The deadline for this summer’s 2018 National Forest Trails Stewardship Funding is just two weeks away, coming up April 15th. Has your group considered submitting a project application? Here are 10 steps for developing a successful trails proposal.

ONE. Coordination with the Forest Service is essential. The local Ranger District should approve the work your organization plans on the National Forest and support it by providing a Letter of Support. It’s never too early to discuss trail needs with your local District contacts and develop a long-range plan of trail activities to improve trail maintenance and reduce the trail maintenance backlog on your local National Forest System trails.

TWO. It should be self-evident, but the Trail Stewardship Funding proposal must be for work that is to be completed on established trail segments of the National Forest Trail system managed by the USDA Forest Service. All types of terra trails, that is, the land-based trail system, is the focus of this funding. System trails can be either motorized or non-motorized, inside or outside of wilderness.

THREE. The Trail Stewardship Funding is being provided to help implement the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act. Information about the Act is available on the NWSA website at <http://www.wildernessalliance.org/current_events>. Become familiar with this Act and its purposes. Plan your proposal to help meet the Act objectives of improving trail maintenance on the National Forests and increasing the number of volunteers involved in trail maintenance.

FOUR. Look for ways to involve lots of volunteers and other partners in your trail stewardship work. Getting more people engaged in trail activities helps build support for the National Forest trail system as well as enlarges the trail stewardship capacity for your organization.

FIVE. Be sure to claim credit for your cash and in-kind contributions, but don’t overreach or exaggerate your match. Money or in-kind contributions to be used on the project should be exclusively for work during the project period, and not part of a broader organization funding plan. Any cash contributions should be focused on the project proposal and not general organization needs.

SIX. Be timely. To count for 2018, trail projects must be completed by December 31, 2018. Choose trail activities that can be completed within the available timeframe.

SEVEN. Consider partnering with other groups in your area. National Forest System trails are used by a large number of user types. Increase the number and type of miles maintained and the people involved by gathering up like minded groups in your area for a joint maintenance proposal. Working together with others in your local area will always bring dividends.

EIGHT. Be competitive. Offer a good value between the work accomplished and the cost. This funding is highly sought after and generally goes to groups offering the best mix of trail miles maintained or backlog reduced, partner and volunteer involvement, for the lowest cost.

NINE. NWSA understands it takes funding to prepare and manage these funding opportunities. That’s why we’ve arranged for up to 10% to be included in your proposal for indirect expenses. Staying within this limit will ensure your proposal is considered.

TEN. The deadline for applications is end of the day, April 15th. Be sure to submit your application materials, including the application, the budget form, and your letter of support and IRS documentation to TrailGrants@wildernessalliance.org by the deadline. Please submit the forms in their WORD and EXCEL formats for ease in transferring information.

There you have it. Ten steps for submitting a successful proposal. Hope you are working on one now. Looking forward to seeing it soon.