

Regional Parks and Trails System 2027 Competitive Equity Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability

Business Item 2026-143
Community Development Committee

Jessica Lee

September 8, 2026



Equity Grant Program Purpose and Background

- Provide funding to Regional Park Implementing Agencies for projects to advance equitable use of the Regional Parks and Trails System, with a focus on race, ethnicity, income, ability, age and/or national origin
- Program started in 2019 with a pilot program and \$300,000 in Council bonds- 3 projects funded
- In 2021 and 2024, parks interest earnings were added to the Council bonds for ~\$2 million each year to fund a total of 45 programming and capital projects



Ramsey County Tuj Lub courts equity grant (partial funding)

Funding for the 2027 Grant Round



- \$1,000,000 in Council bonds is available for capital projects
- \$7,000,000 in parks interest earnings is available for programming/non-capital and capital projects
 - Programming projects will be prioritized
- Agencies may submit up to four applications
 - Agencies are encouraged to partner together on projects; multi-agency applications won't count towards the individual agency limit of 4
- Applications must be a minimum of \$100,000 and a maximum of \$1,000,000

Scoring criteria from the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)

Evaluation Criteria	Points
Impact on equitable use: - The proposal clearly identifies one or more underserved populations that the project will benefit, why they were chosen, and proposed outcomes - The proposal responds to a need demonstrated through previous community engagement and/or long-range planning	20
Community partnerships: - The proposal demonstrates community involvement throughout the project by both developing new relationships and strengthening existing partnerships - The proposal demonstrates how partnerships will continue after the grant period	20
Community engagement and awareness: - The proposal demonstrates how partners and underserved populations will be engaged throughout the project and after the grant period - The proposal includes regional parks and trails system awareness building among underserved communities	20
Capacity building: - The proposal will increase the ability of the regional park implementing agencies and their partners to grow their skills in working with underserved communities - The proposal demonstrates the agency's capacity to leverage the Council's funds through non-state funds, grants, or in-kind contributions and/or the ability to continue the work after the grant period is complete	20
Programming initiatives: - The proposal describes the internal process used to identify and develop the project and it describes the agency's outreach/education staff involvement when applicable - The proposal clearly demonstrates how new programming efforts will affect underserved populations	20
Total Possible Points	100

Revised Anticipated Timeline

September 23: Bring NOFA to the Council for approval - post NOFA and open application in Fluxx shortly after

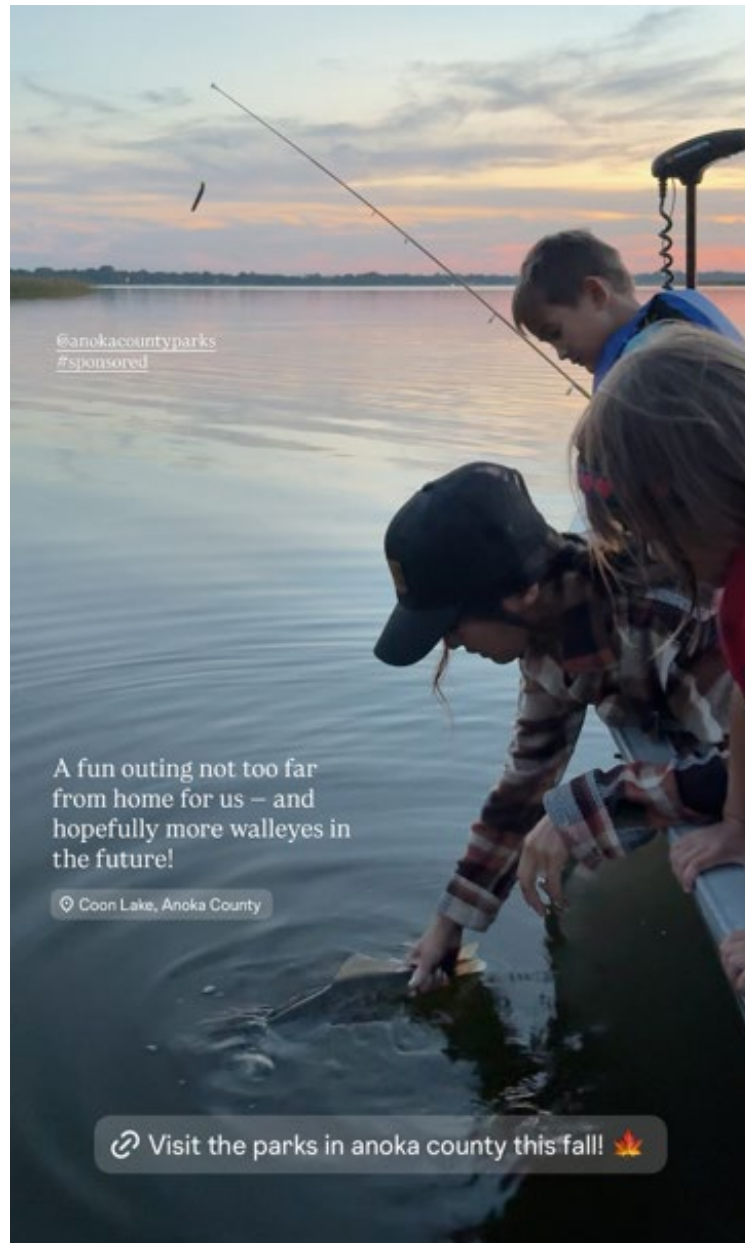
November 30: Applications due by 4 pm

Early December: Internal review

December/January: Technical review team meets to develop funding recommendations

February 2027: Bring funding recommendations to the Council

March 2027: Grant agreements sent out



Rationale for Recommendation



Saint Paul water safety program equity grant

2050 Regional Parks and Trails Policy Plan

Finance Section 8, Action 2: Improve equitable use of the Regional Parks and Trails System states that the Met Council will continue to fund and administer an equity grant program for projects explicitly aimed to strengthen equitable usage of the Regional Parks and Trails System.

Recommendation



That the Metropolitan Council authorize the 2027 Regional Parks and Trails System Competitive Equity Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability.