

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT PROGRAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

September 2022

Eligibility Criteria for Award

Q: Will you consider applications from organizations or people that are not located in San Francisco but for projects on a property within San Francisco?

A: Yes. We will consider applications for any property that is connected to the SFPUC system.

Q: Is this program exclusively for SF residents and businesses or does this also apply to other Bay Area counties?

A: This grant program is exclusive to San Francisco properties.

Q: Can individuals or organizations submit multiple applications and receive multiple grants?

A: Yes, applicants can submit multiple applications for separate projects on separate project sites. A grantee may be awarded multiple grants for different project sites, pending eligibility and funding availability.

Q: Can adjacent properties on separate parcels be submitted as a single project?

A: Adjacent properties that collectively manage stormwater under a single project concept may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Please contact the grant administrator to discuss the concept before proceeding with the grant application process.

Q: Can a single applicant bundle sites if all projects sites are eligible?

A: That is something we will be happy to consider. Please send the team an email about why it might be best to bundle them rather than submit separately, and we will discuss with the City Attorney and get back to you.

Q: Does the grant needs to be for a standalone project or can it be part of a larger project?

A: It can be part of a larger project but only green infrastructure elements of the project are eligible for the grant.

Q: Can an entity, such as a HOA, apply for a grant by managing stormwater from multiple rooftops, driveways and roadways?

A: Yes, however the legal property owner of both the location of the green infrastructure facility and the associated drainage areas must be willing to sign the Grant Agreement.

Q: Does the Green Infrastructure Grant Program fund projects in the public right-of-way?

A: The Green Infrastructure Grant Program is currently intended for on-parcel retrofit projects and is not intended for right-of-way improvements. Projects that are strictly in the right-of-way with no connection to a parcel will not likely be eligible for funding. There are some situations in which parcel-based improvements could expand into the right-of-way or receive stormwater runoff from the public right-of-way. However, the project must be anchored on a parcel and a property owner must agree to maintain all project elements over the course of the 20-year Grant Agreement. The GI Grant Program may explore future changes to the grant program that would allow for more right-of-way work, but those changes will not be effective for the Fall 2022 application cycle. The SFPUC's Watershed Stewardship Grant Program offers funding for community-based projects in the public right-of-way.

Q: Are Sunnydale and parts of Visitacion Valley a Separate Storm Sewer Area?

A: Sunnydale and Visitacion Valley are within our combined sewer system.

Q: Are sites on Recreation and Parks Department property eligible for this grant?

A: Yes, as long as they connect to an SFPUC owned or operated sewer system.

Q: Is PUC land eligible for this program?

A: We would be happy to explore the opportunity. If there is a specific SFPUC parcel with 0.5 acre of impervious area, we are willing to take a look.

Q: Are churches/convents eligible for this opportunity?

A: Absolutely, any property that meets the eligibility criteria which is based on the 0.5 acre impervious size and connected to an SFPUC owned or operated sewer system.

Q: If you're an active grantee, can you still apply for another project site?

A: Yes, as long as you continue to meet the minimum program eligibility requirement for being in good standing in all active GI Grant projects.

Q: Can you define "on-parcel"?

A: At least a portion of your project needs to be located on a physical parcel or real property in San Francisco. This is because the maintenance agreement and deed restriction must be tied to a property.

Q: Can we use a sloped concrete area as part of our DMA if we ensure the runoff goes directly into a newly constructed rain garden?

A: Yes. This would count towards DMA if directed to a green infrastructure facility.

Q: We are looking for funding for a Seed Laboratory that would grow plants for green infrastructure in SF. Is that an eligible project?

A: It might be! Will the project install green infrastructure that can manage at least 0.5 acres of impervious surface? If you are unsure - you can email us at gigrants@sfgwater.org to discuss your specific project.

Q: Is permeable pavement ADA compliant? Can you use it for wheelchair paths

A: Yes, there are types of permeable pavement that are ADA compliant and can be used for paths.

Relationship to Other SFPUC Grants and Policies

Q: How is this program different than the Urban Watershed Stewardship Grant Program?

A: The UWSG Program provides funding to non-profits to fund stormwater management projects in public spaces. The maximum grant amount is \$100,000 and it does not have a minimum performance requirement. More information can be found about this grant, and other SFPUC grants at sfpuc.org/programs/grants.

Q: Can an applicant apply and be awarded different SFPUC grants?

A: Yes, receiving a green infrastructure grant does not prohibit award of other SFPUC grants, listed here: sfpuc.org/programs/grants.

Schedule and Deadlines

Q: Are there any schedule limits on when construction must start after award?

A: Yes, construction must start within two years from the date of signing the Grant Agreement. Applications for the Fall 2022 cycle must begin construction by June 2022.

Q: Are there any restrictions on the construction duration?

A: No, there are not any limits on the construction duration since it depends on project size and complexity. However, grantees will be responsible for completing the construction of the project within the timeframe specified at time of application. Any grant extensions must be requested in writing and approved by the grant administrator.

Q: When is the next round of applications due if we do not make October 31st?

A: We anticipate the next application cycle to be Fall 2022. However, if there are grant funds remaining following the Fall 2022 application cycle, we may hold a Spring 2022 cycle. This will depend on program resources and would be announced in early 2022.

Maintenance and Inspection

Q: How will the 20-year Grant Agreement be enforced if the grant manager (such as a non-profit) goes away?

A: The property owner is responsible for maintenance and must sign the agreement.

Q: Is the 20-year Grant Agreement an easement?

A: No. The Green Infrastructure Grant Agreement includes a Declaration of Deed Restriction ensuring the 20 years of maintenance travels with the property. It does not provide any ownership to the SFPUC.

Q: In a multi-owner complex or neighborhood, who would be the project owner responsible for maintenance?

A: The legal property owner of both the location of the green infrastructure facility and the associated drainage areas are responsible for maintenance. If there is more than one legal owner, all owners must sign the Grant Agreement.

Q: What happens to maintenance of the BMP after 20-years?

A: The grant obligation is considered fulfilled. The owner may continue to maintain, rehabilitate or remove the infrastructure at that time.

Q: How much does 20-years of maintenance cost?

A: Maintenance costs will vary by several factors including BMP type and size, location, and site usage.

Q: Will SFPUC review the installation/implementation of the GI at the end of construction, or at any point during the 20 year maintenance period?

A: Yes, we will have periodic inspections during construction and at the completion of construction. And we will also have periodic inspections during the 20 year maintenance period.

Q: Since the GI Grant does not cover ongoing maintenance costs, are there other resources available to assist property owners and community members in meeting the 20-year maintenance requirement?

A: Yes! The SFPUC offers free Maintenance Training to property owners and community members that can be tailored to your individual project's maintenance needs. There are lots of ways projects can look to reduce overall maintenance requirements through the project design, such as grouping green infrastructure with other planned improvements and selecting specific GI-types that work best with the type of maintenance resources available for a site. In addition, we will also be able to share estimated future Stormwater Runoff Charge credits, which will offer a bill reduction to our current and future Grantees for managing stormwater runoff. This future bill credit represents an ongoing cost savings that can contribute towards the cost of maintenance.

Grant Funding (What project elements can be funded)

Q: Can every project get the maximum grant amount per impervious acre managed? How do you determine how much you will award each project?

A: The grant amount each project receives is dependent on the amount of impervious surface it can manage AND the concept design and corresponding budget. BMP type, soil permeability, and site conditions all impact project costs. Your requested budget will be reviewed for consistency with your concept design and industry standard costs for San Francisco.

Q: Is there any “challenge” component of the grant, or are all funds covered?

A: The grant is designed to cover the full cost of designing and constructing green infrastructure. Other site improvements not related to the green infrastructure would not be covered.

Q: Is the cost of ongoing maintenance eligible for grant funding?

A: No, ongoing maintenance is not eligible for grant funding. It is the responsibility of the property owner.

Q: Is educational programming or training an eligible cost?

A: Ongoing programming and training are not eligible costs. However, educational signage is eligible for grant funding.

Q: Are there other grants to help pay for ineligible costs, such as benches?

A: Yes, applicants are encouraged to look into other programs outside of the SFPUC to support the delivery of a successful project.

Q: Will the grant cover the cost of required permits and environmental reviews?

A: Yes, as all construction permits and environmental review costs are eligible soft cost expenses. However, no more than 20% of the total grant amount may be used for non-construction activities.

Q: Would the cost of replacement plants be reimbursed? Could it be a line item in the grant application for funding?

A: No. Replacement of plants is considered an ongoing maintenance cost and is the responsibility of the property owner.

Q: What assistance is available if there are performance issues after the project is built?

A: The property owner is responsible for ensuring the system is performing for the duration of the grant. However, SFPUC staff will conduct inspections throughout the grant duration and will be available to provide technical assistance if required.

Q: Is the limit for the 'ask' linked to the organization's income or solely based on the cost of the project?

A: The grant is a performance-based award system. A person or organization's income does not factor into the award.

Q: Is there a matching funds requirement?

A: No, there is no match requirement for this program. However, projects typically include many nongreen infrastructure elements (benches, play equipment, public amenities) that cannot be funded through this grant.

Q. I just want to confirm that the 10% Grantees front is then reimbursed in the final retention. IF all conditions are met. Is that correct?

A: Correct – the full grant amount will be paid out with the final payment once all post-construction requirements are met.

Stormwater Management Ordinance Coordination

Q: Can a project that is required to build green infrastructure to comply with the Stormwater Management Ordinance apply for grant?

A: The Green Infrastructure Grant Program is intended for retrofit projects and cannot be used to pay for compliance with the Stormwater Management Ordinance (SMO). Therefore, new development projects that trigger the SMO are not eligible for grant funds.

However, the SFPUC may consider, on a case-by-case basis, funding stormwater management systems (green infrastructure) that are proposed as a separate and fully independent system that manages an otherwise unmanaged portion of a Project with documented SMO compliance. In other words, the proposed system must be a standalone project that able to be installed or removed without affecting the project's stormwater management systems required for SMO compliance.

For projects complying with the SMO, the following conditions must be met to be eligible for a GI Grant:

1. The proposed green infrastructure must be an entirely separate and fully independent system ("Addition") that manages an otherwise unmanaged portion of a project with documented SMO compliance ("Baseline") and
2. The separately managed Addition to a project site must not be connected to, or dependent on, a green infrastructure facility required for Baseline SMO compliance and
3. The Project must receive Preliminary SCP approval for the corresponding Baseline stormwater management system before a GI Grant can be awarded.

Co-benefit Opportunities

Q: Can you expand on why environmental justice areas are considered a co-benefit?

A: The mission of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) is to provide our customers with high quality, efficient, and reliable water, power and wastewater services in a manner that is inclusive of environmental and community interests and that sustains the resources entrusted to our care. As part of the agency's core mission, the SFPUC is proud to be the first public utility in the nation to adopt an Environmental Justice Policy (the "EJ Policy" 200) and a Community Benefits Policy (the "CB Policy" 2011) which seek to ensure the inclusion of environmental and community interests by being a good neighbor to all whose lives or neighborhoods are directly affected by our water, wastewater, and power operations, programs or policies. By supporting projects in these communities, the grant program provides critical investments in our infrastructure while providing community benefits for the people and places in need.

Q: How are EJ areas defined?

A: The GI Grant Program Map uses the SF Environmental Justice Communities developed by SF Planning as part of the Environmental Justice Framework in 2022. The Environmental Justice Communities Map (EJ Communities Map) describes areas of San Francisco that have higher pollution and are predominately low-income. This map is based on CalEnviroScreen, a tool created by CalEPA & OEHHA that maps California communities that are most affected by pollution and other health risks. The EJ Communities Map includes additional local data on pollution and demographics. The draft EJ Communities Map was released in December 2020. The map received public feedback for refinement, through a community engagement process, and is expected to be finalized in Fall 2022. Environmental Justice Communities (EJ Communities), in red, are defined as the areas with the top 30% of cumulative environmental and socioeconomic vulnerability across the city.

Q: Is there a public access requirement for private property projects?

A: Public access is not required, but highly encouraged as a co-benefit in the grant award process.

Q: Is it okay to show mixed use zones (nature play in conjunction with a rain garden/ lined bioretention) in our stormwater management concepts, such as what was found at Lafayette Elementary? Also have you seen any issues with this at school projects where the rain gardens/ bioretention areas are subjected to compaction from play?

A: Absolutely we encourage combination of stormwater management, education and play. The technical team would coordinate during design to ensure overcompaction would not be a risk in these types of green infrastructure facilities. For example the facility at Lafayette is a dry creek bed that is resilient to compaction.

Q: How can we begin to calculate how much water (per unit) and dollars will be saved by putting in such infrastructure?

A: If your project proposes rainwater harvesting, you can use SFPUC's current rates for water to estimate the cost savings of the harvested rainwater. Soon, we will also be able to share estimated future Stormwater Runoff Charge credits, so please reach out to us if you would like a planning-level bill estimate.

Applicant Team

Q: Can the Project Manager be the Project Engineer?

A: Yes, any member of the project team can serve as the Project Manager.

Q: For licensed professionals - is it either an engineer or a landscape architect?

A: Correct, engineer or landscape architect.

Q: Are contractors required to have GI experience?

A: No. However, someone on the grant team must have GI experience. There is also contractor training available for free through the SFPUC and is strongly encouraged.

Q: Who is eligible to be lead applicant? Must they be a 503(c)?

A: Anyone can be the designated applicant for the project as long as the team meets the experience requirements. They do not need to be a 503(c), but please note grants are taxable income to private for-profit entities.

Q: If the grantee is not the property owner, do they also have to sign the maintenance agreement?

A: Yes, both the grantee and the property owner will need to co-sign the agreement. Only the property owner will sign the Deed Restriction and be responsible for ongoing maintenance.

Q: Is there a designer we can work with to show the suggested improvements?

A: We have a list of green infrastructure vendors that provide design and construction services on our website available here: www.sfpuc.org/gigrants.

Q: Are applicants allowed to use vendors not on the GI vendor list?

A: Yes! The list is an informational resource only and is intended to help grantees identify potential resources. The SFPUC in no way endorses or requires the use of any vendors identified on the list.

Q: I'm a contractor that is interested in working with a property owner. How do I identify a property owner to work with and when should I reach out to SFPUC for technical assistance?

A: We recommend identifying large properties in San Francisco with at least 0.5 acres of impervious surface and reaching out to land owners directly. You can also use our Program Map to measure areas and view high priority Environmental Justice Communities, soil conditions, and high priority areas for Heat and Flood Resilience. After you have established a contact with the land owner, please feel welcome to reach out to the GI Grants Technical Assistance Team to schedule a site visit or Green Infrastructure Opportunities Assessment.

Q: Can a grant team include a City agency like SF Planning or DPW?

A: Yes. We have had previous grant projects with RPD and SFUSD.

Application Assistance

Q: What application assistance do project teams have access to?

A: The SFPUC has a technical assistance program that can help applicants understand the stormwater opportunities on their site through site visits and in-person meetings. However, applicants will be responsible for assembling their grant teams, creating the concept designs and applying for the grant.

Q: What would be entailed in a site visit prior to application?

A: Members from the SFPUC technical team will meet potential project teams onsite to evaluate stormwater management opportunities and constraints. Technical teams can help identify potential drainage management areas, recommend BMP types, and answer any questions that come up during the site visit.

Q: Are webinar presentations recorded and available online?

A: Yes, webinar recordings, the Guidebook, Application, grant agreement, and example projects are available at the Green Infrastructure Grant Program web page.

Q: For submission, is it allowable to email a download link (Dropbox, WeTransfer, etc.) if the file size is larger than 10MB?

A: If you think it will not fit in an email or two, you can email gigrants@sfgwater.org and request a link to a fileshare that the PUC hosts.
