



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Ocean Protection Council

FROM: Drew Bohan, Executive Policy Officer

DATE: September 10 – 11, 2008

RE: Revisions to the OPC Funding Guidelines and OPC Program Priorities

ATTACHMENTS: 1 - [Revised OPC Funding Guidelines](#)  
2 - [OPC Program Priorities for 2008 through 2010](#)

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### REQUESTED ACTION:

Staff recommends the council approve the following resolution:

“The Ocean Protection Council adopts the attached the revised *OPC Funding Guidelines* and *OPC Program Priorities for 2008 through 2010*.”

### BACKGROUND:

The OPC originally adopted funding guidelines in November 2006 and adopted funding priorities for fiscal year 2007-2008 last fall. Over the past year, staff has received comments from stakeholders and partners regarding these documents, with many offering ideas about how to amend these documents and how to improve the transparency of the OPC grant application and review process. In addition, staff has now had its proposal review process in place long enough to learn some lessons. Several members of our review team have expressed the need to streamline the process, use staff and outside expertise more efficiently and most importantly, provide more clarity and direction for applicants.

Accordingly, staff is recommending the OPC approve two documents. The first is our Funding Guidelines that staff has revised to accommodate the recommendations we have heard over the last year. The second is what we propose the OPC adopt as our Program Priorities for 2008 through 2010. The program priorities document will guide OPC staff for the next two years and inform stakeholders of the types of projects the OPC plans to fund.

## **FUNDING GUIDELINES:**

The proposed changes are primarily to clarify the different mechanisms the OPC can use to provide funding for projects. Additional changes have been made based on feedback and comments from the OPC proposal review committee—a group of representatives from different coastal agencies who participate in the proposal review process. In addition to the changes within the document, staff will also provide better clarity about proposal deadlines and application review dates by providing this information on the OPC website. Staff proposes three primary major changes to the Funding Guidelines:

### **1) Grant Program Objectives**

Staff is proposing to amend the grant program objectives and selection criteria to better reflect central themes of the OPC mission. In particular, the document is clearer about the fact that the OPC prioritizes innovative ideas and projects that improve how ocean and coastal resources are managed – the central mandate of the OPC enabling legislation.

In addition, the guidelines now specify what types of projects the OPC will not consider. These include ongoing monitoring projects (OPC funds are not a long-term funding solution and limited OPC funds should be focused on initiating new, innovative ideas) and requests for funds to make up for funds lost from another source (these projects do not offer the OPC an opportunity to work with grantees to tailor the project outcomes and coordinate with other OPC actions).

The proposed guidelines also are clear that the OPC will not consider projects that are focused solely on public education. The primary rationale for this is because the California Ocean Protection Act does not identify public education as a priority for funding from the Ocean Trust Fund. Instead, OPC staff proposes to focus on the educational and outreach opportunities that can come from other projects. Staff will work with our grantees to create outreach opportunities as a part of their project delivery. Staff will also better communicate OPC project outcomes so that others may help disseminate these new data, ideas or approaches (a primary source of these partnerships will be through the *Thank You Ocean* campaign).

### **2) Funding Mechanisms**

The guidelines are amended to more clearly explain the different types of funding mechanisms used by the OPC. The previous guidelines had descriptions of three different mechanisms, but several people commented that these descriptions were not as clear as they could be. The new document now details four types of funding mechanisms:

- A. Competitive Grants – staff will periodically prepare Requests for Proposals (RFPs) or other competitive solicitations focused on specific issues within our program priorities.
- B. Directed Funding – staff will continue to regularly develop projects for funding to achieve specific programmatic goals. The funding guidelines document describes the circumstances under which OPC staff will develop a directed project; in some cases, these projects will not fit within our Program Priorities.
- C. Unsolicited Proposals – the OPC will receive proposals from applicants on an ongoing basis as long as they are consistent with the OPC Strategic Plan, California Ocean Protection Act and the current Program Priorities.

D. State and Federal Agencies – the OPC’s primary partners in developing projects to improve management approaches are the state and federal agencies. OPC staff have and will continue to work with partner agencies to tailor projects that suit both organizations’ needs.

### **3) Unsolicited Proposal Application Process**

Over the past few years, we have received proposals on a vast array of issues, some of which are not appropriate for the OPC to fund or do not address priority issues. To remedy this, the new guidelines specify that unsolicited proposals must adhere to the Program Priorities and specifically state a strategic plan *action* that the project will address. Staff believes that this will provide clarity about the types of projects currently being pursued, thereby allowing grantees to judge whether their projects are suitable for OPC funding and potentially saving effort if they are not.

In addition, we propose a change to the application process so that applicants initially submit a one-page pre-proposal. Staff will review each pre-proposal to determine if the project fits the criteria outlined in the funding guidelines and whether it is consistent with the OPC Strategic Plan and the Program Priorities document discussed in this staff recommendation. This initial screening is only for consistency – the merits of the project will not be evaluated. If a project is deemed consistent, the applicant will be asked to submit a full proposal – we will send the applicant a simple form similar to what we are currently using. The full proposal will be reviewed and graded by the OPC review committee that consists of OPC staff and staff from several departments represented on the OPC steering committee. The proposal may also be sent to outside experts for technical review.

Projects that rank highly in the review process will be submitted to OPC management for a final determination on whether these projects will be recommended to the OPC for funding.

### **OPC PROGRAM PRIORITIES FOR 2008 TO 2010:**

On October 25, 2007, the OPC adopted “OPC Funding Priorities for Fiscal Year 2007/2008.” As the name implies, the document is focused solely on what the OPC will consider for funding. However, since funding is only one tool available to the OPC, the proposed Program Priority document outlines not only what we plan to fund but what we plan to devote the majority of our staff resources to for the next two years. This will help to create opportunities for partnerships with other organizations on these key issues, even when funding is not the primary action the OPC might take.

The proposed Program Priority document represents a subset of the OPC Five-year Strategic Plan. What it means for something to be on our priorities is that either: (1) OPC staff will devote significant time towards developing projects and policies; (2) the OPC will expend a significant amount of funds supporting related projects; or (3) the issue will be a the focus of one of the OPC public meetings. Staff will no doubt devote some staff time and other resources to issues not in our program priorities; however, the bulk of our resources will focus on addressing the priorities. If a critical issue emerges that is not on our priorities list, staff stands ready to address it. If it appears that it may divert a substantial amount of our resources, we will return to the OPC with a request that our program priorities be modified accordingly.

## **Process for Developing the Priorities**

This document was crafted through a series of meetings. OPC staff held a staff retreat in late July to discuss ongoing projects and ideas for future directions. From this meeting, a draft program priorities document was written and released for public comment on August. Staff held two public meetings (one in Oakland on August 19 and one in Costa Mesa on August 22) to discuss the document and to hear comments and suggestions for changes. We also received 13 letters providing written comments. Staff revised the draft program priorities document based on this input.

### **Public comment responses**

Many changes were made to the priorities based on the comments received in writing and at the public meetings. However, a few issues were mentioned more than once in oral or written comments, but were not included for various reasons, including:

***Area-based Management (ABM)*** – This issue is gaining momentum nationally and internationally. The OPC is currently supporting several projects that will inform future actions related to ABM. The aquaculture programmatic environmental impact report will discuss siting issues related to nearshore and offshore aquaculture facilities. Our work on ocean energy is examining similar issues. Other OPC projects are underway that are mapping existing human uses, current legislation, marine habitats, and existing impacts. Staff will continue to follow these efforts and decide if additional information can be collected to create the baseline information needed to begin a public process to develop an ABM plan. OPC staff will also consult with colleagues in Massachusetts, who are currently tasked with creating an area-based management plan. This issue may be added to the priorities in the future as more information is gathered and more people support developing ABM statewide.

***Data management*** – Several participants during the public meetings expressed a desire to access a wide range of existing data and recommended that the OPC develop a comprehensive ocean data access portal. OPC staff sees merit in this idea; however, many reasons exist to approach this project methodically. Efforts by other organizations to create comprehensive databases have required significant staff time and funding and have rarely resulted in a database that is widely used. Instead, staff initially plans to participate in data management efforts that focus on a specific subject. For example, SB 1070 mandated that state agencies and nongovernmental partners coordinate to collect and provide water quality data. In addition, the MPA Monitoring Enterprise is currently creating a single site for collecting and disseminating MPA monitoring data in California. Staff will follow these efforts and will also look into existing databases that may serve as a model system, such as the Oregon Coastal Atlas and the Klamath Resource Information System (KRIS). If an opportunity appears to exist to build on these existing efforts, staff will propose a revision to the program priorities.

***Education and Outreach*** – Staff revised the program priorities document to include a new priority related to OPC communications based on many people's expressed desire to better understand what the OPC is supporting and the outcomes of projects the OPC funds. However, additional suggestions to include more specific public education projects were not included for the reasons stated above.

***Past OPC initiatives*** – OPC staff will continue to follow projects we have highlighted in the past to determine if new opportunities exist for the OPC to assist. Once-through cooling is a good example. We have provided information needed for the State Water Board to develop and adopt a statewide policy and have urged them to act swiftly to do so, but it is now their responsibility to take action. If new opportunities arise for OPC involvement, staff will bring this issue to the OPC for further discussion.