



**Staff Recommendation**

June 10, 2025

Item 10

**Consent Item:**  
**Consideration and Approval to Adopt the 2025 General Grant Guidelines**

Maria Rodriguez, Climate and Environmental Justice Program Manager

**Recommended Action:** Adoption of Ocean Protection Council (OPC)'s 2025 General Grant Guidelines.

**Location:** Statewide

**Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives:** Goal 1: Climate Resilience; Goal 2: Equity; Goal 3: Biodiversity; Goal 4: Access; Goal 5: Coastal and Marine Science

**Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:** Improved access to state funds by streamlining grant guidance; enhancing flexibility of grant processes; maximizing community benefits and stewardship for underrepresented groups and California Native American tribes.

**Exhibits:** Exhibit A: Proposed Final 2025 General Grant Guidelines

**Findings and Resolution:**

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibit(s), OPC hereby finds that:

1. The 2025 General Grant Guidelines are consistent with the purposes and requirements of the California Ocean Protection Act (Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code), the applicable provisions of the Budget Acts and bond measures, and all other relevant statutory authorities governing the funds administered by OPC.”

## Executive Summary:

The 2025 General Grant Guidelines (Guidelines) establish the overarching process, procedures, and general requirements for which the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) administers its allocated funds. The Guidelines are intended to provide a clear and consistent framework that applies across all OPC-administered funding programs to streamline standard guidance, provide transparency, and align with state laws and policy provisions to support access to funding opportunities for prospective grant applicants.

Individual grant solicitations will reference and supplement these Guidelines to provide further direction on program-specific criteria, priorities, and application instructions. The Guidelines reflect OPC's continued commitment to advancing strategic priorities, including climate resilience, maximizing community benefits, coastal and marine resource protection, and a sustainable blue economy. Adoption of the Guidelines will facilitate more efficient grantmaking and ensure that state funds are administered in a way that delivers meaningful and durable benefits to California's coast, ocean, and communities.

## Project Summary:

### Background and Overview:

OPC developed the 2025 General Grant Guidelines to consolidate and clarify the processes for administering OPC's allocated funds. The funds include, but are not limited to, Proposition 4 (2024 Climate Bond), Proposition 68, General Fund, Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), and other funding sources. The Guidelines build on lessons learned from past and current grant cycles and are intended to improve clarity, consistency, and accessibility across all OPC's funding programs.

The document reflects OPC's commitment to transparency and incorporates best practices in equitable grantmaking. It aligns with state requirements and is intended to provide clear, accessible guidance to help prospective applicants and grantees navigate the grant process.

### Purpose and Structure of the Guidelines:

The 2025 General Grant Guidelines are not a solicitation, but rather a reference document that outlines how OPC manages competitive and discretionary grants. The Guidelines aim to streamline the grant process, clarify roles and responsibilities for applicants and grantees, and guide them through OPC's funding approach. Specifically, the Guidelines:

- Establish a consistent framework for project development, application, and implementation expectations

- Outline OPC’s overarching goals and strategic priorities across funding programs
- Maximize community benefits and stewardship
- Describe project and applicant eligibility, evaluation, and administrative processes
- Summarize expectations for permitting, CEQA compliance, data management, and signage
- Provide grant management tools for invoicing, payment structures, and grant reporting
- Highlight flexibility options for grantees with limited capacity, such as advance payments

The Guidelines provide general grant guidance applicable across all funding programs, including consistent state legal and administrative requirements. Program-specific priorities and additional details will be outlined separately in individual grant solicitations.

**OPC’s Strategic Goals and Priorities:** OPC’s Strategic Plan (2020–2025) guides OPC’s vision and funding priorities, with an updated plan for 2026–2030 currently in development. All funded projects must align with OPC’s mission and advance outcomes that support OPC’s coast and ocean work at the intersection of science, community benefits, climate resilience, biodiversity, and a sustainable blue economy. Priorities include but are not limited to: ecosystem restoration, nature-based climate solutions, tribally-led stewardship, inclusive coastal access, sustainable fisheries, biodiversity protection, and workforce development. Projects are also encouraged to complement broader state climate and conservation initiatives and documents, as well as additional priorities and requirements defined in individual OPC grant solicitations.

**Funding Sources Covered:** The Guidelines apply to a range of OPC funding sources, including but not limited to:

- Proposition 4 (2024 Climate Bond)
- Proposition 68 (2018 Bond) – supplement with OPC [Proposition 68 Grant Guidelines](#) (2024)
- Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF)
- General Fund appropriations
- Environmental License Plate Fund
- Once-Through Cooling Interim Mitigation Funds
- Resources Agency Sea Grant Advisory Panel (RASGAP) Funds

Each funding source has distinct statutory or policy purposes and may include specific requirements that shape individual grant programs. Section 2 of the Guidelines provides a brief overview of these sources, while individual solicitations will offer more detailed information tailored to each funding opportunity.

**Project Development and Scoping:** The Guidelines describe the overall approach for navigating OPC’s grant process, which includes project development, which must be grounded in the Strategic Plan and supported by OPC key policy documents, such as but not limited to the [Equity](#)

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[Plan](#), [Tribal Engagement Strategy](#), and [State of California Sea-Level Rise Guidance](#). Projects must demonstrate clear contributions to state priorities around coastal and ocean protection, climate resilience, and biodiversity.

Applicants must review individual solicitations to determine project-specific priorities, eligibility, and requirements. Specific OPC solicitations fund a wide variety of projects, including but not limited to research, coastal resilience and ecosystem restoration, climate adaptation, nature-based infrastructure improvements, technical assistance, and coastal planning efforts.

**Applicant Eligibility and Project Types:** Eligible applicants include public agencies, non-profit and community-based organizations, federally and non-federally recognized California Native American tribes, universities, and private entities. Each solicitation will define eligible project types, requirements, and timelines based on available funding and program-specific priorities.

**Application, Evaluation, and Council Approval:** Applications must be submitted through formal solicitations, which will include specific instructions, templates, and evaluation criteria. The Guidelines require that proposals be assessed based on alignment with program-specific priorities and consistency with OPC's overarching goals. Additional evaluation factors include scientific and technical merit, contributions to maximize community benefits and stewardship, project readiness, and the potential to deliver long-term public benefits.

Review and evaluation of proposals may involve OPC staff, external reviewers, and/or state partner agencies. Final funding decisions are made by the Council at publicly noticed meetings, based on staff recommendations.

**Grant Agreements and Project Implementation:** Once approved, grant agreements are executed between OPC and the grantee. The Guidelines outline expectations for documentation (such as environmental compliance and site control), invoicing and payment (including options for reimbursement or advance payments), and reporting requirements.

Projects must submit deliverables that demonstrate progress and track performance, share data publicly when appropriate, and acknowledge OPC funding in public communications and signage. Grantees are also required to maintain records for audit purposes and ensure long-term stewardship of funded projects.

**General Requirements:** All OPC-funded projects must comply with applicable local, state, and federal laws, including environmental review and permitting requirements, conflict-of-interest standards, permitting and CEQA (when applicable), accessibility, and data confidentiality policies (especially when projects involve tribal lands or sensitive information). Provisions related to land

tenure, sovereign immunity waivers (when relevant), and post-project monitoring are also outlined in the Guidelines to support efficient project management practices.

### **Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:**

Consistent with OPC’s [Equity Plan](#) and [Tribal Engagement Strategy](#), the Guidelines prioritize projects that deliver direct, meaningful benefits to communities and tribes, particularly those historically underrepresented or disproportionately burdened by environmental or socioeconomic challenges. Projects are encouraged to be developed in collaboration with these communities and should maximize opportunities for local stewardship and participation. The Guidelines emphasize that community benefits must be demonstrable, substantial, and intentionally integrated throughout the project’s design, implementation, and outcomes.

### **Public Comment:**

Public comment on the General Grant Guidelines is welcomed during the Council’s publicly noticed meeting, consistent with the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act. While there is no legal requirement for separate public outreach on the Guidelines, they are informed by current and established best practices in accessible and inclusive grantmaking, many of which have been shaped through engagement efforts across OPC, advisory bodies, interagency partners, and the public.

OPC recognizes that forthcoming guidance related to Proposition 4 (2024 Climate Bond) may include new requirements for public input in the development of associated funding guidelines. OPC will revise the General Grant Guidelines accordingly to reflect any new public engagement provisions, if such requirements are issued.

### **Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act:**

The proposed Guidelines are consistent with the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because they are consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650(b)(2) as projects which:

- Eliminate or reduce threats to coastal and ocean ecosystems, habitats, and species.
- Improve the management of fisheries and/or foster sustainable fisheries.
- Improve coastal water quality.
- Allow for increased public access to, and enjoyment of, ocean and coastal resources, consistent with sustainable, long-term protection and conservation of those resources.
- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.

- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.
- Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Address coastal water contamination from biological pathogens.
- Provide funding for adaptive management, planning coordination, monitoring, research, and other necessary activities to minimize the adverse impacts of climate change on California's ocean ecosystem.

### **Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):**

Adoption of the General Grant Guidelines is not a “legal project” that triggers the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21068 and Title 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15378. Future projects that may be funded through individual grant program solicitations will be required to comply with CEQA and other necessary environmental permitting requirements or otherwise explain why permits are not applicable to the project.