



San Francisco Bay Area Priority Conservation Area Grant Program

2025 Grant Guidelines and Call for Proposals



In cooperation with



ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS
METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

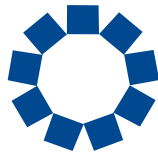


Coastal Conservancy

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), in cooperation with the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC), is pleased to issue a call for proposals focused on the Bay Area's Priority Conservation Areas.



MTC is the transportation planning, financing, and coordinating agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. In collaboration with ABAG, MTC develops the regional long-range transportation plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy, also known as Plan Bay Area.



ABAG is a council of local governments that works to strengthen cooperation and collaboration among government agencies, and to implement innovative solutions for issues involving land use, housing, climate change, earthquake and disaster resilience, and economic equity.



SFEP is part of the National Estuary Program and leads a comprehensive strategy to protect and restore the San Francisco Estuary. For more than 35 years, SFEP has collaborated with local, state, and federal agencies, NGOs, academia, business leaders, and community-based organizations to manage regional, multi-year programs. SFEP is hosted by ABAG and manages the PCA Grant Program.



The SCC is a state agency with a vision of a beautiful, restored, and accessible coast for current and future generations of Californians. The SCC's San Francisco Bay Area Program undertakes projects within the entirety of the nine counties focused on protecting regionally significant lands, restoring habitats, providing trails and open space, and helping communities prepare for the impacts of climate change.

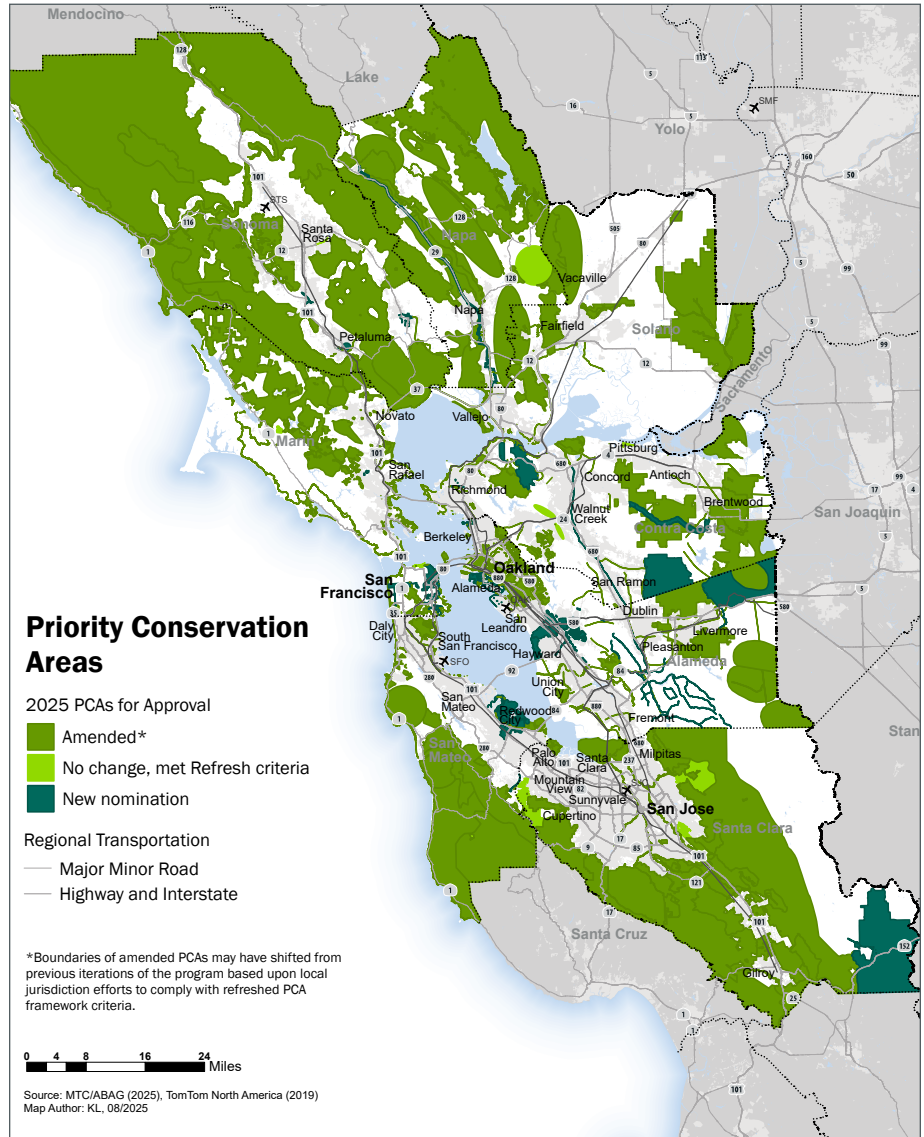


Introduction

Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) are regionally significant areas to be protected and improved. PCAs include natural habitats, farms and ranchlands, recreation areas, urban green spaces, and locations that can help fight the effects of climate change. These areas are identified and nominated through a voluntary, locally-driven process by cities, counties, and park/open space districts, and then designated by ABAG as lands in need of protection and management to maintain valuable ecological benefits. PCAs are categorized by five designations: Natural Landscapes, Agricultural Lands, Urban Greening, Regional Recreation, and Climate Adaptation.

In May 2024, the ABAG Executive Board approved revisions to the PCA planning framework, marking the first substantial changes since the framework's creation in 2007. The two-year PCA Refresh culminated in a Final Report, which introduced new minimum data criteria to improve regional cohesion across PCA geographies. The recent PCA amendment and designation process resulted in new and updated designated PCAs in the region.

Plan Bay Area 2050 is the integrated long-range transportation and land-use plan for the San Francisco Bay Area and includes the Bay Area's Regional Transportation Plan (updated every four years), and ABAG's demographic and economic forecast (updated every two years). MTC promotes compact development in established communities with high-quality transportation access (Priority Development Areas) so there is less development pressure on the region's vast and varied open spaces and agricultural lands. Plan Bay Area 2050 strategies encourage future growth to occur within established urban growth boundaries, supports regional goals of protecting and maintaining over two million acres of open space by 2050 – informed by the Conservation Lands Network



approach to protecting biodiversity – and further improving equitable outdoor access and urban greening in existing communities, while enhancing regional resilience to climate change. The PCA Grant Program is one of MTC and ABAG's primary tools for reaching these goals.

The PCA Grant Program, funded through the One Bay Area Grant (OBAG) program, was initiated by MTC in 2013 to provide funding to cities, counties, park districts, utility districts and other agencies and non-profits to acquire, enhance, or improve designated PCAs. Since the PCA Grant Program's inception, MTC and the SCC have jointly disbursed over \$38 million in three prior grant rounds.



Call for Proposals

Available Funds

MTC has provided \$8 million in local and federal funds for the current grant round of this program.¹ Grants may range from \$200,000 to \$1 million. We anticipate a highly competitive grant round so encourage applicants to be as cost effective as possible when preparing application budgets.

Geographic Scope

The project must be within an existing PCA. Projects not located entirely within an existing PCA may be considered on a case-by-case basis and would need to demonstrate strong, clear physical or cultural benefits to an existing PCA.

Eligible Applicants

Local governments (cities, towns, and counties), county transportation agencies, state agencies, Tribes, water/utility districts, resource conservation districts, park and/or open space districts, land trusts and other land/resource protection nonprofit and community-based organizations are invited to apply. Applicants are strongly encouraged to collaborate and partner on project applications.

Eligible Activities

Planning and design, environmental review and permitting, project implementation, and easements or acquisitions associated with the program goals: natural resource

protection, restoration, or enhancement, public access to open space and parklands, support for the region's agricultural economy, and provision or enhancement of urban parks and green spaces.

Funding Targets

To align funding with Plan Bay Area 2050 strategies and the intent of the PCA Program to protect high-value conservation lands, this grant round will seek to target funds based on project purpose, type, and location:

- **Project Purpose:** Invest a minimum of \$4 million of the available \$8 million (50%) in PCAs that would result in the long-term protection, restoration, or enhancement of regionally significant critical habitats, ecosystems, watersheds, farmlands, and/or other agricultural lands and economy.
- **Project Types:** Fund a mix of project types including planning / design, implementation, and acquisition activities.
- **Project Location:** Fund a minimum of one project per county. Due to the concentration of regionally significant natural and working lands in the North Bay, including 56 percent of the region's Conservation Lands Network Priority Lands and 81 percent of the region's Prime Farmland, this grant round includes a \$4 million minimum investment target (at least 50% of available funds) for PCAs in Marin, Sonoma, Napa, and Solano counties.

1. Up to \$8 million in local funds are available; however, federal transportation funds may be awarded to projects that are eligible and well-suited to receive federal transportation funding – for example, the construction of a bike/pedestrian trail. Projects utilizing federal funds will be subject to federal match requirements of 11.47%. Refer to Appendix B for additional funding considerations.

Eligible Projects

Planning and design, implementation, and acquisition projects must consist of one or more of the following activities.

1. Protection, Restoration, or Enhancement of Natural Resources, Open Space, or Agricultural Lands:

Acquisitions of or easements over natural landscapes, habitats and ecosystems, agricultural lands, parks and open space and natural resources. Restoration or enhancements for parks and open space, climate resilience, environmental facilities, or natural resources such as listed species, identified priority habitat, wildlife corridors, watersheds, or agricultural soils of importance. Projects that support agricultural land protection by enhancing the agricultural economy, including farm-to-market infrastructure. Land acquisition projects must involve willing sellers.

2. Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities:

Pedestrian and bicycle trails, on-road bicycle facilities, sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian and bicycle signals,

pedestrian and bicycle bridges, traffic calming, lighting and other safety-related infrastructure, staging areas, improvements to trails to improve accessibility for people with disabilities, and conversion and use of abandoned rail corridors for pedestrians and bicyclists.

3. Urban Greening:

Protection or enhancement of potential or existing green spaces in urban areas to increase habitat connectivity, improve community health, expand urban forests and street trees, capture carbon emissions, and address stormwater.

4. Planning Activities:

Planning associated with the PCA program goals including, but not limited to, natural resource protection, restoration, or enhancement, wildlife connectivity, public access to open space and parklands, support for the region's agricultural economy, and provision or enhancement of urban parks and green spaces. Broader planning efforts that include, but are not entirely within, designated PCA(s) may be eligible if the planning effort aligns with and advances PCA Program goals.



Project Evaluation Criteria

Program Goals:

- Projects need to meet one or more of the [PCA Program objectives](#) identified in the PCA Framework Refresh. As feasible, PCA Refresh data should be utilized to support the application narrative with quantitative and qualitative information (i.e., acres of Essential Habitat protected, miles of regional trails advanced, acres of prime farmland protected, Equity Priority Community (EPC) population within ½-mile of the project, etc.).

Regional Significance:

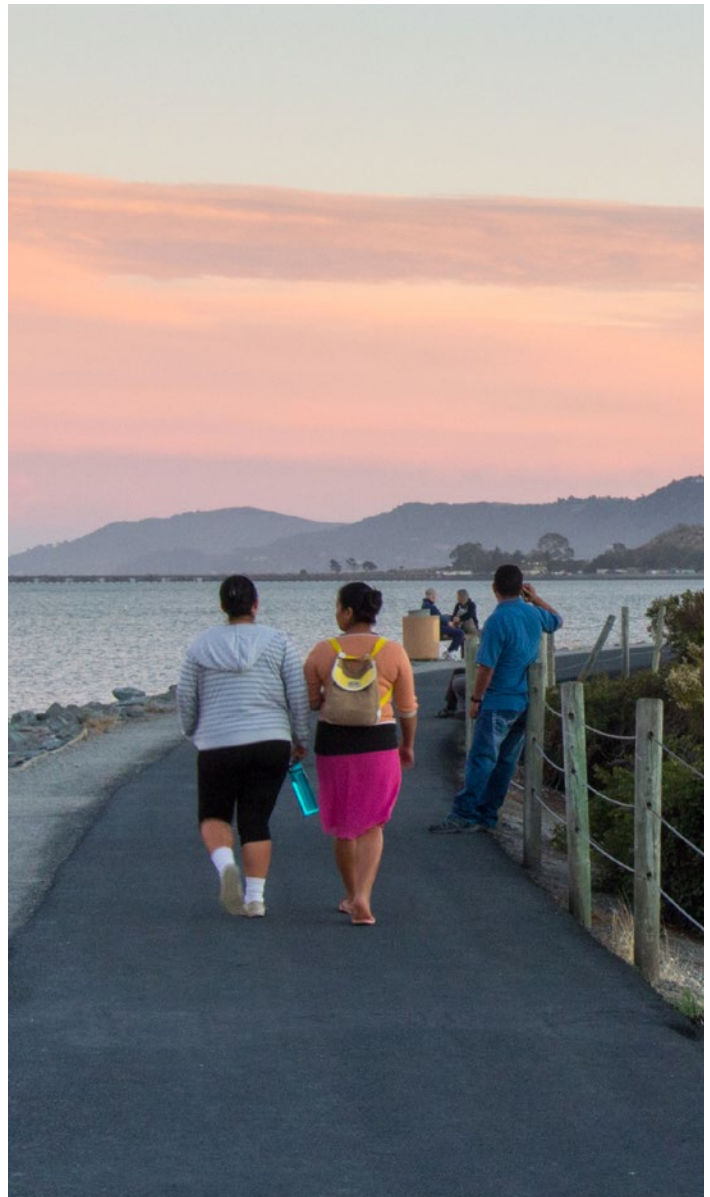
- Projects should serve a greater-than-local need. Indicators of regional significance include a project's consistency with and contribution to existing regional land use, habitat, agricultural or open space plans such as Plan Bay Area, the Estuary Blueprint, 30 x 30, MTC Active Transportation Plan and other bicycle/ pedestrian plans, Conservation Lands Network, and countywide plans. Protection, restoration, or enhancement of regional wildlife corridors, including upland shoreline migration areas, are also a priority. Projects that address and overcome common challenges—and share lessons learned to help others—can also be an indicator of regional significance.

Partnerships:

- Project applicants should identify key partners and the types of community and/or Tribal involvement in carrying out the project. The application should describe how project partners will contribute to the project's stated outcomes and ongoing implementation beyond the grant period.

Likelihood of Success:

- Project applicants should demonstrate the programmatic capability to deliver the project and, if applicable, how the project will leverage other resources, including other local/state/federal funding. Grant funded tasks should be completed by 2030.



Match is not required, but cost effectiveness and leveraging of staff and funding resources will be considered. If the project is eligible and well-suited to receive federal transportation funding, a federal match requirement of 11.47% will apply. If you require assistance in determining if your project is eligible, reach out to PCAGrants@bayareametro.gov for assistance.

In addition to the criteria above, the application review committee will consider other factors in ranking projects, including (1) cost effectiveness and good investment of resources, (2) geographic distribution of grant funds, and (3) capability of the project partners to operate and maintain the project long-term.

Additional information regarding scoring criteria is provided in [Appendix A](#).

PCA Project Examples



Pajaro River Watershed: Habitat Restoration and Climate Resilient Improvements — \$379,000

Point Blue Conservation Science, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (OSA), and the Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency (VHA) are restoring riparian habitat on the OSA's South Pajaro River Agricultural Preserve. The PCA grant supports the Students and Teachers Restoring A Watershed (STRAW) program, which is engaging K-12 students, community members, Conservation Corps members, and working lands owners and managers in hands-on, professionally-designed climate-smart restoration that facilitates long-term collaborative stewardship of the Upper Pajaro River watershed.

Phinney Fee Acquisition — \$1,000,000

The 523-acre Phinney acquisition connects 9,000 acres of existing protected land, allow formal dedication of a 4 mile section of Bay Area Ridge Trail, fill in a key gap in a priority wildlife corridor, protect rare species, and help ensure and protect municipal water supplies. PCA Grant funds leveraged a grant award from SCC.



Dotson Family Marsh Restoration and Public Access — \$1,000,000

This PCA grant funded restoration of 68.4 acres of wetlands and 96 acres of coastal prairie and construction of public access improvements including a small staging area, new bridge over Rheem Creek, a number of boardwalks over protected wetlands, a scenic overlook, a picnic area, fishing access and a 1.5-mile extension of the San Francisco Bay Trail into Point Pinole Regional Shoreline.

Coyote Valley Wildlife Connectivity Planning Project — \$250,000

This project addresses barriers to wildlife movement in Coyote Valley – a key regional wildlife corridor. PCA Grant Program funds identify actions that increase the ability of wildlife to safely navigate across major roadway and rail barriers in Coyote Valley by synthesizing existing data, identifying and evaluating the feasibility of various wildlife permeability enhancements, developing conceptual plans, and advancing designs, planning, environmental review, and permitting to deliver a shovel-ready project.



Visitacion Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Improvement Project — \$750,000

This project would support construction of new pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the Visitacion Avenue corridor in southeastern McLaren Park to calm traffic, provide improved access to Visitacion Valley Middle School, and better connect Visitacion Valley and Sunnydale neighborhoods to McLaren Park's program areas and trail network. The PCA Grant Program funding supports environmental review and construction.



Application Process

The PCA Program follows a two-step application and evaluation process that will be overseen by an evaluation committee consisting of staff from MTC/ABAG and SCC.

Step One

All interested applicants must submit a completed application form.

The Application Form includes the following. Please keep write-ups short and concise (more detail will be needed if you are invited to submit a proposal).

- Identify the project title, name of applicant, project manager, and contact information.
- Name the project partners, supporters, and community and tribal engagement.
- Describe the proposed project, including the location and PCA it is within; the specific activities to be funded by the grant; and the anticipated or desired start and end dates (month/year, or season/year). Attaching a map, figure, and/or images is encouraged, but not required.
- Describe status of CEQA and/or NEPA review.
- Describe why the project is needed, and how the project falls within at least one of the four eligible activities.

- Identify the total cost of the project, the amount of PCA funding requested, and the amount and source of any secured and pending funds.
- Proof of compliance with MTC's Complete Street Checklist. (Refer to **Appendix B**).

Applicants are also asked to provide a weblink of their project generated through the Bay Area Greenprint (bayareagreenprint.org). The Bay Area Greenprint brings together a wide range of conservation data through an easy-to-use tool, through which applicants will be able to download a standardized and shareable set of data that identifies and measures the existing natural characteristics of the project location and potential multiple benefits from the project. Data reported by the tool include biodiversity and habitat, agriculture, water, carbon, recreation, urban greening, hazards, and climate change.

Please refer to Appendix C for instructions on how to generate the report and reach out to Ben Botkin (ben.botkin@sfestuary.org) to receive assistance in using the Greenprint.

LOIs should be submitted electronically to the PCA Evaluation Committee at [PCAgants@bayareametro.gov] by December 19, 2025 at 11:59 PM. Attachments to emails cannot be larger than 20 MB.

Step Two

Letters of Interest will be evaluated by an evaluation committee. The committee may contact applicants, as needed, for additional information, clarification, or modification. Based upon its review, the evaluation committee will select a limited number of applicants with the projects that most closely align and implement the PCA program goals and meet the evaluation criteria. Selected applicants will be invited to continue the application process by submitting a more detailed proposal for further evaluation. The more formal proposal will include more detailed:

- Applicant Information, Project Information, Project Description, Scope of Work and Budget, Schedule, Additional Questions, GIS Shapefiles, and Maps and Images.
- Letters of Support.

For invited applicants, MTC/ABAG will offer office hours to discuss proposed projects, ask questions, and to provide additional information, clarification, or modification suggestions for project components.

As with the LOIs: Proposals (if invited) must be submitted electronically to the PCA Evaluation Committee at [PCAGrants@bayareametro.gov]; attachments to emails cannot be larger than 20 MB.

Program Process and Project Delivery

The PCA Program Evaluation Committee will develop project award recommendations, including the recommended fund source for each project. In certain cases, the Evaluation Committee may recommend a project for partial award and staff will engage with potential grantees to refine project scopes accordingly. Projects (federal or non-federal) will subsequently be approved by the MTC Commission.



Application Timeline and Review Process

2025	
October 30	Issue Call for Letters of Interest
November 4	Webinar for Potential Applicants: Tuesday, November 4 12:00-1:00 p.m. Zoom link https://bayareametro.zoom.us/j/86268760184
December 19	Letters of Interest Due
2026	
January 23	Evaluation Committee Review Complete
February 2	Invitations to Apply Sent
February 9	Office Hours for invited Applicants: Week of February 9
March 20	Full Applications Due
April 17	Evaluation Committee Review Staff recommendation for Program of Projects
June	MTC Program Action
July	Funds provided to sponsors on a reimbursement basis, according to availability of funds

Appendix A – Scoring Criteria

Project Purpose & Goals

Max. Score: 30

Extent to which the project advances one or more of the objectives of the PCA Program.

Natural Lands Objectives:

- NL1: Protect a full representation of the Bay Area’s habitats in robust amounts to ensure long-term resilience of the region’s biodiversity.
- NL2: Enhance watersheds including priority stream corridors, wetlands, and groundwater recharge areas.
- NL3: Maintain and enhance wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity.

Agricultural / Working Lands Objectives:

- WL1: Protect important farmland, grazing land, and timber land to support the region’s agricultural economy and access to locally- and community-grown food.
- WL2: Maintain areas of high carbon stock and enhance low-carbon stock areas with multi-benefit management.

Urban Greening:

- UG1: Expand tree cover in urban areas with limited shade and vegetation.
- UG2: Expand green stormwater infrastructure projects particularly in areas with low surface permeability or other stormwater management issues.
- UG3: Enhance urban creeks to provide improved ecological, recreational, and resilience functions.
- UG4: Prioritize urban greening areas within ½-mile radius of Equity Priority Communities and/or areas with high pollution burden.

Regional Recreation:

- RR1: Complete and enhance access to the Regional Trails Network.
- RR2: Create new and enhance existing local parks, particularly in areas with limited access to outdoor recreation.
- RR3: Prioritize recreation areas within ½-mile radius of an Equity Priority Community.

Climate Adaptation:

- CA1: Enhance and prepare areas that provide habitat migration opportunities, particularly for marsh and other shoreline systems when sea levels rise, and extreme precipitation events become more frequent.
- CA2: Manage very high fire risk to reduce the intensity and spread potential for future wildfires.
- CA3: Protect and enhance areas that provide cooling experiences in areas experiencing extreme heat.

To receive the maximum points, the proposal must demonstrate outstanding achievement of at least one program objective or very good achievement of multiple objective.

Appendix A — Scoring Criteria (continued)

Regional Significance

Max. Score: 25

The extent to which the project serves a greater than-local need and implements adopted regional habitat, agricultural or open space plans, such as Plan Bay Area 2050, Conservation Lands Network, Estuary Blueprint, countywide plans, the MTC Active Transportation Plan and other bicycle/ pedestrian plans. Protection, restoration, or enhancement of regional wildlife corridors, including upland shoreline migration areas, are also a priority.

Partnerships

Max. Score: 20

Demonstrate project partners and community and/or Tribal involvement in carrying out the project. Identify partnerships that will contribute to project success and ongoing implementation beyond the grant period. Provide specifics as to each partner's activities. Provide letters of support from partners to document their role. Describe how project partners will contribute to the project's stated outcomes and benefits. If there are no project partners, then demonstrate how the applicant will effectively and efficiently perform the project without partners.

To receive maximum points, the proposal must show that there has been meaningful and appropriate outreach or engagement, including but not limited to participation or direct engagement from the community (as participants in the project, on a working group, etc.)

Likelihood of Success

Max. Score: 15

The extent to which the applicant demonstrates the programmatic capability to deliver the project and that the project will leverage other resources, including local/state/federal funding. Applications should be complete, reasonable, and well thought-out, including:

- **Scope**
- **Budget**
- **Schedule**
 - Does the proposal applicant demonstrate experience successfully implementing similar projects?
 - Does the proposal demonstrate the investment of local/state/federal resources to deliver and expand project outcomes and benefits?
 - Does the proposal demonstrate staff expertise/qualifications, staff knowledge, and resources (or the ability to obtain them) to successfully achieve the goals of the proposed project?

TOTAL

100

Appendix B – Additional Funding Considerations

Federal Transportation Funding

Projects that are eligible and well-suited to receive federal transportation funds (such as a bicycle or pedestrian facilities) may be selected to receive federal funding. Projects recommended for federal transportation funds must be approved by MTC and included in the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Grantees receiving federal funds must go through the Caltrans federal-aid process.

For additional information and questions on the programming and delivery of federal-aid projects contact Mallory Atkinson at matkinson@bayareametro.gov.



Local Funding

Grant awardees receiving non-federal funds will need to enter into a grant agreement with MTC, provide a board resolution authorizing execution of the grant agreement, and meet other grant conditions (provision of a workplan, budget, and schedule, proof of insurance, landowner agreements if needed, proof of permits, a sign plan, etc.).

Complete Streets Checklist

In March 2022, the MTC adopted a new Complete Streets Policy (MTC Resolution No. 4493). The goal of the policy is to make sure that people who are biking, walking, rolling and taking transit are safely accommodated within the transportation network.

MTC's Complete Streets Policy requires that all projects in the public right of way (with a total project cost of \$250,000 or more) applying for regional discretionary transportation funding – including PCA grants – submit a Complete Streets Checklist (Checklist) to MTC.

Project sponsors must coordinate with their respective County Transportation Agency (CTA) or local Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) (or equivalent) to review the Complete Streets Checklist. Checklists must be reviewed by the local or county BPAC (or equivalent) prior to MTC's review of the Checklist. If a project includes a transit stop/station or is located along a transit route, the checklist must be signed by the transit agency(ies) to



confirm transit agency coordination and acknowledgement of the project.

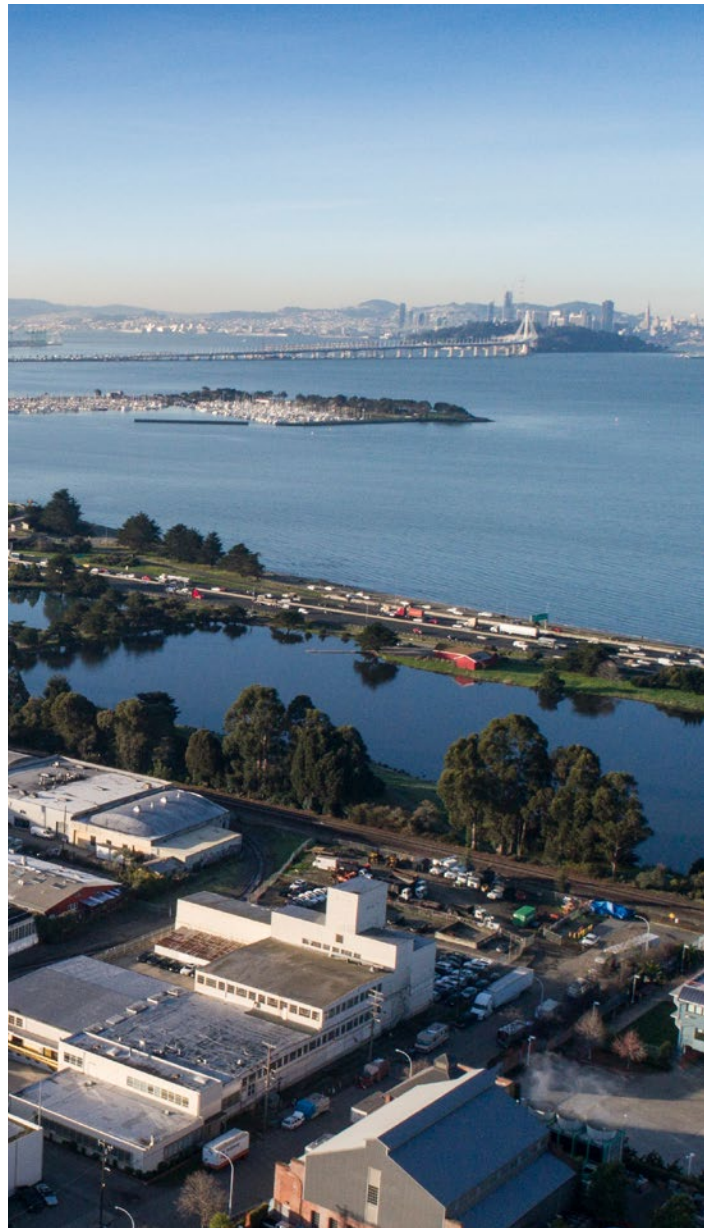
Please note that projects claiming exceptions to the Complete Streets Policy must complete the Exceptions section on the Checklist, including the BPAC review, and provide a Department Director-level signature. For additional information and questions on the Complete Streets Checklist visit mtc.ca.gov/planning/transportation/complete-streets or contact Toshi Shepard-Ohta at tshepard-ohta@bayareametro.gov or (415) 778-5270.

APPENDIX C – Bay Area Greenprint

Project applicants will be asked to generate a project report through the Bay Area Greenprint. The Bay Area Greenprint provides an easy-to-use tool to gather standardized and shareable location data for all PCA grant applications. The Greenprint also provides a range of data about existing characteristics of the project location and potential multiple benefits from the project. The application review committee is evaluating whether such data could be used in future grant solicitations, but it will not be used for scoring projects in this call for projects.

Quick Report How-to

1. Go to <https://www.bayareagreenprint.org/report/>
2. Identify the location of your project by drawing it manually, uploading an existing file, or selecting a predefined area.
 - a. Under **Draw an Area**, you have three options to identify your project location:
 - If your project is best defined by a polygon, use **Draw an Area Freehand** to capture the project coverage area. Example projects include land acquisitions or a new green space in an existing urban area.
 - If your project is best represented by a point location, use **Select a Point or Address**, select an appropriate buffer size (1/8 mile buffer recommended), and either manually drop a pin at the location or enter in the address. Example projects include staging areas or bicycle and/or pedestrian bridge.
 - If your project is linear, use **Draw a Path and Buffer**, select an appropriate buffer size (1/8 mile buffer recommended), and draw the extent of the project. Example project types include a trail project or creek restoration.
 - b. Use **Upload a File** if you have a Shapefile (GIS) or KML (from Google Earth) of your project area.
 - c. Use **Choose an Area** if your project is city- or county-wide or is best defined by an entire watershed or the entire coast or baylands.



3. After identifying the project location, click the green **Get Report** at the top right of the screen. Give the report a project name and then submit.
4. After generating the report, scroll to the bottom of the screen and click on the **Share & Compare** button. This generates a project unique weblink that can be pasted into your grant proposal.
5. Include the project weblink directly into your Letter of Interest.

Contact Information

Technical questions related to Bay Area Greenprint should Ben Botkin at ben.botkin@sfestuary.org.