

SONOMA COUNTY STRATEGIC GRANTS PROGRAM

The Strategic Grants Program operates in alignment with the County’s priorities and Legislative Program to advocate for state and federal program funding. Grants are an important resource for a variety of resiliency and strategic planning efforts at the County. While the County grant function is decentralized, the funding associated with 2017 fire recovery efforts highlighted the need for a centralized understanding of grant activity across County departments and agencies. The Grants Program works in coordination with the Legislative Affairs Program to maximize funding opportunities that reflect the County’s highest priority needs.

In response to department input, the CEO Strategic Grants Program is working toward establishing a County-wide support structure and foundation for grant practices and resources. Initially approved by the Board on [11/12/24](#), the goal of the program is to bolster coordination and knowledge sharing of grant opportunities, tools and grant management. While the CEO has had varying levels of grant responsibility over the years, the confluence of a changing federal funding landscape, the review of [Safety Net department procurement practices](#), and the ongoing desire by the Board to have an understanding of County grant activity are key drivers for establishing the program. Near-term projects include: establishing a baseline set of grant policies; developing a working manual of grant guidance, particularly focused on pre-application and application for competitive funding opportunities; and creating a central repository of grant policies and documentation, including a “live” spreadsheet tracking competitive grant activity.

The following roles and policies provide a foundation for the Strategic Grants Program and will be updated as needed.

Board

- 1) County Strategic Priorities: Through the County’s Strategic Plan and adoption of an annual Legislative Platform, the Board prioritizes departmental program efforts and provides authority to pursue identified funding opportunities.
- 2) Authority to Submit Grant Applications with County Funding Commitment: Grant applications which require financial commitments beyond those approved in the adopted County Budget require Board preauthorization. If a deadline does not permit preauthorization, the lead department will obtain Board approval after application submittal; if the Board does not approve the application, the lead department will withdraw the application and notify the grantor.
- 3) Authority to Accept Grant Awards: The Board of Supervisors must take action to approve the acceptance of grant awards. The lead department will request Board acceptance of the grant award before entering into any contract or work related to the award.

County Executive’s Office

- 1) Role: CEO Grants Program staff serve as the first point of contact for general, grant-related questions and coordinate post-disaster recovery funding efforts as needed. While they do not submit grant applications on behalf of departments or agencies, they may assist in coordinating cross-departmental Board items as needed.
- 2) Grant Consultant Contract Management: The CEO currently manages contracts with grant consultants for a range of services, including grant seeking, research and writing services, and bid-no-bid analysis. There is a growing need across departments for technical assistance to support compliance with state

and federal grant requirements. The CEO will explore a pilot contract to gauge utility and effectiveness of technical advisory services, but in the meantime, is leveraging the collective knowledge of the Grant User Network and the California State Association of Counties Grants Initiative.

- 3) Climate Plan Grants: Staff will continue to identify and manage funding for the Climate Plan. Staff will work with departments to respond to grant-related Board inquiries, and as capacity permits, meet with departments in an advisory capacity to discuss specific funding opportunities, potential projects, and feasibility/competitiveness.

As the Grants Program evolves and more resources are available to dedicate to grant-related efforts, staff roles could expand to the following focus areas:

- Initial Department Consultation: When a County department identifies a funding opportunity worthy of further investigation, Grants Program staff and/or the County's grant consultants could schedule and meet directly with the department head(s) or their designee(s) to discuss the proposed project, application requirements and potential partners to evaluate if a competitive project application could be developed.
- Partnering with County Department(s) on Application Strategy: Grants Program staff and/or the County's grant consultants could provide strategic services in the development of grant applications for a limited number of projects, with priority given to projects aligned with the Strategic Plan or Legislative Platform. The level of service provided for each application would depend on the needs of the department, application complexity, level of coordination required, available department expertise and resources, and program capacity.
- Internal Review: Grants Program staff and/or the County's grant consultants could assist in the coordination and circulation of the application for review by County department(s) and partner(s).

County Departments

Applicant departments are generally the lead and subject matter experts on grant applications. They respond to Notices of Intent to Apply (NOI's) and submit applications for grant funding, either independently or with assistance from a grant-writing consultant. County departments and agencies are responsible for meeting the conditions of the award, including submission of relevant documentation, progress reports and adherence to the grant timeline and budget.

If a grant application requires participation from other departments, agencies, non-profits, or other organizations, the applicant department will coordinate applicable agreements, including memoranda of understanding and contracts. The applicant department is also responsible for obtaining Board approval for any grant-related match funds or financial commitments prior to application and for compliance with all County contract and purchasing policies with respect to grant funding. On a quarterly basis, departments will provide an update of their grant activity to the CEO to inform the quarterly Board update.

- 1) Department Director: Has primary programmatic and fiscal responsibilities for a designated department and ensures adequate resources are in place for the appropriate conduct of project management duties and grant award management.
- 2) Project Manager: Responsible for programmatic activities on a project as authorized by the grant agreement. Although some tasks may be delegated, the Project Manager is responsible for overall administration of the grant award, meeting the terms and conditions of the award, and for representing the project to the grantor.
- 3) Award/Fiscal Manager: An award (or fiscal) manager may reside within a department receiving a grant or this role may be contracted out to a consultant. The award manager is responsible for managing the

financial requirements and maintaining the award record in the County's financial system. Additionally, the fiscal manager works with their department's CEO budget analyst to ensure that the appropriate resolutions and budgetary processes are completed.

- 4) Grant Auditor: An outside consultant may be engaged to conduct a risk assessment and an internal control review to identify key controls for each grant.

Grant User Network

The Grant User Network is a department staff-led forum for best practice and information sharing. The users are County staff who work on grants in a range of capacities.