



**SAN FRANCISCO BAY**  
RESTORATION AUTHORITY

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** April 22, 2022

**TO:** Governing Board  
San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority

**FROM:** Jessica Davenport, Deputy Program Manager  
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San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority

**SUBJECT:** Update on Community Grants Program

The Community Grants Program, now in its second year, was created by the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (Authority) in July 2020 as one of several measures to improve equity in Measure AA grantmaking. This report on the Community Grants Program complements staff's annual updates on improving equity in the Authority's grant programs. (See *Yearly Update on Implementing Advisory Committee Recommendations for Implementing Measure AA in a Manner that Benefits Economically Disadvantaged Communities*, October 15, 2021, for the most recent update.)

**Background**

Measure AA states, "The Authority shall give priority to projects that... Benefit economically disadvantaged communities." The Governing Board and the Advisory Committee (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 economically disadvantaged communities (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 continuously (applications are accepted on a rolling basis), making it more flexible for community-based organizations to apply for the funding.

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.

### **Community Grants Program Implementation, Fiscal Year 2021-2022**

Applicants initiate the process of participating in the Community Grants Program by submitting an 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. If staff determine a project is appropriate for the Community Grants Program, the applicant will work closely with Authority staff to answer follow up questions and refine the project proposal.

For the second year of the program, staff updated the application process to clarify the timeline between application submission and potential receipt of funding, and to reduce the volume of back-and-forth email correspondence between applicant and application reviewers. After applicants submit an initial application, staff and Advisory Committee (AC) member reviewers attend a brief meeting with the applicant to discuss the proposal and voice initial questions and comments. After the meeting, staff provide a written record of the comments and questions, and applicants can submit a revised application. Reviewers then do a formal review of the application, and staff send a response to the applicant stating whether the Authority would like to work with them on bringing the project to the Governing Board for funding approval. Staff also had preliminary conversations with a couple of organizations to discuss initial project ideas and partnership opportunities in applying for Authority grants.

In addition to hosting the Community Grants Program, staff held four virtual networking sessions in September of 2021, one for each region of the Bay Area. The networking sessions were intended to encourage new connections between community-based organizations and restoration-focused agencies, facilitate conversations about partnership opportunities, and spread the word about the Authority's grant programs. Over the four sessions, there were over 50 participants representing community-based organizations, public agencies, environmental nonprofits, and consulting companies. Building on lessons learned from the pilot year in 2020, staff provided brief presentations on Authority grant programs and invited representatives of community-based organizations that have received funding from the Authority to share their experiences. Participants requested additional networking sessions in the future that could facilitate partnerships in time to apply for Authority grant funds.

### **Annual Budgets and Projects Authorized to Date**

In the Community Grants Program's pilot phase in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020-2021, the Authority allocated \$200,000 for the program in the annual budget and set an initial limit of \$100,000 per project. Three eligible proposals were received, and the Authority has now funded two of those projects, Marin City Urban Wetland Community Visioning Project and Candlestick Point

Stewardship Project. A third project is currently on hold, as discussed below. (See Attachment 1 for a summary of applications received to date, including project descriptions and amounts requested.)

The Authority allotted \$400,000 for the Community Grants Program for Fiscal Year 2021-22, with maximum grant awards of \$100,000 each. Thus far, staff have received two eligible grant proposals in FY2021-2022 and the Authority has funded one of them, Bay Restoration: Youth Engagement and Service Learning in East Oakland. This project, led by Planting Justice, was approved for funding at the Governing Board's February 25, 2022 meeting. The second proposed project, led by Brower Dellums Institute for Sustainable Policy Studies and Action, is currently in the application and review process. Staff expect at least one more application in the coming months.

For FY 2022-23, staff propose raising the maximum grant award from \$100,000 to \$200,000 per project and allocating \$600,000 for the program in the Authority's annual budget (to be presented to the Governing Board at its June 24, 2022 meeting). Staff see value in supporting community-led projects for larger dollar amounts that can potentially fund work over longer periods of time and engage more community members, considering the substantial funding required for meaningful community engagement that may include paid internships and workforce development, and given the significant time and effort needed to develop projects that meet the Authority's eligibility requirements.

### **Achievements and Challenges to Date**

Although three projects have been authorized under the Community Grants Program to date, not enough time has passed to accurately assess results of the projects or draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the program. Nevertheless, staff have reflected on the status of projects funded to date, and the potential for the program to continue to evolve and support communities in achieving their goals.

- Marin City Urban Wetland Community Visioning Project (led by Marin City Climate Resilience and Health Justice (MCCRHJ)): This project aims to educate and empower Marin City youth and other residents to help shape the design of a small restoration project in their community. However, it has been difficult for MCCRHJ to focus on habitat restoration, when the community is faced with severe flooding issues, sediment contamination concerns, and a highly constrained site for restoration. Staff are keeping open lines of communication with MCCRHJ and their partner Audubon California to support the community's needs in relation to the project.
- Candlestick Point Stewardship Project (led by Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ)): This project will engage youth and other residents of southeastern San Francisco in restoring Sunrise Point at Candlestick Point State Recreation Area, implementing a shoreline habitat project with strong community benefits. While attempting to clarify the project scope, staff realized the need to coordinate closely with LEJ and the landowner, California State Parks. LEJ initially selected a project location that was problematic for State Parks. Collaboration among LEJ, State Parks, and Authority staff resulted in a project in a different location that met everyone's needs.
- Bay API Youth Connected to Environment (BAYCE) (led by AYPAL: Building API Community Power): The goal of this project is to engage youth of color through outdoor educational workshops and restoration activities to inspire stewardship of local shoreline areas in the cities of Oakland and Richmond. The project is not ready to be presented to

the Board for funding authorization and is currently on hold, which highlights the challenges of developing a project from application to staff recommendation. Staff provided questions and suggestions to guide the project in a direction that would meet the Community Grants Program objectives, but AYPAL and Authority staff have not yet come to a consensus on specific Measure AA eligible project locations and activities. However, Authority staff have pointed AYPAL to the Coastal Conservancy's Explore the Coast grant program, which may align well with AYPAL's goals and interests.

- Bay Restoration: Youth Engagement and Service Learning in East Oakland (led by Planting Justice): This project will train youth interns in environmental justice issues and San Francisco Bay habitat restoration at the Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline. Authority funds will support Planting Justice's ongoing education and workforce development efforts while they expand beyond growing traditional nursery plants for commercial and residential use, to growing and planting native plants to restore shoreline habitat. This project is just starting and there will be much to learn from it in the coming months.
- Oakland Shoreline Leadership Academy (led by West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project): This project was funded through the competitive grant round, but it serves as a model for the type of project that can be funded by the Community Grants Program. The goal of the project was to educate a cohort of Oakland residents about environmental and social issues along the Oakland shoreline and facilitate a visioning process for new shoreline restoration project ideas. Staff expect the visioning project to lead to development of small implementable restoration projects that can be funded by the Authority and other project ideas that can be funded by different agencies. The premise of the project can potentially be replicated in similar communities around the Bay to inspire a new generation of environmental leaders.

Overall, staff have observed a growing interest among community-based organizations in engaging in shoreline restoration work, particularly if the projects can also address their concerns about flooding and mobilization of contaminants in their communities, problems which are expected to increase with sea level rise. In addition to supporting community-led restoration activities, such as growing and planting native plants, removing invasive plants, and shoreline cleanups, we see the Community Grants Program supporting leadership development for community-based organizations interested in engaging with the broader set of government and non-profit entities working on climate adaptation and ecological restoration along the shoreline.

### **Lessons Learned and Next Steps**

Over the past year, staff have listened to feedback from applicants, grantees, and participants in the networking sessions; noted repetitive or burdensome processes associated with the Community Grants Program; and connected with groups that may be good candidates for the funding. To continue refining the Community Grants Program and better meet the needs of community-based organizations in EDCs, staff propose the following improvements:

1. Update the Authority's EDC maps based on 2020 census data and clarify Measure AA location eligibility maps.
2. Clarify and streamline the application process where possible.
3. Provide adequate comments and suggestions on project proposals during the application process to ensure that projects can be recommended to the Governing Board for funding authorization in a timely manner.

4. Conduct targeted outreach to specific community-based organizations that may benefit from the Community Grants Program.
5. Host networking sessions earlier in the year, likely over the summer, so that participants can start making connections and building partnerships in time for the next round of Authority grant funds.

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. AC assistance could be modeled after the San Francisco Estuary Institute's (SFEI) engagement with the Oakland Shoreline Leadership Academy through their efforts funded by the Resources Legacy Fund to support grassroots organizations in nature-based solutions in shoreline planning. An AC member and their colleagues at SFEI assisted the grantee with developing the project budget and working out details of the project scope, and they presented to program participants on nature-based solutions to climate adaptation. General grant and project management support was very helpful to the grantee, along with sharing of more scientific and technical knowledge.
- Recruiting grantees and other EDC representatives engaged in shoreline habitat projects through the Community Grants Program to apply to serve on the AC. Staff have recruited a couple of EDC and environmental justice advocates to the AC in past years and will continue to reach out to new representatives.