

November 14, 2025

To: California State Coastal Conservancy, Conservancy Members

From: City of Fresno, Department of Parks, After School, Recreation, and Community Services (PARCS)

RE: Explore the Coast Grant Program

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a public comment to the California State Coastal Conservancy's (SCC) Board. The City of Fresno Department of Parks, After School, Recreation, and Community Services (PARCS) would like to provide feedback regarding the SCC's Explore the Coast (ETC) Grant Program to suggest steps to improve the transparency and equity of the ETC application instructions and grant scoring process.

In January 2025, Fresno PARCS submitted an application for the 2025 ETC Grant requesting \$45,900 to support our **No Senior Left Behind** program. This program would provide free day trips to California State beaches for 75 older adults from Fresno, an inland community with limited access to coastal experiences.

In June 2025, we were notified that our application was not selected for award. The ETC Project Manager kindly agreed to meet with us to share the project scoring criteria, scoring results, and to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of our proposal.

Our proposal was scored by two reviewers whose scores differed significantly in several categories, particularly in criteria #5 and #7. During our meeting, SCC shared that a primary weakness of our grant project was the high cost per participant. We were informed that our high cost per participant resulted in our grant application being scored lower in the budget category and was a primary contributing factor to our application not being selected for award.

However, the 2025 ETC application instructions did not specify any parameters on the per participant cost. The 2025 ETC application instructions also did not state that the per participant cost would be used as a factor in project scoring. Also, because Fresno is an inland community, a high percentage, about one-third, of our grant request was for transportation costs to mobilize participants from our inland community to the coast. We recognize that applicants from geographic areas that are closer to the coast will have lower transportation costs, and these lower transportation costs will potentially result in a lower cost per participant.

Given this information, **we ask that SCC consider making the following changes to the ETC grant guidelines and scoring process for future rounds to improve transparency and equity for applicants:**

1. If SCC plans to continue to use the per participant cost as a factor in scoring decisions, we recommend that SCC update the ETC application instructions to include parameters for the per participant cost and to explicitly specify that the per participant cost will affect how the application is scored.
2. We recommend that SCC include in their scoring process a provision that takes into account the necessarily higher transportation costs that will be incurred by inland communities to ensure that inland communities are not penalized for higher costs related to transportation in the scoring process.
3. We recommend that SCC provide more specific scoring criteria to reviewers to support greater objectivity in scores.
4. We recommend that SCC increase the number of reviewers per application to 3-5 rather than only 2 to improve the fairness of the scoring process.

We thank SCC for making the ETC Grant Program available to communities like ours, and we hope that SCC will consider our feedback to improve the transparency and equity of the ETC grant scoring process for future rounds.