



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 Grant Program.

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Project Background and Description

In preparation for the 2022 wildfire season, the County of Sonoma is directing up to \$4 million to near-term vegetation management activities in high-risk areas and near key ecosystems. All interested parties must submit an application to be eligible for receipt of grant 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 Grant Program (VMGP) supports community resiliency, improves risk mitigation techniques, and increases wildfire prevention. This grant cycle will aim to support long-term vegetation treatments that are economically practical, ecologically appropriate, and strategic in preventing or suppressing large-scale fire events. Preference will be given to grant projects in the January 2022 application cycle that focus on supporting long-term vegetation management that will be sustainable and consistent with the protection of natural resources and ecosystem services, including protecting watersheds and biodiversity and sequestering carbon while protecting against wildfires. The VMGP hopes to support multi-beneficial projects in the areas most vulnerable to wildfire. Projects that involve alterations to vegetation or fuels should address how they will protect watersheds and sustain or enhance biodiversity, native species habitat, and wildlife corridors. The County of Sonoma is directing up to \$4 million to high-priority, vegetation management activities in high-risk areas and near key ecosystems. The VMGP 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
- Tribal entities

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. (see **Attachment A: Sample Agreement** for additional information)

B. GRANT REQUIREMENTS

1. 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 treatment buffers and strategic fuel breaks along the wildland urban interface (WUI)
- b. Treatment and maintenance of recently burned areas (particularly near the WUI or fire-prone watershed areas that will be more difficult to treat once vegetation reestablishes)
- c. Prescribed burning for fuel reduction and forest health enhancement
- d. Ecologically appropriate understory thinning of woodlands and forests
- e. Prescribed grazing where feasible
- f. Education and outreach campaigns or materials within the community or focus area regarding wildfire safety, vegetation management, fire prevention, etc.

Applicants are encouraged to submit projects that demonstrate measurable and relevant outcomes ahead of the 2022 fire season, even if they do not readily fit into the parameters or areas cited above.

2. 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 will be evaluated and prioritized according to the following award criteria:

Award Criteria:

- Offers multiple benefits, for example, whole-ecosystem and landscape-level management actions such as watershed protection, wildlife corridor enhancement, carbon sequestration or other ecosystem services (including alignment with priorities outlined in the Sonoma County Wildfire Protection Plan (SCWPP), local wildfire protection plans, 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)
- Advances local workforce development and training
- Engages multiple landowners
- Includes highly visible pilot project that advances public education and outreach and could demonstrate the scalability of innovative and affordable techniques

3. 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, materials and supplies, legal fees, permitting and environmental compliance fees, labor, equipment, monitoring, and project implementation. Reasonable administrative expenses may be included and will depend on the complexity of the project. Administrative expenses are defined as necessary incidental or overhead costs 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, meal expenses; and
- g) 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 2 Dates
Grant Solicitation Open from the County	December 16, 2021
Grant Workshop	Via Zoom Webinar from 5:00-6:30 pm Wednesday, January 5, 2022 Thursday, January 13, 2022 English and Spanish (live translation)
Deadline to Submit Written Questions to County	5:00 pm January 7, 2022
Response to Questions from County	5:00 pm January 12, 2022
Deadline for County Receipt of Applications	5:00 pm January 23, 2022
VMGP Selection Committee Application Review and Selection	January 31 – February 9, 2022
Applicants Notified and Recommended Awardees Provided with a Draft Grant Agreement	February 18, 2022
Recommendations & Grant Agreements Presented to Board of Supervisors for Final Approval	April 5, 2022
Projects Start Date	Upon execution of VMGP Grant Agreement by the County and receipt and approval of all Agreement documents
Project Completion Date	Dependent upon project and Applicant’s VMGP Grant Agreement, but not later than 12/31/2023

E. GRANT WORKSHOPS

The County will host two virtual workshops on January 5 & 13, 2022. Participation is voluntary. The workshop will be conducted in English with live Spanish translation. County staff and VMGP Selection Committee members will provide an overview of the application process and respond to applicants’ questions.

Workshop Dates:

- January 5, 2022
- January 13, 2022

Time: 5:00 – 6:30 pm

Zoom Webinar Link:

<https://sonomacounty.zoom.us/j/96514062663?pwd=c0dITnFqMFVzSVp2dTEvbHhPWtZMQT09>

Passcode: 627110

Or Telephone:

US: +1 669 900 9128

Webinar ID: 965 1406 2663

F. QUESTIONS

Applicants must 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 Grant Program website. Questions must be submitted by January 7, 2022 and will be responded to in writing on January 12, 2022. The Community Workshops will be recorded so that applicants can review this information.

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

G. GRANT PROPOSAL SUBMITTAL

1. FORM

Applicants must submit application forms (Attachments B, C, and D) via email. All application documents can be accessed on the Vegetation Management Grant Program website:

www.SonomaOpenSpace.org/our-impact/vegmanagement

Applicants must enter their project data into the **Project Ranking Tool** (see Section G.4 below). Applicant's project ranking will be sent directly to applicant's email and VMGP Coordinator.

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

2. Due Date

Grant proposals must be received by **5:00 pm on Sunday, January 23, 2022** 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 Grant Program Application Form (attachment B), Vegetation Management Grant Program Application Budget Sheet (attachment C), Vegetation Management Grant Program Application Questions (attachment D). Applicants must enter their project into the Vegetation Management Grant Program (VMGP) Ranking Tool portal (described below).

4. Vegetation Management Grant Program (VMGP) Project Ranking Tool

For the 2022 Vegetation Management Grant Program application review process, in addition to an evaluation of the application documents, the Selection Committee will use a tool that was developed to prioritize and rank projects for the Sonoma County Wildfire Protection Plan (SCWPP). Applicants will enter their project information into the "**VMGP Project Ranking Tool**" which will use a unique portal to separate applicants from the broader Sonoma County Wildfire Protection Plan Project List. This tool will assist the Selection Committee in an initial review of candidate projects and elevate those applicants

that best improve public safety and prevent large damaging fires, using a formula based on the [Sonoma County Wildfire Risk Index](#), [CAL FIRE's Fire Hazard Severity Zone \(FHSZ\)](#), estimated response times of fire suppression resources, in collaboration with other wildfire hazard reduction criteria identified in the SCWPP to aid in ranking and prioritizing mitigation, education, and planning projects. The VMGP Project Ranking Tool has been especially adapted to include additional criteria that address long-term sustainability, multi-benefit impacts to protecting or improving watersheds and biodiversity, or engaging or benefitting vulnerable communities.

The survey will ask the applicant a series of questions over 10 pages. It may seem like substantial information but the entire survey should not take any more than 30 minutes and primarily draw off the narrative portion of the application.

Prior to initiating the survey, you can review the Project Ranking Tool Questions [here](#) or visit the VMGP website Application Resources. Applicants will need to access this online [web map application](#) in order to respond to some of the Survey Questions in the Project Ranking Tool. The application will allow the applicant to determine the project area's average Wildfire Risk Index, average Fire Hazard Severity Zone, and determine a count of Communities at Risk (CARs) within 1.5 miles of the project area. Lastly, some responses to survey questions in the VMGP Project Ranking Tool have character count limits. Applicants may want to use this link to [estimate word/character counts](#) to help check text input prior to filling out the form.

[LINK to Project Ranking Tool](#)

5. Grant Funding, Compliance and Reporting

VMGP 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 VMGP 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 by the awardee.

Awardees will receive funds upon execution of a VMGP 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. (see Section 4 of Attachment A)

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.

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 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. However, each applicant will be required to enter their project into the VMGP Project Ranking Tool (see Section D.4) which will be included in the Selection Committee’s analysis of each application.

- a. Use of priority project types/activities (see Section B.1)
- b. Potential for multiple benefits, whole-ecosystem, and landscape-level management actions
- c. Benefits and engages lower-income and highest-vulnerability communities
- d. Organizational capacity to complete proposed work
- e. Advances local workforce development and training goals
- f. Engages multiple landowners and resource managers
- g. Inclusion of highly visible demonstration/pilot projects to advance public education and outreach and prove the scalability of innovative and affordable techniques

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.

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, 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 any applicant on any item in a proposal that County believes to be in error.

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:

[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 anyway 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 pre-contractual 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. Applicants requesting must submit proposed alternative language along with your application. Submission of this request does not guarantee acceptance of the requested changes, any exceptions or changes requested to the Agreement may constitute grounds to reject the proposal. **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.

J. LIVING WAGE & PREVAILING 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 and California Prevailing Wage affecting the services provided

by this agreement. It is the responsibility of the Awardee to seek independent legal counsel as to the applicability of any and all federal, state, and local laws.

County of Sonoma Living Wage Ordinance - 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/>

Prevailing Wage - Pursuant to Section 1720 and Section 1771 of the Labor Code, the work described in this RFP may be subject to the payment of prevailing wages and will be subject to compliance monitoring and enforcement by the California Department of Industrial Relations (DIR). Grant recipients and all subcontractors performing work that requires payment of prevailing wages shall be registered and qualified to perform public work pursuant to Labor Code section 1725.5 as a condition to submitting a proposal to this RFP. Prevailing wage requirements are further detailed in Article 9 of the Sample Agreement (attachment A).

For more information about prevailing wage please visit: <https://www.dir.ca.gov/public-works/prevailing-wage.html>

ATTACHMENTS AND EXHIBITS

Attachment A: Vegetation Management Grant Program Sample Agreement

Attachment B: Vegetation Management Grant Program Application Form

Attachment C: Vegetation Management Grant Program Application Budget Sheet

Attachment D: Vegetation Management Grant Program Application Questions