

Habitat Conservation Fund

Questions and Answers

(Updated 12/6/2024)

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1	Question: Can multiple applications be submitted? For example, multiple land acquisitions properties.
	Answer: Yes. Grant applicants may submit multiple applications for multiple land acquisition properties. For each land property acquisition and/or restoration project, a separate HCF grant application must be completed and meet the HCF eligibility requirements as identified in Page 1 of the HCF Application. The grant applicant is encouraged to prioritize their land acquisition properties in order of preference.
2	Question: How will you compare the priority of restoration vs. acquisition?
	Answer: A selection criteria has been developed for each grant category, (restoration projects and land acquisitions) to evaluate HCF grant applications. Each HCF grant application will be reviewed by the Evaluation Committee and scored in its respective category based on the information provided in the grant application. The HCF strives to prioritize projects that provide the most biological benefit in Orange County. The highest ranked restoration project and/or land acquisition within each category will be offered the HCF grant and the remaining HCF funds will be awarded to subsequent grantee(s) based on scoring rank until the \$8 million HCF is expended
3	Question: Who can apply for these grants?
	Answer: The HCF grant is open to all organizations and agencies. All Projects (restoration and land acquisitions) must be partially or entirely within Orange County. General eligibility requirements are provided on Page 1 of the Habitat Conservation Fund Application available at: https://thetollroads.com/media/4szikzce/habitat-conservation-fund-application.pdf
4	Question: Are matching funds required? And are matching funds a factor in the application ranking?
	Answer: Matching funds are not required but are considered as part of the evaluation criteria.

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5	<p><u>Question:</u> For land acquisitions, is there a certain acreage size that is needed? For example 40+ acres or several hundred acres?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> <i>There are no minimum or maximum acreage size requirements to qualify for HCF. The total budget available for the 2025 HCF program is \$8 million.</i></p>
6	<p><u>Question:</u> For restoration projects: What can funds be used for? (Can they be used for staff time?)</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> <i>HCF may be applied towards staff time related to the proposed restoration activities.</i></p> <p><u>Question:</u> For restoration projects: Is there a specific timeline in which projects need to be completed?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> <i>It is expected that restoration projects or portions of a multi-year restoration project funded by HCF (by December 2025) would be completed within a reasonable time in accordance with the respective permitting agency performance standards for restoration activities and plant establishment. As part of the selection criteria, grant applicants must provide dates for anticipated completion of on-site restoration activities, performance standards and timeline for meeting performance standards.</i></p> <p><u>Question:</u> For restoration projects: What would we need to report on?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> <i>Because each project is expected to have unique performance criteria, the grant applicant is required to develop, for consideration, the monitoring and reporting process to achieve project goals. Please refer to Section III of the Application.</i></p>
7	<p><u>Question:</u> Will workshop #2 cover the same information as today's workshop?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> <i>HCF Workshop #2 will cover the same information provided in the PowerPoint presentation. However, different questions may be posed during the second workshop in which staff will provide clarification and answers related to HCF. Please note that the date and time for HCF Workshop #2 has been moved to <u>Tuesday, December 3rd from 3PM to 4PM</u> to allow grant applicants to ask last minute clarification questions and support.</i></p>

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8	Question: Can you explain the boundaries of the geographic area where funds can be used?
	Answer: <i>Restoration projects must be located within Orange County. Land Acquisitions can be entirely or partially within Orange County (if acquired to enhance wildlife movement across the landscape).</i>
9	Question: Are applicants encouraged to provide letters of support from other stakeholders? If such letters are encouraged and considered as part of the process, we would probably be able to obtain one or more letters, but if not then I will save the effort.
	Answer: <i>While letters of support are not required, Applicants are encouraged to provide such letters in support of the need for the project</i>
10	Question: If a grant is awarded, are any in-kind services eligible for expenditures under the grant? Some grants permit up to 10% for project administration. It would be helpful to know if this is an eligible expense.
	Answer: <i>HCF could be applied towards services related to the completion of the work on the Project (land acquisition or restoration) as defined in your completed HCF Application. Administration expenses for the HCF are capped up to 15% of the total HCF award. Grantees awarded HCF are expected to make appropriate decisions for the best use of funds to accomplish Project goals.</i>
10	Question: Are habitat restoration projects located within California State Parks eligible for funding (e.g. Crystal Cove State Park)? These are state owned and protected lands intended for conservation and passive recreation.
	Answer: <i>The HCF grant is open to all organizations and agencies, including California State Parks. Projects (restoration or land acquisitions) must be partially or entirely within Orange County.</i> General eligibility requirements are provided in Page 1 of the Habitat Conservation Fund Application by following this link: https://thetollroads.com/media/4szikzce/habitat-conservation-fund-application.pdf

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	<p>Question: Are habitat restoration projects in San Diego County eligible if SSOC is one of the funding partners, it seemed like a possibility.</p> <p>Answer: Restoration projects must be located within Orange County. Land Acquisitions can be entirely or partially within Orange County (if acquired to enhance wildlife movement across the landscape).</p>
11	<p>Question: Is there a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) or any additional documentation outlining project requirements (specifically the minimum and maximum request amounts or any expected match requirements).</p> <p>Answer: Additional information about HCF is provided in TCA's Habitat Conservation Fund web page: https://thetollroads.com/about/about-tca/environmental-commitment/habitat-conservation-fund/. Available HCF grant award(s) for 2025 is \$8 million. There are no minimum grant requests or match requirements.</p> <p>General eligibility requirements are provided in Page 1 of the Habitat Conservation Fund Application by following this link: https://thetollroads.com/media/4szikzce/habitat-conservation-fund-application.pdf</p>
12	<p>Question: Is there a recording of the first grant workshop?</p> <p>Answer: The video and presentation of HCF Workshop #1 is available at: https://thetollroads.com/about/about-tca/environmental-commitment/habitat-conservation-fund</p>
13	<p>Question: Why was the second workshop pushed back almost a full month, creating a tight timeline?</p> <p>Answer: The date and time for HCF Workshop #2 has been moved to <u>Tuesday, December 3rd from 3PM to 4PM</u> to allow grant applicants to ask last minute clarification questions and support before the December 15th deadline, otherwise this workshop will cover the same material that was covered in Workshop #1.</p>

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14	<p>Question: Is it problematic if a restoration project involves multiple jurisdictions. What documentation would the grantor need?</p> <p>Answer: The HCF grant is open to all organizations and agencies. To be considered for the HCF grant, please complete the HCF Grant Application and provide the applicable documentation requested in the HCF Grant Application. The HCF Grant Application is provided in the following link: https://thetollroads.com/media/4szikzce/habitat-conservation-fund-application.pdf</p> <p>If the restoration project is awarded HCF, TCA will notify the grantee of required agreements and other documents necessary to complete and finalize the HCF award.</p>
15	<p>Question: Are there any additional information you could provide on funding request amount expectations or match requirements for the Habitat Conservation Fund opportunity.</p> <p>Answer: Additional information about HCF is provided in TCA's Habitat Conservation Fund web page: https://thetollroads.com/about/about-tca/environmental-commitment/habitat-conservation-fund/. Available HCF grant award(s) for 2025 is \$8 million. There are no minimum grant requests or match requirements.</p>
16	<p>Question: What is the performance period when the project needs to be completed by?</p> <p>Answer: Project completion date is dependent on the type of project and for which the HCF would be expended. For example, if the grantee is utilizing the entire HCF award on the initial on-site restoration activity, then the completion date would be for the actual on-site restoration. If the grantee is utilizing the HCF grant for on-site restoration and monitoring activities to meet establishment criteria, then the project completion date should be the end of the performance period.</p>
17	<p>Question: Can an applicant apply for a plan such as a habitat restoration management and monitoring plan (HMMP)? Can this be a plan only, or does some restoration work need to be included in the grant request/plan?</p> <p>Answer: HCF could be utilized for the preparation of plans. However, the HCF may not be used for the preparation of plans to satisfy existing project's impact and mitigation requirements.</p>

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	<p>Question: If the restoration project is at multiple sites with different landowners for a common purpose, does each site need to be considered a separate project or can they be lumped into a single proposal?</p> <p>Answer: <i>A separate HCF application would need to be prepared and submitted because the ownership of the properties involves different landowners.</i></p>
18	<p>Question: How far along does the process of property acquisition need to be for it to be considered eligible?</p> <p>Given that this process can be extensive and costly, involving significant staff time and external coordination, could these efforts be incorporated as part of the overall project proposal for the grant?</p> <p>Answer: <i>The HCF applicant may apply for HCF at any point of the land acquisition process. Staff and administrative costs related to land acquisition are not eligible expenses.</i></p> <p>Question: Are there examples of co-benefits such as cultural, watershed protections, and public access?</p> <p>We noticed that parks are excluded for community access and benefit, particularly in one of our more urban and disadvantaged communities.</p> <p>Answer: <i>Land acquisitions and restoration projects with the primary purpose of providing biological benefit is the main objective of the HCF. Projects with the primary function and purpose of enhancing recreational areas are not eligible for HCF. Co-benefits are environmental resources that would benefit in addition to biological resources. For example, a proposed land acquisition to conserve habitat may also protect a cultural resource within the same parcel.</i></p> <p>Question: What types of neighboring land uses are considered eligible?</p> <p>Answer: <i>Any type of land uses neighboring land uses are eligible for HCF as long as the project provides a biological benefit.</i></p>

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19	Question: Please confirm that acquisitions of conservation easements are allowed under the HCF. Also, please let us know if TCA would hold the easement or if you require that a third party, such as a non-profit hold the easement?
	Answer: <i>Acquisition of conservation easements are allowed expenditures for HCF. It is TCA's preference for a third-party to hold the easement.</i>
	Question: Would TCA want to purchase the entire property including the buildings, or would you prefer these improvements be retained by the owners, or transferred to third party (such as a non-profit)? Or would you prefer the buildings be removed?
	Answer: <i>Acquisition of land for the purpose of conservation and restoration are the priority. If buildings and structures located on the subject acquisition property hinders conservation, restoration, maintenance and pose as a public safety issue, then the buildings as part of the acquisition may not be favorably evaluated during the HCF grant evaluation period. However, the buildings and structures that provide a co-benefit, such as preservation of cultural or historic resource, would be perceived as a benefit.</i>
20	Question: Are projects or studies to monitor and/or preserve wildlife such as the Santa Ana mountain lions eligible for HCF?
	Answer: <i>Monitoring and preservation of wildlife species are eligible for HCF Funding.</i>
21	Question: Our organization is interested in potentially funding a critical segment of a trail project requiring land acquisition through the Round 1 of the HCF Cycle. Are there any restrictions on applicants applying for both cycles on the same project (but different segments of the same project)? Will the organization be allowed to submit for the trail project in both Round 1 and 2, as long as the funding would not be duplicated?
	Answer: <i>Grant Applicants are eligible to seek funding for multi-phase projects. However, the primary purpose of the HCF is to provide biological benefit in Orange County through land acquisition for the purpose of biological conservation and preservation and/or habitat restoration including planning, design, restoration activities, monitoring and maintenance. HCF is not eligible for land acquisition with the primary purpose of active recreation such as a trail project.</i>

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22	<p><u>Question:</u> Is there a maximum amount request for land acquisition?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> <i>The available amount for this current solicitation of HCF is \$8 million. This is the maximum amount available for land acquisition.</i></p>
23	<p><u>Question:</u> Will we be able to submit additional materials (e.g. letters of support, restoration plan, and etc.)?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> <i>Yes. Applicants may submit supporting documents via TCA's HCF Webpage:</i></p>
24	<p><u>Question:</u> Would a project that consists solely of wildlife monitoring in support of ongoing and future habitat restoration activities be eligible?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> <i>Yes. Projects proposing wildlife monitoring are eligible for HCF and must demonstrate a biological benefit within Orange County.</i></p>
25	<p><u>Question:</u> Is the landowner for a restoration project site necessarily a "joint applicant"? What are the implications of being a joint applicant in terms of responsibility for the project? Are there advantages to listing joint applicants?</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> <i>If awarded HCF, joint applicants are responsible for meeting the terms and conditions of the HCF. Whether the grant application identifies one or multiple applicants, HCF application evaluation considers this as a neutral administration item.</i></p>
26	<p><u>Question:</u> We are interested in applying for HCF grant to fund further monitoring of habitat restoration impacts on bird species through the Laguna Canyon and Aliso Creek regions, which is home to species of concern such as Least Bell's Vireo and Coastal California Gnatcatcher. Would the scope of this grant cover a project related to a monitoring program? This would be a broad monitoring program covering point count surveys collecting information on species usage of habitat restoration projects throughout this region, instead of a specific project site.</p> <p><u>Answer:</u> <i>Projects proposing wildlife monitoring (including avian species) and monitoring programs are eligible for HCF.</i></p>

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27	<p>Question: For the land acquisition criteria, must the current landowner be a willing seller? What if the current landowner has not been approached? Where does the land acquisition project stand on the evaluation?</p> <p>Answer: One of the main goals of the HCF is to provide an immediate biological benefit. For land acquisitions, the current landowner must be a willing seller and have the intention to sell the property for conservation purposes. Priority will be given to land acquisition proposals that are further into acquisition process.</p>
28	<p>Question: Are restoration projects for the purpose of mitigating another project's impacts eligible for HCF?</p> <p>Answer: Restoration projects for the purpose of mitigation of an impact are not eligible for HCF</p>
29	<p>Question: It seems like monitoring and reporting criteria are fairly flexible and left to the applicants to propose. Are there any additional criteria imposed on restoration projects?</p> <p>Answer: The criteria for restoration projects are flexible and considers varying performance requirements depending on the project. If there are any performance standards established by the permitting agency, then it should be provided in the HCF Application.</p>
30	<p>Question: How is the project overview on page 3 different from the habitat restoration project description on page 8?</p> <p>Answer: The Project Overview section on page 3 of the HCF Application, requires an overview of the project and a statement of the goals, need, and the benefit of the project. The Project Description on page 8 requires a detailed description of the activities, current and future land uses, long term management and conservation, main issues and risks, and performance criteria.</p>
31	<p>Question: Is there a preference in how the HCF Application is submitted? Do you want the file submitted in the PDF application file? Or do you prefer to have it in a separate like document package?</p> <p>Answer: The HCF Application has space limitations. Grant applicants may use continuation pages to further elaborate on responses. Submittal of the completed HCF application may include separate file attachment uploads or a single PDF file upload.</p>

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32	<p>Question: We would like to attach one or two letters from key agencies in support of our project. To whom should those letters be addressed? Is there a limit to the size of files we can upload as attachments to our application?</p> <p>Answer: Letters supporting your project could be addressed to either the project proponent or TCA. There are no file size restrictions for attachment uploads. If there are issues with file uploads, please notify TCA immediately.</p>