

## **STAFF REPORT**

### **IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION 22-5287, FOR THE PURPOSE OF APPROVING 2022 NATURE IN NEIGHBORHOODS NATURE EDUCATION AND OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES COMMUNITY GRANTS**

Date: September 29, 2022

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## **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 were referred to the voters by Metro Council (Resolution 12-4398). The Metro Council awarded Conservation Education grants in July 2014 (Resolution 14-4549), in July 2015 (Resolution 15-4635), in July 2016 (Resolution 16-4691) in June 2018 (Resolution 18-4896), and in June 2020 (Resolution 20-5114). In November 2016, voters renewed the Metro parks and natural areas levy with Measure 26-178, which continued funding for Nature in Neighborhoods community grants, which were referred to the voters by Metro Council (Resolution 16-4690). 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.

Grant program staff used the framework provided by Metro Council in Resolution No. 12-4398, Resolution No. 16-4690, and Resolution No. 16-4708 to develop an outreach plan, application materials, review committee and evaluation criteria for these community grants, referred to as Nature Education and Outdoor Experiences grants. Staff aligned Metro's grant criteria with state, regional and community initiatives in order to achieve multiple benefits.

### **Grant Evaluation Criteria**

The following are the purpose and three goal categories for funding. Fulfillment of these purpose and goals are the primary evaluation criteria for the proposals submitted to the Nature in Neighborhoods community grants program:

#### **Purpose**

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

#### **Cultural equity**

People of all cultures, races and traditions connect with nature and with one another in the region's parks and natural areas.

## Environmental equity

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.

These grants help address inequities in the conservation movement by providing access to nature and the positive impacts of clean land, air and water to Black communities, Indigenous communities, communities of color and other historically and continually marginalized groups in greater Portland.

## Economic equity

Communities of color prosper economically from the business of Parks and Nature in greater Portland.

## Review committee

Jonathan Blasher, Parks and Nature Director, selected this year's review committee from a pool of applicants. Participation on the grant review committee is by application, open and advertised to all community members. The review committee included local experts in nature education, outdoor experiences, cultural programs, mentorship and job skill development, diversity, equity and inclusion, community partnership development, philanthropy, grant management and related fields.

The members of the 2022 Nature in Neighborhoods Nature education and outdoor experiences grants review committee are:

- Gwen Amsbury, *Records Management Analyst*, Oregon State Archives
- Faith Cathcart, *On Call Grants Coordinator*, Zenger Farm
- Ridhi D'Cruz, *Member*, Atabey BIPOC Medicine Council; *Program Instructor*, Your Street Your Voice, Camp ELSO; *Core Artist Resident*, Stelo Arts
- Kolini Fusitua, *Program Coordinator*, Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization
- Isaiah Jackman, *Housing Specialist*, Urban League of Portland
- Aisha McCoy, *Project Developer*, Homes for Good
- Lucy Ohlsen, *Associate Attorney*, Buchanan Angeli Altschul & Sullivan
- Jen Shih, *Grants and Enrollment Specialist*, Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District
- Wilson Yee, *Project Manager (CERCLA and Navajo Nation sites, Stafford Act)*, Weston Solutions, Inc. and Board Member, Friends of Tryon Creek

Committee members declared any direct conflict of interest in the proposals and did not score or participate directly in the discussion or ranking of an application where there was a conflict.

## 2022 Nature in Neighborhoods nature education and outdoor experiences grants review discussion

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.

This funding opportunity was extremely competitive, as Metro received many very strong grant proposals. The review committee determined which proposals were the closest match to the grant program's purpose and goals based on the information submitted, the stated evaluation criteria, and the review committee's professional and collective judgment. The review committee included local experts in environmental education, habitat restoration, natural area land management, conservation planning, mentorship and job skill development, diversity equity and inclusion, community partnership development, philanthropy, and grant management.

In the sixth round of the renewed natural areas levy grants, the review committee valued the range of organizations, project types and project scales represented in the pre-applications submitted. There is solid geographic diversity in this slate of proposals, with five projects focused on Multnomah County, two projects focused on Clackamas County, two projects focused on Washington County, and one with a Metro-wide focus. Proposals came from a mix of culturally specific organizations and conservation focused organizations and included both organizations familiar to this program and many first-time applicants.

Proposals recommended for funding show strong evidence of involvement from BIPOC groups in proposal planning and development. This review committee was especially compelled by proposals from more grassroots and community led organizations, and several proposals recommended for funding are from smaller organizations that are earlier in their development, many of which are new to this funding opportunity. Overall, half of the organizations recommended for funding are larger organizations and half are small or medium-sized organizations.

The review committee members were happy to see strong evidence of BIPOC leadership's influence in proposals focused on work done by and with BIPOC communities, rather than for them.

The review committee was pleased that many of the proposals acknowledge the connection between nature and mental health, and the need to decolonize our relationship with nature. They appreciated proposals that centered the voices and perspectives of young people, and which aim to help youth build leadership skills and learn about STEM careers. Several proposals recommended for funding feature strong economic equity components, whether by paying stipends for participants, creating career pathways, or explicitly naming other steps that the organization will take to remove economic barriers to participation.

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. Proposals which showed newer, less established relationships with community-specific organizations were less competitive.

The review committee felt that nearly all applicants had strong and thorough answers about their diversity, equity and inclusion experience, and this was especially true for organizations that advanced to the full application phase. The review committee was glad to see the applicant organizations being thoughtful and clear about where's they're currently at with their equity work and about their next steps.

Applicant organizations' ability to pivot and evolve their programs in response to safety concerns around the pandemic impressed the review committee. Applicants' resilience and determination in the face of these challenges has led to new ways of delivering programs and connecting with community, and the review committee is eager to see how the work will continue to evolve.

The review committee was compelled by proposals that projects that acknowledge that communities' relationship with and access to nature is complicated, and projects that incorporated innovative strategies to build program participants' connection with nature and their sense of safety and personal empowerment in outdoor spaces. They appreciated organizations that are building meaningful, holistic, transformative cross-community partnerships and using participants' feedback to guide their program development and implementation.

## **Recommendation**

Staff recommends the approval of the slate of grants indicated in Exhibit A of this Resolution. Metro received 41 pre-applications, totaling \$2.45 million in funding requests and 19 full applications, totaling \$1.24 million. The review committee reviewed the pre-applications and full applications according to the grant criteria and recommends **ten (10)** grants for funding a total of **seven hundred thousand dollars (\$700,000)** to the Metro Council (see Exhibit A).

Pending Metro Council approval, grant-funded projects will begin October 20, 2022. Grant applicants may have up to three years to complete their projects.

## **ANALYSIS/INFORMATION**

### **1. Known Opposition**

None.

### **2. Legal Antecedents**

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

Resolution No. 18-4896, For the Purpose of Approving the 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 Conservation Education Community Grants.

Resolution 15-4635, For the Purpose of Approving the 2015 Nature in Neighborhoods Conservation Education Community Grants.

Resolution No. 14-4549, For the Purpose of Approving the 2014 Nature in Neighborhoods Conservation Education 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.

### **3. Anticipated Effects**

This Resolution approves the award of 2022 Nature in Neighborhood 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 October 20, 2022. Projects may be up to three years in length.

### **4. Budget Impacts**

This Resolution authorizes award of contracts in an amount previously identified by the Metro Council in the budget for this purpose. The adopted FY 2022-23 budget includes the necessary appropriation authority for reimbursement of these grants.

### **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

The Chief Operating Officer recommends approval of Resolution No. 22-5287.