



Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants Brief and Factsheet

A. THE NATURE IN NEIGHBORHOODS COMMUNITY CHOICE GRANTS

Funded through the 2019 bond measure, the Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants utilizes a novel participatory approach based on participatory budgeting principles that gives community members a direct voice in choosing which projects to recommend for funding in their communities. A Program Design and Review Committee composed of community members led the design of the program and will ultimately recommend up to \$5 million in grant funding over two funding rounds to the Metro Council for projects proposed and approved by community members. **The Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants will support community-led projects that benefit historically marginalized communities, protect and improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat, support climate resilience, and increase people’s experience of nature at the community scale.** Chosen projects will emphasize community engagement, racial equity, and climate resilience as well as meet the requirements of the 2019 Parks and Natural Areas bond measure for capital grants.

The process begins by inviting the community to brainstorm project ideas. Community volunteers and government staff distill ideas, refine project ideas, and develop them into feasible projects that come back to the community for deliberation and a final vote. A key difference in participatory budgeting processes is that the public’s participation is not advisory – the vote itself decides which projects to implement with available funds.

1) THE PROGRAM DESIGN AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

With support from Metro staff, the Program Design and Review Committee establishes bylaws, ground rules, meeting procedures, roles, and other Committee norms to guide their work. This Committee represents the community during program design; vets projects submitted by the community for adherence to program goals and criteria; and refers the community’s final vote for funding to the Metro Council.

2) THE COMMUNITY CHOICE GRANTS TIMELINE & AVAILABLE FUNDING

Approximately \$2 to 3 million will be available for project awards through the 2024-2025 round of Community Choice Grants funding. This round’s process runs from Spring 2025 – Spring 2026.

The intent of this grant program is to fund capital projects. Therefore, the minimum project budget eligible for funding is \$10,000 and a maximum project budget eligible for funding is \$250,000 for the 2024-25 Community Choice Grants program.

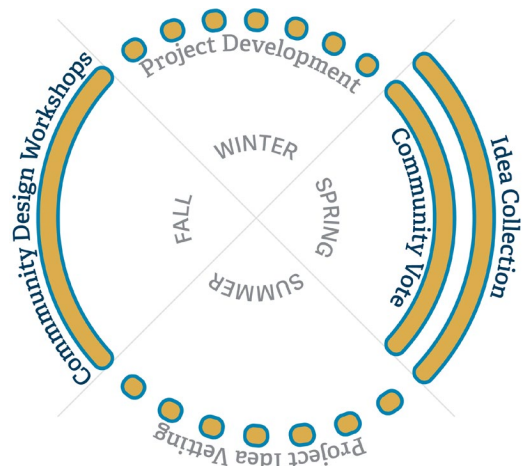


Figure 1: Program Timeline for 2025-2026 funding round.

3) 2024-2025 COMMUNITY CHOICE GRANTS PROGRAM AREA

Metro leadership has determined that the spending for 2024-2025 will occur within Metro Council District 2 (Clackamas County), east of the Willamette River and west of Happy Valley including Clackamas County, Gladstone, Milwaukie, Oregon City and North Clackamas Parks and Recreation District.

4) THE METRO NATURE IN NEIGHBORHOODS COMMUNITY CHOICE GRANTS PROCESS

The participatory model presented in this guidebook was based on participatory budgeting principles and developed in collaboration by the Program Design and Review Committee and Metro staff to interpret the purpose, principles, and criteria of the 2019 parks and nature bond through the values of community engagement and community ownership, racial equity, and transparency. These goals guide a framework that adheres to legal and fiscal constraints, represents project development best practices, and respects the staff capacity and autonomy of local jurisdictions within the Metro region.



Figure 2: The participatory process of the community choice grants.

B. IDEA COLLECTION

The purpose of the Idea Collection phase is to provide opportunities for community members to share their passion and lived experience, and to provide an accessible venue for them to share their ideas for what type of projects that should be created. This is also an opportunity to provide general education on the process, the funding, what the process hopes to accomplish, and to recruit participants for engagement in subsequent phases.

PROCESS

- Concepts and ideas for small projects are submitted by community members and community-based organizations.
- A Community Priorities Survey identifies community needs and desires for large projects in and around their neighborhoods.

ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

Community survey

Any community member that meets the eligibility criteria may complete the survey or recommend project ideas. The survey should be available in-person and online, in multiple languages, clear in purpose, and meet the racial equity and engagement requirements of projects.

Age requirements

The Committee agreed on a minimum age of 11 for idea submission and the Community Priorities Survey.

Geography requirements

The Committee determined that the Community Priorities Survey be limited to individuals and groups within the program geography, but that idea submission is open to the entire Metro region.

Credentialing

To verify eligibility, the Committee determined to use participants' self-attested age and zip code to determine eligibility for both idea collection and the community votes. In addition, contact information would be requested for submitted ideas to enable continued project collaboration.



Figure 3: Idea collection event, spring 2023.

C. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of the Project Development phase is to take ideas submitted during the Idea Collection phase and develop them into complete project proposals including scope, budget, and schematic design for the community to choose among during the Community Vote phase.

Community members work with project implementers to refine and develop viable project ideas into feasible project proposals. This happens through a series of community design workshops, meetings with staff (Project Vetting), site visits, and a Preliminary Community Vote. Project implementers advise on what is possible, estimate project cost, and inform community members on relevant internal processes (i.e. procurement policies, spending restrictions, etc.).

PROCESS

- 1) The Program Design and Review Committee and jurisdictional staff vet submitted ideas for potential feasibility. (Is it legal? Is it feasible? Is it fair and in keeping with bond and program criteria?)
- 2) Community design workshops held in program area neighborhoods connect idea submitters and community members to implementer staff and subject and design experts to build back-of-the-envelope project concepts with scope, budget, and design outlines.
- 3) Workshop-developed concepts are then shaped by implementers and Metro staff to a Schematic Design (scope, budget, location, design).

- 4) A Preliminary Community Vote is held to identify a pool of potential projects to be further developed.
- 5) Community design workshops held in program area neighborhoods connect idea submitters and community members to implementer staff and subject and design experts to refine project concepts into proposals with scope, budget, and preliminary site designs.
- 6) Idea submitters, implementer staff, and design professionals develop projects ideas into complete project proposals in preparation for a Final Community Vote.



Figure 4: Community design workshop, summer 2023.

ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

Vetting

In addition to ensuring projects meet minimum requirements, the Committee will use the established program criteria to vet projects and narrow the pool of potential project ideas for project development. The Committee will use graded scoring, in which the Committee will decide weights for each criterion to best meet bond and program goals.

Community design workshops

The Committee agreed that Community design workshops meet the intent, goals, and values of this program contingent on event and engagement efforts. This includes engaging communities of interest in their spaces and providing resources necessary for inclusion and accessibility.

Multiple events

The Committee determined that the Community design workshops (where project ideas are developed with implementers) be multiple smaller events organized by neighborhood.

D. COMMUNITY VOTE AND PROJECT SELECTION

After project proposals have been fully developed, those ideas are presented to the community for a vote to choose which projects should be funded. **The community vote is the step in the process in which all eligible members of the public, as determined by the Program Design and Review Committee and outlined in the Guidebook, vote on which projects they would like to see implemented.**

Voting often takes place both in person at Project Expos and community spaces and through online voting. The ballot will be available in multiple languages. In addition to events, there is the possibility of conducting voting by presenting links and QR codes at community events or in publicly accessible locations (e.g., libraries, schools, etc.).

PROCESS

- 1) Project expos present the final pool of potential projects for funding.
- 2) The community votes on the slate of projects, both online and in-person.
- 3) Community vote results are forwarded to the Program Design and Review Committee for their recommendation.
- 4) The Program Design and Review Committee recommends funding to the Metro Council.

ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS

Age requirements

The Committee agreed on a minimum age of 11 for the Community Votes to be consistent with Idea Submission and the Community Priorities Survey.

Geography requirements

The Committee selected that participation for the Preliminary Vote be limited to program geography while the Final Vote be open Metro-wide to ensure that projects presented on the final ballot align with the needs and desires of the program geography communities.

Credentialing

To verify eligibility, the Committee determined to use participants' self-attested age and zip code for both Idea Collection and the Community Votes.

Voting distribution

The Committee determined that the votes would occur both digitally and in-person at multiple smaller events in community spaces.

Voting method

The Committee determined to use a Ranked Choice Voting method for the Community Votes.

E. GOALS AND VISION

In addition to the goals and values intrinsic to participatory budgeting frameworks, the Program Design and Review Committee, as a representative of the Metro regional community, is tasked with defining additional program objectives, goals, and values to guide the process in support of the Parks and Nature Bond purpose, principles, and criteria.

COMMUNITY FOCUS AREAS

- **Environmental Justice:** center communities that are disproportionately impacted by pollution and environmental hazards, and/or disproportionately vulnerable to climate change-related disasters
- **Underserved Communities:** center communities that are or have been historically underinvested, nature-deficient, represent intersecting marginalized identities, and/or communities impacted by displacement or gentrification.

Instead of focusing on a particular population (e.g. youth or people with disabilities), Community Choice Grants will use a targeted universalist approach:

- Bring in the general population for crowdsourcing ideas, then engage underserved voices to ensure their voices are being heard
- Engage multi-generational audiences to get a complete understanding of the community's needs

PURPOSE, PRINCIPLES, AND CRITERIA

The 2019 parks and nature bond outlined the purpose, principles, criteria, and minimum requirements to which Nature in Neighborhoods Community Choice Grants must adhere.

What are the guiding **purposes** for the Community Choice Grants?

A growing population and changing climate threaten streams and habitat Oregonians have worked hard to protect. Treasured parks and trails need improvements to keep up with demand and to be welcoming to all. And some communities – particularly communities of color and other historically marginalized communities – still await equitable access to the benefits of public investments. This proposed 2019 bond measure will allow the region to continue efforts protecting water quality and wildlife habitat for generations to come.

This program will fund community-led projects, with an emphasis on benefitting historically marginalized communities.

These projects will protect and improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat, support climate resiliency and/or increase people’s experience of nature at the community scale.

All projects must satisfy required bond program community engagement, racial equity and climate resilience criteria ... as well as the Capital Grants requirements set forth below.

What are the guiding **principles** for the Community Choice Grants?

- Serve communities through inclusive engagement, transparency and accountability.
- Advance racial equity through bond investments.
- Protect clean water for people, fish and wildlife.
- Protect and restore culturally significant native plant communities.
- Protect, connect and improve habitat for native fish and wildlife.
- Take care of what we have.
- Make parks and natural areas more accessible and inclusive.
- Connect more people to the land and rivers of our region.
- Invest in trails for biking and walking.
- Support community-led parks and nature projects.
- Make communities more resilient to climate change.

What are the guiding **criteria** for the Community Choice Grants?

Community Engagement and Racial Equity Criteria

Community Choice Grants investments must satisfy **all of the following community engagement and racial equity criteria:**

- Meaningfully engage with communities of color, Indigenous communities, people with low incomes and other historically marginalized communities in planning, development and selection of projects.
- Prioritize projects and needs identified by communities of color, Indigenous communities, low-income and other historically marginalized groups. Metro has found ways to prioritize these communities in ways that do not violate the law, like outreach or reducing barriers.
- Demonstrate accountability for tracking outcomes and reporting impacts, particularly as they relate to communities of color, Indigenous communities, people with low incomes and other historically marginalized communities.
- Improve the accessibility and inclusiveness of developed parks.

- Include strategies to prevent or mitigate displacement and/or gentrification resulting from bond investments.
- Set aspirational goals for workforce diversity and use of COBID contractors and work to reduce barriers to achieving these goals; demonstrate accountability by tracking outcomes and reporting impacts.

Climate Resilience Criteria

Community Choice Grants investments must satisfy **at least one of the following climate resilience criteria:**

- Protect, connect and restore habitat to support strong populations of native plants, fish and wildlife that can adapt to a changing climate.
- Protect and restore floodplains, headwaters, streams and wetlands to increase their capacity to handle stormwater to protect vulnerable communities from flooding.
- Increase tree canopy in developed areas to reduce heat island effects.
- Use low-impact development practices and green infrastructure in project design and development.

Program Criteria

Community Choice Grants investments must satisfy **at least one of the following five program criteria:**

- Build wealth in communities of color, Indigenous communities, low-income and other historically marginalized communities through contracting and jobs.
- Improve human mental and physical health, particularly in communities of color, Indigenous communities, low-income communities and other historically marginalized communities.
- Nurture a relationship with land and create educational opportunities (including Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math [STEAM] opportunities) and promote careers in the environmental and agricultural sector, especially for people and youth of color.
- Demonstrate leadership by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in project identification, selection, design and implementation.
- Increase accessibility of public, park, and other natural spaces.

F. APPLICANT AND PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

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

Who can apply for grants through the Community Choice Grants?

Anyone eligible, either individuals or community groups, can submit project ideas during idea submission. Those ideas are refined and developed into project proposals, which act as grant applications for project implementers for Community Choice Grants funding.

Capital grants are intended to support community-driven initiatives; therefore, partnerships are key to a successful proposal. Tribal governments, public schools, non-profits, community-based organizations, local governments, and special districts can apply for grants.

State or local governments and jurisdictions operating in the Metro region are eligible public agencies. The final capital asset must be publicly owned. Tribal governments, non-profits, and community-based organizations would have to partner with a state or local government to be eligible for the capital grants. Tribes may not be considered a public entity under Oregon law, for purposes of the lending of credit prohibition that applies to general obligation bond proceeds. As requested by Metro's tribal relations specialist, Metro may or may not be eligible to be a beneficiary of the capital grants as a partner to tribal governments.

What is a capital project and what expenses can Capital Grants fund?

Land or other assets acquired or created with Metro bond funds must be owned by the public and capitalized by a non-federal public entity. *Tribes are not considered a public entity for the reasons referenced above.*

Expenses must be a capital expense. Funds cannot be used for general operating expenses.

“Bond proceeds must be spent on capital costs, which could include, but are not limited to, costs for land acquisition, design, planning and construction, general and program administrative expenses, bond issuance costs and reimbursable bond preparation expenses related to community engagement, design, planning and feasibility of the acquisition and capital construction program.” Projects may be required to partner with a jurisdiction to help develop (i.e. plan, engineering or architectural plans) and jurisdictions would be required to own the capital asset.”

What are the minimum **project requirements** for Capital Grant funded projects?

- To maximize the impact of investments, projects must demonstrate strong partnerships between community-based organizations and public (non-federal) agencies.
- Grant funds must be expended within the Urban Growth Boundary and/or the Metro jurisdictional boundary or as approved by the Metro Council. *Projects outside the boundaries must provide benefits to people, fish or wildlife within those boundaries to be considered for funding.*
- Projects must be clearly achievable given the knowledge, skills, and resources available among project partners.
- Expenses must be associated with capital projects only. Funds cannot be used for general operating expenses. Administrative costs will not be eligible for reimbursement in this program. The only reimbursable costs are related to the capital project plus up to 10% for project management staff time.

Administrative costs are defined as: costs including staff costs and Overhead and Indirect Costs, up to a maximum of ten percent (10%) of the total Project Cost for each project. Metro will apply the 10% cap on a project-by-project basis and each Grantee will be responsible for tracking and accounting for its costs to ensure compliance with the 10% cap.

- Projects that involve the acquisition of properties or easements must be negotiated with willing sellers.
- Grantees will be required to evaluate their projects. Progress reports would suffice.