

Meeting Date: December 4, 2014, 1:30 pm – 4:00 pm

Meeting Location: Natural Resources Building, Room 285, Olympia, WA

Prepared by: Darrell Jennings, Senior Grants Manager
Recreation and Conservation Office

Advisory Committee Members and Attendance

Name	City	Represents	Attendance
Charlotte Claybrooke	Olympia	State Department of Transportation	Yes
Daniel Collins	Seattle	Citizen at Large	Yes
Darrell Jennings	Olympia	Recreation and Conservation Office	Yes
David McMains	Moses Lake	4x4	Yes – phone
Dean Moberg	Olympia	Federal Highway Administration	Yes
Don Crook	Sammamish	Water trail recreation	Yes – phone
Durlyn Finnie	Allyn	Citizen at Large	Yes – phone
Gary Paull	Darrington	Federal Agency	Yes – phone
John Keates	Shelton	Local agency	No
Kevin Farrell	Spanaway	Hiking	Yes
Kristen Kuykendall	Olympia	Department of Fish and Wildlife	Yes
Marc Toenyan	Mossyrock	Off-road motorcycle	Yes
Mat Lyons	Wenatchee	Mountain bicycle	No
Nikki Fields	Olympia	State Parks and Recreation	No
Patricia Wible	Port Orchard	Equestrian	No
Sandy Sternod	Kent	Snowmobile	Yes – phone
Ted Jackson	Auburn	ATV recreation	No

Welcome

Darrell Jennings outlined the purpose of the meeting, which is to review the results of the evaluation and ranking of projects and to discuss the application and evaluation process and the criteria. This annual meeting also meets federal program requirements to establish and maintain eligibility to receive Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funding. Committee members introduced themselves and announced the user group or land manager/recreation provider they represent. Ten of the fifteen committee positions were represented at the meeting.

Mr. Jennings then provided a brief overview of the federal RTP program and explained how in Washington State the program is currently administered to:

- reduce the backlog of deferred maintenance on trails that provide a backcountry experience, and to
- provide up to 5% of the funding to operate educational programs that promote user safety and environmental protection.

2014 Grant Cycle

Category	Applications	Request	Match	Total
General category	64	\$5,677,097	\$7,798,355	\$13,475,452
Education category	15	\$268,500	\$272,966	\$541,466
Total:	79	\$5,945,597	\$8,071,321	\$14,016,918

After a summary of the applications received, Committee members were provided an overview of the schedule, process, and the remaining steps for the 2014 grant cycle:

Date	Action
July 1	Applications due date
July 1 – September 12	Staff performed technical review of applications. Applicants could modify their applications during this period until September 12, the technical completion deadline. Applications had to then be in their final form.
October 13 – November 20	RTP Advisory Committee reviewed and scored proposals.
December 4	Grant results and Annual Meeting of the RTP Advisory Committee

June 24-25, 2015	The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board (RCFB) will approve the ranked list of projects and authorize funding authority pending receipt of RTP funding from the Federal Highway Administration.
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RTP General Category Projects

Lorinda Anderson emailed evaluation reports to the committee in advance of the meeting. Mr. Jennings described how evaluator's individual scores are combined to derive project rankings; the committee reviewed and discussed the ranked list of 64 projects for the RTP General Category. There were no major surprises to the rankings by the advisory committee. Some noted specific comments were:

Kevin Farrell noted that the Washington Trails Association (WTA) had the top 3 ranked trail projects and would receive over \$380,000 if all projects were funded. Mr. Farrell recalled conversations from a prior RTP meeting about limiting the number of grant awards any one organization may receive to better distribute the limited RTP funding. Mr. Jennings stated that there is currently no restriction on the number or amount of grants that an organization may receive. Since this was the operating framework that was stated at the beginning of the grant cycle we would not impose that limitation with this list of projects now. . Later in the meeting or before the next grant cycle, this committee could discuss that approach as a suggestion to the RCFB to consider for future grant rounds. Mr. Moberg suggested that the Advisory Committee provide feedback to other applicants that scored lower on areas where the committee felt their proposals could be improved. He also suggested other applicants look to the WTA, and other successful proposals, as examples of how to develop and write a grant proposal.

Mr. Jennings commented that 7 of the top 10 ranked projects were submitted by nonprofit organizations and that there is only about a 20point difference between the top ranked and bottom ranked projects – a very tight score distribution with no noticeable separations in points.

Mr. Jennings also noted that grooming proposals by State Parks were as a group rather low ranked proposals. A committee member noted that this might be because winter trails are seasonal trails and therefore do not necessarily fall into a category of “deferred maintenance”. Another member noted that many of these applications were not uniquely put together for each of the grooming areas and that they could show more volunteer support. Sandy Sternod explained that she is currently the president of the Washington State Snowmobile Association (WSSA) and their organization had worked to support State Parks with their applications. She also explained that snowmobile registrations are down and that the WSSA worked successfully with the Legislature to increase registration fees for snowmobiles that goes to the State Parks grooming program.

Charlotte Claybrooke asked if the committee would be allowed to reorder or to move projects up or down on the list. Mr. Jennings explained that the RTP committee does not have the authority to reorder the list. If something is found to have been flawed with the process or if information about a project is found to be false, this committee could make a recommendation that staff consider and forward their concerns to the RCFB during the funding recommendation. But generally, the committee's evaluation work is to individually measure and score each proposal on how well it meets the RCFB approved evaluation criteria.

The advisory committee felt that projects that had specific, quantifiable statements and data in their proposals generally did better than those that did not.

The committee discussed the proposal submitted by Friends of the Trail (14-1904) that included the purchase of a vehicle. They discussed if it was the best use of grant funding to be purchasing expensive vehicles. Mr. Jennings and Mr. Moberg explained that the RTP allows organizations to purchase equipment and vehicles that are used and wholly dedicated to trail maintenance purposes. Daniel Collins suggested wanting more cost/benefit analysis information in the proposal to demonstrate why purchasing equipment is better than leasing. Mr. Moberg suggested that the RTP committee provide this type of feedback to the applicants during/after the review.

Ms. Claybrooke asked the committee why they felt the project (14-2043) from the City of Issaquah ranked last. Gary Paull felt that the cost for the bridge work was exceptionally high and out of scale. Mr. Collins felt that if a bridge replacement is requested for grant funding, the committee should have a clear report on the degraded condition of the structure. This analysis-investigation should be part of the Needs Statement. Others felt the ranking was the result that the project did not meet the program objective for backcountry trails as well as other projects.

The committee also questioned the top ranked project, Washington Trails Association – Front Country Volunteer Trail Maintenance (14-1981) at how well the project met the goal of backcountry when it had front country in the title. Gary Paull explained that the “front country” projects were typically projects that could be done on day trips from the trailhead, versus their backcountry trails program where the trail work occurred so far from the trailhead that it was more beneficial to have overnight trips to accomplish the work.

Don Crook asked about the process for getting advisory committee questions about application materials clarified during the evaluation period. Mr. Jennings explained that evaluators were asked not to directly contact applicants. Any questions during the evaluation period were to be directed to Lorinda Anderson or himself who would then consider the request for information and contact the applicant. Any resulting information would then be distributed to all evaluators so everyone could benefit from the additional information. There were no such requests during this cycle.

Kristen Kuykendall stated it is the applicant’s responsibility for having complete information in their proposals.

[The audio recording of the meeting begins here.](#)

RTP Education Category Projects

Mr. Jennings briefly explained the Education category and that the RTP legislation allows up to 5% of the program funding to be used for education projects. The committee had very little discussion about the ranked list of education projects. We did notice that unlike the General category list, the top 10 projects on the Education list were dominated by governmental organizations instead of nonprofit organizations. Nine of the top 10 projects are US Forest Service education programs.

The Committee felt that the applications from the nonprofit organizations needed some additional work to make them clearer and focused on addressing the criteria. These applicants also need to find ways to make be more effective at making contacts with the users that they are targeting. Ms. Kuykendall and

Mr. McMains felt as though the administrative cost categories for the nonprofits were disproportionately higher than other projects and there was not adequate understanding or justification as to why.

Mr. Collins stated that he was glad to see all the Education projects. He also sees educational characteristics or opportunities in several of the General Category Projects; for example in providing cross-cut sawyer training on backcountry Wilderness projects.

Both the RTP General and Education projects lists will be forwarded to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board at their June 24-25, 2015 meeting for funding consideration and approval.

Federal Funding

Dean Moberg, Area Engineer for the Federal Highway Administration, described the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) which is the funding source for the RTP program. MAP-21 is part of the Federal Highway Administration's Transportation budget. MAP-21 was set to expire in September 2014 but was extended until the end of May 2015. Funding for the program though has not been approved beyond December 11, 2014. Mr. Moberg indicated that this is not uncommon with transportation budgets.

Mr. Moberg described the complexities of the funding appropriations and the importance of Congress passing a transportation budget. He also noted that recreational trails programs are popular and that there is large support for them.

RTP 40-30-30 Rule

Mr. Jennings explained the assured access funding requirement and how projects are categorized as being either motorized single or multiple use, nonmotorized single or multiple use, or compatible (or diversified) use.

- 30% may be used for motorized single use and motorized multiple use projects
- 30% may be used for nonmotorized single use and nonmotorized multiple use projects
- 40% may be used for compatible use, motorized multiple use, and nonmotorized multiple use projects

He also explained that up to 5% may be used for the Education category projects. In situations where there are excess education funds because of insufficient Education projects, the unobligated funding will be applied to General category projects in the same assured access category.

Project Metrics

The committee looked at some of the metrics for the portfolio of projects. The 2014 applications by sponsor type included 36 federal agency, 25 nonprofit organization, 13 state agency, and 5 city/county agencies. Of the 79 total applications received 42 were for trail maintenance, 19 were for winter trail maintenance, 15 were for education, and 3 were for trailhead development.

For trails maintenance if all projects were funded, 11, 280 miles of trail would be maintained; 1,769 miles would be maintained that are considered “backlogged”; and 1,149 bridges would be maintained. No new trail miles would be maintained. The zero for new trails reflects the Washington State priorities for the Recreational Trails Program. It augments what the Nonhighway and Off-road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) program funds.

Committee discussion of the metrics revealed that these metrics actually duplicate efforts done by organizations on the same trail through the season. For example if a five mile snowmobile trail is groomed four times it would be counted as 20 miles of trail maintained. This could be the same organization or different organizations. Mr. Jennings explained that these numbers are reported in this format as needed by the American Trails Association. In further discussion the committee suggested the phrase “total miles of trail maintenance” as a better way to express the total mile concept.

Later in the meeting they suggested adding a metric: “is this trail accessible?” or ADA compliant? Would a packed or paved trail be considered ADA compliant?

Backlog was difficult for some evaluators. They would like some definition of the term. Maybe go to land managers and see what they can tell you. However, some applications explained backlog or an unusual trail in the Need question; while other had pictures to show the conditions....it was helpful – some evaluators got what they needed.

Criteria Changes

Mr. Paull noticed that the cost per mile maintained had a wide range from \$200 to \$2,000 for a trail system. It would be nice to have a method that would help evaluators score, maybe a table would help. Keep in mind that the cost per mile of trail will vary by type of trail (hiker, horse, motorized) and where that trail is located. More remote locations like Wilderness may need to use stock.

Cost benefit/efficiency needs to be distinguished more. Some committee members got this information from the response to the Need question-the things that are high like user numbers, safety numbers. They wanted a menu they could refer to for the cost benefit question. Others said no, that is the benefit of the committee as we each have our own interpretation of need within sideboards. Are numbers important to you or are experiences?

Mr. Paull considered the sustainability question not very helpful. He was surprised by the weight and multiplier assigned to the question. Some of the sustainability responses were found under the Need response. Ten points seems pretty high. However others liked the question but concurred that the weight might be too high. Mr. Crook suggested having some instructions going forward so applicants know what is appropriate to include in this question response – it could also be in the Need question.

On the Readiness to Proceed question it’s difficult to score a 5. Either you have the permits or money or you don’t. If you aren’t ready, don’t submit. RCO should consider if this could be a staff scored question.

2014 Grant Cycle Changes

Mr. Jennings covered all the implemented changes for this grants cycle:

- Sustainability and non-governmental contribution questions (no RCO grant may match another RCO grant)
- Definition changes for maintenance and development projects
- NEPA compliance procedures – RCO now has a memorandum of understanding with the Federal Highways Administration to streamline review and approval process of projects
- Metric changes in PRISM
- Do Not Fund recommendation – originated with the NOVA program. If there are any projects you feel should have this designation, please contact Mr. Jennings.

Process Improvements

Committee members took from 16 hours to 35 hours to complete evaluation. Most felt they had enough time to complete the evaluation. One person suggested they have two months' time. Mr. Paull endorsed the October – November time frame as being very helpful.

Materials Improvements

Maps were not very informative for advisors. They were so big it was difficult to understand what they were showing you. The same mapping source would be helpful so there was some consistency and similar scale. Some thought it might present an unfair advantage to those organizations that could use such a map source versus those who would not have access to such a source.

Committee members were interested in knowing the track record of each organization, especially for their last project application. How was their performance? Are they doing what they said they would do? Were they on time and on budget? This could be scored and could be part of the evaluation process. They suggested looking at several grant cycles and see if the organization finished (regardless of staff turnover). Consider looking at the volunteer hours for the performance measure.

Mr. Paull suggested such information could come out of the Final Report from PRISM. Mr. Jennings suggested it could also come from the progress reports.

Policy tasks

Mr. Jennings presented some of the tasks RCO will consider working on before the next grant cycle:

- Revisions to capital equipment purchases and management guidelines

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- Long-term compliance terms for maintenance projects
- Conditions for time extensions for maintenance projects
- Evaluation criteria revisions
- Efficiencies in evaluation processes
- Stakeholder request to fund more urban soft surface trails

Questions and comments raised during this section included:

- Can applicants get their money earlier than June 2015?
- How do we involve youth, more diversity, and ADA into this program? These items aren't really conducive to backcountry recreation.
- How should this program look going forward?
- Is deferred maintenance of backcountry trails still the appropriate focus for the RTP program?
- Is RCO adequately funding maintenance functions?
- What are the impacts in switching to more urban trails – higher costs, fewer projects?

Mr. Jennings also shared details on the State Trails Plan and the NOVA Plan. Stakeholders want maintenance on trails near to home while clearly the RTP and NOVA programs emphasize the backcountry environment.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:05pm.