

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION 25-5469, FOR THE PURPOSE OF APPROVING 2024
NATURE IN NEIGHBORHOODS NATURE EDUCATION AND OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES
COMMUNITY GRANTS

Date: February 18, 2025
Department: Parks and Nature
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Neighborhoods community grants review
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Length: 30 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

Nature education and outdoor experiences grants support and create partnerships in local communities that improve water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and connect people with nature.

The program has three goals: Cultural equity, Environmental equity, and Economic equity. Fulfillment of these goals are the primary evaluation criteria for the proposals submitted to the Nature in Neighborhoods nature education and outdoor education grants program.

Requests for this year's funding opportunity were evaluated by a volunteer review committee. The review committee evaluated pre-applications and full applications based on the information submitted by applicants, the stated evaluation criteria, and the review committee's professional and collective judgment.

ACTION REQUESTED

The Metro Council is requested to vote to approve the award of the 2024 Nature in Neighborhoods Nature Education and Outdoor Experiences community grants to those recipients listed in Attachment 1 and for the amounts listed for each individual award.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Metro Nature in Neighborhoods community grants implement the Metro Council policy direction outlined in the 2005 Title 13, 2013 Parks and Nature (PN) Levy, 2018 PN Levy and 2022 PN Levy as well as the 2016 Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) Plan and 2019 PN REDI Action Plan, including the Racial Equity Framework. Furthermore, the community grants improve administrative processes based on lessons learned and feedback from previous grant cycles, other grantmakers, community and community research, such as Metro's 2017 report on Resident Needs and Behaviors in Portland Parks and Natural Areas and the Coalition of Communities of Color's 2011 report Philanthropy and Communities of Color in Oregon. By doing so, the community grants have evolved in step with Metro Council direction over the past 17 years to better meet the needs of the community and organizations connecting people to nature in our region.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

Nature education and outdoor experiences grants achieve the policy outcome of supporting and creating partnerships in local communities that improve water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and connect people with nature. These projects address equity for underserved communities and center the needs and priorities of BIPOC communities and other historically and systemically marginalized groups.

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

The Metro Council has the option of approving or declining the attached funding recommendations.

Approving the funding recommendations would allow the projects to begin and would obligate the full \$750,000 available to this program in this year's budget. The projects recommended for funding help people of all cultures, races and traditions connect with nature and with one another in the region's parks and natural areas. These projects ensure that communities of color in greater Portland enjoy the benefits of conserving land, air and water, and equitable access to safe and welcoming parks, trails and natural areas; communities enjoy learning about, helping restore, experiencing and connecting with nature and the region's natural areas. The projects recommended for funding support efforts to ensure that Black communities, Indigenous communities, communities of color and other historically and continually marginalized groups will prosper economically from the business of Parks and Nature in greater Portland.

Declining the funding recommendations would leave this year's \$750,000 unobligated and the recommended projects would not receive funding. This would delay distribution of this year's funds and would require program staff to redo the funding opportunity and organizations to reapply for funding.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommends approval of Resolution No. 25-5469.

Staff recommends the approval of the slate of grants indicated in Exhibit A to this Resolution. Metro received 33 pre-applications, totaling \$2,853,802 in funding requests and 19 full applications, totaling \$1,663,802 in funding requests. The review committee reviewed the pre-applications and full applications according to the grant criteria and recommends **nine (9)** grants for funding a total of **seven hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$750,000)** to the Metro Council (see Attachment 1).

Pending Metro Council approval, grant-funded projects will begin March 7, 2025. Grant applicants may have up to three years to complete their projects.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

How is this related to Metro's Strategic Framework or Core Mission?

As noted in Chapter 3 of Metro's Regional Framework Plan:

"The importance of the region's natural landscape and its recreation facilities cannot be understated. They support the air we breathe, the water we drink and define the look and feel of our communities. They ensure that natural resources and habitats are protected and that citizens have recreational opportunities close to where they work and live.

Citizens throughout the region have demonstrated the importance of parks, natural areas, trails and recreation services through their support of funding measures, participation in recreational activities and volunteer community service and from what they have said in public opinion surveys. Metro recognizes the desire of citizens to have high-quality natural areas, trails and parks close to home. Metro is working with federal, state and local governments, nonprofit organizations and citizens to address and meet the park and recreation needs of the Portland metropolitan area.

The Nature in Neighborhoods community grants program nature education and outdoor experiences funding opportunity is responsive to Metro area residents' desire to have easy and equitable access to nature and to have opportunities to connect with nature in ways that are resonant with their personal and community priorities."

How does this advance Metro's racial equity goals?

Nature in Neighborhoods community grants advance Metro's racial equity goals by prioritizing proposals that support historically underserved communities' access to nature

and which center the voices and perspectives of BIPOC communities and other historically and systemically marginalized communities.

How does this advance Metro's climate action goals?

This work supports Metro's climate change goals supporting nature education and conservation projects at the neighborhood level and focus on helping individual Metro area residents build their relationship with nature, become environmental advocates, and build the skills and knowledge necessary to actively participate in restoration projects in their own homes, in their neighborhoods, and even at the regional level.

Known Opposition/Support/Community Feedback

There is no known opposition. The Nature in Neighborhood community grants program has been supported by the community. Staff continuously seek opportunities to evolve and improve the program in response to community feedback.

Explicit list of stakeholder groups and individuals who have been involved in policy development

Metro has collaborated with a broad array of local stakeholders to develop this policy and program staff continue to consult with local environmental organizations and other stakeholders to refine and improve the funding opportunity.

Beyond direct feedback from the community members and community led organizations served by this program, the need for such a funding focus has been established via many sources. Work done by Metro that illuminates this need includes:

- Metro Parks and Nature Systems Plan
- 2022 Levy Renewal Framework
- Metro Parks and Nature Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion Plan
- Resident Needs and Behaviors in Portland Parks and Natural Areas – Needham and Rushing
- Connect With Nature: Planning Parks and Nature with Communities of Color

External research also highlights the importance of directing resources to historically and systemically underserved groups as an important part of efforts to address existing inequities, and offers guidance on how to more effectively implement equity-centered grantmaking:

- Philanthropy and Communities of Color in Oregon: from strategic investments to assessable impacts amidst growing racial and ethnic diversity (2011), by the Coalition of Communities of Color
- Analysis of Policies, Practices, and Programs for Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (2013), by the D5 Coalition
- Incorporating Diversity, Equity, And Inclusion In Your Grant-Making Process: A Checklist Of Potential Actions (2016), by Arabella Advisors
- Oregon by the Numbers (2018), by The Ford Family Foundation

- 2021 Outdoor Participation Trends Report (2021), by the Outdoor Foundation

Legal Antecedents:

Resolution No. 22-5287 For the Purpose of Approving 2022 Nature in Neighborhoods Nature Education and Outdoor Experiences Community Grants.

Resolution No. 22-5279, For the Purpose of Referring to the Voters of the Metro Area Renewal of the Metro's Local Option Levy for Protecting Water Quality, Restoring Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Connecting People to Nature.

Resolution No. 20-5114 For the Purpose of Approving 2020 Nature in Neighborhoods Nature Education and Outdoor Experiences Community Grants.

Resolution No. 18-4896 For the Purpose of Approving 2018 Nature in Neighborhoods Nature Education and Outdoor Experiences Community Grants.

Resolution No. 16-4690, For the Purpose of Referring to the Voters of the Metro Area Renewal of the Metro's Local Option Levy for Protecting Water Quality, Restoring Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Connecting People to Nature.

Resolution 16-4708, For the Purpose of Approving the Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

Resolution 16-4723, For the Purpose of Approving the 2016 Nature in Neighborhoods Nature Education and Outdoor Experiences Community Grants.

Resolution No. 15-4635, For the Purpose of Approving 2015 Nature in Neighborhoods Nature Education and Outdoor Experiences Community Grants.

Resolution No. 14-4549, For the Purpose of Approving 2014 Nature in Neighborhoods Nature Education and Outdoor Experiences Community Grants.

Resolution No. 12-4398, For the Purpose of Referring to the Voters of the Metro Area a Local Option Levy for the Purpose of Preserving Water Quality, Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Maintaining Metro's Parks and Natural Areas for the Public.

Resolution No. 05-3574A, Establishing a Regional Habitat Protection, Restoration and Greenspaces Initiative called Nature in Neighborhoods.

Resolution 05-3580A, Transferring \$1,250,000 from the Balance of the FY 2004-05 Recovery Rate Stabilization Reserve to a General Fund Reserve for Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration Projects.

Ordinance No. 07-1160B, Transferring \$250,000 from the Recovery Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund for Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration Projects.

Ordinance No. 09-1215B, Approving \$92,500 in the FY 2009-10 Budget and Appropriation Schedule for an additional round of Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration and Enhancement Grants.

Ordinance No. 10-1235B, Approving \$150,000 in the FY 2010-11 Budget and Appropriation Schedule for an additional round of Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration and Enhancement Grants.

Ordinance No. 12-1274A, Approving \$200,000 in the FY 2012-13 Budget and Appropriation Schedule for an additional round of Nature in Neighborhoods Restoration and Enhancement Grants.

Anticipated Effects

This Resolution approves the award of 2024 Nature in neighborhoods nature education and outdoor experiences community grants and begins the individual contract award process for the selected grant applicants with an anticipated project start date on or after March 7, 2025. Projects may be up to three years in length.

Financial Implications (current year and ongoing)

This Resolution authorizes award of contracts in an amount previously identified by the Metro Council in the budget for this purpose. The adopted FY 2024-25 budget includes the necessary appropriation authority for reimbursement of these grants.

BACKGROUND

For nearly two decades, the Metro Council has provided funding for grants to community groups, nonprofits, and other organizations, designed to support and create partnerships in local communities that improve water quality, fish and wildlife habitat and connect people with nature.

In May 2013, voters approved Measure 26-152, providing new funding for Metro's parks and natural areas and providing increased funding for Nature in Neighborhoods community grants, which was referred to the voters by Metro Council (Resolution 12-4398). The Metro Council awarded Nature in Neighborhoods nature education grants in 2014 (Resolution 14-4549), in 2015 (Resolution 15-4635), in 2016 (Resolution 16-4723), in 2018 (Resolution 19-4896), in 2020 (Resolution 20-5114), and in 2022 (Resolution 22-5287). This year's funding opportunity is the seventh round of awards for the Nature in Neighborhoods nature education grants (Resolution 25-5469).

In November 2016, voters renewed the Metro parks and natural areas levy with the approval of Measure 26-178, referred to the voters by Metro Council (Resolution 16-4690), which continued funding for Nature in Neighborhoods community grants. Furthermore, in June 2016, the Metro Council adopted the Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity, Diversity

and Inclusion (Resolution 16-4708), which directs the agency to incorporate racial equity into all aspects of its work.

In May 2022, voters renewed the Metro parks and natural areas levy with the approval of Measure 22-5279, which continued funding for Nature in Neighborhoods community grants.

Grant program staff used the framework provided by Metro Council in Resolutions No. 12-4398, No. 16-4690, No. 16-4708, and No. 22-5279 to develop an outreach plan, application materials, review committee and evaluation criteria for these community grants, referred to as Nature in Neighborhoods nature education and outdoor experiences grants. Staff also aligned Metro's grant criteria with state, regional and local conservation plans and community initiatives in order to achieve multiple benefits.

Due to the large number of applications, Metro's Nature in Neighborhoods nature education and outdoor experiences grant program follows a two-step process including a pre-application phase and a full application phase. The review committee evaluated pre-applications and full applications based on the information submitted by applicants, the stated evaluation criteria, and the review committee's professional and collective judgment.

In this second round of the renewed natural areas levy grants, the review committee valued the diverse types of organizations, robust partnerships, and the wide range of projects represented in the pre-applications submitted. Proposals recommended for funding offer a broad array of strategies to support different paths and purposes that bring people in connection with nature. The review committee members were impressed by proposals that were clearly grounded in BIPOC perspectives, traditions, and ways of knowing, and by proposals which focused on work done by and with communities rather than for them.

Committee members also noted that many proposals meaningfully incorporated opportunities for program participants to learn about agriculture, connect with cultural first foods, build skills and gain experience in hands-on restoration work, and explore career development opportunities for youth and early career professionals in the environmental sector.

Committee members were impressed by how many applications were strong on all three of the program goals. Proposals came from both culturally specific organizations and conservation focused organizations and included both organizations familiar to this program and many first time applicants.

The review committee identified compelling projects which offer opportunities to participate in hands-on outdoor STEM education; gain habitat restoration skills and experience, address career pathways in the environmental field; remove barriers for marginalized communities to enter that field; learn about traditional and restorative land management, and engage with nature as a space of restoration, healing, and learning.

The review committee valued projects which aligned with the Nature in Neighborhood grant goals, individual organizations' plans or priorities, and state, regional or local conservation strategies. They found proposals stronger when they demonstrated longstanding and holistic partnerships with communities and community-specific organizations. They emphasized the importance of projects that combined opportunities to get out in nature with opportunities to build community power and voice to create lasting holistic impact.

The review committee discussed the history and contemporary presence of Indigenous people in the Portland Metro Area, and the importance of applicants partnering with both local Tribes and intertribal urban Native organizations. They appreciated proposals which clearly articulated the role of Tribes and/or urban Native organizations as project partners and which incorporated plans to deepen engagement with those communities.

Overall the review committee was pleased with how applicants addressed their diversity, equity, and inclusion experience and goals, especially those applicants which submitted full applications. Reviewers prioritized transparency and authenticity over perfection, noting that the applicant organizations were all on different parts of their equity journey but most of them were clear about who they were and where they are headed next.

The review committee found compelling applications that were clear in how the proposed work built long lasting and holistic connections between communities, individuals, and nature. Proposals that interwove western science with Traditional Ecological and Cultural Knowledge also resonated with review committee members. They appreciated projects that acknowledge that communities' relationship with and access to nature is both critical and complicated, and projects that explore new ways for communities and individuals to interact with nature at a neighborhood scale and beyond.

Finally, the review committee valued authentic and holistic long-established or newer partnerships, especially when those partnerships integrate historically marginalized communities' priorities and center BIPOC voices. The committee acknowledged the difficulty of establishing true, long-term partnerships between larger, complex organizations and historically and systemically marginalized communities and/or grassroots organizations. The committee appreciated applicants' efforts to embrace the challenge and create such partnerships regardless of the difficulties faced along the way.

ATTACHMENTS

None