



Santa Cruz County Measure Q Citizens Oversight Advisory Board



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PRELIMINARY GRANT FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FY 25-26 MEASURE Q GRANT PROGRAM

Recommended Action

1. Accept and file report on preliminary grant funding recommendations for the FY 25-26 Measure Q Grant Program,
2. Direct staff to return to the Citizens Oversight Advisory Board on May 27, 2026, with final grant funding recommendations which incorporate community and COAB feedback.

Executive Summary

This report presents preliminary staff recommendations and scoring results for the FY25-26 Measure Q Grant Program cycle. Following close of the application period on March 13, staff completed an initial compliance review and coordinated evaluation of 53 complete applications across internal and external reviewers using the grant scoring system previously approved by the COAB and Board of Supervisors.

Three alternative funding scenarios are presented for COAB consideration, each scenario reflecting different values that could inform final award recommendations among top scoring projects. Staff will use COAB input received at this meeting to inform final recommendations presented at the May 27 COAB meeting, ahead of final approval by the Board of Supervisors on June 9.

During this inaugural cycle of a newly established grant program, staff are committed to continuous improvement and will return to the COAB in August with a formal evaluation of the program's first cycle, including lessons learned and proposed refinements for future grant cycles.

Discussion

1. Program Overview & Application Summary

The Measure Q Grant Program allocates approximately \$2.5 million annually, equal to 40% of tax measure revenue, through a competitive grant program supporting community projects advancing water quality, wildfire resilience, habitat protection, and equitable parks access in Santa Cruz County. In the program's inaugural cycle, accumulated interest and administrative cost savings have increased the total grant program budget to \$2,740,000, highlighting an ongoing opportunity to increase program reach through responsible fiscal management.

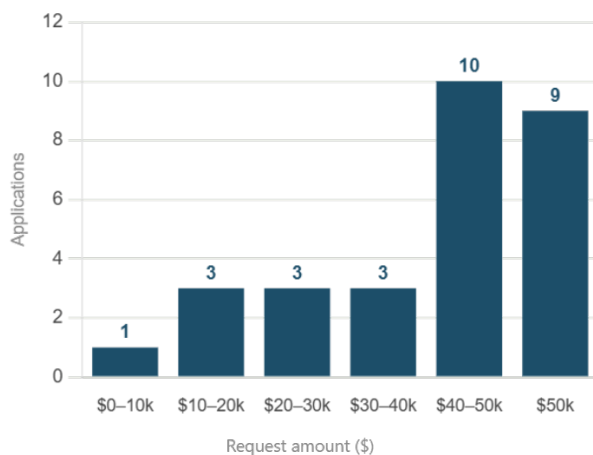
The table below summarizes key milestones in the evaluation process from application close through final Board of Supervisors approval.

Milestone	Date	Status / Notes
Application close	March 13	Complete. 54 applications received.
Initial completeness review by County staff; request for information (RFI) process	March 15 – March 22	Complete. 1 application deemed incomplete.
Project scoring by internal and external evaluators	March 15 – April 14	Complete. 53 applications scored, 1 internal and 1 external review per application.
Synthesis of scoring results; development of alternative funding scenarios	April 14 – April 22	Complete. Top 10 scoring projects in each tier considered.
Publication of preliminary funding recommendations / May 6 COAB staff report	April 24	Complete.
May COAB Meeting #1 – Preliminary funding recommendations	May 6	Today.
Incorporation of May 6 feedback; revision of funding recommendations	May 6 – May 22	Pending.
Publication of final funding recommendations / May 22 COAB staff report	May 22	Pending.
May COAB Meeting #2 – Approve final funding recommendations	May 27	Pending.
Board of Supervisors – Approval of grant funding recommendations	June 9	Pending.

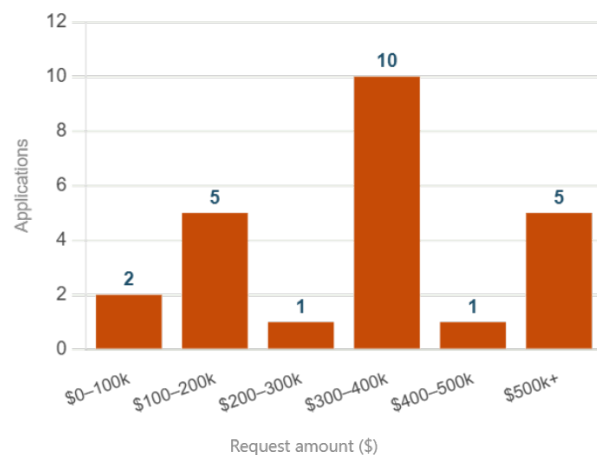
Staff extended the application period by 7 calendar days in response to applicant questions surrounding grant program guidelines and technical issues with the application portal that prevented some users from saving their work. The extension of the application period shortened the evaluation window by a week and a half; despite this constraint, staff and external evaluators completed scoring by April 14, with each complete application receiving 1 internal and 1 external score. Staff contacted all applicants, including those who experienced portal issues, and confirmed that affected applications were successfully resubmitted prior to closing.

A total of 53 complete applications were received following application period close on March 13: 29 Tier 1 applications (Community Catalyst, \$5K–\$50K) requesting \$1,137,484, and 24 Tier 2 applications (Community Impact, \$50K–\$500K) requesting \$7,754,593, for a combined total of \$8,892,077 and a demand ratio of approximately 3.3 to 1. One additional application was deemed incomplete following staff review; the applicant was unresponsive to a request for information and was not advanced to evaluation.

TIER 1 — COMMUNITY CATALYST (N=29)

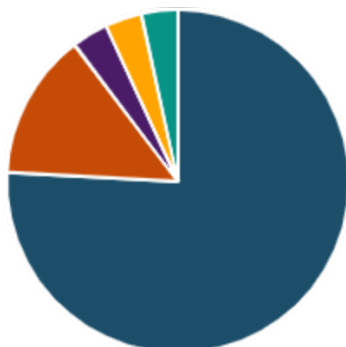


TIER 2 — COMMUNITY IMPACT (N=24)



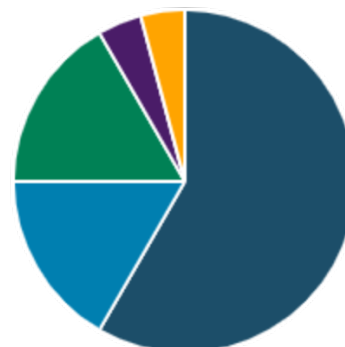
TIER 1 — COMMUNITY CATALYST (N=29)

Nonprofit — 22 Fire — 4 Academia — 1
 County — 1 Tribal — 1



TIER 2 — COMMUNITY IMPACT (N=24)

Nonprofit — 14 City — 4 Special District — 4
 Academia — 1 County — 1



Nonprofit applicants dominated both tiers, comprising 76% of Tier 1 and 58% of Tier 2 applicants. Tier 2 showed greater institutional diversity, with cities and special districts representing a significant share. Tier 1 requests clustered at the \$50,000 ceiling, reflecting strong demand at the upper request limit; Tier 2 requests were more variably spread, but concentrated in the \$300,000–\$500,000 range.

Set-Aside Allocations

Tier 2 Community Impact Grants incorporate two dedicated funding set-asides mandated by Chapter 4.65 of the Santa Cruz County Code: at least \$600,000 for projects serving San Vicente Redwoods and at least \$600,000 for up to three grants benefitting Pajaro Valley residents.

Of the 5 Pajaro Valley set-aside projects submitted, 3 applicants submitted under both the general Tier 2 and set-aside categories. For the purposes of scoring and scenario development, these were treated as single applications; staff retained flexibility to allocate awards into either the general or Pajaro Valley set-aside categories depending on the scenario, with the understanding that the intent of this language was to create a “floor” of investment to the Pajaro Valley and not a ceiling. Future improvements to program guidance will seek to clarify the application and evaluation process for projects eligible under the Pajaro Valley set-aside to reduce duplication and applicant confusion.

Three applications were received for the San Vicente Redwoods (SVR) set-aside totaling \$600,000, equal to the statutory minimum allocation. All three projects were reviewed for completeness and are included in the award recommendations. Because requests did not exceed the minimum, competitive scoring was not applied. If future cycles receive requests exceeding \$600,000, scoring will be used to guide selection.

2. Evaluation Process & Decision-Making Framework

The COAB and Board of Supervisors previously approved scoring criteria for Tier 1 and Tier 2 grants, summarized below. The approved guidelines established broad scoring categories and point ranges but did not include detailed guidance for evaluators. To improve inter-rater consistency, staff developed supplemental scoring calibration guidance (Attachment B) defining score bands within each category with concrete criteria used across internal and external evaluators. Staff will return in August or September with

an evaluation of the calibration guidance and recommendations for improvement ahead of the next grant cycle.

Tier 1 – Community Catalyst (100 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alignment with Measure Q Vision Plan – 40 pts• Community Benefit – 30 pts• Feasibility – 20 pts• Innovation or Capacity – 10 pts• Bonus (optional) – up to 5 pts
Tier 2 – Community Impact (100 points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alignment with Measure Q Vision Plan – 25 pts• Community Benefit – 20 pts• Wildlife and Environmental Benefit – 15 pts• Project Feasibility and Readiness – 15 pts• Partnerships and Collaboration – 10 pts• Budget, Cost-Effectiveness and Leveraging – 10 pts• Long-term Maintenance and Monitoring – 5 pts• Bonus (optional) – up to 5 pts

The evaluation team consisted of 2 internal County staff reviewers and 2 external evaluators. One internal and one external score was assigned to each Tier 1 and Tier 2 application. Staff estimated median review time of 2–3 hours per Tier 2 application and 1–2 hours per Tier 1 application.

Each complete application received one internal and one external score. Full scoring details are available in Attachment C. Patterns in score variance across the application pool point to areas where stronger applicant guidance or revisions to the scoring criteria may improve consistency and utility of scoring criteria in future cycles.

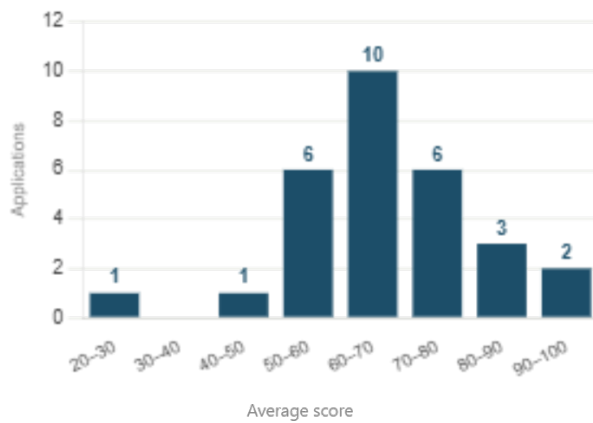
Possible sources of grant evaluation score variance include:

- **Rubric interpretation** – areas where guidance left room for judgment or subjective interpretation produced more divergent scores. Staff will bring specific examples and proposed revisions to the August evaluation, including updates to the calibration guidance developed for the inaugural scoring cycle.
- **Contextual knowledge** – reviewers familiar with local conditions, organizations, and priorities may consciously or subconsciously weight factors not fully captured in the application narrative; staff made every effort to score based on submitted materials.

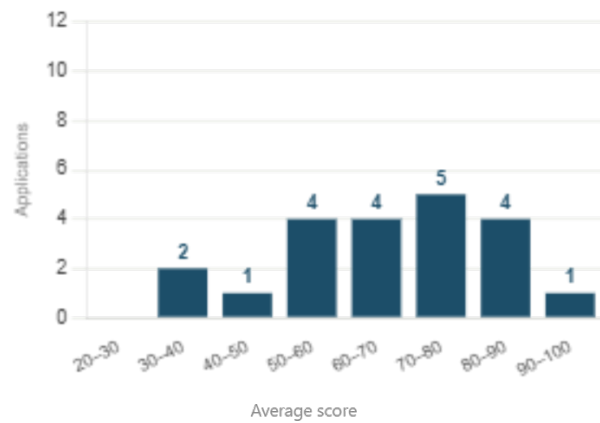
- **Noise** – two evaluators reading the same application on different days or in a different order may score it differently; this is an unavoidable feature of any judgment process, and two scores per application limits the ability to account for and level out this type of “noisy” variance.

Tier 1 applications showed greater scoring variance overall, reflecting the wider range of project types and sizes under that tier. Tier 2 variance was more limited, clustering around differences in implementation readiness and feasibility. Score distribution graphs are included below.

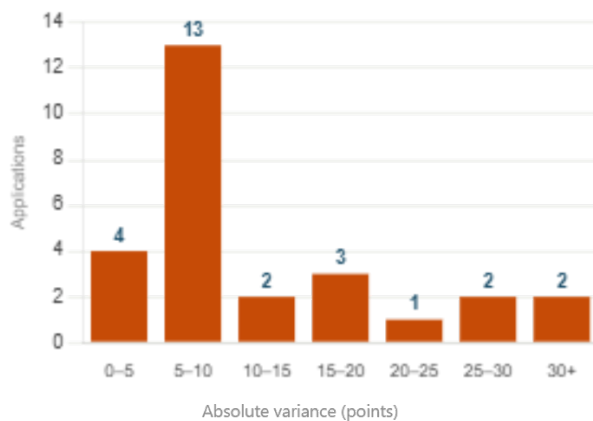
TIER 1 — AVERAGE SCORE DISTRIBUTION (N=29)



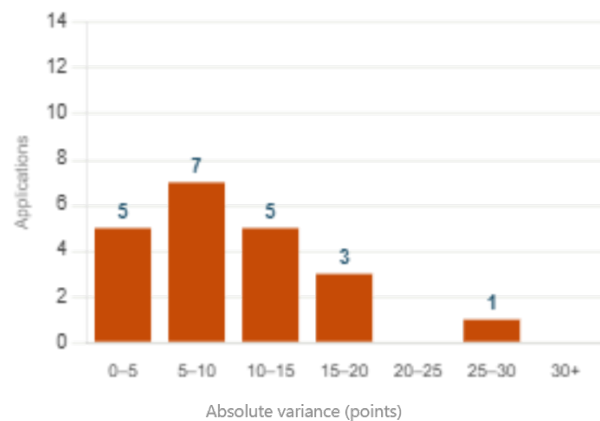
TIER 2 — AVERAGE SCORE DISTRIBUTION (N=21)



TIER 1 — ABSOLUTE VARIANCE DISTRIBUTION (N=27)



TIER 2 — ABSOLUTE VARIANCE DISTRIBUTION (N=21)



* Tier 2 distributions exclude the three San Vicente Redwoods (SVR) set-aside applications, which were not subject to competitive scoring.

Scores are a key input to guide funding recommendations, not the sole determinant. The program's first edition evaluation scoring rubric and supplemental calibration guidance reduces but does not eliminate evaluator variance, and applications within a few points of each other should not be treated as meaningfully different in quality. With that context in mind, the

following describes how staff developed funding recommendations from the scored pool.

Following scoring, OR3 and Parks staff ranked applications within each tier by average score and reviewed the resulting pool against the broader program values and priorities identified in the Vision Plan. Using different combinations of the top 10 ranked projects, staff developed 3 alternative funding scenarios for COAB consideration: one scenario based entirely on scores (Scenario A), and two scenarios which apply a specific organizing value to select from the top 10 ranked projects in order to achieve greater geographic balance (Scenario A) and measurable outcomes (Scenario B) within the recommended funding portfolio. Across all scenarios, strategic reductions to individual award amounts were applied to allow the budget to accommodate a broader set of funded projects.

Scenario	Organizing Value
A – Score-Driven	Fund projects in strict rank order by average score .
B – Geographic Balance	Adjusted selection from the top 10 scoring projects across Tier 1 and Tier 2 to achieve greater countywide geographic distribution of impact
C – Scale of Impact	Adjusted selection from the top 10 scoring projects across Tier 1 and Tier 2 to prioritize projects with the largest measurable outcomes

Full scenario details and a project-level comparison table are presented in Section IV. Additional values COAB may wish to consider prior to the May 27 final recommendation include balance across Vision Plan thematic priorities, environmental benefit concentration, implementation readiness, or reducing overlap between competitive grant awards and entities already receiving Measure Q non-competitive direct allocation funds.

The top 10 projects in each tier were identified as the competitive pool for scenario development based on score distribution and available budget. A natural break in the score distribution below the top 10 (applications scoring roughly 70 points or higher), combined with funding constraints, supports a focused discussion of alternatives.

Many applications outside the top 10 demonstrated meaningful alignment with the Vision Plan and genuine community benefit. Competitive funding decisions are inherently difficult, and in this inaugural grant evaluation process has been scoped to support a transparent and justified recommendation before the COAB and Board of Supervisors within the allowable timeframe. Where alternative scenarios depart from strict rank order, they do so based on portfolio-level values rather than assessments of individual projects, so that COAB feedback can inform program guidance and future cycles rather than adjudicate between specific applicants. Applicants not selected in this cycle are encouraged to reapply as the Measure Q program matures.

3. Top 10 Projects Description

This section contains a summary description of the top 10 scoring projects across Tier 1 and Tier 2 categories which form the basis for alternative funding scenarios. Full application details are available in Attachment A for all complete applications submitted.

Tier 1 – Community Catalyst

1. **River Stewards** | Coastal Watershed Council

- Total Request: \$50,000
- Average Score: 97.0
- Location Served: City of Santa Cruz – San Lorenzo Riverwalk
- Vision Plan Thematic Area(s) Addressed: Water Resources; Parks/Access/Equity; Wildlife & Habitat
- Abbreviated Executive Summary: Engages unhoused residents in weekly riparian habitat restoration along the lower San Lorenzo River, combining ecological stewardship with workforce development and equitable parks access.

2. **Pinto Lake Water Quality Monitoring** | Santa Cruz County Parks

- Total Request: \$48,000
- Average Score: 92.0
- Location Served: Pajaro Valley – Watsonville, south county
- Vision Plan Thematic Area(s) Addressed: Water Resources; Parks/Access/Equity; Wildlife & Habitat; Coastal Protection

- Abbreviated Executive Summary: Tributary monitoring and in-lake sampling to identify phosphorus sources driving harmful algal blooms, supporting TMDL compliance and future restoration investment.
3. **Truck Trail Emergency Response Navigation | Santa Cruz County Fire Dept.**
 - Total Request: \$6,000
 - Average Score: 86.5
 - Location Served: Countywide – rural WUI truck trails
 - Vision Plan Thematic Area(s) Addressed: Water Resources; Wildfire Risk Reduction; Parks/Access/Equity; Wildlife & Habitat
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Installs mile markers, access signage, and water source indicators along 160+ miles of rural truck trails to improve emergency response navigation countywide.
 4. **Kids2Parks | Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks**
 - Total Request: \$14,915
 - Average Score: 85.0
 - Location Served: Countywide – 26 Title-1 schools
 - Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Parks/Access/Equity
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Funds bus transportation for Title-1 students to visit Santa Cruz State Parks, removing financial and logistical barriers to outdoor access for low-income and underserved youth.
 5. **Real-Time Digital Signage for Wildfire Preparedness | Santa Cruz County Fire Dept.**
 - Total Request: \$43,982
 - Average Score: 81.5
 - Location Served: San Lorenzo Valley; Pajaro Valley
 - Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Wildfire Risk Reduction; Parks/Access/Equity; Wildlife & Habitat; Coastal Protection
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Installs two permanent bilingual digital signs at key corridors in the San Lorenzo and Pajaro Valleys to deliver real-time wildfire, evacuation, and emergency alerts.
 6. **Strategic Water Supply Enhancements for Rural Areas | Santa Cruz County Fire Dept.**
 - Total Request: \$29,158
 - Average Score: 79.5
 - Location Served: Nisene Marks / Aptos Creek; South Skyline ridgeline

- Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Water Resources; Wildfire Risk Reduction; Parks/Access/Equity; Wildlife & Habitat
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Restores and expands remote water tank infrastructure at two high-risk wildfire sites (Nisene Marks and South Skyline) creating a replicable pilot model for rural suppression capacity.
7. **Creating Accessible Park Experiences for the Blind and Visually Impaired | Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired**
- Total Request: \$50,000
 - Average Score: 79.0
 - Location Served: Countywide
 - Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Parks/Access/Equity
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Provides monthly guided Orientation and Mobility walks in county parks for blind and low-vision residents, conducts park assessments and develops recommendations for accessible wayfinding and park staff training.
8. **Expanding Coastal Access, Ocean Safety, and Surf Education | Black Surf Santa Cruz**
- Total Request: \$50,000
 - Average Score: 78.5
 - Location Served: City of Santa Cruz; Capitola; south county coast
 - Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Parks/Access/Equity; Coastal Protection
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Delivers free surf instruction and ocean safety education for Black and BIPOC communities through Pop-Up and Prepare-to-Pop-Up programs at Santa Cruz County beaches.
9. **Outdoor Equity & Wellness Initiative | Boys & Girls Clubs of Santa Cruz County**
- Total Request: \$50,000
 - Average Score: 76.5
 - Location Served: City of Santa Cruz; Live Oak; Scotts Valley
 - Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Parks/Access/Equity
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Funds two passenger vans to provide regular nature-based field trips to parks and open spaces for underserved youth across three club locations.
10. **Las Cumbres Shaded Fuel Break Project | South Skyline Firesafe Council**
- Total Request: \$10,000
 - Average Score: 76.0

- Location Served: Santa Cruz Mountains – Las Cumbres, south Skyline
- Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Water Resources; Wildfire Risk Reduction; Wildlife & Habitat
- Abbreviated Executive Summary: Improves and maintains roadside shaded fuel breaks on the 1,260-acre Las Cumbres HOA using contractors and CDCR crews, with a dollar-for-dollar community match.

Tier 2 – Community Impact

1. **Pajaro Valley Watershed Stewardship, Habitat Restoration, and Outdoor Access and Equity** | Watsonville Wetlands Watch

- Total Request: \$350,000
- Average Score: 94.0
- Location Served: Pajaro Valley – Watsonville: Corralitos Creek, Mintie White Elementary, PVHS Slough trail
- Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Water Resources; Parks/Access/Equity; Wildlife & Habitat
- Abbreviated Executive Summary: Implements riparian habitat restoration, school greening, and wetland trail enhancement across three Watsonville sites, combining workforce development, community volunteers, and matched funding.

2. **Rural Lands Assistance Program Pilot** | Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County

- Total Request: \$342,140
- Average Score: 85.5
- Location Served: Countywide – targeted outreach to high-risk WUI landowners
- Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Wildfire Risk Reduction
- Abbreviated Executive Summary: Pilots a rural-resiliency program offering technical and financial assistance to private landowners for wildfire preparedness, forest health, erosion control, and land stewardship in WUI communities.

3. **Watsonville City Plaza Revitalization Project** | City of Watsonville

- a. Total Request: \$600,000
- b. Average Score: 82.0
- c. Location Served: Downtown Watsonville – Pajaro Valley set-aside
- d. Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Parks/Access/Equity

- e. Abbreviated Executive Summary: Restores and modernizes a historic downtown plaza on the National Register of Historic Places, adding a permanent stage, upgraded gazebo, fountain restoration, landscaping, and improved event infrastructure.
4. **PVUSD Rolling Hills Middle School Track and Field Recreation Access Project | Pajaro Valley Unified School District**
- Total Request: \$500,000
 - Average Score: 81.0
 - Location Served: Watsonville – Pajaro Valley set-aside
 - Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Parks/Access/Equity
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Constructs a permanent ADA-compliant restroom facility completing a modernized track and field, enabling Joint Use community recreation outside school hours for Pajaro Valley residents.
5. **Mesa Village Park Phase 1 Improvements | Friends of Santa Cruz County Parks**
- Total Request: \$279,500
 - Average Score: 81.0
 - Location Served: Unincorporated south county – near Watsonville, Pajaro Valley
 - Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Water Resources; Parks/Access/Equity; Wildlife & Habitat
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Construction of a natural play area, expanding the existing playground with nature-based elements, native landscaping, shade trees, outdoor exercise equipment, and accessible pathways.
6. **Pajaro River Bridge to Bay Project Feasibility Study & College Lake Borrow Study | Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency**
- Total Request: \$390,000
 - Average Score: 79.0
 - Location Served: Lower Pajaro River corridor – Pajaro Valley set-aside
 - Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Water Resources; Wildlife & Habitat; Coastal Protection; Agricultural Lands
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Advances two flood resilience studies, a feasibility study for setback levees downstream of Highway 1 and a geotechnical study evaluating College Lake soils as borrow material for levee construction.

7. **Sol Y Tierra: Climate Justice Learning Series and Climate Adaptation Work Crews** | Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County
 - Total Request: \$509,000
 - Average Score: 77.0
 - Location Served: Pajaro Valley and Davenport; park excursions countywide
 - Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Water Resources; Wildfire Risk Reduction; Parks/Access/Equity; Wildlife & Habitat
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Delivers culturally adapted climate education, park access excursions, and paid adaptation work crews for farmworker families, unsheltered residents, and low-income communities across the county.
8. **San Lorenzo Flood Control System – Debris Boom Project** | City of Santa Cruz
 - Total Request: \$300,000
 - Average Score: 76.0
 - Location Served: City of Santa Cruz – San Lorenzo River mouth, Main Beach
 - Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Water Resources; Parks/Access/Equity; Wildlife & Habitat
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Installs a seasonal floating debris boom at the San Lorenzo River flood control intake to protect water quality and endangered fish habitat while maintaining safe recreational beach access.
9. **Resilience-Ready Santa Cruz County: Zone-0 Equity & Workforce Initiative** | Long Term Recovery Group of Santa Cruz County
 - Total Request: \$398,266
 - Average Score: 74.5
 - Location Served: Countywide with equity focus on underserved communities
 - Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Water Resources; Wildfire Risk Reduction; Parks/Access/Equity; Wildlife & Habitat
 - Abbreviated Executive Summary: Trains and supports underserved residents to complete defensible space hardening on their own properties, combining workforce development with direct wildfire risk reduction in vulnerable neighborhoods.
10. **Wildfire and Ecology Resilience via Beneficial Fire** | Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association

- Total Request: \$399,360
- Average Score: 73.0
- Location Served: Three sites countywide – south county, Davenport, Scotts Valley
- Vision Plan Thematic Areas Addressed: Water Resources; Wildfire Risk Reduction; Parks/Access/Equity; Wildlife & Habitat
- Abbreviated Executive Summary: Implements prescribed burns on three shovel-ready private properties, builds regional prescribed fire capacity through a State Parks partnership, and acquires equipment to expand beneficial fire countywide.

4. Funding Scenarios

The following section presents three alternative funding scenarios for COAB consideration. Each scenario reflects a different set of organizing values applied to the top 10 scoring projects in each tier. All scenarios include the full San Vicente Redwoods set-aside and honor the Pajaro Valley set-aside minimum.

Funding Scenario A represents the most straightforward application of the grant scoring criteria approved by the COAB and Board of Supervisors and communicated to applicants. Funding Scenarios B and C depart from strict rank order scoring to better reflect the intent of the Measure Q Vision Plan by applying additional organizing values, which introduces additional subjectivity into the award decision process. The intention of presenting these scenarios is to make those judgments explicitly justified and transparent to applicants and the public, and to invite COAB direction on which portfolio-level values should inform the final recommendation.

All funding recommendations presented in this report are preliminary and subject to final approval by the Board of Supervisors. Following approval, awards will proceed through the County's contracting process. Consistent with Measure Q grant guidelines, awards directing funds toward capital improvements, public works, or construction activities may be subject to specific agreement requirements, including prevailing wage obligations, environmental compliance, and public access agreements to ensure that publicly funded improvements to parks and open spaces remain accessible to Santa Cruz County residents.

#	Project	Organization	Avg	Asked	Scenario A Score-Driven	Scenario B Geo. Balance	Scenario C Impact Metrics
Tier 1 - Community Catalyst					\$192,055	\$272,915	\$198,055
1	River Stewards	Coastal Watershed Council	97	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
2	Pinto Lake Water Quality Monitoring	Santa Cruz County Parks	92	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$48,000	—
3	Truck Trail Emergency Response Navigation	Santa Cruz County Fire Dept.	86.5	\$6,000	\$6,000	—	—
4	Kids2Parks	Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks	85	\$14,915	\$14,915	\$14,915	\$14,915
5	Real-Time Digital Signage for Wildfire Preparedness	Santa Cruz County Fire Dept.	81.5	\$43,982	\$43,982	—	\$43,982
6	Strategic Water Supply Enhancements	Santa Cruz County Fire Dept.	79.5	\$29,158	\$29,158	—	\$29,158
7	Accessible Park Experiences — Blind & Visually Impaired	Vista Center	79	\$50,000	—	\$50,000	\$50,000
8	Expanding Coastal Access, Ocean Safety & Surf Education	Black Surf Santa Cruz	78.5	\$50,000	—	\$50,000	\$50,000
9	Outdoor Equity & Wellness Initiative	Boys & Girls Clubs of SC County	76.5	\$50,000	—	\$50,000	—
10	Las Cumbres Shaded Fuel Break Project	South Skyline Firesafe Council	76	\$10,000	—	\$10,000	\$10,000
Tier 2 — Community Impact (Includes PV Set-Aside)					\$1,939,500	\$1,869,626	\$1,939,766
1	Pajaro Valley Watershed Stewardship	Watsonville Wetlands Watch	94	\$350,000	\$350,000 PV	\$350,000 PV	\$350,000 PV
2	Rural Lands Assistance Program Pilot	RCD Santa Cruz County	85.5	\$342,140	\$300,000*	\$282,000*	\$282,000*
3	Watsonville City Plaza Revitalization	City of Watsonville	82	\$600,000	\$400,000* PV	—	\$400,000* PV
4	Mesa Village Park Phase 1	Friends of SC County Parks	81	\$279,500	\$279,500	\$230,000* PV	\$279,500
4	PVUSD Rolling Hills Track & Field*	Pajaro Valley Unified School District	81	\$500,000	\$500,000 PV	—	—
6	Pajaro River Bridge to Bay & College Lake	Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency	79	\$390,000	\$110,000*	\$110,000* PV	\$110,000*
7	Sol Y Tierra: Climate Justice Learning & Adaptation	Community Action Board	77	\$509,000	—	—	—
8	San Lorenzo Flood Control — Debris Boom	City of Santa Cruz	76	\$300,000	—	\$100,000*	\$120,000*
9	Resilience-Ready SCC: Zone-0 Equity & Workforce	Long Term Recovery Group	74.5	\$398,266	—	\$398,266	\$398,266
10	Wildfire & Ecology Resilience via Beneficial Fire	Central Coast Prescribed Burn Assoc.	73	\$399,360	—	\$399,360	—
Tier 2 — SVR Set-Aside (all scenarios)					\$600,000	\$600,000	\$600,000
SVR	SVR — Targeted Stream Crossing Repairs	Peninsula Open Space Trust	—	\$425,000	\$425,000	\$425,000	\$425,000
SVR	SVR — Botanical Resource Management	Peninsula Open Space Trust	—	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000
SVR	SVR — Public Access Improvement	Peninsula Open Space Trust	—	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Total awarded (max: \$2,740,000)					\$2,731,555	\$2,742,541	\$2,737,821
Projects funded					15	17	16

* Indicates proposed award reduction relative to requested amount. PV = contributes to PV set-aside allocation

Scenario A (Scoring Criteria Only)

Scenario A funds projects in strict rank order by average score until the grant program budget is exhausted. The resulting Tier 1 portfolio funds six projects totaling \$192,055. The resulting Tier 2 portfolio is notably concentrated in the Pajaro Valley: five of six competitive Tier 2 awards serve south county, representing approximately 75% of competitive grant dollars. This composition reflects the genuine strength of those applications and scoring criteria that reward equity impact and priority geographies laid out in the Vision Plan, both of which map heavily to the Pajaro Valley region. This is consistent with Vision Plan priorities but worth further consideration by COAB as to whether additional weight should be placed on geographic balance in future cycles.

Four of six top ranking projects are public agencies. Public agencies are often strategically well-positioned to compete in grant programs as they tend to have established project scopes, clear deliverables, and staff with experience meeting technical application requirements. This pattern is worth monitoring over time to ensure the program remains accessible and competitive for nonprofit entities.

Scenario B (Geographic Balance)

Scenario B adjusts the selection from strict rank order to achieve broader countywide geographic distribution, resulting in 17 funded projects and the highest Tier 1 total of the three scenarios at \$272,915. Scenario B considers a balance of site-specific implementation projects with educational or programmatic projects serving a regional or countywide population.

In Tier 1, three Santa Cruz County Fire Department projects (Truck Trail Emergency Response Navigation, Real-Time Digital Signage, and Strategic Water Supply Enhancements) are removed in favor of Vista Center, Black Surf Santa Cruz, Boys & Girls Clubs, and Las Cumbres Shaded Fuel Break. This expands the Tier 1 portfolio to balance programs which address countywide recreational access barriers and site-specific implementation in residential-rural geographies.

In Tier 2, Watsonville City Plaza and PVUSD Rolling Hills Track & Field are removed from the Pajaro Valley set-aside to allow for a broader distribution of south county investment. Watsonville Wetlands Watch, Mesa Village Park, and a reduced award to the Pajaro River Bridge to Bay study together satisfy

the Pajaro Valley set-aside while leaving budget capacity for three projects serving broader geographies: the San Lorenzo Debris Boom, the Zone-0 Equity and Workforce Initiative, and Wildfire and Ecology Resilience via Beneficial Fire. Rural Lands Assistance Program Pilot is retained as the general Tier 2 countywide award at a modestly reduced amount.

Scenario C (Scale of Impact)

Scenario C adjusts the selection from strict rank order to prioritize projects with the largest measurable reach (i.e., populations served, acres treated, or structural outcomes) resulting in 16 funded projects and a Tier 1 total of \$198,055, comparable to Scenario A.

In Tier 1, Truck Trail Emergency Response Navigation is removed in favor of Vista Center, Black Surf Santa Cruz, and Las Cumbres Shaded Fuel Break. Vista Center and Black Surf directly address access and equity barriers for underserved populations countywide and along the coast. Las Cumbres, while serving a smaller geographic area, delivers direct and measurable wildfire risk reduction outcomes tied to a defined community and defensible space footprint.

In Tier 2, the Pajaro Valley set-aside is fully satisfied through Watsonville Wetlands Watch, Watsonville City Plaza, and Mesa Village Park, covering habitat restoration, community infrastructure, and park access across south county. The key departure from Scenario A is the substitution of PVUSD Rolling Hills Track & Field with the Zone-0 Workforce Initiative and a partial award to the San Lorenzo Debris Boom, both of which deliver measurable reach across larger and more geographically distributed populations. Rural Lands and the Pajaro River Bridge to Bay study are partially reduced for budget reasons.

Financial Impact

No direct financial impact associated with COAB's review of preliminary grant program funding recommendations. The program will distribute its portion of annual Measure Q revenue consistent with the Measure Q Vision Plan previously adopted by the Board.

Submitted By:

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Attachments:

[Attachment A – Grant Application Content](#)

[Attachment B – Grant Scoring Calibration Guidance](#)

[Attachment C – Complete Evaluation Scoring and Comments](#)