**COMMUNITY SPACES**

**MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM**

**WEBINAR**

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

**Pre-Application Standard of Readiness**

Question:

The Pre-Application mentions a review of eligibility and readiness. The readiness description in the application guide is descriptive. How is readiness evaluated in the pre-app process for conservation easements versus recreation covenants?

Answer:

The primary purpose of the Pre-Application is to establish project eligibility. An element of eligibility is that the proposed project has been conceived and stewarded to the stage where a Full Application is possible. The Pre-Application does not consider the relative readiness merits of conservation easements versus recreation covenants.

**Sonoma County Parks Gap Analysis (Location) Map**

Question:

We are concerned with the walkability (Location) map. It appears that it was generated without some vital data, showing existing parks in the center of the areas showing lack of parks. We are concerned that our project may already be counted as a park. We would like to work with you on this data.

Answer:

We are happy to talk through any concerns with the data and/or maps used to evaluate projects. In this case, the Sonoma County Parks Gap Analysis Map is a collaboration of Sonoma County Ag + Open Space and Regional Parks, and data was also collected from all nine of the county’s incorporated cities. That said, applicants are encouraged to reach out with any related questions, and we will connect you to the Ag + Open Space Geographic Information System (GIS) staff who can answer your questions and make any needed changes as merited.

**Projects with Significant Community Based Support**

Question:

Are you looking for a public comment plan, or for the public comments to be completed by submittal of final application.

Answer:

One of the Community Spaces Matching Grant Program’s primary goals is to support the creation of well-identified and high priority community open space needs. Thus, we are looking for Full Applications that document various forms of community support including: outreach efforts, organizational letters of support, events, workshops, tours, public comments, etc.

**Combination (Acquisition/Improvement) Project Competitiveness**

Question:

Is applying for a mix of acquisition and improvement funding competitive — or would you recommend focusing on MGP funding for one or the other?

Answer:

The voter approved [Ag + Open Space 2006 Expenditure Plan](https://www.sonomaopenspace.org/wp-content/uploads/Measure-F_Expenditure-Plan-2006_Exhibit-A.pdf) prioritizes “MGP projects that bring the experience of open space to populous areas of the County through the creation of minimally developed recreational, education and community gatherings spaces and that also offer natural resource restoration and enhancement and/or access to local food and fiber production.” Thus, combination Acquisition and Improvement projects receive slightly greater points than stand alone Acquisition or Improvement project proposals.

**Competitiveness for projects previously awarded**

Question:

Would we be competitive if our project was awarded two years ago for an acquisition phase?

Answer:

The Community Spaces Matching Grant Program is a competitive grant process. Relative competitiveness is determined by the number and types of projects, and project scoring, in light of the funding available. In an effort to distribute MGP resources to underserved areas, projects are preferred in areas (measured by census tract) where no MGP projects have been awarded in the previous three funding cycles. However, this metric has a score of 2.5 out of possible 100 points, so there are many other factors, as noted above, that determine overall project competitiveness.

**Authorizing Resolution**

Question:

Would the resolution be required for the pre-application?

Answer:

No. The Pre-Application asks if you have the capacity to secure an Authorizing Resolution, which establishes that the applicant is aware of this requirement in the event they are invited to submit a Full Application.

**Pre-Application rolling grant process**

Question:

Do pre-application approvals get rolled over to the next funding cycle? If your project is denied on the pre-application because it does not appear competitive in this round, would it roll to the next round or would a new application be required?

Answer:

When proposed project Pre-Applications are determined to be eligible, applicants are invited to complete a Full Application. If an eligible Pre-Application does not submit a Full Application during a funding cycle, their eligible Pre-Application would be rolled over to the proceeding funding cycle.

If a proposed project Pre-Application is not found eligible, applicants can consider modifying it to make it eligible in either the current or proceeding round.

If a Pre-Application is found eligible and a Full Application is submitted during a funding cycle, but is not awarded funds, both the Pre-Application and Full Application will roll over to the proceeding funding cycle unless the applicants chooses to submit a different application.

**Previously Funded Project eligibility**

Question:

If partial funding is awarded and the project will be phased, can the applicant apply again for the next round?

Answer:

Yes.

**Total Project Costs clarification, Pre-Application, pg. 3**.

Question:

What is the difference between Total Matching Grant Project Cost and Total Project cost on the pre-application budget question page 3. Is there an example?

Answer:

Noting the example below, Total Matching Grant Project Cost is the sum of the funds requested, $500,000, plus the matching funds, $250,000 (50% matching grant requirement), which equals $750,000. Total project cost refers to the entire cost of the project which includes costs that are in addition to the Total Matching Grant Project Cost. In the case below, additional cost outside the Total Matching Grant Project Cost is $250,000, when added to the Total Matching Grant Project Costs, the Total Project Cost is $1,000,000.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Grant Funding Request: |  $  |  500,000  |
| Matching Funds: |  $  |  250,000  |
| Total Matching Grant Project Cost:  |  $  |  750,000  |
| **TOTAL PROJECT COST:**  |  $  |  1,000,000  |

**Funding Cycle Available Funds**

Question:

If the requests exceed available funding prior to the August submittal, when will the additional funds become available through the rolling application process?

Answer:

Ag + Open Space is authorized to dedicate $3 million for the 2024 funding cycle. Full Proposals submitted by the August 16 due date will be considered for 2024 funding. The next round of $3 million in funding will be available for MGP projects considered in the 2025 funding cycle. Full Proposals submitted after August 16, 2024 will be considered for the 2025 funding round up to the 2025 due date (still TBD). That being said, the Board of Directors make the final funding determinations, and they may choose to allocate additional or less funding to projects accepted into the Community Spaces Matching Grant Program.

**Pre-Application submittal timing**

Question:

Is there an advantage to submitting a Pre-Application sooner rather than later? Better to submit early and somewhat incomplete than later and fully complete?

Answer:

The sooner applicants submit Pre-Applications, the sooner they will be considered for an invitation to complete a Full Application and be eligible to be accepted into the Matching Grant Program for project funding. Full Application annual funding cycle due dates are noted in the Answer above.

The purpose of the Pre-Application is to:

* Establish relationships with applicants early in the application process to support the development of urban open space projects aligned with the Matching Grant Program goals;
* Determine project eligibility; and
* As needed, offer grant application Technical Assistance (TA) to project sponsors serving economically disadvantaged communities who otherwise don’t have the resources required to submit an MGP Full Application.

Applicants are encouraged to submit Pre-Application when their proposed project has developed to the stage where they 1) Can complete a Full Application; or 2) Have reached the point where completing a Full Application is beyond the capacity of the organization, and they require technical assistance.

**Recreation Covenant allowable structures**

Question:

Is there a list of project structures that are allowable within the [recreational covenant](https://www.sonomaopenspace.org/wp-content/uploads/Recreation-Covenant-Template-2023_remediated.pdf)?

Answer:
No. The Recreation Covenant is a legal contract that requires the property owner to convey a recreation conservation covenant to Ag + Open Space to assure that the property will be continuously used, maintained and operated by the owner and its successor in interest as a public park and open space preserve in perpetuity, available to the public for low-intensity public outdoor recreation and education uses which are consistent with the Conservation Easement.

For a list of MGP eligible project structures, please review the [Eligible Project Activities and Funding](https://www.sonomaopenspace.org/wp-content/uploads/Eligible-Project-Activities-and-Funding-Eligibility-ADA-1.pdf) document on the website.

**Funding Cycle Timing**

Question:

In the first cycle there is $3 million available, when does the rolling second cycle begin?

Answer:

As noted on the [Ag + Open Space website](https://www.sonomaopenspace.org/how-we-work/matching-grant-program/), Full Applications to be considered for the 2024 funding round must be received by August 16, 2024, with funding determinations by the Board of Directors estimated to occur in December. Full Applications to be considered for the authorized $3 million 2025 funding round will be accepted from August 17, 2024, with funding determinations expected in December of 2025.