



Reference Guide for Advisory Committee Members



WASHINGTON STATE
Recreation and
Conservation Office





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A Note from the Director

Welcome!

Thank you for participating on an RCO advisory committee!

Your work as an advisor is essential in awarding funds for exciting recreation and conservation projects across the state.

This guide will be a reference tool for you in your role as an advisory committee member.

Our advisory committees reflect a mix of community member, nonprofit organization, tribal, and state agency representatives who share their knowledge and skills to review and evaluate project proposals. Committee participation is vital in helping ensure that RCO's work is conducted fairly and that public funds are invested in solid projects that benefit Washington communities. Advisory committees also may help develop program goals, rules, and policies.

Thank you again for volunteering your time. Your participation helps make RCO a unique granting agency and Washington a great place to live.

We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Megan Duffy
Director



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About RCO

The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) is responsible for investing state and federal money in outdoor recreation facilities, farmland and forestland preservation, and critical habitats for wildlife. It makes those investments by offering competitive grants to local, state, federal, tribal, and non-governmental organizations.

Funding for RCO comes from a mix of sources including state general obligation bonds and general taxes, federal funds, gasoline taxes, permits, and vehicle registration fees.

RCO's Mission

RCO is an exemplary partner that provides statewide leadership and funding to protect and improve the best of Washington's natural and outdoor recreation resources, now and for future generations.

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board

RCO supports the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board. Established by citizen Initiative 215 in 1964, the board helps finance recreation and conservation projects throughout the state.

The eight-member board consists of five citizens appointed by the Governor and three state agency directors.

The board meets several times a year. You are welcome to observe these meetings, but you are not expected to attend.

The board reviews the ranked lists of projects created by advisory committees.



Your Role as an Advisor

As an advisor, your analysis and recommendations are essential to RCO's mission. Your input on policy decisions helps RCO make our grant programs efficient and effective and your work reviewing and evaluating grant applications allows funding to be distributed where it is most needed.



Advisory committees use the project selection process adopted by the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board to evaluate grant requests. RCO's director considers the advisory committee's evaluations when recommending projects to the board for funding.

Advisory committee members provide an important link between the public, RCO, and its boards.

[Specific information about each advisory committee](#) may be found on RCO's Web site. Each committee page has an advisory committee charter, list of current members, and meeting dates.

Advisory Committee Responsibilities	RCO Support
Familiarize yourself with the program.	RCO will share the program criteria and review the program before technical review and evaluation.
Attend technical review and evaluation meetings (using Zoom) and/or submit comments and scores by the deadline.	RCO will provide the meeting dates as early as possible and the meeting day schedule 2 weeks before the meeting.
Maintain impartiality.	RCO provides ethics information in this guide on page 7 .
Use PRISM to view project materials, share feedback with applicants, and score projects.	RCO will provide PRISM training materials.
Complete survey after project evaluation and provide policy feedback as needed.	RCO will e-mail survey links and policy questions as they arise.

General Guidance

- Serving the public interest is the top priority.
- Examine all available evidence before making a judgment.
 - Do not let personal feelings toward other members, staff, or project proponents interfere with judgment.
 - Exhibit fairness and impartiality towards projects and project proponents.
- Communicate well and actively participate in group discussions.
- Authority to act is granted to the committee, not to individual members.
 - Advisors score each criteria individually. All scores are averaged to create the ranked list of projects.

Avoid conflicts of interest and perceived conflicts of interest (see [page 7](#)).

- The committee operates in an open and public manner.

Appointments and Terms

The RCO director appoints advisory committee members based on their applications and on the goals of each grant program. Appointed members share in the duties and responsibilities of their committees.

The director also may dismiss advisory committee members for reasons including, lack of participation in committee activities, an unexcused absence from a required meeting, and actions that are contrary to RCO's mission, the advisory committee's charter, or RCO statutes and policies.

Members typically serve four years. Members' terms overlap to ensure continuity of experience on the committee. The director may reappoint members to an additional, two year term, for a maximum of six years of service. State agency members serve at the pleasure of their agency directors.



Stipends

To help offset any costs that may pose a barrier to participation, advisors who are not paid by their workplaces to participate are eligible to receive stipends and reimbursement for some child and adult care costs.

The volunteer and grant process coordinator will coordinate stipends with eligible advisors before project review.



Conflict of Interest for Advisory Committees

Advisory committee members must uphold a high ethical standard. It is extremely important to avoid both the appearance and actual conflicts of interest.

In the event of a potential or actual conflict of interest, advisors may recuse themselves from scoring individual projects.

See [Conflict of Interest Policy for Advisory Committees \(wa.gov\)](#) for RCO's full conflict of interest policy and procedures.

If you have questions about a potential conflict of interest in your role as an advisory committee member, contact RCO.

Reviewing and Evaluation Projects

Technical Review

Technical review is a chance for advisors to give applicants feedback about their projects before they are scored.

During technical review, ask questions. This is the time to help applicants improve their projects. It's also an excellent opportunity for you to fine-tune how you interpret the criteria.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to participate in technical review, but it is not required.

The criteria each program uses are subjective. Every advisor will look at criteria differently depending on their perspectives and that's ok! Just make sure you apply the criteria evenly to all projects.

Evaluation

Evaluations are the cornerstone of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board ranking and project selection process. This is a mandatory step in the process and all applicants must participate. It is equally important that advisory committee members participate in the entire evaluation process.



Evaluation is not the time to critique a project with the intent of improving it. RCO encourages committee members to ask probing questions to gain information that will help score the proposal. Remember, you score projects against each criterion, not against one another.

Presentation Process

Many programs use a presentation process for technical review and grant evaluation. Applicants share their responses to each criterion in a PowerPoint presentation and the committee has time to ask questions. RCO staff facilitates all advisory committee meetings. Each meeting will include an introduction to review the grant program and criteria and how to use our electronic scoring system. Most grant programs require two rounds of multi-day meetings—one for technical review and one for evaluation—every other year.

Meeting dates are shared with advisors months in advance. Meeting day schedules are e-mailed as soon as possible after we receive grant applications.

All meetings take place over Zoom.

We expect advisors to attend all meetings. If you have a conflict, please let us know as early as possible. For us to use your scores, you must score every project.

Meeting presentations move fast!

Presentations are scheduled back-to-back without time in between. You can get a feel for the presentation process by checking out previous meetings.

During presentations, advisors will view PowerPoints through Zoom and score projects online. For this reason, it may be easier to have access to two screens during meetings. RCO will work with advisors to make sure you have what you need to participate.

Written Process

Some programs use a written technical review and grant evaluation process. In these programs, applicants address program criteria through written responses. Technical review and evaluation are completed remotely over the course of a few weeks, through RCO's online PRISM system. RCO will host a Webinar in the weeks leading up to a written evaluation period to review program criteria and how to use PRISM.

Project information is available through RCO's database, PRISM. Projects are also scored in PRISM. Advisors will receive more information about accessing PRISM as project review and evaluation dates near.

Other Advisory Committee Responsibilities

Results Meeting

Every grant program, regardless of whether it uses a presentation or written review and evaluation process, has a results meeting.

These meetings take place in the days following project evaluation and are a chance for RCO to share the ranked list of projects with the committee before making them available to the public.



Results meetings give us the chance to do the following:

- Review the evaluation results
- Debrief the process and hear your feedback
- Discuss any policy questions that may have come up

Your participation in these meetings is important to wrapping up the grant round and making sure RCO's processes continue to improve. Meetings take place over Zoom.

After you have reviewed and scored, applications you will receive a survey from RCO. Please fill it out! Your feedback is critical to improving our process and programs!

Public Disclosure

All documents related to RCO's advisory committees are subject to disclosure, unless there is a specific exemption. When RCO sends an e-mail or other documents to an advisory committee member, RCO maintains the primary record, so the member may delete the information when it is no longer needed. If a committee member receives an e-mail or other document from someone else about committee activities, it may need to be kept or disclosed. The e-mail address that you use for committee business is subject to disclosure.

- For example, if a member of the public were to contact an advisory committee member about a project or evaluation results, the communication and the response should be kept.
- Records of routine business, such as confirming attendance may be discarded. If an advisory committee member receives a request for disclosure of documents, it must be forwarded to RCO immediately.

Policy Feedback

RCO occasionally reaches out to advisory committees for policy feedback. Although we only reach out as questions come up (some years you might not hear from us at all), your feedback is critical to ensuring the community is represented in our policies. This usually takes place during non-grant round years.



Grant Program Processes

Grant Program	Technical Review		Project Evaluation	
	Presentation	Written	Presentation	Written
Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account	●		●	
Boating Facilities Program	●		●	
Boating Infrastructure Grant Program–Tier 1		●		
Boating Infrastructure Grant Program–Tier 2		●	Written evaluation by national team	
Community Athletic Facilities	RCO staff review only			●
Community Forests Program	RCO staff review only			●
Firearms and Archery Range Recreation	●		●	
Land and Water Conservation Fund	●		●	
Land and Water Conservation Fund–Legacy		●	Written evaluation by national Team	
No Child Left Inside Tiers 1 and 2	RCO staff review only			●
No Child Left Inside Tier 3	RCO staff review only		●	
Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA)	RCO staff review only		●	
NOVA: Education and Enforcement Category	RCO staff review only			●
Recreational Trails Program	RCO staff review only			●
Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program				
Critical Habitat Category	●		●	
Farmland Preservation Category		●		●
Forestland Preservation Category		●		●
Local Parks Category	●		●	
Natural Areas Category		●		●
Riparian Protection Category	●		●	
State Lands Development and Renovation Category		●		●
State Lands Restoration and Enhancement Category		●	●	●
State Parks Category	●		●	
Trails Category	●		●	
Urban Wildlife Habitat Category	●		●	
Water Access Category	●		●	
Youth Athletic Facilities	RCO staff review only			●