports safe, accessible, and vibrant local communities. To protect the Adirondacks, the Council uses the best science to guide regional decision-making and a deep knowledge of the political landscape in Albany and the North Country to educate, inform, and motivate the public and those who make public policy.

LIZ CROWLEY COMMENTS: As the largest citizen environmental group in New York State, the Adirondack Council acts as one of the main players in the realm of environmental policy advocacy for the Adirondack Park, both on the regional and federal levels. On a state level, they advocate for laws that protect the park and for the distribution of state dollars to the park and its communities. On the federal level, using their 50-plus years of uninterrupted data and research on topics such as environmental pollutants, AC does the work of representing the Adirondacks as part of a larger national environmental agenda. They also continue to monitor the federal budget and actively advocate for increases that will lead to improvements in air quality monitoring pollution limitations in the Adirondacks. I find that the best summary of AC's work and impact is found in this quote from the application:

“The work of the Council is multifaceted and nuanced, often taking place behind the scenes and over many years. Our impact is measured in how well the Park is sustainably managed, preservation of its wild character, and the ability of our regional communities to serve as vital and vibrant hubs for locals and visitors alike.”

The big news for AC (and, more broadly, the environmental advocacy efforts in New York State) is that, in November 2022, the NY State Legislature passed the [Clean Water, Clear Air, and Green](#)

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[Jobs Environmental Bond Act](#) which allocates \$4.2B towards environmental infrastructure and programming throughout the state. This funding has the potential to be pivotal in the fight to protect the Adirondack Park from the ongoing effects of acid rain, overuse, and climate change. The Council has tirelessly, and successfully, advocated to ensure that funds from the Bond Act are secured specifically for the Adirondack region. The funds that AC has successfully secured have three main focuses: 1) collecting baseline data for freshwater lakes in the Park to measure and track the effects of climate change on freshwater biodiversity; 2) tackling overuse of the park by starting to follow the data-collection and infrastructure recommendations put forth by the Council's Overuse Report of 2021 to create visitor management plans that mirror the standard put forth by the National Park Service; and 3) creating a pathway for CUNY students to access conservation jobs and careers via the Timbuctoo Summer Climate Jobs and Careers Institute, which will hold its first three sessions this summer.

I am particularly excited about the focus on freshwater ecosystem data collection and monitoring via the Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems ([SCALE](#)) project. The need for data collection for freshwater lakes comes on the heels of the publication of a research report by [Cornell University](#) (who will be one of the academic partners in the testing effort) that found that “only about 5% of Adirondack lakes may continue to maintain water that is cold and oxygenated enough to support cold-water species” of fish, including trout. Along with maintaining a general understanding of how acid rain and climate change are affecting the freshwater ecosystems of the Adirondacks, there is an immediate need to identify which freshwater sources will continue to have the ability to host coldwater species and to protect them from the effects of pollution and climate change to protect further loss of biodiversity. One of the lakes that has already been identified as a high-priority cold water source, Follensby Pond, was acquired by the Nature Conservancy of the Adirondacks with support from an FMKF grant. I want to clarify that SCALE is separate from the Adirondack Lake Assessment Program (ALAP, a program of Protect the Adirondacks that FMKF funds directly). While both aim to assess Adirondack waterbodies, SCALE builds on the research of the Adirondack Lake Survey from the 1980s, which was specifically established to monitor the impact of acid rain on Adirondack lakes. On the other hand, ALAP focuses on the effects of human development and activities such as road salt usage on lake water quality. Still, it is interesting to see how all of the subject areas that AC has prioritized coincide with the work of our other partners in this area as they all fight the increasingly intense battle against climate change, pollution, and overdevelopment.

Additional topics for which AC has successfully secured funding allocations from the Bond Act include invasive species management, land stewardship, farmland and open space protection, and septic system modification and replacement. AC also continues to monitor and advocate for adherence to state and local regulations that require monitoring, such as the 2021 Aquatic Invasive Species Spread Prevention Regulation and the creation of an Adirondack Road Salt Task Force. Beyond just advocating for the allocations, AC will ensure that the budgeted funds are actually spent as allocated.

Last year we saw the retirement of longtime Executive Director, William Janeway, after ten years at AC's helm. He has been succeeded by his deputy, Raul “Rocci” Aguirre who had been serving as the Interim ED since Janeway's official retirement. Aguirre has been a presence in the New York conservation world for 28 years and with Adirondack Council for 9 years. Along with his

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experience in multiple positions within AC, he brings the experience and knowledge of NY state environmental policy and land management that is required to run a large public-facing environmental policy organization. In addition to this transition, AC has also welcomed a new Director of Development (Janine Scherline, my new primary contact) and a new Director of Strategic Initiatives and Engagement in the past year. The latter position is newly created and aims to “refine the Council’s upcoming initiatives and program efforts to be more strategic, innovative, and relevant to the issues currently at play in the Adirondacks.” I will be visiting Adirondack Council for an in-person site visit in August and I look forward to meeting Rocci and Janine face-to-face and learning more about this new position and, more generally, about how the organization is faring in the wake of this leadership transition.

I continue to be very impressed by the work of the Adirondack Council and feel that it is appropriate to allocate our largest grant in this region to their expansive advocacy efforts, considering the holistic nature of their advocacy. While I would not be opposed to a grant of \$100,000 in the future, I recommend the budgeted \$90,000 in general operating support for 2024.

RECOMMENDATION: I recommend \$90,000 for General Operating Support.

JUSTIN J. KICZEK COMMENTS: It has been marvelous to watch Adirondack Council invest time and effort to helping “downstate” legislators see the significance that the Park has for their constituents in places like the Bronx, Queens, and Yonkers. I saw the beginnings of this in September 2022, when the Council was first introducing this Caucus to the Park, and today, we see that the Council nominated the The Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian State Legislative Caucus as the Adirondack Council’s “Conservationist of the Year,” in honor of their leadership in helping secure state funding for the park. Surely, some of this is just smart political lever pulling, but for both the current and future state of the park, Adirondack Council has been careful to try to shed the notion of it being a place where folks of color are not seen or represented, and in doing so, they have created “buy-in” from legislators who may be in Albany for a long time and who may not have seen the Park’s concerns as their concerns.

Similarly, I read with interest the partnership with CUNY Medgar Evers (in Brooklyn) and the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry to bring high school students to the Timbuctoo Institute in the summer to study and learn about green jobs. Another great effort to connect young people who may not have seen themselves in Adirondack Park.

I wish Rocci and his new team well. I remain convinced that, pound for pound, no other organization has the same political experience, the connections in Albany and D.C., and the knowledge of the Park. Adirondack Council can make things happen in the Park unlike any other group I have seen, largely due to the ability to connect people to one another and to the land and habitat itself.

RECOMMENDATION: I concur with the recommendation above. I recommend \$90,000 in General Operating Support.

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DISPOSITION:

- Declination
- Hold for review on/about:
- Approval for: **\$90,000**
- Recommended Grant Payment(s):
2024:
2025:
2026:
- Hold for Board Review: **April 26, 2024**
- Payee Other Than Addressee:
- Insert Information: **General Operating Support**
- Other:

Initials: JK

Date: 04/12/2024

Check # _____

Date: _____