3.3.5. EVALUATION OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT FOR COMPETITIVE GRANTS

In the following three competitive grant programs, applicants will be eligible to receive points for demonstrating robust engagement that goes beyond the minimum requirements outlined in this document:

- Natural Lands, Local Beaches, Water Conservation and Protection Program Competitive Grants
- Regional Recreation, Multi-use Trails and Accessibility Program Competitive Grants
- Recreation Access Program Projects Competitive Grants

Points will be awarded based on the quality of outreach and engagement conducted by applicants. The five guidelines below describe best practices to guide applicants as they plan and conduct outreach and engagement for projects.

Additional criteria for competitive grant evaluation can be found in Section 2.2.

Engage the Community at an Appropriate Time

Although the most appropriate time to engage the community will vary depending on the project type, it is important that community members have an opportunity to raise questions and offer suggestions when their input can still influence the outcome of the project. Grantees who fail to engage the community according to the submitted Community Engagement Plan and project schedule may lose their status of good standing and be ineligible to receive payment reimbursements. See Section 3.4.6 for additional information on good standing status. Competitive grant applications will be evaluated based on the following requirements and best practices:

- Participants should be engaged during points in the project that allow them the opportunity to identify issues and needs; conceptualize project scopes; establish project goals; assess constraints, challenges, and opportunities; and benefit from the project outcomes.
- Appropriate timing may include but is not limited to: the onset of the project; during design phases; during construction; upon project completion; and through ongoing programming.

Employ Inclusive Outreach Methods

Inclusive outreach should seek to engage people whose interests are affected by the project plans, particularly groups who typically experience barriers to participation such as ethnic minorities, non–English speakers, and members of low-income communities. Outreach for all engagement approaches should begin at least two weeks prior to any event or major decision.

As mentioned in Section 3.3.1, outreach methods should be appropriate in scale and type to the community being served. Acceptable outreach methods include but are not limited to: door-to-door canvassing, phone banking, distribution of flyers or other printed materials, local and regional print media, local radio and television, surveys and focus groups, email blasts, online newsletters, and social media.

Remove Barriers to Access

To maximize opportunities to engage in the public process, applicants should mindfully remove any practical, financial, or cultural barriers to participation.

- **Practical Barriers.** To reduce practical barriers, applicants should: select locations easy to access by multiple modes of transportation; provide child-care services or kid-friendly engagement activities; provide easy-to-read wayfinding signs; schedule meetings during weekends or evenings; ensure venues provide ADA accessibility; provide adequate audio-visual devices; and provide refreshments if meetings are scheduled close to traditional meal times.
- **Financial Barriers.** To avoid financial barriers to participation, applicants should provide free or reimbursed parking; provide free child-care services or kid-friendly engagement activities; and avoid scheduling meeting during traditional work hours.
- **Cultural Barriers.** To avoid cultural barriers to participation, applicants should provide language translation services (as required); utilize culturally relevant messaging; and partner with CBOs who are familiar with the community's cultural sensitivities.

Establish and Leverage Community Partnerships

Establishing and leveraging strong, sustainable, and authentic community partnerships can help to center the perspectives of vulnerable communities; encourage inclusive community-based participation; promote shared decision-making; and support agencies with limited organizational capacity. Community organizations can help public agencies improve their quality of engagement by developing and implementing appropriate outreach materials and methods, facilitating meetings and events, providing translation services, and by providing direct connections to the community to ensure inclusive representation of local values and goals. Financial assistance to fund engagement services provided by community organizations services may be available through Technical Assistance Program (TAP) (see Section 2.4).

Incorporate Community Input into Project Plans

RPOSD is committed to ensuring that the park projects are successful. RPOSD's experience over the last 25 years is that parks that thrive are those whose community members take ownership, one factor in this is including the community in the development of a park project. This is not always possible or feasible, however incorporating community input into project plans is essential to building trust and collaborative relationships between public agencies and the communities they serve. Participants should always have a clear understanding of how their feedback will or will not be incorporated into project development and a general understanding of how policies and regulations may influence the project development. Although there are cases when the utility of community feedback may be hampered by fiscal, legal, or other constraints, applicants should give participants opportunities to:

- Provide input regarding the location of facilities or amenities
- Learn about and/or report deferred maintenance concerns
- Recommend new facility locations and/or amenities
- Provide design ideas for recreation features
- Provide design ideas for softscape features
- Request programmatic changes

It is critical that participants understand how their feedback will or will not be used for project development. Applicants should avoid raising false hopes and soliciting feedback without intent to consider it during project development. For projects with limited ability to genuinely incorporate community input, applicants should focus the conversations on educating and informing the community to ensure they understand the needs, opportunities, and anticipated outcomes. Applicants are encouraged to partner with community-based organizations to help facilitate difficult conversations around unaligned priorities.