



MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM GUIDELINES

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (District) is pleased to offer matching grants to cities, the county, other public agencies and non-profit organizations for projects that provide local open space, community recreation or public access opportunities. The Matching Grant Program is an important component of the District's overall program since the passage of the original ballot measures that created and funded the District in 1990. In general, the Matching Grant Program provides funding for land acquisition, development of recreational amenities, and restoration of open space within or near urban areas. The Matching Grant Program requires applicants to provide a matching contribution at a one-to-one ratio.

SECTION A: PROJECT EVALUATION PROCESS

The District accepts applications during a designated period each year, as announced on the District website www.sonomaopenspace.org and via direct mailing. Applications will be available during the application period by mail and on the District website. The process to evaluate applications may take up to three months, and includes the following steps:

- The District will hold a public information workshop each year to provide interested parties an overview of the Matching Grant Program and to review project requirements and selection criteria. It is not necessary to attend the workshop to apply for the program.
- Following submission, District staff and members of the District's Citizens' Advisory Committee review and evaluate the applications based on the Matching Grant Program guidelines and criteria. During this period, staff may request a site visit of the project property or more information from Applicants.
- District staff makes project recommendations to the Citizens' Advisory Committee in a public meeting.
- District staff presents the recommendations to the District's Board of Directors (the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors) for its approval, which signifies acceptance into the Matching Grant Program.
- District staff will notify Applicants regarding their acceptance into the Matching Grant Program. Applicants representing projects not recommended for funding will also be notified at this time.

An application that is not accepted during one funding cycle may be resubmitted for consideration during a subsequent funding cycle. Also, it is possible that projects may receive partial funding. If approved with funding less than the amount requested, the Applicant will be asked to submit a revised budget and timeline.

SECTION B: PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

This section explains the Matching Grant Program and outlines the requirements that all projects must meet in order to be considered for the program.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include Sonoma County's nine cities, the county, other public agencies and non-profit organizations. Applications that include partnerships between or among cities, public agencies and non-profit organizations are encouraged.

Eligible Projects

Projects eligible for the Matching Grant Program must include acquisition, restoration or development of real property for open space, agricultural, natural resource or recreational use, or a combination of two or more of these types of projects. To ensure preservation of open space consistent with the District's voter-approved Expenditure Plan, development that results in an impervious surface will be limited to a specific percentage of the project site, typically five to 25 percent, as provided in the conservation easement. Note that gravel trails, grass fields and similar improvements that do not have impervious surfaces are not included in this calculation.

Acquisition Projects

Eligible acquisition projects include, but are not limited to, acquisition of open space for:

- Public access to open space and recreational amenities, such as urban parks, greenways, athletic fields and trails.
- Preservation of land with significant natural habitats or resources, such as rivers, streams, wetlands and uplands.
- Agriculturally-productive lands near urban centers for agricultural use.

Basic requirements for acquisition projects include the following:

- The current property owner must be a willing seller. The Applicant is responsible for landowner negotiations, including obtaining an appraisal that meets the District's Guidelines and Standards, securing a title report that covers all parcels in the proposed project, and performing all due diligence tasks.
- Acquisition of the property must be free of significant title defects and obstacles to use, such as restrictive deeds and/or easements, restrictive water rights issues, restrictive cultural or historical resources, hazardous conditions and/or materials, public use conflicts, and in-holdings or property boundaries that limit or preclude management options.

Restoration Projects

Eligible restoration projects include, but are not limited to, restoration, preservation and enhancement of significant natural areas, including oak woodlands, marshes, wetlands, uplands, riparian corridors and other critical habitat areas.

Recreation Development Projects

Eligible development projects include, but are not limited to, development of:

- Site improvements necessary for and which facilitate initial opening of open space and parks for public access or recreational use, particularly if the project includes trails that provide linkages within and adjacent to urban areas.
- Construction of new site improvements necessary for low-intensity recreation facilities, including park amenities, trailheads, staging areas and picnic areas.
- Construction of new site improvements necessary for outdoor recreation facilities, such as athletic fields.

Ineligible Projects

Projects that are not eligible for the Matching Grant Program include, but are not limited to:

- Projects that involve acquisition of property through the power of eminent domain.
- Projects that rehabilitate existing active recreation facilities.
- Projects intended to mitigate environmental impacts of other projects.
- Acquisition of, or interest in land that unlawfully restricts access to specific persons.

Funding Components

Examples of specific components that may or may not be eligible for Matching Grant funding are listed in Section E of these Guidelines.

Community Support

There must be broad community support for the project as well as strong support from the affected public agencies.

Planning and Environmental Context

The project must be based on sound planning, as demonstrated by consistency with the jurisdiction's general plan, any relevant specific plan, area plan, habitat plan and other applicable planning documents. The project must comply with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and all other local, state and federal environmental and permitting requirements. Any necessary approvals or permits must be able to be obtained in a timely manner.

SECTION C: PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Projects that satisfy the requirements identified above will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Is the project specifically identified in an adopted city, county or agency plan as a priority for open space preservation, resource enhancement, public access or recreation?
- Does the project propose acquisition or development of open space lands identified as priority areas in the District's most recent long-range Acquisition Plan, *Connecting Communities and the Land*?
- Does the project contribute to open space preservation within or near urban areas, with additional importance given to projects that improve recreational access for urban residents?
- Will the project serve a regional constituency, involve multiple jurisdictions, or otherwise provide a substantial public benefit to both city and rural residents?
- Will the project fulfill needs within an underserved community?
- Does the project promote preservation of natural habitats, wildlife movement connectivity, scenic areas and/or other open space resources of regional importance?
- Is the project ready for implementation, shown, for example, by an approved Management Plan, detailed implementation plan, completed CEQA review, and/or signed purchase agreement (for projects involving acquisition)?
- Is the budget detailed, reasonable and complete, and includes content similar to the sample budget included in the application?
- Does the project include a strong match, such as secured contributions that represent a broad range of agency and community support?
- Does the match further the likelihood of successful completion of the project?

SECTION D: PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Once a project is accepted into the Matching Grant Program, District staff and the Applicant will work together to address and complete the following required project components.

Grant Agreement

All Matching Grant projects include a **grant agreement**, which the District and the Applicant execute. The grant agreement must be approved by the District's Counsel and the District's Board of Directors.

The grant agreement includes, but is not limited to, the following provisions:

- Identification of respective responsibilities of parties (i.e. District, Applicant).
- Conveyance/acceptance of Conservation Easement.
- Funding contribution/allocation.
- Time period within which certain tasks must be completed (i.e. development of public access or restoration plans).
- Signage requirements acknowledging District participation.
- Indemnification provisions.

Conservation Easement

The District retains a **conservation easement** over all lands the Applicant acquires in fee title and/or over those lands for which development or restoration funds are being requested, in order to ensure preservation of the property's open space values. The conservation easement must be approved by the District's Counsel and the District's Board of Directors, and recorded with the County Recorder.

In general, the conservation easement:

- Sets forth the conservation values and purpose.
- Restricts uses and activities on the property that are inconsistent with the conservation values and purpose.
- Assigns to the District all development rights associated with the property, except those rights which are specifically reserved by the Grantor (Applicant).
- Requires District review and approval of all project plans to ensure consistency with the conservation values and purpose.
- Identifies preparation of baseline documentation of the condition, use and features of the property through written description, photographs and maps.
- Allows the District to monitor the property to ensure that the requirements and conditions of the easement are met.

In general, the process to record the conservation easement includes the following steps:

- Applicant secures a title report for all legal parcels which the easement will encumber.
- District reviews title report and title exceptions.
- Applicant secures subordination of all liens affecting the property to the conservation easement.
- County Surveyor reviews and approves legal description for all project parcels.
- County Surveyor may review and approve property surveys.

Property Appraisal

For **acquisition** projects, a property appraisal of the subject property must be completed to establish its fair market value. The District can only contribute funds up to the appraised fair market value of the property. For **development and restoration** projects, an appraisal of the value of the conservation easement may be required.

It is preferable that the appraisal is completed before the application is submitted; however, this may result in the need for an update at a later date. Typically, the Applicant initiates and pays for the appraisal, and is responsible for coordinating the appraisal process. Appraisals must comply with the District's Appraisal Guidelines and Standards, and the District prefers that the appraiser be selected from its list of qualified appraisers (refer to the Appraisal Guidelines and Requirements for Matching Grant Applicants, and the Guidelines and Standards for Preparation of Narrative Appraisal Reports, available at www.sonomaopenspace.org). District staff reviews the appraisal to ensure it complies with the Guidelines and Standards. The District may request a pre-appraisal meeting with the appraiser and the Applicant to ensure conformance with these standards.

Implementation Timing

For **acquisition** projects, Applicants must acquire the property within two (2) years from the date the Board initially accepts the project into the Matching Grant Program.

In general, Applicants must implement the proposed project and provide the anticipated public use of the property within five (5) years from approval of the grant agreement.

Payment/Reimbursement

The Applicant must maintain accurate records of all expenditures associated with the project as grants made under this program, and the Applicant's expenditure of grant funds, are subject to audit.

Acquisition funding is typically deposited into an escrow account prior to purchase; however, in certain cases, the District may reimburse the Applicant for property acquisition. The following steps apply to acquisition projects:

- Applicant typically opens escrow; however, District prepares its own escrow instructions.
- The acquisition is completed in a single escrow in which Applicant takes fee title to the property and conveys a conservation easement to the District.

Development and restoration funding is typically reimbursed by the District through the following process. The grant agreement sets forth the project costs that are eligible for reimbursement.

- Applicant submits invoices with supporting documentation, showing that the costs have been reasonably and necessarily incurred, and are consistent with those costs outlined in the grant agreement.
- When the claims are complete, District reviews and approves invoices.
- District processes payment.

Match Requirement

The Matching Grant Program requires Applicants to provide a matching contribution at a ratio of **one to one**. The match can include both direct contribution and in-kind services and materials; however, typically, no more than fifty (50) percent of the match can be operations and management (O&M).

The Applicant must identify matching funds in the project budget submitted in the application, including all anticipated in-kind contributions. The matching funds must be currently available or obtained in a timely manner. If grant funding is not yet secure, the Applicant must indicate when funding is anticipated to be secured, as well as provide District with verification when the full amount of matching funds are received.

The matching revenues or in-kind resources that the Applicant proposes must represent a broad range of agency and/or community support for the project. The Applicant must clearly demonstrate in the application that all reasonable efforts have been made to identify and pursue funding from other sources, and that such funds are not sufficient and/or cannot be used to cover expenses that are the subject of the grant request to the District.

Examples of What May Qualify as a Match:

- Real property (e.g. purchase of the property or donation from a property owner to Applicant for project), when acquisition is a project component
- A monetary contribution from any source (such as a public or private grant or donation, or funds from an organization or agency's allocated budget)
- In-kind match in the form of:
 - skills, time or materials of the agency/organization not otherwise allocated
 - project materials
 - professional services
 - labor for project implementation
- On-going operation and maintenance costs to manage or steward the project
- A combination of the above

Examples of What Does Not Qualify as a Match:

- Staff and consultant costs incurred before the application is submitted to the District
- Costs for preparing required environmental (CEQA) documents
- Costs for obtaining required permits
- General non-project-related overhead costs, including salaries and rent
- Costs for improvements not functionally related to and directly supportive of the proposed project

SECTION E: FUNDING COMPONENTS

This section lists examples of components that may or may not be eligible for funding through the Matching Grant Program. The budget provided by the Applicant in the application should reflect this list. Note that after a project is approved, the District may consider and approve requests to reallocate funding that deviates from the original application provided that such funding otherwise meets all requirements of these guidelines.

Eligible Funding Components

The following specific project components are eligible for District funding:

- Acquisition costs such as fee title, conservation easement purchase, title report update, appraisal update, certain escrow and/or closing costs.
- Public access improvements such as walkways/trails, creek crossings, boat put-ins, ADA-accessible components (e.g. railing, ramps), and parking improvements that facilitate access.
- Recreation/park facility elements such as interpretative signage, informative/educational kiosks, fences, gates, benches, tables, signs, drinking fountains, bike racks, restrooms, and trash/recycling containers.
- Habitat restoration such as native plant and habitat enhancement, including materials and irrigation.
- Landscaping and gardening elements such as plants, soil, sod, irrigation, and materials to build gardening beds.

Ineligible Funding Components

The following specific project components are **not** eligible for District funding:

- Planning process
- Environmental documents and permits
- Recreation facilities that include intensive structural improvements (e.g. gymnasiums, swimming pools, water parks, skate parks, playgrounds, tot lots)
- Operations, maintenance and management of the property
- Structural demolition
- Program and project equipment (e.g. tools such as shovels, tractors)
- Office equipment (e.g. computers, furniture)
- Non-project-related overhead (e.g. salaries, rent)
- Long-term leases
- Workshops
- Research