

# Memo



**Metro**

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**Date:** July 1, 2021

**To:** JPACT and Interested Parties

**From:** Jon Blasher, Parks and Nature Director  
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**Subject:** Coordinating trails funding processes

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## Introduction

The Portland region's system of off-street trails is a critical, well-used and beloved part of achieving our regional vision and policy direction. Historically, millions of dollars of the region's federal funding allocation have supported the development and construction of multiple trails projects, demonstrating their importance. Voters affirmed their support and desire for more trails in the region with the passage of the 2019 Parks and Nature (P&N) bond measure. This measure contained funding specific to support trails projects and continuing to create a well-connected network of trails throughout the region.

With this overall increase both in support and available funding for trails, Metro intends to combine the processes of allocating the 2025-2027 Regional Flexible Funds (RFFA) Step 2 funding and the trail-specific grant funding from the P&N bond measure.

There is up to \$20 million for trails available from the P&N bond funds to be allocated through this process. As in previous RFFA cycles, trails projects remain eligible to be funded with RFFA funds as well.

Metro Council directed staff to look for opportunities to work across departments and leverage resources where possible to achieve Metro overall outcomes. These two funding sources – Planning and Development's (P&D) RFFA funds and the P&N bond funds for trails – have similar goals and priorities. The regional importance of building a well-connected network of trails is demonstrated through policy direction identified in the Parks and Nature System Plan, the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and the Regional Active Transportation Strategy.

The main advantages of sharing an application and evaluation process for these funding sources mean that jurisdictional partners can submit one application to be considered for funding from both sources. This reduces workload on applicants. Applicants will not need to wait through two processes to know their project's funding status. And the two funding sources can work together to allow for greater flexibility in how projects are developed and built.

## Shared priorities

Both the RFFA and P&N bond funding policy direction are centered in the goals of advancing equity and responding to the challenges facing the climate. Trails projects have a long history of being funded through the RFFA process. They are a critical component of a well-connected, multi-modal transportation system and help to advance the RTP Investment Priorities of Equity, Safety, Climate and Congestion. And they provide important recreational opportunities that contribute to creating livable communities and improve people's access to nature.

RFFA Priorities	P&N Bond Criteria
Equity	Racial Equity
Safety	Climate Resilience
Climate (CSS)	Community Engagement
Congestion Relief	

By coordinating these two funding sources, the region can make better, more informed funding decisions that more fully understand and respond to the region's most urgent needs and community desires.

## Eligible activities and requirements by funding program

The two funding programs can fund similar yet not identical activities and have different eligibility requirements. To be eligible for RFFA funds, projects must be included in the Regional Transportation Plan Project List. To be eligible for Parks and Nature Bond funds, projects must be included on the [Regional Trails System Plan Map](#).

Project development, construction, and ADA/accessibility improvement phases are eligible for both funding sources, while capital maintenance is eligible for Parks and Nature Bond funds only. Project development activities include, but are not limited to, feasibility studies, alignment studies, alternatives analyses, master planning, schematic design, design development, construction documents and right-of-way.

The following table provides a side-by-side comparison of the two funding programs, and shows what types of active transportation projects are eligible for each funding program and which regional plan the project must be included in.

	RFFA	P&N Bond
<b>Consistency with regional plans</b>		
Regional transportation plan project list	Required	N/A
Regional trails system plan map	N/A	Required
<b>Eligible active transportation facility types</b>		
On-street bike/ped facilities	Yes	Yes
Off street paved trails	Yes	Yes
Natural surface trails	No	Yes
Water trail improvements	No	Yes
<b>Eligible project phases</b>		
Project development	Yes	Yes
Construction	Yes	Yes
ADA/accessibility improvements	Yes	Yes
Capital maintenance	No	Yes

### Proposed process

Applicants will complete a common application that will capture information needed for consideration in either funding source category. The call for projects is scheduled to open in November 2021 and closes in February 2022. Prior to the project call, a proposer's workshop will be held to familiarize prospective applicants with the funding purposes, evaluation methodology and application process. This assists applicants in proposing projects that are well-aligned with regional policy objectives and suited for regional funding.

All applications will be reviewed through a single technical evaluation and risk assessment process. The purposes of the RFFA and Trails funds are similar. As such, the technical evaluation will provide project information that is relevant to either funding source. There may be certain policy direction for each funding source that will require additional evaluation criteria specific to that source. In particular, to be funded with the RFFA dollars, a specific trail project must meet federal eligibility requirements.

The technical evaluation will help regional decision makers understand and compare the benefits and potential outcomes of projects proposed to be funded. It will help differentiate which projects are suitable for a specific funding source, or both. A work group comprised of a representative cross section of state and regional agency staff and community leaders will assist in the creation of the technical evaluation measures and will also conduct the evaluation.

The risk assessment will examine the proposed projects for any potential factors that could negatively impact the project being built to the proposed scope, budget or timeline. Information from the risk assessment can lead to applicants adjusting their project proposals to address identified issues. The risk assessment is intended to result in better project proposals and to help the region make fully informed funding decisions. Metro intends to hire a consultant to perform the project risk assessment.

It is recognized that one of the two funding sources may be more appropriate for a specific project. Applicants may indicate which of the sources they prefer, but it is not possible to guarantee the use of a particular source should a project be selected for funding. The determination of which funding source is to be used on a trail project will be informed by several eligibility factors. Examples of

factors to be considered in determining whether a project is eligible to be funded through RFFA or Trails bond dollars may include:

- If the project is primarily located on-street vs. in a dedicated off-street right-of-way
- The types of destinations to which the project improves access (jobs, services, nature, etc.)
- Sources of funding already used on the project (federal or local)
- Unique opportunities that may exist by funding the project from a particular source
- Design elements, such as trail type (paved v. non-paved), intersections with streets or highways, geographical or environmental complexities, etc.

For the Regional Flexible Funds, final project selection and funding determination will be made by JPACT and Metro Council. For the P&N Bond Funds, the Bond Oversight Committee will review the final project list for consistency with the bond measure's policy direction before advancing the project list to Metro Council for final approval. The discussion for the selection process will include opportunities for both groups of decision-makers to review, understand and provide input on all proposed projects prior to final action. Final project selection and adoption by Metro Council is scheduled for Fall 2022.

### **Next steps**

More work is ahead to fully create and describe the combined project solicitation and selection process. In the summer of 2021, Metro staff will consult with coordinating committees, parks and local jurisdiction staff, and other stakeholders in developing a detailed and transparent application and decision-making process, prior to the Call for Projects issued in November 2021.