

Grants: How Local Groups Can Partner with PRNS

Many times Community Groups and residents find grants to support the Parks and Recreation Programs that they love. Yet, some experience the City's process for approval as a "black box" that acts as a barrier. In June 2014, San Jose Parks Advocates sat with three PRNS officials and outlined the process for partnering with the city on grants and grants applications. Large projects (over \$270,000) requiring Council approval were not the focus of discussion.

Point of Contact for all Grant Applications: Deputy Director of PRNS Administrative Services Matt Cano. All application forms and grant regulations are to be submitted to Matt.

Triage: Deputy Director PRNS Administrative Services triages. Projects are screened for

- Clear benefit to the City
- Safety
- Does it fit within the department's current workplan (workplan definition at end)
- Conformance to Municipal Code
- Consistency with Council Policy
- Alignment with Parks Policy, Goals, and Objectives
- Conflict of interest
- Staff time likely required to make the grant competitive: is it available, and is the benefit large enough to shift staff from other planned projects

Projects unlikely to move forward without extensive conversation with staff

- On-going financial commitment from the City for staffing or materials
- Extensive after-implementation reporting requirements
- Reporting requirements of any size that extends over long periods of time
- New programs that require hiring additional personnel, even temporarily
- Significant staff time required to research background data for grant application
- Environmental clearance required (CEQA)
- A significant change to a program or facility/park that might require community input

Staff Support Determined

Deputy Director Administrative Services routes grant application to applicable groups (recreation, park operations) to determine level of support for project. Grant applications that already have support of local managers (community centers, parks supervisors, etc) and an accompanying email or letter of support move through this process more quickly.

Letter of Support vs. Co-Signing

Letters of support are preferred over taking the role of Co-Applicant. Letters of Support can be issued by the Parks Department.

At present, all projects requiring City signatures as co-applicants must go through City Manager's Office (currently, Deputy City Manager Norberto Dueñas), and sometimes, through City Attorney's Office. Park Staff will be pursuing permission to sign small grant applications (under \$2500) at the Department level.

Timelines

Small grant proposals require about 30 days to review and obtain approvals from applicable staff. While it doesn't always take this long, 30 days is appreciated so that staff can fit this in without impacting existing heavy workloads. If the request is accompanied by a letter of support from the involved department staff, this time period can be shortened. Applicants who are not already known to City staff will require some sort of interview to establish bonafides.

Larger grant proposals may require about 120 days for review and approval. More departments are usually involved, such as:

--research for background data

--estimates of staff time and identification of funding source

--contracts administration analysis including

Municipal Code, Environmental (CEQA), Employee Contracts, City bidding requirements, insurance needs, risk management, conflict of interest, and more.

Language of Application

Sometimes, the specific wording of an application can imply violation of city regulations. Staff members, Matt Cano, Zulma Maciel, and Jon Moog are willing to work with applicants to improve wording to meet intended goal.

Example: A "Friends of" group wants to do outreach to increase membership and hold a reception at the park for potential new members.

Problem: "New membership" component makes it seem like a fundraising event. Fundraising is not allowed on City property.

Solution: Hold an informational event. Provide a "member appreciation" event and invite others to learn about the organization at the member appreciation event.

Make clear that the "Friends of" group has no dues or fees to join.

Competitive Applications

With enough advanced notice, staff is happy to provide feedback on making a grant more competitive. Staff will not re-write a grant. Pre-application discussion with appropriate staff is encouraged. Staff will suggest modifications to grant application that will help avoid conflicts with City regulations.

Templates and Protocols Exist For Some Projects

--Templates exist for bringing guest speakers to Community Center programs.

Contact the local recreation supervisor for signature.

--Protocols exist for working with Volunteer Coordinator (Molly Tobias' group).

Projects that fall into the realm of volunteer work days are best coordinated with Molly. In some situations another group may have contractual responsibility, such

as Little Leagues at some parks (but not all) are responsible for maintenance of some buildings. Coordination is required.

Utilizing Parks Foundation

Groups are encouraged to use San Jose Parks Foundation as the receiving agency. It is a 501-3(c) organization which is required by many grant-giving organizations. Also, the Parks Foundation is not subject to as many regulations and operating rules as the City. For example, if a group wanted to re-survey a park to update the map, the City has extensive regulations on how to qualify, competitively bid, and then hire the surveyor. If the Parks Foundation receives the grant, they can hire the surveyor without the same rules.

Sample Projects That Are Quick (Under 30 days) To Approve

1. Buy arts and crafts for teen leadership programs at local community center
2. Pay for specialized enrichment program at a center (Form exists, local recreation supervisor can approve)
3. Prepare educational or marketing materials to be designed, printed, and available for distribution. Coordinate content with affected staff.
4. Install and maintain waterwise landscaping or portions of parks or community centers. Coordinate with local park manager within Deputy Director for Park Operations Steve Hammack's group.
5. Conduct regular work days and provide volunteer recreation events. Coordinate with Volunteer Coordinator (Molly Tobias)
6. Buy supplies and coordinate a facility's refreshment. Coordinate with Volunteer Coordinator. (Molly Tobias). Check that a different "Friend" group does not have contract to maintain. Resolve conflict, if any.
7. Tree planting at local park. Coordinate with park supervisor, and volunteer coordinator.

Sample Projects Requiring More Discussion

1. Conduct a membership drive for a "Friends of " group. As discussed in "Language of Applications" section, the wording of this application might imply fundraising which is not allowed on city property. A re-alignment of goals may put the plan within city legal restrictions.
2. Subsidize participation of volunteers and PRNS staff at parks, recreation, or landscaping conferences. The specific language of the application might bring up conflict of interest issues. It also must conform to the city's language about "gifts." With proper wording of the application and possible use of the SJ Parks Foundation as a grant receiver, Contracts Staff felt that the intent of sending a volunteer and a staffer to a conference clearly was beneficial to the City and worthy of resolution of legal details. An example given: local volunteer, local parks supervisor to Native Plants conference.
3. Underwrite four years of a homework center that would be managed by PRNS. If this were an adjunct to an already existing plan, then it likely would be approved

quickly. If it required contracting for a new site, hiring of supervisors, it would require extensive discussion and may be rejected.

Sample Projects With Hidden Issues -Requiring Dialog and Longer Lead Time

1. Carry-out demolition of a small (League League) building using volunteer labor. Risk assessment, insurance. Environmental clearance for construction impacts (noise, dust, etc), historic, more. Asbestos concerns. Who supervises? How will the site be left? Legal issues with employee contracts. Qualifications of equipment operators. Disposal of debris. Clean-up of site. What if environmental contaminants found in soil?

2. Refurbishment of historic structure (Log Cabin in Alum Rock Park). Large grant of \$20,000. To be competitive, the grant requires extensive research on the history of the building, the context of the park, the nature of the needed repairs, and the potential for future use. This takes a LOT of staff time which must be worked in among regular duties. Questions to be resolved: who will do the work—will it require bidding by the City, who will supervise the repairs/construction, who will inspect the work, CEQA, risk assessment, insurance, employee contracts, more. Also what reporting requirements does the grant agency require?

3. Contract with a specialized nursery to grow oak trees that are biologically compatible with each of the watersheds so that the City would have a resource for these trees for its properties. Provide trees to City. This would depend on the details of the grant provider. Does it *require* City to obtain all oaks from this nursey? To monitor the success/failure of plantings? To monitor numbers of trees planted each year? Does the group proposing this project have the capacity to do this work? In addition, what's the view of Deupty Director of Operations Steve Hammack's group, specifically, Maintenance Supervisor, Peggy Rudd. Is there a perceived need. Coordinate with local non-profit Our City Forest.

4. Develop/subsidize pilot sheep grazing program to address grassland and fire hazards. This also depends on the grant requirements. "Pilot" suggests that it would be evaluated in order to implement more broadly. Is this a requirement of the grant? What metrics will be used? Who will take and report those metrics? Currently, PRNS contracts with City Department of Transportation (DOT) to do Weed Abatement for large parcels such as Monterey Road property in Coyote Valley. Changes would have to be coordinated. Risk management office would have to be involved. What vendors for sheep would be used? How does the County utilize in their parks?

5. Develop a park proposal for property not owned by the City. Use the proposal to lobby and fundraise to purchase the park. For a letter of support, the City would require a letter from the current property owner stating that the owner is a willing seller. Coordinate with current Greenprint. Check with Council office for concerns. Do usual analysis of location for appropriateness for park. For cosigning the grant application, would need to identify the consultant preparing the park proposal.

What is a “workplan?”

PRNS staffer Jonathan Moog responds:

Great question. In general when we mention "workplan" it means a collection of projects, priorities and/or initiatives that the PRNS department seeks to achieve within either the short or long term. They can be very specific projects or broader visionary type goals that give the department decision-making framework. Workplans can also be specific to each site and work unit. Ideally, these types of work plans would be aligned with the department's objectives. Due to this diversification and variation of workplans throughout the department, it's very difficult to provide specific details.

Perhaps the best way to answer the question, "does the project fit within the Department's current workplan?" is to discuss specific ideas with the site supervisor. In our previous meeting, Deputy Director Matt Cano mentioned garnering the support of this person to support the grant. The supervisor will also know what obstacles and opportunities exist with implementing particular grant ideas and be able to put the idea into larger context of their specific workplan. For example, they maybe able to tell you that a playground is scheduled to be installed in the same site being considered for a grant funded bedding area. Ultimately, Deputy Director Matt Cano will review and consult with the appropriate deputy director of Parks or Recreation to ensure the grant project is compatible with the workplan.

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