

Section 4: Project Selection

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 process⁴⁵ 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 outdoor recreation and conservation 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.⁴⁶ 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 material submitted by the applicant

⁴⁵Washington Administrative Code 286-13-020

⁴⁶Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2023-24

and information obtained from the state Departments of Commerce and Health and the state Office of Financial Management.

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 for approval and to the National Park Service, which makes the final decision.⁴⁷ The public is given an opportunity to comment on the grant proposals before the board makes its decision.

For the **Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program**, the applicant prepares written responses to address the evaluation criteria. The advisory committee reviews the projects and recommends to the RCO director which projects should be forwarded to the National Park Service for further consideration. A national panel reviews the written responses to the criteria, graphics included in the application, and summary application materials, and scores the projects.

Do Not Fund Recommendation⁴⁸

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.

⁴⁷Washington Administrative Code 286-13-050

⁴⁸Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2014-06

Evaluating Combination Projects

Projects involving both acquisition and development 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 or development projects.

Evaluation Criteria

The [2023 State Recreation and Conservation Plan](#) and Recreation and Conservation Funding Board *Unified Strategy* establish priorities for funding outdoor recreation in Washington State. The evaluation questions below incorporate the plans' priorities identified specifically for the LWCF. This priority rating system is part of the LWCF open project selection or evaluation process.⁴⁹

Summary of Criteria

| Criteria | Project Type | Maximum Points | Priority | |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|
| Unscored | | | | |
| 0 | Project Introduction | All Project Types | 0 points | Board Priority |
| Scored by the Advisory Committee | | | | |
| 1 | Need–Local Priorities | All Project Types | 25 points | Recreation and Conservation Plan |
| 2 | Project Scope | All Project Types | 20 points | Recreation and Conservation Plan |
| 3 | Immediacy of Threat and Viability | Acquisition | 20 points | Board Priority |
| | | Combination | 5 points | |
| 4 | Project Design | Development Projects | 15 points | Recreation and Conservation Plan |
| | | Combination Projects | 10 points | |
| 5 | Project Engagement | All Project Types | 20 points | Board Priority |
| 6 | Sustainability | Development and Combination | 5 points | Recreation and Conservation Plan |
| 7 | Cost Efficiencies | All Project Types | 5 points | Board Priority |
| Scored by RCO | | | | |
| 8 | Need–Statewide Priorities | All projects | 9 points | Recreation and Conservation Plan |
| 9 | Proximity to People | All projects | 0.5 point | State Law |
| 10 | County Population Density | All projects | 0.5 point | State Law |
| 11 | Applicant Compliance | All projects | 0 points | National Park Service Priority |
| Total Points: | | | 100 | |

⁴⁹Land Water Conservation Fund State Assistance Program Manual, Chapter 2(B)

Detailed Evaluation Criteria

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.⁵⁰
- 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. Need–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.
- 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, which are multiplied later by two and a half.

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2. Project Scope. 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: 0-5 points, which are multiplied later by two.

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⁵⁰NOTE: The service area is the geographic area where most of the anticipated users live, as defined by the applicant.

3. Immediacy of Threat and Viability (acquisition and combination projects only).

Why purchase this particular property at this time? How viable are the anticipated future uses and benefits of the site?

Consider the following:

Threat

- What is the immediate threat or will the property be available for acquisition at a later time?
- What is the significance of the threat? Is it imminent?
- Why was this property selected over other properties considered?
- Is this a high priority outdoor recreation property that will be lost if funding is not made available?
- What proactive steps have been taken to preserve the opportunity for securing this property until funds become available? Why?

Viability

- How does existing or planned land use in the surrounding area affect the viability of the site and the proposed outdoor recreation use?
- How many acres will be added to the outdoor recreation inventory? Is this a new site or expansion of an existing area?
- 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, what is the timeframe for implementing future site improvements?
- Who will maintain the site and what resources are necessary and available for maintenance of the site?

▲ Point Range: zero to five points, which are later multiplied by four for acquisition projects.

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4. Project 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, which are multiplied later by two for development projects.
- 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.

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5. Project Engagement. RCO encourages applicants to use a variety of methods to gather input on the project. 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 multiplied later by one and a half.
- How has community input influenced the project design?
- ▲ Point Range: zero to five points, which are multiplied later 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 points.

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- 6. Sustainability** (development and combination projects only). Sustainability reflects choices made to balance the desired benefits and potential impacts of a project on the surrounding landscape and community. Please discuss how the project's location or design supports the applicant organization's sustainability plan or how the ecological, economic, and social benefits and impacts in the project plan were considered.

Examples of sustainability factors that could be part of a project or maintenance plan are provided below for consideration but are not all-inclusive. Applicants and evaluators should treat this list as a guide, not a checklist. Applicants are encouraged to be creative in expressing the sustainability factors of their projects, and evaluators should score projects based on the extent to which applicants have considered and addressed the benefits and impacts of their projects whether they discuss one of the factors below or many.

Ecological Factors

- Minimizes impacts to, or improves ecological function of, surrounding lands
- Includes low-impact design or other green building techniques that reduce water, energy, resource consumption, or greenhouse gas footprint
- Provides a buffer to future natural disasters or anticipated climate impacts
- Includes landscaping that supports native species and/or pollinator habitat

Social Factors

- Encourages access via multi-modal and active transportation choices
- Promotes opportunities for physical activity, social and cultural connections, or community education

Economic Factors

- Uses materials that support local producers, are recycled or recyclable, increase the project's anticipated lifespan, or reduce future maintenance costs
- Creates efficiency in the provision of public services (stormwater infiltration, increased tree canopy, carbon sequestration, etc.)
- Maximizes lifespan or reduces future operational costs
- Supports a local economic development initiative

▲ Point Range: zero to five points.

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- 7. Cost Efficiencies.** To what extent does this project demonstrate efficiencies or a reduction in government costs through documented use of donations or other resources?

Donations—cash, real property, volunteer labor, equipment use, or materials

- What are the donations for this project?
- Who is making the donations?
- What are the values of the donations and how were the values determined?
- Are the donations in hand?
- If the donations are not in hand, does the applicant have letters of commitment from the donors that specify what is being donated and when?
- Are the donations necessary for implementation of the project? Are donations included in the project proposal?

Private grants awarded by non-governmental organizations

- Is there a private grant that is being used as match for this project?
- Who awarded the grant?
- What is the grant amount?
- What is the purpose of the grant?
- When will grant funds be available?

Are there other efficiencies for this project that will result in cost savings?

- What is the cost efficiency?
- Who is providing it?
- What's the value?
- When was the commitment made and when does it expire?

▲ Point Range: zero to five points.

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8. Need–Statewide Priorities (applicant does not answer). 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, or 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: zero 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: zero to three points.

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9. Proximity to People(applicant does not answer). Is the project in the urban growth area boundary of a city or town with a population of five thousand or more?

RCO uses a map provided by the applicant to help score this question. To receive a score, the map must show the project location and project boundary in relationship to a city's or town's urban growth boundary.

▲ Point Range: zero or half a point.

Yes Half a point

No Zero points

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10. County Population Density(applicant does not answer). Is the project in a county with a population density of 250 or more people per square mile?

RCO uses county population data from the Office of Financial Management to score this question.

▲ Point Range: zero or half a point.

Yes Half a point

No Zero points

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11. Applicant compliance(applicant does not answer). Is the sponsor in compliance with its RCO grant agreements?

When scoring this question, staff will consider the applicant's record in all RCO-managed grant programs.

▲ Point Range: Minus one to zero points.

Zero points Sponsor has no unapproved conversions.

Minus a half point Sponsor has at least one unapproved conversion but is actively working with RCO on resolving the conversion.

Minus one point Sponsor has at least one unapproved conversion but is not working actively with RCO on resolving the conversion; or the sponsor has been identified as a high-risk sponsor.

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