Explore the Coast Grants

2027 EXPLORE THE COAST APPLICATION GUIDE

Released November 12, 2026

Application is attached to this announcement
Submit Application via Survey Monkey
Application Due **Friday, January 29, 2027**
by 11:59 PM PST

For questions only, email **explorethecoast@scc.ca.gov**
Please read this resource and the application thoroughly.



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Explore the Coast (ETC) Application Guide

Summary

The California State Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy) announces the Explore the Coast grants to public agencies, federally recognized tribes and California Native American communities, and nonprofit organizations for projects that facilitate and enhance the public's opportunities to explore California's spectacular coast and San Francisco Bay shoreline. The ocean, coast, and beaches have long been recognized and used as spaces of joy, relaxation, and healing for many Californians. The ability to experience the coast without fear of physical barriers, feelings of not belonging, or financial challenges is crucial to how individuals cultivate their lifelong connections with the coast. Furthermore, joyful memories of the coast can organically inspire stewardship. The Explore the Coast grant program seeks to provide enjoyable coastal experiences for people and communities who face challenges or encounter barriers to accessing or enjoying the coast ("ETC Priority Communities").

The Conservancy is a non-regulatory state agency that provides grants to provide public access to the coastline, preserve and restore coastal habitats, and preserve coastal agricultural lands along the Pacific coast, San Francisco Bay shoreline, and adjacent counties. The Conservancy undertakes projects and works with public agencies, tribes, and nonprofit organizations to accomplish these goals.

Increasing public access to California's coast is a core component of the Conservancy's work. With the Explore the Coast Program, the Conservancy seeks to support programs and organizations that work with people and communities who face challenges accessing and/or enjoying the coast.

ETC Priority Communities

ETC Priority Communities may include but are not limited to lower-income individuals and households, people with disabilities, people of color, Native American communities, immigrant communities, foster youth, and other historically excluded communities who face societal challenges or barriers to accessing or enjoying the coast. You can use the Outdoor Equity Program Community FactFinder Mapping Tool, CalEnviroScreen Mapping Tool, Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, or other resources you know of to help determine if you are serving communities in need (please note the tools linked will refer to these as a "disadvantaged" or "severely disadvantaged community"). These tools are not required, but you may consult them to help describe the community that you aim to serve.

ETC program priorities:

- Provide an enjoyable and/or healing experience at the coast.
- Reduce economic, physical, operational, or societal barriers to accessing or enjoying the coast.

- Projects may also achieve secondary goals, such as inspiring coastal stewardship, promoting community leadership, and providing lasting positive impact. For a comprehensive list of our project prioritization criteria, refer to the Selection Criteria below.

Award Amount

Applicants may request a grant amount of up to $100,000. Approximately $1,000,000 is available for this grant round.

Success Rate

The Explore the Coast Grant program is highly competitive. For the 2025-2026, and 2026-2027 ETC Grant Round, less than 10% of the applications were funded, respectively. We encourage potential applicants to contact us with any questions regarding the competitiveness of a project. Additional information on how to contact us for further technical assistance is located below.

Project Start and End Date

Based on when selected projects can be presented to the Conservancy's board and timing restrictions on funding sources, applicants should apply for projects that aim to **start in January 2028 and end in December 2029.** The Conservancy will base the size of an award on each project's needs, its overall benefits, and the extent of competing demands for funds.

Project Eligibility

Eligible Applicants

The Conservancy may award grants to public agencies, federally recognized tribes, and nonprofit organizations that constitute a 501(c)(3) under the Internal Revenue Code. Other community-based organizations and tribes or California Native American communities that are not federally recognized may apply with a 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor.

PLEASE NOTE: Organizations with a current ETC grant that want to apply for funding should make sure: 1) the requested start date of the new application is after the completion date of the existing grant and 2) the work completion date of the current grant is before **June 1, 2028**. If the work completion date of your current Explore the Coast grant is June 1, 2028, or later, your organization should wait until next year to apply for a new ETC grant. Reach out to your Conservancy project manager if you have questions about this.

Eligible Project Locations

Based on the funding sources, projects must involve participants visiting the coast of California, including the shores of bays. Projects can bring participants from throughout the state to the coast, including participants from inland areas. Please note that because of funding restrictions, only a small amount of funding may be available for projects that visit the shores of San Francisco Bay (see above section Award Amount for more details).

Project Eligibility and Competitiveness

Projects can include a wide range of programs and activities that help bring people to the coast and/or enhance their experience at the coast. **The Conservancy prioritizes grants where at least 70% of the participants served by the grant are from ETC Priority Communities**. Projects should also provide participants with joyful or healing coastal experiences that reduce barriers for ETC Priority Communities to access and/or enjoy the coast. Other benefits such as hands-on ecosystem stewardship and environmental education are secondary benefits that can increase project competitiveness. **(See Selection Criteria below for more information).**

Project Examples:

- Connecting low-income youth to the coastline through a series of expeditions, including hiking the Coastal Trail, visiting tidepools, kayaking in the sea, camping near the beach, and birdwatching.
- Serving adults with developmental disabilities by implementing a weeklong summer day camp at the coast with activities, such as yoga, sandcastle building, and whale watching.
- Providing tribal youth and families with two summer camping trips in their ancestral, coastal lands to participate in fishing, tide pooling, edible kelp gathering, beach exploration, and cooking.
- Taking low-income children and their families from inland communities to Catalina Island for an overnight camping excursion.
- Taking students on a coastal field trip to participate in a community science project on restoring coastal habitat.
- Hosting a surf camp over several weeks for children who are survivors of abuse, providing a safe space for joyful coastal experiences and mentorship, and providing surf-camp leadership opportunities to teens who graduated from the program.
- Projects with minimal non-coastal pre-trip activities (e.g., a safety briefing or exercise before recreating at the coast). All non-coastal activities must occur prior to a coastal trip and directly relate to coastal trips.

Examples of projects that are a lower priority or inconsistent with its current funding sources or Division 21:

- Projects that comprise **more than 25%** of classroom-based programs and/or curriculum.
- Projects that solely involve beach clean-ups or volunteer ecosystem stewardship activities.
- Construction of new facilities. Please note, however, that the Conservancy has funded hundreds of projects to build new trails, trailheads, and other amenities (beach stairways, bathrooms, overlooks, etc.) through other funding programs. Please contact us directly if you are pursuing this type of project.
- Trips to locations other than the coast cannot be funded by an Explore the Coast grant. For example, taking a group to an inland lake or state park would not be eligible.

- Gatherings and/or events that occur after the coastal trip cannot be funded by an Explore the Coast grant. For example, a closing celebration hosted at a school or inland campground would not be eligible.

We encourage you to contact us if you have any questions. Additional information on how to contact us for further technical assistance is located below.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidance

Artificial Intelligence (AI) software applications have significantly increased, transforming various sectors, including grant writing. We recognize that the integration of AI can serve as a valuable tool to improve efficiency. During recent ETC grant rounds, AI usage in application submissions was apparent, notably in the use of repetitious phrases and standardized language from the RFP with little to no supporting claims. For example, multiple applications stated that their program would provide joyful and healing experiences at the coast or peer-to-peer mentorship without specific descriptions. While AI can be a helpful tool, it should not replace essential human elements of creativity and skill. In our experience, AI-written applications are generally not very competitive. We are seeking compelling proposals that not only align with ETC goals, but also effectively articulate your work well for the communities you aim to serve.

Application Submittal

This year's Explore the Coast grant application will be submitted through SurveyMonkey. The application has two parts:

Part 1: Grant Narrative Application (Word Document or PDF)

Complete the Narrative Application, where you will provide the majority of your project information and narrative responses. Save this document as a Word file or PDF.

Part 2: Project Data SurveyMonkey Form

When you submit through SurveyMonkey, you will enter required project details, such as the project name, organization and contact information, and the number of participants from ETC Priority Communities. To assist with this portion of the application, we have a Project Data Worksheet, which is optional to use.

Use the following link to access SurveyMonkey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GTVGB2L

Optional: Project Data Worksheet

The Project Data Worksheet itself is not required and should not be submitted. It is provided simply as a tool to help you collect your information before beginning the SurveyMonkey form. SurveyMonkey does not allow you to save your progress. We recommend completing the worksheet first and then transferring your responses into SurveyMonkey when you are ready to submit your full application.

We have created an application submission tutorial with instructions on how to submit via SurveyMonkey. Watch it here.

The Explore the Coast Grant Narrative Application and Project Data Worksheet can be accessed by clicking the links below or clicking the links on our website.

IF USING WORD:

Download the grant narrative application here.

Download the optional data worksheet here.

Word Documents will download automatically, so check your downloads folder for the file.

IF USING GOOGLE DOCS:

When open, go to file > "Make a copy". You can then freely edit and share the document in Google Docs. When you are ready to submit the application, go to File > Download > Microsoft Word (.docx). If you do not have a Microsoft Office license, you can instead download the document as a PDF and send it to the link below.

Please use 12 pt font and do not exceed 14 pages or delete RFP questions in the application.

Completed grant applications will be submitted through SurveyMonkey as a Word document or PDF by **Friday, January 29, 2027, by 11:59 p.m. PST.**

In SurveyMonkey, complete all required fields and upload the following:

- Completed ETC Grant Narrative Application
- 501(c)3 documentation, if applicable
- A photo that represents your project (optional)

Applicants are **highly encouraged** to attach a relevant photo (preferably as jpg) with their application submission; these attachments should not exceed 10MB total. Letters of support will be requested after the applicant has been notified that they are being recommended to the Conservancy Board for funding.

Please be aware that all documents submitted to the Conservancy become public records. Please refer to the Photo Release section for further technical assistance on photo submissions.

Contact Us for Further Technical Assistance

Prospective applicants are highly encouraged to discuss their projects with Conservancy staff before submitting their applications. We can help you determine if your project would be a good fit for the Explore the Coast program funding and can suggest ways to make your application as competitive as possible. You can request a consultation, join our informational webinar, and/or join the application assistance "Office Hour" sessions. A project consultation call is an opportunity to meet with staff to ask project questions. We **do not** offer feedback on draft applications. **Potential applicants can contact us any time before January 18, 2027 for application assistance.**

Contact Information

To request a project consultation meeting, please email explorethecoast@scc.ca.gov. Please provide a brief description of your project idea, the general geographic area your participants will come from, and the name, phone number, and email of the person to be contacted. We will typically respond within 3 business days.

Informational Webinar

The Conservancy will hold a webinar on December 10, 2026, from 1:00-2:00 p.m. to walk through the Explore the Coast Grant Program and address questions regarding the application. Potential project applicants are encouraged to attend. The registration link for the webinar is here. The recorded webinar will be posted on our website afterward.

Application Assistance

The Conservancy will offer two one-hour Application Assistance "Office Hour" sessions where Conservancy staff will answer more specific grant questions and provide guidance with application preparation to potential applicants via zoom meeting. Break-out rooms will be an option for one-on-one assistance.

- **January 7** Application Assistance registration link is here.
- **January 20** Application Assistance registration link is here.

Anticipated Grant Schedule

Grant Round 2027-2028	
November 12, 2026	Release Explore the Coast Application and Application Guide
December 10, 2026	ETC Informational Webinar, 1 - 2 pm
January 7, 2027	Application Assistance Office Hours #1, 3 - 4 pm
January 20, 2027	Application Assistance Office Hours #2, 12 - 1 pm
January 29, 2027	Applications Due by 11:59 p.m. PST
February – June 2027	Conservancy Staff & ETC Advisory Board Review of Applications
Early July 2027	Applicants Notified of Application Status

Early 2028	Grantees Start Work on their Projects

Application Review and Grant Award Process

Project Review

Conservancy staff will evaluate each application for how well it meets the Selection Criteria stated below. Applicants may be contacted to provide additional information during the review process. Conservancy staff may seek assistance in evaluating the applications from individuals and technical experts with pertinent expertise from other governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and other entities. After an initial round of review, a subset of the applications will be reviewed by the Explore the Coast Advisory Board. The Advisory Board will discuss the applications and select which projects will receive funding.

Selection Criteria

Projects will be evaluated against the following criteria:

1. The extent to which the project provides an enjoyable and/or healing experience at the coast. (10 points)
2. The extent to which the project reduces economic, physical, or societal barriers for participants in accessing or enjoying the coast during the project and beyond. (5 points)
3. The extent to which the project serves participants from groups that consistently face barriers getting to or enjoying the coast. (5 points)
4. The extent to which the applicant has a mindful outreach strategy to recruit participants from ETC Priority Communities. (5 points)
5. The extent to which the project is inclusive of all participants and considers differences in cultural and social backgrounds, past experiences, knowledge, comfort levels, etc. (5 points)
6. The extent to which the project serves participants with varying physical and/or cognitive capabilities. (5 points)
7. The extent to which the project experience has longer-term post-project positive impacts on participants. (10 points)
8. The extent to which the project promotes leadership of the community served through partnerships and leadership roles. (10 points)
9. The extent to which the project description is clear. (5 points)
10. The extent to which the budget is clear and reasonable given the impact on each participant. (5 points)
11. The extent to which the applicant has the capacity to carry out the project effectively and in a timely manner. (5 points)

Total possible points: 70

Final Selections

The Conservancy anticipates notifying applicants in early July 2027 if their project is selected to be recommended to the Conservancy's Board for approval.

Conservancy Board Approval

Projects recommended by staff for funding are subject to approval by the Conservancy Board at a public meeting. Conservancy staff anticipates presenting the recommendations for Explore the Coast grants to the Conservancy Board on September 23, 2027. Applicants recommended by staff for funding are required to provide staff with all pertinent information in a timely manner for Board consideration. Applicants will be notified of the Board's decision after the Conservancy's September 23, 2027 Board Meeting.

Project funding will not be available until a grant agreement between the Conservancy and the grantee has been executed and the grantee has met the grant pre-conditions. This generally takes at least two months after Board approval. Therefore, it is best to plan to start your project no earlier than January 2028.

Helpful Resources

The following resources may be helpful for the preparation of your grant application.

Tips for Applicants that have been Awarded Previous ETC Funding:

Be sure to fully describe your program. Your project manager will not be the one reviewing your application, so you need to fully describe your project to someone who does not know that you have had ETC funding before and is not familiar with your project.

SurveyMonkey Submission Tutorial

For guidance on submitting your application through SurveyMonkey, please review the application submission tutorial here.

Sample Application

We have created a sample application and sample data worksheet. These samples are intended to provide guidance and understanding on the level of detail and types of information typically requested in this application.

Sample Narrative Application

- https://scc.ca.gov/files/2026/11/Sample_ETC-2027-28-RFP-Grant-Narrative-Application.pdf

Sample Project Data Worksheet

- https://scc.ca.gov/files/2026/11/Sample_ETC-2027-28-RFP-Project-Data-Worksheet.pdf

Grant Writing Skills

In 2016 and 2025, the Conservancy offered two grant writing training webinars:

- "Improve Your Grant Writing Skills"
- "SCC Grant Writing 101"

These webinars provide helpful guidance on how to write robust grant applications.

Conservancy Grant Terms

Please review the sample grant terms before completing your application. Please note the insurance requirements for ETC grants. If the requirements result in higher insurance premiums for the applicant, this cost can be included in the grant budget. **The sample grant terms are subject to change at any time.**

Assistance with Incomplete Application Documents

The Conservancy does not automatically disqualify an application if it is missing a required element. In these cases, the Conservancy may request the missing information and provide a deadline for submittal. However, if multiple parts of the application are missing, it will not be considered.

Feedback

If your project does not receive a grant award, you can reach out to Conservancy staff to get feedback based on the Project Selection Criteria once all decisions have been made. This feedback may be helpful to you in applying for funding in the future.

Photo Release

Photos and Records Submitted with Application

All information that you submit is a public record subject to disclosure under the Public Records Act. Please only submit photos, maps, or other materials with this application in which either (1) you own the copyright, trademark, or have some other ownership rights in the materials, or (2) you have permission to use and have the authority to grant the Conservancy the permission to use such materials for non-commercial purposes. When submitting photos, maps, or other materials, please confirm in writing via the grant application or some other method that you are granting the Conservancy the unlimited right to use such materials for non-commercial purposes. Please indicate if photos, maps, or other material submitted with this application require crediting when reused by the Conservancy - you should indicate this on each document.

If you provide any photographs of individuals to the Conservancy, please ensure that the individuals (or the guardians of individuals under the age of 18) consented to the photographs being taken and used for any non-commercial purpose.

Privacy Notice

Notice on Collection of Personal Information

Please review the link above to review the Conservancy's notice regarding the collection and use of personal information when completing grant materials. Please do not submit personal information as part of an ETC application. The ETC Grant Program only requests business-related information, which is subject to the Public Records Act.

Map of Explore the Coast Regions

Use this map to determine which region(s) your participants are from:

