

Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy



CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND COMMUNITY ACCESS GRANT PROGRAM

Funded by the State of California General Fund

Grant Guidelines

Approved by CVMC Board November 14, 2022

Direct all inquiries, correspondence, and grant applications to:

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I. Introduction

California continues to be challenged by unsustainable global greenhouse gas emissions levels that negatively impact residents, wildlife, and natural resources. The state is experiencing rising average temperatures, shrinking mountain snowpack, warmer storms, higher sea levels and more extreme and prevalent natural disasters, such as floods, landslides and wildfires.

Our state has long been a trailblazer in its policy responses to climate change, for example by enacting the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (“AB 32”). On October 7, 2020, California’s Governor, Gavin Newsom, issued Executive Order N-82-20 to combat climate change by conserving 30 percent of California’s lands and resources by 2030 (Order N-82-20). The order: (i) established the California Biodiversity Collaborative comprised of government and tribal leaders, and stakeholders; (ii) set a goal at least 30 percent of California’s land and coastal waters by 2030; (iii) sought to promote biodiversity and enhance equity in access to outdoor recreational amenities; and (iv) created a process to develop a Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy to achieve the State’s goal of carbon neutrality. The objectives of Order N-82-20 are commonly referred as “Nature Based Solutions” or “Climate Resilience”.

The state legislature and the California Natural Resources Agency (“CNRA”) continue to work diligently to implement these and related state policies through the integration of greenhouse gas (“GHG”) reduction and climate resiliency features into existing programs and by working toward funding for new or expanded climate resiliency programs in the future.

As an agency within CNRA, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy (“Conservancy”) is an essential part of implementing state policies here in the Coachella Valley and surrounding mountainous areas in accordance with our statutory mission in Public Resources Code section 33500. While most statewide climate change programs are focused on coastal, forested, or urban areas, desert regions also play a significant role in carbon sequestration: in fact, at least a third of California’s biodiversity is found in desert regions like the Coachella Valley. Due to the distinct ecosystems within deserts, different actions are needed to respond to climate change than those used in coastal or forested areas.

Devising and implementing such approaches is a fitting challenge for the Conservancy, as the only state conservancy located entirely with a desert region that hosts plant and animal populations found nowhere else on earth. Climate change is threatening many of those species due to increasing temperatures and hyper-aridity. Invasive plant species crowd out natural species such as desert dry wash woodlands or mesquite groves that are better at absorbing carbon than invasive species. Further, the undisturbed carbon sinks throughout the desert may be better at storing carbon than moist or tropical forest

regions. Yet those sinks are disturbed by invasive species and human activity which releases the carbon. Finally, the Coachella Valley continues to experience urbanizing development, which, without smarter land use and recreation planning, may further accelerate the loss of species and the degradation of carbon sinks in the surrounding desert.

A critical part of efforts to combat the impacts of climate change is the human element: expanding access to recreational and educational programs will showcase the wildlife, scenic and cultural resources that we seek to protect and encourage individuals to promote sustainability in their lifestyles. Furthermore, access to outdoor recreational amenities in the Valley is uneven, with many economically disadvantaged communities entirely lacking nearby parks, trails or open spaces. Tackling such inequities will help create a more sustainable future as the Coachella Valley continues to grow and new development, land use and traffic patterns are created.

These guidelines describe the strategies and methods that the Conservancy will use to fund projects or programs that respond to climate change and promote resiliency in this unique desert and mountainous region. It addresses both natural ecosystems management in the vast undeveloped open spaces here as well as interventions in human activities to reduce GHG emissions arising from the developed parts of the Coachella Valley.

II. Overview of the CRCA Grant Program

The Conservancy received an appropriation of \$2.5 million from the General Fund in fiscal year 2021-22 and created its Climate Resilience and Community Access Grant program (CRCA). It issued an RFP in late 2021 that focused on organizational capacity building and awarded most of the available funding in early 2022. The Conservancy received \$2.9 million from the General Fund in fiscal year 2022-23 and may receive several million more in the fiscal year 2023-24. These guidelines are being adopted to set forth the objectives and application and award procedures that govern the CRCA, which will implement future local assistance appropriations from the General Fund.

The minimum grant amount is \$25,000. The Conservancy plans to issue at least one request for proposals (“RFP”) in each fiscal year in which funding remains available, although applications will be accepted continuously. The RFP will be posted on the Conservancy’s website and will be sent to local media, public agencies, tribes and nonprofit organizations. Conservancy staff will undertake extensive outreach to encourage applications from economically disadvantaged communities and areas underserved by recreational amenities.

III. Eligible Applicants

State and local public agencies (including joint powers authorities), nonprofit organizations with 501(c)3 tax exempt status and tribes recognized by the state or federal governments.

IV. **Strategic Plan for Use of General Funds for the Climate Resilience and Community Access Grant Program**

The Conservancy historically focused on acquiring, or funding the acquisition of, land for perpetual conservation in accordance with its statutory mission and the objectives of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (“CVMSHCP”). We also have funded habitat restoration projects and small trail building projects, and since 2015, we have operated our Proposition 1 Grant Program which implements the California Water Action Plan in the Coachella Valley. In addition, in 2019, the Conservancy launched its Proposition 68 Grant Program which implements capital projects focused on outdoor recreation, preserving cultural or historical resources, land restoration and responding to climate change. In the course of our work, we have identified the need to focus more specifically on climate change as it relates to adaptation and resilience.

Broadly stated, climate resilience is about successfully coping with and managing the impacts of climate change while preventing those impacts from growing worse. The primary way to achieve climate resilience is to cut the heat-trapping emissions that drive climate change while adapting to the changes that are unavoidable. The Conservancy believes resiliency investments, align with the mission and objectives of the CVMSHCP, while creating economic activity growing the overall Coachella Valley economy.

Through CRCA, the Conservancy will fund initiatives and programs that further Nature Based Solutions or Climate Resilience objective or enhance access to outdoor recreation or education. In addition, all funded projects shall be consistent with the CVMSHCP.

(a) **Funding Priorities.** Projects that demonstrate Conservancy climate change objectives in the areas of mitigation, adaptation, and resilience will be eligible for support, including but not limited to the following:

1. People and Communities

- a. Create and/or accelerate grassroots, community-based innovations and adaptations to build resilience in communities to adapt to climate change.
- b. Educate and/or disseminate climate resilience approaches that help communities adapt to climate change.
- c. Public improvements or facilities near residential communities that contribute to a reduction in vehicle miles traveled, such as small electric

vehicle or bike lanes, charging stations, public transit facilities, walking, or other programs.

- d. Greenhouse Gas Reduction: Renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, natural parks and open spaces.
- e. Public awareness and behavior change: Raise the visibility and produce behavioral change at the local level implementing actions that can be taken by people to mitigate further climate change, increase adaptability and build resilience.
- f. Public health and behavior change: Raise awareness and produce behavioral changes to address climate change, increase adaptability and build resilience. For example, improved air quality can be enjoyed when accessing outdoor natural spaces.
- g. Urban green infrastructure: Develop natural landscapes featuring cool pavement and native plant species.
- h. Water conservation: Rainwater harvesting, xeriscaping, or water-saving agricultural practices.

2. Wildlife and Ecosystems

- a. Restoration of critical natural infrastructure and habitat areas to remove invasive plants that contribute to global warming, use excessive amounts of water or harm endangered or threatened species of plants or animals and replace them with indigenous plants.
- b. Enhancing natural systems such as flood plains that include protective benefits against hazards, such as flooding, erosion, stormwater, and extreme heat.
- c. Reducing edge development in sensitive habitats.

3. Land Use or Management

- a. Managing open spaces, wildlife, scenic, biological, hydrologic, anthropological, cultural or recreational resources of the Coachella Valley to protect them from, or help them adjust to, the impacts of climate change, especially types of programs for which other Conservancy funding sources are not available.
- b. Programs that prevent conversion of agricultural land to urban use, promote urban greening, enhance compost, grazing and fire prevention and similar practices.
- c. Soil health initiatives: Adoption of soil health systems that store carbon, reduce greenhouse emissions, improve water quality, build drought resilience, increase nutrient availability, provide pollinator habitat, suppress plant diseases and reduce dust and other pollutants that harm air quality.

4. Community Access

- a. Community access projects, such as preserves, parks, trails, interpretive

facilities or language services, disabled access improvements, transportation services.

- b. Public education about habitat conservation, the effects of climate change on nature, and sustainability.
- c. Public education on local history featuring diverse cultures and viewpoints of the people who ancestrally and culturally call the region “home.”

- (b) **Disadvantaged Community Investment and Co-Benefits.** People who live in disadvantaged communities face health disparities due to poor air quality, exposure to harmful pollution, and lack of public amenities and services. The Conservancy seeks to invest in these areas to mitigate the disproportionately negative impacts to residents, particularly children and senior citizens. The Conservancy will allocate at least 20 percent of the funds available for projects serving severely disadvantaged communities, as well as additional funds to economically disadvantaged communities or severely disadvantaged communities (as those terms are defined by state law) and other areas traditionally underserved by outdoor access or recreational amenities.
- (c) **Capital Improvements.** Because the Conservancy’s other grant programs support only capital improvements (including land acquisition or restoration), CRCA funds generally will not be awarded for capital projects but instead will support non-capital programs or projects, including community or public education, organizational capacity building, program development or delivery, etc.

V. Project Requirements

- (a) All projects must comply with applicable environmental review requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
- (b) All applicants must agree to comply with the state audit requirements applicable to CVMC funding, including that the grantee retain for at least three years following final payment, satisfactory financial records relating to the project and make them available to the Conservancy upon request.
- (c) All projects must comply with applicable federal, state and local permitting requirements.
- (d) Projects involving construction, demolition, restoration and similar activities must comply with prevailing wage requirements (except to the extent certified conservation corps or volunteer services are used), and if applicable, public contracting laws.
- (e) Projects are encouraged to include the California Conservation Corps or a certified conservation corps where feasible.
- (f) No funds will be granted to complete environmental mitigation requirements of other projects, except where the grant funds would support only aspects of the project

- that exceed the minimum mitigation requirements of the applicable permit condition.
- (g) Enumerated staff costs and expenses that are related to the funded project and are included in the approved project budget may be paid with grant funds.
 - (h) Grantees whose projects are funded will have to execute a grant agreement with the Conservancy that includes all provisions required by state law and the CRCA program, as well as the Conservancy's standard insurance and indemnification provisions. *(Copies available upon request.)*

VI. Application and Review Process

Applications will be accepted upon the issuance of RFPs. The first step in the application process is for the applicant to complete the pre-application form. The pre-application form is included in the RFP and available on the Conservancy's website ("Pre-Application"). Conservancy staff will review the Pre-Application and then contact the applicant to discuss the project. Applicants whose projects are deemed eligible will be notified that they should complete the full application and narrative ("Full Application"). The Full Application components are set forth below, under "VII. Contents of Full Applications."

All Full Applications will be reviewed and evaluated for compliance with the Strategic Master Plan by staff (in consultation, where appropriate, with independent professionals with relevant expertise). Staff will then recommend grant awards for consideration by the Conservancy board. The board meetings are public in accordance with the Bagley Keene Act, and applicants may address the board regarding their applications.

Projects with scores of 80 points or more on the evaluation criteria described below will be eligible for funding, but the board retains discretion to reject any or all eligible projects. No final grant awards shall be made until compliance with CEQA has been achieved. The Conservancy resolution approving each award will include written findings detailing the objectives of the Strategic Master Plan that are met by the award.

VII. Contents of Full Applications

The Full Application consists of a form application and certification and a required written narrative not to exceed 10 pages (exclusive of exhibits such as photos, charts, schedules, staff resumes and support letters), that addresses the following:

1. **Project Description.** Provide a detailed explanation of the project, along with accompanying exhibits (e.g., conceptual designs, charts, etc.).
2. **Project Location.** Include a map with enough detail to allow a person unfamiliar with the area to locate the project or area to be served. If the applicant does not own the site where the project or program will operate, please document site control or describe plan for obtaining it.
3. **Schedule.** List proposed estimated starting and completion dates, together with

significant milestones. In the alternative, you may list the time periods required for each stage.

4. **Metrics.** Description of project/initiative outcomes desired, milestone events, measures that will be used to determine progress towards outcomes, and reporting schedule to CVMC.
5. **Budget and Cost Effectiveness.** Detail the costs of the entire project and sources of all funds, including those requested from the Conservancy. Describe any use of the California Conservation Corps, volunteers or similar resources.
6. **Organizational Capacity.** Describe the applicant's staff capacity and record of accomplishing similar projects. Highlight local projects and achievements. Attach resumes of lead staff persons or contractors.
7. **Benefits to Underserved Communities.** If applicable, explain how the project will serve disadvantaged communities, severely disadvantaged communities or areas otherwise documented to be underserved by outdoor access, recreational amenities or climate change educational opportunities. Projects that are located in or adjacent to, and serve, a disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged community as defined by [CalEnviroScreen 3.0 tool](#) should document that in their application.
8. **Environmental Review.** To the extent possible, describe the proposed environmental review for the project. If you have considered whether the project qualifies for exemption under CEQA or has already been subject to environmental review for a larger project, provide the relevant exemption or project information.
9. **Project Sustainability.** Describe how the future of the project can be sustained after CRCA funds are expended.
10. **Project Support.** Describe support anticipated from interested stakeholders, such as public agencies, nonprofit organizations, community groups, local businesses or landowners. If any significant opposition is expected, please describe that as well.
11. **Response to Project Evaluation Criteria.** Explain in detail how the project fulfills the project evaluation criteria set forth in the next section.

In addition, applicants whose projects are appropriate for conservation corps participation will be required to consult with the appropriate state or local corps before they submit their Full Application.

VIII. Project Evaluation Criteria

Project applications will be assigned a score with a maximum of 100 points based on the following:

- (a) **Objectives.** The extent to which the project fulfills one or more objectives of the Strategic Plan for Use of State of California General Funds for Climate Resilience and Community Access Grant Program set forth in Section IV above. (Up to 20 points.)

- (b) **Technical Effectiveness and Innovation.** Use of methods and techniques based on best available science, innovative and interdisciplinary approaches and demonstrated readiness to proceed with implementation. (Up to 10 points.)
- (c) **Cost Effectiveness.** Efficient use of funds and maximization of value. (Up to 10 points.)
- (d) **Leveraged Financial Support.** The ability of projects to leverage Conservancy funds by including funding or in-kind contributions from other public agencies or private funding sources. (Up to 15 points.)
- (e) **Collaboration.** Private/public partnerships or cooperative projects among governmental agencies will be preferred, including use of the California Conservation Corps or certified community conservation corps in appropriate projects. (Up to 15 points.)
- (f) **Grantee Capacity.** Applicants shall demonstrate relevant technical capability and a proven track record at implementing similar projects (Up to 10 points.)
- (g) **Local Economic Benefits.** The extent to which a project benefits severely economically disadvantaged communities or disadvantaged communities (as those terms are defined in state law) or other areas traditionally underserved by outdoor access or recreational amenities. (Up to 10 points.)
- (h) **Public and Community Support.** Evidence of a level of community and local stakeholder support. (Up to 5 points.)
- (i) **Consistency with Established Local Plans.** The extent to which a project contributes to the implementation of existing environmental, recreational, climate change and similar plans, such as the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, the Riverside County General Plan Open Space Element, the Northern Coachella Valley Trails Plan, the Desert Recreation District Master Plan, California 2030 Natural and Working Lands Climate Change Implement Plan. (Up to 5 points.)

Note: The Conservancy reserves the right to change the allocation of points in the specific RFPs to be issued in order to reflect changing priorities or needs.

IX. Further Information

Contact CVMC's office at (760) 776-5026