



**STATE OF WASHINGTON**

**RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE**

June 2008

**Item #14: Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA)  
Program Proposal for a Trial Evaluation Team  
“Do Not Fund” Process**

**Prepared By:** Greg Lovelady, Grant Services Program Manager

**Presented By:** Greg Lovelady, Grant Services Program Manager

**Approved by the  
Director:**

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**Proposed Action: Decision**

**Summary**

During grant evaluations, evaluators will occasionally say that a specific project does not merit funding even if sufficient monies are available. They have asked for a process to facilitate making a “do not fund” recommendation to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (Board). In response, the Recreation and Conservation Office’s (RCO) staff drafted a process and asked interested people to comment. Overall, staff received favorable comments about the proposal.

**Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Board adopt Resolution #2008-017 to approve this process on a trial basis in the NOVA Program. If the trial is successful, staff will recommend adopting it permanently in NOVA and investigating whether to implement the process in other grant programs.

**Background**

During the process of evaluating grants, there are times when one or more evaluators will agree that a specific project does not merit funding. Reasons may include that the project does little to further the goals of the grant program or that its costs are out of proportion to its benefits. Even if such a project receives a low score, it could still be



approved for funding if sufficient funds are available. The current system has no formal way for an evaluation team to recommend against funding a project.

When RCO staff presented this topic to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board in March 2008, the Board asked staff to re-work its proposed solution, and specifically requested the following revisions:

- All evaluators should explain their rationale, not only those who favor a "do not fund" recommendation.
- The process should have less complexity (for example, avoid using formulas to determine the number of evaluators that would have to concur with a "do not fund" recommendation).

Staff has completed these revisions, summarized as follows. The revised policy is shown in Attachment A.

- Evaluators may nominate a project(s) for "do not fund" consideration at the end of each evaluation day, after evaluating a category, or during the evaluation meeting's wrap-up session.
- If a majority of evaluators want to continue this discussion, RCO staff would invite the applicant to participate (either in-person or by phone) in the post evaluation meeting, typically conducted a few weeks after evaluations.
- In the post evaluation meeting, evaluators would decide whether to adopt a do not fund recommendation.
- If the decision is to adopt, all committee members would document their reasons for supporting or opposing the recommendation. RCO staff would summarize those reasons and provide the information to the Board.

## **Analysis**

All of the comments (Attachment B) received by staff on this second proposal seem to favor implementation.

Comments regarding the fairness of the process should be considered. During the first round of public review (before the March 2008 Board meeting), a comment noted that the timing of the process may be unfair because the applicant would not have received the recommendation until just before the Board's funding meeting. At that point, the applicant would have invested considerable time and effort in completing the process. However, it also was noted that the timing, while unfortunate, might not be avoidable because it can be difficult for evaluators to understand a project's scope until after the technical completion deadline.

### **Next Steps**

If the Board approves the resolution, RCO staff will implement the proposal for NOVA's 2008 grants cycle. Staff will report the outcome of the process to the Board after the cycle.

### **Attachments**

Resolution #2008-017 (revised)

- A. Proposed new language for NOVA Program Manual 14, Project Evaluation section
- B. Public Comments on the Proposed Do Not Fund Policy

**RESOLUTION #2008-017 (revised)**

**NOVA Program Trial Evaluation Team “Do Not Fund” Process**

**WHEREAS**, during grant evaluations, evaluators occasionally suggest that a specific project does not merit funding; and

**WHEREAS**, the reasons for this may include that an eligible project does little to further the grant program’s goals or that its costs are not in proportion to its benefits; and

**WHEREAS**, under the current evaluation system used to recommend projects for grants, there is no formal way for an evaluation team to recommend against funding a project; and

**WHEREAS**, establishing such a process would further the Board’s strategic goal to “[f]und the best projects as determined by the evaluation process”; and

**WHEREAS**, the staff of the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) has solicited public comment on such a process;

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the RCFB does hereby direct its staff to immediately implement the process described in Attachment A hereto on a trial basis for the Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that RCO staff will report to RCFB regarding the effectiveness of the process, together with recommendations on whether it should be continued and considered for other grant programs.

*Resolution moved by:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Resolution seconded by:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Adopted/Defeated/Deferred (underline one)*

*Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

## Proposed New Language for NOVA Program Manual 14 Project Evaluation Section

[PROPOSED NEW TEXT IS UNDERLINED]

**Project Evaluation.** The purpose of evaluations is to provide a basis for funding recommendations. This is done by assessing the merits of each project using the questions found in the appendices to this manual. Before the evaluation meeting, RCO sends evaluators information from the applications that includes project summaries and cost estimates. By appointment, applicants appear before the advisory committee/evaluation team and, over a period of about 25 minutes, orally respond to each evaluation question and any committee queries.

Though applicants use PowerPoint® to assist with their presentation, funding relies heavily on their oral responses to the evaluation questions. For help with responses, applicants should consult with their RCO outdoor grants manager. Letters and other documented expressions of project support will *not* be provided to the evaluation team. Applicants should, however, summarize this support when responding to the *Project Support* evaluation question (#5). Complete copies of all such support material must be provided to RCO.

After individually scoring all projects using the criteria, the evaluation team meets to discuss the projects. At the conclusion of this open and publicly announced meeting, final ranking recommendations are decided. (In order to ensure that all projects are treated equally, no project-related testimony from visitors is taken at this meeting.) RCO's director uses the resulting ranked list of projects as the foundation for funding recommendations to RCFB's board.

During evaluations, the committee/team may express concerns about a project, and some members may want to discuss a "do not fund" recommendation. If this occurs, the discussion will take place during the post-evaluation meeting. RCO staff will invite the applicant's representatives to attend the meeting in person or by phone and respond to questions. The evaluation team will vote on the "do not fund" recommendation; the vote will pass with a simple majority vote. Each committee/team member will write his or her opinion and considerations for approving or disapproving the recommendation. RCO staff will summarize the explanations and forward them and the recommendation to the RCFB.

## **Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program Public Comments on the Proposed Do Not Fund Policy**

On April 29, 2008, Recreation and Conservation Office staff contacted people who had expressed interest in a "do not fund" procedure. Those contacted were:

- Recreation and Conservation Funding Board members and designees
- The 17 people who had commented on the original proposal
- NOVA advisory committee members.

The following shows the April 29, 2008 e-mail message.

*To People Interested in the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board's (RCFB)  
Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program:*

*In February, I wrote to ask for your thoughts on a proposal to adopt a way for  
evaluation teams to send a "do not fund" recommendation to RCFB. Today I am  
writing on the same subject, but with a slight revision.*

*The RCFB met on March 27 to consider the original proposal and the thoughts of  
those who commented. At that time, the board indicated that it likes the proposal's  
concept and encourages the evaluation team to pass along project concerns and  
any "do not fund" recommendations. It also asked staff to re-work the proposal by:*

- *Having ALL evaluators explain their rationale (not just those who favor "do not fund")  
when a project is not recommended for funding, and*
- *Considering less regimentation, perhaps by dropping the "project of concern" checkbox, etc.*

*Staff has completed these revisions (attachment) and would like to give you another  
opportunity to let us know what you think. If adopted by RCFB when it meets June  
19-20, this proposal would affect the 2008 NOVA grant cycle. If review shows the  
trial to be successful, it could be made permanent in NOVA and considered for  
adoption in other RCFB grant programs.*

*Comments on the attached proposal should be received by me by Friday, May 23,  
2008. This will help ensure that board members can consider any feedback in  
advance of its June meeting. Comments may also be made in person at the RCFB  
meeting, June 19-20, 2008 at the Bellingham Cruise Terminal  
(<http://www.rco.wa.gov/rcfb/board/schedule.htm>).*

*Background: The reason we are proposing this is that across RCFB's many grant  
programs, on occasion evaluators will agree that a specific project does not merit  
funding. Reasons for this may include that the project, while eligible, does very little  
to further the goals of the grant program or that its costs are far out of proportion to  
its benefits. Under the current system, however, and apart from scoring it very low,  
there is no formal way for an evaluation team to recommend against funding a  
project. If there are sufficient funds to reach the project on the evaluation team's  
ranked listing, it will likely be funded.*

*Greg Lovelady (contact information included)*

This table summarizes the comments received.

Public Comments on the Proposed Do Not Fund Policy		
Commenter	Recommendation	Comments
1. Karen Daubert, RCFB member, 4/30/08	None	Great email - thanks! This makes a lot of sense.
2. Arlene Brooks, NOVA Advisory Committee, 5/6/08	Qualified support	<p>Thanks to everyone who worked to put the original recommendation together for the March RCFB meeting - I thought it would work; however, the revision now being presented will address past concerns at least in this section.</p> <p>Question: When the situation presents itself - when will the advisory committee know (collectively) that someone has an issue with a project?</p> <p>At the end of the EVALUATION WEEK - set aside an hour or (?) to discuss the proposed 'do not fund' project(s) - while the committee is all together?</p> <p>Waiting until the post evaluation meeting - there may be a chance not all of the committee can attend or be available via teleconference; applicants will have the opportunity to attend to answer concerns and questions; written questions/comments submitted by committee members would then be helpful. Lots of uncertainty.</p> <p><b>Staff reply:</b> Thanks for asking about how we think the NOVA advisory committee will address member concerns about when a project should not be funded. Pene Speaks (DNR) noted one way when she indicated a preference for addressing these infrequent concerns informally at the end of the evaluation day or when we finish evaluating a category. It could also be done on the last day of evaluations during the wrap-up.</p> <p>On any of these occasions it would probably be possible to quickly determine if there is a consensus for inviting the applicant back, either in-person or by phone, to the post evaluation meeting. At that time, the advisory committee would decide whether to proceed with a do not fund recommendation. If the decision is to proceed with "do not fund" we would ask all committee members to write out their reasoning (yea or nay), perhaps using something like the draft form previously distributed.</p>

Public Comments on the Proposed Do Not Fund Policy		
Commenter	Recommendation	Comments
3. Ken Irwin, NOVA Advisory Committee, 5/5/08	Agrees with the proposal and suggests the noted addition	<p>AFTER THIS: "...and given an opportunity to attend the meeting to respond to questions."</p> <p>ADD THIS: "The NOVA Advisory Committee's recommendation to "do not fund" will be achieved by a simple majority vote of the members. The recommendation, along with an explanation in writing from the committee through RCO staff, will be forwarded to the RCFB for their final determination."</p> <p><b>Staff reply:</b> We like this idea and, after a bit of wordsmithing, revised the proposal.</p>
4. John Spring, NOVA Advisory Committee, 4/30/08	Agrees with the proposal	<p>[Paraphrased] I like the idea of entertaining brief evaluator suggestions during project evaluations to put certain projects on the "do not fund" agenda for further consideration at the post evaluation meeting. This way the applicant will know to be present.</p> <p>Most applicants would also know that their projects are in jeopardy based on written evaluator comments made during the July technical reviews. This would have provided them with a chance to modify the request or withdraw the project before evaluations.</p> <p>I also agree that evaluators voting "do not fund" must disclose their reasons in writing. I personally have not seen more than one or two projects on which I would have ever used the "do not fund" recommendation during the years I have been involved. In those cases, it was always cost versus the number of users that would have benefited.</p>