



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

ACTION PLAN & BUDGET COMMITTEE

R-17-133
December 5, 2017

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Update to Board Policy 3.10 – District Grantmaking Program

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Approve updates to Board Policy on the District's Grantmaking Program.

SUMMARY

Since 2007 the District has supported academic research on District lands through its Resource Management Grant Program. The purpose of this program has been to award small grants to local researchers to support work that furthers the District's mission, enhances public education, and advances scientific understanding of natural processes while strengthening local partnerships with researchers. In 2016, the Board discussed future investment in this program. The conversation led to a broader discussion as to whether the District should increase its grantmaking investment, as well as consider broadening the categories of available funding.

Going forward, the District can increase its impact by enhancing the investment made in this program, both by increasing the staff and financial investment, as well as by updating the grantmaking focus areas. District staff recommends expanding the focus to ensure a broad range of projects are considered, reflecting the diversity of the work in which the District engages. Future grantmaking will be guided by an emphasis on investments that incorporate a regional approach to resource management and provide avenues for partnership, both with the District as well as other stakeholders. Future eligible project categories will include applied science research and proof-of-concept; networks and partnerships; policy/advocacy within networks; and environmental education and interpretation.

DISCUSSION

Program purpose and history

Since 2007 the District has supported applied academic research on District preserves through the Resource Management Grant Program. The purpose of this program has been to provide small grants to local researchers to support work that furthers the District's mission, enhances public education, and advances scientific understanding of natural processes while strengthening local partnerships with researchers conducting work relevant to the District.

This grantmaking serves a variety of critical functions, with projects selected in part based on the extent to which they support the District's mission. More broadly, this grantmaking also serves to:

- Build District partnerships within the conservation community by supporting their work;
- Influence the conservation field by steering grantees towards areas of focus that the District has prioritized;
- Increase the conservation field's capacity to address regional gaps in conservation, recreation, and restoration; and
- Provide an avenue of communication in order to learn from and provide ongoing input on partner organization's work.

To date, 15 grants have been awarded through two Request for Proposal (RFP) rounds to researchers who are connected with established academic institutions, for a total District investment of approximately \$183,000 (approximately \$101,000 between 2007-2014 and approximately \$77,000 between 2014-2018). Projects have focused on research relating to natural resource management, operational and maintenance actions, public outreach, or public use decisions that provide educational benefit. To solicit proposals, an RFP has been twice been issued when funding is available. A review committee consisting of District staff with relevant expertise evaluated the proposals and selected grantees. Award limits have been up to \$5,000 per year, with the possibility of renewing the grant for up to five years, for a total of \$25,000. Grant monitoring included yearly reports and periodic check-ins with grantees to ensure objectives were being met.

The District's grantmaking program has successfully funded research that has advanced resource management on District land. For example, San Jose State University (SJSU) received a grant to collect and manage wildland fuels and meteorology data for use in fire weather research. With data collected from Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve, SJSU has been providing real-time fuels data to the public and land managers through the National Fuels Monitoring Database and fireweather.org. The collected data are used to better understand and effectively forecast potentially hazardous fire weather conditions that pertain to coastal mountainous areas in the Bay Area, which can help inform the District's land management and better predict fire risks within its preserves. Additionally, University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) mountain lion research, partially funded through a District grant, identified critical bottlenecks caused by major highways in the region as well as provided information on animal behavior in relation to human disturbance levels. This information is being used in regional planning to develop wildlife corridors and target important habitat for conservation and has informed the District's own approach to enhancing connectivity among its preserves.

Beyond the applied and academic value of this research, the District's funding has contributed to developing and strengthening partnerships with local researchers. For example, funding for a study by San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory (SFBBO) to compare the abundance, richness, and diversity of grassland bird species throughout 10 habitat types both with and without grazing and prescribed burns has strengthened the District's relationship with the organization. Since the project began, the lead researcher has provided outreach assistance with the District's Wingding event, which helps connect the public to research on District preserves. District staff has also attended SFBBO trainings to enhance their understanding of habitat management techniques.

Future Investment

In 2016, the Board discussed the District's future investment in this program. This discussion was prompted by a conversation about the concept of non-dilutive financing, in which investors provide seed money for graduate students to advance innovative ideas for products, services, or

resource management strategies. The conversation led to a broader discussion as to whether the District should increase its grantmaking investment, as well as consider broadening the categories of available funding.

Going forward, the District can grow its impact by increasing the investment made in this program. Past grants have been successful, but the small scale of the program limits what can be achieved. In order to attract both more organizations to apply and increase the impact of the projects, in the next budget cycle District staff will recommend increasing the dollar amount available for grantmaking to up to \$250,000 per year. Individual awards will be for up to \$50,000 and can be equally or unequally apportioned among years, up to three years of the award date. Requests for Proposals will be issued every year or every other year, depending on staff time and budget available for the program.

Future programmatic priorities

The last two RFPs have focused on academic research projects. However, to stay aligned with the District's evolving priorities, the grant categories must be expanded and the name of the program updated, from the Resource Management Grant Program to the Grantmaking Program. Below outlines the suggested funding categories going forward:

Applied Science - Advancing scientific understanding of resource management issues relating to District lands remains a priority funding focus. These grants foster and strengthen partnerships with academic institutions, advance the scientific understanding of natural processes, and further the District's mission to ensure sound resource stewardship. Grantmaking will continue to focus on applied science projects that support the protection and enhancement of natural resources on District lands. This includes academic research as well as proof-of-concept projects that demonstrate the viability of innovative land management techniques. Potential metrics of success include peer-reviewed research published, natural resource management techniques developed, demonstrated potential for scaling developed techniques, etc.

Network and Partnership Support - The District recognizes that partnerships are key to addressing long-term conservation challenges and that building strong networks is one way to ensure a ready and engaged partnership community. Without local, regional, and state partners, the District is limited in its ability to broaden its impact and ensure its priorities align with multi-jurisdictional conservation and recreation plans. Likewise, the conservation community as a whole is more effective when strong partnerships exist. Consequently, proposals that cultivate, sustain, or grow conservation networks would be accepted. Potential metrics of success include the strength of these partnerships, including depth of understanding of partner work, amount of collaboration on joint priorities, number of joint meetings, etc.

Network support through Policy/Advocacy - Advancing legislative priorities is a core component of a successful conservation agenda. However, these policies require partner and network engagement in order to strengthen the conservation community's collective voice and demonstrate broad support. Therefore, network support could also include funding for consulting or lobbying support*. Any proposals for policy/advocacy would be required to be submitted through an existing partner network, have specific policy goals, and align with the District's legislative policy. Potential metrics of success could include meetings with legislative representatives or other outreach conducted, successful adoption passage of

legislation or rulemaking, input provided on upcoming legislation, etc.

*The District is prohibited from providing support to influence ballot initiatives or individual candidates and will require grantees to provide strict budgetary reporting and increased District oversight in order for the District to ensure compliance.

Interpretation and Education - Stewarding the next generation of passionate environmental stewards is more important now than ever before. At the same time, funding opportunities for environmental interpretation and education is sorely lacking. Providing grants to schools and nonprofits to educate children and adults about our natural world is critical to fostering respect and appreciation for our environment while continuing to build enduring support for the District's work. Further, these dollars are highly impactful given how much programming can be provided on a small budget. Therefore, proposals that advance environmental interpretation and education within District boundaries will be considered. Potential metrics for success: educational programming or interpretation opportunities developed, number of adults or students served, new populations served, etc.

Program risks and mitigation

Including policy/advocacy in the eligible grant categories is a significant shift in programmatic direction. Policy/advocacy funding is scarce and can represent an important source of funding for grantees given that many granting organizations prohibit funds from being spent for this purpose. Consequently, these funds are highly impactful and have the additional benefit of facilitating consensus around these issues for the networks through which the funds will be spent. The result of this is the potential to enable networks and partnerships to mature, facilitate dialogue among stakeholders to form plans for collective action, and enable a stronger legislative voice for the conservation community. Additionally, this funding dovetails with the District's relatively new Governmental Affairs program and provides an opportunity to learn from organizations with more mature legislative action programs.

At the same time, policy/advocacy grants represent additional risks to the District. The level of oversight needed for these grants is higher to ensure legal compliance and conduct the due diligence necessary to verify that grantee has the systems in place to accurately track how funds are spent. Additionally, the District must also closely evaluate and track the grantees proposed and ongoing work and predict and address potential complexities relating to partners or its own legislative agenda. District staff will evaluate proposals and the Legislative, Funding, and Public Affairs Committee (LFPAC) will review the General Manager recommendations prior to funding to identify potential risks and develop appropriate mitigation strategies if necessary. Additionally, District staff will put internal controls in place to vet proposals, identify potential risks upfront, and ensure ongoing compliance. Last, the District can engage frequently with grantees by setting up regular check-ins and by selecting only projects that directly align with the District's legislative priorities.

Further, District staff recommends treating the first two years of the Grantmaking Program as a pilot for any policy/advocacy grants. During this time District staff will offer additional opportunities for Board feedback and will evaluate the efficacy of the grants awarded in comparison with the staff time invested to ensure compliance and fit with the District's mission. Depending on the success of these grants, District staff will provide a recommendation as to whether that category of funding will remain in the policy.

Programmatic administration, and oversight

The District's Grantmaking Program will be administered by the Grants Program and an associated Administrative Policy will be developed after the RFP is developed and the process is established.

An important distinction between grantmaking and consulting arrangements is the autonomy by which the organization is allowed to operate. Although both agreements help fulfill the District's mission, work performed by consultants is dictated by the District with a high degree of control and oversight. In contrast, grants are structured such that the grantee retains autonomy in how the objectives of the grant are met. In this way, the grantee is empowered to manage the project independently, with the District overseeing progress. Consequently, RFPs will focus on categories of funding and outlines parameters for eligible projects but will not suggest specific projects or specify a particular methodology.

FISCAL IMPACT

If this Board Policy is approved, District staff will seek a budget of \$250,000 per year, beginning in the FY18-19 budget.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The proposed action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and no environmental review is required. Awarded grants will be required to comply with CEQA, as appropriate.

NEXT STEPS

The updated District's Grantmaking Policy will be presented to the Board in January 2018 and the 2018 RFP will be released in spring/summer 2018. A review committee that includes content experts from Visitor Services, Public Affairs, and Natural Resources, as appropriate, will review and evaluate the proposals. Successful grantees will be notified in fall 2018.

Attachments:

1. Draft Board Policy 3.10 - District Grantmaking Program
2. Resource Management Grant Program Policy

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Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Board Policy Manual

District Grantmaking Program	Policy 3.10 Chapter 3 – Fiscal Management
Effective Date: xx/xx/2017	Revised Date: N/A
Prior Versions: 11/17/2010; 11/14/2007	

Purpose

The purposes of the District's grantmaking program are to a) achieve the District's mission by supporting partner organizations; b) provide support to academic and nonprofit institutions in order to sustain and grow the conservation field; and c) build and strengthen partnerships.

Grantmaking programmatic focus areas

Programmatic priorities

The District's grantmaking program will include a broad focus to ensure a range of projects are considered and reflect the diversity of work in which the District engages. Grantmaking will be guided by an emphasis on investments that reflect a regional focus and provide avenues for partnership, both with the District as well as among other stakeholders.

Using these guiding principles, eligible project categories will include proposals focusing on applied science; networks, partnerships; policy/advocacy through networks and partnerships; and interpretation and education. General grant parameters for each grant proposal category are outlined below, with the Request for Proposals (RFPs) providing additional detail for each category.

Applied Science

Research proposals will include academic or practitioner science projects that support the protection and enhancement of natural resources on District lands. The purpose of this support is to develop and disseminate information that advances scientific understanding of natural processes. Projects with potential to increase the effectiveness of applied stewardship of resources on District lands will be preferentially considered. Types of projects may include applied academic research or proof-of-concept, with focus areas including topics such as integrated pest management, species habitat, restoration, or similar topics relating to natural resource management. Faculty at accredited academic institutions must sponsor research-related projects and field research must take place on District lands. Practitioner science projects other than peer-reviewed research may require faculty sponsorship, and will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Network and Partnership Support

In order to broaden its impact and ensure District priorities are aligned with multi-

jurisdictional conservation and recreation plans, grant proposals that cultivate, sustain, or grow conservation networks will be accepted. Network or partnership support could take the form of facilitation or other consulting support, staff time for network participation, outreach, meeting supplies, etc.

Network and Partnership Support through Policy/Advocacy

Beyond encouraging regional planning and cooperation, networks are also effective at advocating for regional, state, and federal legislative policies that benefit the conservation community. Therefore, support may also include advancing a conservation-related legislative agenda. This could take the form of lobbying or other types of advocacy* through an established conservation network, such as joint letters of support, keeping networks up to date on legislative happenings, or similar types of work. Supported action will be in line with the District's mission and legislative priorities.

*This funding excludes ballot measures and support for individual candidates, which the District, as a government agency, is prohibited from supporting.

Interpretation and Education

Funding for environmental interpretation and education will be directed towards creating and executing nature-based educational and interpretive experiences for children and adults. These will preferentially take place in District preserves and complement existing District environmental interpretation and education efforts. Funding can be used for staff time to create or execute content, transportation, educational and interpretive programming materials or supplies, etc.

Grant management and internal controls

Program administration

The Grants Specialist will oversee the RFP solicitation, grant selection, and manage the grants once selected. Other departments, including Visitor Services, Public Affairs, and Natural Resources, will be brought in for technical expertise to assist in evaluating proposals through a review committee. Once the grants have been selected, the Grants Specialist will oversee the administrative requirements for grant management, with at least one technical content expert from the relevant department assigned to assist in evaluating grant progress.

Proposal selection and due diligence

Eligible grantees will include accredited academic institutions or 501(c)(3) nonprofits. Organizations without an IRS-designated status will be eligible for funding if a fiscal sponsorship is established prior to application submittal. A formal evaluation criteria will be used to select proposals for funding, including the organization's ability to administer the grant. Example evaluation categories include the applicant's ability to successfully complete the proposed work in the anticipated timeline and budget, past District funding, fit with District's mission, and potential to develop new partnerships.

Grants relating to policy/advocacy will require a more rigorous evaluation process as compared to other funding categories. Additional factors to consider include a thorough vetting process to

ensure the grantee can comply with budgetary tracking requirements, as well an evaluation process to ensure that the District understands the potential risks, such as potential partner relationship complexities relating to funding particular legislative action. To mitigate this risk, the RFP will focus on soliciting projects that are of broadly applicable benefit to the conservation field with minimal potential for disagreement. As part of the vetting process, District staff will invite the Legislative, Funding, and Public Affair Committee (LFPAC) to assist in identifying these risks prior to grants being awarded.

Grant terms and internal controls

The maximum award for individual grants will be \$50,000. The award can be expended as necessary within a three-year grant term, contingent on satisfactory progress on grant objectives. Grants will be administered on a reimbursement basis, with up to 15% available up front if the grantee has a demonstrable need. Grantees will be eligible for reimbursement costs up until the original grant amount, contingent on satisfactory progress toward grant goals.

Grant applications and reporting

Grantees will be responsible for submitting annual reports that summarize activities and any relevant findings, in addition to periodic check-ins with District staff. Additionally, reimbursement submissions will require expenses to date recorded against the budget, along with invoices and accomplishments and milestones achieved during the reimbursement period.

The application and reporting process will be specific to a) the grant category, with policy/advocacy work requiring additional reporting and check-in requirements as well as an increased level of due diligence before the grant is awarded, and b) the dollar amount awarded. Applications and reporting procedures will have two tiers of requirements (up to \$25,000 and up to \$50,000). This structure will ensure that smaller grantees are not prohibited from applying due to cumbersome application and reporting requirements in relation to the funding received. Additionally, the District will require that grantees make any acquired data or conclusions available to the public. The Board will receive updates on the status of the grants and outcomes through an annual report.

Additional grant requirements and process

- The RFP will be released every year or every other year when funding is available and the District Grantmaking Policy will be evaluated every three years and updated as necessary. Grantees will continue to be eligible for additional RFP cycles, with no funding tenure limit. However, the District will consider past District funding in its scoring criteria in order to encourage a diverse range of organizations to apply.
- Eligible projects must not result in permanent damage and/or impairment to habitats or natural resources on District lands and will be in compliance with the District's Permit to Enter procedures (required for research projects).
- If indirect costs are costs incurred that do not have directly attributable expenses, they may be charged at no more than 10% of total grant cost. Examples include general and administrative costs, general equipment purchase or maintenance, and salaries and benefits of executive or administrative personnel who may not be directly engaged in the project. Subcontractors are excluded from indirect cost calculations.
- In compliance with state and federal law, the District is prohibited from funding ballot

measures and individual candidates. To ensure compliance with this requirement, the District will require detailed expenditure reports that demonstrate how grantees spent funding relating to lobbying or advocacy.

Board Policy
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
GRANT PROGRAM

Adopted by the Board of Directors
November 14, 2007
Amended: November 17, 2010

Purpose:

The District encourages and supports applied academic research on District preserves. Partnerships with researchers from academic institutions can provide the District and the larger scientific community with information that furthers the District's mission, enhance public education, and advances scientific understanding of natural processes. The goal for the Resource Management Grant Program is to develop and strengthen local partnerships with researchers in support of the District's mission. This policy establishes the guidelines by which District staff will solicit, review, award, and administer grant funds to meritorious projects.

Background:

Numerous academic research institutions are located within the San Francisco Bay Area, providing opportunities for the District to partner with researchers to make better informed decisions about land management and public outreach.. Numerous research projects have been conducted on District lands, however, given the diversity of natural habitats found on District lands and the volume of research questions of direct interest to District staff, fostering research opportunities will provide the District with applied research that is targeted specifically to the District's needs. Partnerships with local academic institutions are a vital component to achieving the District's mission to "protect and restore the natural environment".

Procedures:

The following procedures will assist the General Manager in soliciting, reviewing, and awarding grant funds to research projects consistent with the District's mission:

1. The Resource Management Grant Program (Program) will be an interdepartmental program jointly administered by the Planning, Operations, and Public Affairs Departments. Staff from these departments will collaboratively administer all aspects of the Program.
2. Grant awards will not exceed \$5,000 for any one project annually and total annual Program funding will not exceed \$25,000. Multi-year projects will be considered provided that the total amount of funding does not exceed \$25,000 over five consecutive years, subject to approval in the District's annual budget and an annual review by District staff to ensure satisfactory progress.

3. Eligible projects must, at a minimum, be sponsored by a faculty member of an accredited academic research institution.
4. Eligible projects must contribute information that aids in resource management, operational and maintenance actions, public outreach, or public use decisions by the District or provide a larger educational purpose that furthers the District mission.
5. Eligible projects must not result in permanent damage and/or impairment to habitats or natural resources on District lands and will be in compliance with the District's Permit to Enter procedures (required for each research project).
6. The General Manager will establish a detailed evaluation and selection process to be used in reviewing eligible proposals in the form of Administrative Guidelines. Evaluation criteria will include but not be limited to the proposal promoting and accomplishing the District's mission, advancing the District's management of natural resources, enhancing the District's interface with the public, establishing collaborative partnerships with research institutions, and advancing the general understanding of the natural environment.
7. A Request for Proposals will be released annually to solicit proposals for consideration for funding provided funding is available. Proposals will also be accepted throughout the year and considered for funding as received and as funding is available.
8. The General Manager will prepare an annual report to the Board of Directors on the Resource Management Grant Program that details the proposals received as well as those selected for funding, and the results of research received.
9. This Policy will be reviewed every five years from the date of approval.