



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 7/11/2023

To: Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
Department or Agency Name(s): Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
Staff Name and Phone Number: Lauren Alpert, (707) 565-7345
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

Public Outings and Youth Education Program FY24-26

Recommended Action:

Authorize the General Manager of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to execute six service agreements for the Public Outings and Youth Education Program totaling \$1,655,000, effective from July 11, 2023 and ending June 30, 2026, as follows:

1. An agreement with Friends of the Petaluma River in the amount of \$80,000 (\$30,000 in FY25 and \$50,000 in FY26);
2. An agreement with the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation in the amount of \$195,000;
3. An agreement with LandPaths in the amount of \$480,000;
4. An agreement with Sonoma Ecology Center in the amount of \$240,000;
5. An agreement with Sonoma Land Trust in the amount of \$225,000;
6. And an agreement with Sonoma Resource Conservation District in the amount of \$435,000.

Executive Summary:

For over 20 years, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) has contracted with nonprofits and other local service providers to offer public outings, youth education, and workforce development programming that connects community members with the natural and working lands we have conserved through in-person and virtual experiences. This program directly supports Ag + Open Space's mission by:

- Increasing public awareness of Ag + Open Space's mission and accomplishments, and helping community members develop a greater understanding of the impact and multiple benefits of land conservation.
- Encouraging all Sonoma County community members to develop an appreciation for the conservation of agricultural lands and natural areas, and engaging them in the stewardship of protected land in their community.
- Connecting community members of all ages to the working and natural lands of Sonoma County to explore the important relationship between healthy agricultural systems, a healthy environment, and healthy communities.

- Providing enjoyable, safe, and positive opportunities to experience the beauty of our county's open space lands, and to appreciate the value and assist in the stewardship of conserved lands in their community. □
- Inspiring current and next generation conservation leaders.

In the program's last three years, we have increased the number of participants from 4,000 per year to 7,000 - 8,000 per year.

On March 2, 2023, Ag + Open Space issued a Request for Proposals for the Public Outings and Youth Education Program covering the next three fiscal years, with a special focus on strengthening the program in the following areas:

- **Equity and justice in land conservation:** Land conservation should be a place for everyone, so we strongly encouraged applicants to demonstrate their own commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work throughout their organizations, and in their proposed programming.
- **Elevating Ag + Open Space's mission and accomplishments:** Program participants should leave with an understanding of Ag + Open Space, how their own tax dollars support the organization, and the benefits they receive as a result of our work. Further, one of the most powerful aspects of this program is that it demonstrates the impact of collaboration between a publicly-funded land conservation agency and our local environmental/agricultural/educational/recreational nonprofit organizations.
- **Connecting the public to privately-held conserved lands:** Consultants were encouraged to provide increased opportunities to connect with Ag + Open Space-conserved lands that are privately owned and managed. Ag + Open Space will be an active partner in building relationships with landowners to increase the breadth of properties visited by these programs.

Given the specialized nature of this program and the geographically diverse conserved lands on which this program provides access, Ag + Open Space requires the assistance of experts in the field of public outings, youth education, and workforce development. Six service providers were selected pursuant to the above-described request for proposals process to support Ag + Open Space's community engagement efforts.

Discussion:

As part of the Vital Lands Initiative, Ag + Open space has further committed to engaging our communities with their investment in land conservation through thoughtful and authentic community relations efforts. Key to these efforts is the Public Outings and Youth Education Program, which offers programming in every supervisorial district. This programming is always free to participants, and contract funds are often utilized to offer transportation (or offset costs of transportation, like paying for school buses) and for addressing other cost barriers, when applicable. Approximately one-third of the public outings currently offered are led in Spanish and/or hosted by bilingual staff.

Ag + Open Space proposes to enter into six service agreements (on file with the Clerk of the Board) for these services totaling \$1,655,000 effective for three years ending on June 30, 2026. Partners will receive payment for services on a monthly or quarterly reimbursement basis, after work is completed. The proposed service agreements are as follows:

1. An agreement with Friends of the Petaluma River in the amount of \$80,000 (\$30,000 in FY25 and \$50,000 in FY26);
2. An agreement with the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation in the amount of \$195,000;
3. An agreement with LandPaths in the amount of \$480,000;
4. An agreement with Sonoma Ecology Center in the amount of \$240,000;
5. An agreement with Sonoma Land Trust in the amount of \$225,000;
6. And an agreement with Sonoma Resource Conservation District in the amount of \$435,000.

All six of the organizations have unique strengths:

Friends of the Petaluma River: A new partner in this program that will increase our youth education presence in Petaluma. The program is well aligned with local and state science standards and includes field-based projects including water quality testing, habitat monitoring, and other stewardship activities. It will be offered broadly throughout Petaluma City Schools, while actively recruiting Title 1 Schools.

Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation: Their beloved youth education program focuses on watershed and wetland science learning for 2nd-4th grade students, with a mix of in-class and field-based experiences led by staff and over 100 volunteer docents. The outings program offers a broad range of themes and cultural connections, including bilingual (English/Spanish) events.

LandPaths: Offers a suite of programs including community events and youth education experiences (in-class and field-based). Their strong cultural competency and equity work is infused throughout their programming, and these new contracts include outings focused on engaging with LGBTQIA+ community members and those with mobility limitations (which can be a barrier to outdoor programs).

Sonoma Resource Conservation District: The Sonoma RCD has been a strong partner in connecting local youth to agriculture through youth education experiences (in-class and field-based), while also working with high school youth to introduce them to career opportunities in agriculture.

Sonoma Ecology Center: Serving Sonoma Valley, Sonoma Ecology Center offers culturally relevant programming including youth education experience (in-class and field-based) that enhance students' classroom education, and dynamic outings at Sonoma Garden Park and on several other properties. They also offer a paid workforce development program, Enviroleaders, that helps connect youth to career paths in the environmental field.

Sonoma Land Trust: As a new partner in the last round of contacts, Sonoma Land Trust has proven to be a strong partner in youth education and public outings. Their programming is culturally relevant, connects folks to the Baylands and other properties across the county, and a significant portion of their programming is

offered in English and Spanish.

Competitive Selection Process

Ag + Open Space conducted a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to identify and screen qualified contractors to provide the services described above. The RFP was sent to approximately 851 organizations and advertised on the Ag + Open Space website and the County Purchasing website. A total of six organizations submitted proposals in response to this RFP. Using objective selection criteria, an evaluation committee comprised of internal and external staff independently reviewed the proposals, scoring each according to the pre-established criteria, requesting further information as needed, and selecting the candidates most capable of providing the identified services. The six contractors identified above submitted responsive proposals that clearly addressed the needs of the Ag + Open Space and thoughtfully responded to the elements described in the RFP.

Beyond assessing the responsiveness and merit of all proposals received, review of proposals also prioritized cost/benefit (i.e. the costs per outing/field trip/event), along with partners’ abilities to enhance the program in areas described in the RFP.

Local Preference, Local Experience

All of the selected organizations have locations in Sonoma County and have significant experience working in the Sonoma County community.

Strategic Plan:

N/A

Prior Board Actions:

April 7, 2020: The Board approved five contracts for a total of \$1,380,959.

FISCAL SUMMARY

| Expenditures | FY 23-24 Adopted | FY24-25 Projected | FY25-26 Projected |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Budgeted Expenses | \$525,000 | \$555,000 | \$575,000 |
| Additional Appropriation Requested | | | |
| Total Expenditures | \$525,000 | \$555,000 | \$575,000 |
| Funding Sources | | | |
| General Fund/WA GF | | | |
| State/Federal | | | |
| Fees/Other | \$525,000 | \$555,000 | \$575,000 |
| Use of Fund Balance | | | |
| Contingencies | | | |
| Total Sources | \$525,000 | \$555,000 | \$575,000 |

Agenda Date: 7/11/2023

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

N/A

| Staffing Impacts: | | | |
|--|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Position Title (Payroll Classification) | Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step) | Additions (Number) | Deletions (Number) |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

1. N/A

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

1. Agreement with Friends of the Petaluma River
2. Agreement with Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation
3. Agreement with LandPaths
4. Agreement with Sonoma Ecology Center
5. Agreement with the Sonoma Land Trust
6. Agreement with the Sonoma Resource Conservation District