

TAHOE FOR ALL GRANT PROGRAM

Background

Although Lake Tahoe is a world-class outdoor recreation destination, many people face economic, social, or physical barriers to accessing and enjoying its recreational opportunities. Access to the outdoors is distributed unequally; race, income, and physical ability, among other barriers, often determine access. California's Outdoors for All initiative acknowledges these inequities and focuses on expanding equitable access to parks and nature through investments in outdoor recreation infrastructure and programming that fosters belonging and connection. The California Tahoe Conservancy's (Conservancy) 2024-2029 Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) recognizes access to the outdoors as a fundamental right and a cornerstone of physical and mental health and calls for the Conservancy to reduce barriers that limit access to public lands for communities facing the greatest inequities.

The Tahoe for All Grant Program (Program) will advance the Outdoors for All initiative and fulfill the commitments of the Strategic Plan by providing grants for projects that expand access for historically underserved and underrepresented communities to enjoy Lake Tahoe and its surrounding public lands. The ability to experience the Lake Tahoe Basin (Basin) and its incredible recreational opportunities without fear of physical barriers, feelings of not belonging, or financial challenges is crucial. With such experiences, individuals can form lifelong connections with the Basin, inspiring stewardship and improving health and wellbeing.

In 2022 and 2023, the Conservancy successfully implemented two pilot funding rounds, awarding a total of \$858,000 to eight projects led by nonprofit and local government organizations. These grants aimed to improve equitable access to Lake Tahoe's beaches, trails, and mountains. Based on the Conservancy Board's recommendations and discussion during those rounds, staff has been working to formalize the Program. In addition, staff has been strengthening relationships with grant recipients and community-based organizations to provide context about the Program's benefits and identify areas for improvement. The pilot funding rounds and ongoing grant management has provided valuable insights to shape key components of the Program. The Conservancy is now committing \$100,000 of Lake Tahoe License Plate funding annually for the Program. Proposition 4 may provide another funding source for the Program.

History of Guidelines

In 1986, the Conservancy established the Recreation and Public Access Program and developed program guidelines that defined the focus of the program and the Conservancy's work. These guidelines established grant application and funding processes for planning, site improvement, and land acquisition projects, and were updated in 1992 and 2009. In 2019, the Board adopted agency-wide, consolidated grant guidelines, which apply to grants for all Conservancy programs and funding sources. The Conservancy uses these grant guidelines to manage and administer Conservancy grants (Conservancy Grant Guidelines). With ongoing funding established and two years of research and pilot projects shaping the Program, there is a need to formalize the Program by incorporating a more detailed program description into the existing Conservancy Grant Guidelines.

Components of the Program

The Conservancy's intention is to support programs and projects that provide positive and inclusive outdoor experiences in the Basin for communities that face the greatest barriers, defined as "priority communities" in the Tahoe for All Grant Program Description (TFA Description). Additionally, the Conservancy will consider grants for infrastructure improvements or other capital projects that reduce barriers for priority communities.

The Conservancy intends for the Program to be ongoing. Staff will develop evaluation criteria, such as how projects reduce barriers for and serve priority communities, to assess grant applications and provide transparency for prospective grantees.

1. TFA Description: Once developed, the TFA Description will be the guiding document for the Program. Staff recommends that it define Program goals, objectives, priority communities, eligibility criteria, funding priorities, and eligible and ineligible costs. The TFA Description will serve as a tool for soliciting quality projects and ensuring that Program funding goals are communicated clearly on outreach materials and on [grants.ca.gov](https://www.grants.ca.gov). The TFA Description will help the Conservancy solicit projects from outside the Basin and serve more Californians. A proposed outline of the TFA Description is included as Attachment 2 for the Board's review and feedback.
2. Priority Communities: Multiple plans, initiatives, and policies helped staff identify priority communities the Program may serve. Staff relied on the Conservancy's Racial Equity Action Plan, the Governor's executive order strengthening the State's commitment to a California for All, the Outdoors for All initiative, and Proposition 4. The State recognizes the need to focus on California communities that have historically been underserved and marginalized. Such communities have been disproportionately impacted from natural resource exploitation, economic disinvestment, under-investment, and social and political disenfranchisement. Based on this guidance, staff recommends that the

Program primarily support programs and projects that reduce barriers to accessing the Basin.

Priority communities served by the Program could include, but are not limited to: people of color; people with physical, cognitive, or emotional disabilities; low-income individuals or households; English as an Additional Language learners, California Native American communities, rural communities, foster youth, and other historically excluded communities who face societal challenges or barriers to accessing and enjoying Lake Tahoe and the surrounding public lands.

3. Advisory Committee: During public comment when the Board considered authorizing the first pilot grant round, a proposed grantee suggested that the Conservancy establish an advisory committee for the Program. Conservancy staff recognizes the potential value of an advisory committee to support the Program's goals. An advisory committee would help ensure that Program goals and funding align with the needs of the communities it aims to serve. The advisory committee could provide guidance to Conservancy staff on reviewing and scoring applications, as well as offer input to ensure the Program effectively addresses the most pressing needs of priority communities.
4. Funding Announcement: The funding announcement will be a flexible document reflecting updates and changes based on funding and feedback from the advisory committee, previous grantees, funding source requirements, and Conservancy staff to ensure an impactful and equitable Program. It will include the amount of funding available, application instructions and deadlines, Conservancy staff contact information, proposal scoring criteria, and grant agreement timelines.

Examples of projects funded during the pilot grant rounds, and the types of projects that could continue to be funded, are:

- Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC): ARC is an environmental education nonprofit focused on facilitating transformational opportunities for rural, low-income, and English Learner high school students. The Conservancy's \$100,000 grant supported a multi-year program consisting of cohorts of 12-14 mostly Hispanic and low-income North Tahoe High School students. The program includes several elements: monthly outdoor excursions, one-on-one mentoring, English language instruction, a 34-day immersive summer backpacking course, environmental education, wilderness first aid training, poetry writing, and a student-led outdoor leadership day for middle school youth.
- Lake Tahoe Waterman Foundation (Tahoe Waterman): Tahoe Waterman seeks to make meaningful impacts in the lives of under-resourced youth, people confronting physical disabilities, and those facing mental health challenges

through paddling experiences on Lake Tahoe. The Conservancy's \$84,000 grant supported scholarships for paddle-based summer camps for low-income youth, individual and group paddle experiences for people with disabilities, and rental of adaptive nonmotorized watercraft.

Next Steps and Anticipated Timeline

1. Seek input from the public, past grantees, the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, and the Board (March – May 2025)
2. Staff anticipates returning to the Board for further discussion later this year.
3. Advertise, recruit, and select advisory committee members and conduct outreach to potential grant applicants (fall 2025)
4. Announce available funding, solicit proposals, score grant applications, and prepare recommendations for Board consideration (winter 2025)
5. Present the first round of recommended grants to the Board (spring 2026)

List of Attachments

Attachment 1 – Board Member Perspectives on Tahoe for All Grant Program Description

Attachment 2 – Proposed Outline for the Tahoe for All Grant Program Description

Conservancy Staff Contact

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