

SAN DIEGO RIVER CONSERVANCY

Directed Grant Program



FINAL PROGRAM GUIDELINES
FOR GOVERNING BOARD APPROVAL

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Program Manager
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I. Introduction

A. Background

The San Diego River Conservancy (“Conservancy”) is a state agency, established in 2002, to work within the San Diego River watershed to implement multi-benefit projects that protect and enhance the San Diego River and its connected resources (Public Resources Code, Division 22.9.). The San Diego River Conservancy Act authorizes the Conservancy to undertake projects and award grants to achieve the goals set forth in Division 22.9. The Conservancy works along the entire length of the San Diego River, from its mouth in the City of San Diego at Ocean Beach to its headwaters in the mountains near Julian. The Conservancy’s jurisdiction also includes all of the contributing area to the San Diego River watershed including streams and tributaries, an estuary, wetlands, reservoirs, uplands, meadows and forests. A map of the Conservancy’s jurisdiction can be viewed at www.sdrc.ca.gov.

The Conservancy’s Directed Grant Program seeks to support multi-benefit projects that advance a number of **goals**, including but not limited to:

- Conserving land
- Protecting resources
- Reducing flood and fire risk
- Improving water quality
- Protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats
- Completing the San Diego River Trail
- Providing public access for the enjoyment of the San Diego River Park and open space, trails, campgrounds and park facilities
- Removing invasive plant species from the watershed
- Increasing native habitat and promoting the re-establishment of native species
- Promoting cultural and tribal preservation, and historical interpretation of the San Diego River and its people
- Protecting the natural and scenic beauty of the San Diego River watershed

B. Budgetary Language

Funding for the Directed Grant Program (Grant Program) may be provided through the General Fund, Special Funds, Proposition 68, and other eligible funding sources, subject to the availability of funds through the State’s regular budget process. The funding for this grant program shall be available for eligible entities to implement local assistance projects. If additional eligible funding sources become available, the Conservancy may allocate those funding sources to support this grant program.

Project requirements or limitations tied to specific funding sources or state budget allocations will be discussed with applicant and appropriate language included in the grant agreement, if awarded.

II. Program Purposes, Required Criteria and Eligibility

A. Purpose of Grant Program Guidelines

These Grant Program Guidelines support goals listed above, projects that create or improve ecological health of the watershed and result in a combination of multiple benefits, including but not limited to native habitats, ecosystems services, and community benefits.

These draft guidelines were posted on the Conservancy's website for public comment from January 12, 2022 through February 22, 2022. Comments must be submitted by February 27, 2022 via email to dustin.harrison@sdrca.gov or delivered to the San Diego River Conservancy, 11769 Waterhill Road, Building 2, Lakeside, California, 92040.

The guidelines may be revised based on comments received and will be presented to the Conservancy's Governing Board at a public meeting for approval. These Guidelines are effective upon approval of the San Diego River Conservancy Governing Board.

Listed below are key action dates and a proposed schedule for the process:

Step	Schedule
Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)	January 7, 2022
Draft guidelines posted	January 12, 2022
Workshop & Meeting Join Zoom Meeting https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84185647248	February 15, 2022 at 1:00 p.m.
Public comments due	February 27, 2022
Adopt final grant program guidelines	March-May 2022

B. Project Eligibility

To be eligible for an award from the Conservancy under this grant program, projects must meet all of the following:

- Eligible entity
- Be located within the San Diego River watershed
- Be consistent with Conservancy goals and program priorities
- Achieves the Conservancy's mission, statutory programs and goals
- Be consistent with requirements of funding source and budget provisions
- Promote or implement approved state plans and priorities
- Result in clear, demonstrable benefits to the public or environment
- Meet all California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and/or National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, as applicable
- Include long-term management plan and/or possible agreement with Conservancy to maintain project site for 10-20 years, as applicable
- Funds from Budget Act 2021-22, Section 73, must be spent by May 17, 2024. Deadlines for other funding sources will be provided when available.

C. Eligible Entity

Project applicant must be (1) a public agency, including any city, county, city and county,

special district, joint powers authority, state agency, public college, public university; (2) a non-profit organization that qualifies under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code; or (3) a Native American Tribe that is either federally recognized or is a California Native American Tribe on the Native American Heritage Commission contact list and located within traditional Kumeyaay territory and culturally affiliated with the County of San Diego.

D. Program Priorities

- (1) Land Acquisition/Conservation
- (2) Public Access, Recreation, Education and Interpretation Projects
- (3) Climate, Wildfire and Forest Resilience
- (4) Resource Protection and Native Habitat Enhancement or Restoration
- (5) Benefits disadvantaged, severely disadvantaged or underserved communities (<https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>)

III. Grant Application Process

A. Contact the Conservancy/Request Concept Proposal

The first step in the application process is to email the Conservancy and summarize the potential project, discuss design and permitting, describe its benefits to the environment and local community, provide budget estimate and matching or in-kind funds, and request a concept proposal. The Conservancy will conduct a brief consultation with applicant.

B. Concept Proposal

The next step in the process is to submit a Concept Proposal. This form is posted on the Conservancy's website and may be updated periodically. The Conservancy may elect to solicit targeted proposals for a specific project type. The Conservancy may provide technical assistance to assist applicants in developing their projects. For any questions concerning the grant program, please contact Dustin Harrison, Environmental Scientist, at dustin.harrison@sdrca.gov or 619-390-0571.

C. Solicitation Periods

After Concept Proposals are submitted, the Conservancy will meet with potential applicants, visit project sites, evaluate applicants' organizational capacity and confer on planned projects, after which Conservancy staff may invite applicants to submit full applications. Conservancy staff and technical experts will review and consult subject matter experts, as appropriate.

The Conservancy reserves the right to reject any applicant who has a history of performance issues with past grants or other agreements with any public entity.

D. Application Review and Evaluation

Full applications will be reviewed and evaluated based on how well the proposed project advances the objectives of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, meets its project evaluation criteria, and meets the goals and priorities identified in these Program Guidelines. To be funded by this Directed Grant Program, projects must be consistent

with both the Conservancy’s enabling legislation and the conditions listed in these guidelines.

E. Conservancy Project Selection Criteria

The Conservancy’s Program Guidelines provide required criteria that must be satisfied by all projects as well as additional program criteria that are not mandatory, but which will be considered for purposes of evaluation. Proposals scoring 80 or more points may be eligible for a recommendation for award:

Criteria	Points
Benefits to the public and resources and alignment with funding and program goals	20
Project design and budget	20
Achieves Conservancy goals, mission, and statute	15
Alignment with State plans and priorities	15
Organizational capacity and project readiness	10
Collaboration and Community, Tribal, Non-Profit and/or Government Support	10
Leveraged Funding	10
Total Points Possible	100

Evaluation Criteria:

1) Benefits to the public and resources and alignment with funding and program goals (20 points)

The degree to which the project aligns with funding program goals, improves public access, education, watershed health, and results in multiple, tangible public benefits. How strong is the need for the specific project? How critical are the natural, cultural, tribal, historical resources, and public benefit outcomes?

2) Project design and budget (20 points)

Clarity on the project purpose, goals, deliverables, treatment approach, schedule, and budget. Is the project design supported by science and proven methodologies or the use of new or innovative technology or practices? If it is a planning project, does it prepare all needed elements for the future implementation of the project, or address needs on a larger landscape scale? Are the proposed deliverables appropriate for the project? Is the budget adequate and reasonable to complete the project, with costs clearly defined and supported?

3) Achieves Conservancy goals, mission and statute (15 points)

Division 22.9 of the Public Resources Code “[The San Diego River Conservancy Act](#),” at Public Resources Code Sections 32630 – 32659.9 [\[doc\]](#) [\[pdf\]](#) a [Strategic Plan 2018-2023](#)

(http://sdrca.gov/webmaster/arc/docs/StratPlan_update_2018-2023_Final.pdf)

Program areas:

- Land acquisition and conservation
- Recreation
- Education/interpretation
- Habitat protection and restoration
- Cultural, tribal and historical resource preservation
- Water quality and supply
- Outreach, Education and Interpretation

For Conservancy goals see page 1, 2nd paragraph.

For Conservancy's mission see, <https://sdrca.gov/> , Page 1, 2nd paragraph.

4) The extent to which the project promotes and implements state priorities (15 points)

Promotion and implementation of State plans and priorities require that projects be consistent with adopted statewide plans and priorities. Related state plans include, but are not limited to: California Water Action Plan, Forest Carbon Plan, Safeguarding California – California's Climate Adaptation Strategy, the 2017 Climate Change Scoping Plan (Scoping Plan) and the Integrated Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Program, Natural Working Lands Plan, and Wildlife Action Plan, Water Quality Control Plan for the San Diego Basin, as well as other adopted State plans and Governor's Executive Orders.

5) Organizational capacity and project readiness (10 points)

The degree to which the project is ready to proceed promptly and can meet funding expenditure requirements, if funded. Are property owners supportive of the project? In addition, for Implementation Projects: Is project planning and coordination complete? Is access secured, environmental compliance, permitting, or other necessary preparations complete, as appropriate? Is all funding identified or secured?

6) Collaboration and Community, Tribal, Non-Profit and/or Government support (10 points)

Support letters from local, state, tribal and federal organizations and community members. Extent to which the public, non-profit groups, landowners, and others will support or contribute to the project.

7) Leveraged funding (10 points)

Include other sources of funds, including matching funds and in-kind funds or donations.

IV. Ineligible Projects

Funds must be spent consistent with the funding source. Examples of ineligible projects include, but are not limited to:

- Projects cannot be used to fund acquisitions of land by eminent domain.
- Projects that include acquisition of property for more than fair market value.
- Projects that include both acquisition and development.
- Projects that are intended to correct problems caused by inadequate routine maintenance.
- Projects that would be used to fulfill mitigation requirements imposed by law.
- Projects cannot establish or increase an endowment.

V. Grant Awards

Grants will be awarded after approval by the Conservancy Board. The Conservancy Board holds public board meetings approximately 6 times a year. Staff recommendations will be provided to the Conservancy Board to document how each project meets criteria objectives and priorities for this Directed Grant program. Recommended awards will be posted on the Conservancy's website prior to the public meeting.

VI. Additional Information

A. Grant Provisions

Following Conservancy Board approval of a grant, staff will prepare a grant agreement with detailed conditions specific to the project. The grant agreement will be the binding legal agreement between the Conservancy and its grantee. The grant agreement must be signed by the grantee before funds will be disbursed. Several typical grant agreement provisions are:

- Actual awards are conditional upon funds being available from the State.
- Grantees must submit a detailed project work program and budget for Conservancy approval.
- Grant funds will only be paid in arrears on a reimbursement basis.
- Site control from applicant or the landowner is needed prior to commencing work.
- Grantees may be required to reimburse the Conservancy for some or all of the disbursed grant funds if the project is not successfully completed.
- Grantees must maintain liability insurance during grant term and include the San Diego River Conservancy as an "additional insured."
- Expenses incurred before the Conservancy grant agreement is executed are not reimbursable.
- The project complies with all applicable current laws and regulations affecting development projects, including but not limited to, legal requirements for construction and implementation, building codes, health and safety codes, state contractor's and other licenses, and disabled access laws.
- Grantee must certify that all applicable permits have been obtained.
- Grantees must comply with signage requirements acknowledging funding

source.

- Grantees must sign the grant agreement and exhibits, as needed, and comply with general terms and conditions in order to receive funds.

B. Payment of Grant Funds

Funds cannot be disbursed until there is a fully executed grant agreement between the Conservancy and grantee and satisfactory site control is provided, including a Memorandum of Understanding for operations and maintenance (if applicable); CEQA/NEPA (if applicable) is completed; and signage is installed. As stated above, project payments are made on a reimbursement basis (i.e., the grantee pays for services, products or supplies; submits invoices and proof of payment; and is then reimbursed by the Conservancy). Each Request for Disbursement (RFD) submitted will require a progress report with supporting documentation. It generally takes 4-6 weeks to process payment once a complete RFD is submitted to the Conservancy. Up to ten percent (10%) of the amount submitted for reimbursement may be withheld and issued as a final payment upon project completion.

C. Use of Project Property

Grantee must maintain and operate the property acquired, restored or developed in a manner consistent with the grant agreement and grant guidelines. Land acquisition, conservation, and trail easement proposals must include a plan describing the proposed restrictions and reservations for the easement and the funding mechanism available to support the plan. The final conservation easement terms and conditions are subject to approval by the Conservancy.

Grantees must own the land or hold a lease, long-term agreement, or other legal, long-term interest in the land that is satisfactory to the Conservancy.

D. Project Monitoring and Reporting

The Full Application must include a monitoring and reporting component that explains how the effectiveness of the project will be measured and reported. In addition, Conservancy staff will work with grantees to develop appropriate monitoring and reporting templates and procedures. The monitoring and reporting component will vary depending on the nature of the project.

E. Loss of Funding (*not a complete list*)

The following are examples of actions that may result in a grantee's loss of funding:

- (1) Grantee fails to execute a grant agreement within three (3) months of grant approval.
- (2) Grantee withdraws from the grant program.
- (3) Property cannot be acquired at or below approved fair market value.
- (4) Grantee loses willing seller(s).
- (5) Grantee loses site control or landowner does not sign an operation and maintenance agreement.
- (6) Grantee fails to submit required documentation within the time periods specified in the grant agreement.

- (7) Grantee fails to submit evidence of CEQA/NEPA compliance as specified by the grant agreement.
- (8) Grantee changes project scope without prior approval from the Conservancy.
- (9) Grantee fails to complete the project.
- (10) Grantee fails to demonstrate sufficient progress.

F. State Audit and Accounting

Audit Requirements

If the project is selected for audit, the grantee will be contacted in advance. The audit shall include all books, papers, accounts, documents, or other records of the grantee, as they relate to the project for which the funds were granted.

The grantee must have the project records, including the source documents and canceled checks, readily available and provide an employee with knowledge of the project to assist the auditor. The Grantee must provide a copy of any document, paper, record, or the like, requested by the auditor.

Accounting requirements

The grantee must maintain an accounting system that:

- accurately reflects fiscal transactions, with the necessary controls and safeguards,
- provides a good audit trail, including original source documents such as purchase orders, receipts, progress payments, invoices, time cards, canceled checks, etc.
- provides accounting data so the total cost of each individual project can be readily determined.

Records Retention

Project records must be retained for a period of three (3) years after final payment is made by the Conservancy or one (1) year following an audit, whichever is longer. A project is considered complete upon receipt of final grant payment from the Conservancy.

Ongoing Project Reporting

Grantees are required to submit reports on the progress of the project as requested by the Conservancy through the term of the grant agreement. Entities will be provided a final report of tasks completed and final accounting, including matching and in-kind contributions with the final invoice.

END OF GUIDELINES