

MEMORANDUM

Date: August 3, 2023
To: Chehalis Basin Board
From: Cindy Malay, Office of Chehalis Basin
Re: Federal Funding Strategy - Technical Support Program

Purpose

This memo is intended to provide the Chehalis Basin Board with information needed to further the discussion on the Office of Chehalis Basin's approach for providing technical support for federal grant applications through the Chehalis Basin Strategy.

Background

In October 2022, the Chehalis Basin Board identified that a priority need of the long-term Strategy should include a process that would put together the needs of Strategy partners with federal funding programs, and to hire a consultancy to assist in writing grant applications to obtain funding. This would serve to more effectively leverage the money the State invests into the Chehalis Basin Strategy and expand the capabilities of both OCB and the Strategy partners.

To accomplish this, OCB has developed a federal funding support framework that focuses on obtaining the fullest complement of available federal funding by hiring ICF consulting to provide strategic advice on available opportunities that would be appropriated for Strategy partners and to provide a suite of options for grant writing support.

To best understand the needs of Strategy partners, OCB has convened a Federal Funding Advisory Group consisting of partners that work on various Strategy elements, and have representation from the Flood Authority, City of Centralia, the Cities of Aberdeen and Hoquiam, American Rivers, Salmon Lead Entity, Wild Salmon Center, Ecology's Floodplains by Design, and the Flood Control Zone District. OCB has also done outreach to the Chehalis Tribe, Quinault Indian Nation, and state agencies, including RCO, WDFW, WSCC, DNR, and WSDOT, and asked each to put forward staff that would be willing to participate as needed and act as a resource through this process.

This workgroup serves in an advisory capacity to OCB staff and has guided the development of a funding support approach. Staff have looked to this workgroup to help identify criteria and best-fit practices including defining priority factors, a project ranking approach, and a proposal review process. This has allowed OCB to develop guidance on how project sponsors can request pre- and full federal application support and how those requests are received. This will maintain transparency to how and when OCB would be able to provide grant writing support to project sponsors.

Technical Resources Support Approach

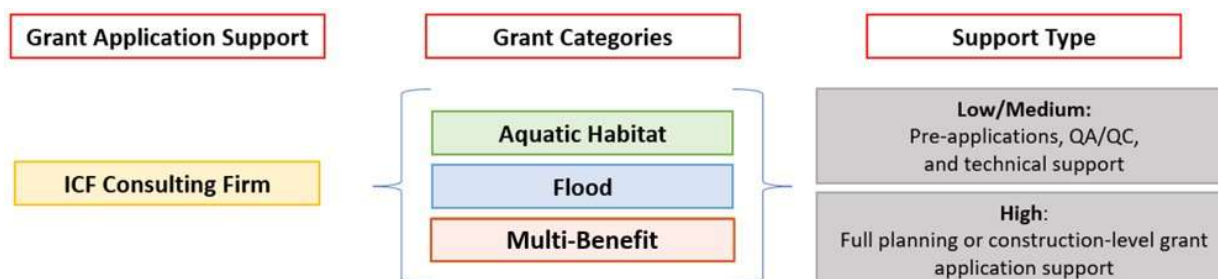
A technical resources support approach is being led by OCB staff and would supply funded grant writing support to project sponsors on a case by case, first come first serve basis. The structure that has been developed would allow ICF Consulting to provide support for federal grant applications over the next biennium; however, there is a significant cost associated with receiving full grant application support. To use available Strategy dollars most effectively toward application support for partners, OCB has split the funding equally between three grant categories. By creating flood, aquatic habitat, and multi-benefit

funding opportunities categories, it serves as the starting point for determining how consultant support is being allocated.

To ensure there are funds available for both larger, more complicated applications and smaller/medium capacity support, OCB has earmark funding for two tracks:

- **Low:** Pre-application review
- **Medium Support:** QA/QC and technical support
- **High Support:** Full support for planning or construction-level grant applications.

Federal Funding Support Structure:



OCB Support Consideration Process

Within the flood, aquatic habitat, and multi-benefit categories, the number of proposals that could be supported may vary depending on the size of the grant, the type of activities, and the level of support needed. Other factors that could influence the number of proposals supported include the level of involvement by project sponsors and their ability to complete full applications independently.

To be eligible for funded support, staff will evaluate each proposal with the following criteria:

- Alignment with the overall Strategy goals set by the Chehalis Basin Board.
- Level of effort and cost of support needed by consultants.
- Grant application competitiveness.

As opportunities are identified, project sponsors would be prompted to provide information on the project and the grant support request through a relevance questionnaire covering the questions in the table below. Once complete, the project sponsor's description of project scope/value would be reviewed by OCB staff. If it is determined to be relevant to the Strategy, project sponsors would be matched with relevant grant programs, and be required to provide a project request for information (RFI) to support a competitiveness evaluation.

Relevance Questions/Consideration Questions:

1. Eligibility: Does the project potentially qualify for a grant program?
2. OCB Strategy Alignment: Does the project advance the goals of the Chehalis Basin Strategy?
3. Level of Effort/Contractor Support: What level of contractor support is desired to prepare/submit the grant proposal?
3a. Level of Effort/Contractor Support: If you are offered a lower level of support than indicated, would you still pursue the grant funding?

3b. Level of Effort/Contractor Support: If full support is not available, would a lower level of support be helpful to allow your organization to pursue the grant funding?

Grant Competitiveness Evaluation

Once a project has passed through the relevance screening, each request would go through a competitiveness evaluation done by an OCB-led technical review committee which would include OCB staff and consultants. Competitiveness evaluation questions are shown in the table below. Scores can receive a high, medium, and low scores ranging from 0-5 points for each question (except for the evaluation criteria score, which has a larger range of 0-10 points). If a project sponsor's request receives a high competitiveness score, OCB will consult with the Advisory Group for any additional considerations related to the project (e.g., fatal flaws) and a final determination will be made by OCB.

Competitiveness Questions/Considerations Scoring:

Evaluation of published grant criteria: what percentage of available scoring criteria could this project obtain?
Local Match requirement/availability: does the grant require a match? If so, what is the status of the match?
Project benefit and impact (or future/potential impact): Does the project benefit a large service population, habitat area, and/or disadvantaged community?
Project implementation resources: Does the project team have sufficient resources to implement the project, navigate regulatory requirements, and meet grant management requirements?
Project identified through other planning efforts: Has there been significant planning and investment in project development (e.g., through a Hazard Mitigation Plan, ASRP, etc.)? Are there existing materials on the project?
Community/partnership support: Does the project have partners and stakeholders who can provide letters of support? Has outreach and stakeholder engagement occurred?

Additional Consideration

OCB recognizes there will be cases in which a proposal is put forward but does not score high enough on competitiveness that would allow for funded support at the level requested by the project sponsor. In these cases, staff would still attempt to provide technical resources that could be used by the project sponsor to develop a more competitive application independently.

Through the development of letter of support templates, project sponsors would be able to quickly modify template language to reflect specific grant information. It would also give Strategy partners an opportunity to further advocate on behalf of the project by doing targeted outreach to their respective groups. This approach would alleviate some of the burden on partner organizations that would not otherwise have the capacity to develop a letter of support.

Additional support may also include identification of basin partners that have had experience applying for specific grant opportunities that could serve as points of contact for project sponsors. This would allow project sponsors an opportunity to do independent outreach and ask questions on what made past applications successful or what could make their proposal more competitive.

As OCB learns more about the federal funding landscape and works toward gaining a clearer understanding the needs of Strategy partners, staff will provide the Board updates on the ongoing development of resources and expanding the capabilities of the Federal Funding Strategy.