

MAKING A  
GREAT  
PLACE



# Nature in Neighborhoods Capital Grants Handbook

October 2015

# Nature in Neighborhoods Capital Grants Program

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## SUMMARY

The Metro Council seeks to inspire innovative projects that improve the ecological functions of our neighborhoods and enrich people's experience of nature as a fundamental element of their community's character and livability. This can be accomplished through the purchase, construction or restoration of outdoor, natural spaces that are or will be in public ownerships. Approximately \$1.7 million is available for the final round of this \$15 million program. Funding is made possible thanks to the voter-approved 2006 Natural Areas bond measure.

## ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Proposed projects must fulfill the following minimum requirements to be considered:

- The total project cost must be at least \$50,000.
- The project must be on publicly-owned property or result in a publicly-owned asset and is within Metro's jurisdictional boundary or the region's urban growth boundary.
- The project must demonstrate public and private partners.
- Metro will provide no more than one-third of the total project costs of the capital project. Matching funds must be identified and close to secured at the time of application.
- A project must have minimal feasibility challenges and able to be constructed by 2019.

## APPLICATION PROCESS & TIMELINE

Interested non-profit organizations, schools, neighborhoods or government agencies can submit a letter of interest at any time. Full applications are accepted by invitation only.

Letters of Interest accepted between October 2015 and April 2016

Full applications deadline on August 1, 2016

Recommendation to Metro Council in November 2016

Grant agreements and notice to proceed by January 2017

## PROGRAM GOALS AND CRITERIA

All project proposals must strongly meet at least one of the program's two main goals.

### **"Re-nature" goal – enhance ecology**

Protect water quality and enhance wildlife habitat through the preservation and restoration of ecological features and functions.

### **"Re-green" goal – enrich people's experience of nature**

Ensure that the presence and experience of nature is a fundamental element of every neighborhood's character and livability.

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*The following documents are available on the program website at [www.oregonmetro.gov/capitalgrants](http://www.oregonmetro.gov/capitalgrants)  
Contact Metro’s Capital Grants Coordinator at 503-797-1781 to request hard copies of these documents.*

### **Application instructions and forms**

- Letter of Interest instructions
- \* Full application instructions will be sent to applicants upon invitation to submit
- Application cover sheet
- Line item budget form
- Matching resources form

### **Template documents include**

- Conservation easement
- Sample agreement with a community group
- Sample IGA with local agencies
- Sample IGA with Government Sponsor if community group is grantee

## SECTION 1: OVERVIEW OF THE CAPITAL GRANTS PROGRAM

### PROGRAM BACKGROUND

In November 2006, voters approved a \$227.4 million bond measure designed to protect the region's water quality, fish and wildlife habitat and provide people with greater access to nature. The Natural Areas Program consists of three elements:

- Regional natural area and trail corridor acquisition in the amount of \$168.4 million.
- Local share program providing \$44 million to cities, counties and park districts to meet their own needs for acquiring natural areas, restoring habitat, enhancing public access to nature, designing and constructing trails and providing environmental education opportunities.
- Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program in the amount of \$15 million.

The Nature in Neighborhoods capital grants program is intended to complement the regional and local share elements of the 2006 natural areas bond measure by funding projects that protect and enhance natural resources on public lands at a neighborhood level, particularly in neighborhoods that are more deficient of parks and natural areas.

### FUNDING AVAILABILITY

Approximately \$1.7 million will be available in 2016 for this competitive grant program. While letters of interest are accepted at any time, full applications are accepted by invitation only. Check the program website for application deadlines. Make sure to leave enough time between submitting the letter of interest and the full application deadline. Three months is recommended.

The intent of this grant program is to fund significant capital improvement projects. Therefore, the *total* project cost must be at least \$50,000. Since the required match is \$2 for every \$1 of Metro funding, a minimum grant award is \$16,600. A maximum grant request of \$500,000 has been established for the 2016 funding round.

### WHO CAN APPLY?

The following groups and organizations are eligible to apply: governmental agencies; nonprofit organizations; public educational institutions including primary and secondary schools, community colleges, colleges, universities and extension centers. Although individuals and for-profit organizations are not eligible to apply, they are encouraged to participate as project partners. Due to bond restrictions, the federal government cannot own the asset or improvement.

### PARTNERS

The project must demonstrate public and private partners who will leverage human and financial resources. A partner is not simply an organization or individual that writes a letter of support. Partners are actively engaged in leveraging financial or in-kind services in order to make the project a success. Partners allow inclusiveness and lead to creative approaches that address multiple social and economic needs of the community as well as ecological benefits.

## MATCH

Metro awards no more than one-third of the total project cost of successful applications. Matching guidelines include:

- The match can be a combination of financial resources and in-kind services.
- The match needs to be identified and close to secure at the time of application.
- The value of donated or acquired property can be used as a match if the property was donated or acquired within one year of the grant application, as long as no Metro funds were used to acquire the property.
- Volunteer time should be valued based on the Independent Sector's value of volunteer time. The 2015 value is \$23.07/hour. The most current information can be found at: [http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/volunteer\\_time.html](http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/volunteer_time.html).
- Metro funds or in-kind support of Metro staff cannot be used as a match.
- Match can include pre-agreement planning costs. It is recognized that some costs must be incurred to adequately prepare the full application. For that reason, the following costs can be included as a match if incurred after Metro's invitation to submit a full application.

For development projects: Professional services, agency staff time and volunteer time spent on the following activities: site planning, feasibility studies, preliminary design, environmental assessment, preparation of cost estimates, construction drawings and specifications, building relationships with potential partners and similar tasks necessary for project preparation.

For acquisition projects: Professional services, agency staff time and volunteer time spent on appraisals, survey, environmental evaluation costs and building relationships with potential partners.

## TYPES OF A CAPITAL PROJECTS FUNDED

The project must result in a publicly-owned capital asset within Metro's jurisdictional boundary or the region's urban growth boundary.<sup>1</sup> The definition of a capital asset may vary depending on how the project will be accounted for by the public agency that owns or will own the property or easement being acquired or improved. To ensure that this requirement is met, **the chief financial officer for the public agency must confirm that the line items funded by the capital grants shall be properly recorded as assets in the jurisdiction's audited financial statements and that the accounting treatment for this project is consistent with other similar transactions.** Application instructions direct you to provide a letter of support from the jurisdiction that includes this assurance.

There are four types of capital projects that may be funded through the capital grants program. *Projects that take the place of required mitigation or penalty payments or are regulatory in nature are not eligible.*

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<sup>1</sup> Metro's website has an interactive tool that will tell you if your property is inside the urban growth boundary. Go to [www.oregonmetro.gov](http://www.oregonmetro.gov), search for "Urban Growth Boundary lookup".

## Land acquisition or conservation easement

Acquisition of real property (including easements) by a public agency. Acquisition projects can include natural areas, wildlife habitat and trail corridors, nature-related parks or other opportunities for increasing people's connections to nature and/or restoring ecological systems. Agreements to acquire any interest in land shall be negotiated with willing sellers. The federal government may not own property purchased with these bond funds.

### *Allowable costs*

Costs associated with the acquisition including appraisals, appraisal review, surveys, environmental review and closing costs.

Costs necessary to "stabilize" the property including a survey, the demolition of unwanted structures and other hazards, installation of signage and fencing to control access and the initial removal of invasive species and planting of natives.

### *Required conservation easement*

Government agencies taking fee title ownership to property being acquired with grant funds shall grant Metro a conservation easement substantially in compliance with Appendix A. If the agency is acquiring a conservation easement of their own from the property owner, then this requirement does not apply.

## Capital improvement projects

Projects will result in the creation of a capital asset such as a park, trail, boardwalk or nature play area, with a discrete useful life of at least 20 years; OR projects will significantly extend the useful life of an existing capital asset. Projects will be an improvement to non-federal, publicly-owned property.

### *Allowable costs*

A project must have a total value of at least \$50,000. Such costs can include design and engineering costs, bid documents and permits, as well as materials and construction expenses.

Projects can occur on Metro-owned property if at the time of the property's acquisition, it was never the intention for Metro to develop facilities on the site. The project must be consistent with the intent of the bond measure under which the project was acquired and the management goals at the time of acquisition. If an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with a local jurisdiction for the management of the property is in place, the project must comply with that agreement.

- **Restoration** projects that either create or renovate an asset to enhance fish habitat and/or wildlife connectivity such as enhancing stream complexity with large woody debris, removing or replacing culverts, and providing viewing platforms to reduce people's impact on sensitive habitat.
- **Urban transformation** projects that seek to change development norms in the region's most urban settings by raising sustainable site development standards, balancing human needs with the health of natural systems and providing people with opportunities to learn about and experience nature.
- **Neighborhood livability** projects that give people a place to walk, reflect and connect with nature close to home.



<p><b>Multiple benefits for people and nature</b></p>	<p>Metro seeks to fund projects that achieve additional environmental, social and economic benefits beyond project scope. Such projects can catalyze future investments in restoration within a basin, intentionally involve underrepresented groups, advance workforce development, contribute to leadership development within communities, and transform a community’s cohesiveness, health and sense of place.</p> <p>Contracting with MWESB:  Metro’s policy is to provide equal opportunity to everyone to access and participate in locally-funded projects, programs, and services by removing barriers to participation and promoting economic opportunities for certified minority-owned enterprises (MBE), women-owned enterprises (WBE) and emerging small businesses (ESB). Every applicant will be asked to describe the applicability of MWESB policy of the Government Sponsor to the project and how the contracting for this project will help meet the goals of the policy.</p>
<p><b>Project readiness and risk</b></p>	<p>Metro seeks to fund projects that can be completed by 2019. In assessing a project’s feasibility, the following factors will be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project team members –skills and qualifications of project managers, designers, engineers, technical advisors and community advocates that are on the project team.</li> <li>• Design development – how far along is the design, what alternatives have been considered, scientific or engineering studies that contributed to the design solution and potential permit issues.</li> <li>• For land acquisition projects, discuss the status of the negotiations with the property owner.</li> <li>• What long-term management and maintenance plans are there for the project? Who will be responsible for implementing those plans?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Project evaluation and monitoring</b></p>	<p>Describe the project’s indicators of success. If the project is addressing the ReNature criterion, how will you monitor ecological functions? If the project is addressing the ReGreen criterion how will you know that people are finding the experience of nature meaningful? How will this information be collected, reported and used?</p>

**PROJECT PLANNING**

The strongest projects have been well thought-out and based on thorough research and planning. This includes looking at the project in the broadest context and framing the need for the project within the entire watershed basin or the needs of the surrounding neighborhoods. Building relationships with a variety of stakeholders can allow the project to more holistically address multiple elements of a livable community such as public safety, health, affordable housing and jobs. Metro is willing to provide suggestions to potential applicants and help to identify potential resources. Applicants are encouraged to contact Metro staff as early in the project planning phase as possible. Metro staff can provide a quick assessment over the phone and suggest ways that the project can be strengthened to better meet the

program criteria. If the project is a land acquisition project, various land conservation organizations may be available to assist with negotiations and due diligence procedures.

It is equally important to gather specific data or research to support the project's need and the context in which the project is discussed. Data or mapping sources to consider include:

- Demographic data collected from census information or local school student populations that can be used to help identify who the project will serve and how the design of the project will address their needs and interests.
- Existing planning documents can include a state or city planning documents, watershed action plans, neighborhood plans, or others that can document the social, economic or ecological needs in the project area.
- Master plans or other specific engineering or feasibility studies completed for the project site.

A list of potential resources for such information begins on page 8.

## **APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

Potential applicants must submit a letter of interest describing the proposed project and how it meets the eligibility requirements. Letters of interest can be submitted at any time. Full proposals will only be accepted from applicants who have been invited to apply. Section 2 of this grant handbook gives specific instructions on completing a letter of interest. Full application instructions will be sent with the invitation to apply.

## **REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS**

The administration of this grant program is designed to be responsive to the needs of potential applicants and flexible enough to assist with the evolving nature of capital improvement projects.

### **Letter of interest review**

Metro staff will review the letter of interest to ensure the applicant's proposal meets the eligibility requirements and can address the criteria adequately. This review may include follow-up communication with the applicant or possibly a site visit. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure their project is sufficiently defined according to the guidelines so that staff can efficiently review the project.

If staff determines that the project meets the intention of the grant program, the applicant will be invited to submit a full proposal along with feedback on how to strengthen the application to be more competitive.

While staff reviews for basic eligibility and criteria guidelines, the Metro Council's appointed review committee determines if a project meets the program criteria strongly enough to recommend funding.

### **Full proposal review process**

Staff review. Metro staff will review proposals for eligibility and completeness.

Site visits. Metro staff will conduct site visits during the proposal review period. Site visits are intended to provide a more in-depth understanding of the proposal in order to form a stronger basis for comparison

with other proposals. Members of the Grant Review Committee may or may not participate in the site visits. All site visits shall be documented for the Grant Review Committee to review as a group.

Grant Review Committee. The Grant Review Committee, appointed by the Metro Council, will review the full applications and site visit analysis. The Grant Review Committee will base their funding recommendations on how strongly a project is able to address the selection criteria and if the amount of the funding request is proportional to the outcomes achieved. Funding recommendations will be submitted to the Metro Council for approval.

Notification to applicants. Applicants will be informed of the review committee’s recommendations and if the project will be recommended with conditions of approval. The applicant will have the opportunity to discuss the conditions of approval and confirm their ability to meet those conditions.

### **Metro Council approval**

Metro staff will submit a resolution for approval to the Metro Council based on the Grant Review Committee’s recommendations. One or more members of the Grant Review Committee will be available at this scheduled meeting to present the committee’s recommendations to the Metro Council and answer questions. The Metro Council will consider the information received and award funds to those proposals that best advance the vision, goals and intent of the Nature in Neighborhoods Capital Grants Program.

### **AGREEMENTS**

Metro staff will work with the successful applicant to enter into the necessary agreements for the project between Metro and the applicant. There are three potential agreements that may be used.

- Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA): This template is used when the applicant is a government agency.
- Grant Agreement: This template is used when the applicant is a community-based organization.
- Government Sponsor IGA: This template is used for the government agency when the applicant is a community-based organization. It is used together with the Grant Agreement discussed above.

See the program website or contact staff for agreement templates.

### **Notice to Proceed**

The only elements of the project that can be implemented prior to fully executed agreements with Metro are those identified in the grant proposal budget as “pre-agreement costs.” These expenses can only be used as match, and Metro has no obligation to reimburse these expenses or enter into a grant agreement if all match funds are not secured or if all Metro Council conditions of approval are not met.

### **Changes to Scope of Work or Budget after Executed Agreement**

Amendments to the agreement can be made to extend the grant period, make necessary budget adjustments or make other alterations that are still consistent with the project scope and conditions approved by the Metro Council.

If the need arises to redirect capital grant funding to a new project element that was not part of the original scope of work, the following criteria will be considered.

- The new project element addresses the same problem or need identified in the grant application.
- The originally funded project element is not feasible, was funded by some other funding source, or did not cost as much as anticipated at time of application.
- The new project element is consistent with the intent of the Nature in Neighborhoods Capital Grant program as defined by the 2006 Natural Areas bond measure.

The request must be approved by Metro's Chief Operating Officer.

## **Reporting requirements**

Grant recipients will be required to report on the progress and outcomes of the project throughout the project period. A final report will be required that includes full and final accounting of all expenditures, the value and source of matching funds, a description of work accomplished, volunteer hours and participation, Project photos (including a photo of the signage acknowledging the Nature in Neighborhoods Capital Grants Program participation), and data on success indicators. Such success indicators will be determined on a project-by-project basis and included as part of the grantee's scope of work.

Metro is committed to successful project implementation for all grant recipients and will work cooperatively to ensure project success.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **Public information**

All applications are subject to the Oregon Public Records Law.

### **Pre-award activities**

Notwithstanding any oral or written assurances, there is no obligation on the part of Metro to cover pre-award costs.

### **Resources**

- [Regional Conservation Strategy](#). This document organizes conservation strategies for the Portland metropolitan region by landscape types – natural area, working lands and developed areas – as well as strategies for biodiversity corridors and for species of special concern. This document will be helpful as you consider how a project advances biodiversity on a regional scale. It is available on the Intertwine Alliance website at [www.theintertwine.org](http://www.theintertwine.org).

The Regional Conservation Strategy High Value Habitat viewer ([www.regionalconservationstrategy.org](http://www.regionalconservationstrategy.org)) shows the high value habitat across the Portland-Vancouver region and within any watershed, jurisdiction, urban growth boundary/area, or custom shape that you choose. It helps you visualize the relative importance of habitats within your project area.

You can also view summary statistics about the land cover, habitats, and parks and ownership in your selected area. Comparing the high value habitats with the other layers on the map can help prioritize conservation efforts. For example, if you view the parks and protected areas layer and the high value habitats at the same time, you can see which high value habitats are not currently protected. You can also determine whether any high value habitats exist that could connect currently protected habitats.

- Public school districts. One source of local demographic data is the neighborhood schools. Each public school maintains data on the percentage of students eligible for the free and reduced lunch program and students participating in English as a Second Language program.
- Regional Equity Atlas. Using maps, policy analysis, and community-based research, the Equity Atlas assesses how well different populations across the four-county Portland-Vancouver metro region can access key resources necessary for meeting their basic needs and advancing their health and well-being. The Atlas is on the web at [www.equityatlas.org](http://www.equityatlas.org).

Metro's web site has a variety of maps and tools to assist with project research:

- MetroMap. This is Metro's web mapping service where you can view and print maps or data specific to your area of interest. MetroMap allows you to view map-based information about a location of your choice. View information on parcel and tax assessment, zoning, political boundaries, planning, flood plain and special districts. The results can be displayed in text-only format or on a map.
- Urban Growth Boundary tool. Enter an address to see a map that shows whether a specific property is inside, was added to, or removed from the urban growth boundary.