MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 16, 2021

TO: Governing Board
San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority

FROM: Jessica Davenport, Deputy Program Manager
Linda Tong, Project Manager
San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority

SUBJECT: Update on Community Grants Program

Staff has begun implementing the Community Grants Program, which was created by the Authority in July 2020 as one of several measures to improve equity in Measure AA grantmaking. Staff will be recommending three projects for funding in this initial pilot phase. Staff also proposes including $400,000 for the program in the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 budget, which we will bring to the Governing Board at its June 18, 2021 meeting.

Pilot Phase Implementation to Date

Staff received five applications to the program and held consultations with all five applicants. (See Attachment 1 for a summary of applications received, including project descriptions and amounts requested.) Two of the projects were ineligible because the applicants were not community-based organizations in economically disadvantaged communities (EDCs), as defined by the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (Authority).[1] However, staff provided the ineligible applicants with the opportunity to have a consultation in order for staff to learn more about their projects and determine if there were other ways to support them.

Staff and members of the Advisory Committee (AC) reviewed and rated the three eligible applications and obtained additional information from applicants, as needed. Based on this process, staff developed the following list of projects to be recommended for funding:

- Marin City Urban Wetland Community Visioning Project
- Yosemite Slough Wetlands Stewardship Project
- Bay API Youth Connected to Environment (BAYCE)

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[1] *An economically disadvantaged community* (EDC) is defined as a community with a median household income less than 80% of the area median income (AMI). Within this set of low-income communities, communities of particular concern include those that: are historically underrepresented in the environmental policymaking and/or projects, bear a disproportionate environmental and health burden, are most vulnerable to climate change impacts due to lack of resources required for community resilience, or are severely burdened by housing costs, increasing the risk of displacement.

In the Community Grants Program, individual projects are limited to a maximum of $100,000, with no minimum dollar amount. The Authority's Fiscal Year 2020-2021 budget includes a $200,000 allocation for the Community Grants Program. Since each of the three applicants requested $100,000, only two projects can be funded in this fiscal year. Staff proposes to fund the third project in Fiscal Year 2021-2022 if the Authority continues to support this program, as recommended.

In addition to the grant consultation and review process, staff held four virtual networking sessions in November and December 2020, one for each region of the Bay Area. The sessions were intended to facilitate new connections between community-based organizations and restoration-focused agencies. Over the four sessions, participants represented six community-based organizations, six public agencies, five environmental nonprofits, and one communications consulting company. Participants shared information about themselves and their organizations, as well as their planned or ongoing projects. They were also asked to share what kinds of partners, opportunities or support they needed. Participants told staff that they appreciated that these networking sessions also provided an opportunity to connect with staff in an informal setting, and we plan to hold more sessions in the coming fiscal year.

Background

Measure AA states, "The Authority shall give priority to projects that… Benefit economically disadvantaged communities." The Governing Board and the AC have both expressed a strong commitment to achieving this goal. On July 17, 2020, in response to recommendations from equity and environmental justice representatives and the AC to improve equity in our grantmaking, the board adopted Resolution 69 authorizing the creation of a Community Grants Program.

The Community Grants Program provides an alternative application pathway for projects led by community-based organizations in EDCs and focuses on supporting leadership development and meaningful community engagement. Unlike the competitive grant round, which has an annual deadline for applications, the Community Grants Program operates on a rolling basis, making it as flexible as possible.

Applicants initiate the process by submitting a Community Grants Program application, so that Authority staff can determine if a project is eligible for Measure AA funding. The application asks for basic information about the proposed project, schedule, budget, and partners, and it can be submitted at any time.

If staff determines a project is appropriate for the Community Grants Program, the applicant will work closely with Authority staff to answer follow up questions and develop a staff recommendation that can be brought to the Board for funding authorization when ready.

The following types of projects are eligible for the Community Grants Program:

- Community visioning led by community-based organizations in EDCs aimed at the development of conceptual plans for implementable shoreline habitat projects.
- Training for EDC leaders to develop, apply for, and implement small shoreline habitat projects in partnership with shoreline landowners, such as planting native plants, removing invasive plants, and cleaning up trash.
- Supporting community-based organizations in EDCs in gaining knowledge of shoreline issues and building relationships with government agencies and nonprofits engaged in

shoreline enhancement and restoration in nearby areas so that they can have a voice in the design and implementation of large projects.

- Implementing small shoreline habitat projects with strong community benefits, e.g., community engagement, education, workforce development, career development, leadership development, and community celebrations.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

Over the past eight months of this new program, staff have begun building relationships with community-based organizations in EDCs and learning how to refine the program to better meet their needs. We intend to make the following improvements:

1. Provide clearer information about who is eligible to apply, i.e., only community-based organization in EDCs. Provide a definition of community-based organization and improve the accessibility of the EDC maps.
2. Clarify the timeline of the grantmaking process so that applicants know when they should plan for their project to start. Reduce the time between application and the receipt of funding, if possible.
3. Provide an application form that is specific to the Community Grants Program rather than relying on the Pre-Application Form used in the competitive grant rounds. This will allow for specific questions relevant to the Community Grants Program, such as whether the organization's staff are reflective of the community they aim to serve.
4. Streamline the process to reduce the number of times staff requests additional information from applicants.
5. Reframe the networking sessions as an opportunity for informal discussions with staff, as well as a venue for building partnerships between community-based organizations and restoration-focused agencies.

In the coming years, staff will also facilitate capacity building in the organizations that receive Community Grants Program funding by:

- Inviting grantees to participate in a cohort and share strategies and lessons learned over the course of the grant period.
- Providing group training on goal setting, preparing a work program, preparing invoices, and communicating successes to wider audiences.
- Inviting AC members to help with training, give presentations, and be mentors to grantees.
- Recruiting grantees and other EDC representatives engaged in shoreline habitat projects through the Community Grants Program to apply to serve on the Advisory Committee.