



STATE OF WASHINGTON

RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE

March 2008

**Item #16: NOVA Program Proposal for a Trial Evaluation Team
"Do Not Fund" Process**

(Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities)

Prepared By: Greg Lovelady, Applied Planning Manager

Presented By: Greg Lovelady, Applied Planning Manager

**Approved by the
Director:**

Proposed Action: Decision

Summary

During grant evaluations, one or more evaluators occasionally suggest that a specific project does not merit funding. In response, Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) staff solicited input on a process for evaluators to recommend that the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) not fund a specific project (a "do not fund" process). The decision about whether or not to fund a project would remain with the Board. Staff received favorable comments about the proposal, and asks the Board to adopt the process on a trial basis in the Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) program.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board adopt Resolution #2008-017 to approve a process by which an evaluation team may send a "do not fund" recommendation to the Board.

Staff recommends that the Board initially adopt the process on a trial basis in the Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program. If the trial is successful, staff will recommend whether to make the process permanent in NOVA and whether to implement the process for other grant programs.

Background

During the process of evaluating grants, there are times when one or more evaluators



will agree that a specific project does not merit funding. Reasons may include that the project does little to further the goals of the grant program or that its costs are out of proportion to its benefits. The project may receive a low score but still be approved for funding if there are few projects or sufficient funds. The current system has no formal way for an evaluation team to recommend against funding a project.

On February 29, 2008, RCO staff asked those on the following mailing lists for comments on the “do not fund” proposal:

- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account Program
- Boating Facilities Program
- Firearms and Archery Range Recreation Program
- Land and Water Conservation Fund Program
- NOVA Advisory Committee
- People interested in the NOVA Program
- RCFB and designees
- Recent NOVA applicants
- WWRP Farmlands
- Youth Athletic Facilities Program

The two options provided were:

- Option 1 – Rely on qualitative feedback from evaluators.
 - Add a “*Project of Concern*” checkbox¹ with each project on evaluator’s score sheets. Provide evaluators with a list of factors to consider before checking the box (Attachment A, page 2). If five² or more evaluators check the box, the team will discuss the project at its post-evaluation meeting and decide whether to recommend that RCFB not fund the project.
- Option 2 – No change
 - Staff would continue to forward evaluators’ concerns to RCFB, but there would be no formal “do not fund” recommendation.

Staff described the “do not fund” option to reviewers as follows:

- The evaluation team would invite a representative of each project of concern to be present (in person or by phone) at the post-evaluation meeting to answer any evaluation team questions.
- At least 60 percent of evaluators must participate in the post-evaluation meeting to discuss whether the committee wants to make a “do not fund”

1 The checkbox also will be on the comment page used by advisory committee members during project reviews, which takes place earlier in the application process.

2 This is 1/3 of the full NOVA evaluation team. Typically, the entire 15-member team evaluates projects each year.

recommendation for any project of concern. Staff would remind team members that the project is eligible for funding and it has successfully completed a lengthy and comprehensive application process.

- After discussion, evaluators would complete a form that outlines their opinion on the project (Attachment A, pages 1-2). If 60 percent³ or more of those present at the post-evaluation meeting vote against funding the project with clearly stated reasons, that recommendation and accompanying rationale would be provided to RCFB. If fewer than 60 percent agree, the “do not fund” recommendation would be dropped.

Analysis

All of the comments received by staff seem to favor implementation of the proposal, although some offer only qualified support (Attachment B). The following are paraphrased comments offering improvements for Option 1:

- Applicants should receive the “do not fund” feedback early in the process, so there is time to modify projects before evaluations.
 - Staff response: Agree (see footnote 1). For project reviews, staff requests that respondents provide this information.
- Please explain why staff chose to use five committee members to start the process, rather than a percentage of the evaluation team.
 - Staff response: We selected a specific number to reduce the effect of a varying number of evaluators. For example, if we had selected 33 percent, then one person could invoke a “do not fund” recommendation if only three people participated in evaluations.
- The proposed changes could have unintended effects regarding how the program handles unused and return funds. For example, if there were enough projects to use all of a cycle’s available money, but one project were identified as DO NOT FUND, how would the unspent funds be used? Would they be shifted to competitive dollars or perhaps remain in a category until the next cycle?
 - Staff response: Agree. The proposal could complicate decisions. In part, this is why we recommend a trial process in one grant program. Given the recommended criteria, it is likely that few projects will qualify as projects of concern.
- As proposed, it appears that only the supporting forms come to the RCFB for review with testimony from the project proponent. The process does not give evaluators who disagree with the recommendation a chance to state their opinion. Every evaluator should complete the form, including the evaluator’s

³ Sixty percent of the NOVA evaluation team (a 15-person committee) is nine people.

opinion and the user group he or she represents.

- o Staff response: Agree. Staff will modify the form accordingly.

Next Steps

If the resolution is approved by RCFB, RCO staff will implement the proposal for NOVA's 2008 grants cycle and report to the Board.

Attachments

Resolution #2008-017

- A. Draft Project Evaluator "Do Not Fund" Report Form
- B. Public Comments on the Proposed Do Not Fund Policy

RESOLUTION #2008-017

NOVA Program Trial Evaluation Team “Do Not Fund” Process

WHEREAS, during grant evaluations, one or more evaluators occasionally suggest that a specific project does not merit funding; and

WHEREAS, the reasons for this may include that an eligible project does little to further the grant program’s goals or that its costs are not in proportion to its benefits; and

WHEREAS, under the current evaluation system used to recommend projects for grants, there is no formal way for an evaluation team to recommend against funding a project;

WHEREAS, establishing such a process would further the Board’s strategic goal to “[f]und the best projects as determined by the evaluation process”; and

WHEREAS, the staff of the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) has solicited public comment on such a process;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the RCFB does hereby direct its staff to immediately implement the process described in Attachment A hereto on a trial basis for the Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that RCO staff will report to RCFB regarding the effectiveness of the process, together with recommendations on whether it should be continued and considered for other grant programs.

Resolution moved by: _____

Resolution seconded by: _____

Adopted/Defeated/Deferred (underline one)

Date: March 27, 2008

Attachment A

Sample

Project Evaluator Do Not Fund Report

Evaluators: complete only if you favor a "do not fund" recommendation

Project Information

Editor's Note: This is an example of a form that could be summarized and provided to RCFB with a "do not fund"

Evaluator's
Name (print):
Applicant's
Name:

RCO Project
Number:

Project Name:

Project Funding
Category:

Today's Date:

See the criteria on the reverse.

1. What led to your "do not fund" recommendation?

2. If not implicit in your above explanation, what reasonable measures can the applicant take to change your recommendation?

3. Other comments.

Evaluators must complete this section

Check each that applies; add an example or explanation to support each checkmark.

1. The project does not support the spirit or intent of this program's enabling statute or state plan.
▶ Example/explanation:

2. The applicant has not provided enough information to determine the need for, or the benefit of, the project.
▶ Example/ explanation:

3. The project has a high cost relative to anticipated benefits, or costs are not fully justified.
▶ Example/ explanation:

4. The project does not do enough to address a significant program issue (its main focus is on meeting a low priority need).
▶ Example/ explanation:

5. The project depends on other key conditions or processes that need to be addressed first.
▶ Example/ explanation:

6. The project relies on a technique(s) that has not been successful.
▶ Example/ explanation:

7. It is unlikely the project will achieve its objectives (or, it is not clear how the project will achieve its objectives).
▶ Example/ explanation:

8. Other (specify):
▶ Example/ explanation:

Attachment B

**Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program
 Public Comments on the Proposed Do Not Fund Policy**

On February 29, 2008, Recreation and Conservation Office staff contacted over 600 addresses with the following message:

The Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) would like to hear your comments on a proposal to adopt a way for evaluation teams to send a “do not fund” recommendation to RCFB. If adopted by RCFB, this proposal will affect the 2008 NOVA grant cycle. If review shows the trial to be successful, it could be made permanent in NOVA and considered for adoption in other RCFB grant programs.

The reason we are proposing this is that across RCFB’s many grant programs, on occasion evaluators will agree that a specific project does not merit funding. Reasons for this may include that the project, while eligible, does very little to further the goals of the grant program or that its costs are far out of proportion to its benefits. Under the current system, however, and apart from scoring it very low, there is no formal way for an evaluation team to recommend against funding a project. If there are sufficient funds to reach the project on the evaluation team’s ranked listing, it will likely be funded.

Comments on the attached proposal should be received by me no later than Monday, March 17, 2008 to help ensure that board members can consider any feedback in advance of its meeting. Comments may also be made in person at the RCFB meeting, March 27-28, 2008 in Olympia.

This table summarizes the comments received.

Public Comments on the Proposed Do Not Fund Policy	
	Comment
Greg Jones, Chelan PUD No. 1, Wenatchee, 3/3/08	I would support an option to include a recommendation of “do not fund” for the evaluation committee members. I agree, there are times when this could prove more effective.
Theresa Julius, Grays Harbor Council of Governments, Aberdeen, 3/3/08	I reviewed the proposal. It’s very well thought out. I think you (RCO staff) have done a good job. I believe it is what the NOVA committee was trying to get at. I like the multiple steps and the comment worksheets. Well done.
Ann Dunphy, Mt. Baker Ranger District, Sedro- Woolley, 3/3/08	I agree with the proposal but would emphasize the need to provide this feedback at the early review of the project so that projects have a chance to be adjusted to better fit the program. Sometimes it is not clear just what the board is looking for in response to the criteria and it is easy to miss the mark. Other times the comments

Public Comments on the Proposed Do Not Fund Policy	
Comment	
	from the early review are so brief as to not be helpful or reflects a point of view of an evaluator that cannot be fully satisfied.
Carol A. Ready, Yakima Tributary Access & Habitat Program, Ellensburg, 3/3/08	This process sounds like good for this program, as well as others if they do not now have a Do Not Fund option.
Phil Wolf, 3/3/08	I agree with this proposal. If extra monies are available they should not necessarily be used to fund projects that do not make sense. I would rather see this funding "banked" for worthy projects. My comments may or may not represent views of the DNR. They are from a ORV / Mountain Bike enthusiast
John Spring, NOVA Advisory Committee, 3/3/08	I agree with the language and the process. My only concern is with the "initial" box checking and if it would not be more efficient to use a percentage number of say 40% of the committee in attendance rather than a hard number of 5, that will trigger further discussion on a grant. Otherwise. I agree.
Bill Koss, State Parks, 3/3/08	We ran into that in LWCF grants as well when one proposal surfaced that nominally met the qualifications but did not appear good enough to merit finding. Yet we had no way of not providing it funds. I agree with the idea of being able to 'Just say No' sometimes.
Steven J. Drew Citizen Member RCFB, Olympia, 3/3/08	Greg, after review of this proposal I have a few comments. Not sure if they are questions or concerns. 1. With all of the time invested in review of proposed changes in how the program handles unused funds, return funds etc. it concerns me that this idea could muddy the water. For instance one might ask "in the NHR category we had enough projects to use all of the cycles available money but one big project was identified as DO NOT FUND, so now NHR has unspent funds. Do these now get shifted to competitive dollars?" If we are not clear then one might argue that funds unspent as a result of this (do not fund) process should remain in a category till the next cycle (if the other NOVA proposed changes are adopted). 2. If I understand the form "project evaluator do not fund report" it looks like it is only filled out by those who vote to not fund the project and then these forms come to RCFB for review along with testimony from the project proponent. What is lacking is any representation of the minority opinion. I would be interested in two things: A. To have the user group every evaluator involved represents shown on each

Public Comments on the Proposed Do Not Fund Policy	
Comment	
	<p>form.</p> <p>B. To have a form filled out by every evaluator present and to have the form be just as functional for those in favor as for those against the funding.</p> <p>In short, I want every chance to see things for what they are and if the body is split along some line, well I may consider the nature if the split in support.</p>
Rick Burk, 2/29/08	I like it – as is! Its Idea that’s time has come GREAT WORK GREG! Wish we had this tool in the past
Michael Steffani, Tacoma, 2.29/08	<p>Seems as tho this may be a slippery slope of sorts in that any off-road vehicle project could be nixed by those persons or groups opposed to it. I would think this might be a good thing however if used fairly.</p> <p>So as it applies to each category of uses it would work only if a majority of the uses affected were to oppose funding... ie; hiking trail uses should not have FULL nay saying power over OHV uses... so also OHV should not be able to, in an of themselves, shut down a bike or pedestrian trail project... a level field can only be assured in a representative democracy when not only the majority but the minority too is protected.</p>
Tommy Thomson, Belfair, 2/29/08	<p>Outstanding Proposal! I have always been a proponent of not funding bad projects just because there is money available.</p> <p>Adopting this proposal could have a dramatic effect on your proposed changes to NOVA Program fund allocation policies. Any funds remaining on the table after a funding session should be reallocated in the same manner as originally allocated. These left over funds should not be allocated "in order of those benefiting the greatest number of NOVA recreationists". The WTA folks can claim there are 23,000,007 hikers in Washington and would end up with all the money, robbing the ORV portion once again.</p>
Bill Fraser, State Parks, 3/3/08	If in fact RCO is receiving a lot of applications that are not consistent with the goals of the grant programs, I'd support Option 1 to identify "Projects of Concern" and implement the dialog between the applicant and evaluation team. The proposed action occurs immediately after the initial evaluation review, but prior to the formal evaluation presentation, right?