

## RECREATION AND CONSERVATION FUNDING BOARD SUMMARY MINUTES

**Date:** December 4, 2023

**Place:** Hybrid – Room 175, Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE; Olympia, WA and online via Zoom

### Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Members:

---

<b>Ted Willhite, Chair</b>	Seattle	<b>Shiloh Burgess</b>	Wenatchee
<b>Trang Lam</b>	Camas	<b>Kristen Ohlson-Kiehn</b>	Designee, Department of Natural Resources
<b>Michael Shiosaki</b>	Seattle	<b>Amy Windrope</b>	Designee, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
<b>Kitty Craig</b>	Seattle	<b>Peter Herzog</b>	Designee; Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

---

**This summary is to be used with the materials provided in advance of the meeting. The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) retains a recording as the formal record of the meeting.**

All board members participated virtually.

### Call to Order

**Chair Willhite** called the special meeting of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (board) to order at 9:00 AM and **Julia McNamara**, Board Liaison, performed roll call, determining quorum. Member Kitty Craig, Member Trang Lam, and Member Amy Windrope were absent at the time of roll call.

**Motion:** Move to Approve **December 4, 2023, Special Meeting Agenda**

**Moved By:** Member **Shiosaki**

**Seconded by:** Member **Ohlson-Kiehn**

**Decision:** **Approved**

Member Craig joined at 9:02 a.m. Member Windrope joined at 9:03 a.m. Member Lam joined at 9:13 a.m.

### 1: Grant Criteria Changes

**Ben Donatelle**, Policy Specialist, provided an overview of the grant criteria changes process that began in January 2023. Guided by the board's 2020 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Statement, the 2022 Prevention Institute's equity review, and the 2023 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), staff began a policy review and

prioritization of programs and specific criteria. With the help of a technical workgroup and board work groups, staff drafted criteria for public and tribal feedback, which informed the final draft criteria changes.

With the goals listed below, staff reviewed the criteria in six programs: Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Aquatic Land Enhancement Account (ALEA), Youth Athletic Facilities (YAF) and Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP) Local Parks, Water Access, and Trails categories,

- 1) Reducing gaps in access to greenspace.
- 2) Reducing disparities in access to funding.
- 3) Aligning criteria across multiple platforms.
- 4) Simplifying and providing guidance.

**Leah Dobey**, Policy Specialist, explained the public input process which started with a technical work group consisting of past applicants, members of evaluation committees, stakeholder groups, partner agencies, and two board members, Member Burgess and Member Lam. Workgroup feedback informed draft language for the public comment period. During the comment period, a request was received to extend the time for tribal governments to provide comment which staff accommodated.

Staff received twenty-nine comments, categorizing them into support, neutral, and further consideration groups. Eighty-one to eighty-seven percent of the comments received on the introduction, need, project engagement, and expansion and renovation changes were either supportive or neutral. Project scope and project design had a wider range of input, with the fewest comments received on project scope.

Feedback on the criteria changes agreed that using objective data, including amount of available greenspace, can be useful when in the right balance. Many comments were supportive of simplifying criteria and creating consistency but wanted the criteria to still include enough guidance. Additionally, all project types in different places and stages should be valued.

Ms. Dobey and Mr. Donatelle described the specific proposed changes. An unscored project introduction has been added to the criteria to introduce the project location and goals to set the stage for the project. Need consists of a staff-scored objective component based on statewide priorities (i.e., social vulnerability index, health disparity index, and greenspace availability) and a narrative component for applicants to describe local priorities. Project Scope simplifies the model on how to understand the scope of a project. Project Design asks the applicants to describe how the design addresses any constraints and provides access for users of all abilities and provide an overview of the

project budget and how cost was determined. Previously called Project Support or Public Support, Project Engagement asks how the people who will be most impacted by the project were engaged, including underserved communities and/or tribes to better understand the quality of engagement. Expansion and Renovation exists only in WWRP Local Parks and Water Access categories, and the staff recommended eliminating these criteria. Additional details are provided in the meeting [materials](#).

The proposed criteria changes will impact the weight of each criterion differently across programs, and staff were mindful of state statutes, board priorities, public and tribal comment, and existing relative values when considering the weight of criteria. Changes to the weight of each criterion for each program are provided in Attachment B of the meeting [materials](#). The average proposed weight of criteria aligns with SCORP and the recommendations from the equity review. Based on the proposed weight of criteria, the top five priorities are Need at thirty percent, Acquisition Projects at thirty percent, Project Engagement at seventeen percent, project design at 15.6 percent, and Project Scope at fifteen percent.

Following board decision, staff will publish changes in appropriate grant manuals, update PRISM, conduct outreach and promotions to share these changes with the public, provide training and technical assistance for staff and applicants, provide proposal development support, and assess lessons learned throughout this process.

Staff recommend approving Resolution 2023-27 to adopt the proposed evaluation criteria as outlined in Attachment A of the meeting materials and Resolution 2023-28 to approve the updated relative weight of evaluation criteria as detailed in Attachment B.

#### *Public Comment:*

**Christine Mahler**, on behalf of the Washington Wildlife Recreation Coalition (WWRC), encouraged RCO staff, specifically the soon to be hired Tribal Liaison, to create a process for more comprehensive tribal outreach for future public comment periods. Regarding the proposed criteria changes, WWRC supports the adoption of these changes, which add additional weight to communities in need and reduce the burden on under resourced communities. **Chair Willhite** asked how these changes are anticipated to be received in Legislature. Ms. Mahler believed these changes will increase support from Legislature and improve perception of WWRP with regards to equity across the state.

**Roxanne Miles**, on behalf of Washington Recreation and Park Association (WRPA), expressed cautious support of these changes, noting the possibility of unintended

consequences that can come from changes, such as how agencies set local policy. The objective tools and the new process were important for WRPA membership. WRPA is hopeful these changes will bring more facilities to high-need communities but felt that while the criteria were simplified, the process was not necessarily.

Going forward, Ms. Dobey noted that staff will aid smaller communities and have been brainstorming other ideas like direct assistance at conferences to create more opportunity for sponsors. Mr. Donatelle added that simplifying the criteria allows inexperienced applicants to compete at a higher level. **Lance Hansen**, NOVA Advisory Committee Member, agreed with the metrics used in the criteria changes, and wanted to see the need metric left in. Mr. Donatelle noted that the goal with data-driven metrics is to make the information available to the applicants, evaluators, and public as part of the overall scoring process.

Please note, the need criterion was left in.

**Ashely Mocorro-Powell**, a conservation science professional and staff at Sustainable Seattle, was grateful for the changes to the grant criteria and application processes, and submitted written comments as well that are included in the meeting materials. Ms. Mocorro-Powell expressed concern with technical access, sharing that King County Communities of Opportunity (COO) has had a good technical assistance support program to serve King County and hoped to see a similar support program at RCO. The database was also of concern, and Ms. Mocorro-Powell would like to have underserved communities be able to submit their own determination of what underserved means to them (e.g., lack of resources, previous lack of access to resources, or community history), and transparency in where data is being shared. Ms. Dobey noted the importance of keeping self-determination in mind going forward with these programs and others.

During board discussion, **Member Craig** asked staff to provide insight into how RCO will institute these changes. Mr. Donatelle clarified that with the implementation of data-driven metrics, a clear picture of who is applying and where funding is going will be available. Staff will continue to assess how these changes impact applicants.

Members shared their appreciation for this process and provided support for these changes. Ahead of the next Legislative session, **Member Burgess** encouraged staff to educate Legislative members on these changes. **Member Windrope**, **Member Herzog**, and **Member Ohlson-Kiehn** shared their respective agency's support for these changes.

**Chair Willhite** asked how staff plans to recognize problems and opportunities going forward and how staff plans to communicate those issues to the board. Mr. Donatelle answered that during the regular grant review, post evaluation surveys and processes,

staff will receive direct feedback from applicants and evaluators so that questions asked throughout the process can be tailored to be specific to these grant criteria changes. Staff plan to continue this work after each grant round and report what they learn back to the board. **Director Duffy** noted that as a public agency, it is RCO's job to always be looking at all their programs and collecting input from applicants and evaluators to assess how they are working. Review of these criteria is consistent with how RCO operates currently and will continue to operate.

**Motion:** Move to Approve **Resolution 2023-27**

**Moved By:** Member **Shiosaki**

**Seconded by:** Member **Burgess**

**Decision:** **Approved**

**Motion:** Move to Approve **Resolution 2023-28**

**Moved By:** Member **Herzog**

**Seconded by:** Member **Ohlson-Kiehn**

**Decision:** **Approved**

**ADJOURN: 11:00 A.M.**

**Motion:** Move to **Adjourn**

**Moved By:** Member **Burgess**

**Seconded by:** Member **Craig**

**Decision:** **Approved**

The next regular meeting will be held in-person January 30-31, 2024, in Room 172 of the Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia WA 98501, and virtually via Zoom.



Chair Michael Shiosaki