



County of Sonoma

Request for vegetation management and wildfire prevention project grant proposals

The County of Sonoma invites you to respond to a request for proposals for its Vegetation Management Project Grant Program.

A. Introduction

1. PROJECT BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

In preparation for the 2021 wildfire season, the County of Sonoma is directing \$2-\$4 million to near-term vegetation management activities in high-risk areas and near key ecosystems. All interested parties will be required to apply for these funds.

In October 2017, three major wildfires simultaneously came through Sonoma County. The Sonoma Complex Fires collectively burned over 110,000 acres, destroying over 5,000 homes and businesses, taking 24 lives, and forcing hundreds of thousands of residents to evacuate. In February 2018, following the emergence of evidence that Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) electrical equipment caused the 2017 fires, Sonoma County agencies filed a lawsuit against PG&E seeking recovery for these damages. The parties reached a settlement agreement in 2020 allocating \$149 million to Sonoma County entities.

In October 2020, following extensive community and stakeholder outreach, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors voted to allocate a minimum of \$25 million of the PG&E settlement funds toward vegetation management activities, broadly encompassing the intentional alteration of vegetation to reduce wildfire risk, promote safety, and support ecosystems and agriculture, along with associated governance, education, funding/financing, and workforce development efforts.

2. DESIRED OUTCOMES

The Vegetation Management Project Grant (VMPG) Program supports community resiliency, improves risk mitigation techniques, and increases wildfire prevention. To do as much as we can before the 2021 wildfire season, the County of Sonoma is directing \$2-\$4 million to high-priority, near-term vegetation management activities in high-risk areas and near key ecosystems. The VMPG Program supports the County of Sonoma's commitment to reducing the risk of wildfires through prevention and mitigation.

3. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY

- Nonprofit organizations
- Community groups/ organizations
- Local fire districts
- Communities with Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) in place
- Resource Conservation Districts
- Licensed foresters
- Technical advisors
- Schools

Awardees will be required to enter into a legal contract with the County of Sonoma. Applicants that do not have the capacity to enter into a legal agreement are encouraged to partner with another entity to collaborate and serve as sponsor/fiscal agent. Individuals are not eligible to apply but are encouraged to work with their local Fire Safe Council or other community group to apply.

B. GRANT REQUIREMENTS

1. FOCUS AREAS FOR PROJECTS – 2021 PHASE 1

Funding is available countywide; however, projects should focus on the high-risk areas with high potential for creating a positive impact to a community or area. Below is a list of potential project areas:

- a. High-fire risk areas to the northeast of developed communities
- b. Defensible space within 100 feet of homes in densely populated areas that are oriented in a west and/or south direction and are within canyons that border the east and west of the populated area
- c. Areas that burned in recent fires and/or have high fire return interval
- d. Boundary areas between large public and private lands and dense developments
- e. Areas surrounding primary evacuation routes and key infrastructure
- f. Specific regions may include but are not limited to:
 - i. Guerneville/Camp Meeker/Occidental area
 - ii. Mark West and the Tubbs and Glass Fire corridors
 - iii. Lake Sonoma
 - iv. Sonoma Valley (including Mayacama Ridge, Sonoma Mountain/Bennett Ridge, and adjoining communities)
 - v. Timber Cove/Sea Ranch area to Cazadero

2. TYPES OF PROJECTS CONSIDERED FOR FUNDING

Projects should ideally focus on high quality, sustainable vegetation management activities and outreach, including but not limited to:

- a. Creation of “calming zone” vegetation removal buffers and strategic fuel breaks along the wildland urban interface
- b. Re-treatment and maintenance of recently burned areas (particularly near the Wildland Urban interface (WUI) or vulnerable watershed areas that will be more difficult to treat once vegetation gets reestablished)
- c. Prescribed (maintenance) burn of completed thinning projects
- d. Understory thinning of woodlands and forests
- e. Prescribed grazing where feasible
- f. Creation/maintenance of defensible space within 100 feet of homes
- g. Education and outreach campaigns or materials within the community or focus area regarding wildfire safety, vegetation management, fire prevention, etc.

- h. Creation of plans (for example, a local CWPP)

Applicants are encouraged to submit projects that demonstrate measurable and relevant outcomes ahead of the 2021 fire season, even if they do not readily fit into the parameters or areas cited above.

3. AWARD CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN GRANT APPLICATION EVALUATION

The County will prioritize projects that have been planned and permitted (i.e. are covered by an existing vegetation or forest management plan approved by Cal Fire and/or a local fire agency). Projects that meet the following award criteria in the Focus Areas identified above are eligible for funding.

Award Criteria

- Potential to reduce fire risk in advance of the 2021 and 2022 fire seasons
- Location in or proximity to priority project regions listed above in Section B,1(Focus Areas)
- Use of priority project activities
- Offers multiple benefits, for example, whole-ecosystem and landscape-level management actions (including alignment with priorities outlined in the County's 2016 CWPP, local CWPP's, and best management practices
- Benefits and/or engages lower-income and high-vulnerability communities
- Applicant has organizational capacity to complete proposed work (preference for entities with a proven track record in the field)
- Advancement of local workforce development and training
- Project engages multiple communities, including neighboring counties
- Includes highly visible pilot project that advances public education and outreach and could demonstrate the scalability of innovative and affordable techniques

4. PROJECT BUDGET

The budget should be comprehensive, realistic, and directly related to the project. All project costs and expenses must be included on the budget sheet. Applicants are encouraged to explore other supplemental funding sources to show diverse support for the project. All project proposals must include a completed budget worksheet.

Eligible Project Costs

Eligible project costs include the reasonable costs of studies, engineering, design, materials and supplies, legal fees, labor, equipment, monitoring, and project construction. Reasonable administrative expenses may be included and will depend on the complexity of the project. Administrative expenses are the necessary costs incidentally but directly related to the project including the portion of overhead and administrative expenses that are directly related to the project in accordance with the standard accounting practices of the applicant.

Costs that are not eligible for reimbursement include, but are not limited to the following items:

- a) Costs incurred prior to the award date of the grant.
- b) Purchase of equipment that is not an integral part of a project.
- c) Establishing a reserve fund.
- d) Monitoring and assessment costs for efforts required after project construction is complete.
- e) Replacement of existing funding sources for ongoing programs.
- f) Travel expenses, such as transportation and lodging.
- g) meal expenses; and
- h) overhead not directly related to project costs.

C. LOCAL PREFERENCE

It is the policy of the County to promote employment and business opportunities for local residents and firms on all contracts and give preference to local residents, workers, businesses and consultants to the extent consistent with the law and interests of the public. A Local Service Provider is defined as a business or consultant who has a valid physical address located within Sonoma County from which the supplier or consultant operates or performs business on a day-to-day basis, and holds a valid business license if required by a city within the jurisdiction of Sonoma County.

D. SCHEDULE

The following schedule is subject to change. Except as provided below, changes will be made by written amendment to this Request for Grant Proposals. The County Administrator’s Office will issue any amendments to all applicants.

Event	Phase 1 Dates
Grant Solicitation Open from the County	Friday, April 23, 2021
Grant Workshop	Thursday, April 29, 2021 from 5:00-6:30pm English and Spanish (live translation)
Applications Must be Received By	Sunday, May 16, 2021 at 5:00pm
VMGP Working Group Review and Selection	Monday, May 17 - 24, 2021
Applicants Notified	Tuesday, May 25, 2021
Projects Start Date	Upon execution of VMGP Agreement by the County and receipt and approval of all Agreement documents
Project Completion Date	Dependent upon project and Applicant’s VMGP Agreement, but not later than 12/31/2022

E. GRANT WORKSHOPS

The County will host a workshop on April 29, 2021. Participation is voluntary. The workshop will be conducted in English with live Spanish translation. County staff and VMGP Working Group members will provide an overview of the application process and respond to applicants' questions.

Workshop

Date: April 29, 2021

Time: 5:00 – 6:30pm

Zoom Link: <https://sonomacounty.zoom.us/j/98198681040?pwd=ZWp2TXlvY1ZlYcDhGTVZWc2dha21oUT09>

Passcode: 544139

Telephone: +1 669 900 9128

Webinar ID: 981 9868 1040

Passcode: 544139

F. QUESTIONS

Applicants can submit any and all questions in writing in order for staff to prepare written responses to all potential applicants. All questions and written answers will be shared with all potential applicants on the Vegetation Management Project Grant website.

Questions should be sent via e-mail to: vegmanagement@sonoma-county.org

G. GRANT PROPOSAL SUBMITTAL

1. FORM

Applicants must submit applications forms (attachments B, C, and D) via email. All application documents can be accessed on the Vegetation Management Project Grant Program website: www.SonomaOpenSpace.org/VegManagement

Submission: All grant submittals should be sent to the Vegetation Management Project Grant email: vegmanagement@sonoma-county.org

2. DUE DATE

Grant proposals must be received by 5:00 pm on Sunday, May 16, 2021 to be considered. The proposal due date is subject to change by the County. If the proposal due date is changed, all known applicants of the original solicitation will be notified of the new date via email and the updated information will be posted on the website.

3. APPLICATION DOCUMENTS

Applicants need to complete the Vegetation Management Project Grant Program Application Form (attachment B), Vegetation Management Project Grant Program Application Budget Sheet (attachment C), Vegetation Management Project Grant Program Application Questions (attachment D).

4. GRANT FUNDING, COMPLIANCE, AND REPORTING

Vegetation Management Project Grant funding is solely a monetary contribution from the County of Sonoma; funding does not represent the County's co-sponsorship of any project. Successful awardees of Vegetation Management Project Grant Funding are required to comply with any applicable laws, regulations or permit requirements for the project funded. Failure to comply or complete the project could result in a repayment of the funding.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Compliance. The County must make findings regarding compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) when approving a project for funding. Your project must be either exempt from CEQA or CEQA review must be complete before the grant award. Applicants must complete the CEQA section of the application for consideration.

Awardees will receive funds upon execution of a VMPP Agreement and receipt of all County-required documents. Each grant awardee will be required to submit progress and financial reports. Upon completion of the project, a final report, including a financial expenditure record with back up documentation, and photo documentation, must be submitted. All awardees must agree to allow County representatives to access the project site upon request to confirm project progress and/or completion.

H. SELECTION PROCESS

The County will prioritize projects that have already been planned and permitted (e.g., covered by an existing vegetation or forest management plan in concert with Cal Fire and local fire agencies), but have not yet been funded. Projects meeting the following award criteria and that will occur in the named project focus areas below are eligible for funding. Proposals will be evaluated using the criteria listed below. Note that there is no value or ranking implied by the order of this list.

1. Potential to reduce fire risk in advance of the 2021 and 2022 fire seasons
2. Location in/proximity to priority project focus areas (Section B,1)
3. Use of priority project types/activities (Section B,2)
4. Potential for multiple benefits, whole-ecosystem, and landscape-level management actions
5. Benefits and engages lower-income and highest-vulnerability communities
6. Organizational capacity to complete proposed work
7. Advances local workforce development and training goals
8. Engages multiple communities and/or neighboring counties
9. Inclusion of highly visible demonstration/pilot projects to advance public education and outreach and prove the scalability of innovative and affordable techniques

10. The County may, during the evaluation process, request from any applicant additional information which the County deems necessary to determine the applicant's ability to perform the required services, including any applicable supporting documentation. If such information is requested, the applicant shall be permitted three (3) business days to submit the information requested.
11. An error in the proposal may cause the rejection of that proposal; however, the County may, in its sole discretion, retain the proposal and make certain corrections. In determining if a correction will be made, the County will consider the conformance of the proposal to the format and content required by the solicitation, and any unusual complexity of the format and content required by the solicitation. If the applicant's intent is clearly established based on review of the complete proposal submittal, the County may, at its sole option, correct an error based on that established content. The County may also correct obvious clerical errors. The County may also request clarification from an applicant on any item in a proposal that County believes to be in error.
12. All applicants responding to this solicitation will be notified of their selection or non-selection after the evaluation committee has completed the selection process.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

RULES AND REGULATIONS

1. The issuance of this solicitation does not constitute an award commitment on the part of the County, and the County shall not pay for costs incurred in the preparation or submission of proposals. All costs and expenses associated with the preparation of this proposal shall be borne by the applicant.
2. The County reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to take any of the following actions at any time before approval of an award: waive informalities or minor irregularities in any proposals received, reject any and all proposals, cancel the grant program, or modify and re-issue the solicitation. Failure to furnish all information requested or to follow the format requested herein may disqualify the applicant, in the sole discretion of the County. False, incomplete, misleading or unresponsive statements in a proposal may also be sufficient cause for a proposal's rejection
3. The County may waive any deviation in a proposal. The County's waiver of a deviation shall in no way modify the solicitation requirements nor excuse the successful applicant from full compliance with any resultant agreement requirements or obligations. Sonoma County reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, or to waive any defect or irregularity in a proposal. The County further reserves the right to award a grant to the applicant or applicants that, in the County's judgment, best serves the needs of Sonoma County.
4. The County reserves the right to select the proposal(s) which in its sole judgment best meets the needs of the intent of the grant program and to award to only one or multiple qualified submittals. The County also makes no guarantee of any or equal amounts of work. The County of Sonoma further reserves the right to reject any or all proposals for any reason.
5. All applicants submit their proposals to the County with the understanding that the recommended selection of the review committee is final.
6. Upon submission, all proposals shall be treated as confidential documents until the selection process is completed. Once the selected applicant executes the grant agreement with the County, proposals shall be deemed public record. In the event that an applicant desires to claim portions of its proposal exempt from disclosure, it is incumbent upon the applicant to clearly identify those portions with the word "Confidential" printed on the top right-hand corner of each page for which

such privilege is claimed, and to clearly identify the information claimed confidential by highlighting, underlining, or bracketing it, etc. Examples of confidential materials include trade secrets. Each page shall be clearly marked and readily separable from the proposal in order to facilitate public inspection of the non-confidential portion of the proposal. The County will consider an applicant's request for exemptions from disclosure; however, the County will make its decision based upon applicable laws. An assertion by an applicant that the entire proposal, large portions of the proposal, or a significant element of the proposal, are exempt from disclosure will not be honored and the proposal may be rejected as non-responsive. Prices, makes and models or catalog numbers of the items offered, deliverables, and terms of payment shall be publicly available regardless of any designation to the contrary.

7. The County will endeavor to restrict distribution of material designated as confidential to only those individuals involved in the review and analysis of the proposals. Applicants are cautioned that materials designated as confidential may nevertheless be subject to disclosure. Applicants are advised that the County does not wish to receive confidential or proprietary information and those applicants are not to supply such information except when it is absolutely necessary. If any information or materials in any proposal submitted are labeled confidential or proprietary, the proposal shall include the following clause:
8. **[Legal name of applicant]** shall indemnify, defend and hold harmless the County of Sonoma, its officers, agents and employees from and against any request, action or proceeding of any nature and any damages or liability of any nature, specifically including attorneys' fees awarded under the California Public Records Act (Government Code §6250 et seq.) Arising out of, concerning or in any way involving any materials or information in this proposal that **[legal name of applicant]** has labeled as confidential, proprietary or otherwise not subject to disclosure as a public record.

NONLIABILITY OF COUNTY

The County shall not be liable for any precontractual expenses incurred by the applicant or selected contractor or contractors. The County shall be held harmless and free from any and all liability, claims, or expenses whatsoever incurred by, or on behalf of, any person or organization responding to this solicitation.

FORM OF AGREEMENT

1. No agreement with the County shall have any effect until an agreement has been signed by both parties. Pursuant to Sonoma County Code Section 1-11, County personnel are without authorization to waive or modify agreement requirements.
2. A sample of the agreement is included as Attachment A hereto. Applicants must be willing to accept the terms of this sample agreement. With few exceptions, the terms of the County's standard agreement will not be negotiated. Indemnification language will not be negotiated.
3. Proposals submitted shall include a statement that (i) the applicant has reviewed the sample agreement and will agree to the terms contained therein if selected, or (ii) all terms and conditions are acceptable to the applicant except as noted specifically in the proposal. An applicant taking exception to the County's sample agreement must also provide alternative language for those provisions considered objectionable to the applicant. Please note that any exceptions or changes requested to the Agreement may constitute grounds to reject the proposal.

4. Failure to address exceptions to the sample agreement in your proposal will be construed as acceptance of all terms and conditions contained therein.
5. Submission of additional agreement exceptions after the grant application submission deadline may result in rejection of the applicant's proposal.

DURATION OF PROPOSAL; CANCELLATION OF AWARDS; TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

1. All proposals will remain in effect and shall be legally binding for the term of the agreement.
2. Unless otherwise authorized by County, the selected awardees will be required to execute an agreement with the County within fourteen (14) days of the County notifying the applicant of their award. If agreement on terms and conditions acceptable to the County cannot be achieved within that timeframe, or if, after reasonable attempts to negotiate such terms and conditions, it appears that an agreement will not be possible, as determined at the sole discretion of the County, the County reserves the right to retract any notification of award and proceed with awards to other applicants, or not award at all.

WITHDRAWAL AND SUBMISSION OF MODIFIED PROPOSAL

An applicant may withdraw a proposal at any time prior to the submission deadline by submitting a written notification of withdrawal signed by the applicant or an authorized agent. Another proposal may be submitted prior to the deadline. A proposal may not be changed after the designated deadline for submission of proposals.

K. LIVING WAGE

The grant recipient shall comply with any and all federal, state, and local laws – including, but not limited to the County of Sonoma Living Wage Ordinance – affecting the services provided by this agreement. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the grant recipient expressly acknowledges and agrees that this agreement may be subject to the provisions of Article XXVI of Chapter 2 of the Sonoma County Code, requiring payment of a living wage to covered employees. Noncompliance during the term of the agreement will be considered a material breach and may result in termination of the agreement or pursuit of other legal or administrative remedies.

The link to the Living Wage Ordinance is: <http://sonomacounty.ca.gov/CAO/Living-Wage-Ordinance/>

ATTACHMENTS AND EXHIBITS

Attachment A: Vegetation Management Project Grant Program Sample Agreement

Attachment B: Vegetation Management Project Grant Program Application Form

Attachment C: Vegetation Management Project Grant Program Application Budget Sheet

Attachment D: Vegetation Management Project Grant Program Application Questions