



Board Report

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Agenda Number: 5.

PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE MARCH 15, 2023

SUBJECT: AWARD RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECREATION ACCESS COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

CONSIDER:

- A. APPROVING project selection and programming of \$1,000,000 for the Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program (Attachment A).
- B. AUTHORIZING the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or her designee to negotiate and execute all necessary agreements for approved projects.
- C. AUTHORIZING the CEO or her designee to adjust programming amounts, including, but not limited to, soliciting additional project applications, shifting funding amounts between the awarded projects, and/or increasing award amounts should additional funding become available.

ISSUE

On June 27, 2019, the Metro Board of Directors (Board) approved a motion directing staff to “collaborate with the County of Los Angeles [Regional Park and] Open Space District by contributing \$1 million in funding to create a grant program for cities and non-profits to fund transit to parks programs and initiatives” (Attachment B). The Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program, developed by the County of Los Angeles with input from Metro staff (Attachment C), allocates \$1 million for investment in transit improvements to increase access to parks and open spaces.

Staff has solicited, received, and evaluated project submittals. Staff recommends partial awards for both project submittals received as described in this report.

This funding recommendation is aligned with the goals and recommendations in the Board-adopted Transit to Parks Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) and motion to provide funding up to \$1 million. Board approval is necessary to program the funds for the recipient agencies.

BACKGROUND

On June 27, 2019, the Board adopted the Strategic Plan (Item 22, File #2018-0774). The Strategic Plan presents a systematic vision for increasing access to parks and open space countywide and specifically addresses access inequities shown in the Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department's 2016 Countywide Parks Needs Assessment. The Strategic Plan analyzed data to identify target locations and described best practices and techniques for self-sustaining projects. At the same meeting, the Board directed staff to partner with the LA County Regional Park and Open Space District (RPOSD) by contributing \$1 million in funding for the Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program, with the intent of funding transit service, connections (e.g., shuttles from fixed route transit), or related efforts. Metro's funding for this program is leveraging the County's Measure A funding while collectively improving access to parks and open space countywide.

Staff previously worked with RPOSD staff on the 2019-2020 Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program guidelines to reference the Strategic Plan and emphasize funding projects that implement programs and initiatives from the Plan. The grant program opened on September 9, 2019, and closed on February 25, 2020. Staff was notified on July 23, 2020, by RPOSD staff that the program was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, staff continued to coordinate with RPOSD staff on the re-release of the Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program. The re-released grant program opened on June 20, 2022, and closed on September 29, 2022. Potential eligible applicants could submit their applications through RPOSD's Grants Management System. Promotion of the funding program was sent via e-blast through RPOSD's distribution list that, combined with several additional recipients provided by Metro, totaled nearly 3,000 staff persons from potential eligible agency applicants. On July 7, 2022, RPOSD held a virtual workshop for potential eligible applicants for the Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program. Staff also promoted the funding program through the Bus Operations Subcommittee and Local Transit System Subcommittee. The program received two applications requesting Metro's funding.

Staff surveyed eligible applicants who did not apply for the program to determine if potential barriers limited the response. The results of the assessment concluded three common factors:

1. Labor shortages, especially bus operators, dissuaded agencies from applying for funding to expand transit service.
2. Available funding is insufficient to sustain service long-term, and agencies are hesitant to seek funding for limited term pilots.
3. Agency staff transition and turnover hindered program awareness.

DISCUSSION

The overarching goals of Metro's funding for the Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program align with those in the Strategic Plan, which are to identify targeted, holistic ways to increase access to parks and open spaces, especially for communities most in need of such access.

Program Requirements

Metro's funding component for the Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program included the following program requirements:

- Lead applicants must be a local/municipal transit agency or a public park authority.
- Applicants are required to identify and partner with a community-based organization (CBO) as part of the project development process.
- Funding available for new or augmented transit service and supportive elements, including transit stop improvements, marketing materials, educational and interpretive programming, improved signage, and wayfinding, among others.
- New or augmented transit service must connect a Strategic Plan-identified “Community of Interest” (generally, communities that suffer from poor access to parks and outdoor recreation) to a high-quality park or open space.
- Ten percent (10%) local match requirement can be cash or “in-kind” resources, such as staff time.
- Community engagement, market research, and performance monitoring requirements.

Project Selection

Two applications were submitted by September 29, 2022, requesting Metro’s funding from the Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program. Metro assembled an evaluation team composed of four agency staff from multiple departments for projects seeking funding from Metro. The four independent evaluators scored both applications. Applications were scored using the following criteria:

- Project Elements
- Project Outcomes
- Supportive Programs & Initiatives
- Innovative Partnerships
- Community Engagement & Market Research
- Budget & Funding Strategy
- Performance Monitoring & Cost Effectiveness

Funding recommendations are based on the average total evaluation score and are limited by the amount of available funds (Attachment A). Both projects, as described below, are eligible, scored favorably, and are recommended for partial funding. Both applicants have confirmed that projects are viable with partial funding and can commence. Given the partial awards, the recommended action provides the CEO discretion to adjust the award amounts.

- *Mt. Wilson Express Route Development & Operations*
Weekend shuttle to connect transit riders from Memorial Park Station on the Metro L Line (Gold) to the Angeles National Forest. The route travels along the 210 Freeway to Angeles Crest Highway (Highway 2), with forest stops at the Mt. Wilson Observatory, the Haramokngna American Indian Cultural Center at Red Box, Clear Creek Information Center, and trailheads at Eaton Saddle, Colby Canyon and Gould Mesa.
- *Nature Education Program at the Stone Barn Nature Center in Glendale's Deukmejian Wilderness Park*
Bus transportation with designated stops in Glendale to visit Deukmejian Wilderness Park one day a week to allow youth and their families to explore the park on their own, as part of the

monthly Glendale Outdoors (GO!) Program where youth and their families can ride the bus at no charge.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

There is no direct safety impact associated with the recommended action.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Approval of the award recommendation for the Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program would have a one-time \$1 million financial impact to the agency. Funding for this program fulfills the Board directed intent to broaden the reach of the County's Measure A funding, which collectively improves access to parks and open spaces countywide.

Impact to Budget

The Office of Management and Budget has identified eligible and available Prop A/C/TDA Administrative funds as the funding source for the \$1 million award recommendation. The FY24 Budget will include funds in Project 473003 and Cost Center 0441. Since these are multi-year projects, the Cost Center managers and Chief Planning Officer will be responsible for budgeting in future years.

EQUITY PLATFORM

The recommended action awards funds to two eligible projects. Award recommendations are based on criteria that culminate a multi-step process that considers and elevates equity considerations at all stages. Specifically, to be considered for funding, projects must provide connections to park facilities from "Communities of Interest" as designated in the Strategic Plan. Communities of Interest are designated based on a variety of socio-economic factors, health indices, and are most associated with locations with poor access to open space and outdoor recreation. Both awarded projects would provide transportation service within at least 3 Metro-designated Equity Focused Communities within Pasadena and Glendale, respectively. Note that precise routing is subject to change. Beyond this direct benefit, residents of other Equity Focused Communities may benefit by connecting to these services from the larger transit network. As such, the selected projects will benefit transit riders in specifically targeted communities with lower incomes and poor health outcomes. Further effort will be undertaken by implementing awarded projects to ensure that intended benefits to highest need residents are realized. This includes a requirement for awarded projects to conduct inclusive outreach and to partner with community-based organizations (CBO), which aligns with Metro's own CBO Partnering Strategy. Potential harms associated with the projects are limited and may include noise and congestion for local residents along transit service routes, as well as limited utility of these projects for transit riders in locations that would require long travel times. Potential harms may be reduced by outreach and community involvement during the project, grant oversight from Metro staff, and through thoughtful project design.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The program advances several Strategic Plan Goals including:

- Goal #1: High-quality mobility options - advances new transit connections to high-quality parks and open spaces for communities who lack that type of access.
- Goal #2: Outstanding trip experiences for all - selected project will be coupled with supportive elements to both encourage the success and help raise the visibility of this transit service including marketing materials, educational and interpretive programming, improved signage and wayfinding, among others.
- Goal #3: Enhancing communities and lives - targeting investment to “Communities of Interest” that were identified by overlaying three pre-existing measures of disadvantage with a series of demographic characteristics.
- Goal #4: Transform LA County through collaboration and leadership - prompts new partnership models with transit providers, park agencies, and community-based organizations to deliver various project elements.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board could elect not to approve the selected projects and the programming of funds; however, this is not recommended as the Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program is a Board-directed activity (Attachment B). Without approval and programming of funds for the selected projects under the Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program, this would further delay increasing transit access to a high-quality park and open space areas for communities who lack that type of access.

NEXT STEPS

Upon Board approval, the respective implementing agencies will be notified, and Funding Agreements will be executed. Staff will continue to work with the selected projects as described in this report. Annual updates will be provided to the Board.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Award Recommendations

Attachment B - Transit to Parks Board Motion 22.1

Attachment C - Recreation Access Competitive Grant Program Guidelines

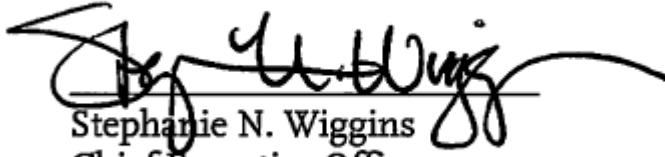
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