Regional Parks and Trails System 2027 Competitive Equity Grant Program Draft Notice of Funding Availability

Information Item

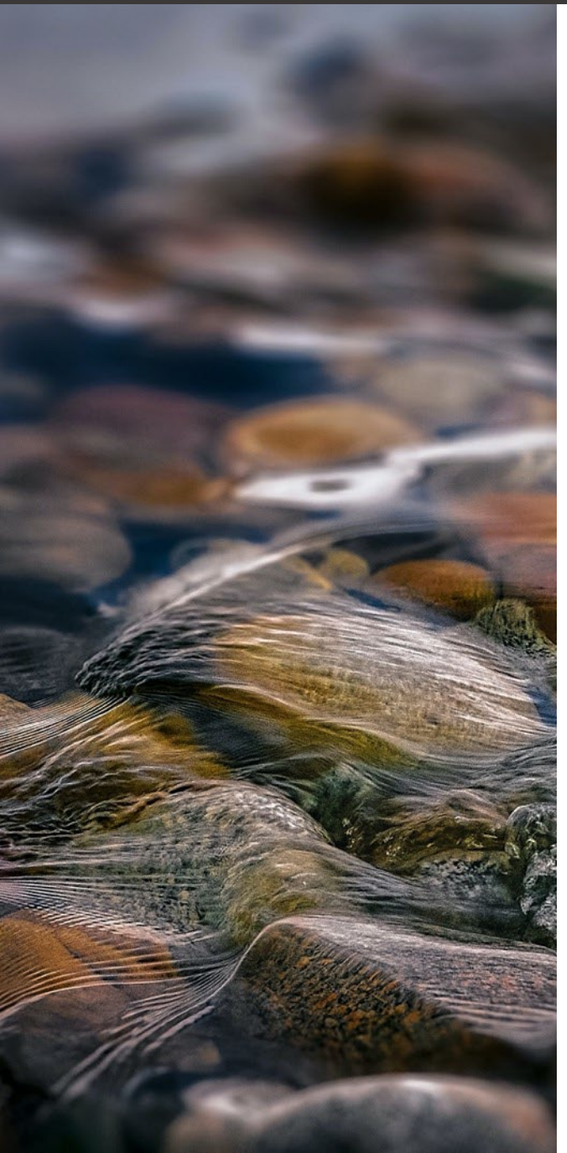
Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

June 30, 2026



METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

Equity grant program purpose



Provide funding to Regional Park Implementing Agencies for projects to advance equitable use of the Regional Parks and Trails System, with a focus on one or more of the following:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Income
- Ability
- Age
- National Origin

Equity grant program background



Started with a $300,000 pilot program in 2019

- *Thrive 2040* committed the Council to strengthening equitable use of the parks and trail system
- Council bonds were set aside for a pilot grant program
- Funded 3 of 14 capital projects, applications exceeded $1.5 million

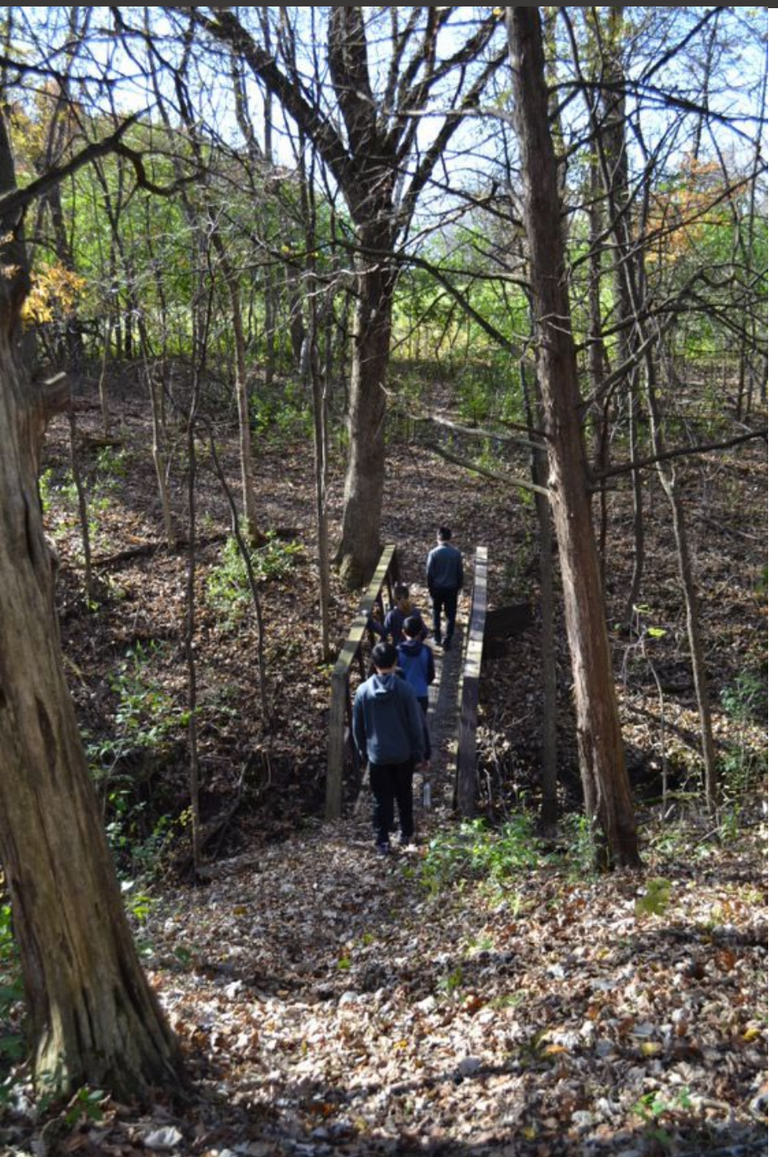
$2 million in 2021

- Council dedicated the interest earnings from the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund to the equity grant program
    - Interest earnings can be used for non-capital and capital projects
- Funded 23 of 37 projects- mix of capital and programming

$2 million in 2024

- Funded 22 projects- mix of capital and programming

Previously funded projects highlight



- Saint Paul BIPOC Ambassador Program
- Scott County mental health and nature-based wellness program for disproportionately impacted communities
- Minneapolis bike skills park along Minnehaha Parkway RT
- Ramsey County tuj lub courts at Keller RP
- Three Rivers water safety education
- Washington County American Indian historical cultural study
- Dakota County Unity Trail Loop at the Mississippi River Greenway RT
- Anoka County adaptive equipment solutions
- Carver County ADA assessment

Funding for the 2027 grant round



- $1,000,000 in Council bonds is available for capital projects
- $7,000,000 in parks interest earnings is available for programming/non-capital and capital projects
  - Programming projects will be prioritized
  - Programming projects may have capital components such as recreation equipment (and vice versa)
- Agencies may submit up to four applications
- Applications must be a minimum of $100,000 and a maximum of $1,000,000

Scoring criteria from the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)

Competitive Scoring Criteria

Evaluation Criteria	Points
Impact on equitable use: • The proposal clearly identifies one or more underserved populations that the project will benefit and why they were chosen • The proposal identifies measurable equity outcomes for intended populations	20
Community partnerships: • The proposal demonstrates community involvement throughout the project by both developing new relationships and strengthening existing partnerships • The proposal demonstrates how partnerships will continue after the grant period	20
Community engagement: • The proposal demonstrates how partners and underserved populations will be engaged throughout the project and after the grant period • If the proposal includes community engagement, it clearly demonstrates how the engagement will focus on underserved populations in future planning and projects	20
Capacity building: • The proposal will increase the ability of the regional park implementing agencies and their partners to grow their skills in working with underrepresented communities • The proposal demonstrates the agency's capacity to leverage the Council's funds through non-state funds, grants, or in-kind contributions and/or the ability to continue the work after the grant period is complete	20
Programming initiatives: • The proposal was developed with the agency's outreach/education staff • The proposal clearly demonstrates how new programming efforts will affect underserved populations	20
Total Possible Points	**100**

Anticipated timeline



- September 2026: Bring final NOFA through the Council
- October 2026: Post NOFA and open application in Fluxx
- December 30, 2026: Applications due by 4 pm
- January: Internal review
- February 2027: Technical review team meets and develops funding recommendations*
- April 2027: Bring funding recommendations to Council
- May 2027: Grant agreements sent out

Thank you!

Questions, Comments, Suggestions?

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