

Business Item 2021-2

Regional Parks System Competitive Equity Grant Program, 2021 Notice of Funding Availability

January 19, 2021

Community Development Committee



Equity Grant Program Background

- The *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* commits the Council to develop a competitive equity grant program to strengthen equitable use of the Regional Parks System and enhance institutional capacity around equity work
- The Equity Grant Program was formally established in 2019 through a pilot program with capital funding that resulted in awards for three Regional Park System equity projects
- The pilot program, with feedback from the regional park implementing agencies and 2019 review committee members, illustrated the need for non-capital funding
- The Council responded by authorizing \$1.4 million in Parks Interest Earnings for the 2021 Equity Grant Program
 - These dollars may be used to fund operating costs, including programming and staff

2021 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)

- The 2021 NOFA was developed with input from the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, the Community Development Committee, the Equity Advisory Committee, and regional park implementing agencies' directors, planners, and outreach staff
- The 2021 NOFA emphasizes partnership building, equity programming efforts, internal and inter-agency collaboration, and designing accessible capital projects that not only meet ADA requirements, but provide innovative ways to bring meaningful, rich experiences to users

Funding for the 2021 Equity Grant Program



Council bonds for capital projects	\$664,000
Parks interest earnings, prioritized for non-capital/programming projects	\$1,400,000
TOTAL	\$2,064,000

Eligible Applicants

- Only implementing agencies may apply
- As a condition for participating in this grant program, applicants must either have, or be substantially working towards, completing a current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) self-evaluation or transition plan
- If an Agency's plan is more than ten years old, the Agency is encouraged to apply for a \$20,000 grant through the Equity Grant Program to update its plan



2021 Focus Areas

- Projects must advance equitable use of the Regional Parks System with a focus on one or more of the following:
 - Race
 - Ethnicity
 - Income
 - Ability
 - Age
 - National Origin



Project Proposal Examples

- Collaborative efforts among multiple agencies
 - System-wide marketing plan, system-wide signage, purchasing a shared bike fleet for outreach or education programming, purchasing a mobile classroom to share across the agencies, etc.
- Partnerships between an agency and a community effort to identify and produce a capital project or non-capital programming effort
 - Contracting with a non-profit organization or private consultant to develop and initiate equity programming
- New equity programming efforts
 - Outreach, education, marketing, external communications, special events, translation and interpretation services, staff training, and hiring new staff to develop and implement equity efforts
- Innovative or new capital projects, built on existing partnerships, that will advance accessibility and provide a meaningful experience to users with disabilities

Available Funds and Award Limits

- \$664,000 is available for competitive capital projects
 - Agencies may apply for multiple capital projects, but cannot receive more than \$200,000 in capital funds
- \$1,400,000 in Parks Interest Earnings
 - The Council prioritizes using these interest earnings for non-capital programming projects
 - Agencies may apply for multiple non-capital projects, but cannot receive more than \$200,000 in interest earnings funds
 - Non-capital projects will be reviewed first and recommended for funding; at the review committee's discretion, remaining funds may be recommended for capital projects
 - Parks interest earnings may be used to pay for engagement and outreach activities included in a capital project
- No individual grant shall be less than \$20,000 or more than \$200,000

Guidance to Agencies from Commissioners and Council Members

- Encourage innovative ADA capital projects that are built on established or mature partnerships and provide a meaningful, rich experience for users with disabilities not limited to physical
- Encourage agencies to submit project ideas for non-capital equity programming and to collaborate internally across agency staff
- Both large and small projects are encouraged
- Strong value on partnerships and ideas coming from partners or the community to inform the project
- Encourage projects that build new partnerships and demonstrate how partnerships will grow or be maintained after the grant period
- Collaboration across agencies is encouraged

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 the Council
- The review team will be comprised of members from the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, The Community Development Committee, the Equity Advisory Committee, and Implementing Agency representatives
- Members of the review team shall recuse themselves from scoring or commenting on any applications for which they have a real or perceived conflict of interest

Evaluation and Scoring Criteria

- Prioritize programming, partnership building, and internal collaboration with outreach staff
- 5 review categories:
 - Impact on equitable use
 - Community partnerships
 - Community engagement
 - Capacity building
 - Programming initiatives



Next Steps and Funding Schedule

- February: application period opens for approximately 6 weeks
- March/April: staff review of applications
- April/May: review committee meets and provides funding recommendations
- June: staff brings funding recommendations to the Council for approval



Recommended Action

That the Metropolitan Council authorize the Regional Parks System Competitive Equity Grant Program 2021 Notice of Funding Availability.

Questions, Comments, and Discussion

Jessica Lee, Senior Parks Planner
jessica.lee@metc.state.mn.us

Community Development Division

