

# Section 4: Project Evaluations

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## This section covers the following:

- ✓ How project evaluation works
- ✓ Evaluation criteria

## How Project Evaluation Works

The evaluation process begins when the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board adopts the evaluation process<sup>38</sup> and evaluation criteria during public meetings.

The RCO director appoints people to serve on an advisory committee to evaluate each grant proposal. In recruiting members for the committee, RCO seeks to appoint people who possess a statewide perspective and are recognized for their experiences and knowledge of aquatic lands in Washington. The director may appoint *ex officio* members to the advisory committee to provide additional representation and expertise. Visit RCO's website for [membership and other details](#).

An applicant prepares a PowerPoint presentation to address the evaluation criteria and delivers it to the advisory committee during a virtual, oral presentation.<sup>39</sup> Advisory committee members may ask follow-up questions before they score the grant proposal. The virtual online presentation process is broadcast live on YouTube for the public, but the public is not invited to comment.

The advisory committee then scores the grant application using the responses to the criteria, graphics included in the application or provided during the presentation, and summary application materials.

At the same time, RCO scores the objective sections of the application, such as the amount of matching share an applicant is providing and conformance to growth management planning. Staff scores are based on information submitted by the applicant and obtained from the state Departments of Commerce and Health and the state Office of Financial Management.

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<sup>38</sup>Washington Administrative Code 286-13-020

<sup>39</sup>Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2023-24

The advisory committee and staff scores are combined for an application's total evaluation score. The resulting ranked lists are the basis for funding recommendations that the RCO director submits to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board, which makes the final decision about funding in public meetings.<sup>40</sup> The public is given an opportunity to comment on the grant proposals before the board makes its decision.

### **Do Not Fund Recommendation<sup>41</sup>**

Occasionally during evaluations, the advisory committee may express significant concerns about a project, such that it would like to discuss a "Do Not Fund" recommendation. If this occurs, the advisory committee may discuss its concerns at the post-evaluation meeting, which takes place after application scores are tabulated.

If a "Do Not Fund" recommendation is scheduled to be considered, RCO will notify the applicant in writing, identify the significant concerns expressed by the evaluators, and invite the applicant to attend the post-evaluation meeting to respond to questions. The applicant also may submit a written response to the evaluators' concerns. To ensure all projects are treated equally, no additional testimony from applicants or visitors is taken at the post-evaluation meeting. The advisory committee determines a "Do Not Fund" recommendation by a simple majority vote of the committee members that participated in application evaluations.

RCO staff will forward to the board a summary of the "Do Not Fund" recommendation and any committee member comments. The board will consider the advisory committee's recommendation at a regularly scheduled public meeting, before the ranked list is adopted (consideration may take place at the same meeting, but the "Do Not Fund" recommendation will be discussed before the ranked list is adopted). The board retains discretion in awarding all grant funds.

### **Growth Management Act Compliance**

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board considers an organization's compliance with the Growth Management Act when awarding grants for public facilities.<sup>42</sup> The board gives preference through evaluation scoring to towns, cities, and county applicants who are required to plan under the Act.<sup>43</sup> Scoring for compliance with the Growth Management Act and other staff-scored evaluation criteria is based on the organization's status as of the category's technical completion deadline. RCO uses information reported by the Washington State Department of Commerce for scoring Growth Management Act compliance. Agencies in compliance receive a zero score on the question; out of compliance status results in a minus one score.

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<sup>40</sup>Washington Administrative Code 286-13-050

<sup>41</sup>Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2014-06

<sup>42</sup>Revised Code of Washington 43.17.250

<sup>43</sup>Revised Code of Washington 36.60A

At the time of application, an applicant should consult its organization’s planning department or contact the Washington State Department of Commerce’s [Growth Management Act Division](#) to determine the compliance status. If the organization is out of compliance, this advance inquiry may give the organization time to change its status before the technical completion deadline. RCO is not responsible for changing an organization’s compliance status with the Growth Management Act.

## Evaluating Combination Projects

Projects involving both acquisition and development and/or restoration are evaluated on all criteria for both types of projects. To ensure equal treatment for combination projects, the scoring multiplier for some evaluation criteria is half of that used for individual acquisition and/or development and/or restoration projects.

### Evaluation Criteria

The ALEA program strives to fund projects focused on the following two main program purposes:

- **Protection and Enhancement:** to improve or protect aquatic lands for public purposes
- **Public Access:** to provide and improve public access to aquatic lands.<sup>44</sup>

Below are three tables that reflect the evaluation questions based on the two project purposes above and the seven project types below:

- Acquisition
- Acquisition, Development, and Restoration
- Acquisition and Development
- Acquisition and Restoration
- Development
- Development and Restoration
- Restoration

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<sup>44</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79.105.150(1)

## Projects Meeting **Both Purposes: Protection and Enhancement** AND Public Access Projects

**Project Types:** Acquisition; Acquisition, Development, and Restoration; Development and Restoration

Question	Purpose	Project Type	Points	
<b>Unscored</b>				
Project Introduction	All Purposes	All Project Types	0 points	
<b>Scored by the Advisory Committee</b>				
1	Fit with Public Access Goals	Public Access Purpose	All Project Types	7.5 points
2	Fit with Protection Goals	Protection and Enhancement Purposes	All Project Types	7.5 points
3	Need for Public Access—Local Priorities	Public Access Purpose	All Project Types	12.5 points
4	Need for Protection	Protection and Enhancement Purposes	All Project Types	12.5 points
5	Project Scope—Public Access	All Purposes	All Project Types	7.5 points
6	Suitability for Protection	Protection and Enhancement Purposes	All Project Types	7.5 points
7	Urgency and Viability	All Purposes	Acquisition Projects	15 points
			Acquisition, Development, and Restoration Projects	5 points
8	Development Design	Public Access Purpose	Development and Restoration Projects	7.5 points
			Acquisition, Development, and Restoration Projects	5 points
9	Restoration Design and Viability	Protection and Enhancement Purposes	Development and Restoration Projects	7.5 points
			Acquisition, Development, and Restoration Projects	5 points
10	Project Engagement	All Purposes	All Project Types	20 points

Question	Purpose	Project Type	Points	
<b>Scored by RCO</b>				
11	Need–Statewide Priorities	All Purposes	All Project Types	9 points
12	Proximity to People	All Purposes	All Project Types	1 point
13	Growth Management Act Preference	All Purposes	All Project Types	0 points
<b>Total Points</b>			<b>100</b>	

## Projects Meeting the **Single Purpose** of Protection and Enhancement

**Project Types:** Acquisition, Acquisition and Restoration, and Restoration

Question	Project Type	Points
<b>Unscored</b>		
Project Introduction	All Project Types	0 points
<b>Scored by the Advisory Committee</b>		
2	Fit with Protection Goals	All Project Types 15 points
4	Need for Protection	All Project Types 20 points
6	Suitability for Protection	All Project Types 15 points
7	Urgency and Viability	Acquisition Projects 20 points
		Acquisition and Restoration Projects 10 points
9	Restoration Design and Viability	Restoration Projects 20 points
		Acquisition and Restoration Projects 10 points
10	Project Engagement	All Project Types 20 points
<b>Scored by RCO</b>		
11	Need–Statewide Priorities	All Project Types 9 points
12	Proximity to People	All Project Types 1 point
13	Growth Management Act Preference	All Project Types 0 points
<b>Total Points:</b>		<b>100</b>

## Projects Meeting the **Single Purpose** of Public Access

**Project Types:** Acquisition, Acquisition and Development, and Development

Question		Project Type	Points
<b>Unscored</b>			
	Project Introduction	All Project Types	0 points
<b>Scored by the Advisory Committee</b>			
1	Fit with Public Access Goals	All Project Types	15 points
3	Need for Public Access–Local Priorities	All Project Types	20 points
5	Project Scope–Public Access	All Project Types	15 points
7	Urgency and Viability	Acquisition Projects	20 points
		Acquisition and Development Projects	10 points
8	Development Design	Development Projects	20 points
		Acquisition and Development Projects	10 points
10	Project Engagement	All Project Types	20 points
<b>Scored by RCO</b>			
11	Need–Statewide Priorities	All Project Types	9 points
12	Proximity to People	All Project Types	1 point
13	Growth Management Act Preference	All Project Types	0 points
<b>Total Points:</b>			<b>100</b>

## Detailed Evaluation Questions

Applicants must look in the charts above and note which questions they need to answer based on the project purpose (protection and enhancement or public access or both) and project type (acquisition, development, restoration, etc.).

**Project Introduction.** In one to two minutes, introduce the project’s location and goals to set the stage for the project.

- Locate the project on statewide, regional, and site maps to help orient the evaluators to the project area and its context in the service area.<sup>45</sup>
- Summarize the site’s condition; the project’s acquisition, development, or renovation goals; and the recreation opportunities the project will provide.

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**1. Fit with Public Access Goals.** How well does this project improve or provide public access to aquatic lands?<sup>46</sup>

- How will this project do the following:
  - Provide new opportunities for people to get to the water and access aquatic resources for recreational and educational purposes?
  - Renovate or improve existing public access to aquatic lands for recreational and educational use?
  - Create non-motorized boating or small boat and pedestrian-oriented access to aquatic lands that is designed to protect the integrity of the environment?
  - Integrate public access in a way that is compatible with the physical features of the site?
  - Increase public awareness of aquatic lands as a finite natural resource with irreplaceable public heritage?
  - What are the environmental benefits of the proposed project?<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>NOTE: The service area is the geographic area where most of the anticipated users live, as defined by the applicant.

<sup>46</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79.105.150

<sup>47</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79.105.150(2)



- ▲ Point Range: zero to five points. The points for projects meeting both protection and enhancement and public access purposes are multiplied later by one and a half. The points for projects meeting only the public access purpose are multiplied later by three.

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**2. Fit with Protection Goals.** How well does this project fit the goals to enhance, improve, or protect aquatic lands?<sup>48</sup>

Additional guidance on ALEA program goals and objectives is in section 2 of this manual.

- How will this project do the following:
  - Protect existing, high-value aquatic land that will contribute to important ecological functions and processes?
  - Improve the ecological function of aquatic resources through the restoration and enhancement of critical marine, estuarine, and freshwater aquatic land?
  - Preserve or establish naturally, self-sustaining aquatic and riparian areas that are a high priority in the larger ecological landscape?
- What are the environmental benefits of the proposed project?<sup>49</sup>

- ▲ Point Range: zero to five points. The points for projects meeting both protection and enhancement and public access purposes are multiplied later by one and a half. The points for projects meeting only the protection and enhancement purpose are multiplied later by three.

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**3. Need for Public Access–Local Priorities.** Describe the need for new or improved recreation facilities, how the need is known, and why existing amenities in the service area do not satisfy the need. A complete response should include the following:

- A simple inventory and condition of relevant outdoor recreation opportunities in the service area.
- Description of gaps in access, opportunity, or service delivery.

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<sup>48</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79.105.150

<sup>49</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79.105.150(2)

- Description of the current and/or anticipated use of the project site and any factors that contribute to fluctuations in use or demand for service.
  - Description of how the need for this project has been identified and prioritized, including whether it is linked to local recreation or open space plans.
- ▲ Point Range: zero to ten points. The points for projects meeting both protection and enhancement and public access purposes are multiplied later by one and a quarter. The points for projects meeting only the public access purpose are multiplied later by two.

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**4. Need for Protection.** What is the need for this project and how will this project address the applicant's protection and enhancement priorities?

- How does the project address priorities in an approved watershed plan, shoreline master plan, species recovery plan, or other state or local plan? Is the project mentioned specifically in the plan?
  - How does the project enhance or complement other nearby protection and enhancement efforts in the watershed or on the shoreline?
  - How is the need for this project supported in studies, surveys, and other analyses?
  - Will the project benefit sensitive, threatened, or endangered species or critical plant and animal communities? If so, how?
  - For Water Resource Inventory Areas 1-19, how is the project referenced in the *Action Agenda* developed by the Puget Sound Partnership? The [Action Agenda](#) can be found at the Puget Sound Partnership's website. Evaluators should ignore this question for projects outside Water Resource Inventory Areas 1-19.
- ▲ Point Range: zero to ten points. The points for projects meeting both protection and enhancement and public access purposes are multiplied later by one and a quarter. The points for projects meeting only the protection and enhancement purpose are multiplied later by two.

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**5. Project Scope–Public Access.** Describe the site's existing natural and built features. Describe what is being proposed in the project, including land acquisition and/or elements to be built or renovated, and for what purpose.

- What recreation opportunities will this project provide?
- ▲ Point Range: zero to five points. The points for projects meeting both protection and enhancement and public access purposes are multiplied later by one and half. The points for projects meeting only the public access purpose are multiplied later by three.

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**6. Suitability for Protection.** Is the site well suited for the intended uses?

- Are the location and natural features of the site, for example the size, topography, soil conditions, and natural amenities, well suited for the intended uses?
  - What are the historic and current human uses of the site?
  - What are the historic and current ecological functions of the site?
  - What steps will be taken to avoid or mitigate adverse impacts to the site once it has been acquired, restored, enhanced, or developed? Possible impacts to address could include flooding, extreme tides, storms, sources of contamination, and long-term impacts due to development and climate change.
  - Are there similar sites available near the area that provide a similar opportunity or is this property a one-of-a-kind opportunity to address an ecological need?
  - Is the site size and configuration sufficient to meet the specified ecological goals on its own? Possible things to address include water quantity and flow patterns at the site, patch size and shape, edge and interior habitat, and habitat corridors.
  - Is the site contiguous with other conservation areas or actions that address similar ecological functions and processes?
- ▲ Point Range: zero to five points. The points for projects that meet both protection and enhancement and public access purposes are multiplied later by one and a half. The points for projects that meet enhancement and restoration only purposes are multiplied later by three.

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**7. Urgency and Viability. Only projects including acquisition answer this question.**

- Why purchase this particular property at this time? How viable are the anticipated future uses and benefits of the site?
  - If ALEA funding is not made available, will high-priority aquatic land habitat and/or public access be lost?
  - What are the alternatives to acquiring the property?
  - Is there an immediate threat or will the property be available for acquisition or enhancement at a later time?
  - What is the likelihood that the property will be converted to a non-recreational use or that aquatic habitat resources will be impacted or lost if the property is not acquired now?
  - Is there a threat to the public availability of the resources at the site?
  - Will the site be available immediately for public use or will the site require some improvement to make it available for public use? If improvements are necessary, when will the improvements be made?
  - What are the nature and condition of existing surrounding land use as well as future factors such as shoreline designation, zoning, or comprehensive or project-specific planning that may impact the viability of the site?
  - Describe land management practices in the area that may affect the viability of the site?
  - Who will maintain the site and what resources are necessary and available for that maintenance?
- ▲ Point Range: zero to five points. For acquisition only projects, the points for projects meeting both purposes are multiplied later by three and for those meeting only one purpose are multiplied later by four. For projects that combine acquisition with either development or restoration and that meet only one purpose are multiplied later by two.

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**8. Development Design.**

- Describe how the design aligns with the need, location, and project scope. Describe how the design addresses any constraints and whether the design provides access for users of all abilities. Applicants may choose to describe design elements such as parking and site access, accessibility features,

environmental considerations, green infrastructure, cultural or historic interpretation, mitigation of public use impacts, etc. If available, include design visuals.

- ▲ Point Range: zero to five points. The points for projects that meet both protection and enhancement and public access purposes that combine acquisition, development, and renovation are multiplied later by a half point. The points for projects that meet public access purposes and are for development are multiplied later by three.
- Provide an overview of the project budget and how the cost estimate was determined. If the proposal includes additional site design and permitting, what is the process and anticipated schedule to be construction-ready?
- ▲ Point Range: zero to five points. The points for projects meeting both protection and enhancement and public access purposes are multiplied later by a half.

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**9. Restoration Design and Viability.** Only projects including restoration answer this question.

- How does the project address the stated restoration or enhancement need? Is the project well designed? Will the project lead to sustainable ecological functions and processes over time?
- How will the site be treated to re-establish the desired ecological processes and functions?
- What habitat functions will be enhanced or restored?
- How well does the proposed restoration or enhancement design or actions address desired long-term results?
- What is the certainty that the restoration or enhancement actions will be successful?
- Will the project require decreasing involvement over time?
- What is the habitat quality and land management practices in the area that may affect the viability of the site?
- What is the nature and condition of existing surrounding land use as well as future concerns such as shoreline designation, zoning, or comprehensive or project-specific planning?

- How will the site be managed over time to maintain the desired ecological processes and functions?
  - Who will maintain the site and what resources are necessary and available to do it?
- ▲ Point Range: zero to five points. The points for restoration-only projects are multiplied later by four. The points for projects that combine acquisition and restoration are multiplied later by two. The points for projects that combine development and restoration are multiplied later by one and a half.

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**10. Project Engagement.** RCO encourages applicants to use a variety of methods to gather input on projects. How were the people who will be most impacted by the project engaged?

- Describe what methods were used and the populations engaged, including underserved populations and/or Native American tribes. Describe the relevance of that participation for the population size, demographic or socioeconomic conditions of the community or service area.
- ▲ Point Range: zero to five points, which are later multiplied by one and a half.
- How has community input influenced the project design?
- ▲ Point Range: zero to five points, which are later multiplied by one and a half.
- Describe any community partnerships that are providing support for the project whether through financial, in-kind, project delivery, or other means. Partnerships may be formal or informal. Describe the significance of the partnerships within the community or service area.
- ▲ Point Range: zero to five.

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**11. Need–Statewide Priorities** (applicant does not answer in evaluation session).

Social vulnerability and health scores are based on information from the Washington Tracking Network’s [Information by Location mapping tool](#). Social vulnerability scores use a combination of sixteen social and economic conditions such as limited English, crowded housing, and population living in poverty. Health scores are from the network’s Poor Health Outcomes ranking. Green space availability scores are determined using spatial data analysis from RCO’s equity review of grant programs. For that review, census tracts were classified as having High (more than eight acres per one thousand residents), Medium (three to eight acres per one thousand

residents), and Low (less than three acres per one thousand residents) green space per capita.

- Green Space Availability

One point      High green space

Two points     Medium green space

Three points    Low green space

- ▲ Point Range: one to three points

- Health Disparity Index–Poor Health Outcomes

Zero points     Health outcome rating one to two

One point       Health outcome rating three to five

Two points     Health outcome rating six to seven

Three points    Health outcome rating eight to ten

- ▲ Point Range: one to three points

- Social Vulnerability Index

Zero points     Vulnerability rating one to two

One point       Vulnerability rating three to five

Two points     Vulnerability rating six to seven

Three points    Vulnerability rating eight to ten

- ▲ Point Range: one to three points

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**12. Proximity to People** (applicant does not answer in evaluation session). RCO is required by law to give funding preference to projects in populated areas. Populated areas are defined as a town or city with a population of 5,000 or more, or a county with a population density of 250 or more people per square mile.<sup>50</sup>

- Is the project in an area meeting this definition?

▲ Point Range: zero to one point

Zero points      No

One point        Yes

**13. Growth Management Act Preference** (applicant does not answer in evaluation session). Has the applicant<sup>51</sup> made progress toward meeting the requirements of the Growth Management Act?<sup>52</sup> State law requires the following:

- A. Whenever a state agency is considering awarding grants to finance public facilities, it shall consider whether the applicant has adopted a comprehensive plan and development regulations as required by Revised Code of Washington 36.70A.040.
- B. When reviewing such requests, the state agency shall accord additional preference to applicants that have adopted the comprehensive plan and development regulations. An applicant is deemed to have satisfied the requirements for adopting a comprehensive plan and development regulations if it:
  - Adopts or has adopted within the time periods specified in state law;
  - Adopts or has adopted by the time it requests a grant or loan; or
  - Demonstrates substantial progress toward adopting within the time periods specified in state law. An agency that is more than six months out of compliance with the time periods has not demonstrated substantial progress.
- C. A request from an applicant planning under state law shall be accorded no additional preference based on subsection (B) over a request from an applicant not planning under this state law.

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<sup>50</sup>Revised Code of Washington 79A.25.250

<sup>51</sup>Applicant in this question means counties, cities, and towns only. This segment of the question does not apply to state agencies, tribes, nonprofits, or lead entities.

<sup>52</sup>Revised Code of Washington 43.17.250



Scores for this this question are based on information from the state Department of Commerce, Growth Management Division. If an agency’s comprehensive plan, development regulations, or amendments have been appealed to a Growth Management Act Hearings Board, they cannot be penalized during the period of appeal. Scoring occurs after RCO’s technical completion deadline.

▲ Point Range: RCO staff subtracts a maximum of one point.

- Minus one point      The applicant does not meet the requirements of Revised Code of Washington 43.17.250.
  
- Zero points            The applicant meets the requirements of Revised Code of Washington 43.17.250.
  
- Zero points            The applicant is a state, tribal, or federal agency.