



# San Francisco Bay Area Priority Conservation Area Grant Program

## 2024 Grant Guidelines and Call for Proposals



In cooperation with

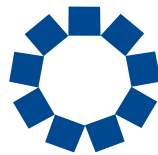


ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS  
METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION



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.

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 and connecting urban populations to trails and open space, and helping communities prepare for the impacts of climate change.



# Introduction

**Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) are open spaces that provide agricultural, natural resource, scenic, recreational, and/or ecological values and ecosystem functions in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.** 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 four designations: Natural Landscapes, Agricultural Lands, Urban Greening, and Regional Recreation. The PCA planning framework was inaugurated in 2007, received a minor update in 2014, and is currently undergoing an update with the PCA Refresh Project (see below). This call for proposals is for currently designated PCAs under the existing 2014 PCA framework.

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. Currently, there are 185 designated PCAs eligible for funding under this grant round.

Plan Bay Area 2050 is the long-range plan for transportation, housing, economic development, and environmental resilience for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. Plan Bay Area 2050 was adopted in fall 2021 and is updated every four years. MTC promotes compact development in established communities with high-quality transportation access (Growth Geographies, including Priority Development Areas, Transit Rich Areas, and High Resource Areas). This growth pattern reduces 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's primary tools for reaching these goals. Since the PCA Grant Program's inception, MTC and the SCC have jointly disbursed over \$30 million in two prior grant rounds.



## PCA Refresh

ABAG and MTC are currently updating the PCA planning framework and designation process, particularly to advance the use of data and further integration of equity and climate resilience. The PCA Refresh process, scheduled for completion in spring 2024, will then be implemented with a subsequent ABAG regional call for updating existing PCAs and for new PCA designations. Upon completion of the PCA Refresh designation process, anticipated in winter 2024/25, MTC has authorized another PCA grant round of \$8 million to fund implementation of locally identified conservation investments in new and existing PCAs consistent with the PCA Refresh planning framework. For questions about the PCA Refresh project please contact Michael Germeraad, [mgermeraad@bayareametro.gov](mailto:mgermeraad@bayareametro.gov).

# Call for Proposals

## Geographic Scope

Projects must be located in the nine-county Bay Area. Multi-county projects are allowed and encouraged.

## Eligible Applicants

Local governments (cities, towns, and counties), county transportation 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 with other entities on project applications.

## Eligible Activities

Planning and design, project implementation, and 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 \$6 million of the available \$8.5 million (70%) 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:** Seek to fund a minimum of one project per county. In addition, this grant round includes a \$4.25 million minimum investment target (at least 50% of available funds) for PCAs in Marin, Sonoma, Napa, and Solano counties. This is 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.





## Eligible Projects

Planning and design, implementation, and acquisition projects must consist of one or more of the following activities within an existing PCA<sup>1</sup>.

**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, capture carbon emissions, and address stormwater.
- 4. Visual Enhancements:** Construction of turnouts, overlooks and viewing areas.

1. Projects not located entirely within an existing PCA may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Applicants would need to demonstrate strong, clear physical or cultural benefits to an existing PCA, such as improved habitat connectivity or enhanced community access to an adjacent PCA.

# 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.

## **Suscol Headwaters Preserve Acquisition — \$1,107,000**

This project acquired 400 acres of habitat and open space near Napa's Skyline Park and provided a conservation easement on an additional 460 acres of riparian habitat. An easement of approximately 40 acres was also provided to close a key gap in the Bay Area Ridge Trail and enhance recreational access in eastern Napa County.

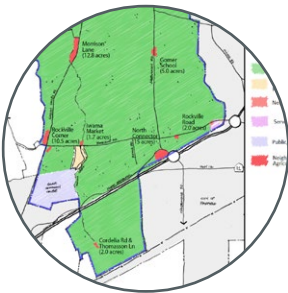


## **Dotson Family Marsh Restoration and Public Access — \$1,000,000**

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.

## **Adapt Oakland: Urban Greening and Living Buffers in West Oakland — \$900,000**

In collaboration with diverse stakeholders, West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project and partners identified strategies to block and mitigate air pollution that will be implemented by this PCA funded project. These strategies will buffer the community from known traffic and port related emissions, based on the adaptive framework developed for implementing green infrastructure to improve environmental health, including construction of vegetated buffers and greening along 7th and 16th streets near the Port of Oakland.



## **Suisun Valley Farm to Market Phase 1-2 — \$1,175,000**

The Solano Transportation Authority partnered with the County of Solano to construct bicycle and pedestrian improvements and staging areas at Mankas Corner, Rockville Road, Abernathy Road and Ledgewood Road. These improvements were consistent with the County's Strategic Plan for Suisun Valley to provide a vision and plan for the long-term agricultural viability of the valley.

# Project Selection Criteria

Proposed projects must meet the following criteria and will be ranked on how well they meet these criteria:

## Eligibility Screening Criteria

- **PCA Designation:** The project must be within, or connect to, an existing PCA.<sup>2</sup>
- **Open Space Protection:** If the project consists of land acquisition or easements for purposes of open space protection, land must be located in areas without open space protection in place. If the project does not include acquisition or easements, the project should connect to, or be located in, an area protected from development, such as by policy (e.g. zoning or urban growth boundaries) or by public land ownership (e.g., open space preserve or right of way).

## Evaluation Criteria

**Program Goals:** Projects need to meet one or more of the program goals

- Protect, restore, or enhance critical habitats, ecosystems, watersheds, and resource areas as defined in California Government Code Section 65080.01
- Protect farmland, grazing lands and timberlands or otherwise support the agricultural economy of the region, such as farm-to-market infrastructure.
- Provide or enhance bicycle and pedestrian access to regional parks, trails, open spaces and recreation areas. Notable examples are the San Francisco Bay Trail, Bay Area Ridge Trail, and Bay Area Water Trail systems.
- Provide or enhance parks and green spaces in urban areas to improve community health, increase habitat connectivity, capture carbon emissions, and address stormwater.

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2. See footnote 1 (one).

## 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 habitat, agricultural or open space plans (such as the Conservation Lands Network), Estuary Blueprint, countywide plans, Plan Bay Area, MTC Active Transportation Plan and other bicycle/ pedestrian plans.

## Likelihood of Success

Project applicants should demonstrate the programmatic capability to deliver the project and how the project will leverage other resources, including other local/ state/federal funding. 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.

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) partnerships, equity, and support for the project, (3) geographic distribution of grant funds, and (4) capability of the project partners to operate and maintain the project long-term. Applicants should indicate status of any necessary permits or approvals, and status and timing of review under CEQA/NEPA (or indicate applicable exemptions). Environmental review and permitting activities are eligible for PCA grants.

Additional information regarding scoring criteria is provided in Appendix A.



# 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 Letter of Interest Application Form. Please keep write-ups short and concise (more detail will be needed if you are invited to submit a full proposal):

- Identify the project title, name of applicant, project manager, and contact information.
- Name the project partners and supporters.
- Describe the proposed project, its regional significance, and how it meets the program goals and evaluation criteria.
- Describe how the project falls within at least one of the four eligible activities.
- Indicate the PCA(s) the project is in or touches.
- Describe status of CEQA and/or NEPA review.
- Identify the total cost of the project, the amount of PCA funding requested, partnerships, community and tribal engagement, and the amount and source of any secured and pending funds.



## Application Timeline and Review Process

**2024**

<b>March 11</b>	<b>Issue Call for Proposals</b>
March 15	<p><b>Pre-Application Webinar.</b> Webinar will be recorded and posted online. Zoom: <a href="https://bayareametro.zoom.us/j/87441894529">https://bayareametro.zoom.us/j/87441894529</a></p>
<b>May 8</b>	<b>Letters of Interest Due</b>
May 29	Evaluation Committee Review (MTC/ABAG/SCC staff)
June 6	Invitations for Full Applications Sent
June	<p><b>Office Hours for invited Applicants:</b> <b>Week of June 24</b></p>
<b>August 28</b>	<b>Full Proposals Due</b>
September	Evaluation Committee Review (MTC/ABAG/SCC) Staff Recommendations Prepared
<b>November</b>	<b>MTC Commission Action</b>
<b>December</b>	Desired project start date. Funds provided to sponsors on a reimbursement basis.





Applicants are also asked to provide a weblink of their project generated through the Bay Area Greenprint ([bayareagreenprint.org](http://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 Adam Garcia, [AMGSustainablePlanning@gmail.com](mailto:AMGSustainablePlanning@gmail.com) to receive assistance in using the Greenprint.

Letter of Interest Application Form and attachments should be submitted electronically to the PCA Evaluation Committee by May 8, 2024 at 11:59 PM at [PCAGrants@bayareametro.gov](mailto:PCAGrants@bayareametro.gov)

Attachments to emails cannot be larger than 20 MB.

**Step Two:** Letters of Interest will be evaluated by an evaluation committee of MTC/ABAG and SCC staff based on the scoring criteria in Appendix A. 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 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 Photos.
- Letters of Support

As with the Letters of Interest: Proposals (if invited) must be submitted electronically to the PCA Evaluation Committee at [PCAGrants@bayareametro.gov](mailto: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 recommendations, including the recommended fund source for for each project based on the scoring criteria in Appendix A. Projects (federal or non-federal) will subsequently be approved by the MTC Commission (refer to Appendix B).

# Appendix A – Scoring Criteria

Scoring Criteria	Max. Score
<p><b>Project Purpose &amp; Goals</b></p> <p>Extent to which the project achieves one or more of the purposes of the PCA Grant program.</p> <p><b>PCA Grant Program Goals:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protect, restore, or enhance critical habitats, ecosystems, watersheds, and resource areas.</li> <li>Protect farmland, grazing lands and timberlands or otherwise support the agricultural economy of the region, such as farm-to-market infrastructure.</li> <li>Provide or enhance bicycle and pedestrian access to regional parks, trails, open spaces and recreation areas.</li> <li>Provide or enhance parks and green spaces in urban areas to improve community health, increase habitat connectivity, capture carbon emissions, and address stormwater.</li> </ul> <p>To receive the maximum points, the proposal must demonstrate outstanding achievement of at least one program goal or very good achievement of multiple goals.</p>	<p><b>25</b></p>
<p><b>Partnerships OR Equity Priority Community Benefits</b></p> <p>The extent to which the proposal describes EITHER the project’s partnership activities OR its potential benefits for Equity Priority Communities (EPCs). Applicants should choose one option below:</p> <p><b>Partnerships</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p><b>Equity Priority Community Benefits</b></p> <p>Describe the location of the project in relation to an EPC(s) <a href="https://mtc.ca.gov/planning/transportation/access-equity-mobility/equity-priority-communities">https://mtc.ca.gov/planning/transportation/access-equity-mobility/equity-priority-communities</a>. Provide details on the ways in which the EPC will benefit from the project and provide letters of support from community members as applicable. Describe how the project will meaningfully engage with these affected communities, especially local residents in these communities who will be affected by the project. Describe the project’s expected outcomes that will make a difference to an affected community.</p> <p>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.)</p>	<p><b>20</b></p>
<p><b>Regional Significance</b></p> <p>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.</p>	<p><b>15</b></p>

## Appendix A — Scoring Criteria (continued)

Scoring Criteria	Max. Score
<p><b>Likelihood of Success</b></p> <p>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 project scope, budget, and schedule.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the proposal applicant demonstrate experience successfully implementing similar projects?</li> <li>Does the proposal demonstrate the investment of local/state/federal resources to deliver and expand project outcomes and benefits?</li> <li>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?</li> </ul>	<p><b>20</b></p>
<p><b>Multiple Benefits</b></p> <p>Extent to which the project provides multiple benefits:</p> <p>Multiple benefits may include (but are not limited to) the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Benefits more than one program goal</li> <li>Includes more than one eligible project type (ex. bike/ped. access + creek restoration)</li> <li>Increases resiliency to climate change</li> <li>Located in or directly benefits equity priority communities</li> <li>Benefit the region's economy, including EPCs supporting the agricultural economy, local workforce development, and employment opportunities for Bay Area residents</li> <li>Demonstrates innovation in approach or project type</li> <li>Provides educational or capacity-building opportunities; leverages volunteers or student groups</li> </ul>	<p><b>10</b></p>
<p><b>Operations &amp; Maintenance</b></p> <p>Extent to which the applicant demonstrates the investment will be maintained to deliver ongoing and sustained outcomes in the long-term.</p>	<p><b>10</b></p>
<p><b>Total</b></p>	<p><b>100</b></p>

# 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](mailto:matkinson@bayareametro.gov).



## Local Funding

Projects recommended for local funds provided by MTC must be approved by MTC and included in the regional TIP for tracking purposes. 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.).

# 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 be directed to Adam Garcia at: [AMGSustainablePlanning@gmail.com](mailto:AMGSustainablePlanning@gmail.com).