Equitable Grantmaking:
A Comprehensive Review of Washington State
Recreation and Conservation Office Grant Programs

Prepared by Prevention Institute, June 2022

Background

In its ongoing efforts to achieve equitable outcomes for all residents, the Washington State Legislature issued a budget proviso requiring an equity review of some Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) grant programs. The goals of the review were stated as follows:

- To reduce barriers to historically underserved populations' participation in RCO grant programs;
- To redress inequities in RCO policies and programs; and,
- To improve the equitable delivery of resources and benefits in these programs.

In conducting the review, RCO was to complete the following:

- Identify changes to policy and operational norms and practices in furtherance of the equity review purposes;
- Identify new investments and programs that prioritize populations and communities that have been historically underserved by conservation and recreation policies and programs; and,
- Consider historic and systemic barriers that may arise due to any of the following factors: race, ethnicity, religion, income, geography, disability, and educational attainment.

RCO is a small state agency that provides grants to create and maintain opportunities for recreation; protect habitat, working farms and forests; and recover salmon and orca from near extinction. It administers 26 grant programs with 33 sub-grant programs. Since 1966 it has awarded over 11,800 grants, totaling more than $3.3 billion, that have been matched with more than $1.6 billion in resources for a total investment of nearly $5 billion in Washington State.

The budget proviso focused this review on recreation grant programs, though due to the interconnectedness of recreation and conservation, several conservation-oriented programs were also included. Neither RCO's salmon recovery grant programs, nor programs funded by other state agencies were considered in the review. The following programs, which are funded by state capital resources, were analyzed:

RECREATION FOCUSED GRANT PROGRAMS	
WWRP – Local Parks	Grants to buy, develop, or renovate outdoor recreation facilities. Program is for neighborhood, community and regional parks.
WWRP – Trails	Grants to buy, develop, or renovate pedestrian, equestrian, bicycle, and cross-country ski trails. Grants are for non-motorized activities that provide connections to neighborhoods, communities, or regional trails.
WWRP – Water Access	Grants to create physical access to shorelines for non-motorized, water-related recreation activities such as boating and fishing.
WWRP – State Parks	Grants to the State Parks and Recreation Commission to buy or develop state parks.
Youth Athletic – Large	Grants to buy land and develop or renovate outdoor athletic facilities serving youth.
Youth Athletic – Small	Grants to develop or renovate outdoor athletic facilities serving youth in small communities.
Aquatic Lands	Grants to buy, protect, and restore aquatic habitat to provide public access to the waterfront.
Boating Facilities	Grants to acquire, design, build and renovate facilities such as launching ramps, guest moorage and support facilities for motorized boats and other watercraft.
Firearm and Archery Range Recreation	Grants to acquire, develop, and renovate firearm and archery training and practice facilities.
Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities	Grants to buy, develop, or maintain backcountry recreational areas or off-road vehicle parks, and to provide education and enforcement of those areas.

CONSERVATION FOCUSED GRANT PROGRAMS	
WWRP – Riparian	Grants to conserve land along the water, as well as submerged land such as streambeds, which provide habitat for salmon and other wildlife
WWRP – Urban Wildlife	Grants to conserve wildlife habitat in cities or urban growth areas.
Community Forests	Grants to conserve working forests for community benefit.

In July 2021, RCO selected Prevention Institute, a national nonprofit organization with expertise in health equity, racial justice, and park equity, through a competitive process[1] to lead this equity review over a 12-month period.

Joining Prevention Institute, The Vida Agency (TVA) coordinated community engagement activities. GreenInfo Network produced spatial analysis. Sean M. Watts, served as a project consultant bringing essential statewide context and subject matter expertise along with California-based researcher Jon Christensen, who provided additional subject matter expertise.

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[1] RCO Request for Proposals No. 2105

Final RCO Equity Review

Overview of this report

Beginning in July 2021, the Prevention Institute-led team coordinated a multi-faceted effort to review RCO's grantmaking structures, processes and outcomes. The analysis considered opportunities to reduce gaps in the distribution of greenspace and the resources that support them.

It should be noted that while efforts to achieve fairness, justice and equity in the greenspace arena are not new, government agency leadership in achieving and sustaining equitable outcomes is still formative. Achieving demonstrable results takes time. Park agencies, recreation offices, park boards and special districts who appear to be "furthest along" in their equity efforts have a variety of results to show for their work. In commissioning this equity review, Washington State has again positioned itself among a relatively small group of "early adopters" aiming to do better with its finite, but critical, public resources.

The methods, key findings, and recommendations detailed in this report are based on an extensive review of RCO manuals and proposal records (2016-2020), interviews with 35 subject matter experts, 11 community and stakeholder engagement sessions, and iterative dialogue over the year-long period with RCO staff and key stakeholders who have engaged with RCO.

Basis for this Equity Review

Parks, nature preserves, recreation facilities, trails, gardens, and nature-based stormwater systems (hereafter, "greenspace') are essential civic infrastructure that protect public health by providing opportunity for physical activity, social connection, ritual, and respite[2]. In cities, greenspace also filters air and stormwater, mitigates pollution, buffers noise, cools temperatures, and replenishes groundwater[3]. Greenspace should serve every community fairly, justly, and safely. Yet, a growing body of analysis demonstrates that communities – including those in Washington – continue to be affected by an inequitable and limited history of investment in open space and recreation facilities; and that these communities are likely to be the least wealthy and most racially diverse.[4,5] Prevention Institute has advanced a framework developed by Yuen and colleagues to help practitioners and decision-makers interpret the systemic factors underlying greenspace inequities, and to advance policy and funding strategies that reverse them[6].

Historic drivers of greenspace inequity include racial segregation, biased planning decisions, discriminatory home lending practices, exclusionary zoning, racial covenants, and redlining, among

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[2] Wolch, J.R., Byrne, J and Newell, J.P. (2014). Urban green space, public health, and environmental justice: The challenge of making cities 'just green enough.' *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 125, 234-244.

[3] Jennings, V., et al. (2017). Emerging issues in urban ecology: Implications for research, social justice, human health and well-being. *Population and Environment*, 39(1), 69-86.

[4] King County Open Space Equity Cabinet (2019). Report and Recommendations to King County Executive and Council. URL: your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/water-and-land/land-conservation/equity/20190319-Open-Space-Equity-Cabinet-Report.pdf

[5] Recreation and Conservation Office, Outdoor Recreation Equity Grant Program, 2021-2023 Budget Request

[6] Yañez, E., Aboelata, M.J., Rigolon, A. & Bennett, R. (2021). Changing the Landscape: People, Parks and Power. URL: www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/PI_People-Parks-Power_Report_210624_FINAL.pdf

others.[7,8] Present-day drivers include tax and fiscal restructuring, shifting responsibility for public services, and a reduced ability to fund recreation facilities and programs among local governments with limited tax-bases and lower-income populations.[9,10] Local factors unique to the physical, economic, social, and regulatory environments of communities can also explain how access barriers for distinct groups of greenspace users were created and maintained. The strategies described in this equity review are intended to benefit Washingtonians most impacted by these disparities; mainly, lower-income households, people of color, people with disabilities, and other socially and economically diverse users.

Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.[11]

Greenspace equity is the fair and just distribution of parks and open space, such that all communities have access to these health-promoting resources. Pursuing greenspace equity requires closing gaps in access to parks, trails and open space that disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color. This includes considering elements such as the geographic distribution of recreational facilities and greenspaces, funding and the grantmaking structures that determine allocations, and the organizational policies and norms that have created and maintained greenspace inequities over time. The equity review considered each of these elements.

The framework used to support this review identifies three distinct dimensions of equity that pertain to green infrastructure funding and planning. They are summarized as follows:

> **Distributional Equity** often comes to mind first when considering greenspace access because it relies most on quantifiable information. This includes the geographic distribution of existing recreational facilities and protected spaces and funding allocations to support capital projects, operations and programming.
>
> **Procedural Equity** in grantmaking involves processes that are transparent, navigable, and free of barriers and biases that would ignore or unduly complicate proposals in prioritized settings. When considering capital development grants, it seeks to provide greater opportunity for under-resourced and equity-driven applicants to successfully propose and administer projects.

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[7] Rigolon & Németh (2018). What shapes uneven access to urban amenities? Thick injustice and the legacy of racial discrimination in Denver's parks. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 41(3), 312-325.

[8] Boone, C.G., Buckley, G.L., Grove, J.M. & Sister, C. (2009). Parks and people: An environmental justice inquiry in Baltimore, Maryland. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 99(4), 767-787.

[9] Rigolon, A., Browning, M., & Jennings, V. (2018). Inequities in the quality of park systems: An environmental justice investigation of cities in the United States. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 178, 156-169.

[10] Joassart-Marcelli, P. et al. (2011). Building the healthy city: The role of non-profits in creating active urban parks. *Urban Geography*, 32(5), 682-711.

[11] Equity vs. Equality: What's the Difference? (2020 November 5). *MPH@GW, the George Washington University online aster of Public Health program.* URL: onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu/resources/equity-vs-equality/

Structural Equity addresses organizational policies and norms that have created and maintained greenspace inequities over time. Though it may involve less quantifiable factors, it is crucial for operationalizing equity to the extent of mitigating prior harm and preventing unintended consequences. This often begins with building internal staff capacities with equity frameworks and practices, and regularizing assessing implementation and learnings on equity related actions.

Major Recommendations

This equity review revealed several opportunities to forge a pathway toward more equitable grantmaking and outcomes. These are organized by the following six overarching categories:

1) Prioritize funding for high-need areas
2) Modify scoring criteria to elevate projects addressing park and greenspace inequities
3) Change processes and procedures to support equitable proposal development and review
4) Proactively build applicant capacities to attract and support equity-driven sponsors and projects
5) Build in structures and criteria to promote community involvement in shaping project proposals
6) Fund projects that address intersecting social and economic challenges in communities

This analysis emphasizes two key strategies to improve distributional equity, which have been central features of other equitable granting models: underlined funding set-asides that ensure grant programs prioritize underinvested areas and underlined strengthened scoring criteria that identify and reward equity-driven proposals.

This review also identifies two key procedural areas where crucial equity gains can be achieved: a recruitment strategy to underlined improve representation within evaluation panels and a underlined grant payment structure that reduces the cost-carrying challenges of under-resourced applicants.

From a structural standpoint, this review spotlights a need for more underlined proactive technical assistance and capacity-building to a diversifying pool of project applicants. Advancing greenspace equity also calls for underlined more collaborative approaches with nongovernmental partners, whose varying capacities can help to generate momentum and resources for needed projects, and whose local intelligence and convening power is critically needed to contextualize investments for marginalized communities.

SECTION 1. METHODS

Between July 2021 and April 2022, Prevention Institute worked with RCO staff and the project team to conduct the comprehensive equity review. The review focused on the following:

Granting Outcomes Analysis: Data from three RCO grant cycles (2016-2020) were analyzed to better understand the relationship between neighborhood and jurisdiction characteristics and the grant programs studied. Project staff reviewed both awarded funding and proposal activity, to consider where participation or success rates may be uneven.

Granting Procedures Review: Grant manuals for each program were reviewed in detail. Eligibility criteria, fiscal requirements and administrative needs were examined to better understand potential impacts for under-resourced applicants and community-driven partnerships. Evaluation criteria and scoring scales were also examined for their specificity regarding key equity objectives, weighting within scoring formulas, and potential to bias projects away from the most vulnerable and underinvested areas. Evaluation panel membership was assessed to understand if disadvantaged communities in Washington and diverse sectors (e.g. government, nonprofit, tribes) were represented. Consideration of these criteria was informed by feedback provided in prior applicant surveys, as well as practitioner expertise from recent park and greenspace funding initiatives in Washington and elsewhere. Input provided throughout the engagement sessions and interviews provided valuable context for understanding ways that procedures impact the granting process from project inception to funding.

Emerging Practices Research: Though equitable greenspace funding models are a relatively new phenomenon, Prevention Institute staff conducted a scan of efforts to advance equitable procedures and outcomes. Specifically, project staff reviewed: need assessment criteria developed by the King County Open Space Equity Cabinet, California's Proposition 68, and Los Angeles County's Measure A grants manual. The project team also reviewed policy and design literature of to better understand the equity landscape for public space.

Stakeholder Engagement: A mixed-methods approach to engagement was utilized to gather qualitative input from a range of practitioners whose work intersects with parks and conservation funding. During October-November 2021, TVA facilitated eight community conversation sessions for specific audiences, including past applicants, nonprofit and community serving organizations, government and tribal sector staff, members and staff of some tribal communities and organizations, as well as a Vietnamese-language session. These sessions sought input on greenspace priorities and use, proposal development capacities, and RCO granting procedures. Two additional sessions were facilitated by TVA during March-April 2022 to reflect on research and engagement findings, and brainstorm recommended strategies. Interviews were another important method for gathering intelligence about the RCO process and relevant equity strategies. Prevention Institute conducted 12 interviews with subject matter experts between October 2021 and January 2022 with RCO staff, other greenspace space funders, staff from large and small jurisdictions, and community leaders to gather input on the RCO process and relevant equity strategies. TVA also conducted 23 interviews with community leaders in either English or Spanish. In addition to these methods, TVA distributed digital surveys in five languages to prior applicants and other entities, seeking feedback on RCO proposal procedures, fiscal requirements and project parameters.

SECTION 2. FINDINGS

Based on the analyses, research and engagement performed for this equity review, Prevention Institute found the following:

- **RCO grants skew markedly toward places with pre-existing park and conservation lands.** Census tracts with 8 or more acres of protected open space per thousand residents make up 56% of the total tracts but received 69-100% of the funding in a given grant account, 70-100% of awarded proposals, and accounted for 74-100% of proposal activity during the past three funding cycles. Conversely, census tracts with 3 or fewer acres of protected open space per thousand residents make up 28% of total tracts, but received 0-17% of funding, awarded proposals and proposal activity in a given grant account (see Tables 1-3).

Table 1: Proportion of awarded funding (2016-20) by park acreage (per thousand residents)

	low (<3 acres)	medium (3-8 acres)	high (8+ acres)
WA census tracts	**28.2 %**	**15.8 %**	**56.0 %**
WWRP-Local Parks	16.5 %	14.2 %	69.3 %
WWRP-Trails	2.5 %	4.9 %	92.5 %
WWRP-Water Access	-	16.3 %	83.7 %
WWRP-State Parks	-	-	100 %
Youth Athletic-large	4.2 %	22.7 %	73.1 %
Youth Athletic-small	15.5%	-	84.5 %
Aquatic Lands	3.8 %	11.4 %	84.8 %
Boating Facilities	5.1 %	-	94.9 %
Firearms & Archery	-	2.9 %	97.1 %
Nonhighway &Offroad	1.2 %	-	98.8 %

Table 2: Proportion of awarded proposals (2016-20) by park acreage (per thousand residents)

	low (<3 acres)	medium (3-8 acres)	high (8+ acres)
WA census tracts	**28.2 %**	**15.8 %**	**56.0 %**
WWRP-Local Parks	15.4 %	14.1 %	70.5 %
WWRP-Trails	4.0 %	8.0 %	88.0 %
WWRP-Water Access	-	14.3 %	85.7 %
WWRP-State Parks	-	-	100 %
Youth Athletic-large	3.8 %	20.3 %	75.9 %
Youth Athletic-small	16.7 %	-	83.3 %
Aquatic Lands	5.7 %	9.4 %	84.9 %
Boating Facilities	4.4 %	-	95.6 %
Firearms & Archery	-	4.8 %	95.2 %
Nonhighway &Offroad	1.6 %	-	98.4 %

Table 3: Proportion of proposal activity (2016-20) by park acreage (per thousand residents)

	low (<3 acres)	medium (3-8 acres)	high (8+ acres)
WA census tracts	**28.2 %**	**15.8 %**	**56.0 %**
WWRP-Local Parks	8.1 %	17.7 %	74.2 %
WWRP-Trails	7.1 %	7.1 %	85.9 %
WWRP-Water Access	2.2 %	11.1 %	86.7 %
WWRP-State Parks	-	-	100 %
Youth Athletic-large	4.5 %	20.2 %	75.3 %
Youth Athletic-small	16.7 %	-	83.3 %
Aquatic Lands	5.6 %	9.3 %	85.2 %
Boating Facilities	5.0 %	-	95.0 %
Firearms & Archery	-	4.5 %	95.5 %
Nonhighway &Offroad	1.9 %	-	98.1 %

Table 4: Proposal success rates (2016-20) by park acreage (per thousand residents)

	low (<3 acres)	medium (3-8 acres)	high (8+ acres)
WA census tracts	**28.2 %**	**15.8 %**	**56.0 %**
WWRP-Local Parks	60.0 %	25.0 %	29.9 %
WWRP-Trails	16.7 %	33.3 %	30.1 %
WWRP-Water Access	-	80.0 %	61.5 %
WWRP-State Parks	-	-	68.2 %
Youth Athletic-large	75.0 %	88.9 %	89.6 %
Youth Athletic-small	100 %	-	100 %
Aquatic Lands	100 %	100 %	97.8 %
Boating Facilities	80.0 %	-	89.6 %
Firearms & Archery	-	100 %	95.2 %
Nonhighway &Offroad	57.1 %	-	68.5 %

- **Communities of Color are underinvested by most RCO grant programs, particularly those with low park and greenspace acreage.** Since 2016, census tracts that were at least one-fifth Black saw grants in only 3 of 13 program accounts, with only 2 at a proportional level to the statewide total. Census tracts that were at least on-fifth American Indian or Alaska Native received grants in only 4 of 13 program accounts. Census tracts that were at least one-fifth Asian received no grants in 3 program accounts and were markedly underinvested in 11 accounts. Census tracts that were at least one-fifth Hispanic/Latinx received no grants in 4 program accounts and were markedly underinvested in 9 accounts (see Tables 5-6).

Of further concern, only 2 proposals and awards were located in communities of color with lower park and conservation acreage (less than 3 per thousand residents) during the past three funding cycles. As Table 7 demonstrates, high-acreage White census tracts make up 55% of all Washington census tracts, but received 89% of awarded grants, whereas low- and medium-acreage tracts were underinvested across all groups. Notably, high-acreage communities of color were awarded grants

at closer to proportional levels, but not at the disproportionally higher levels of high-acreage White census tracts.

Table 5: Proposal activity (2016-20) by race[12]

	Black alone (20%+)	Asian alone (20%+)	Am Ind/Ak Nat alone (20%+)	Hispanic or Latino (20%+)	White alone (20%+)
WA census tracts	**30 (2%)**	**145 (10%)**	**12 (1%)**	**190 (13%)**	**1,417 (98%)**
WWRP-Local Parks	4 (2%)	8 (3%)	5 (2%)	39 (16%)	238 (96%)
WWRP-Trails	3 (4%)	10 (12%)	-	5 (6%)	84 (99%)
WWRP-Water Access	-	2 (4%)	-	3 (7%)	45 (100%)
WWRP-State Parks	-	2 (5%)	-	-	44 (100%)
WWRP-Riparian	-	2 (6%)	-	-	35 (100%)
WWRP-Urban Wildlife	-	2 (6%)	-	-	31 (100%)
Youth Athletic-large	-	3 (3%)	3 (3%)	15 (17%)	84 (94%)
Youth Athletic-small	-	-	-	1 (8%)	12 (100%)
Aquatic Lands	-	5 (9%)	-	2 (4%)	54 (100%)
Boating Facilities	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	15 (15%)	99 (98%)
Firearms & Archery	-	-	-	5 (23%)	22 (100%)
Nonhighway &Offroad	-	1 (0%)	1 (0%)	19 (5%)	363 (100%)
Community Forests	-	-	-	-	15 (100%)

Table 6: Awarded proposals (2016-20) by race[13]

	Black alone (20%+)	Asian alone (20%+)	Am Ind/Ak Nat alone (20%+)	Hispanic or Latino (20%+)	White alone (20%+)
WA census tracts	**30 (2%)**	**145 (10%)**	**12 (1%)**	**190 (13%)**	**1,417 (98%)**
WWRP-Local Parks	2 (3%)	4 (5%)	-	10 (14%)	73 (99%)
WWRP-Trails	2 (8%)	4 (16%)	-	-	25 (100%)
WWRP-Water Access	-	2 (8%)	-	1 (4%)	24 (100%)
WWRP-State Parks	-	2 (9%)	-	-	23 (100%)
WWRP-Riparian	-	-	-	-	18 (100%)
WWRP-Urban Wildlife	-	1 (6%)	-	-	16 (100%)
Youth Athletic-large	-	3 (4%)	3 (4%)	14 (19%)	71 (95%)
Youth Athletic-small	-	-	-	1 (8%)	12 (100%)
Aquatic Lands	-	4 (8%)	-	2 (4%)	53 (100%)
Boating Facilities	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	14 (16%)	89 (99%)
Firearms & Archery	-	-	-	5 (24%)	21 (100%)
Nonhighway &Offroad	-	1 (0%)	1 (0%)	10 (4%)	248 (100%)
Community Forests	-	-	-	-	6 (100%)

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[12] A small portion of proposals counted for more than one race identified within the data table, when those proposals were located within census tracts that had multiple races accounting for 20% or more of population.

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Table 7: Proposals and awards by race and park acreage (per thousand residents)[14]

census tracts proposals / awards	Black alone (20%+)	Asian alone (20%+)	Am Ind/Ak Nat alone (20%+)	Hispanic or Latino (20%+)	White alone (20%+)
low (<3 acres)	9 (1%) 1 / 1 (0% / 0%)	48 (3%) - / -	3 (0%) - / -	59 (4%) 1 / 1 (0% / 0%)	395 (27%) 49 / 29 (4% / 4%)
medium (3-8 acres)	8 (1%) 1 / - (0% / -)	23 (2%) - / -	1 (0%) - / -	47 (3%) 21 / 10 (2% / 1%)	222 (15%) 79 / 37 (7% / 5%)
high (8+ acres)	13 (1%) 6 / 4 (1% / 1%)	74 (5%) 36 / 22 (3% / 3%)	8 (1%) 11 / 6 (1% / 1%)	84 (6%) 82 / 46 (7% / 7%)	800 (55%) 998 / 613 (87% / 89%)

- **Some RCO grant programs serve lower-income communities at proportional levels to population, but not where there is low park and greenspace acreage.** Lower-income census tracts (those with median household incomes below $50,000) make up 21.5% of the statewide total and received 4-32% of funding in a given grant account, 4-50% of awarded proposals, and account for 0-50% of proposal activity during the past three funding cycles. Conversely moderate-income census tracts (those with median household incomes up to $100,000) make up 62% of the statewide total and received 50-92% of funding, 50-84% of awarded proposals and account for 50-80% of proposal activity in a given grant account (see tables 8-10). Accounts geared more towards parks and physical activity (which tend to be the most competitive) were closer to proportional than other accounts, but still underserved lower-income census tracts in some cases. It is important to note, however, that proposal activity and grant awards still skewed heavily toward places with already high park and conservation acreage, whether they were lower- or moderate-income census tracts. This disparity can be seen when noting that moderate-income/higher-acreage areas fielded a proposal and grant award for nearly every applicable census tract, whereas lower-income/lower-acreage areas fielded a proposal for every 9.1 census tracts and an award for every 16.7 census tracts (see Tables 11-12).

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[14] A small portion of proposals/awards counted for more than one race identified within the data table, when those proposals were located within census tracts that had multiple races accounting for 20% or more of population.

Table 8: Proportion of awarded funding (2016-20) by median household income

	very low <25k	low 25-50k	moderate 50-100k	high 100-200k
WA census tracts	**1.0 %**	**20.5 %**	**61.9 %**	**16.7 %**
WWRP-Local Parks	-	18.9 %	70.2 %	10.8 %
WWRP-Trails	-	15.1 %	76.5 %	8.4 %
WWRP-Water Access	-	21.8 %	51.6 %	26.6 %
WWRP-State Parks	-	13.3 %	64.5 %	22.1 %
WWRP-Riparian	-	27.4 %	72.6 %	-
WWRP-Urban Wildlife	-	-	56.6 %	43.4 %
Youth Athletic-large	-	31.1 %	60.0 %	8.8 %
Youth Athletic-small	-	49.3 %	50.7 %	-
Aquatic Lands	1.8 %	18.5 %	59.2 %	20.5 %
Boating Facilities	-	16.2 %	80.6 %	3.2 %
Firearms & Archery	-	4.6 %	78.2 %	17.2 %
Nonhighway &Offroad	-	10.1 %	77.3 %	12.5 %
Community Forests	-	8.9 %	91.1 %	

Table 9: Proportion of awarded proposals (2016-20) by median household income

	very low <25k	low 25-50k	moderate 50-100k	high 100-200k
WA census tracts	**1.0 %**	**20.5 %**	**61.9 %**	**16.7 %**
WWRP-Local Parks	-	21.8 %	66.7 %	11.5 %
WWRP-Trails	-	28.0 %	64.0 %	8.0 %
WWRP-Water Access	-	17.9 %	57.1 %	25.0 %
WWRP-State Parks	-	20.0 %	63.3 %	16.7 %
WWRP-Riparian	-	36.8 %	63.2 %	-
WWRP-Urban Wildlife	-	-	73.7 %	26.3 %
Youth Athletic-large	-	34.8 %	56.2 %	9.0 %
Youth Athletic-small	-	50.0 %	50.0 %	-
Aquatic Lands	1.9 %	17.0 %	60.4 %	20.8 %
Boating Facilities	-	17.8 %	78.9 %	3.3 %
Firearms & Archery	-	4.8 %	81.0 %	14.3 %
Nonhighway &Offroad	-	10.1 %	79.4 %	10.5 %
Community Forests	-	16.7 %	83.3 %	-

Table 10: Proportion of proposal activity (2016-20) by median household income

	very low <25k	low 25-50k	moderate 50-100k	high 100-200k
WA census tracts	**1.0 %**	**20.5 %**	**61.9 %**	**16.7 %**
WWRP-Local Parks	0.4 %	23.4 %	67.7 %	8.5 %
WWRP-Trails	2.4 %	20.0 %	60.0 %	17.6 %
WWRP-Water Access	-	15.6 %	60.0 %	22.4 %
WWRP-State Parks	-	20.5 %	65.9 %	13.6 %
WWRP-Riparian	-	34.3 %	57.1 %	8.6 %
WWRP-Urban Wildlife	-	-	71.0 %	29.0 %
Youth Athletic-large	-	32.9 %	57.0 %	10.1 %
Youth Athletic-small	-	50.0 %	50.0 %	-
Aquatic Lands	1.9 %	16.7 %	59.3 %	22.2 %
Boating Facilities	-	17.8 %	79.2 %	3.0 %
Firearms & Archery	-	9.1 %	77.3 %	13.6 %
Nonhighway &Offroad	-	14.0 %	76.3 %	9.6 %
Community Forests	-	40.0 %	53.3 %	6.7 %

Table 11: Census tracts per proposal by income and park acreage

	low (<3 acres)	medium (3-8 acres)	high (8+ acres)
low/very low (<50k)	9.1	2.3	0.8
moderate (50-100k)	8.4	2.8	0.7
high (100-200k)	58.0	4.4	1.2

Table 12: Census tracts per award by income and park acreage

	low (<3 acres)	medium (3-8 acres)	high (8+ acres)
very low (<25k)	16.7	5.2	1.4
moderate (50-100k)	11.1	5.7	1.1
high (100-200k)	58.0	7.0	2.0

- **Sizeable differences in proposal activity are the driving factor in disparate funding outcomes.** The granting disparities described above occurred despite proposal success rates that were similar (or occasionally better) in lower-acreage, lower-income and racially diverse communities. Gaps in awareness of RCO funding opportunities provide a partial explanation for these differences, but does not tell the whole story. Capacity differentials, barriers to civic participation and influence, and compounding issue priorities created by generations of exclusion, discrimination and neglect have produced a challenging but not insurmountable context for grantmaking, necessitating fresh approaches by funders. A sustained, multi-faceted effort will be needed to generate proposals where they are most needed, including a new focus on collaboration and innovative project models, building the capacity of applicants that have a track record of working in and with underserved communities but are newer to the field of conservation, and continuing efforts to make proposal and administrative structures accessible.

- **Smaller jurisdictions (5,000 population or fewer) field successful proposals at similar rates to larger jurisdictions, but some population-related criteria do impact outcomes.** Smaller jurisdictions obtained grants for 52% of their proposals in the past three funding cycles, while those with populations above 150,000 succeeded on 51% of their proposals (see Table 13). On a per constituent basis, smaller jurisdictions consistently proposed and were awarded a higher ratio of grants than those moderately and larger sized jurisdictions across the grant programs applicable to this study (see Tables 14-15). However, jurisdictions that met criteria for Urban Growth Areas (UGA) and county population density showed a 12.5% higher success rate in the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program-Local Parks account. The analysis also noted 16 proposals (of local, state, and federal applicants) during the past three funding cycles that scored well enough to be funded were it not for these withheld points, which do not relate to vulnerable or marginalized populations at the local level.

Table 13: Proposal success rates (2016-20) by jurisdiction size

constituents	<2,500	5k-10k	10-20k	20-150k	150k+
WWRP-Local Parks	31.8 %	16.0 %	26.2 %	44.6 %	24.5 %
WWRP-Trails	8.3 %	37.5 %	27.3 %	27.3 %	44.0 %
WWRP-Water Access	62.5 %	0.0 %	80.0 %	44.4 %	85.7 %
WWRP-Riparian	-	-	-	0.0 %	0.0 %
WWRP-Urban Wildlife	-	-	0.0 %	66.7 %	50.0 %
Youth Athletic-large	70.0 %	70.0 %	90.9 %	100 %	100 %
Youth Athletic-small	100 %	100 %	-	-	-
Aquatic Lands	100 %	100 %	100 %	96.3 %	100 %
Boating Facilities	85.7 %	100 %	50.0 %	84.2 %	87.5 %
Firearms & Archery	-	-	-	50.0 %	-
Nonhighway &Offroad	0.0 %	-	-	46.7 %	46.2 %
Community Forests	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	50.0 %	0.0 %

Table 14: Constituents per proposal (2016-20) by jurisdiction size

constituents	<2,500	5k-10k	10-20k	20-150k	150k+
WWRP-Local Parks	5,515	8,882	13,179	46,664	160,214
WWRP-Trails	20,223	27,757	50,319	176,050	314,019
WWRP-Water Access	30,335	222,056	110,701	215,172	1,121,495
WWRP-Riparian	-	-	-	3,873,091	3,925,232
WWRP-Urban Wildlife			276,752	1,291,030	1,962,616
Youth Athletic-large	24,268	22,206	50,319	121,034	713,678
Youth Athletic-small	40,446	55,514	-	-	-
Aquatic Lands	48,536	74,019	110,701	143,448	654,205
Boating Facilities	11,556	222,056	92,251	203,847	981,308
Firearms & Archery	-	-	-	1,936,546	-
Nonhighway &Offroad	242,678	-	-	258,206	603,882
Community Forests	242,678	222,056	276,752	1,936,546	7,850,463

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Table 15: Constituents per award (2016-20) by jurisdiction size

constituents	<2,500	5k-10k	10-20k	20-150k	150k+
WWRP-Local Parks	17,334	55,514	50,319	104,678	654,205
WWRP-Trails	242,678	74,019	184,501	645,515	713,678
WWRP-Water Access	48,536	-	138,376	484,136	1,308,411
WWRP-Riparian	-	-	-	-	-
WWRP-Urban Wildlife	-	-	-	1,936,546	3,925,232
Youth Athletic-large	34,668	31,722	55,350	121,034	713,678
Youth Athletic-small	40,446	55,514	-	-	-
Aquatic Lands	48,536	74,019	110,701	148,965	654,205
Boating Facilities	13,482	222,056	184,501	242,068	1,121,495
Firearms & Archery				3,873,091	7,850,463
Nonhighway &Offroad	-	-	-	553,299	1,308,411
Community Forests	-	-	-	3,873,091	-

- **Developing grant proposals is time-consuming, which may deter less well-resourced applicants.** Engagement participants estimated that staff can spend well beyond a hundred hours on application and evaluation activities. For small jurisdictions where staff perform a variety of functions, applying for grants comes with significant trade-offs and requires advance planning. Though nonprofits sometimes rely on grant-writing staff and volunteer capacity, they also voiced similar staffing and planning challenges. Further assessment would be needed to determine what extent the complexity of the RCO proposal process discourages smaller and lower-resourced organizations and how that may affect the distribution of greenspace resources. Our review of emerging practices includes government programs that have sought to make adjustments to address the deterrence of less-resourced applicants.

- **The reimbursement model is likely precluding some smaller entities from pursuing RCO funding.** It is difficult to assess how many applicants struggle (or potential applicants would struggle) to pay the up-front costs of developing projects (before reimbursement), or to fund the technical work needed for proposals. However, engagement participants consistently noted that mitigating this challenge could be a game-changer for nonprofits and small local governments seeking to fund greenspace and recreation facilities. This challenge is compounded for nonprofits, whose funding does not always cover basic operations and staffing costs that are essential for project management.

- **Match Reductions improve accessibility to RCO grants, but can limit project size.** Feedback and proposal records show that providing match contributions (i.e. matching shares) is a challenge for some applicants. RCO's current match reduction structure does help projects in lower-income areas and smaller jurisdictions; however, reducing a project's required match also reduces its overall budget.[15] This has the potential to preclude or reduce the scope of park and greenspace investment where it may be most needed. The calibration of grant maximums with match reductions can help these projects "pencil-out" (cover costs).

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[15] Recreation and Conservation Office, Outdoor Recreation Equity Grant Program, 2021-2023 Budget Request

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- **Washington's nonprofit partners serve an important function in greenspace projects, particularly in under-resourced communities.** Large and small nonprofits have provided crucial energy and guidance for recent greenspace projects in Washington's underinvested communities. However, stakeholder input and proposal records indicate that nonprofits have not been actively engaged in RCO granting programs. Eligibility barriers are one factor related to this, as nonprofits are precluded from primary sponsorship roles on certain in-demand accounts, such as Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Outdoor Recreation grants. Fiscal sponsors, community-based advisors and multi-sector collaborations are also not recognized as sponsors within current grantmaking programs. A need for sustained investment in nonprofit capacities, and fraught or non-existent collaboration between nonprofits and local park/recreation agencies were also identified as factors in the under-involvement of nonprofits.

- **Current scoring scales rely considerably on the subjective determinations of panelists, which may undermine current and future equity indicators.** With lower proposal activity coming from underinvested, high-vulnerability communities, it is imperative that the evaluation process capture as many project proposals from these areas as are viable and aligned with community vision. Measurements for socioeconomic (e.g. disability, race, income) and health disadvantage are included in some grant criteria and not others, and are sometimes mixed with other inventory and service considerations, leaving panelists to their own interpretation of data points and weighting to determine scores. Our recommendation for project need criteria includes a list of key indicators that can be objectively measured and more directly linked to project scores.

- **Evaluation panels lack important dimensions of diversity.** A lack of social and sectoral diversity on RCO evaluation panels is a widely recognized issue among staff, applicants, equity advocates and panelists themselves. Stakeholders indicated that people representing marginalized and underinvested communities, as well as those contributing non-governmental experience, are typically not part of evaluation panels and suggested that better representation could help make panels better equipped to evaluate proposals. However, stakeholders also noted the difficulty in recruiting diverse panelists with the needed availability and that it will take sustained effort and some innovation.

- **Communications about RCO tend to focus on traditional contacts and could be broadened**. Updates about RCO granting processes have been distributed mainly to prior applicants, government staff, and organizations within the land conservation sector. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to broaden the reach of RCO communications to community development organizations and other small nonprofit project developers that are likely to work toward equity-driven projects, as well as technical assistance providers, park and greenspace equity advocates and other field-building organizations. Given lower proposal activity from these communities, a comprehensive strategy, which includes but is not limited to a proactive communication plan, will be important to increase knowledge and interest.

- **RCO grant agreements involve distinct challenges for some tribal applicants.** During the past three funding cycles, 9 of 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington submitted proposals for grant programs included in this review. Based on the feedback we gathered, waivers of sovereign

immunity have been a deterrent for some tribes in the past, particularly as grant-seeking staff must gain tribal council approval to finalize grant agreements. While the current agreement language resulted from negotiations with tribal representatives across the state, there is also recognition that tribes are not a monolith, and will be encouraged or deterred to varying degrees by the shape of agreement language.

SECTION 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are grounded by the premise that greenspace should serve every community fairly, justly, and safely. However, the least wealthy and most racially diverse communities in Washington continue to be negatively affected by recreation and open space investment patterns.

To help inform future outdoor equity efforts, a multi-faceted review was conducted to identify factors driving the current distribution of greenspace resources (detailed in sections 1 and 2), and to advance policy and funding recommendations to reverse them, described below.

The underlying framework for these recommendations is based on three distinct dimensions of equity that pertain to green infrastructure funding and planning. These lenses were applied to various aspects of the RCO grantmaking process and the broader landscape of greenspace management in Washington:

> **Distributional Equity** includes the spatial distribution of existing recreational facilities and protected spaces, as well as the fiscal allocation of resources to support capital projects and operations.

> **Procedural Equity** involves processes along the grantmaking continuum, from the earliest stages of outreach and engagement to eligibility criteria, scoring rubrics, and evaluation processes. It seeks to remove impediments to viable projects in high need or prioritized areas, so that grantmaking can proceed in ways that result in the fair and equitable distribution of greenspace resources.

> **Structural Equity** addresses underlying policies and norms at the institutional/organizational level that have created and maintained greenspace inequities over time. Structural or systemic factors may include internal staff beliefs, norms and capacities with equity frameworks and practices, and the extent to which course corrections can be made by RCO when it identifies inequities.

Equity recommendations are organized into the following six overarching categories:

1) Prioritize funding for high-need areas
2) Modify scoring criteria to elevate projects addressing park and greenspace inequities
3) Change processes and procedures to support equitable proposal development and review
4) Proactively build applicant capacities to attract and support equity-driven sponsors and projects
5) Build in structures and criteria to promote community involvement in shaping project proposals
6) Fund projects that address intersecting social and economic challenges in communities

Below, each recommendation is followed by a brief description and summary table of specific strategies and approaches to operationalize the recommendation. Not all recommendations may be appropriate for all grant categories. Recommendations focus largely on those that support active recreation such as park, trails, and other open space amenities.

1) Prioritize funding for high-need areas

Funding programs that proactively address (current-day or historically produced) inequities use strategies to close observed gaps. One strategy is to develop a grant program with an explicit focus on the population or geographies of interest. Another strategy is to dedicate portions of program funding for projects that directly address (in both location and service) documented park and greenspace inequities. Mechanisms such as "earmarks" or "set-asides" designate a minimum amount of resources specifically toward geographies, populations, or applicant-types that have historically not received adequate, or equitable funding.

There is not an easy way to determine the "right" percentage of funding that represents a fair and equitable set-aside, given several factors such as: the size of inequities between geographies and population groups, population growth and movement over time, the long timeline between planning and implementing projects, and the complex histories that have shaped current inequities. Recent examples show that the percent set-aside is influenced by political will and public input. However, there is both a tangible and symbolic dimension to the set-aside. Beyond directing real resources to high-need areas, the language governing a set-aside indicates an intent to address identified racial, geographic, health or other inequity in grantmaking and may be a way to build and strengthen the pool of applicants from historically under-resourced areas. One way to start is to base the set-aside amount on the percentage of population living in marginalized communities. Current practices signal that set-asides can also account for past harm and be calibrated to redress and <u>reverse</u> racial and health inequity, which necessitates a further commitment of funding beyond what is proportional.

For RCO, a new equity-focused grant program provides a direct mechanism for funding needed projects in the short-term and provides time for potential statutory changes and further analysis of existing programs, though it should not be considered a substitute for embedding equitable funding strategies throughout RCO's procedures and practices.

Operational strategies:

1.1	Update fund allocation policies for WWRP Outdoor Recreation and Youth Athletic Facilities (YAF) grants to dedicate (i.e. set-aside) no less than 18.75% of account funding for proposals located in areas lacking ¼-mile park/greenspace proximity that are also in the bottom third of census tracts for household income or the top third of census tracts for asthma or diabetes hospitalization rates. Also provide a qualitative method for proposals to access this funding source by describing how those served disproportionately experience access barriers to greenspace in addition to social, economic, health or environmental hardships.
1.2	Work with state legislators and outdoor equity advocates to create a transitional Outdoor Equity Grant program that funds high-quality parks and greenspace, recreation facilities, trails and youth sports facilities in underinvested areas. The program should fund planning and pre-development costs and require zero or minimal matching funds, conditional upon community input that is demonstrably

	incorporated into project scope and design. After a finite number of grant cycles, funding for the Outdoor Equity Grant program should be shifted permanently to set-asides advancing equity in other grant programs.
1.3	Analyze a potential revision to the WWRP Local Parks account to include distinct categories for large and small jurisdictions.
1.4.1	Refine match reduction criteria to more specifically consider the neighborhood-level conditions surrounding projects sites: ○ Minimize the required match for proposals located within/adjacent to low park-acreage census tracts (<3 acres per thousand residents) that also have low/very-low household incomes (<60% of county median). ○ Minimize the required match for jurisdictions of 20,000 residents or fewer that also have low/very low household incomes (<60% of county median); for projects that provide specific climate and accessibility features (e.g. shade-sheds, splash-pads, universal playgrounds) in new or substantially upgraded form
1.4.2	Make all match reductions conditional upon the documentation of a collaborative process, including iterative design/scoping meetings and/or project MOU agreements (as described in 5.3).
1.4.3	Raise maximum grant limits to enable the adequate funding of grant proposals utilizing match reductions (i.e. located in historically underinvested, high-need communities), based on an analysis of recent project costs within key program accounts. Consider structuring maximum grant thresholds on an inverse scale corresponding to the required match.
1.5	Analyze the potential demand for match reductions in the Aquatic Lands Enhancement (ALEA) and Boating Facilities Program (BFP).

2) Modify proposal scoring criteria to elevate projects addressing park and greenspace inequities

Grantmaking relies on objective and subjective measures. When seeking to address inequities, evaluation criteria should elevate proposals aimed at equity goals set by the grant maker. RCO should adjust "project need" criteria at one-third or more of the overall points range so that addressing RCO-identified gap areas is emphasized alongside criteria related to design and cost. Because the equity review has identified measures of underinvestment, RCO can use these measures to clarify project need and weight its impact within the scoring rubric. In future rounds of granting, as RCO notices whether gaps are closing or widening, it could increase the weight of project need, as appropriate. In the public sector and private grantmaking, it is common to weight project need to emphasize its importance. The strategies described below also address places where criteria could be working against needed projects in smaller jurisdictions or in urban neighborhoods, because they do not prioritize underinvested populations (e.g. UGA boundaries, county population density) or consider the context of high-need areas (e.g. scenic values).

Operational strategies:

2.1	Reassess point scale to reward projects that provide climate and accessibility related features (e.g. shade-sheds, splash-pads, universal playgrounds) in low-income census tracts.
2.2	Update evaluation criteria to provide more weighting for proposals that addresses park/greenspace access, health/environmental vulnerability, and community engagement and partnership. ○ Assess point scales to increase emphasis on *Project Need*. ○ Assess point scales to increase emphasis on *Project Support.*
2.3	Update *Project Need* criteria to include current best management practices for proximity and access to outdoor recreation facilities, trails and amenities:

	- Population living more than a ¼-mile walking distance from a publicly-owned park, greenspace or trail - Population within a ¼-mile walking distance of project site that reside in low/very-low income census tracts - Population within a ¼-mile walking distance of project site that reside in census tracts with 35% or more persons of color - Population within a ¼-mile walking distance of project site that reside in higher disability census tracts - Population within a ¼-mile walking distance of project site that reside in higher hospitalization census tracts for asthma, diabetes or heart disease - Population within a ¼-mile walking distance of project site that reside in lower life expectancy census tracts - Population within a ¼-mile walking distance of project site that reside in lower tree equity census blocks - Walking distance to the nearest prominent climate and accessibility related recreational features (e.g. shade-sheds, splash-pads, universal playgrounds) - Walking distance to the nearest existing recreation amenity identified as a priority need through community engagement (e.g. operational barbeque stalls)
2.4	Assess evaluation criteria where smaller communities may be disadvantaged by population data that is not specific to the project vicinity or vulnerable user-groups.
2.5	Eliminate scoring for scenic values in the WWRP-Trails category to reduce the competitive imbalance between pristine natural areas and locations offering daily access to greenspace and physical activity.
2.6	Update *Project Need* criteria to provide additional points if an inventory of recreation facilities/ amenities within a jurisdiction is provided, including a comparison of maintenance levels and existing conditions.

3) Change processes and procedures to support equitable proposal development and review

Presentations are a challenging part of the RCO proposal process for some applicants. Converting to virtual presentations during the pandemic affecting the 2020 and 2022 funding cycles has been welcomed, but applicants still seek clarity on presentation quality and scoring outcomes. Evaluation panels are also a key equity variable, as described earlier. The strategies described below focus on a broadened network of communication and collaboration to help build panels with more diverse racial, gender, geographic and sectoral perspectives (including advocates and community leaders), and compensation for this vital form of participation.

An important opportunity for expanding a base of equity-driven applicants relates to fiscal procedures. RCO should collaborate with legislators and analysts to study potential granting structures that would fund pre-development activities, such as architectural and engineering work, other technical functions, as well as participation and facilitation stipends for design workshops. Possibilities for advance reimbursement, direct invoicing methods, and funding of the overhead/indirect costs of nonprofit applicants (who are systematically underfunded in this regard) should be considered.

Part of a continual improvement process towards equity involves routine assessment of actions taken, learnings and potential shifts in outcomes. Where equity-related gaps persist, state partners should work with RCO to fund and implement solutions.

Operational strategies:

3.1	Make remote presentations (utilizing online meeting platforms) a permanent option for applicants, beyond the current pandemic.
3.2	Provide a standardized presentation format in advance of panel evaluation sessions (for each program subaccount, updated for each granting cycle). These templates should clarify for applicants and panelists a baseline level of graphic content and project details, the organization/progressions of slide content (including time estimates), and links between content areas and the evaluative criteria to be scored.
3.3	Consider methods for providing more detailed feedback related to scoring outcomes to applicants following presentations.
3.4	Create an eligible project type and allowable costs for pre-development activities, based on a proposal's location. This proposal classification would provide advance funding for architectural and engineering work, appraisals, permitting work, and other technical functions, as well as participation and facilitation stipends for design workshops.
3.5	Enable direct invoicing or cash advances for anticipated project expenses in RCO grant programs, conditional upon a project's location within a high-need setting and collaboration with community organizations and leaders.
3.6	Develop capacity-focused funding available to nonprofit organizations that supplements the indirect/overhead costs needed to administer grant funded projects.
3.7	To support tribal governments with limited administrative capacity, provide a waiver option from competitive procurement requirements.
3.8.1	Update evaluation panel charters to achieve improved social, geographic and sectoral representation among panel participants.
3.8.2	Implement strategies that help improve social, geographic and sectoral representation within evaluation panels: ○ Continue offering volunteer compensation (stipends) for community participants and non-profit/tribal representatives (as implemented in September 2021) ○ Solicit panelist referral lists from relevant state commissions, as well as park equity and environmental justice organizations. ○ Utilize an expanded, multi-sectoral contacts list (as described in 4.7) to more broadly communicate about panel participation.
3.9	Develop performance measures to track impacts of equity efforts, such as: ○ Proportion of proposal activity, grant awards and funding amounts based on race, income, park/greenspace access, health/environmental vulnerability, jurisdiction size, geographic regions, etc. ○ Analysis of proposals in underinvested geographies (neighborhood and regional level) to identify scoring gaps, capacity barriers, and process disruptions ○ Analysis of proposal elements and project features (e.g. universal playgrounds, shade-sheds, snack bars), and other relative weighting within scoring rubrics ○ Report on progress and learnings of capacity-building efforts, in both external collaborative settings and within the agency.

4) Proactively build applicant capacities to attract and support equity-driven sponsors and projects

Reversing differences in proposal activity between high- and low-acreage communities is crucial to narrowing gaps in greenspace access. Recognizing that entities which may be most able to develop equity driven proposals, because of location and experience, may not have sought RCO grants before, RCO should invest in a proactive technical assistance program to grow and diversify its base of applicants.

One approach RCO can use is to assemble a consultant "bench" with a range of expertise to help applicants create excellent project proposals. In addition to addressing content and technical expertise, RCO's bench should be diverse racially, culturally and linguistically. As noted earlier, structural factors have excluded many non-white groups from the recreation and conservation arena, writ large. RCO's efforts to include and invite projects grounded in various dimensions of equity will therefore require proactive steps to address these norms in the field.

RCO should also return to providing more frequent webinars between grant cycles, with a greater focus on content standards and proposal techniques. Because RCO delivers assistance through grants managers, and they are frequently working at capacity, a new funding commitment to support this work will be needed.

Another key pathway for investing in applicant capacities is to collaborate with philanthropies, equity-minded conservancies, and advocacy organizations that are also committed to improving equitable outcomes for park and greenspace accessibility. RCO can help to inform both private and government funders as they consider strategies to support nonprofits to grow their capacity to develop proposals, fund projects and administer grants.

Finally, RCO should implement regular communications with non-profits, private foundations, and equity-focused conservancies to provide grant program updates and highlight emerging practices and collaboration opportunities in the park and outdoor equity field.

Operational strategies:

4.1	Implement a *Technical Assistance* program that deploys specialized expertise in support of project applicants in underinvested jurisdictions: ○ Retain a consultant "bench" encompassing these and other knowledge areas: proposal development, site/environmental analysis, sustainability, project design, cost estimation, compliance/permitting, operations/maintenance planning, community engagement, partnerships/agreements, grants administration, project implementation ○ Include consultant expertise that is familiar with the capacity limitations of small jurisdictions, tribes and nonprofit organizations ○ Utilize eligibility and prioritization criteria (similar to *Project Need* metrics described in 2.3) to determine the recipients of technical assistance resources in a given grant cycle ○ Coordinate a peer-to-peer learning exchange that connects less experienced applicants with grantees of similar projects
4.2	Conduct a series of webinars before the start of each granting cycle, with in-depth and practical content that addresses challenging aspects of project proposals (e.g. cost estimates, project design, environmental procedures, need assessment, presentations) and describes successful examples of past proposals from each grant program subaccount. A portion of the webinar should be devoted to Q-and-A and content should be shaped by applicant feedback from the previous cycle.
4.3	Develop technical assistance guides for each grant program that help to clarify high-quality proposal standards, and crowdsource practical methods for developing proposal components from recent applicants. These should be supplemental to grant manuals, which serve to define requirements and protocols for the proposal process and grant implementation.
4.4	Develop grants available to nonprofit organizations that focus on project administration, community engagement, and other aspects of project development and implementation.
4.5	Continue to augment the SCORP Grant Applications Data Tool with easily referenceable socioeconomic, health and environmental information that applicants use to articulate project need. Incorporate new

	measurement tools of park/greenspace access, proximity to specialized recreation amenities, and compounding health/environmental disadvantage as they are available.
4.6	Sponsor and co-facilitate convening events (i.e. workshops, webinars) that highlight innovative greenspace funding and project development trends in underinvested, environmentally-burdened communities. Potential content could include the Parks for People collaboration in the Wenatchee Valley, the work of Seattle Parks Foundation partner organizations, and the development methods of urban parkland trusts/conservancies. A key goal of such convenings is to share and replicate emerging practices between Washington communities and beyond, and to catalyze collaboration between sectors and with RCO.
4.7.1	Expand the active contacts lists used by RCO for email updates to include equity-focused and community development organizations throughout the state.
4.7.2	Implement a communications strategy (between grant cycles) for equity-focused and community development organizations that highlights community-driven mechanisms (e.g. MOU) for RCO proposals and case examples.
4.8	Implement learning curriculum amongst RCO staff and RCFB membership that builds knowledge of historic and present-day injustice related to outdoor equity and community-level challenges that intersect with greenspace, as well as emerging funding and design models advanced by equity practitioners. The curriculum should include both externally and internally led activities.
4.9	Adopt an increased rate of overhead funding within grant program budgets to accommodate additional capacity needed to manage capacity-building activities and other equity-related actions.

5) Build in structures and criteria to promote community involvement in shaping project proposals

To ensure greater inclusion of community voices and perspectives, RCO should create more flexibility for collaborating sponsors and community groups to be named on RCO proposals. This will help to deepen engagement and oversight at a local level as projects move from design to implementation. Structures that document community agreements and contributions toward RCO proposals can also help to solidify project partnerships where trust-building is needed or where local issues are particularly sensitive.

Project Support criteria is another place where RCO can signal the importance of authentic engagement and reward proposals deriving from community-level knowledge and priorities. Equity driven nonprofits and tribes often do this work already – based on their own participatory values – so it is also important and more equitable to reward those engagement efforts that produce better contextualized project proposals. Recommendations below provide additional guidance for assessing community involvement.

Operational strategies:

5.1	Make nonprofit organizations eligible applicants for Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) grants in the local parks, trails and water access categories.
5.2	Allow community-based organizations utilizing fiscal sponsorships to be identified as secondary sponsors of RCO grant proposals.
5.3	Work with nonprofits to develop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) templates to help guide partnerships between agency applicants, community organizations and private sector funders. MOU templates should clarify how project scope and design details advance the equity goals of community leaders and respond to local factors and intersecting social and economic challenges.
5.4	Consider evaluation criteria that rewards land and habitat conservation proposals collaboratively developed with local tribes.
5.5	Revise *Project Support* criteria to emphasize more thorough, authentic and collaborative forms of community engagement. A potential scoring scale could include:

	o Minimal scores for support letters, supportive public comments at adoption hearings, informative sessions that provide superficial opportunities for input, or a mere lack of documented public opposition
	o Better scores for voter-approved funding or planning processes that are specific to the immediate neighborhood context of a project, or paired with collaborative project design efforts
	o Better scores for outreach processes that are collaboratively planned and facilitated with community organizations and leaders, are adapted for distinct user-groups, and document an iterative process for input gathering and related design/scope outcomes
	o Maximum scores for the execution of a project MOU (as described in 5.3)

6) Fund projects that address intersecting social and economic challenges in communities

Greenspace and its related programming provide critical physical and social infrastructure for promoting health and wellbeing in all communities, but especially in environmentally and socially disadvantaged communities. Greenspaces intersects, directly and indirectly, with other social, cultural and economic issues, such as universal accessibility, housing stability, and community safety and self-determination. Best practices in greenspace management from across the nation show staff working outside of statutory silos to advance collaboration, partnerships and strategies at these intersections. There is potential for RCO to play a proactive and facilitative role in identifying solutions (particularly those advanced through grant funding mechanisms) to benefit all Washingtonians in a fair and just manner.

Universal design features amplify the benefits of greenspace investments by improving the experiential quality of outdoor and public space for people with physical, auditory or visual disabilities, autism, or neuro-cognitive disorders. Considering these broader design features could result in scoring criteria that identifies and rewards higher levels of inclusivity. Direct involvement from these user groups is also essential for developing responsive design treatments at specific project sites. At the same time, there continues to be a lag in many places for adopting and implementing transition plans that would help to ensure physical connectivity to parks and recreation assets. RCO should consider how to evaluate proposals where accessibility gaps may still impact connectivity to greenspace.

Where cultural and housing displacement pressures impact neighborhoods, it is important that established community members see their values and needs reflected in local greenspace. The design and management of greenspace can provide valuable community reference points for social gathering, exercise, rest, and celebration, while also helping to interpret a neighborhood's cultural and historic roots. However, greenspace investments that are made without a mindful contextualization of these factors can appear to be preferencing the needs of newcomers and supporting speculative forces in local housing and commercial markets. As these forces amplify, the intended beneficiaries of greenspace investments can be pushed out to places of deeper underinvestment, social isolation, and long commute burdens. RCO programs should consider how cultural and economic stability can be addressed in project proposals. It is also becoming more common for equitable funding models to reward jurisdictions that already have complimentary housing policies adopted.

Questions about **safety** within green space and the public realm often arise in marginalized communities, as well as important new strategies. Safety concerns pose a real barrier to the utilization of greenspace – compounding disparities in access and quality – and involve the distinct experiences of varying identity groups. Racialized policing and the criminalization of unsheltered homelessness also continue to playout in these spaces, underlying the need for community-driven solutions and innovation. RCO can support these efforts by incentivizing design features and safety strategies that derive from violence prevention advocates and residents, particularly those most vulnerable to harassment and over-policing.

RCO's **work with tribes** has largely focused on cultural resources review and consultation, in addition to routine assistance with proposals provided during granting cycles. However, there is a growing view that climate strategies will need to involve more direct forms of indigenous stewardship to be successful. Creating this synergy will involve nation-to-nation discourses occurring at the highest levels of government, but as a driver of land and resource conservation efforts in Washington, RCO is in a key position to inform and participate in these. Consideration should be given for how RCO grant criteria and procedures could integrate forms of tribal influence.

Operational strategies:

6.1	Incorporate text within *Public Need*, *Need Fulfillment/Project Scope* and *Project Design* evaluation criteria to specifically reward elements of local contextualization, such as: ○ Analysis of how distinct user-groups (e.g. limited-mobility children, older-adults, women, informal athletes, informal vendors and laborers) existing in a community are likely to utilize project space and features; along with responsive design and programming treatments ○ How project design addresses culturally specific preferences and reinforces existing cultural character ○ Interpretive features (e.g. land recognition) describing ancestral and social histories and ceremonial space included in project design ○ Incorporation of multilingual park/facility signage in languages relevant to users; existing procedural norms for multilingual park/facility communications (e.g. website, promotional material, Board meeting interpretation)
6.2.1	Award evaluation points for engagement processes that produce community-driven recommendations addressing intersecting social and economic challenges, such as: ○ Complimentary housing policies to help mitigate potential gentrification impacts of project ○ Community-based public safety and violence reduction strategies appliable to site and vicinity ○ Locations of accessibility barriers and preferred treatments within and external to project site ○ Complimentary economic policies related to development and management of project site
6.2.2	Reward proposals that describe innovative work on community-based public safety strategies, housing and anti-displacement strategies, and other intersecting challenges that have potential access and utilization benefits for the project site.
6.2.3	Reward proposals that incorporate physical design treatments (e.g. lighting, plazas, pedestrian design, vendor activation) including those derived from the direct safety-related input of vulnerable users
6.3.1	Include a stand-alone points category (distinct from other project design considerations) that rewards universal design features that exceed minimum accessibility standards and incorporates the direct input of relevant user-groups. Utilize the ASLA Universal Design guide and other innovative practice guidance to inform evaluation criteria.
6.3.2	Award evaluation points for local government applicants that have adopted or updated an ADA transition plan within the previous eight years

6.4	Work with Governor's Office to help ensure diverse representation on the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB)
6.5	Implement a tribal liaison staff position, whose responsibilities include efforts to support applicant capacities within the tribal sector, continuing efforts to address structural barriers to developing grant proposals, and forwarding input from tribes related to proposed projects interfacing with ancestral lands and sacred sites.

Conclusion

Prevention Institute is pleased to present this equity review of RCO administered grant programs for the consideration of Washington legislators and stakeholders. It has been an honor to take part in one of the first formal evaluations of equity in recreation and conservation grantmaking initiated by a state legislature.

The budget proviso that led to this work is testament to the values of equity, fairness and transparency held by Washington's decision-makers and the commitment of RCO leadership to advance a historic shift in how greenspace investments are prioritized. What Washington chooses to accomplish after this review will be observed by other places seeking to optimize efforts to advance environmental sustainability, health equity, economic and racial justice. The actions of the Governor, Legislature, and RCO to embrace and accelerate progress on the findings of this review hold great promise for the future, not just for greenspace equity, but for the many interrelated issues that intersect with recreation and conservation in Washington State and the nation.

Appendix 1

Project Team Descriptions

APPENDIX. PROJECT TEAM DESCRIPTIONS

Equity Review Project Consultant
Prevention Institute is a national nonprofit with offices in Oakland, Los Angeles, Houston and Washington, D.C. Our mission is to build prevention and health equity into key policies and actions at the federal, state, local, and organizational levels to ensure that the places where all people live, work, play and learn foster health, safety, and wellbeing. Since 1997, we have partnered with communities, local government entities, foundations, multiple sectors, and public health agencies to bring cutting-edge research, practice, strategy, and analysis to the pressing health and safety concerns of the day. We have applied our approach to injury and violence prevention, healthy eating and active living, land use, health systems transformation, and mental health and wellbeing, among other issues.

Community Engagement Coordinator
The Vida Agency (TVA) is a woman and minority-owned, full-service marketing and communications firm. TVA provides strategic planning for engagement and communications, qualitative and quantitative research and analysis, skilled facilitation for market segments such as public policy, advocacy, health, environment, education, transportation, and more. TVA works with public agencies and private corporations to reach diverse audiences for greater cultural impact. The TVA team is made up of subject matter experts who serve as a seamless extension of their partner teams.

Expert Subconsultants
Sean M. Watts, Ph.D. is the owner SM Watts Consulting, LLC – empowering communities to drive environmental and land use policy and helping historically white-led organizations move from awareness to action on diversity, equity and inclusion. He has worked for two decades to bridge gaps between science, policy and society to create solutions that yield the greatest human health and ecological benefits. Before launching his consultancy, Sean was Director of Community Partnerships for the Seattle Parks Foundation. There he created programs to build capacity among resident-led groups for policy advocacy and community-driven open space planning, prioritization and implementation.

Jon Christensen teaches and conducts multidisciplinary research focusing on equity and the environment, is a board member of Los Angeles River State Park Partners, and has collaborated with Prevention Institute on a range of park funding and community engagement efforts. He is a founder of the Laboratory for Environmental Narrative Strategies at the UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustainability. He is also a partner and strategic adviser at Stamen Design, an interactive design and technology firm specializing in mapping, data visualization, and strategic communications.

Geospatial Subconsultant
GreenInfo Network supports public interest organizations and agencies with a wide range of information technology, to enable their environmental, conservation, public health, social justice and other missions.
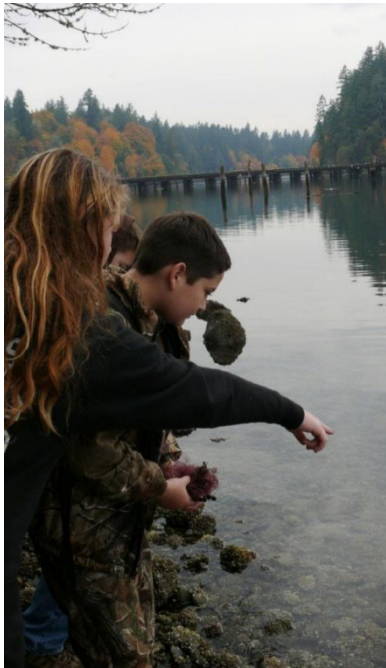
Final RCO Equity Review

Appendix 2

The Vida Agency Report

Spring
2022

Community Input
on Equity of
Grant Programs

WASHINGTON STATE
**Recreation and
Conservation Office**

the*Vida*
AGENCY

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Vida Agency conducted community conversations for the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) as part of a broader review of the agency's grant programs. The results of this outreach are one of several inputs to the equity review of the grant programs being conducted concurrently by the Prevention Institute. The results provide additional insights for RCO to consider in its efforts to make recreation and conservation grants more accessible and equitably distributed across Washington State.

Between October 27, 2021 and April 19, 2022, The Vida Agency held 11 community conversations, conducted 23 interviews in English and Spanish, and collected 39 online surveys from both individuals and organizational representatives. The Vida Agency found several opportunities to improve access to grants, which would increase access to recreation and green space in Washington. Participants shared that they faced multiple obstacles to applying for RCO grants, including application length, match and reimbursement requirements, perceptions about eligibility and competition, and a lack of awareness of the grant programs. Participants also provided suggestions for emerging investment areas and future engagement opportunities to increase awareness of the grant programs.

Overall, researchers at The Vida Agency noted observations, which are detailed throughout this report, around the following six areas:

- Application obstacles

- Obstacles in the grant evaluation process

- Unlevel playing field

- Technical assistance

- Tribal engagement

- Emerging opportunities

Additional insights not directly related to the equity review but important to capture are included in Appendix D.

RCO envisions a Washington State with abundant outdoor recreation spaces, healthy habitats, and working farms and forests that support people, fish, and wildlife.

Context

There are many benefits to RCO's vision, such as creating better physical, emotional, and mental health, and playing a critical role in air and water quality. With Washington's population expected to increase from 7.4 million in 2019 to more than 9 million in 2040,[1] accommodating park and recreational activities in an equitable way requires planning, communication, collaboration, and community input.

To assess if resources help achieve this vision of being equitably distributed, the Washington State 2021-2023 Biennial Budget included a proviso directing RCO to do the following:

" ...complete a comprehensive equity review of state recreation and conservation grant programs administered by the agency. A critical component to that review is engagement with communities across the state that lack outdoor recreation

opportunities to understand their needs and the barriers that exist to accessing grant dollars provided by RCO.

-RCO community engagement coordinator notice of solicitation

RCO's solicitation highlighted several key challenges to accomplishing its vision for abundant outdoor spaces and access:

- **Barriers:** Economic, social, and cultural barriers provide very real obstacles to outdoor engagement for many people in our state.

- **Gaps and Quality Variance:** A recent RCO study on *Recreational Assets of Statewide Significance*[2] found gaps in outdoor recreation access, especially in small rural communities and racially diverse neighborhoods. In addition, there are inequities in park quality that correlate to racial and socioeconomic characteristics of the community served.

- **Size and Crowd:** A report from the Trust for Public Lands finds parks that serve primarily non-white populations are half the size of parks that serve majority white populations and nearly five times more crowded. Additionally, parks serving majority low-income households are, on average, four times smaller and nearly four times more crowded than parks that serve primarily high-income households.[3]

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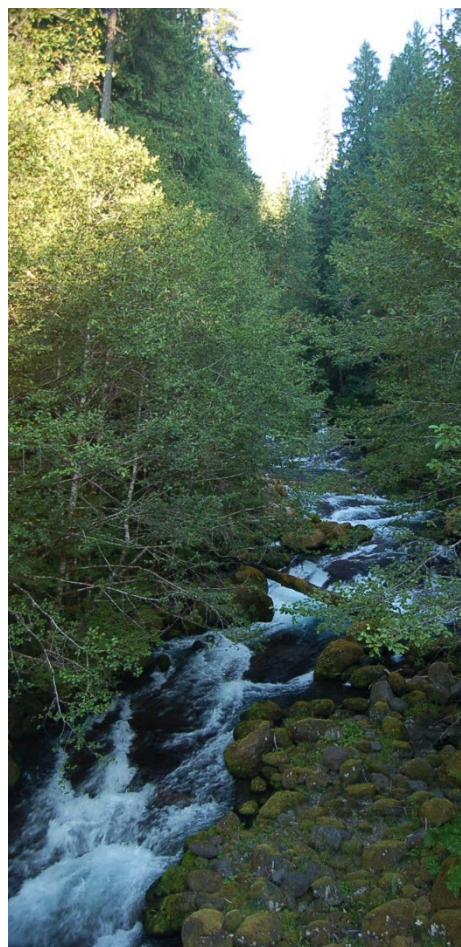
[2]Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office. (2019). *Recreational Assets of Statewide Significance.*
[3]Trust for The Public Land. (2020). *The Heat is On.*

In the *Recreational Assets of Statewide Significance* report, an analysis identified the following services that were lacking statewide:

- Beyond the residential core, most communities lacked sufficient biking facilities and walking opportunities.

- Statewide, there was a lack of nonmotorized winter recreation.

- In eastern Washington, there was a lack of swimming pools, boating, sailing, and fishing activities.

- In large to midsize communities, there was a lack of nature activities.

- Trails lacked coordination, connectivity, and completeness.

- Increasing popularity had created crowded conditions and a backlog of trail maintenance.

- Many agencies could not afford the market rate for land.

These challenges are exacerbated by climate change, COVID-19, and urban heat effect:

- Of the hottest 20 years on record, 19 occurred in the past two decades.[4]

- COVID-19 has put even more pressure on public parks, which already were in high demand, as one of the few places where Americans can escape the confines of home.[5]

- An analysis of 14,000 cities and towns revealed that nationwide, areas within a
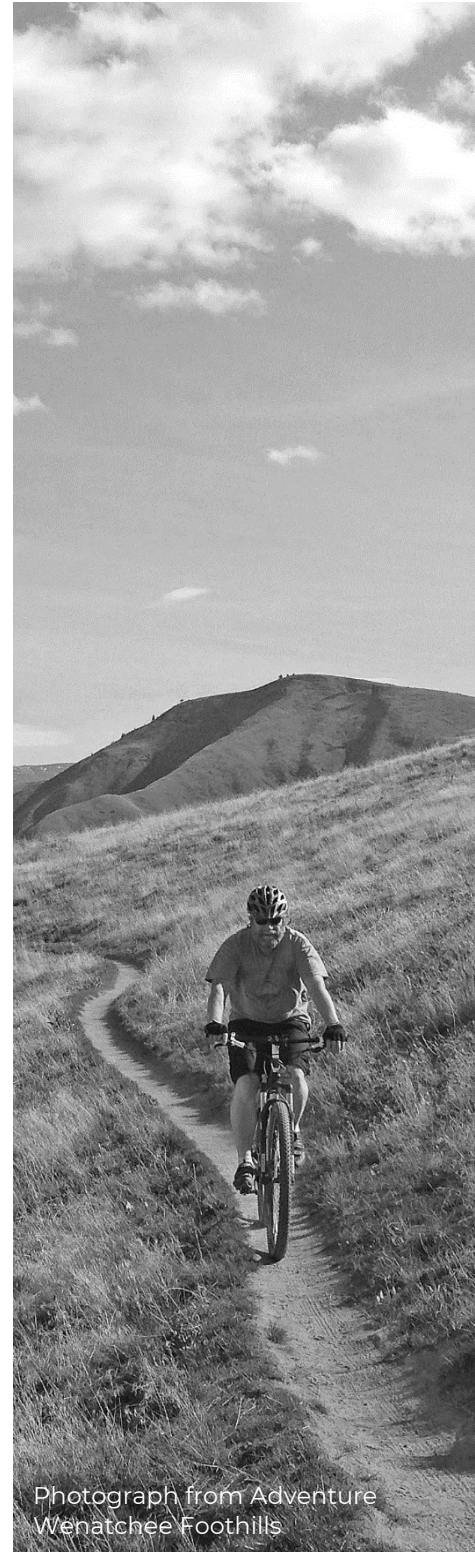
Photograph from Adventure Wenatchee Foothills

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[4]NASA. (2020). *Goddard Global Surface Temperature Analysis*.
[5]Trust for The Public Land. (2020). *The Heat is On*.

10-minute walk of a park are as much as 6 degrees cooler than areas beyond that range.[6]

" We all need and deserve parks—and all of the benefits they provide—all of the time. But during this period of compounded public health emergencies, unequal access to quality parks can be downright dangerous.

-Diane Regas, president and chief executive officer of The Trust for Public Land

Research Goals

The Vida Agency collaborated with RCO and the Prevention Institute to design and implement a community engagement strategy to inform the comprehensive equity review of RCO's recreation and conservation grant programs. The equity review, in tandem with the community engagement work, is intended to help RCO do the following:

- Reduce barriers to historically underserved populations in order to increase participation in RCO grant programs.

- Redress inequities in RCO policies and programs.

- Improve the equitable delivery of resources and benefits in these programs.

To accomplish this, The Vida Agency established primary and secondary research goals to guide community conversations and engagement.

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[6]Trust for The Public Land. (2020). *The Heat is On.*

Primary Research Goals

- Understand the needs of, and barriers to, historically underserved populations accessing RCO grants.

- Identify existing criteria that pose barriers to equitable grant distribution or new criteria that should be added to application, tracking, and reporting processes.

- Identify community-recommended changes to policy and operational norms and practices in furtherance of the equity review purposes.

- Identify new investments and program opportunities or categories that prioritize populations and communities that historically have been underserved by conservation and recreation policies and programs.

Secondary Research Goals

- Understand the impact of existing barriers to equity at RCO.

- Understand who is missing from RCO relationships and partnerships.

- Identify specific inequities in RCO policies and programs.

- Identify geographic gaps in service.

- Include consideration of historic and systemic barriers that may arise due to any race, ethnicity, religion, income, geography, disability, and educational attainment.

- Inform a consistent framework and criteria for RCO to determine if a community is underserved or under-represented.

- Identify preferences and gaps in green space design features, activities, access, transportation, and safety, listening specifically for park quality, size, level of use (is it crowded?), alignment with local culture, and trail connectivity.
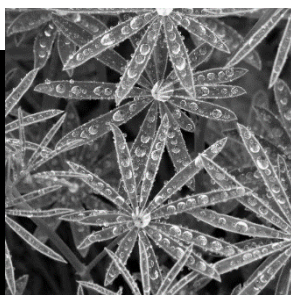
Approach

Based on RCO's solicitation, The Vida Agency initially used a focus-group structure for community input. However, upon feedback and response from priority participants, it pivoted to a mixed-methods, multi-language approach to provide a range of participation levels and access. This included the following:

- **Community Conversations:** 75-minute to 2-hour conversations hosted virtually in English, and one hosted in-person in Vietnamese. Before each virtual discussion, a 15-minute technical support session was provided for participants needing help. Participants were given $100 stipends for their time and expertise if their employers were not able to directly compensate their time.

- **Interviews:** 30-minute, qualitative interviews conducted virtually in English and Spanish. Following each interview, participants were given $100 stipends for their time and expertise if their employers were not able to directly compensate their time.

- **Comment Form**: A digital survey provided in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Somali. Complete responses only were done in English.

Ultimately, the goal was to provide multiple avenues for input so priority participants could select their preferred methods and time commitment.
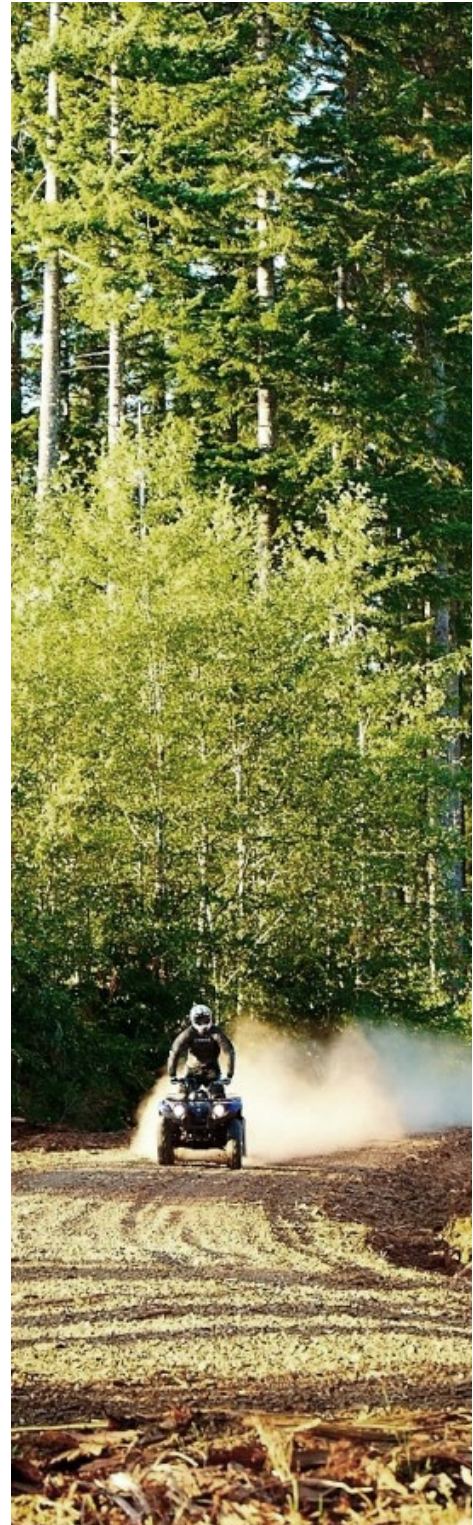
Priority Participants

The Vida Agency recruited participants in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese using the following methods:

- E-mail and phone outreach

- Digital display banner advertisements

- Fliers

- Social media

Input and engagement were prioritized from organizations that met the following criteria:

- Are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)-led

- Serve BIPOC communities

- Serve people with disabilities

- Serve school-aged youth, including educational institutions (kindergarten through high school, college, technical training programs) and youth-focused recreational groups

- Serve parents

- Serve recent immigrants or refugees

- Are community-based or nonprofit

- Bring expertise in environmental justice

- Provide technical expertise or assistance for other organizations to apply for grants

- Provide philanthropic funding for capacity building, environmental justice, parks, or health equity

- Are local governments or jurisdictions, including local agencies, special purpose districts, state agencies

Input and engagement were prioritized from individuals who met the following criteria:

- Historically had been underserved by recreation and conservation programs, such as non-white communities; low-income households; seniors; people with impaired mobility, vision, or hearing; transit-dependent; single family households; and recent immigrants or refugees

- Speak English as a second language, in particular Spanish and Vietnamese

- Are at higher risk to heat exposure, exhaustion, and stroke

Community Participants

Depending on the method of participation, different demographic and experimental questions were asked of respondents. Community conversation participants provided the most detailed documentation of their demographics, organizational focus, and socioeconomics. Comment form respondents provided some of this detail, in shorter form. Interview subjects provided limited demographic detail. In summary, not all participants provided information on each of these questions, hence the number of responses varies. As such, the charts below note which method of participation is reflected: community conversations, comment form respondents, or interview subjects.

Statewide Participation

Only community conversation participants and interview subjects provided zip code information. Geographically, participants largely reflected the population of Washington State. Participants came from 28 of the 39 counties and 65 percent of participants, both community conversations and interviews, were from Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, and Thurston Counties–counties that account for about 70 percent of the population living in the state.
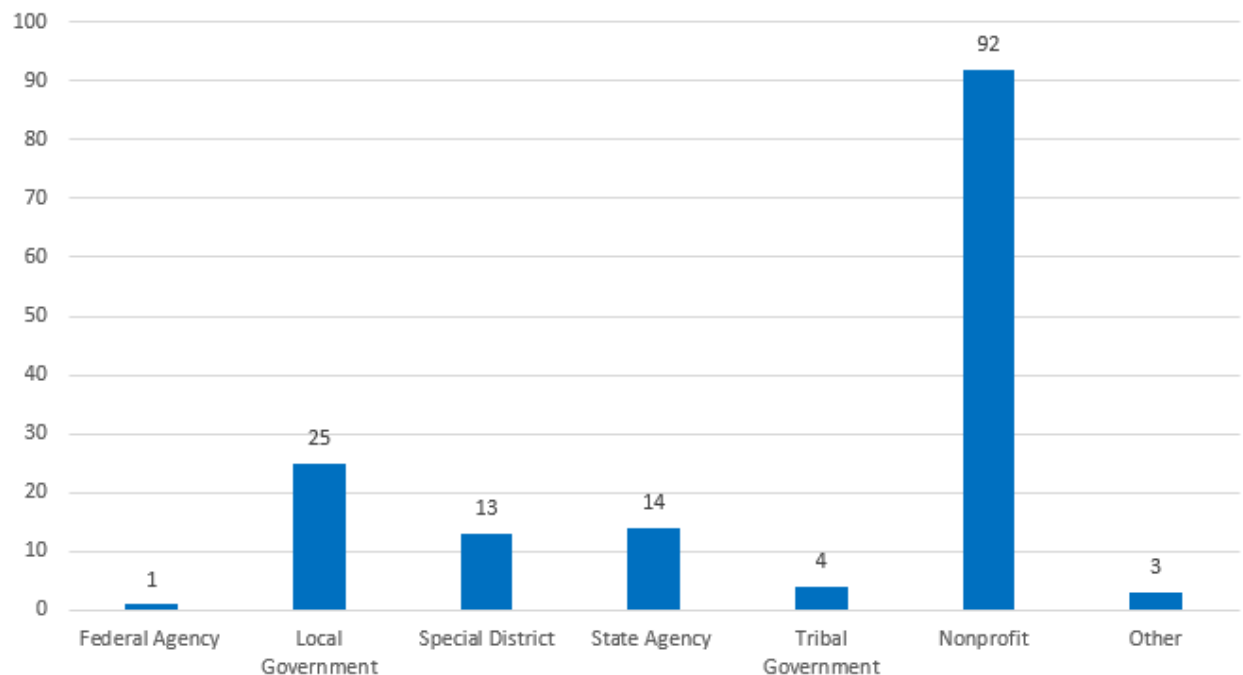
Map of Participants by Zip Code
Community Conversation Participants and Interview Subjects
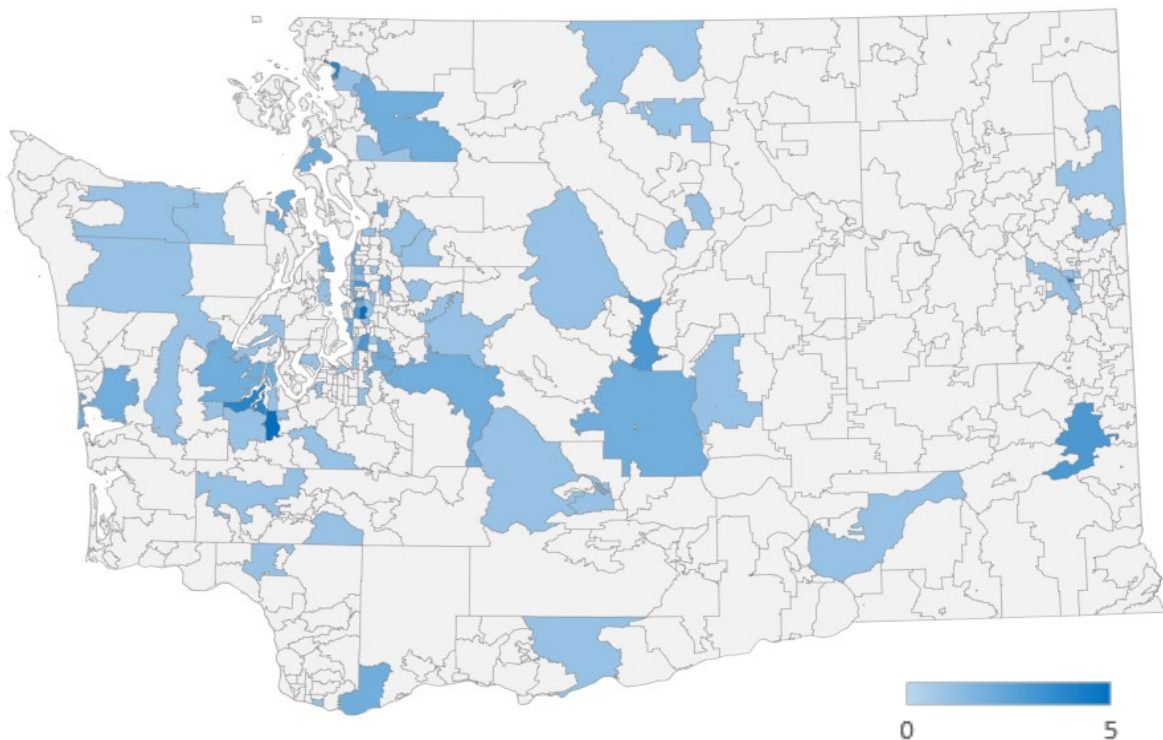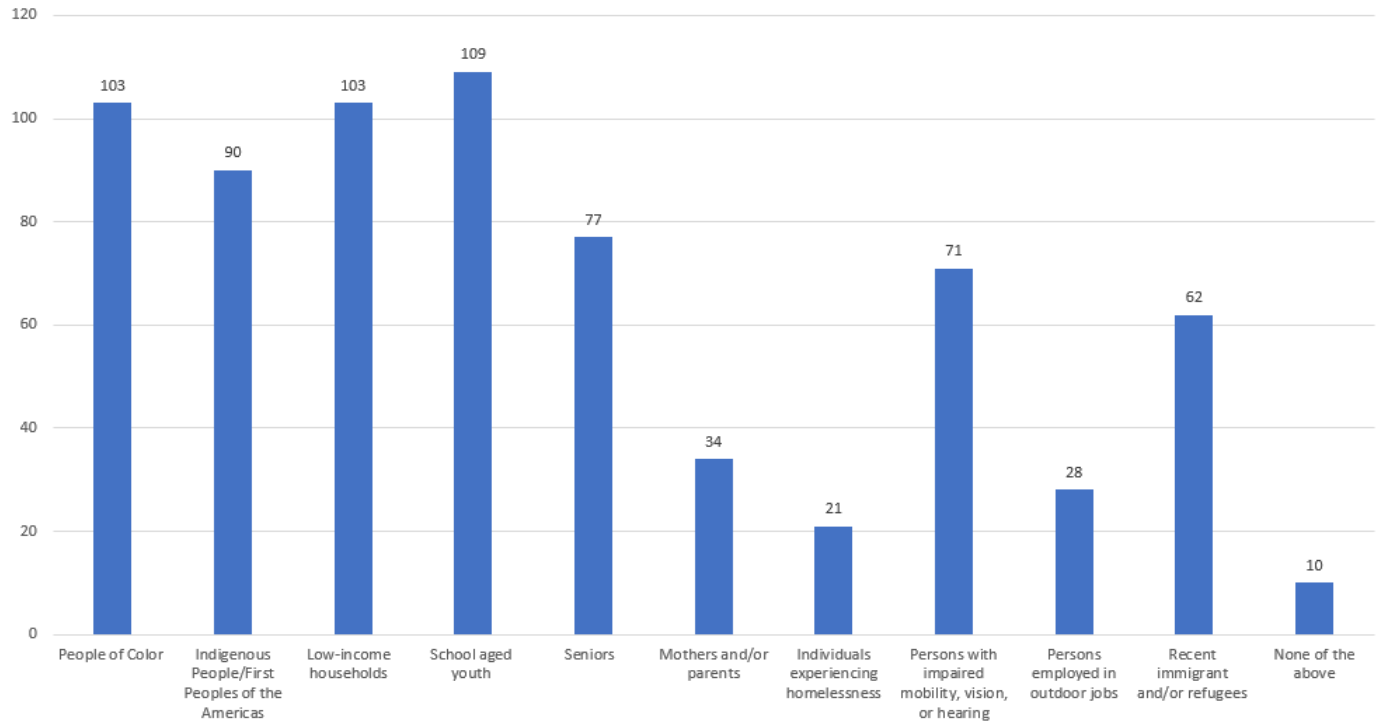
Organizations

Between community conversations, interviews, and comment forms, 152 people participated on behalf of organizations or groups. More than half (61 percent) were with nonprofit organizations, 25 percent with local governments or special districts, 10 percent with state or federal agencies, and several participants were affiliated with tribes, including eight participants from four tribes. A full list of organizations and agencies that registered are in Appendix D.

Participating Organization Type
Community Conversation Participants, Interview Subjects,
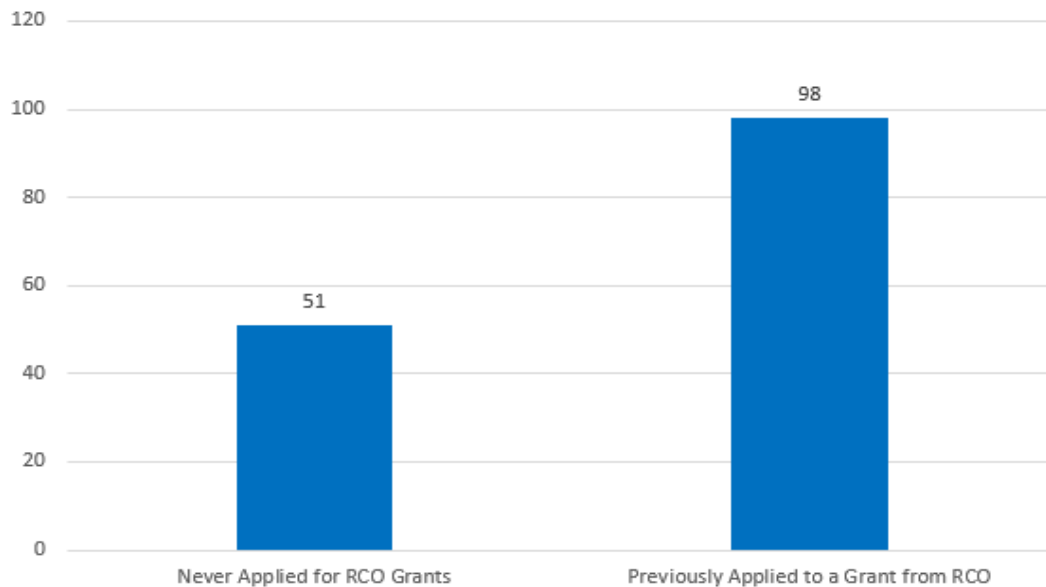and Comment Form Respondents

Communities Served by Participating Organizations
Community Conversation Participants and Interview Subjects

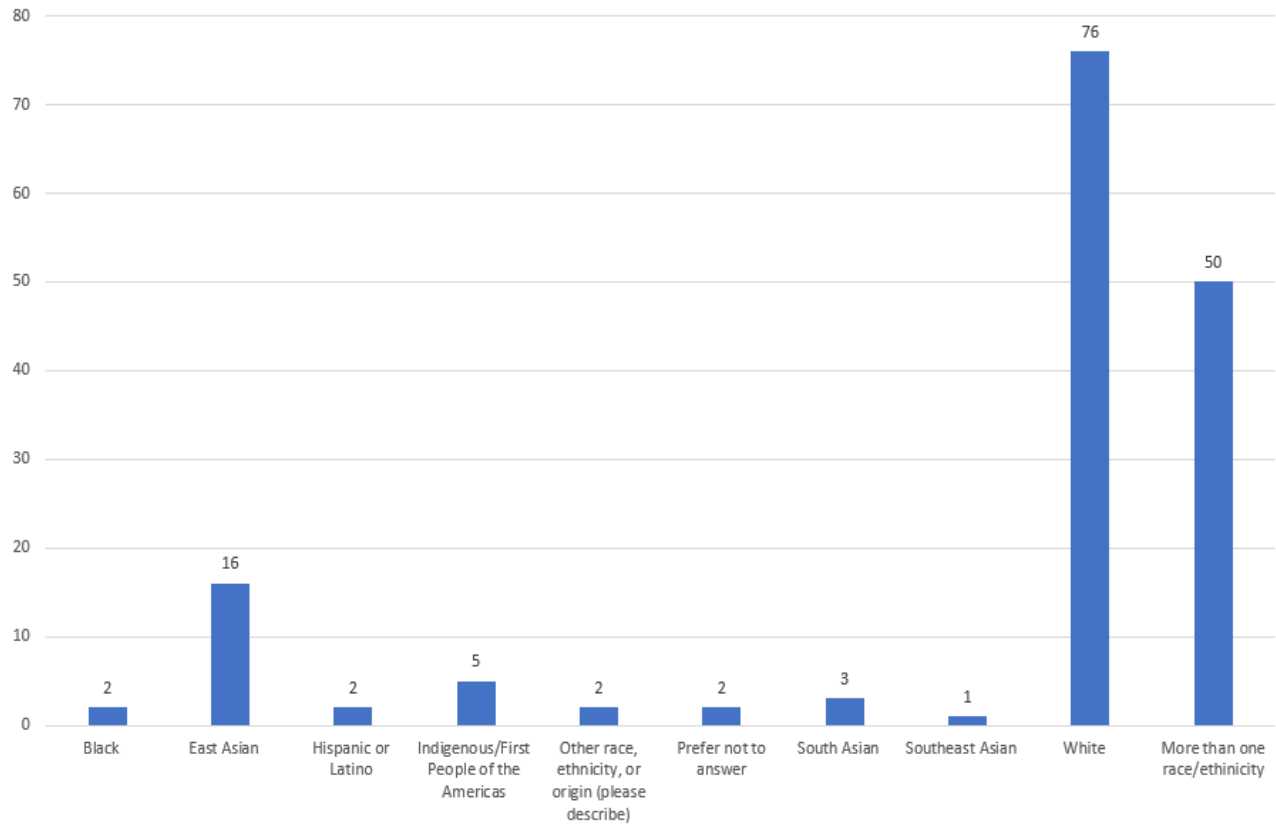| Category	Value
People of Color	103
Indigenous People/First Peoples of the Americas	90
Low-income households	103
School aged youth	109
Seniors	77
Mothers and/or parents	34
Individuals experiencing homelessness	21
Persons with impaired mobility, vision, or hearing	71
Persons employed in outdoor jobs	28
Recent immigrant and/or refugees	62
None of the above	10

Experience with RCO Grants
Community Conversation Participants and Comment Form Respondents

Category	Value
Never Applied for RCO Grants	51
Previously Applied to a Grant from RCO	98

Participant Demographics

Many participants provided demographic information to identify priority participants who were under-represented in discussions.

Race and Ethnicity of Participants
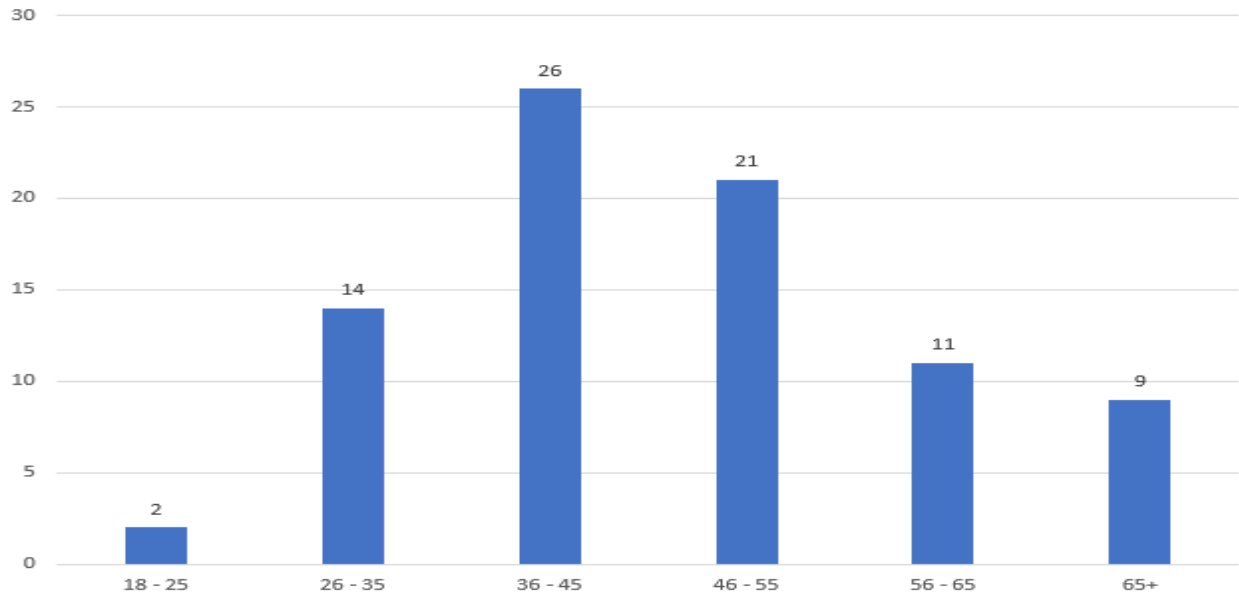Community Conversation Participants and Comment Form Respondents

Category	Value
Black	2
East Asian	16
Hispanic or Latino	2
Indigenous/First People of the Americas	5
Other race, ethnicity, or origin (please describe)	2
Prefer not to answer	2
South Asian	3
Southeast Asian	1
White	76
More than one race/ethinicity	50

Primary Language Spoken at Home of Participants
Community Conversation Participants
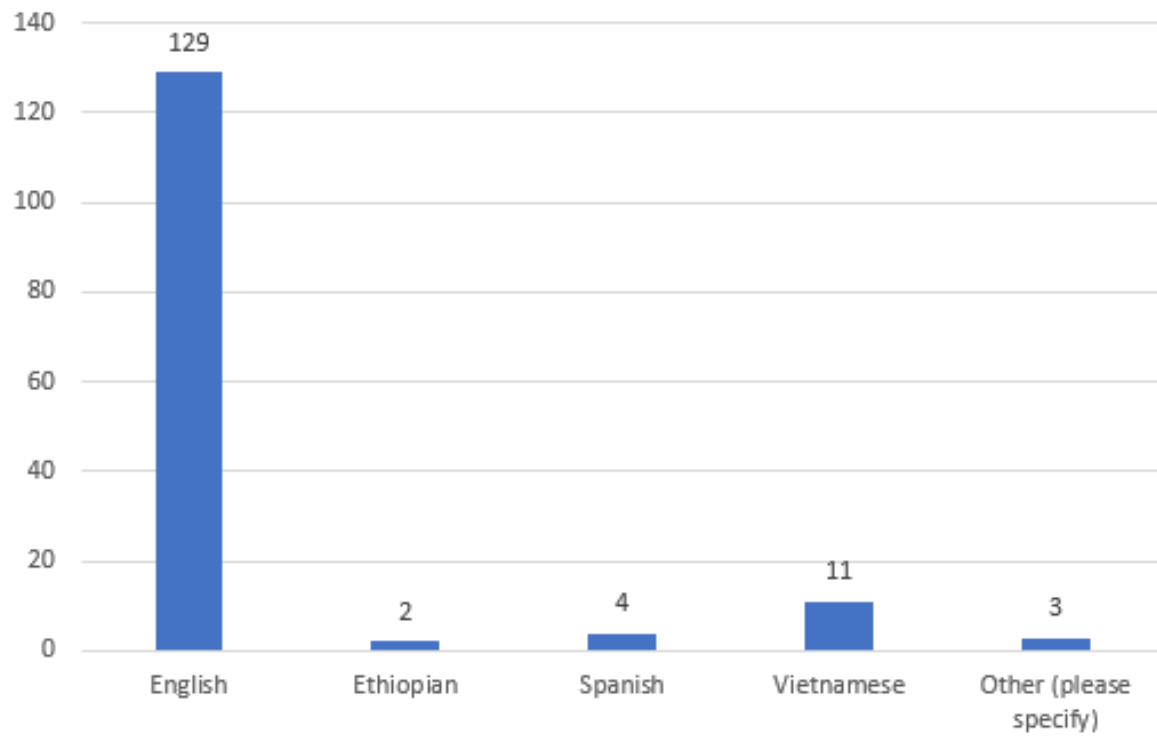
For "Other," the writing options are Amharic, Oromo, and American Sign Language.

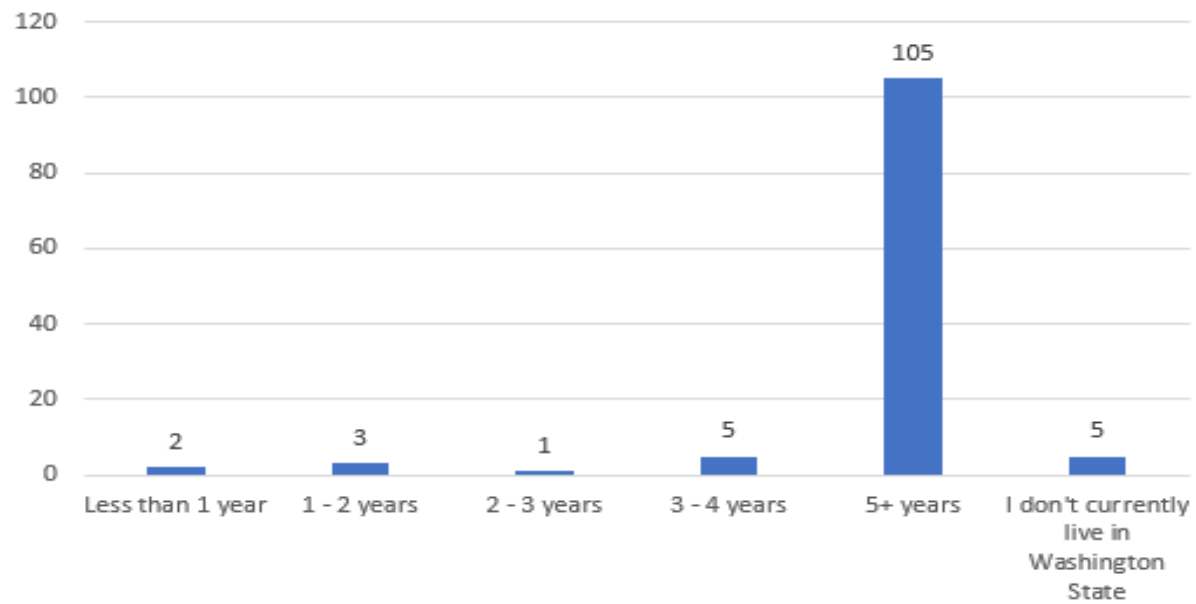## Age of Participants
Community Conversation Participants

Gender of Participants
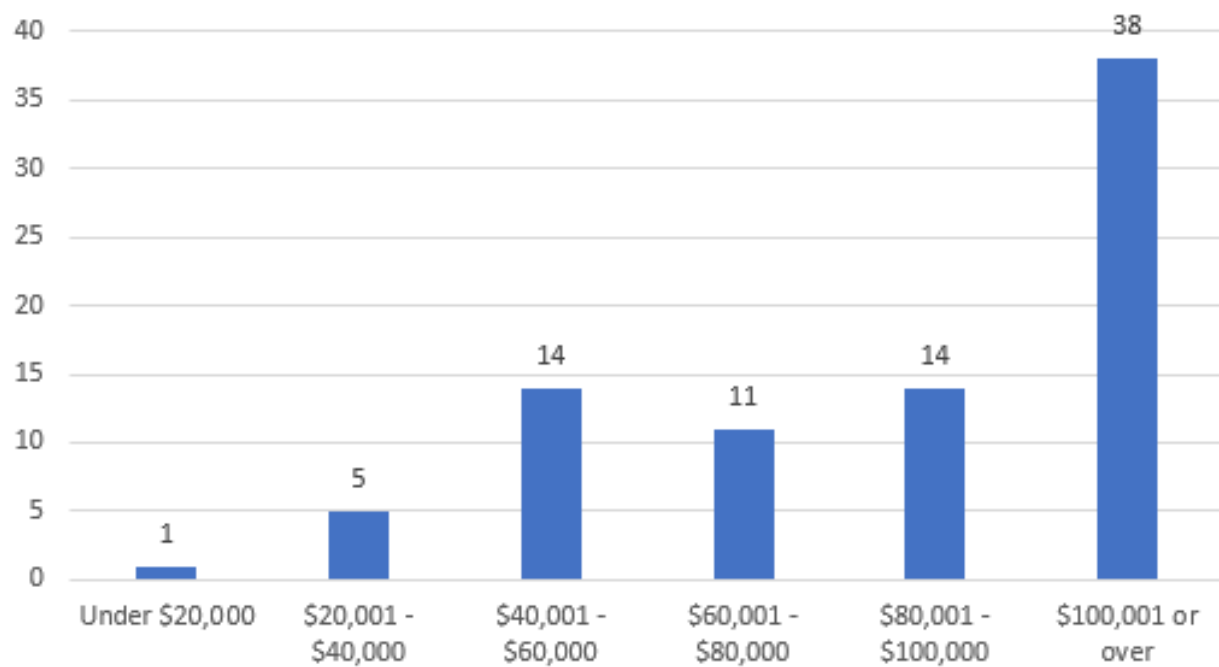Community Conversation Participants and Comment Form Respondents
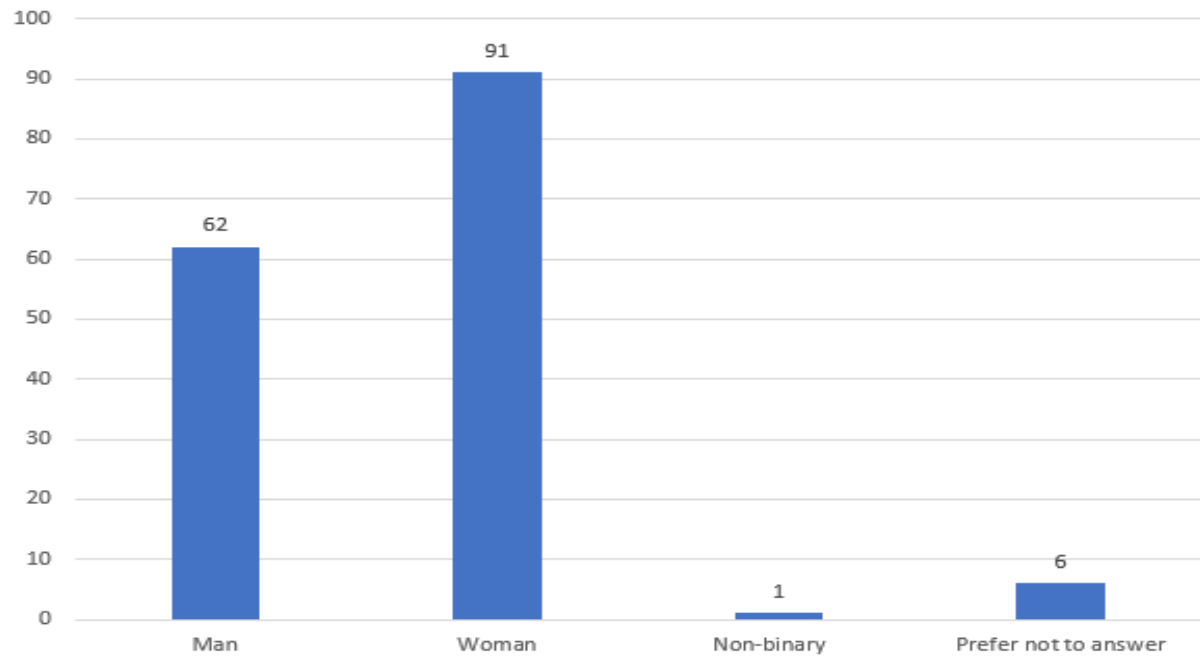
Length of Residency in Washington State of Participants
Community Conversation Participants

Bar chart showing:
- Less than 1 year: 2
- 1 - 2 years: 3
- 2 - 3 years: 1
- 3 - 4 years: 5
- 5+ years: 105
- I don't currently live in Washington State: 5

Household Income of Participants
Community Conversation Participants

Bar chart showing:
- Under $20,000: 1
- $20,001 - $40,000: 5
- $40,001 - $60,000: 14
- $60,001 - $80,000: 11
- $80,001 - $100,000: 14
- $100,001 or over: 38

Interview Participation Demographics

In the focus group interviews, participants were 48 percent white compared to 78 percent white for the state, and 87 percent were from primarily English-speaking households compared to 80 percent for the state. In addition, 87 percent were long-time residents of Washington and 63 percent earn at or more than the state's median income.

Although focus groups represented diversity in demographics and organizations, it was difficult to get members that represented the full needs and diversity of Washington communities. The organizational participant demographics are not surprising similar to the demographics of grant decision-makers in nonprofit and governmental organizations in general, and researchers note that in many of the community conversations, this resulted in participants providing input on the needs of communities that were not adequately reflected in the room.

The tables below compare registrants with priority participant goals to identify gaps.

Organizational Participation
Community Conversation Participants, Interview Subjects, and Comment Form Respondents

Organizational Participant Goals	Participants
Serve BIPOC communities	68%
Serve people with disabilities	47%
Serve school-aged youth	72%
Serve parents	22%
Serve recent immigrants or refugees	41%
Are community-based or nonprofit	61%
80% of governments from rural jurisdictions (counties with a population density less than 100 people per square mile)	28% Representation from 28 of 39 counties; counties in which 97% of Washington residents live, according to the latest census data

Individual Participant Goals	Participants
People of Color	21% were People of Color and 31% identified with more than one race or ethnicity
Low-income	7% had household incomes under $40,000 a year and 63% had household incomes over $80,000 a year
Seniors	11% were more than 65 years old
Speak English as a second language (in particular Spanish and Vietnamese)	13% speak English as their second language, 7% speak Vietnamese, and 3% speak Spanish at home
Higher risk to heat exposure, exhaustion, and stroke	7 out of 11 said they don't have air conditioning in their homes, while 10 out of 11 said there are locations in their neighborhood to go to cool down on hot days

Key Observations

Below are key insights and observations, from participants. These, and community-recommended changes to policy and operational practices are detailed later in the report.

Application Obstacles

Participants identified several key factors that would influence whether or not they would apply for an RCO grant or were cited as challenges in the application process from applicants. Organizations that perceived that the application time and staffing needed were too significant, the match or reimbursement model too prohibitive, or the scoring criteria not well aligned with their projects' goals, said they did not apply for RCO grants. This "self-disqualification" occurred at various stages of the grant process. Some of the issues identified included the following:

- Awareness of opportunities

- Accessibility of grant applications

- Data requirements

- Match requirements

- Reimbursement model of funding

- Organizational capacity

- Grant schedule

Additionally, some participants mentioned that cultural barriers and negative experiences with outdoor recreation in general can be a barrier for organizations led by communities of color. Many of the organizations that mentioned this form of self-disqualification were BIPOC-led, serving BIPOC, small, and/or rurally based communities.

Obstacles in Grant Evaluation Process

Participants discussed the evaluation committees as both a barrier and an opportunity. Common concerns included: perceived and experienced conflicts of interest (such as applicants serving on review committees that are reviewing their organizations' grants), intensive time requirements, uncertainty about how to score equity criteria, and limited diversity of worldview or experiences.

Participants also identified scoring criteria as a challenge. They indicated that many of the criteria appear to be a disadvantage for some applicants based on geography, population size, budget, and costs.

Unlevel Playing Field

Many participants perceived that the RCO process includes unfair competition between organization, budget, and project types that are difficult to compare equitably against one another. Many expressed an "us versus them" mentality while discussing their experience with RCO grant competitions. As a result, applicants perceive that RCO grants are mostly for larger organizations and governments in highly populated areas, and only the largest, more well-funded and staffed organizations said they felt confident investing the time and effort to apply for grants.

Participants said that simplifying the process universally would address many of the major barriers to equity and access. It was observed that there is an inherent tension in simplifying the process so that burdens or barriers are reduced or eliminated versus adding requirements and complexity to the process to gain more insight on how funds will address equity gaps and needs.

Technical Assistance

To help address some of these issues and obstacles, participants felt improvements could be made by providing more support to applicants. Before the application process starts, participants recommended increasing marketing and outreach to organizations that would benefit from grants, increasing support and guidance on how the application needs to be prepared with examples of successful applications, and providing in-language grant writing support.

During the application process, participants want different options to submit applications and more time to prepare applications. More preparation time was especially crucial for nonprofits facing staffing and mental health challenges in the pandemic.

After sending in their applications and receiving their scores, participants want more feedback on their scores and how they can improve their applications in the future.

Tribal Engagement

Participants noted that it's not just the projects that impact their reservations or usual and accustomed sites that may be relevant for local tribes, and they recommended that RCO provide earlier opportunities for tribes to review proposed projects. They suggested that RCO pursue dedicated staff tribal liaisons who could build trust, understanding, and collaboration with tribal councils and organizations, creating ongoing engagement about all grants rather than one-off engagements about a specific project proposal.

Participants generally were supportive of increasing communication between RCO and their tribes or organizations, and suggested committees as an avenue to increase participation from tribes and tribal members. Participants said that while capacity and time were limited, participating in the criteria refinement and being kept in the loop on proposed projects were important solutions.

Emerging Opportunities

Not all participants had specific categories or programs in mind when discussing additional investment opportunities. While specific comments vary depending on the organization and

the communities they serve, their comments can be organized into the following few common themes:

- Mitigating impact on tribal cultural resources

- Returning green spaces to traditional cultural activities

- Providing public education and alignment with treaty rights

- Offering large-scale recreation grants

- Improving access for all

- Addressing road walkability and bike-ability

- Providing education and information

- Providing culture-focused grants

- Providing maintenance grants

- Combating climate change

Detailed Observations from Participants

Application-related Obstacles

Participants commented that several factors would impact whether they applied for a grant or were identified as a challenge in the application process. Some of these issues resulted in potential applicants engaging in "self-disqualification" because the obstacles were seemingly too significant to overcome.

> " The process itself seems so onerous on both the applicant and the reviewers. Maybe this thing has outgrown itself and needs to be not refined with more granular detail, but more simplified...I think it's inhibiting a lot of really great projects from being funded.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " The RCO grant process is such an arduous process that filing the grant applications is hardly worth it for a small organization without full-time grant writing staff members. For our small org to spend 2-4 weeks compiling the necessary information for the application and then not receive a single RCO grant has caused us to stop applying for them despite a ton of really solid projects worthy of these grants.
>
> -Comment Form Respondent
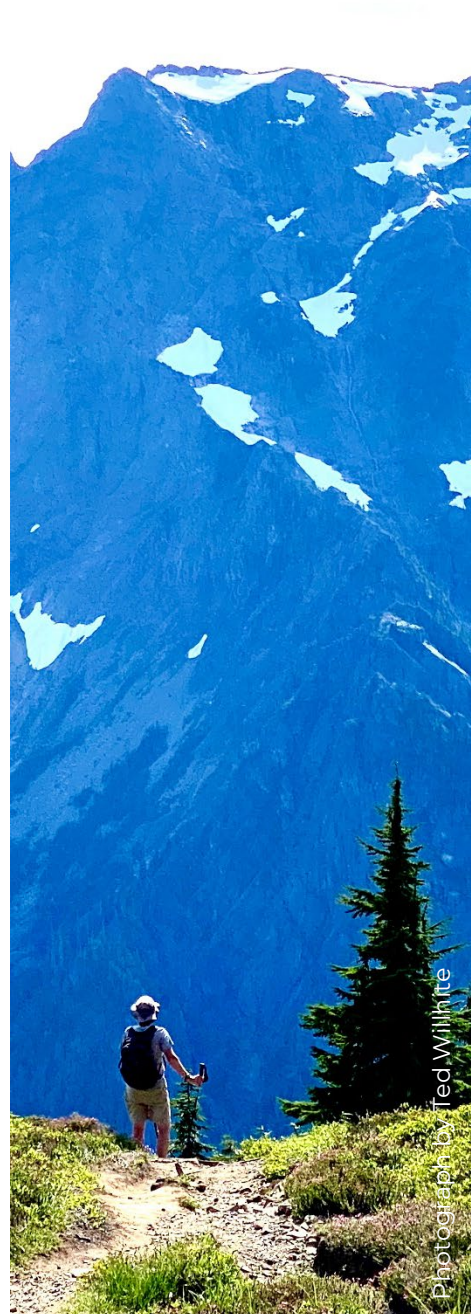
Photograph by Ted Willhite

Participants also suggested improvements to help address some of these obstacles. Issues identified and suggested improvements are captured below by category.

Awareness of Opportunities

When asked about how past applicants learned about RCO grants, participants predominantly indicated word-of-mouth or that their organizations had been applying so long that they don't remember.

Of 133 participants who responded, 34 percent were "very familiar" or "extremely familiar" with RCO, 20 percent said they were "not familiar at all."

Of 122 participants who responded, 61 percent had applied for a grant, and of those, 62 percent had received funding, while 39 percent had never applied.

Participant Familiarity with RCO Community Conversations
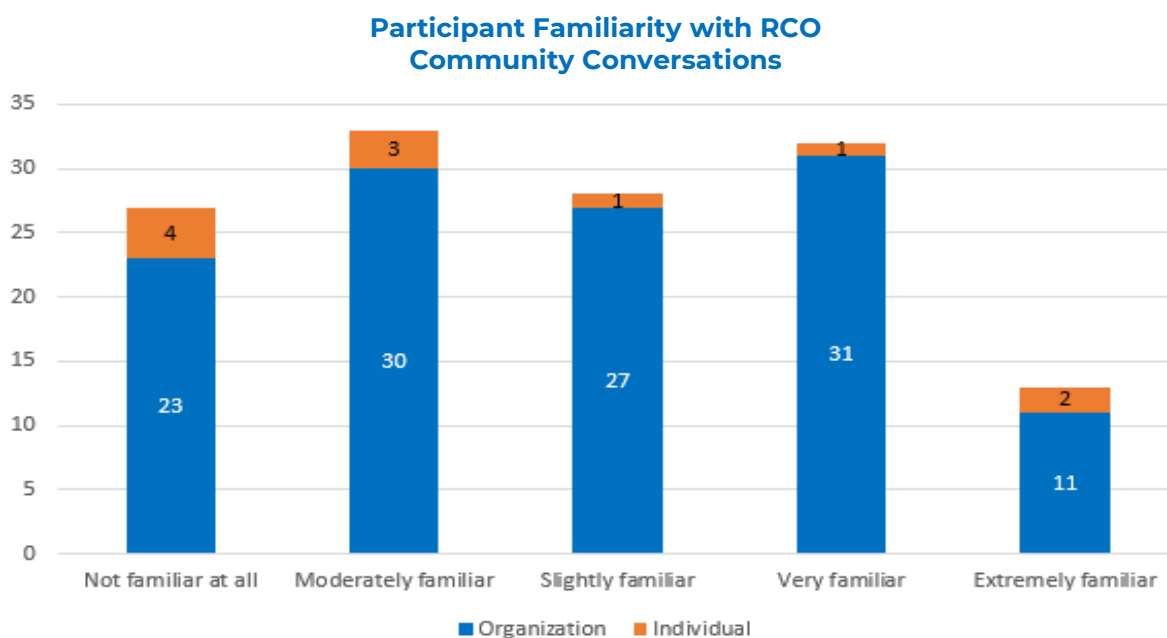
Several participants felt uncertain about which grants were available to tribes, and tribal organizations or governments.

Suggestions to Increase Awareness

Participants made recommendations related to marketing and outreach, noting that it is difficult for organizations to discover RCO grant opportunities that would otherwise benefit from these funds. It was suggested to hold opportunities such as

information sessions in advance of the grant deadlines, both virtually and in-person. Participants noted it can be hard to navigate information in general about grant opportunities, especially for first-time applicants.

> " [You need more] marketing and outreach, so just making sure that more organizations are aware of these opportunities and the way that these grants are out there.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " I'm relatively new to my organization, but I'm the first one to find out about this grant program, and so I think we could have really benefited from it from in the past, but it just wasn't on our radar. So, I'm not sure what's being done for outreach, but making sure that organizations hear about it.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " I'll start by saying I'd never heard of you before. So I think that's a barrier in and of itself, that particularly if you're trying to reach smaller organizations that are in communities of color, there would need to be some initial efforts to make sure that folks know the grant funds exist.
>
> -Interview Subject

One participant recommended improving outreach by using local media to broadcast directly to the communities that would benefit most from these grants and update the Web site with application-support content so that people have a better understanding of the opportunities available to them.

> " [Reach out to] BIPOC networks. [They] would be a great channel to broadcast to community. So just getting the message out there. And making sure the people that could benefit from these grants are learn about them.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Additionally, it was suggested that outreach include a mix of virtual and in-person to alleviate technological and travel barriers.

> " The problem with information sessions is once again, then we go back to tech access, though, because I know that it's hard to have that be throughout the whole state without it virtual, right? So if somebody doesn't have access to a computer, then they can't attend the information

session...But I think maybe doing them somehow in-person and virtual and trying to have them in a few different parts of the region could help.

-Interview Subject

Participants suggested more proactive, direct outreach and education to tribes, directed at sharing upcoming opportunities with all tribes and Indigenous-serving organizations, and to extend eligibility to not just those who are federally recognized.

Accessibility of Grant Applications

Complicated verbiage and jargon were noted as a barrier for both new and returning applicants. The acronyms used throughout grant materials were viewed as an added step in the process, because the applicant first needed to learn the language of RCO before being able to assess if the grants are relevant to their organizations. For applicants new to grant writing, they faced double the challenge, needing to learn both the jargon of grant writing and the RCO-specific acronyms at the same time.

> It just takes a really long time to fully figure out how to speak RCO, to say and to understand all the requirements. Definitely a lot of complicated things there for new organizations.

-Community Conversation Participant

Even for those who were familiar with grant making processes in general, participants noted difficulty with RCO jargon.

> It's really daunting. I mean, I've been doing RCO grants since 2008, and it took me probably 5 or 6 years before I felt like I was fluent in RCO.

-Community Conversation Participant

Additionally, many organizations that serve communities where English is spoken as a second language said they are staffed by non-native English speakers. For those that speak English as a second language, learning and then leveraging RCO-specific verbiage in their applications was viewed as a barrier to being competitive.

> [Generally speaking] a lot of our staffs are from East Africa. English is not our first language, including myself. I'm just learning English as well. Not too long ago that I came to U.S. and I'm just learning.

-Community Conversation Participant

Suggestions to Improve Accessibility

Reduce the amount of acronyms or provide a terms glossary to help interpret the language used. Simplify the communication, particularly on the Web site.

> " The [Web site] is confusing...When I roll over Grant. I see a list of, almost 20 acronyms. And those are meaningless to me. And when I go over to what we do, I see our priorities and I see these lovely little icons and the simple statements. And those are meaningful to me...Pretty important that the very first thing when I go to grants is...this really clean, clear communication of these three little boxes on the left, something like that would [make the] grant programs a little more accessible and a little more comprehensive, civil. Seeing something like that, a change like that would make this a lot less overwhelming.

-Community Conversation Participant

Applications and instructions also should consider and incorporate approaches for those organizations where English is not the primary language.

> " I hope RCO...is looking at different ways to design grants and grant applications so that everyone has a good chance of being able to apply and...regardless of language you speak or if you can write a [good paragraph or not]...

-Community Conversation Participant

Some participants noted that paper applications would be easier for them to complete. They perceived online applications as a slower process, and that they weren't confident that their application was received when submitted digitally.

> " First, applications should be able to be done by paper, so that we can send it by mail. Using the Web/Internet would be slower, it processes slower.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " If I can just print the form, write on it, and mail it, that would be faster for me.

-Community Conversation Participant

Data Requirements

In the comment form, respondents were told that a PowerPoint presentation, detailed maps, and other application documents are required, and in some cases, a recreation plan may be needed, and that applicants will need to sign up to RCO's PRISM online database and submit files electronically. Organizations were asked if these requirements are a barrier and the responses show that for five out of seven organizations that have never received RCO funding, these requirements would make it difficult for them to apply.

Application Document Requirements as a Barrier to Application
Comment Form
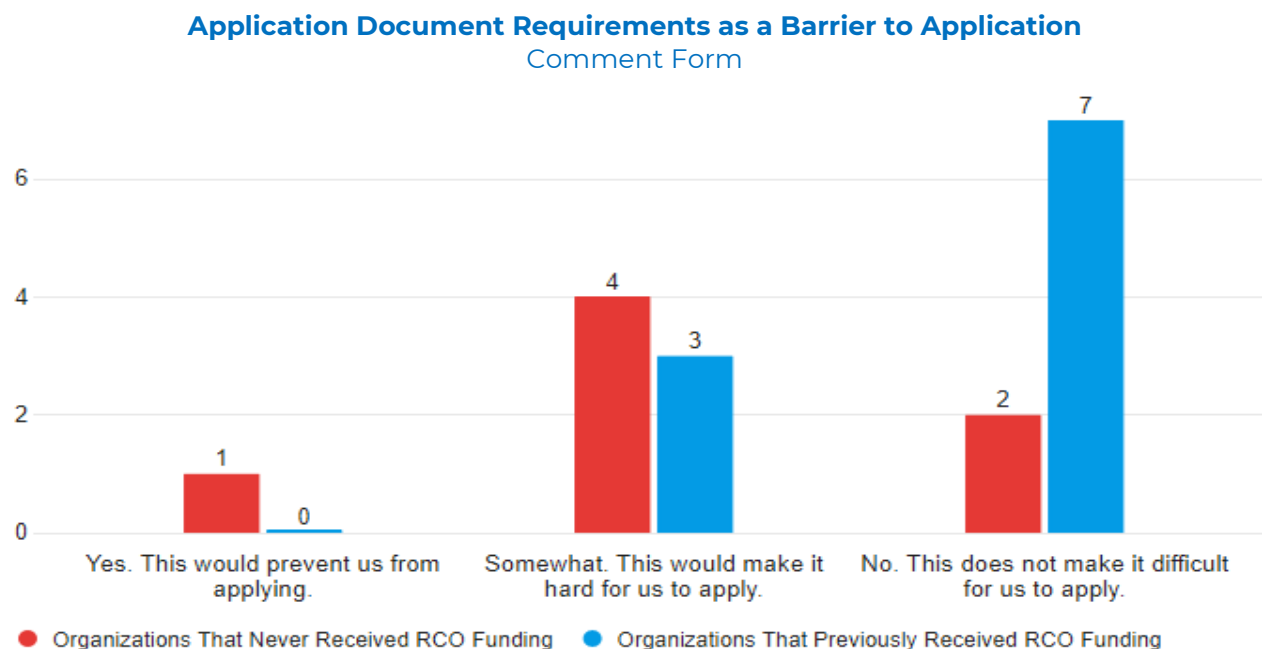
Participants shared that data is hard to find, particularly for smaller organizations or projects that require niche data, and that not having access to data can be an easy cause for self-disqualification.

> " Sometimes it's data that we don't have that is worrisome. When smaller municipalities or agencies see those, then they get discouraged before they ever apply.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

>" We spent probably more time on the application trying to find that data...We collect some demographic data from participants, but we don't have a large, you know, bank of data at our ready...I had many conversations with county and school district level folks who do collect the data, for example, school districts, the question how many of your participants are eligible for free or low-pay lunches, for example? Wow. Where do we start? And I've done grant writing for 30 years, but we are in such a small remote county and community that that data just simply isn't available...data collection is no small thing in this in this process.

-Community Conversation Participant

>" It can be hard to get the data...Income levels, poverty levels, reduced-price lunch levels...We might not have access to that data. And even if we can get it, it might not accurately reflect the population that we're specifically serving with the programs that we're offering or that we're creating to offer to a specific group.

-Community Conversation Participant

>" The data requirements–i.e., maps, demographics, etc.–of our community...is time-consuming. In the last round I had to contact someone in the State School Superintendent's Office to provide data. Tracking down the appropriate person and convincing them to provide the data for the grant purpose took a long time!

-Comment Form Respondent

Even when the data was accessible, many participants shared that their lack of data analyses, visualizations, or mapping expertise and context still made it hard for them to understand and use data in a way that would make their applications compelling.

Ultimately, few participants felt that the data requirements were easy to understand or meet, even for organizations with both data expertise and staff capacity.

Suggestions to Improve Data Requirement

One participant noted applying to the same grants every time and sending in the same applications with minimal changes. A process that allowed applicants to leverage some of their previous application information would simplify their application processes.

> **"**
>
> Streamlining the application process for recurring grant applications with minimal changes in their contents, [for example] a M&O application that is largely a carbon copy of a previous M&O application.
>
> -Comment Form Respondent

Match Requirements

Participants in all sessions said that the match requirement posed a significant barrier, particularly for the following:

- Organizations new to grant writing or the match concept

- Small organizations

- Organizations in rural communities

- Organizations with limited paid staff to help track and coordinate alternative matching documentation

> **"**
>
> Sometimes any match at all, if the organization doesn't understand even what the matching sort of component can look like... is a barrier.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> **"**
>
> The match, 50 percent is a lot for a small organization, especially because our members are workers and the income is $15,000 to $25,000 per year. That will be very difficult.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> **"**
>
> It doesn't feel like a reachable grant at all.
>
> -Interview Subject

> **"**
>
> Having some kind of stipulation where it makes it a fair. Because if rural areas can't come up with the matches like the metropolitan areas, then their applications won't get funded. And there we go, not giving the same opportunity when the metropolitan areas have a huge amount of resources and the rural areas don't.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

" So, I think the match is also another big barrier...State agencies don't have to for some grant programs, but for some they do like the Land and Water Conservation Fund and also the firearm and archery range program. We have to come up with 50 percent match and that definitely does seem to be a barrier for our agency.

-Community Conversation Participant

Organizations that had received RCO funding did not perceive the matching requirement to be an issue, whereas organizations that hadn't applied or received funding felt it was a much bigger barrier.

" A lot of times people go, "oh, it's going to cost me this, I can't match it" and just write that grant off and go for something that's fully funded.

-Interview Subject

" We've turned down grants that had a 50 percent match requirement because we weren't going to be able to do it.

-Interview Subject

Matching Requirement as a Barrier to Application
Comment Form

- Organizations That Never Received RCO Funding
- Organizations That Previously Received RCO Funding
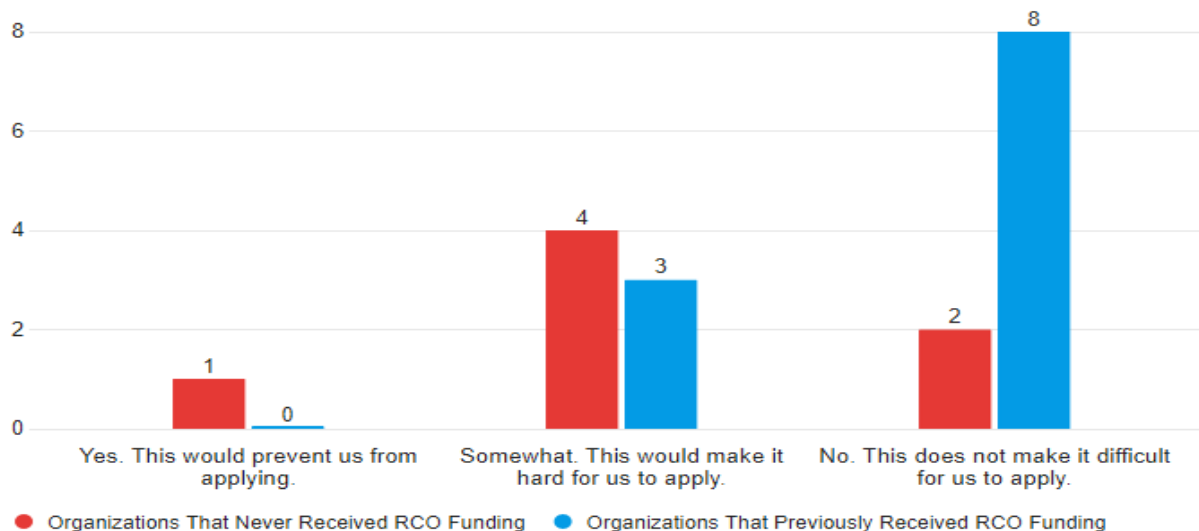
While volunteer time as match is an option, some participants said they didn't realize this until after receiving a grant. Several participants who had been aware of the volunteer option raised concerns about the staff time necessary to track this in-kind form of match. While they were glad to have an alternative to the financial match, the burden of executing the alternative also posed barriers.

> " I think it's hard to sometimes quantify like the amount of, say, volunteer hours that you could use to get an estimate. Cost for your project, knowing that you'll need to say maybe you have a fabricator, maybe have a certain type of designer, or get a contract with a contractor on board with your project. And then, of course, with the pandemic recently being able to have a vision of say what the timeline on your project would be getting this.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

One participant commented that the match requirement necessitated all matches be made through a single organization, making it difficult for partnerships or collaborations between groups to meet the requirement, even if they do have the community volunteer time accounted for.

> " One thing that we've struggled with [is partnerships]. So we operate on a really highly focused partnership model, and we've actually had problems obtaining grants from RCO when we have a lot of matches from the community members because it's not our match, it doesn't come [from] our bank account. [A lot of work is] run through the [partner] organization...They're doing the fundraising, they're doing the project management, but we can't count their match for our RCO application.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Several participants commented on the difficulty in securing a match at all, whether financial or in-kind, for organizations with capacity currently drained due to the pandemic.

> " It's hard to establish new partnerships when our capacity as a nonprofit organization is already very limited and drained for sure. We know that nonprofits have been going through just a really big challenge in the past 2 years.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Participants who were familiar with the concept and process of a match requirement experienced less of an issue with it.

> " Match is not an unusual thing and we're pretty used to dealing with it. So I don't think that's a huge issue at least.

<div align="right">-Community Conversation Participant</div>

Suggestions to Improve Match Requirements

Participants suggested co-stewardship as a possible alternative for small community-based organizations to meet their matching requirements.

> " One of the things we worked out was a partnership for my canoe club. We worked out a partnership with DNR where we would help co-steward the space as part of keeping our rents down. So, we help like, you know, take care of the plants and the restoration work that they're doing. We do cleanups every quarter of the of the park space that are all volunteers...Things like co-stewardship models [for RCO could] help make it more accessible for small, community-based organizations.

<div align="right">-Community Conversation Participant</div>

One grant recipient originally believed the match plan outlined in the application must be kept and was pleased with RCO's flexibility to adjust the match amounts and approach after the grant was awarded. It was suggested that adding this level of clarity from the outset might reduce the pressure on applicants to have a finalized match at the time of application.

> " We were concerned about the match, and we absolutely understand and I personally agree that having skin in the game is important. But we're a really small organization. We had aspirations for doing a lot of work. And what we found was that we didn't actually need to find as much in our personal coffers, or we didn't need to find as much from one particular source of the match that we committed to. We found out that if we got more volunteer time or more from some other kind of source of match after the fact, during the operations of the actual grant, that worked. That was a win for us. I mean, all of a sudden the match process and the big picture part of it helped make it feel more equitable and easier for a small organization like ours to meet.

<div align="right">- Community Conversation Participant</div>

Grant applicants discussed the need for awareness building and clarity around the match flexibility to eliminate some of the perceived barriers and self-disqualification occurring from more resource-strapped entities.

> " It makes me wonder if, for the folks that are self-selecting out of the process, maybe even before they apply, when they see something like the match requirement. Do those organizations at that point of looking at the process, do they understand all the ways that they might be able to apply match to a project? They're probably not getting into those when they're taking themselves out. So that early education of all the creative ways you can match without bringing cash to the project might be helpful.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " A case in point, our total bank account is probably at most $15,000 in the bank at any one time. We have an all-volunteer staff, and yet we were aspiring for $200,000 to $400,000 worth of work to do. So we needed to pony up some match. And what we found out was that volunteer time was as good as cash, but it didn't seem to be that in the application process. After the actual work was being done, we found out that it was. And that was like a tremendous load off our shoulders

-Community Conversation Participant

Participants suggested having government entities provide in-kind match in support of nonprofit projects, rather than financial match.

> " I think a simple way to make that still count as a partnership might solve the barrier.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " Could it be a requirement of park or other public space [to have] governmental agencies sharing in-kind? Or would it have to be financial? Because nonprofits, particularly [our organization], we do lots of stuff in partnership with Parks. They don't give us any money, but they give us space and that saves us money. And we use funds for our programs that are in partnership with the parks, for example.

-Community Conversation Participant

However, while government participants had succeeded in securing nonprofit partners on projects, participants said the reverse was prohibitively difficult.

> " With local parks, bringing in nonprofits makes sense, but bringing in government entities to contribute financially to nonprofit organizations, that's a tough sell. I would not want to see that as one of the requirements, solutions, or even bonus points because it's unreachable for most of us.

-Community Conversation Participant

One person suggested that RCO consider a match waiver model similar to the [King County Conservation Futures](#). In that application, projects that are proposed in "Opportunity Areas" are given a match waiver, and Conservation Futures funding is able to pay 100 percent of the eligible project acquisition costs.

> " They also require a match when you're going to acquire park land with their funds. But they have a tool that they set up recently where they've looked at all the cities in King County. And you can go and look and see if this property you're acquiring is within one of these mapped reduction areas. They'll pretty much pay for the whole thing there…That's a pretty easy to use tool. At least for us when we're doing acquisition projects like that, it helps out a lot

-Community Conversation Participant

Reimbursement Model of Funding

Many participants commented on barriers related to the reimbursement model. Primarily, that many smaller-budget organizations don't have the upfront funds to pay out of pocket, so would be unable to actually use their grants even if grants were awarded.

> " At the risk of overstating, can I be clear about the reimbursement issue and that is for a new grantee, if you're applying for $25,000 for a concept or whatever it is, when you get approval for that, you don't get $25,000, you get the ability to spend $25,000 and get it back…So, a new grant requester has to understand you don't get money, you get the ability to submit bills.

-Community Conversation Participant

> **❝** I think for small organizations, the process of spending and then reimbursement is always a huge barrier...We are very small budget spenders, although we are high expenditure organizations in terms of the needs and the services...Our budgets are really slim because we don't have consistent funding coming in. So, if we were to engage in such an RFP and then we have to do a project, then clearly that's a barrier and we are just straight up out of such processes.
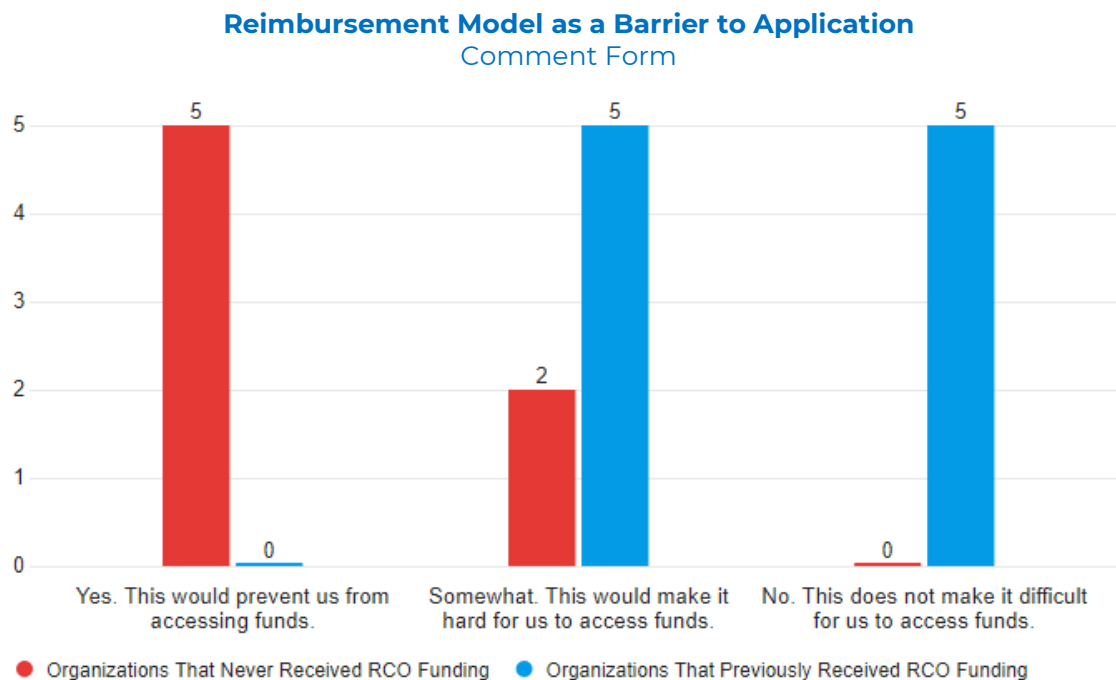>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> **❝** If you're looking to create a program, you have to literally have all the money for that program because everything you spend on that program has to be spent before it gets reimbursed from the grant. So, it presumes a cash availability to the organization. And if you're a small organization, you're looking at big barriers to try and get capital together.
>
> - Community Conversation Participant

In the comment form, respondents were asked whether the reimbursement model would make it difficult for them to access RCO grants. The responses show a polarizing difference between organization that have received RCO grants and those that have not or didn't apply. Five out of seven organizations that had not received funding or applied saw the reimbursement model as a barrier for them to access the funds.

Reimbursement Model as a Barrier to Application
Comment Form

Legend:
● Organizations That Never Received RCO Funding   ● Organizations That Previously Received RCO Funding

Suggestions to Improve the Reimbursement Model

Participants suggested that allowing for grant funds to be distributed in advance would help address this issue.

> " Maybe if there was money available for the first step of a big project, like if there was grant money for research and development or something.

-Interview Subject

Organizational Capacity

Having the capacity, time, and expertise to apply were near-universal challenges felt by participants. They noted that the application takes a lot of time and effort to complete, and often requires grant writers or designers with specialized experience or training in data and mapping. Not all organizations have grant writers on staff, let alone grant writers with experience applying for RCO grant mapping and data requirements.

> " One of the things RCO should focus on is to increase diversity of applicants. We've got to start looking at how a smaller organization has the time and the capacity to apply, and how they find out about the grant as well. A lot of organizations...have one or two people doing the work. And if they're taking 40 plus hours out of their time to apply for the money, then the work doesn't get done. It's a very common Catch 22 with small organizations, I assure you.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " It took me probably 2 full weeks to get through the process, and I've been doing this for 10 years or so. So, it's not it is not the most accessible..."

-Community Conversation Participant

> " You have someone that is not a full-time grant writer that's also a rec coordinator, and they're doing a grant on the side and then they're trying to navigate PRISM and then they're trying to do a presentation on top of that and have to be a master at PowerPoint and not have all the data. So, it's an incredibly difficult process.

-Community Conversation Participant

> **"** I think the last time we applied for an RCO grant was like 11, 12 years ago. And after that process that we went through, I was like, the juice isn't worth the squeeze...All the amount of time involved in it, which takes away from what we're doing for our local community. And to go out and get a $250,000 grant, that's not even worth it. I mean, $500,000 is maybe worth it. It's about the amount of effort involved in going to do this...On top of that, when you're a smaller business like ourselves, when you're going to do a PowerPoint presentation to the people and we don't have a GIS system or we don't have all the resources that a larger agency does to put into that presentation, you're at a disadvantage right off the bat...So, it's an incredibly difficult process.

-Community Conversation Participant

> **"** It's overwhelming to see all that needs to happen to even consider applying.

-Interview Subject

Suggestions to Improve Organizational Capacity

Several participants suggested that RCO could provide support directly to applicants through informational sessions or phone conversations, and others recommended connecting applicants with those who have received funding in the past to provide mentorship through the process.

> **"** I think having more RCO grant staff who can do the deeper dive with the jurisdictions...being able to really build the capacity or hold the hands of potential applicants that meet certain criteria could help overcome some of those barriers around. Do you have access to even get maps made? Do you have access to pictures? Do you have access to what type of information that might help answer some of the questions and strengthen your application, so the applicant doesn't feel so out there on their own trying to figure it out?

-Community Conversation Participant

> **"** So really looking at and also for other organizations even being able to be matched up with like a mentor organization like, hey, you don't feel like you can do this on your own, but we feel like you'd be a great fit for this funding. Let's partner you with this larger organization to be able to make this project happen or even have some ideas for projects and work together. Sometimes we have the kids, but not the program. And are

there some opportunities there to really create mentoring opportunities for organizations within these funding parameters?

-Community Conversation Participant

Several grant recipients commented on the need for networking, knowledge sharing, and partnership development between new and past grant applicants and recipients.

" Informal networks can be pivotal to applicants and projects for long-term success. Offering some network in place to connect new applicants with previous awardees who want to support and create new collaborative opportunities to go on a joint proposal or sub award relationship.

-Community Conversation Participant

" I believe that you should do consulting and a peer review process...and provide the community what they need because they don't have the tools that other communities that are successful get all the time...That is a problem in the way that we review this application. We don't apply because we know we are not going to win.

-Interview Subject

One grant recipient noted that coaching from another organization that had received RCO funding helped and RCO assistance wasn't needed.

" They just stepped up. They answered questions, were available, took us to lunch, did lots of stuff that helped us understand. That's a very helpful part of the application process, knowing what folks who've done this for a while have done for their grants.

-Community Conversation Participant

" It was extremely helpful to see what other applicants had done in prior years.

-Community Conversation Participant

Additionally, grant recipients largely agreed that on-demand videos and resources would have been helpful for them when applying.

> " Accessible videos would be helpful as well. Real time training and Webinars are good but having a video reference by topic could really help as these projects often go on for years.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " Department of Ecology offers in-person and virtual trainings months in advance of their Clean Water grants and in different geographic locations across the state to make it easier for first-time attendees to understand what would be needed to apply and be competitive. I could see RCO implementing something similar.

-Comment Form Respondent

However, one participant noted that there is a balance to the level of support required and that too many resources or too much communication also can be burdensome.

> " Education and examples are great. However, care must be taken not to overwhelm small staffs with additional layers of process above and beyond the already long list of requirements.

-Community Conversation Participant

Participants also recommended providing seed funding for application development, staff time, and capacity development.

> " Capacity grants are very helpful for a small nonprofit.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " It would be very helpful to have a dedicated grant preparation fund with lower maximum award amounts ($5,000 or $10,000). This could be a grant program used to assist in covering fees for smaller agencies to seek crucial professional services (design plans, map design, community outreach). This would help cover the smaller costs that sometimes make the difference between a "great" grant presentation and an unsuccessful one. It would allow smaller agencies with fewer resources and smaller budgets to be better prepared for success with larger grants. Without that funding assistance, some agencies can't compete with larger agencies who have the staff, funding, and resources to better prepare for grants.

-Comment Form Respondent

Some participants also recommend operational and administrative support beyond the initial application process, including project management and implementation support.

> Consider investing more in capacity building and helping the potential applicants walk through and navigate the process overall, not just the application process, but how do you manage the grant once you have it.

-Community Conversation Participant

Grant Schedule

The amount of effort and time required to prepare the applications were common pain-points among participants.

Suggestions to Improve the Grant Schedule

Some suggest extending the application period to ease the burden on smaller organizations that have limited capacity and staff.

> More time to prepare and apply for grants. Three months can be very short.

-Community Conversation Participant

> [Sometimes] we may be putting in requests for three different grants. So having the application period open for a longer duration would be very helpful for us in our organization because in addition to applying for these grants, we have, you know, 10 other projects that are in construction and a lot of other work going on. So, a longer application period would be helpful.

-Community Conversation Participant

Obstacles in the Grant Evaluation Process

Advisory Committees

Several participants commented on the composition of the advisory committees, which score the applications. Some were concerned that advisory committee members also may apply for grants and could lead to a conflict of interest if they are reviewing their own or competing proposals for scoring. Others were concerned that the committee may not reflect the diversity of Washington or may not have

adequate understanding of equity issues in order to make equity-informed grant or scoring decisions.

> " Getting [leaders or community leaders involved in the] processes because...when you involve these people...in such processes, it means that [you are prioritizing the need of the community] and not just say: "Oh, this is going to this and these populations, but then what are the needs...?'"
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " A better understanding of how the volunteer screening teams are trained to ensure a balanced review would be helpful.
>
> -Comment Form Respondent

One grant recipient noted that agency representatives serve on committees responsible for scoring their own grant applications.

> " How to address potential or likely bias due to organizations having representatives on a panel evaluating their own projects. [Our agency] is one of many examples.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Another participant, who had served on a technical review panel, shared a perception that the panel was representative of the state.

> " I would say that the group of people that I've seen has been from a variety of large and small governments from some park districts, big cities, small cities. East and west side. For a number of years there was a fairly core group of people that really represent the state fairly well.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Other participants expressed concerns about the time required to serve on a committee and suggested it may be a barrier to recruitment and broader involvement.

> " Serving on the local parks review and scoring panel, technical review takes up an entire week. That's 5 days, 8 hours per day, generally on Zoom or previously in Olympia. And then scoring takes up the same amount of time. So that's a commitment on behalf of myself and my employer for essentially almost 2 weeks out of work. But I still end up working after I worked for RCO during that time. So I would say that you're correct in your

assumption that that time commitment is very high, at least for local governments. Like I'm still paid. So, we don't need compensation or things like that. But I do think it would be a good to try and involve more people, citizens of the state that would have some basis of knowledge with parks and recreation

<div align="right">-Community Conversation Participant</div>

Suggestions to Improvements Advisory Committees

Participants suggested addressing conflicts of interest and establishing a roadmap for better representation, rather than expecting committees to become fully representative overnight.

> Improving equity diversity representation can be helped by not just stating what that looks like but also describing what better looks like.

<div align="right">-Community Conversation Participant</div>

Participants discussed the possibility of spreading the committee time requirement over a longer period of time so reviewers could integrate the responsibility and tasks into their existing work weeks more easily. They noted that this particularly would help community members who don't have employers who can pay them to participate in an RCO committee.

> I could see a smaller organization or a nonprofit splitting that in between lunch breaks or taking something home and looking at it a few evenings. But it might break down that barrier a little bit if someone was actually interested in participating but didn't have an employer who could spot a couple of weeks wages.

<div align="right">-Community Conversation Participant</div>

> In a 40-hour work week, since it occurs for a week and everyone is kind of all-hands-on-deck, it's something that could be distributed out over a month or two months. If it was work that was done remotely so that people could kind of sprinkle it amongst other activities, as opposed to have to do it at the expense of working a 40-hour week.

<div align="right">-Community Conversation Participant</div>

Several participants felt that serving on an RCO committee would help those new to the grant program gain insight into how it works, which would help them craft more successful applications in the future.

> " One of the best ways to get inside the process and make it more transparent is to be on one of the committees.

-Community Conversation Participant

A participant who had served on a grant review committee for a different philanthropic organization, suggested that RCO might connect with applicants at the end of the grant application process to invite them to participate in a committee the following year to gain experience and understanding of how RCO grants work. The committee the participant served on had taken this approach, and the participant had found it useful for capacity building.

> " We don't know what we don't know. And they reached out to see if I would actually want to be on their grant review process this spring so that I could learn about the foundation. And we've never partnered with them before. So something as simple as just asking anyone out there know anyone that we should connect with at the end of our grant could help spread your outreach.

-Community Conversation Participant

Scoring Criteria

When it comes to specific scoring applications, participants weren't familiar with the details of criteria used to evaluate their projects. Many comments focused on equity as a concept rather than a specific metric. Participants expressed the desire for a fair and equitable process so that the funds may get to where they are needed most.

> " If RCO wants to prioritize equity as a scoring criteria or use their funding to address inequities in the state, [there needs to be more iterations of what that really means, that needs to be unpacked more]...There are different layers of inequity.

-Community Conversation Participant

Participants noted the scoring process as a barrier. They shared that the issue spans many different criteria, and that it appears to be a disadvantage to certain types of applicants or organizations based on geography, population size, budget, and costs.

> " I think [an issue is] the overall category of scoring equity, whether that's the low-income neighborhoods, smaller cities or eastern versus western Washington...So, figuring out how to balance that out. A very, very challenging task, I'm sure, to still result in the right projects being selected.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " As an eastern Washington municipality, it's definitely a struggle and we've looked through scoring criteria. Living in and providing parks in the desert just doesn't provide you the same opportunities to score in certain scoring categories as it does in a wet area.

-Community Conversation Participant

Several grant recipients reiterated concerns about the scoring process prioritizing areas with larger populations and perceived that this automatically discounted rural or small town applicants. One participant shared that in smaller communities, having access to an RCO grant can be the difference between conducting the project at all, whereas in larger municipalities there may be other grant-source options.

> " Looking at population devoid of any other context isn't the smartest way to do this. Looking at need in relation to proximity of other resources is another way of looking at it, and we hope that's applicable on both sides of the state.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " I don't know if something scoring-wise can be done, so the smaller communities get some bonus points. Because if we don't get that grant, our project will not take place.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " Clearly a trail that we build in western Gorge is going to see a lot more visitors because it's closer to a metro. In eastern Gorge, we're doing a lot more weed management and invasive species management and less planting native seeds. We're doing less large-scale restoration. And then

ironically, land is costing us more in eastern Washington because we don't have donors selling us the land at a cost or cheaper.

-Community Conversation Participant

Other participants referenced systemic barriers including long-term social, geographic, and socio-economic challenges that have led to under-funding of certain populations. Some of the challenges noted were scoring criterion considered during the evaluation process.

> " Something that we've struggled with is a lot of our disadvantaged neighborhoods don't have the poster child beautiful projects to build. They're not connecting to amazing networks. They're not finishing a $10 million project. They don't have beautiful views. They don't all have ADA access...And we struggle to when we're looking at projects to submit applications for, you know, we usually almost score ourselves if we were to score ourselves on this project...And usually, the scoring criteria doesn't work in favor of neighborhoods that don't have a lot to offer. And so, there's a lot of them have project need as a criterion and that has to do with low-income Census tracts and fitness levels of people who live there, things like that. But that's a small percentage of the overall score, and we struggle to have that. And most projects, if you look at the scoring, score within a small number of points of each other and project maybe five points different or three points different. And so usually our low-income areas, we struggle to find an awesome enough project that would work there.

-Community Conversation Participant

Suggested to Improve Scoring Criteria

Participants discussed possible solutions, including weighting the score from projects that have no alternative funding source or removing population size considerations from the scoring criteria entirely. The discussion highlighted the tension between simplifying the application process and scoring vs. increasing complexity to achieve equity.

> " You can't control if the county does growth management or not when you're a little city and you can't control the population. And to me, it almost says we don't think that the rural lives matter as much as the urban lives. And I know they're trying to get the bigger bang for the buck. But I'm still of the opinion they ought to just remove some of those. They're just causing more problems. And there are full points difference in

this in this review. A full point or two full points makes a huge difference in the outcome of projects.

<div align="right">-Community Conversation Participant</div>

The Vida Agency explored possible solutions to scoring for equity and discussed the idea of "diversity" being about more than just ethnic and racial diversity, but also including class, income, and ability.

> " Many rural areas in Washington do not have a lot of diversity. Should these areas score lower based on based upon simple demographics? Or is there another way?

<div align="right">-Community Conversation Participant</div>

> " I used to practice in western Washington, and now I'm in eastern Washington and I usually self-score myself before I submit an application. And if I show that I wouldn't anticipate scoring very well, I try to find maybe another project or something, but I have a lot harder time in eastern Washington finding projects where there's as big of an environmental impact. There's less really critical watersheds, less endangered species, and a lot of planting projects out in non-irrigated desert areas are not very easily executed. Back on the west side, I always felt very confident in my ability to produce a good scoring project. But over here, there just aren't as many high scoring projects, even though the community needs still exist for facilities. But they just don't look as exotic as something that's saving salmon and planting wetlands and restoring native vegetation because of the desert.

<div align="right">-Community Conversation Participant</div>

Project Presentations

Throughout discussions, participants identified in-person presentations as a limitation, particularly for smaller and more geographically remote applicants.

> " The presentations for applicants used to be in-person pre-COVID. As a medium to smaller-ish nonprofit, not a government entity, located in southwest Washington / northwest Oregon, that would make this grant pretty much a no-go for us. We wouldn't be able to apply if we had to send staff up, stay the night up there. That that would be a huge hindrance for us to apply.

<div align="right">-Community Conversation Participant</div>

Suggestions to Improve Project Presentations

Participants acknowledged that the shift from in-person presentations to virtual presentations due to the pandemic was a significant benefit. Several noted that without the virtual presentation option, their organizations would not have been able to apply. Overall, the shift to virtual presentations was perceived as a big win to participants and they encouraged RCO to continue providing this virtual option in the future to mitigate some of the time, travel, and staff burden of the application process.

> " Maintain the virtual and online evaluation process. I know we saw another post, another board earlier that was saying that the virtual presentations were also a big win. So, it seems like some potential wins here and moving some of these processes virtual and hope for the little guy.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

One grant recipient noted that it would be ideal to offer in-person or virtual presentation options so applicants can pick the format they prefer. Others raised concern that in-person presenters would have an advantage over virtual presenters, which might present equity challenges for organizations located further from Olympia or with smaller operating budgets to support staff travel.

> " I appreciate having either online or in-person presentations possible. Just letting people present however is most comfortable or easiest for them, depending on where they are in the state
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Feedback after Presentations and Scoring

Many participants shared that the current format of feedback (a number score) doesn't provide them any tangible opportunities for improvement on their next applications. Several commented on seeing that they were only a few points below similar projects that had received funding, but not understanding where they had been docked the critical points.

> " There's not a great feedback loop...I get where I ended up, that's OK. If I ended up there, that's where I ended up. But how to get better than that next time? I don't get a good sense of feedback on that.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " The summation of the feedback that we get was, "Well, you've got a three out of five on this section, you've got a two out of a five on that one, etc." You get a bunch of numbers back...And we don't have any sense of what we're we missing.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " It's a little bit like handing in a term paper and getting back at 23 out of 100 and going, well, where did the 77 points go that I could have had? And there's no feedback. And I say that because I think the grantees, the requesting parties, I heard previously the comment, I've been around here for a while, etc. I don't think there's many new entrants to this. There are some reorganizations, etc. But given that they're around for a while, we want to educate and make them better understanding or build trust, build relationships, etc. and getting that feedback loop helps do that.

-Community Conversation Participant

Suggestions for Improving Feedback

To help applicants improve their competitiveness, participants recommended providing specific notes and narrative feedback about how and why they were scored the way they did, and where gaps could be filled on future applications. One past grant recipient suggested building in more time between evaluation presentations to allow for real-time discussion and feedback.

> " Help me understand why I scored these, why I got these numbers.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " My opinion feedback was super rushed and not very clear at times. Maybe leaving more room in between presentations would be very helpful.

-Community Conversation Participant

Participants did raise concerns about the time it would take RCO staff to provide this for all applicants. They suggested that RCO create an example scoring rubric showing what a proposal looks like at different scoring levels and provide scoring data in a usable format rather than PDF so that applicants can analyze their own results without time-consuming data cleanup.

> RCO likely doesn't have time to provide this detailed analysis to compare specific grant scores against category benchmarks. Getting that data raw in Excel would help to understand outcomes in a way that the provided PDFs of scores don't. The data is in PRISM and PDFs, but it's prohibitively time consuming to aggregate, clean the data into something into something that can be analyzed.

-Community Conversation Participant

> One idea that may be less time intensive for RCO...would be a scoring rubric or scoring example, saying here's an example of a five in this category, here's an example of a four, three, one...It would be helpful in the application process to say, "Oh, this is the level of detail that I need to get to maybe get to a five."

-Community Conversation Participant

One participant noted that this form of feedback also would provide RCO with opportunities to better understand where applicants are struggling, and to adapt the application or supports as needed to address common pitfalls.

> Alternatively, RCO may be able to provide some post-award analysis that they share with applicants. This may help identify what factors have the largest impacts funded and what wasn't. Aside from helping applicants, that score analysis may also help RCO understand if there are particular scoring categories that have an outsized impact and outcome.

-Community Conversation Participant

One grant recipient noted already receiving adequate feedback from RCO during the application process.

> Received good feedback in real time in PRISM through the grant manager.

-Community Conversation Participant

Overall Granting Process Solutions

During the conversations about the complexities identified in the grant process, some of which are identified above, The Vida Agency heard a tension between two broad approaches to improving access and equity:

- Adding requirements and complexity to the application process (such as providing data training workshops, guidance documents, Webinars, planning and engagement requirements, etc.) to gain more concrete insight on how funds will address equity gaps and need.

- Simplifying the process so that barriers and burden are reduced or eliminated altogether (such as reducing the data requirements altogether).

Suggestions to Reduce Complexity

Possible solutions within each approach described above were explored and participants largely favored solutions that simplified the process for everyone involved: applicants, reviewers, and RCO staff. By simplifying the process universally, participants felt it would help address many of the larger barriers to equity and access.

Unlevel Playing Field

Because of the issues identified above, many participants perceived that the RCO application process includes unfair competition between organization, budget, and project types that are difficult to compare equitably against one another. Many expressed an "us versus them" mentality while discussing their experiences with RCO grant competitions. Participants noted the following inequities:

- Small organizations with volunteer grant writers (some who speak English as a second language) competing against those with full-time fundraising staff who speak English as a primary language and are familiar with RCO jargon.

- Nonprofits without access to data tools competing against government entities with robust mapping capabilities and analysis staff.

- Tribal governments and rurally based organizations or governments with distinctly different scale of impact metrics than their competitors.

- Organizations with limited or no paid staff and no budget reserve competing against fully staffed and well-funded organizations or jurisdictions.

- Eastern Washington projects competing with western Washington projects.

- Critical but perhaps unexciting maintenance projects competing against shiny new projects.

- Community groups applying for small grants on projects that might have been integrated into larger projects applied for by the government in their municipality.

> Competing with state programs for the same dollars isn't the level playing field, especially for a small organization.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> There should be a distinction between tribes getting money to restore and protect our lands and resources versus [the grants for] public recreation access.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> I look at what projects were awarded, and generally it is the sexier projects that can do a whole ton because of where it is. And we're not doing all that. So I wouldn't say that we're providing equal benefit, but in terms of regional distribution of funds, it doesn't work out as well.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Overall, applicants perceived that RCO grants are mostly for larger organizations and governments in highly populated areas. Smaller organizations said they tend to struggle with their applications and some consider it not worth the effort due to the low odds of being selected and the intensive time needed. For the apparent "underdog" in each of the comparisons above, participants noted that it reduced their interest in applying for RCO grants and contributed to self-disqualifications.

While larger, more well-funded and staffed organizations said they felt more confident investing the time and effort to apply for grants, they noted that scoring criteria is a challenge for them as well.

> It is challenging for us even as a larger entity with decent funds to hit all the scoring criteria. And so that puts us further down the list.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Suggestions to Level the Playing Field

Participants recommended two primary methods for leveling the playing field in RCO grant applications: The first was to increase the competitiveness of smaller organizations by encouraging and enabling partnership proposals to be submitted alongside larger nonprofits or government jurisdictions.

> This is probably a little bit of a pipe dream, but the opportunity to apply in tandem with larger organizations. So, we have had some projects in the past that we we're interested in doing, but we don't have the infrastructure as our own standalone organization to make those projects happen…If we're trying to have more small opportunities or small organizations have access to the funding, it would be really helpful if we could almost band together and do some projects…
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

The second was to reduce the overall competitiveness by having disadvantaged applications compete among themselves. For example, small grants competing against other small proposals, rural projects competing against rural projects, new projects competing in a pool of new projects; splitting grant opportunities in a way that like-sized and -type organizations compete against similar organizations rather than competing in current categories of funding.

> I wonder if it's ever been considered to sort of break some grant programs into like a bucket of funding for larger organizations and a bucket for organizations who are smaller so that the those with more capacity and maybe more experience with these sorts of grants aren't being compared to those who are trying it for the first time.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Tribal Engagement

In fall 2021, The Vida Agency engaged tribal representatives from three tribes, and in spring 2022 representatives from one additional tribe, in group conversation and individual interviews to gain insight on barriers, challenges, and opportunities with RCO's grant-making process. As tribes are individual sovereign governments, it's critical to engage with all tribes to gain a comprehensive understanding and feedback. The scope of this project did not allow time for that breadth of engagement, and so the input is limited to those who participated. However, there were some recurring themes that could help inform future decisions on how to best engage with tribal governments and indigenous-focused organizations.

Community conversation participants and interview subjects noted the need for a dedicated tribal liaison at RCO. This recommendation was supported through different examples of concerns or questions that came up during projects, where tribal members indicated it wasn't always clear who at RCO to reach out to. Some examples included concerns over cultural resource consultation and protection, grant application notification, and generally increasing communication between tribes and RCO.

> " Having a tribal liaison can help that. I've come to use tribal liaisons through state agencies more and more. And even if there is a hiccup up front, having that liaison to contact and help shepherd that concern, that's huge. And we're doing that right now at [another agency]...The tribal liaison is absolutely helping us get to the right people and make sure the right people are in the meetings and all that stuff. I think that's a really good idea.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Protecting cultural resources was a common concern for community conversation participants and subjects. The issues highlighted included proper and early notification of projects, meaningful engagement, and emphasis of Executive Order 21-02's requirement for consultation.

> " I would like to just raise the awareness of the Executive Order 21-02, which [requires] the agencies to consult with tribes whenever capital funding or land acquisition funding is at play, regardless of whether or not they are giving it as a pass through to a nonprofit. Those organizations now have to prove that they have consulted with the tribe prior to receiving any funding.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

One participant noted timeline implications, as each tribal council has its own process and timeline for decision making.

> " Tribes vary dramatically. Some tribes have a very quick decision-making process that's run purely by a tribal council that can make a decision within a couple hours. And other tribes have very long public engagement processes that informs tribal councils what decision they ought to make. And the tribe that I work for has a block reservation and is very much communal, and the process is much slower, and we proceed with applications only when the majority are on board and supportive, and there's going to be full engagement in the project and that takes time. So when there's a 30-day turnaround or a short turnaround for a grant

application to be submitted, it's very challenging to go through that process. It's not culturally sensitive to the nature of the tribe.

-Community Conversation Participant

In 2020, RCO worked with the Governor's Office, several tribes, and tribal attorneys to update the tribal contract template to address sovereign immunity. In a small group discussion in 2022 with representatives from a local tribe, participants shared that the changes made it more possible for their tribe to apply.

" There is language in the grant agreements and waivers of sovereign immunity that the tribal council would not accept right up until recently.

-Community Conversation Participant

However, there also were members who raised concerns about the tenuous nature of having sovereign immunity language in grant agreements with tribes. Acceptance of the terms, participants felt, could change in the future.

" The tribal council we had in 2020 accepted that limited waiver. That could change. We could get a new tribal council that says, no, we're not going to waive it at all. And then we're back to where we were before, not being able to get these grants and or using terms to do it.

-Community Conversation Participant

" It's just a really big deal every time we do that. And we've had tribal councils that just said "we're not doing limited waivers." I mean, that has been a policy in the past. It's loosened up right now.

-Community Conversation Participant

Emerging Opportunities

While not all participants were able to offer specific categories or programs when discussing additional investment opportunities, the ideas shared tended to fall within the following themes:

- Mitigating Impact on tribal cultural resources

- Returning green spaces to traditional cultural activities

- Providing public education and alignment with treaty rights

- Providing large-scale recreation grant

- Improving access for all

- Improving road walkability and bike-ability

- Providing education and information

- Providing culture-focused grants

- Providing maintenance grants

- Combating climate change

- Offering outcomes-focused grants

Below are recommendations from participants on what they would like to see funding available for.

Mitigating Impact on Tribal Cultural Resources

Many participants noted that the more parks and green space increase access to recreators, the heavier the disruption is to the natural habitat and tribal cultural resources.

> " The more that we see these parks or at least the Snoqualmie area, the more that recreation is expanded, we see an increase in invasive species being introduced into an area because people are trekking them in, in one way or another...Just a lot of things that you're seeing replace native species in these areas that are being opened up for public access.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " There's a lot of encroachment and destruction of the natural habitat, and wildlife is getting more and more stressed and scarce, and we're losing species.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

To counteract this, several participants (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) expressed support for a funding category dedicated to mitigating the impact of recreation on ancestral tribal lands and cultural resources.

> "Funding the cost of mitigating the impacts of outdoor activities that are happening on ancestral lands...Money to ensure that required cultural resource protection measures are taken.

-Community Conversation Participant

Returning Green Spaces to Traditional Cultural Activities

Many Indigenous participants commented on access or site condition barriers related to using parks and trails for their usual and accustomed fishing and harvesting practices. Even when they're able to harvest or fish at a site, several participants commented that pesticides, over-weeding, heavy recreation, and overall human use has resulted in limited remaining native plants and foods.

Some suggested providing funding to reestablish tribal activities in green spaces.

> "There are traditional cultural activities that haven't been practiced for some time due to access problems or site conditions that can't be reestablished. And so it's a great policy: traditional cultural activities. You can imagine what that would encompass when it comes to tribal history...which takes us back to even treaty times.

-Interview Participant

> "Grants structured specifically to the needs of Indigenous peoples.

-Community Conversation Participant

Some participants noted the need to fund projects that specifically will serve the Native community rather than focusing on the public at large.

> "There have been grant opportunities that we wanted to apply for to put in a dock that would support our fishermen and recreational activities on the reservation. But the funding required that we then provide public access to that dock. And part of the reason why we want to have a dock on the reservation is because there are problems when we use public access docks in other areas on the Hood Canal, and so it would defeat the purpose.

-Community Conversation Participant

Providing Public Education and Alignment with Treaty Rights

Many participants supported establishing funds to improve and expand signs to acknowledge tribes and provide guidance on protective measures to care for significant plants and animals or degraded areas. Several expressed an interest in increasing non-Native understanding of treaty rights and cultural sites. Several participants mentioned cultural context, land recognition, and tribal history as an area where the public would benefit from additional education and signs.

> **"** Money to fund appropriate signage that acknowledges tribes.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> **"** I think there's a huge opportunity for educating our public on the importance of our tribal partners and the local tribes in Washington State. The tribal treaties are very powerful tools and they are the law of the land, and there are some recreation that's occurring out in our landscape could be argued that it negatively impacts tribal treaty rights. And I think we need to better educate our public regarding what is in our treaties with our tribal partners and how to navigate the challenges of getting people out in our landscape at the same time respecting these treaties that are indeed the law of the land
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> **"** What's missing is just that acknowledgement that connection to the land and the responsibility that we have as tribal people to manage that for those future generations...What we do today has great, huge impacts on what our future generations are going to have.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> **"** Telling the story about both how the land is used culturally, the history, and story about the land that is current, about that land and the people...
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> **"** There's a lot of Native erasure that happens in signage on public lands. So a lot of inappropriate signage that either doesn't acknowledge tribes at all or has incorrect information and over highlights settler history. And so that's something that there's a lot of room for improvement...
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Providing Large-scale Recreation Grants

A few participants commented on the need to increase grant size to accommodate larger scale projects and the continued escalation of the cost of construction.

> " Recently the Land Water Conservation Fund limits were raised at $2 million. So that's a federal program, which has even more requirements that are added onto it...With construction escalation and what we're seeing going on with inflation, that $500,000 anymore for a large capital project is actually a fairly small amount.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " I'm thinking specifically around property acquisition projects whereby we have a habitat and or species we are wanting to protect. What is not really seeming to be available for our agency specifically is the recreation side of our agency's mission. There really isn't a grant category available...to acquire land for recreation...Having more of a recreational grant category or [like the local parks category but on a much larger scale, for statewide recreation.]

-Community Conversation Participant

Improving Access for All

Participants across all sessions say they would like to see more funding to improve access and reduce barriers for their communities to enjoy green spaces, parks, and other outdoor areas. Applicants identified the following five key barriers to access:

- Cost

- Parking

- Transportation

- Culture

- Disability access

Many participants recognized that accessing parks and outdoor areas can be expensive for low-income families. They noted that the expense of transportation, fees, and other costs add up, and can be a real barrier for low-income communities. Finding a way to provide access to these groups was top of mind for many

participants. Several participants from nonprofits, especially those serving youth, noted the cost of transportation for outdoor activities can be prohibitive.

> " [We need to improve] access for low-income families [and] individuals to visit parks with entrance fees.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " [From] a personal perspective...not only do you need a car and be able to pay for gas to get to many places, but then you have to be able to pay for a Discover Pass or a Northwest Forest Pass or like a different permit for the day. And those costs add up, especially for low-income folks.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " I'm speaking from the disabilities community. I think [one of the barriers to them accessing] resources is financial burden. Many people who do have disabilities who are 18 and over and or adults have limited or fixed incomes. And so when they have to look at finding ways to afford to take the bus, to get to a park or national forest, etc., those are just barriers that make it harder for people...It's hard for some individuals to financially support some of these hobbies and activities...Is there anything in terms of funding or grants that could be utilized to market towards the communities with people who do have some of those disabilities and financial burdens?

-Community Conversation Participant

> " I think one of the one of the challenges for the staff we have is the time consumption of going to the rental place, and either contracting with a bus or van service.

-Interview Subject

Availability and safety of parking were noted as other barriers to access.

> " I've had sometimes where I've had to turn back and change my plans because there wasn't enough parking. I've also had times where it's been a little confusing, trying to figure out "Do I need to pay for parking?"...and then sometimes having to park really, really far away in neighborhoods rather than the parking lots.

-Community Conversation Participant

> **"** I think the challenge that a lot of the people that maybe are a little bit outside of my community that still enjoy these same areas find is parking, it's not well designated, it's not signed properly, it's not monitored, it's not safe. Vehicles get broken into kind of wilderness parking. And I think that is a barrier because people don't want to be gone from their cars too long or they don't want to take that risk.

-Community Conversation Participant

While discussing improvements to parking, most participants felt that the solution wasn't to add more parking, but rather to improve connections between trails, pedestrian pathways, and public transportation.

> **"** Getting some more connections between the trails will help with parking and alleviating [the issues of not enough parking.]

-Community Conversation Participant

> **"** We don't have enough parking for almost all of our parks and it spills out in the neighborhoods. So we've really been trying to work on transportation connections between trails that will lead between parks and allow people to get to parks through other parks and through transportation, through ways like the Urban Trail and other ways like that.

-Community Conversation Participant

> **"** I'm a really huge fan of the transit to trails effort here in King County, the trailhead direct service that runs seasonally sort of in the late spring through the early fall that was providing public transit for the cost of a normal bus ride to get to a couple of trailheads on the I-90 corridor. And I think it would be really incredible if those opportunities were spread out throughout the state.

-Community Conversation Participant

Cultural barriers also were noted by some participants, particularly in sessions that involved organizations serving immigrant and refugee communities. They noted that cultural differences have great impacts on how people use parks and green spaces.

> **"** Communities and the populations we serve, [just happens to be more collective cultures]. They tend to congregate among themselves...They just do things in a certain way they are comfortable with. And when it comes to using facilities and green spaces, they want to use them in a

specific way. And if they can schedule and reserve these facilities, I think that would help a lot in terms of participation.

-Community Conversation Participant

Lastly, while a few participants noted that play structures and parks need to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, many commented that accessibility doesn't stop there. They recommended considering access needs of those who use walkers or wheelchairs and those with hearing or visual disabilities.

> If you go [into any park, usually you have a play structure] and you have wood chips that are around the play structure, right? And then you have something that's like a cut down [for people who are on a wheelchair] to actually access the play structure...But if you think about it logically, someone who's on a wheelchair or a walker, once they hit that bar, it's going to be just as bad trying to get to the play structure...There's different places like Harper's Playground based in Portland that work throughout the Northwest. They actually make universal design playgrounds that actually are accessible for all people...So basically making it not only accessible but usable for someone with a disability on a mobile disability.

-Community Conversation Participant

> A couple of things that our committee discussed prior to this was when we talk about accessibility for individuals with various types of disabilities, whether it be visual or physical hearing, etc. A couple of things that we thought would be really great would be incorporations of assisted technology devices. So like crosswalks with blinkers or with sounds that indicate when somebody can cross or people who might be visually impaired or hearing impaired. And we also thought it'd be really nice [for parks or outdoor spaces to also have their own, I guess, public Internet access. And so individuals who do have any kind of assisted medical devices that need constant Internet access].

-Community Conversation Participant

Improving Walkability and Bike-ability

In every fall 2021 session, participants mentioned walking and biking as important ways to enjoy the outdoors. However, in almost all sessions, when biking and walking were mentioned, there were related concerns about safety. Participants noted that roads are not always designed with pedestrians and bikers in mind, a

problem they say could be improved with more funding for street and transit improvements.

> " We have a lot of wide routes on the highway to our state park, and it makes it very unsafe for bikes or walking.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " So in Kitsap, it's largely a rural county. And yet the population density is rapidly increasing. It's two-lane roads that are typically winding and heavily treed with maybe a foot of shoulder and bicyclists are very much endangered, [as are pedestrians]. So it's just unsafe to do those kinds of activities on the roads, and there aren't other paths to get there.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " In some areas there's kind of bicycle pedestrian access and some areas there's not. And we're working on that, but it's a struggle sometimes to track down funding for redoing 2 miles of road, to add a bike lane, or redoing sidewalks. We can chase after street funding...[But it's easier for us to build the destination], than build the boring route to get there.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Providing Education and Information

Whether in the form of signs or classes, participants in every fall 2021 session requested additional funding to educate and inform their communities. They mentioned etiquette, usage, and safety as main areas that require education. Funding for signs and education were suggested as opportunities to make these outdoor areas feel more welcoming and to create connections between people and the land.

> " [More signage to meet] educational goals, creating a warmer, more user-friendly space for diverse learners. [At the moment], it's not really well thought out and can be an afterthought, but it's very important for educational institutions to have adequate funding for them.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " [We have a] need for multilingual signage as a way to signal [that we are welcoming to everyone].
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

A few topics for education were mentioned specifically: plant and other wildlife education, water safety, and history. In many sessions, participants felt that education on wildlife was important for the maintenance and enjoyment of parks and outdoor spaces. Many mentioned safety and invasive species education.

> [Along the lines of education, education for plant identification and safety. Education on which plants to stay away from and which plants are OK.] Wildlife education on how to stay safe when you're hiking and there's, you know, potential wildlife that you could come across out and the mountains and things like that.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Funding for water safety education was mentioned by a few participants, noting both swimming and boating.

> [We need] funding for...both boating safety and swimming lessons.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> Obviously there's a ton of mixed use on all of our lakes in terms of people kayaking, paddleboarding, power boating, the big barges that go by, swimming. [But not everybody follows the same norms.] And so while some of those communities are very big on traffic patterns on the water, there's also a lot that are not aware of the traffic patterns and kind of going against everybody else.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Providing Culture-focused Grants

When asked about the kinds of activities missing at their local parks and green spaces, fall 2021 participants brought up non-recreational cultural activities in every session as an area that would benefit from more funding and attention. Specifically, activities that promote social change and learning cultural opportunities in BIPOC communities.

> [We could use more] funding in public and parks for public art installations which promote social change.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " I also like this post of more public art and with more BIPOC public art representation and specifically indigenous artwork, Coast Salish artwork that's indigenous to Washington.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " Diversity in the types of activities offered. I'm thinking about like different cultural events and offering, you know, not just running and walking, but Tai Chi and bilingual [activities] and having lots of different activities to involve all of our community.

-Community Conversation Participant

In terms of physical activities and sports, participants requested that the culture and history of the local community to be taken into consideration so that a range of relevant activities are available.

> " I remember recently at a city hall meeting, there were discussions...of maybe installing some like cricket sports field use because there's a growing southeast Asian population in our community and that's a sport that they enjoy. So just kind of just making sure that parks are adapting their spaces to what is relevant to the communities that are coming in.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " We're welcoming [thousands] of Afghan refugees...into urban areas throughout Washington. They have [asked our] organization where they can play volleyball. Very popular sport [for them].

-Community Conversation Participant

Providing Maintenance Grants

In almost every fall 2021 session, participants commented on the need for repairs and maintenance. Participants requested funding to maintain new facilities or repair aging facilities, and many felt that there was too much focus on new project development currently. In addition to issues caused by lack of maintenance in facilities today, participants anticipated that the lack of maintenance funding and continually deferred maintenance would cause long-term issues down the road.

> " While we do try to develop more and new facilities, there's not a really good, sustainable funding mechanism to maintain those new facilities. The backlog and deferred maintenance...is growing exponentially, and at some point it's going [to come to a point] where we actually have to close

down trails instead of opening up new ones, and we don't address the maintenance needs and funding quality maintenance activities. [Then we're] going to be digging ourselves into a rut that is going to be much more difficult to get out of long term.

-Community Conversation Participant

" We may have certain infrastructure that are 40 plus years old, like our boat launch and ramp. Those aren't attractive amenities that people don't want to utilize. So if we can revamp those and put in new infrastructure, then people want to use them because they're much more attractive amenities that function.

-Community Conversation Participant

" Not having enough resources for maintenance and staffing for maintenance has ripple effects [to people] using those spaces. And that's part of the reason we actually started our quarterly clean ups as we weren't asked to do that. We actually just do that because the space will get taken over or trashed or begin to feel less safe.

-Community Conversation Participant

Some participants also noted that maintenance is ongoing, not just about one-time repairs. They suggested that funding should reflect this need for ongoing maintenance and repairs.

" Another thing is just simply ongoing maintenance. It's not sexy. It's not new and shiny, but it's really important, especially as park agencies have aging facilities.

-Community Conversation Participant

" A lot of our parks system here in Kent was built in the 70s and the 80s. It's aging. We are finally received a good amount of capital funding to work on renovations, which is great. And I think with renovations actually come increased use in the park system, which puts a heavier burden on ongoing maintenance. And that's I think that's an issue that every city faces. The county faces that, everyone faces, and I think ongoing funding is a large issue for everybody, for maintenance.

-Community Conversation Participant

Combating Climate Change

Participants noted a general encroachment and destruction of the natural habitat, commenting that wildlife is getting more stressed and scarce, and that as a result, species are being lost. Additionally, participants saw extreme heat, fires, and smoke as something they need additional funds to combat.

> " We're starting to see extreme heat and smoke affecting outdoor recreation...It's really changing how people are recreating. And I think that if you're looking long term, we have to discuss these things and think about how we mitigate it...It's becoming a bigger and bigger problem.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " [It's important to start] reclaiming urbanized land for parks and to mitigate climate change impacts on urban heat.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " [We need to consider] long-term health of our wild area in terms of global warming, which is changing...the ecology and usability of our wild spaces.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

As temperatures become more extreme, a few participants noted the importance of protection against the cold in the winter.

Offering Outcomes-focused Grants

In one session, participants discussed the opportunity for RCO to design outcomes-focused grants, rather than only funding specific projects.

> " The trend within funding grant making is to move away from project-based funding and move towards mission-based funding. REI is a good example. They've changed a lot of their funding. We've received our grants in the past and they've been looking for a specific project that they wanted to put money towards and make things happen, and they have changed that to more mission based. They understand what we're doing. They believe that we're doing a good job with it, and they want to see us continue to do that so that they're funding our general operating support and not necessarily a specific project in a specific location for a specific time kind of thing. So, if there's any real strong need within all of this funding scenario is a higher level of operational funding for all of the organizations that apply for these grants and less of a project funded

based outlook. We all know what we're doing. We all have been doing it a long time. We all have great projects, and the biggest challenge with any type of grant funding is we usually have to change our project to fit the grant requirements and therefore making it more expensive and more difficult to get projects done, rather than just being provided funding to get things done the way we would.

-Community Conversation Participant

"

Perhaps RCO could consider different grant programs targeted at specific outcomes and needs with regards to equity and diversity metrics and their systems level changes. Which will likely take more than a few grant cycles to figure out what can be done in the interim that avoid exacerbating an urban-rural divide and concern about a scarcity mindset creating more division
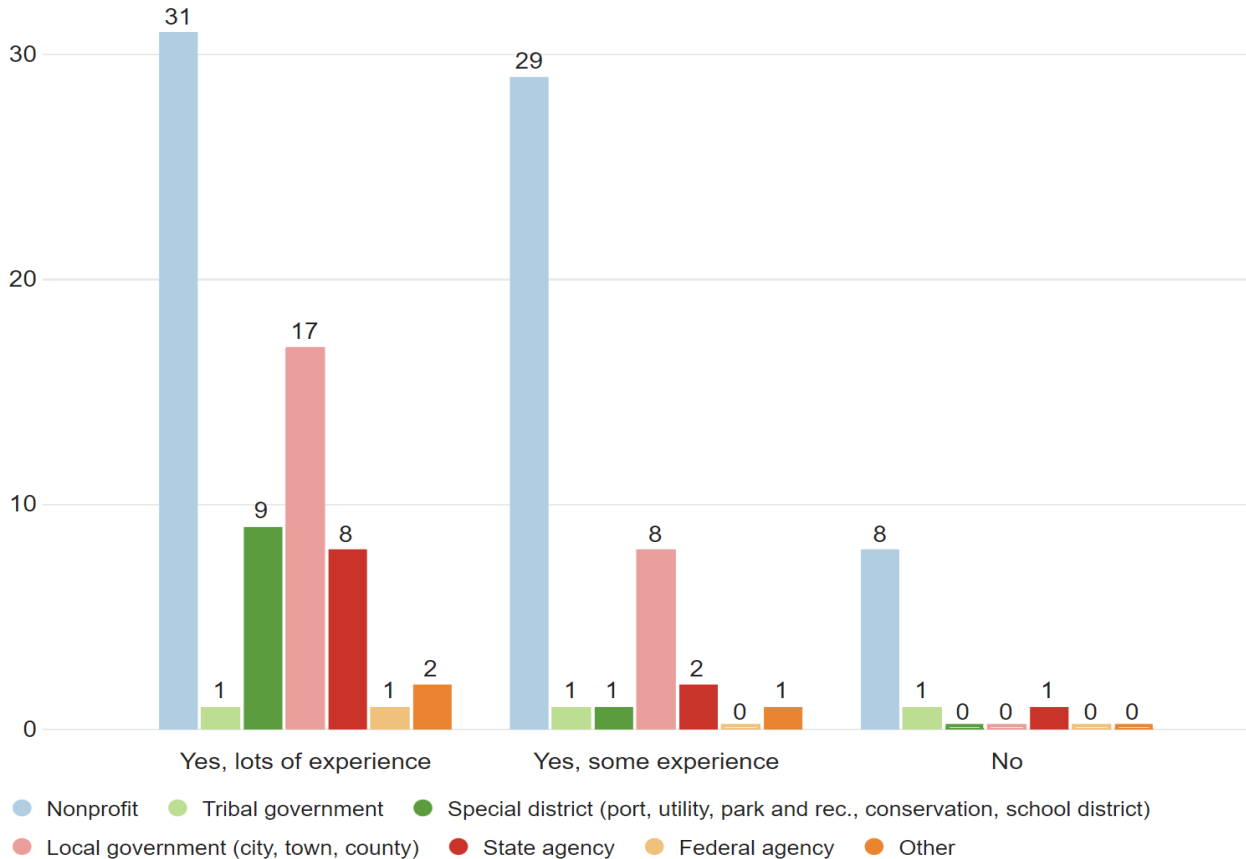
-Community Conversation Participant

Appendix A: Participant Experience Developing Parks, Trails, or Recreational Activities
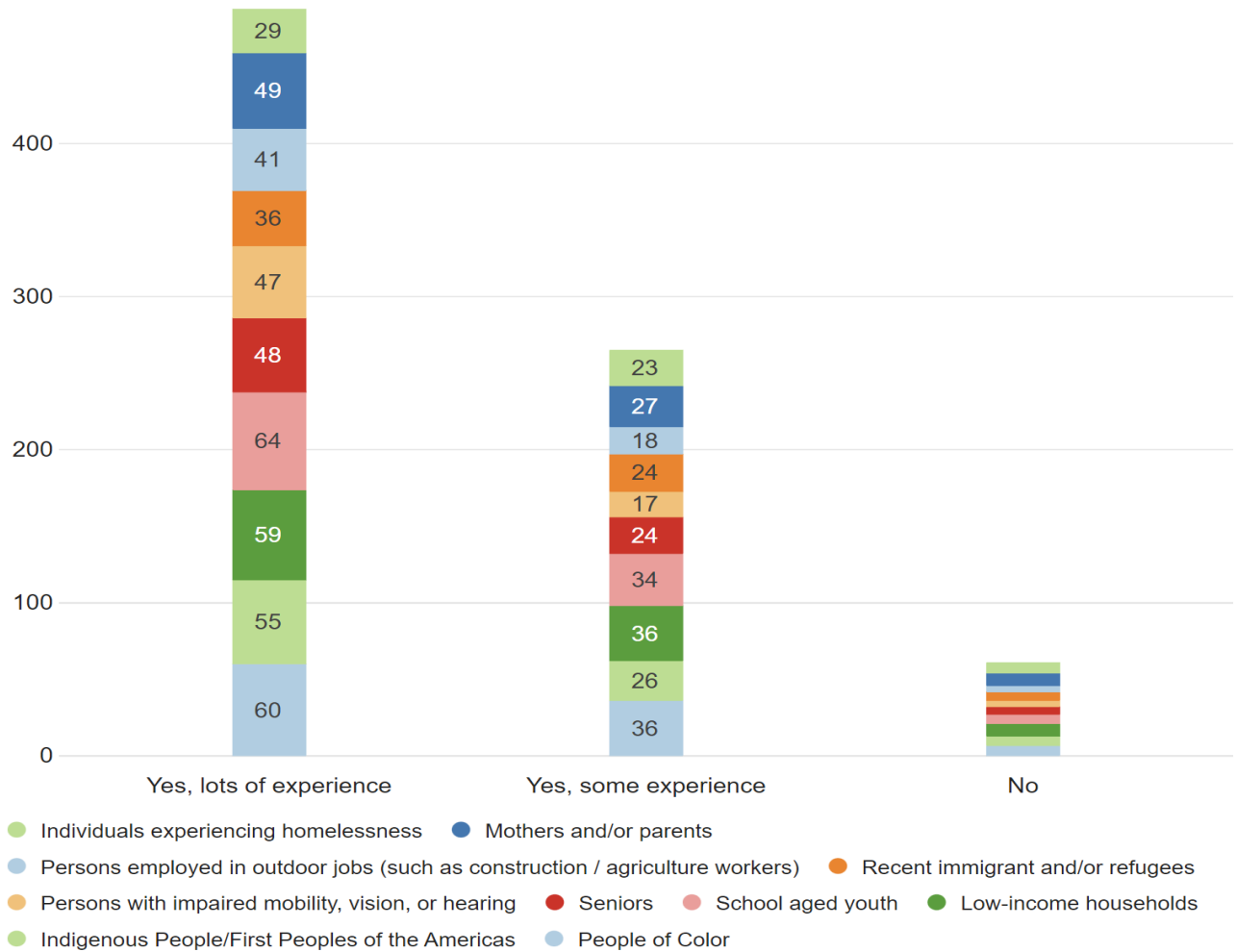
During community conversations in the fall and winter 2021, The Vida Agency asked organizational participants about their levels of experience developing parks and trails. About 60 percent indicated they have lots of experience, about 30 percent some experience, and about 10 percent had no experience.

Experience Developing or Using Parks, Trails, or recreational Activities
Response by Sector

Legend:
- Nonprofit
- Tribal government
- Special district (port, utility, park and rec., conservation, school district)
- Local government (city, town, county)
- State agency
- Federal agency
- Other

Experience Developing or Using Parks, Trails, or Recreational Activities
Response by Community Served

Yes, lots of experience
- 29
- 49
- 41
- 36
- 47
- 48
- 64
- 59
- 55
- 60

Yes, some experience
- 23
- 27
- 18
- 24
- 17
- 24
- 34
- 36
- 26
- 36

No

Legend:
- Individuals experiencing homelessness
- Mothers and/or parents
- Persons employed in outdoor jobs (such as construction / agriculture workers)
- Recent immigrant and/or refugees
- Persons with impaired mobility, vision, or hearing
- Seniors
- School aged youth
- Low-income households
- Indigenous People/First Peoples of the Americas
- People of Color

Appendix B: Participant Access to Parks or Public Green Space

Fall 2021 participants were asked about their personal and organizational access to parks and green spaces: 82 percent (81 percent of organizational participants and 100 percent of individual participants) noted they have a park or green space within walking distance of their home or where their organizations are located.

Park or Public Green Space within Walking Distance of Home or Organization's Location
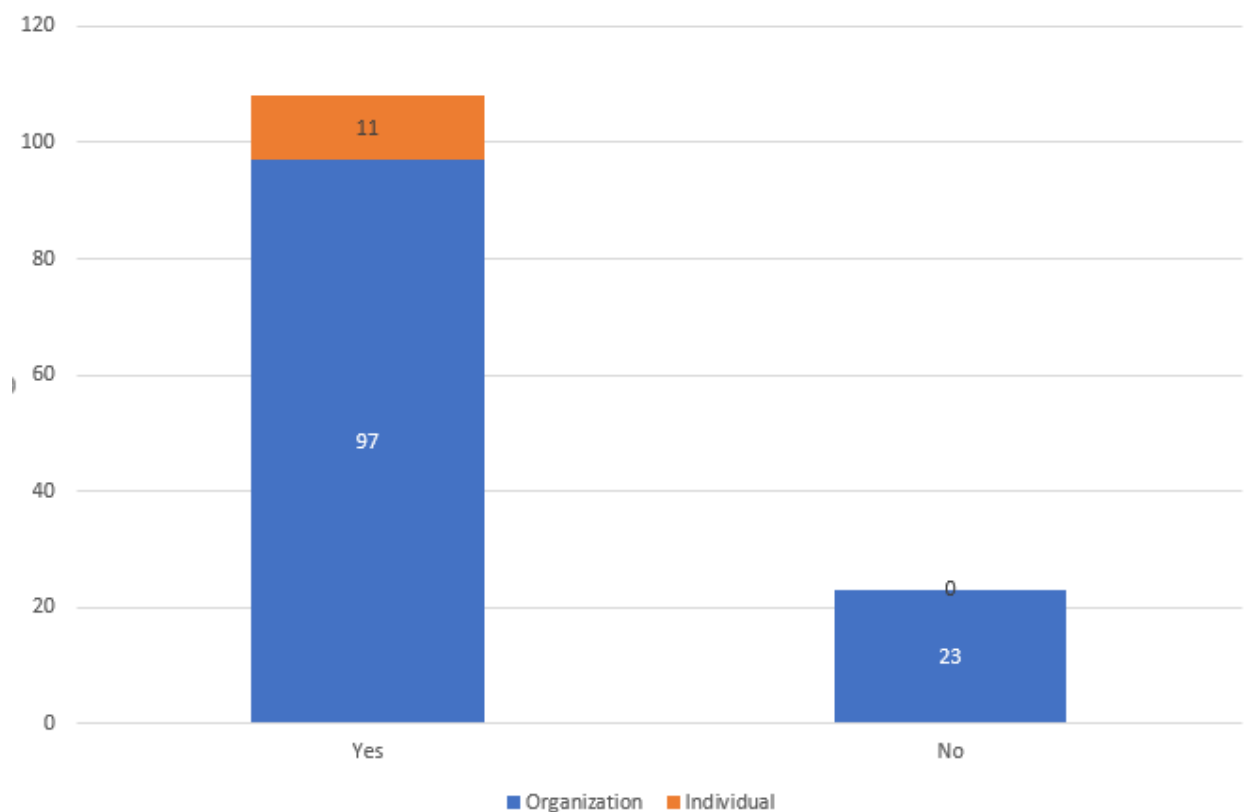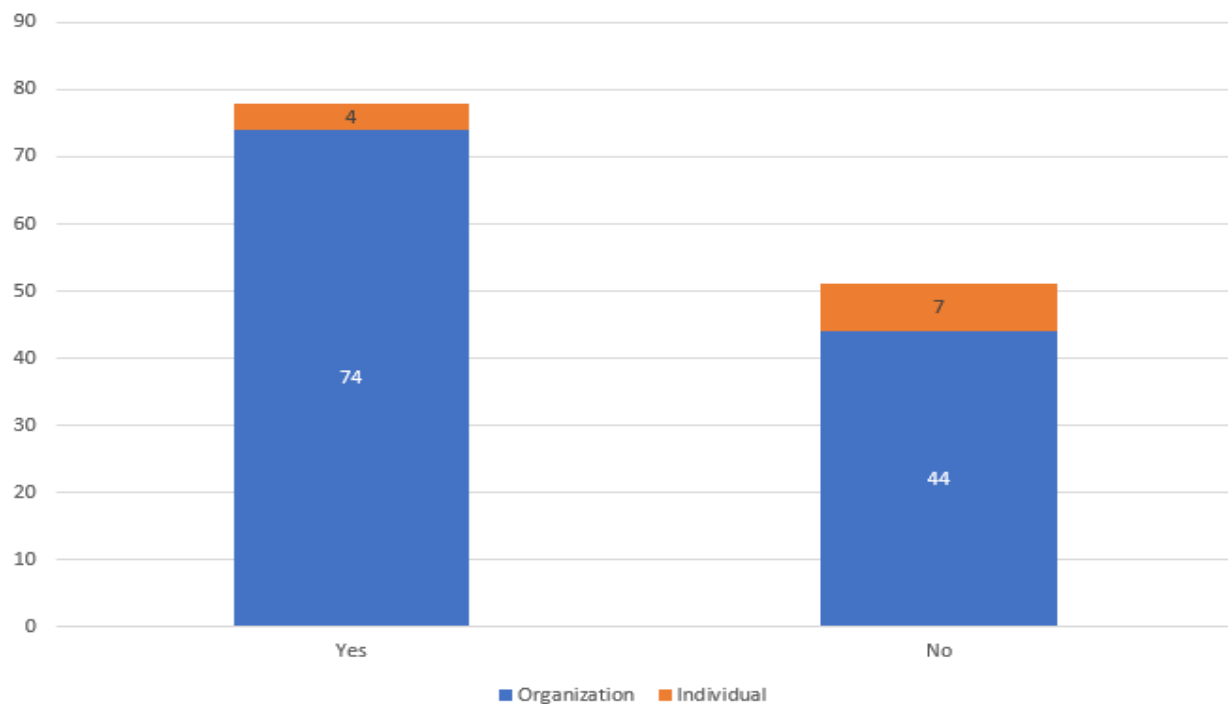
Appendix C: Air Conditioning and Cool-Down Access

Of the hottest 20 years on record, 19 occurred in the past 2 decades, according to National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Goddard's Global Surface Temperature Analysis. The heat will be noticeable especially in cities through a phenomenon called "urban heat islands." Urban heat islands occur when cities replace natural land cover with dense concentrations of pavement, buildings, and other surfaces that absorb and retain heat. An analysis of 14,000 cities and towns revealed that nationwide, areas within a 10-minute walk of a park–areas with natural land cover–are as much as 6 degrees cooler than areas beyond that range.

Heat will be an important area of consideration as RCO thinks about challenges exacerbated by climate change. Among participants in fall 2021 community conversations, 40 percent have no access to air conditioning.

Organizations with Air Conditioning

Stacked bar chart. Yes: Organization 74, Individual 4. No: Organization 44, Individual 7. Legend: Organization (blue), Individual (orange).

APPENDIX D: Opportunities to Improve Current Programs

While not specific to the question of barriers to equity in existing grant programs, applicants identified several opportunities to improve the current RCO programs and grant categories, including the following:

- Remove grant caps

- Build realistic timelines

- Support youth programs

- Clarify location of backcountry and all-terrain vehicle trails

- Provide more room for outdoor recreation variety

Recommendations from participants on how to improve within these areas are below.

Remove Grant Caps

Grant caps were, particularly for past participants, a major pain-point. They noted that limits compound the time and capacity issues that smaller organizations experience, as they may need to apply for more than one grant. They said that removing the caps would not only help organizations do more with a single grant, but also reduce the administrative and staff burden on small organizations.

> [One of my concerns is] the caps that we are allowed to go after, especially in regard to maintenance grants, the caps associated with some of these requests don't even fund one full staff member. Some of them don't even fund one half of a staff member for a 2-year cycle. So, we need to pursue multiple grants to fund even one staff member. And with the perpetual shortfalls and budget shortfalls to actually sustain our staff, we need to compete for these grants just to stay whole.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

Build Realistic Timelines

Some participants shared that the timing of grant applications can be a challenge in that the window for which the grants are available and awarded may not align with program and organizational calendars. Current grants have a 2- to-4-year time limit, which some said was insufficient to develop long-term programs.

> " [We need] multi-year funding programs, allowing groups to do deep work that takes time.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " We really appreciate that the grant is multi-year. Having secured funding makes program development and planning much easier. However, it is challenging to predict project sites 1+ year in advance. Having more flexibility to adjust project parameters as the date for project start comes closer would be really helpful.
>
> -Comment Form Respondent

Additionally, some projects are time sensitive or seasonal, but the window and timeline during which the grants are awarded do not align with these project's schedules.

> " We've applied for sort of fish grants before, but the fish windows often conflict with when the grant award would go out. And so, what's proposed in the full scope of work can't be accomplished as described in the grant. And then similarly, with the No Child Left Inside grant, since the award funds don't come out until after summer, that's one summer that we're missing and unable to then provide the trips...So, the timings can sometimes be iffy of when the grants are actually awarded compared to the work that you're trying to accomplish.
>
> -Community Conversation Participant

> " With RCO being on a 2-year grant cycle, I think many agencies struggle with timing outreach, planning, and design on projects to line up perfectly with application windows. We know that many of the funded projects each cycle are very near ready to proceed when they come in for an application and generally score well. I know for our own agency that we are looking out many years to try and coordinate upcoming projects with application periods. It is always a difficult task
>
> -Comment Form Respondent

> " Getting the match funding in place a couple of years before the project is even slated to begin is challenging at times. Allowing for up to 6 years for project to be built may help so smaller cities who do not have the necessary reserves.

-Comment Form Respondent

Support Youth Programs

With regards to the current funding areas, one participant mentioned other funders and grants are moving away from youth athletics, an area the participant suggested RCO should continue to support.

> " Definitely, youth athletics, I think we've seen a lot of funders shift away from athletics in the last couple of years, and there's been a number of grants that I've attempted to apply for and then they all say specifically, not youth athletics. So that's definitely an area that there's a lot of need.

-Community Conversation Participant

More support and funding in terms of new after-school and summer programs for youth also was suggested by several participants.

> " [For us] successfully meeting the equitable access and social-emotional needs of Vashon's youth means partnering with our local school district. Funding opportunities, which support public school-CBO partnerships, is essential for making a real difference in the lives of these students, and to support our schools to meet their needs beyond the traditional classroom setting and service capacity. We would like to see additional grant opportunities that may support high impact projects in unincorporated King County.

-Community Conversation Participant

> " [What we want to do for young people are after school programs or summer programs], different activities like learning about the nature and also be active in the environment and also learn about some of the activities they can do in the field.

-Community Conversation Participant

> **"** The small communities in my area, none of them offer summer programs, so the kids have no option or [have to] travel a long distance.

-Community Conversation Participant

> **"** [I would like to see more activities created for low-income families, low-income geographic areas]. After school program for children, I think that's important. Perhaps with some kind of [educational or athletic programs in the public recreation areas]. Partly to reduce some the tension and because the low-income family members, the kids...often they are left alone...[They need to be able to] get involved with activities and sports and like reading programs, things like that for educational purposes.

-Community Conversation Participant

> **"** Money for cultural programs for the kids, we should teach them culture too not just sports and play.

-Interview Subject

Participants also mentioned the need for program and physical spaces to introduce children to new areas of outdoor recreation.

> **"** [Tutoring the kids in an outdoor environment, or just having a space] for the children to come together and do some outside learning, rather than being at home all the time or being in a classroom. So, creating some style of that, maybe some [sitting area where] they can have a table and not just a regular picnic table, we're talking about [a space intentionally created] for learning.

-Community Conversation Participant

> **"** I have a lot of my youth that I work with that are very interested in learning about fishing and what natural, what native species of fish we have.

-Community Conversation Participant

> **"** I work with a lot of kids, and we take them outside, and so sometimes I hear their experiences of not having outside time. And I think a lot of it comes from, like here in Spokane, we have some pretty intense winters.

[We have to teach kids how to dress appropriately and teach parents to that] there are opportunities to stay warm when you're outside.

<p align="right">-Community Conversation Participant, Fall 2021</p>

Interestingly, when discussing youth athletics, some participants noted the lack of opportunities once students turn 18 despite the need for exercise and mental health benefits for young adults. Another participant noted the lack of access to pools and swim lessons in more rural parts of the state for adults. Participants suggested that RCO consider expanding the age range or adding a category to fund recreation for adults.

> There's a big need in that area, for more specialized things and more resources to be put into more places, because I know in larger cities it's more accessible than it is here, a lot more accessible than it is here. And I really have been on the phone over the last couple of weeks because I wanted to do swimming lessons, and I can't find anybody that will do group adult group lessons.

<p align="right">-Interview Subject</p>

> The scope of defining what youth is, I'm curious about. Especially through the pandemic, we know that nature and being outdoors is one of the best cures for anxiety and now that's one of our shifts as an organization to create programming to take people outdoors just for the enjoyment of the mental health benefits of nature. And one demographic that we're interested in working with is university students. They're not necessarily youth, right? They still behave like it, but they're not necessarily qualified as that. I think an underserved population is college kids, and people attending college and universities now aren't necessarily always just kids. There's more adults going back. So I think expanding the age demographic on outdoor education would be something good to look at.

<p align="right">-Interview Subject</p>

Clarify Location of Backcountry and All-terrain Vehicle Trails

Some participants commented on backcountry and all-terrain vehicle funding, with an emphasis on off-roading and existing confusion around trail use. Even for organizations and individuals who don't use all-terrain vehicles, participants emphasized the need for clear trail use designations to protect habitat and facilities for other uses.

"

Having ATV pathways is not important to us but having people using designated paths rather than tearing up all of the countryside, doing it in random places is very important.

-Community Conversation Participant

"

One of the grant categories that [we] seem to struggle with being able to compete well in is the NOVA grant category, and that has a lot to do with motorized and non-motorized access and also connecting with trails. And we always seem to kind of position ourselves, maybe in the wrong category. Some of our trails are open to all motorized, not just for ATVs, and that kind of seems to either disqualify us for...or make it to where our projects just don't score really well.

-Community Conversation Participant

"

And I think I think the biggest challenge that we're finding in the mountain bike community right now is that there are a lot of different sources for mapping...the mapping sources don't give the same information. [We have a huge issue] with people hiking on downhill specific mountain bike trails, which were specifically designed and developed in order to create a safe space for mountain bikers to ride at higher speeds and on more difficult terrain...Mountain bikers [are] encountering literally folks having picnics on trails in the middle of these trails...The problem is having trails that are not identified clearly to all users as to the purpose and the expectations that they should run into when they're there.

-Community Conversation Participant

Provide More Room for Outdoor Recreation Variety

Many participants commented on the need for more open spaces with room for a variety of recreational activities, not just for sitting and relaxing.

"

I would just say that we need a diversity of different types of open space and especially within urban areas, I've been seeing more of a trend of plazas being essentially called parks, and there's like very little actual greenery...Having worked in the Chinatown International District for many years, Hing Hay Park, I think, is a good example of those kinds of things and thinking about, you know, playfields and kind of more urban forests...Because I think when you start looking at demographics and where the distribution is across all of our populations across Washington,

who has access to those spaces and what kinds of spaces is really critical in meeting some of the disparities.

-Community Conversation Participant

Appendix E: Registered Organizations

[Grab your reader's attention with a great quote from the document or use this space to emphasize a key point. To place this text box anywhere on the page, just drag it.]

1. ACORNS NW
2. Afghan Health Initiative
3. Airway Heights Parks and Recreation Department
4. Alliance of People with Disabilities
5. American Indian Community Center
6. Asia Pacific Cultural Center
7. Asian Counseling and Referral Service
8. Associated Recreation Council
9. Autism Empowerment
10. Black Farmers Collective
11. Black Stax
12. Blue Mountain Land Trust
13. Capitol Land Trust
14. Carl Maxey Center
15. Cascadia Now!
16. Central Washington Disability Resources
17. Chief Seattle Club
18. Citizens for a Healthy Bay
19. City of Bellingham
20. City of Benton City
21. City of Burien Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department
22. City of Castle Rock
23. City of Chehalis
24. City of Colfax
25. City of Hoquiam
26. City of Kent
27. City of Marysville
28. City of McCleary
29. City of Monroe
30. City of Mount Vernon Parks and Recreation Department
31. City of Mountlake Terrace
32. City of Mountlake Terrace
33. City of Pasco
34. City of Pateros
35. City of Quincy
36. City of Redmond
37. City of Sumner
38. City of Tacoma
39. CJK Community Homes
40. Clallam County
41. Clark County Department of Public Works
42. Coastal Interpretive Center
43. Community Food Bank of Dayton
44. Community for the Advancement of Family Education
45. Community Health Worker Coalition for Migrants and Refugees
46. Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
47. Cowlitz Indian Tribe
48. Dayton Friends of the Pool
49. Dayton Historic Depot Society
50. Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition
51. EarthCorps
52. Environmental Coalition of South Seattle
53. Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance
54. Family Support Center of South Sound
55. Farmer Frog and Western Wildlife Outreach
56. Forterra
57. Friends of North Creek Forest

58. Friends of the Columbia Gorge
59. George Pocock Rowing Foundation
60. Girl Scouts of Western Washington
61. Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment
62. Hands On Personal Empowerment (The Hope Garden Project)
63. Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group
64. Horn of Africa Services
65. Interim Community Development Association
66. King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks
67. Kitsap Accessible Communities Advisory Committee
68. Kiwanis Camp Wa-Ri-Ki
69. Klickitat County
70. Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center
71. Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe
72. Manson Parks and Recreation District
73. Mason County
74. Mother Africa
75. Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association
76. Northwest Glacier Cruisers Snowmobile Club
77. Northwest Maritime Center
78. Northwest Motorcycle Association
79. Oasis Youth Center
80. Outdoor Adventure Center
81. Peak 7 Adventures
82. Peninsula Metropolitan Park District
83. Plus Delta After School Studios
84. Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe
85. Port of Garfield
86. Port of Grays Harbor
87. Port of Whitman County
88. Recreation NW
89. River City Youth Ops
90. Samish Longhouse
91. Sdukwalbixw (Snoqualmie Indian Tribe)

92. Seattle Audubon
93. Seattle Parks and Recreation Department
94. Seattle Parks Foundation
95. Si View Metropolitan Park District
96. Supporting Partnerships in Education and Beyond
97. Tacoma Urban League
98. Teenagers Plus
99. The Chill Foundation
100. The Institute for Community Leadership
101. The Lands Council
102. The Nature Conservancy
103. The Recyclery of Jefferson County
104. The Salvation Army
105. The Service Board
106. Thurston Conservation District
107. Thurston County Public Works Department
108. Town of Winthrop
109. Trout Unlimited
110. Upper Columbia United Tribes
111. U.S.D.A. Forest Service Snoqualmie Ranger District
112. Washington Immigrant Network
113. Washington Off Highway Vehicle Alliance
114. Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs
115. Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
116. Washington State Department of Natural Resources
117. Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
118. Washington State Office of Equity
119. Washington Trails Association
120. Washington Trust for Historic Preservation
121. Wenatchee School District
122. Wenatchee YMCA

123. West Valley Outdoor Learning Center
124. Whatcom Center for Early Learning
125. Whatcom Mountain Bike Coalition
126. Wild Society
127. Woodland Park Zoo
128. World Relief Seattle
129. Washington Outdoor School
130. Yakama Nation Fisheries
131. Yakima Valley Community Foundation
132. YMCA of Grays Harbor-Camp Bishop
133. YMCA of Greater Seattle
134. YMCA of Southwest Washington
135. Your Money Matters

Appendix F: Research Team

Research Team

- Marcela Diaz
- Hailey Fagerness
- Renee Holt
- Tamara Power-Drutis
- Zhonghao Zhang