

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission Report

For the Community Development Committee meeting of June 17, 2019

Subject: Competitive Equity Grant Program for the Regional Parks System, 2019 Fund Distribution Plan

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Adopt the 2019 Fund Distribution Plan for the Competitive Equity Grant Program for the Regional Parks System.
2. Recommend that as the equity program moves forward, additional money be provided to create awareness of the Metropolitan Council's emphasis on expanding equitable usage of the Regional Parks and Trails system.

Summary of Committee Discussion/Questions

Emmett Mullin, Regional Parks Manager, Amanda Lovelee, Parks Ambassador, and Dan Marckel, Planning Analyst presented the staff report and proposed Fund Distribution Plan to the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission at its June 6, 2019 meeting. Commissioners recommend the Fund Distribution Plan for adoption by the Council and additionally forward several related recommendations, included below.

First, Commission members expressed the need for non-capital funding to more fully pursue the equitable use goals of this program. Currently, only capital funding is proposed. This source does not support critical activities such as programming, communication, and awareness-building. Commissioners recommend the Council pursue additional non-capital funds in the future.

Second, Commission members expressed the need for more capital funding for equity-centered work in the Regional Parks System. The current amount being discussed for the program (\$300,000 in capital bonds in 2019 with the possibility of an additional \$331,000 in capital bonds for 2020) will not meet the needs of the Regional Parks System.

Third, commission members discussed the importance of explicit and verifiable evaluation when measuring progress toward the program's goal of increased equitable use.

Finally, commission members advised staff on program refinement as the formal application and review process is created in the coming months. Advice included articulating clear expectations about how community engagement work can be part of funded capital projects; the need for an open grant review process; and ensuring that review meetings are posted on the Metropolitan Council's website and are open to the public. Staff responded that the current Fund Distribution Plan includes language about an open review process.

The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission approved the first proposed action unanimously, as described above. Next, Commissioner Moeller motioned, and it was seconded by Commissioner Theisen to recommend as the equity program moves forward, additional money be provided to create awareness of the Metropolitan Council's emphasis on expanding equitable usage of our Regional Parks and Trails system. It passed unanimously.

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: June 6, 2019

For the Community Development Committee meeting of June 17, 2019

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of June 26, 2019

Subject: Competitive Equity Grant Program for the Regional Parks System, 2019 Fund Distribution Plan

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, Chapter 8, Strategy 4

Staff Prepared/Presented: Emmett Mullin, Regional Parks Manager (651-602-1360), Amanda Lovelee, Senior Outreach Coordinator (651-602-1375), Dan Marckel, Planning Analyst (651-602-1548)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council adopt the 2019 Fund Distribution Plan for the Competitive Equity Grant Program for the Regional Parks System.

Background

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* commits the Council to developing a set-aside, competitive equity grant program in 2019. This program is designed to explicitly strengthen equitable usage of the Regional Parks System. To develop this grant program, the Council worked in close collaboration with Regional Parks Implementing Agencies, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and other partners to formulate criteria and measures for awarding grants to Regional Parks Implementing Agencies for projects aimed at advancing equitable usage of the Regional Parks System.

The idea to establish an equity grant program emerged out of Council Research conducted in 2014 with select communities of color. The commitment was formalized as part of the original *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* in 2015. During the 2018 update of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, the Council committed to launching this program in 2019.

There has been a concentrated effort since the beginning of 2019 to develop the grant program with extensive participation from the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the Council's Equity Advisory Committee, the Community Development Committee, and the Regional Parks Implementing Agencies. The proposed Fund Distribution Plan reflects the feedback gathered from these conversations.

This presentation will review what we heard during the development of the 2019 Fund Distribution Plan for the Competitive Equity Grant Program for the Regional Parks System (Attachment 1). Also, it will describe how we designed the proposal to meet the program's two goals of building capacity around equity work and strengthening equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability.

Rationale

The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, Finance Chapter 8, Strategy 4 states that equity is a consideration in the Regional Parks System funding and investment. The equity grant program is one Council strategy for advancing equity in the region.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The competitive equity grant program seeks to advance the *Thrive MSP 2040* outcome of equity by increasing the equitable usage of the Regional Parks System by all residents of the region.

Funding

There is \$300,000 for the equity grant program included in the Council's adopted 2019 budget.

REGIONAL PARKS SYSTEM COMPETITIVE EQUITY GRANT PROGRAM

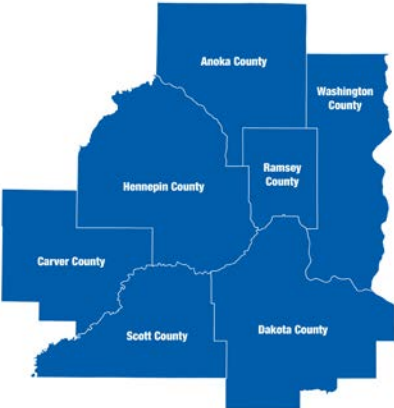
2019 Fund Distribution Plan



The Council's mission is to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous metropolitan region

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The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization for the seven-county Twin Cities area. The Council operates the regional bus and rail system, collects and treats wastewater, coordinates regional water resources, plans and helps fund regional parks, and administers federal funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The 17-member Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the governor.

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2019 Fund Distribution Plan

This 2019 Fund Distribution Plan describes the Metropolitan Council's intentions for the Regional Parks System Competitive Equity Grant Program in 2019. Specifically, this plan:

- Establishes the amount of funding available for the grants during 2019 and the limits that apply to individual awards.
- Sets the schedule for submitting grant applications, reviewing them, and awarding the funds.
- Describes the criteria the Metropolitan Council will use in selecting projects for grants.
- Defines who is eligible to apply for the grants.

The Council will provide more detailed information and instructions on process, grant terms, eligible and ineligible uses of grant funds, and schedules with the release of the grant application in WebGrants.

Background and History

Under [Minnesota Statute 473.145](#), the Metropolitan Council is responsible for preparing a comprehensive development guide for the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Council's [Thrive MSP 2040 \(Thrive\)](#), adopted in May 2014, provides the framework, shared vision, and policy foundation for the future of the region. The Council uses *Thrive* to develop its regional system and policy plans, as well as development policies and implementation strategies. Taken together, these plans constitute the comprehensive development guide that shapes the orderly and economical development of the region. Minnesota Statute 473.145 specifies three metropolitan systems plans, one of which is the [Regional Parks Policy Plan](#).

Thrive specifies that the Council will collaborate with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC), Regional Parks Implementing Agencies (Agencies), and state partners to "strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability." To address those goals, the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* committed the Council to creating a set-aside competitive grant program for capital projects explicitly intended to strengthen equitable usage of the Regional Parks System.

In 2019, Council staff built on earlier engagement with community members and worked with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the Council's Equity Advisory Committee, regional parks implementing agency staff, and the Council's Community Development Committee in a collaborative process to establish the structure of the 2019 pilot year of the program and this fund distribution plan.

For more information about the engagement process and the demographics of visitors to the Regional Parks System, refer to [Regional Park Use Among Select Communities of Color \(2014\)](#), [2016 Regional Parks System Visitor Study Report](#), the [Regional Parks Policy Plan Update Community Engagement](#)

[Summary 2018](#), or research from others. Council Research staff are available to provide additional data upon request.

Purpose

The Council has designated a portion of its regional parks bonds to provide financial support to regional parks implementing agencies for capital projects that will strengthen equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents, such as across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and ability. As a by-product of the partnerships and engagement necessary to shape the proposed capital projects, the Council hopes that the Competitive Equity Grant Program will enhance institutional capacity around equity work across the Regional Parks System and individual implementing agencies.

In 2019, all proposals must address one or more of the following 2019 equity focus areas:

- Investments in welcoming underserved populations to the Regional Parks System
- Accessibility to persons living with disabilities
- Racial equity
- Equitable use of regional trails

Eligible Applicants

By state statute¹, applicants must be a regional parks implementing agency, defined as the counties of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Ramsey, Scott and Washington, the cities of Saint Paul and Bloomington, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board and the Three Rivers Park District.² Regional parks implementing agencies are welcome to collaborate on proposals. Individuals and/or other governmental, private, or nonprofit entities are not eligible to apply, but are encouraged to be included as project partners with regional parks implementing agencies.

As a threshold eligibility criterion for these funds, applicants must either have, or be substantially working towards, completing a current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) self-evaluation or transition plan that covers accessibility to the Regional Parks System as required under Title II of the ADA.

Available Funds and Award Limits

- \$300,000 in Council capital bonds is available for the 2019 Regional Parks System Competitive Equity Grant Program. The Council reserves the right to award less than the available funding. The Council may award up to an additional \$331,000 in 2020 capital bonds during this initial round if the quantity and quality of applications are sufficiently robust.
- The Council reserves the right to award less than the amount requested and will negotiate any necessary revisions in project scope prior to finalizing a grant agreement.
- The Council will only consider funding proposals that meet all the required eligibility criteria and receive at least 50 of the 100 potential points.
- Individual Agencies may submit as many applications as desired. However, no Agency may receive more than \$200,000 in a funding cycle or more than two grants in a funding cycle.
- No individual grant shall be less than \$30,000 or more than \$200,000.

¹ Minn. Stat. § 473.315: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=473.315>

² Minn. Stat. § 473.351: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=473.351>

Eligible Uses of Funds

Consistent with authorizing state statutes and the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, all grants must fund projects that meet all of the below criteria to be considered for funding:

- Address one or more of the 2019 equity focus areas outlined above;
- Are within the boundaries of the Regional Parks System or clearly connect visitors to the regional parks and trails within the Regional Parks System (projects located in local and state parks or trails are not eligible for funding);
- Are consistent with the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*;³
- Are broadly consistent with a Council-approved master plan prior to the Council executing a grant agreement;
- Are capital in nature, including real property, personal property, or equipment used in Regional Parks System operations with an estimated useful life of more than one year and with an initial cost of \$5,000 or more:
 - Capital assets may be either intangible (e.g. easements, water rights) or tangible (e.g. land, buildings, building improvements, vehicles, machinery, equipment, and infrastructure);
 - If public engagement work is proposed as part of a project, it must directly inform an existing⁴ or proposed capital project around increasing equitable usage of the Regional Parks System;
 - Do not allow private uses as any private use can jeopardize the tax-exempt status of the bonds.
- Are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Have been approved by their local elected boards either individually or as part of a local capital improvement plans prior to the Council executing a grant agreement.

Applicants are encouraged to think broadly about their project and are invited to contact Council staff with any and all questions about potential eligible uses of funds.

Example Proposals

Proposals could leverage:

1. Collaborative efforts among multiple regional parks implementing agencies working with equity advisors to develop shared knowledge and approaches to identified capital projects to advance equitable usage.
2. Community engagement work to directly inform existing or proposed capital projects.
3. Partnerships between a regional parks implementing agency and a community-led effort to identify and produce a capital project.
4. Public art as a vehicle to welcome underserved communities to regional parks and trails.

³ The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* is available at: <https://metro council.org/Parks/Planning/Parks-Policy-Plan.aspx>

⁴ Existing capital projects are those already in an implementing agency's Capital Improvement Plan.

These examples are meant to spark imaginations rather than limit thinking. Applicants are encouraged to examine and understand their community needs to develop project proposals that meets the spirit of this funding.

Funding Schedule

July 2019	Notice of funding availability and WebGrants open for applications
September 1, 2019	Applications due
December 2019	Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission recommends project selections
December 2019	Community Development Committee recommends project selections
December 2019	Council approves project selections

Proposal Review Process

Council staff will review all proposals to ensure completeness and eligibility.

A review team will score the proposals and make recommendations for funding to MPOSC and the Council. The nine-member team will be composed of:

- three members of the MPOSC,
- two members of the Council's Equity Advisory Committee,
- two Council members who serve on the Community Development Committee, and
- two outside community members.

Chairs (or, in the case of the Equity Advisory Committee, co-chairs) from each committee will appoint team members. The MPOSC Chair will appoint the outside equity advisors after consultation with other MPOSC commissioners and the Council Member liaison to MPOSC.

Members of the review team shall be asked to recuse themselves from comments on any applications on which they have a real or perceived conflict of interest. Council staff will support the work of the review team, which will be responsible for determining its own leadership and meeting structures. Meetings of the review team will be posted on the Council's website and open to observers.

Grant Terms

Grants will have a two-year term with a single one-year extension possible at the administrative discretion of Council staff. Grant agreements must be signed and returned to the Council within 60 days of issuance. All costs eligible for reimbursement must be incurred during the grant term, as amended, and all costs must be submitted within 120 days after the end of the grant term. Unspent grant funds will devolve to the Council.

Project and Program Evaluation

The Council will review the impact of funded projects and the efficacy of the Council's program application processes regularly with a desire to continually improve both. Evaluation results will be public and will inform future Fund Distribution Plans and funding rounds.

Competitive Selection Criteria

Funds are limited and grant applications will be competitively scored. The Council derived the evaluation and scoring criteria used in this program in part from a community engagement effort that included outreach and subsequent review of this Fund Distribution Plan. After Council staff ensure that the applications meet the eligibility criteria outlined on page 3, the review team will score applications according to following criteria:

Evaluation Criteria	Points
<p>Impact on equitable use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal’s clear articulation of the specific underserved population(s) that the project will benefit, including a description of why the proposal has chosen this underserved population(s) • The plausibility of the expectation that the proposed project activities will directly strengthen usage of the Regional Parks System by the intended population(s) • The scale of the project’s impact on equitable usage relative to the proposed expenditures 	25
<p>Community partnerships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal’s demonstration of the active involvement of community organizations and community members in the shared development of, and shared decision-making around, the proposal • The plausibility of the expectation that the active involvement of community organizations and community members will continue through project completion and evaluation • The strength of the proposal’s demonstration of a more equal and balanced power relationship between agencies and communities 	20
<p>Community engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of the proposal’s effective robust community engagement with affected underserved communities to develop the proposal • The strength of the planned public engagement process, aligned with or beyond the Council’s Public Engagement Plan⁵, to successfully engage with the underserved population(s) who would benefit from the proposed capital project 	20
<p>Capacity building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The likelihood that the proposed process of implementing the project will increase the ability of implementing agencies and their community partners to grow their skills in working with underrepresented communities. • The scale of the project’s impact relative to the implementing agency’s current capacity 	15

⁵ The Council’s Public Engagement Plan is available online: <https://metro council.org/About-Us/Publications-And-Resources/Public-Engagement-Plan.aspx>

Evaluation Criteria	Points
Geographic impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The expected geographic breadth of the visitors who will benefit from the project to strengthen equitable use of the Regional Parks System. 	5
Local match and other leveraged funds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implementing agency's capacity to match or leverage the impact of the Council's funds through local funds, grants, or in-kind contributions. (Funds that pass through the Council are not eligible to serve as local match.) 	5
Innovation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal's introduction of creative approaches and / or new models into the Regional Parks System. 	5
Replicability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal's likelihood of introducing new models or examples that could be used across the Regional Parks System to increase equitable use. 	5
Total Possible Points	100



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