Subject:	**Regional Climate Collaborative Program Round 2 Guidelines**
Reporting Period:	December 2022 – June 2023
Staff Lead:	Ena Lupine, Community Assistance for Climate Equity Program, SGC

Recommended Action

Approve the Round 2 Regional Climate Collaboratives (RCC) Program Guidelines.

Summary

The RCC Program seeks Council approval of the Round 2 RCC Program Guidelines (Guidelines). The Guidelines were refined to increase clarity, expand program accessibility, and incorporate lessons learned from the Round 1 review process. The text was simplified, reducing the guidelines page count by 10 pages.

Following Round 1, RCC Program staff released a survey and offered application debrief meetings to all Round 1 applicants. Staff received 34 survey responses and hosted 23 debrief meetings. RCC Program staff released the Draft Round 2 RCC Program Guidelines for public review in March 2023 and held four audience-specific workshops. Staff received verbal feedback on the draft guidelines in these workshops and four written public comments via email. All input was considered and integrated when feasible into the Round 2 RCC Program Guidelines.

Following Council's adoption of the Guidelines, RCC Program staff will issue a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) and initiate a competitive awards process for RCC Round 2.

Background

About the RCC Program

The RCC Program, established by Senate Bill 1072 (Leyva, 2018), is a capacity building grant program that funds communities to establish partnerships, align projects and plans with funding opportunities, achieve plan and policy readiness, and create a technical assistance network to pursue investment and implement projects. RCC funds cross-sectoral partners (Collaboratives) to conduct capacity building activities that advance both place-based and regional climate projects. The goal of the program is to strengthen local coordination, leadership, knowledge, skills, and expertise with a particular focus on increasing access to funding for the region's under-resourced communities to drive and sustain climate action.

Background on the R2 Guidelines Development Process

Through Senate Bill 170, SGC received $10 million to administer Round 2 of the RCC program, $8.5 million of which is available for Round 2 awards. The remaining funding will support a third-party technical assistance contract that will support Grantees in implementing their RCC projects.

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Guidelines Development

RCC staff released the Draft RCC Round 2 Program Guidelines in March 2023 for a 30-day public comment period. Staff also released a summary of proposed changes to help simplify and better direct respondents' review. During the public comment period, RCC staff hosted four virtual workshops, including two general audience workshops, one tribal audience workshop, and one rural audience workshop, to gather comments on the proposed guidelines. RCC staff recorded all oral comments, reviewed all written comments, and addressed the comments through edits and modifications whenever programmatically feasible to the Guidelines.

Summary of Changes

The RCC Round 2 Program Guidelines make the following changes from Round 1 of the program:

1) Creation of Funding Tracks
Round 2 establishes two funding tracks within the program. The purpose of this change is to enable more effective scoring comparisons of like projects and to increase the diversity of the scale and scope of different collaboratives funded through RCC.

- Small grants: $500,000-$999,999
- Large grants: $1,000,000-1,750,000

2) Geographic Equity within Award Decisions
The RCC enabling statute, SB 1072 (Leyva, 2018) directs SGC to, "prioritize statewide geographic diversity." The guidelines now outline a clear process to better advance geographic equity within the program. RCC program staff will recommend awards to the two top-scoring applications from each funding track. After designating funds to the four projects that meet the grant size targets, the remaining available funds will be awarded to the next highest scoring applications located in counties that have not yet received an RCC award (in either Round 1 or Round 2), regardless of award size.

3) Offering an Activity Waiver
Senate Bill 1072 also states that applicants must carry out all the required grant activities defined in the statute, "except if the council, in consultation with a collaborative, determines that an activity is unnecessary." Past applicants requested that SGC staff create a clear and transparent waiver process for Round 2 applicants who wish to request waiving a required activity for a particular reason. In response to this feedback, staff created a process in which applicants can complete an Activity Waiver Form during the Pre-Proposal phase. In the Activity Waiver Form, applicants can submit a request to exclude one eligible activity from their Full Proposal work plan. In their request, applicants must provide a strong justification for this omission, demonstrating how their proposed work plan still aligns with the intent of the program and advances RCC objectives.

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4) Application Process

Like in Round 1 of the program, RCC Round 2 will have a two-phase application process. However, in Round 2, the Pre-Proposal will no longer be optional and will be required in order to submit a Full Proposal.

5) Threshold and Scoring Criteria

The RCC Round 2 threshold criteria were simplified to increase program accessibility and remove redundancies. The removed Round 1 threshold requirements are instead reflected in the Round 2 scoring criteria. The scoring criteria was also refined for clarity and includes a section dedicated to the interview component of the program.

6) Updates to Project Area Requirements

The program maintains both a regional and place-based component for project area eligibility, with applicants determining a Region and a minimum of two Communities of Focus within that regional boundary. In Round 2, staff made modifications to the definition of each project area component.

Region: The regional definition for RCC Round 1 required that a region be between 1-8 contiguous counties. Instead of using a county scale like in Round 1, applicants can determine their own region based on shared natural, political, and built environment systems; climate risks; and/or other shared challenges or dynamics as long as the region is contiguous.

Communities of Focus: The Round 2 Guidelines increase the percentage of under-resourced communities served and increase accessibility to tribal applicants. Round 2 has two eligibility criteria for the Communities of Focus, and applicants must meet *either* of the following:

1. At least seventy-five percent (75%) of the census tracts or tribal areas identified within the Communities of Focus must meet Senate Bill 1072's definition of under-resourced:
   - Disadvantaged Communities according to CalEnviroScreen: census tracts or tribal lands identified as disadvantaged by the California Environmental Protection Agency*; or*
   - AB 1550 Low Income Communities**:** census tracts or tribal lands with median household incomes at or below 80 percent of the statewide median income or with median household incomes at or below the threshold designated as low income by the Department of Housing and Community Development's list of state income limits adopted pursuant to Section 50093 of the California Health and Safety Code; *or*
   - Department of Water Resources Disadvantaged Communities: census tracts or tribal lands with a median household income less than 80% of the statewide average.
2. At least seventy-five percent (75%) of the census tracts or tribal areas identified within the Communities of Focus must meet Senate Bill 1072's definition of under-resourced

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OR be Tribal Lands (according to the definition below) **as long as at least fifty percent (50%) of the Communities of Focus meet SB 1072's definition of under-resourced.**
- o Located in Indian Country as defined by 18 U.S. Code (USC) 1151;
- o Within the limits of a Rancheria under the jurisdiction of the United States Government; *or*
- o Held in trust by the United States for an Indian tribe or individual; *or*
- o Held by an Indian tribe or individual subject to a restriction by the United States against alienation; *or*
- o Owned by a Tribal Entity in fee; *or*
- o Held in trust for the benefit of a Tribal Entity within the state of California.

Next Steps

Upon Council approval of the RCC Round 2 Program Guidelines, the RCC Program will issue the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) and initiate a competitive awards process in July 2023. The timeline for the Round 2 funding cycle is below.

- July 6, 2023: NOFA Release
- July 2023: Application Overview Webinar and Application Workshops
- September 6, 2023: Pre-Proposals Due
- December 6, 2023: Full Proposals Due
- February 2024: Round 2 RCC Awards adopted by Council

SGC has the following application support available:

1. Office Hours: RCC staff and the technical assistance team will host weekly office hours on Wednesdays from 1 - 2pm via Zoom July 12 - September 6. Registration links are available here.

2. Consultation Calls: The technical assistance team is conducting a limited number of 30-minute consultation calls with applicants from rural, unincorporated, and tribal communities.

3. Application Webinar & Workshop Series: RCC program staff will host a webinar and multiple audience-specific application workshops July 13-July 26. Register to a webinar or workshop using the links below.

- July 13: Application Overview Webinar
- July 18: Workshop for Tribal Communities #1
- July 20: Workshop for Rural Communities
- July 25: Workshop for all Audiences
- July 26: Workshop for Tribal Communities #2

4. Full Proposal Support: Following Pre-Proposal submissions and reviews, SGC will connect applicants with a technical assistance provider to help with the Full Proposal.

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Council Recommendation

Should the Council agree with Staff's recommendation, the following motion language is suggested:

"I move that the Council approve the Regional Climate Collaborative Round 2 Program Guidelines."

Attachments

Attachment A: Regional Climate Collaboratives (RCC) Final Round 2 Program Guidelines

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