

Section 4: Project Evaluation

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 process⁶¹ 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 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 written responses to address the evaluation criteria. Advisory committee members individually review the written responses, graphics included in the application, and summary application materials, and score the project.

Letters and other documented expressions of project support that are provided to RCO by attaching in PRISM by the technical completion date will be provided to the advisory committee as part of the evaluation packet. An applicant also should summarize this support when responding to evaluation question 9 for general projects or question 5 for education projects.

At the same time, RCO staff score the objective sections of the application, such as the amount of matching share the applicant is providing and conformance to growth management planning. Staff scores are based on information submitted by the applicant

⁶¹Washington Administrative Code 286-13-020

and obtained from the state Office of Financial Management and the state Department of Commerce.

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.⁶² The public is given an opportunity to comment on the grant proposal before the board makes its decision.

Do Not Fund Recommendation⁶³

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 who 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 grants.

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.⁵⁷ The board gives preference through evaluation scoring to town, city, and county applicants who are required to plan under the act.⁵⁸ 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. At the time of application, an applicant

⁶²Washington Administrative Code 286-13-050

⁶³Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2014-06

should consult its planning department or contact Washington State Department of Commerce’s Growth Management Services to determine its compliance status. If the organization is out of compliance, this advance inquiry may give it 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.

Evaluation Criteria

Education Projects

Education proposals are evaluated and funded separately from RTP General (development and maintenance) Category projects. The advisory committee assesses each principally on the criteria shown in the table below. RCO does not provide more information to encourage a variety of creative proposals.

The applicant must respond to the five evaluation questions individually in PRISM Online.

These responses along with an application fact sheet, maps, site plans, visuals, and letters of support, comprise the evaluation materials provided to the advisory committee for evaluation review and scoring.

Summary of Criteria

Criteria	Possible Points
Scored by the Advisory Committee	
1. Need	5 points
2. Need satisfaction	5 points
3. Applicant’s ability	5 points
4. Cost-benefit	5 points
5. Support	5 points
Total Points Possible: 25 points	

Revised November 16, 2000

Detailed Scoring Criteria

- 1. Need.** Describe the need for this project.
- 2. Need satisfaction.** Describe the extent to which the project satisfies this need.
- 3. Applicant’s ability.** Describe the applicant’s ability to accomplish the project.
- 4. Cost-benefit.** Describe the project’s cost-benefit.
- 5. Support.** Describe the support for the project.

Development and Maintenance Projects

The applicant for a development and maintenance project responds to each evaluation question individually in PRISM Online.

The applicant does not respond to the staff-scored criteria. RCO will score these questions based on other information or information submitted with the application.

These responses, along with an application fact sheet, maps, plans, visuals, and letters of support, comprise the evaluation materials provided to the advisory committee for evaluation review and scoring

Summary of Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Project Type	Possible Points
Scored by the Advisory Committee		
1. Need	All Projects	15 points
2. Need satisfaction	All Projects	15 points
3. Project design	Development	10 points
4. Maintenance	Maintenance	15 points
5. Sustainability	Development	5 points
6. Readiness to proceed	All Projects	5 points
7. Cost-benefit	All Projects	5 points
8. Cost efficiencies	All Projects	5 points
9. Project support	All Projects	10 points
Scored by RCO		
10. Matching shares	All Projects	10 points
11. Growth Management Act preference	All Projects	0 points
		Total Points Possible: 80

Detailed Scoring Criteria

- 1. Need.** How great is the need for improved trail facilities that provide a backcountry experience? The following considerations are provided to help applicants and evaluators understand some of the elements that help a project score well. A successful proposal need not address each bullet. Applicants should elaborate on all points clearly relevant to their projects.

State, Regional, Land Manager, or Community Needs

- Is the project supported by location or type in a publicly reviewed and adopted plan? For example, the *2023 State Recreation and Conservation Plan*.
- Describe how critical RTP funds are to the completion of this project.

- Describe any significant environmental damage in need of repair.
- Describe the consequences of not funding this project. For example, how immediate is any threat? Will actions be taken that will lead to a loss of quality etc.?

Trail Inventory Issues

- How large is any maintenance backlog?
- What similar trail opportunities are available now in the local area?
- How much of this need can be attributed to a history of inadequate care and maintenance?
- What is the current physical condition of the proposed facility?

Use

- How convenient will the finished project be to intended users?
- How heavily are trails and support facilities in the area used?
- How heavily will the finished project be used?
- Are there significant not served or under-served user groups?
- To what extent will safety hazards be resolved?

▲ Point Range: zero to five points, which staff later multiplies by three.

Zero points	No or very weak need established.
One to two points	Fair to moderate need established.
Three points	Strong need established.
Four to five points	Very high to exceptional need, established in several ways.

Revised February 2006

2. Need satisfaction. To what extent will the project satisfy the service area needs identified in Question 1: Need?

How well does the specific proposal satisfy the need established in question 1? For example, on the proposed trail, will all surface water issues be remedied (water bars, grade dips, puncheon, water crossings, etc.)? How about the trail corridor (clearing, brushing, tree removal, etc.), safety, and sign issues? Responses must be quantified. How efficiently does the proposal target these needs?

▲ Point Range: zero to five points, which staff later multiplies by three.

Zero points	No or weak evidence of need satisfaction
One to two points	Fair to moderate evidence. Project fills only a small portion of the apparent or expressed need, or insufficient information is provided.
Three points	Strong evidence. The project will address an important need, although that need will not be filled completely by the project.
Four to five points	Very high to exceptional evidence. Project fills a critical need.

Revised February 2006

3. Project design (development projects only). Is the proposal appropriately designed for intended uses and users? The following considerations are provided to help applicants and evaluators understand some of the elements that help a project score well. A successful proposal need not address each bullet. Applicants should elaborate on all points clearly relevant to their projects.

- Describe how the project's setting is appropriate to the need? How does it complement the need?
- How does the design protect and complement the environment?
- Describe how the facility is designed for ease of maintenance.
- Describe the extent to which the design is user friendly and universally accessible.
- Describe the spatial relationships, surfacing, width, and grades. How tight are curves? Are there switchbacks? How is multiple use facilitated?
- If a trail, is it designed in a loop. Does it lead to a primary destination?

- Does the project have a Primary Management Objective?⁶⁴
- For projects with a motorized Primary Management Objective, is an adequate level of difficulty maintained?

▲ Point Range: zero to five points, which staff later multiplies by two.

Zero points	Poor evidence presented, or the design is inappropriate. For example: Environmental issues are not addressed; trail difficulty level and user experience are not addressed or can be expected to change substantially; or there is a high probability of user displacement.
One to two points	Below average to moderate. For example, design does only a fair job of addressing environmental issues; the difficulty level and user experience will be somewhat degraded; there appears to be some user displacement.
Three points	Good. For example: Design is adequate and reasonable to address environmental problems, the difficulty level and user experience will be unchanged; not much user displacement will occur.
Four to five points	Very good to excellent. Design is outstanding if a trail retains difficulty level and user experience with no user displacement.

Revised February 2006

4. Maintenance (maintenance projects only). To what degree will the project reduce recreational trail maintenance backlogs and/or recreate a recreational trail opportunity?⁶⁵ The following considerations are provided to help applicants and evaluators understand some of the elements that help a project score well. A successful proposal need not address each bullet. Applicants should elaborate on all points clearly relevant to their projects.

- Typically, how often does this trail require maintenance work?

⁶⁴“Primary Management Objective” means the main type of use for which a trail is managed. Not all trails are managed for a specific use. Primary Management Objectives are adopted by policy and communicated to a trail’s users. For example, if an agency carries out a policy to manage a trail specifically for hiking, and communicates this fact to users, the Primary Management Objective is hiking. A hiking Primary Management Objective does not necessarily mean that other trail uses are prohibited. A Primary Management Objective’s advantage is that it provides all users with an understanding of the type of trail experience to expect.

⁶⁵Many winter recreation trail opportunities are re-created through snow grooming maintenance activities.

- When was maintenance performed last on this trail?
- How much of the area’s trail maintenance backlog will be alleviated by this project? That is:
 - What is the total number of trail miles in the system the applicant administers (i.e., park, ranger district)?
 - What is the number of trail miles the applicant plans to maintain each year?
 - What is the number of trail miles needing maintenance due to unplanned events resulting from such things as unusual weather, etc.?
 - Is this project request for support of regular planned maintenance or maintenance due to unplanned events? If unplanned events, what were the events?
- How is the applicant qualified to complete this project in a quality and timely fashion? What is the applicant’s experience with past maintenance projects?
- Are the project’s maintenance goals specific and appropriate? Explain.
- To what extent will this maintenance project extend the service life of this facility?

▲ Point Range: zero to five points, which staff later multiplies by three.

Zero points	Poor. Too little information is presented, or the project likely will not reduce trail maintenance backlogs or not recreate a recreational opportunity.
One to two points	Fair to moderate. Maintenance backlogs are reduced only somewhat or there appears to be only moderate ability to recreate a recreational opportunity.
Three points	Good. Project substantially reduces maintenance backlogs or a relatively important trail opportunity is recreated.
Four to five points	Very good to excellent. This project effectively eliminates trail maintenance backlogs or recreates a critical trail opportunity.

Adopted April 2020, Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2020-06

- 5. Sustainability** (development 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's sustainability plan or how the ecological, economic, and social benefits and impacts were considered in the project plan.

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

- Addresses an identified disparity in social or environmental services
- 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 (i.e., stormwater infiltration, increased tree canopy, carbon sequestration)
- Maximizes lifespan or reduces future operational costs

- Supports a local economic development initiative

▲ Point Range: zero to five points.

Adopted January 2020, Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2020-06

- 6. Readiness to proceed.** Is the applicant prepared to begin the project? The following considerations are provided to help applicants and evaluators understand some of the elements that help a project score well. A successful proposal need not address each bullet. Applicants should elaborate on all points clearly relevant to their projects.

There are often good reasons why managers are unable to initiate a project immediately. Even so, if other factors are equal, RTP favors projects that move the most quickly.

- Exactly when will work on the project begin? When will work be completed or the facility be open to use?
- Are all elements ready, such as the following:
 - Permits
 - Environmental clearances
 - Engineering
 - Signed agreements
 - Equipment
 - Labor force, etc.?
- Have any appeals been resolved? Explain.
- How urgent is it that immediate action is taken? Explain.

▲ Point Range: zero to five points.

Zero points	Very large barriers exist that likely will delay the project a year or more.
One to two points	Substantial to significant barriers exist that likely will be removed in less than twelve months.
Three to four points	Minimal to ordinary barriers exist that very likely will be removed by the time a grant and contract are awarded.

Five points

No barriers. The project is ready to move forward immediately.

Revised February 2006

- 7. Cost-benefit.** Do the benefits of the project outweigh costs? Costs may include prices that are too high, unacceptable harm to the environment, or factors that cause unnecessary ill will for trail users. Benefits are gains that come with the investment of public dollars. They can be gains for trail users, the environment, the public, or others.

The following considerations are provided to help applicants and evaluators understand some of the elements that help a project score well. A successful proposal need not address each bullet. Applicants should elaborate on all points clearly relevant to their projects.

- What alternatives to the project were considered and why were they rejected in favor of the current proposal? For example, in a snow grooming project, was leasing, contracting work to a private party, or no action considered?
- What is the cost per mile for trails or other unit of measure for other projects?
- What is the long-term cost of maintenance? Will it be cost-effective over the long-term?
- What is the applicant's past record with cost estimates (on-target, overruns, shortages, etc.)?
- Describe other benefits this project will provide, such as community economic development, education, and stewardship.
- What will be the environmental cost-benefit of this project?

It is important that applicants quantify responses. For example, by how much will a new and faster or larger snow groomer reduce maintenance costs? How much will be saved on future reconstruction costs if maintenance backlogs are eliminated now?

▲ Point Range: zero to five points.

Zero points

No evidence of a net benefit presented.

One to two points

Little to modest evidence of a mild net benefit.

Three to four points

Adequate to strong evidence of a good net benefit.

Five points

Substantial evidence of an exceptional net benefit.

Revised February 2006

- 8. 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 donation?
- What is the value of the donation and how was the value determined?
- Is the donation in hand?
- If the donation is not in hand, does the applicant have a letter of commitment from the donor that specifies what is being donated and when?
- Is the donation 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.

Revised by Recreation and Conservation Funding Board Resolution 2016-07 on February 2016.

9. Project support (applicant does not answer). To what extent do users and the public support the project?

The following considerations are provided to help applicants and evaluators understand some of the elements that help a project score well. A successful proposal need not address each bullet. Applicants should elaborate on all points clearly relevant to their projects.

Support can be demonstrated in both financial and non-financial ways and varies depending upon the project type. In scoring this question, evaluators consider the type of support that is most relevant. Examples of support and endorsement include the following:

- Efforts by the applicant to identify and contact all interested parties.
- The extent that there is support for the project. For example:
 - Level of land manager and user support (moderate, very strong, etc.)
 - Positive letters, oral testimony at public meetings, support from friends and user groups.
 - Positive, or the absence of extensive negative, media coverage.
 - The extent to which the public was involved in a comprehensive planning process that includes this project.
- Non-applicant donations to help complete the project: labor, equipment, money, materials, land.
- Advisory board approval or completion of a public planning process that endorsed this project.

▲ Point Range: zero to five points, which staff later multiplies by two.

Zero points	No or very weak evidence presented.
One to two points	Minimal or fair specific evidence of support.
Three points	Moderate to good support.
Four to five points	Exceptional to overwhelming support.

Revised February 3, 2006

10. Matching shares (applicant does not answer). To what extent will the applicant match the RTP grant with contributions from its own resources? RCO staff will respond to this question for each development **or** maintenance project. This question is based on information submitted with the application. For evaluation scoring purposes, an RCO grant used as match will not count toward the award of matching share points. No additional information is required.

▲ Point Range: zero to five points, which staff later multiplies by two.

Zero points	20-25 percent of project's value will be contributed by the applicant.
One point	25.01-30 percent of project's value will be contributed by the applicant.
Two points	30.01-35 percent of project's value will be contributed by the applicant.
Three points	35.01-40 percent of project's value will be contributed by the applicant.
Four points	40.01-45 percent of project's value will be contributed by the applicant.
Five points	More than 45 percent of project's value will be contributed by the applicant.

Revised January 2014

11. Growth Management Act Preference (applicant does not answer). Has the applicant made progress toward meeting the requirements of the Growth Management Act? Revised Code of Washington 43.17.250 requires that:

- A) Whenever a state agency is considering awarding grants to finance public facilities, it shall consider whether the applicant⁶⁶ has adopted a comprehensive plan and development regulations as required by Revised Code of Washington 36.70A.040 ("state law").
- 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 meets any of the following conditions:

⁶⁶All references to applicants in this question refer to counties, cities, and towns only.

- 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.
 - 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.

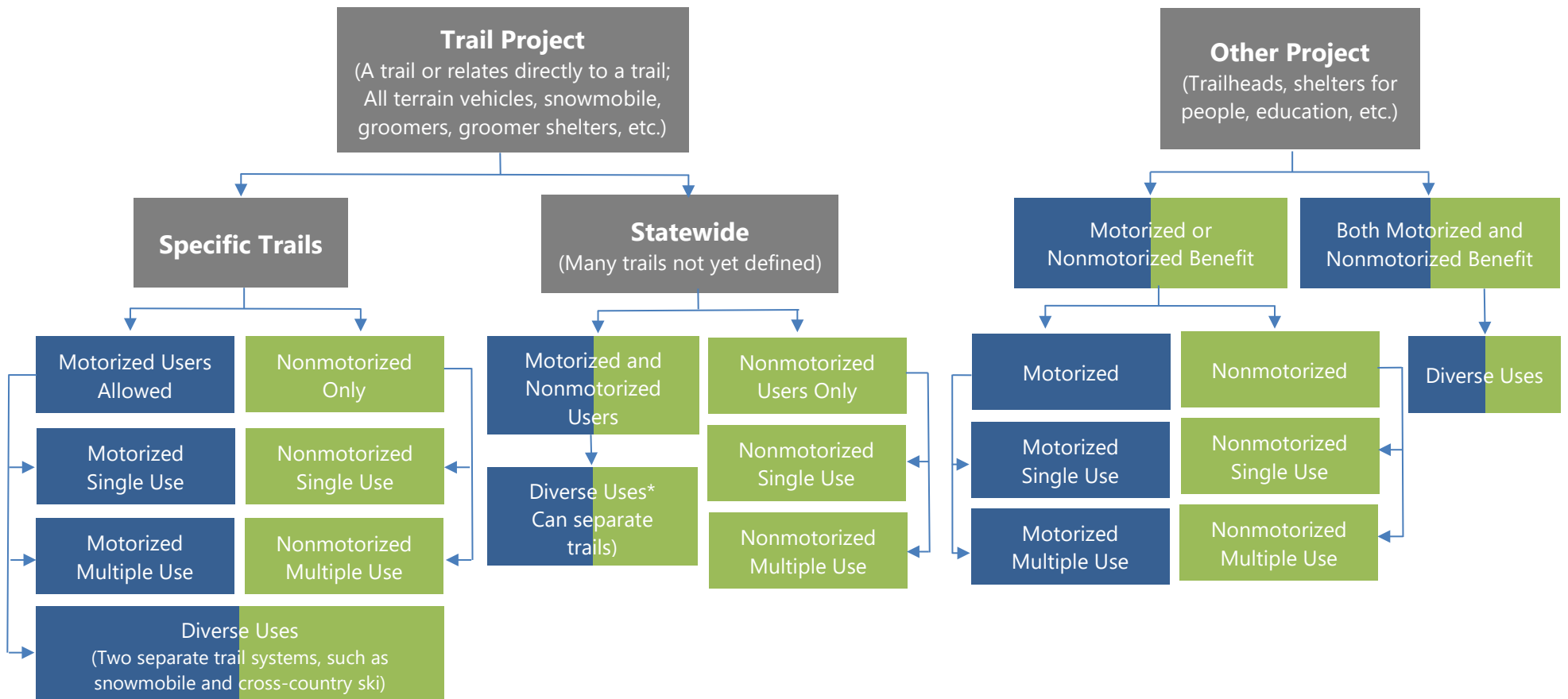
Scores for this question are based on information from the state Department of Commerce, Growth Management Division. If an agency's comprehensive plan, development regulations, or amendments have been appealed to a Growth Management Act Hearings Board, the agency cannot be penalized during the period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

▲ Point Range: zero to minus 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 nonprofit organization or state or federal agency.

Revised July 1999

Appendix 1: RTP Category Decision Tree



Projects are classified as motorized if the amount of approved motorized use is more than incidental. In addition, at least one of the following criteria must be met:

- If an education project, it must target motorized use.
- If a trail project, the manager must have certified it as having a motorized Primary Management Objective. "Primary Management Objective" means the main type of use for which a trail is managed. Not all trails are managed for a specific use. Primary Management Objectives are adopted by policy and communicated to a trail's users. For example, if an agency carries out a policy to manage a trail specifically for hiking, and communicates this fact to users, the Primary Management Objective is hiking. A hiking Primary Management Objective does not necessarily mean that other trail uses are prohibited. A Primary Management Objective's advantage is that it provides all users with an understanding of the type of trail experience to expect.
- If a trail project, it must be open to motor vehicles and include features clearly designed to accommodate recreational, motorized trail vehicles, such as climbing turns, tread hardening, groomed paths, off-road vehicle- or snowmobile-related signs, loading ramps, etc.