

CHEHALIS BASIN BOARD MEMORANDUM

Date: April 25, 2024
To: Chehalis Basin Board
From: Cindy Malay, Program Operation Coordinator
Re: Chehalis Basin Federal Funding Strategy

Intent

This memo is intended to receive Board direction on OCB's recommended approach to securing federal funding for projects outlined in the Chehalis Basin Strategy. This memo aims to outline the rationale behind (1) OCB leading larger federal grant proposals, (2) OCB hiring of a new staff member to support funding work.

Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of continued collaboration with partners and the ongoing support by consultants to develop grant applications and provide technical expertise. These actions would be included as part of the Chehalis Basin federal funding strategy and incorporated into the Board's Long-Term Strategy.

Prior Board Direction and OCB Actions

Over the past biennium, the Board has provided direction to OCB that staff should be working toward obtaining the fullest complement of available federal funding. To support that direction, staff developed a framework that focused on finding available federal funding and provided a suite of options to partners interested in receiving grant writing and technical assistance over the 2023-25 biennium. This approach has presented limitations, as it is driven by local sponsor willingness and interest in seeking federal funding.

At the January 2024 Board meeting, OCB staff presented several actions that could be explored to bolster a funding approach that goes beyond a grassroots, sponsor led funding strategy. Board members were generally supportive of the suggestion to use a dual-track approach for federal funding. This involved a more proactive top-down approach led by the state and supplemented with the current approach with local partners. Board members also recognized that this may influence the amount of resources required to support a federal funding strategy as part of the 2025-27 budgeting process.

Proposed Change and Anticipated Benefit

State Sponsorship

OCB staff are developing an approach for the State to sponsor federal grant applications, with OCB managing successful applications.

OCB anticipates this will increase the number of Chehalis Basin Strategy work elements that receive federal funding by opening more and larger grant opportunities. It also decreases the burden of grant application on Strategy partners, many of whom hesitate to apply for funding because of their limited project management capacity. This will also allow OCB the ability to maintain a dynamic and nimble funding strategy that will include ongoing collaboration with other state and local sponsors involved in the Strategy.

Staffing Capacity

OCB will be hiring 1 FTE that will provide the capacity needed to focus on a comprehensive and tailored approach to grant application development, submission, and management.

By increasing staffing capacity, OCB will be able to become a grant sponsor, which has not been a possibility up to this point. This means that successful grant awards would be managed and distributed by OCB, and local partners would be sub-recipients. This staff position will hold stakeholder engagement events, workshops, and information sessions and will serve as coordinator between the state and local partners, allowing stakeholders to address concerns and foster a collaborative network that is crucial for success. This position will also oversee grant management and support, encouraging partners to participate in the federal grant processes, and reducing the administrative burden associated with grant funding.

Based on information and recommendations provided by ICF consulting on suitable funding opportunities available in mid-late 2024 through 2025-27, there are up to thirteen (13) grant opportunities that could provide additional funding for projects done under the Chehalis Basin Strategy (see [appendix A](#)). To be proactive and responsive to the extensive work required to establish relationships with project partners, refine bundled project opportunities, and begin application development, OCB will likely begin the hiring of this position in the summer of 2024.

Continued Actions

Continued Partner Responsibility

As part of the two-prong approach presented to the Board, staff outlined a continued need for strategy partners to also navigate the federal and state grant process independently.

While OCB will be playing a more direct role in grant development and management for the Strategy, partners will continue to be essential collaborators in the state-led application process. The expectation would be that they would need to continue to work closely with OCB and the state to identify, develop, and secure funding for projects. Partners have a crucial role in identifying potential projects within their respective areas of expertise. Staff anticipate that partners will still need to be responsible for actively engaging with the state (Ecology, WDFW, WSCC, DNR, WSDOT), Tribes, and other stakeholders and communicate their needs to ensure that the state's support aligns with their priorities. They should also be working closely with the

state to develop projects that align with the goals of the Chehalis Basin Strategy and ensure projects are eligible for federal funding opportunities.

Consultant Support

Staff have identified a continued need for dedicated funding in the 2025-27 biennium for consultant support. Support will be refined to reflect the need of the State to provide technical grant writing assistance and strategic advice on competitiveness of projects.

OCB recognizes the role that consultant support plays in federal funding application development and prioritization, ensuring that resources are allocated to applications with the highest potential for success. Currently, consultant support is characterized by ad hoc grant writing support, and primarily focused on immediate opportunities identified by project partners. Support would now include limited application support provided to local partners, and an increased consultant focus on grant application development for State-led applications. By refining the use of consultant support, resources will also be allocated more consistently and efficiently over the biennium.

Board Discussion/Direction

Overall, the proposed changes and continued actions outlined will come together in an effective strategy by increasing the likelihood of projects funding, alleviate the burden on partners, and foster ongoing collaboration. All these actions aim to streamline the funding process and enhance the Strategy's effectiveness.

The recommended approach in this memo is a significant step forward in implementation of a funding strategy. Before OCB moves to solidify actions, staff are seeking feedback and direction from the Board to determine whether this meets the expected intent or if the Board wishes to delve deeper into certain aspects, seeking more detailed information or clarification on specific areas, such as:

- The rationale behind the decision to transition towards a state-led grant application strategy and the hiring strategy to accomplish that goal.
- The expectations and level of engagement by local partners.
- The continued and refined role of consultants in supporting writing federal grant applications, providing technical expertise, and strategic advice and guidance on funding opportunities.

Appendix A

Identified Federal Grant Opportunities

- America the Beautiful Challenge
- Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program (BRIC)
- Five Star & Urban Waters Restoration Program
- Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Program
- Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)
- National Coastal Resilience Fund
- National Culvert Removal, Replacement, and Restoration Grants
- National Fish Passage Program
- Partners for Fish and Wildlife
- Restoring Fish Passage through Barrier Removal Grants
- Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience Grants
- Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program
- WaterSMART Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Program
 - Design/Construction
 - Study