

**CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION**

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# W6e

**Date:** July 22, 2021

**To:** Commissioners and Interested Parties

**From:** John Ainsworth, Executive Director  
Sarah Christie, Legislative Director  
Christiane Parry, Public Education Program Manager  
Annie Kohut Frankel, Grants and Education Programs Coordinator

**Subject:** **Modifications to guidelines for WHALE TAIL® Competitive Grants.** The Executive Director recommends that the Commission approve modifications to application guidelines for WHALE TAIL® Grants Program.

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## SUMMARY OF STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Approve the following changes to the WHALE TAIL® Grant guidelines:

1. Removal of subcategories and addition of climate education as a category.
2. Change in scoring criteria of "Need" to "Purpose and Audience," and changes to the point distribution in the scoring criteria.
3. Increase in the small grant ceiling from \$12,000 to \$20,000.
4. Additional clarification and simplification of the guidelines as included in [Appendix A](#).

## I. MOTION AND RESOLUTION

### Motion:

I move that the Commission **approve** the modifications for the WHALE TAIL® Competitive Grants Program as described in the staff recommendation.

### Staff Recommendation of Approval:

Staff recommends a **YES** vote on the foregoing motion. Passage of this motion will result in authorization of Coastal Commission staff to begin using the modified guidelines when soliciting proposals in Fall 2021. The motion passes only by affirmative vote of a majority of the Commissioners present.

### Resolution to Approve the Permit:

The Commission hereby approves the newly modified guidelines for WHALE TAIL® grants as described in the staff recommendation.

## II. INTRODUCTION

The Commission's WHALE TAIL® grants offered by the Public Education Program support projects that connect children and the general public to the California coast and its watersheds through experiential education, stewardship, and outdoor experiences. A large portion of the Public Education Program's annual budget is distributed through local assistance grants to nonprofit organizations, schools, and public agencies for this purpose. The funding is awarded in two different grant making cycles through recommendations to Commissioners by the staff; some of these funds are awarded as targeted grants in the fall, and the rest of the funds are awarded in the winter through a competitive grants process. The Commission approved guidelines for the competitive grants program in 1998 and approved modifications in 2009, 2013, 2017, and 2018.

In 2020, Justice Outside (formerly Youth Outside) was engaged to help assess the WHALE TAIL® grants outreach and application process to improve its accessibility for applicants and alignment with program goals of equity and inclusion. Modifications to the grant guidelines stemming from this work with Justice Outside are described below.

## III. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WHALE TAIL® GRANT GUIDELINES

These modifications are a concerted effort to clarify and simplify instructions and criteria for applicants. Major changes are highlighted below, and the entire application packet is included as [Appendix A](#).

## Category Changes

“Special subcategories” are removed since the distinction between subcategories and categories was confusing. Climate change-related projects move from “special subcategory” to “category” and the special subcategory for organizations with annual budgets of \$500,000 or less is deleted. This budget-related category was an effort to encourage community-based organizations to apply; the guidelines now address this directly. Categories are described in the modified guidelines as follows:

**Categories of Grants:** The WHALE TAIL® Grants Program will fund projects that fall into one or more of the following four categories: 1) youth education programs, 2) programs for educating the general public, 3) climate change education and stewardship, 4) shoreline cleanup and enhancement programs (such as Adopt-A-Beach®). We strongly encourage projects that engage communities that have historically received fewer opportunities for coastal and marine education and stewardship, and applicant organizations based in and composed of the communities they are engaging.

## Scoring Criteria Changes

There are several modifications in the scoring criteria. Language is adjusted throughout to be more explicit as to what constitutes a strong proposal. Also, the scoring category previously described as “Need” is changed to “Purpose and Audience.” Applicants are invited to address a particular “issue, interest, or need” and explain how it was identified for their proposed project audience. This provides latitude for a range of project purposes connected to community priorities and allows for expressing a project purpose using positive terms. Point allocations are adjusted slightly to pull some of the points previously in the Project Concept category into the new Purpose and Audience category. See below for the modified Criteria:

### **CRITERIA FOR SELECTING GRANT RECIPIENTS (out of 100 points)**

#### **1. Educational Impact and/or Environmental Improvement (25 points):**

Strong proposals will demonstrate educational impact featuring the marine or coastal environment and/or improvement of coastal or marine habitats through community involvement. Strong proposals may include multiple methods and pathways such as experiential, hands-on learning and stewardship; longer and/or repeated experiences with opportunities for reflection; age-appropriate content and delivery; long-term positive impact (which might stem from educational outcomes, or aspects such as leadership development opportunities or family involvement); and/or strong evidence for ecological need and projected improvement.

**2. Purpose and Audience (25 points):** Projects will be assessed on the degree to which they are connected to a specific issue, interest, and/or need (educational, ecological, social, cultural, etc.). Proposals should explain the issue, interest, and/or need, and how it was identified for the project audience. Strong proposals will engage communities that have historically received fewer

marine education and stewardship opportunities, such as communities with low incomes; Black communities; Indigenous communities; communities of color; speakers of languages other than English; people with disabilities; foster and transition age youth; LGBTQIA+ youth; and residents of rural and/or inland areas.

**3. Project Concept (20 points):** Strong proposals will demonstrate that the project is relevant for the identified community and will have a reasonable budget that is clearly connected to the project goals. Projects should be ecologically responsible. The degree to which a project could potentially be expanded or continued after the grant ends, build organizational capacity, build lasting collaborations, and/or create useful tools for others in the field will be considered, as will whether it uses new or creative approaches.

**4. Proposal Content and Project Implementation (30 points):** Proposals should demonstrate that the concept has been fully thought out and developed into a feasible project with clear, realistic goals and objectives; a plan for reaching the intended audience; a workable project design; a clear plan for implementation; and appropriate staffing. The proposal should explain how the organization and/or staff is particularly suited to work with the audience of this project. A plan for tracking and assessing the project's success should be included, as should detailed and accurate cost information. A strong proposal will demonstrate how the project objectives and goals will be successfully achieved. All requested elements of the application packet, as applicable, should be included in the proposal.

### **Other Changes**

With a maximum grant request of \$50,000, small grants up to \$20,000 must receive at least 25% of the available funding during a competitive grants round. The small grant amount was increased from \$12,000.

Organizations that are fiscally sponsored (rather than having their own nonprofit status) have always been eligible for WHALE TAIL® grants, but the new guidelines make that explicit. Many small, community-based organizations are projects of a nonprofit fiscal sponsor, so this change will more clearly welcome them to apply. California Native American Tribes are also now explicitly highlighted as eligible to apply.

Other changes include accepting applications by email for the first time this year and allowing food outside of overnight trips (for example, snacks during a volunteer workday or lunch during a field trip) as allowable expenses for grant funds. These changes will reduce burdens on applicant organizations.

The motion can be found on page 2 of this staff report.