



Memo

Date: March 25, 2021

To: Members of the State Coastal Conservancy

From: Sam Schuchat, Executive Officer
Mary Small, Deputy Executive Officer
Julian Nesbitt, Civic Spark Fellow

CC: Oversight Members

RE: Coastal Conservancy Project Selection Criteria Update

Background

The Conservancy has used Project Selection Criteria for the past twenty years to communicate priorities to potential applicants and project partners, to evaluate grant applications, and to select projects for funding. The criteria have been updated periodically by the Conservancy, most recently in 2014. The project selection criteria are high level concepts written so that they can be applied to the broad range of Conservancy project types.

Updating the criteria is one implementation action under the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Guidelines (JEDI Guidelines) adopted by the Conservancy in September of 2020. Specifically, the criteria are being updated to reflect those JEDI Guidelines that address our funding programs, meaningful engagement, and working with California's Tribes. The update is also an opportunity to align the criteria related to climate change with current state policy and guidance. Finally, the update is an opportunity to clarify, consolidate, and clean up the criteria, which will enable the Conservancy to apply the criteria more consistently.

Current Criteria

The current project selection criteria include required and additional (optional) criteria.

REQUIRED CRITERIA

- **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes**
- **Consistency with purposes of the funding source**
- **Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies** (specific plans and policies that are being considered or implemented)
- **Support from the public**
- **Location** (must benefit coastal, ocean resources, or the San Francisco Bay region)
- **Need** (desired project or result will not occur without Conservancy participation)
- **Greater-than-local interest**
- **Sea level rise vulnerability** (Consistent with Executive Order S-13-08, for new projects located in areas vulnerable to future sea level rise, planning shall consider a range of sea level rise scenarios in order to assess project vulnerability and, to the extent feasible, reduce expected risks and increase resiliency to sea level rise.)

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA

- **Urgency** (threat to a coastal or ocean resource from development or natural or economic conditions; pressing need; or a fleeting opportunity)
- **Resolution of more than one issue**
- **Leverage** (contribution of funds or services by other entities)
- **Conflict resolution**
- **Innovation** (for example, environmental or economic demonstration)
- **Readiness** (ability of the grantee and others to start and finish the project timely)
- **Realization of prior Conservancy goals** (advances previous Conservancy projects)
- **Return to Conservancy** (funds will be repaid to the Conservancy, consistent with the Conservancy's long-term financial strategy)
- **Cooperation** (extent to which the public, nonprofit groups, landowners, and others will contribute to the project)
- **Minimization of greenhouse gas emissions** (project design and construction methods include measures to avoid or minimize greenhouse gas emissions to the extent feasible and consistent with the project objectives)
- **Vulnerability from climate change impacts other than sea level rise** (project objectives, design, and siting consider and address vulnerabilities from climate change impacts other than sea level rise)

Draft Project Selection Criteria

The draft project selection criteria were written with input from our staff, review of our JEDI Guidelines, and review of current climate change policies. In addition, staff vetted the draft criteria with some existing grantees and partners. Staff integrated that input into this initial draft. Following presentation of the criteria to the Conservancy at the March 25, 2021 meeting, staff will revise the criteria based on comments from members of the Conservancy. On April 1st, the draft criteria will be posted to solicit broad public input as described below.

Eligibility Criteria

Staff proposes separating criteria into eligibility criteria and selection criteria. Every Conservancy project would be required to meet all applicable eligibility criteria.

- Consistent with purposes of the funding source.
- Consistent with Conservancy enabling legislation: Public Resources Code, Division 21.
- California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Compliance – The Conservancy must consider how CEQA applies to each funding decision. Unless an exemption applies to the project or to the work being funded, the required CEQA documentation must be complete before the Conservancy authorizes a grant. CEQA documentation does not have to be complete to apply for a grant.
- Grantee capacity – The grantee has the ability to administer the funds and conduct the project in a manner that will meet the State’s requirements and will protect the grantee from potential financial or legal risk. If the grantee does not have the capacity, they have partnered with a fiscal sponsor that will provide them the needed administrative support.
- Site ownership/control – The grantee has or will have the legal right to carry out the project on the land on which the project is proposed.
- Long-term management – The grantee has a plan for the long-term management, maintenance, and monitoring of the project.

Selection Criteria

Selection criteria will be used to prioritize projects for Conservancy funding. Given the broad range of project types funded by the Conservancy, not all criteria will be applicable to every project. For example, land acquisition projects may have more limited opportunities for early engagement given the sensitive nature of some purchase negotiations. However, the Conservancy would expect grant applicants to incorporate the themes of the criteria wherever feasible.

Some of the proposed criteria implement the Conservancy’s JEDI Guidelines, including two new criteria related to meaningful community engagement and tribal engagement. Different project types will be expected to have different levels of community engagement. Development of a new park would benefit from meaningful, extensive community input; replacement of a remote fish passage barrier may not. Tribal engagement is also expected to vary with different types of projects. However, all Conservancy projects are on former tribal lands and early effort should be made to try to engage tribes. Separate from the update of the selection criteria, the Conservancy is also examining its funding programs to support engagement to the maximum extent possible given the funding sources the Conservancy administers.

The Conservancy has long supported multi-benefit projects, but the criteria have been revised to describe both natural resource benefits and community benefits. With this, staff have tried to provide more concrete examples of how our projects could benefit communities, such as: improving public health, addressing the need for additional recreational amenities, reducing

pollution burden, creating jobs, training for jobs, developing workforces, and supporting increased civic engagement.

Additionally, staff is recommending changing the climate change related criteria. Currently our required criteria reference a 2013 Executive Order related to sea level rise. In the proposed new criteria staff have broadened the criteria to ensure that project benefits are sustainable or resilient over the project lifetime. Sea level rise projections continue to increase and this framing allows staff to apply appropriate, current projections based on a project's expected lifespan. The language is broad to encompass all relevant, projected climate impacts. In addition, staff added language to prioritize projects that support rather than impede long-term climate adaptation.

Some of the examples below refer to underserved or frontline communities. As defined in the Conservancy's JEDI Guidelines, these include communities that are economically disadvantaged; historically underrepresented in the environmental policymaking and/or projects; carrying disproportionate environmental and health burdens; vulnerable to climate change impacts due to lack of resources required for community resilience; or severely burdened by housing costs and increased risk of displacement.

The selection criteria are broad concepts and there are different ways of meeting the criteria. Below are the draft criteria in bold, with bullets underneath describing various ways a project could meet the criteria.

1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.

- Develop the California Coastal Trail as a major recreational amenity, tourist attraction, and alternative transportation system.
- Expand the system of coastal public accessways, open-space areas, parks, and inland trails that connect to the coast.
- Revitalize coastal and inland waterfronts that provide significant public benefits and promote sustainable economic development.
- Expand environmental education efforts to improve public understanding, use, and stewardship of coastal resources.
- Protect significant coastal resource properties, including farmland, rangeland, and forests.
- Enhance biological diversity, improve water quality, habitat, and other natural resources within coastal watersheds.
- Enhance coastal working lands, including farmland, rangeland, and forests.
- Enhance the resiliency of coastal communities and ecosystems to the impacts of climate change.
- Improve public access, recreation, and educational facilities and programs within the Santa Ana River Parkway.

- Protect and enhance natural habitats and connecting corridors, watersheds, scenic areas, and other open-space resources of regional importance in the Santa Ana River watershed.
- Identify and prioritize long-term resource and recreational goals for the San Francisco Bay Area.
- Protect and enhance natural habitats and connecting corridors, watersheds, scenic areas, and other open-space resources of regional importance in the Bay Area.
- Improve public access, recreation, and educational facilities and programs in and around San Francisco Bay, along the coast, the ridgelines, in urban open spaces, and natural areas.
- Protect Bay Area working lands and support farmers and ranchers in implementing stewardship of the natural resources on their lands.

2. Project is a good investment of state resources.

- Project provides important benefits to Californians.
- Project is feasible.
- Budget is reasonable.
- Project leverages non state resources including volunteer work, in-kind support, or partnerships.
- Project advances statewide goals and is consistent with regional plans.
- Protects or enhances significant resources.
- Pilot projects that may have demonstration value.
- Applicant has consulted with relevant State and Federal agencies.
- Scientific assumptions of project are explained in proposal, project follows best practices.

3. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.

- Project will continue to deliver benefits over reasonable time period.
- Demonstrate resilience to sea level rise or other climate change impacts.
- Project will not make future climate adaptation more difficult. For example, restoring a wetland will provide benefits in the near term and may allow for other future adaptation actions.
- Applicant for planning project has identified potential implementation funding and has a strategy for obtaining necessary approvals.
- See #6 for sustainability/resilience related to tribes.

4. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

- Projects provides co-benefits and alleviates multiple stressors within communities, such as improving public health, addressing the need for additional recreational amenities, reductions in pollution burden, improved flood protection, habitat enhancement or other environmental benefits.
- Programs and projects increase equity and environmental justice by benefitting underserved and/or frontline communities.
- Project increases community-preparedness or resilience to future climate change

impacts such as drought resilience.

- Project increases carbon sequestration.
- Project provides benefits to the community, such as: job training, job creation, workforce development, support for increased civic engagement, leadership development opportunities, funding for education, and volunteer opportunities.
- Urban parks, urban trails, education centers, and waterfront revitalization projects include consideration of anti-displacement strategies where appropriate.
- See #6 for examples of multiple benefits and significant positive impact for tribes.

5. Project was (or will be) planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.

- Engage with communities in public co-visioning processes before projects are developed to reflect community needs. Project concepts that are anchored in community priorities and expertise.
- Communities engaged in meaningful way to build mutual trust and relationships. Examples could include: 1) process involves staff, board members, or consultants who have worked in or are from respective community or 2) process includes dialogue between all affected and necessary parties, or direct involvement of local community groups.
- Engagement process addresses unequal power dynamics between communities and government, historic inequity, injustices, and trauma. Communities have a decision-making role in the development of the project.
- Community is represented on applicant's staff, board, within the project's planning group, or project is partnering with local community based organizations.
- Engagement process makes it easy for community members to participate by, for example, providing stipends, meeting in convenient locations, using virtual venues, providing childcare and food.
- Project team has a track record working within communities and incorporating insights gained from community engagement into project planning.
- Materials developed during or as a result of the project are made available in multiple languages that are representative of the languages spoken in the engaged community.
- See #6 for meaningful community engagement with tribes.

6. Programs and projects implement tribal engagement wherever possible.

- Applicant has made an effort to communicate with tribes as early as possible in project development.
- Project includes working with tribes to enable traditional stewardship and cultural practices on ancestral land and co-management of their ancestral lands and natural resources; or projects assist tribes to regain access to their ancestral lands on the coast.
- Project includes indigenous voices, leadership, and perspectives, including traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous stewardship, and educational programs.
- Tribal concerns are respected and archaeological and cultural resources are protected.
- Signage, communications, and other project information includes tribal land acknowledgement and accurate historical information.

Public Input and Proposed Process

Presenting draft criteria to the Conservancy Board is the start of a process to develop new selection criteria. After the presentation to the Board, our next step is to revise the criteria to incorporate comments. Then the draft criteria will be posted on the Conservancy website for public comment. Staff will create an anonymous Online Comment form and accept written comments at this address: publiccomments@scc.ca.gov.

The public comment period will be open until July 1st. On April 16th, staff will host a webinar on the draft criteria for the public and stakeholders. At the end of the comment period, staff will revise the criteria as appropriate based on the input received. The final project selection criteria will be presented to the Conservancy Board for possible adoption at its September meeting. The schedule is outlined below.

<u>When</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Who</u>
Nov.	Update Conservancy on Process	SCC Staff/Conservancy
Winter	Research and staff input	SCC Staff/Stakeholders
March 25	Present draft criteria to Conservancy	SCC Staff/Conservancy
April 1st	Post draft criteria for public comment Online Comment form	Public
April 16th	Webinar on draft criteria	Stakeholders
July 1st	Public Comments due	Public
July-Sept	Revise Criteria	SCC Staff
Sept 23	Present final criteria to Conservancy	Conservancy