

Florida Communities Trust 2023-2024 Parks and Open Space Ranking and Selection Workshop

Date: January 29, 2024

Time: 11 a.m.

Location: Go-To-Webinar Link:
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1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Parks and Open Space Grant Overview
3. Application Review and Evaluation
4. Meeting Materials for Board Review
5. Agenda and Ranking and Selection Process
6. Closing Comments

Slide Notes

Slide 3 - Parks and Open Space Grant Overview

The Florida Communities Trust's (FCT) Parks and Open Space grant program provides funding for land acquisition and was established in 1989. The program, funded by the Florida Legislature, provides grants to Local Governments and eligible Nonprofit Environmental Organizations for acquisition of community-based parks, open spaces and greenways which implement the outdoor recreation and natural resource protection needs identified in the Local Government comprehensive plans.

Chapter 380, Part III, Florida Statutes establishes the Florida Communities Trust. Our grant application procedures are enumerated in Rule 62-818, Florida Administrative Code. Rule 62-819 covers land acquisition procedures for Florida Forever projects. Links to the Statutes and Rules that govern our grant programs can be found on our website.

Throughout its history, the Florida Communities Trust has provided grant funding for the total or partial funding of over 600 projects across the State of Florida. Our program currently protects nearly 100,000 acres and provides recreational opportunities and environmental protection to many local governments. Due to the nature of our grant program, the grants run in perpetuity, ensuring the continued protection of project sites now and into the future. The program is funded under the Florida Forever Program.

Slide 4 - Parks and Open Space Grant Program

Eligible applicants for the Parks and Open Space Florida Forever Grant Program include local governments and eligible nonprofit organizations. Project sponsors may only submit one (1) application per project site. Each applicant may only apply for up to \$5 million per cycle, regardless of the number of applications.

Local governments are defined as “a county or municipality within the State of Florida.”

Nonprofit Environmental Organizations are defined as “private nonprofit organizations, existing under the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code which can demonstrate that the conservation of natural resources or protection of the environment are among its principal purposes and goals.”

A partnership application is defined as “an Application for an Award submitted to the Trust by two or more eligible Applicants.” A partnership can include any variation of an application being submitted by two or more local governments, two or more nonprofit environmental organizations, or a combination of two or more local governments and nonprofit environmental organizations.

The two main requirements for an FCT site once acquired are to develop the project site in accordance with the Dedication to Public Use and Declaration of Restrictive Covenants (DDRC) and its approved Management Plan.

Slide 5 - FY2023-2024 Funding

With the signing of the budget in June, that Parks and Open Space program was allocated \$15 million from the Florida Legislature.

The application cycle opened on October 10, 2023, and ran through January 10, 2024.

Applications must have been received by 5pm.

Trust Staff notifies all recipients that their application has been received.

Slide 6 - Limit on Grant Awards

Under the provisions of subsection 62-818.003(7), F.A.C., the total amount of any award or combination of awards applied for by any local government or nonprofit environmental organization under any applications or partnership applications for any projects shall not exceed \$5 million dollars during any one cycle.

All award(s) for Partnership Applications shall, for purposes of calculating award limitations, be divided equally among the Local Government(s) or Nonprofit Environmental Organization(s).

This is to say that if a local government and a nonprofit apply requesting \$1 million to fund a project, each partner would be responsible for \$500,000.

Slide 7 - Ineligible Applicants

Rule 62-818.003 also defines eligibility standards and lists the factors that would make an applicant ineligible to apply. These factors include:

- Per program rules, all project sites shall be open to the public. An inability to define clear public access for your project may disqualify your application.
- If any applicant has three or more active Grant Agreements at the time of the project selection meeting, the Applicant will not be eligible to be funded. The applicant would become eligible again once they have closed out one or more of the three active Grant Agreements.
- A stewardship report is considered overdue when it has not been received or approved by Trust Staff within the one-year period immediately preceding the grant application deadline, or January 10, 2023.
- Applicants may cure their overdue status if the overdue stewardship report is received and approved by Trust Staff at least 21 days prior to the scheduled FCT Governing Board Ranking and Selection meeting. With the Board meeting

Scheduled for February 13, 2024, applicants will need to submit their reports no later than **January 22** to cure overdue status.

Slide 8 - FCT Application Review and Evaluation

Applications are received and reviewed for eligibility by Trust Staff based on the adopted criteria. Trust Staff will contact the applicant to request clarification of any materials provided in the application.

Once determined eligible, the application is evaluated and scored.

Trust Staff provides applicants with a draft Evaluation Report prior to the FCT Governing Board Ranking and Selection meeting for review. The list of scored projects is also published prior to the FCT Governing Board Ranking and Selection meeting.

Formal objections, which are addressed by Trust Staff, may be heard by the Board at the Ranking and Selection Meeting.

The Board ranks the applications in descending order.

The amount of available funding and the estimated FCT grant award per project determines how many of the top ranked projects can be funded.

Slide 10 - Materials for Board Review

To facilitate Board review and deliberation, Trust Staff will prepare a binder for each member. This contains a preliminary list of all project applications in the FF23 cycle. We have also included the preliminary scoresheet for each application. Each applicant is aware of their preliminary point total. If an applicant raised objections to the preliminary score, we have added that detail as well.

Each tab in the binder contains information on one project. The tabs are presented in order of project number. The following documents are placed in each tab:

Trust Staff Evaluation Report. This is a summary of the preliminary score for the project. This lists the project number, project name, applicant agency, the grant amount request, match amount request and the project score by evaluation category. Each project is scored according to criteria set forth in Rule 62-818.007, F.A.C.

Project Summary. This is taken directly from the project application. It is the applicant's description of the project, its history and its importance to the applicant agency's mission.

Project Evaluation and Scoring. This is the detail of the preliminary score for the project.

Project Excellence. If the applicant included a discussion of project excellence in the application, we included that in the tab. You might find this helpful in your deliberations when deciding whether or not to award Project Excellence points to the applicant.

Project Site Plan. Again, this is taken directly from the project application. This is the conceptual site plan submitted by the applicant.

Support Letters. If the project received letters of support, we have included those as well.

Slide 11 - Summary of Objections

Applicant objections to preliminary scores are required to be submitted in writing to Trust Staff at least 5 working days prior to the February 13th meeting, in order to be considered by the Board. The deadline is Tuesday, February 6.

No new information shall be presented to, or considered by, the Board at this point.

By Rule, evaluation of the application is based on the information contained in the application when it was submitted.

If the applicant raised objections to their preliminary score, we have included that detail.

Each objection is specific to one of the scoring criteria.

For each objection, we included a description of the criterion, a discussion of why Trust Staff did not award points, the applicant response (objection) and the Trust Staff decision.

Slide 13 - Special Purpose Meeting Agenda

The meeting will begin with the call to order and meeting parameters.

Trust Staff will introduce the projects in the order that the applications are received.

Trust Staff and the applicant will speak to each project and respond to any questions from the Board.

After hearing the presentation and resolving any questions, the Board will award any extra points and approve the final score.

Once all projects have been heard the Board will recess for staff to complete the calculations and prepare a preliminary ranking list of all eligible projects in priority order.

The Board will resume the meeting and approve the preliminary priority list.

Slide 14 - Ranking and Selection Process

Trust Staff Presentations – Staff will introduce the project name, project number and applicant agency. We will present recommended scores for each project application and mention whether or not the applicant submitted objections to the preliminary project score.

Applicant Objections to Point Score –Applicants who have raised objections have the option of presenting those objections to the Board at this meeting. Each applicant has up to five (5) minutes to address any unresolved issues or objections to Staff recommended scores. (Trust Staff will notify the presenter and the Chair with time warnings). It is important to note that not all applicants who raised objections intend to present those to the Board. Applicants may disagree with our decision on their objection; however they may elect not pursue Board action.

Governing Board discussion – The Board may ask additional questions of applicants and Staff.

Scoring Consideration – The Board will vote to either uphold Staff recommendations or to accept applicant objection information for the awarding of additional points.

Applicant Project Excellence Presentation – Each applicant is limited to a maximum of five (5) minutes to present their project to the Board. (Trust Staff will give presenter and Chair time warnings). Applicant comments should only address requests for the awarding of additional Project Excellence points.

Governing Board Discussion – The Board may ask additional questions of applicants and Trust Staff.

Slide 15 - Project Excellence Points

The decision to award, or not to award, Project Excellence points is a critical responsibility of this Board. Staff will not make a recommendation one way or the other regarding Project Excellence. By Program Rule, this responsibility rests entirely with the Board.

The Board may award a maximum of 10 points to an application, based on issues that support the goals of the Trust but such issues that may not have been adequately addressed by the evaluation criteria of the application.

Examples of excellence include strong community-based support, possessing exemplary characteristics, exemplifying regional cooperation, assisting disadvantaged communities, or aiding in the resolution of land use conflicts.

This is not an exhaustive list but does provide context for some criteria that a Board member may use to justify the awarding of project excellence points.

The Board will make the final applicant score determination, including the awarding of project excellence points, if any.

The Board will clearly state the basis for the awarding of project excellence points.

The Board has two options at this point, option one is for a member to motion to approve the priority score plus one to 10 Project Excellence points, option two is a motion to approve the priority score with no Project Excellence points.

Slide 16 - Ranking and Selection Process

Calculation of Scores – After the last application has been presented, a brief 20-minute adjournment will ensue where Staff will calculate applicant scores, and the preliminary ranking list will be created in descending point order. In the event of a tie score, Rule 62-818.008(2)(d), Florida Administrative Code establishes a four-step tie breaking procedure. Trust Staff will apply each of these steps, in order, until the tie is broken; Score received in the Community Planning Section, Score received in the Outdoor Recreation Section, Score received in the General Standards Section, and the order in which the applications were received.

Selection for Funding – The Board will then reconvene after the temporary adjournment to make a preliminary determination of which applications will be funded for the FF24 Grant Cycle.

Public Comment – the Board will receive public comment and adjourn as all business has been concluded.

Post-Meeting Trust Staff Site Visits and Other Investigations - Following the meeting Trust Staff will conduct site visits or other investigations to verify conditions for each project. Point totals (and the order of the priority list) may be adjusted as a result. Based on the results of the site visits or other investigations, Trust Staff will create a final priority list for Board approval.

Final Ranking List - The final ranking list will be approved by the Board at the May 15, 2024, meeting and then published in the Florida Administrative Register.

Slide 18 - Trust Staff Contact Information

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