



GRANTMAKING PHILOSOPHY

Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) invests a portion of Colorado Lottery proceeds in the state's parks, trails, wildlife, rivers, and open spaces. As a values-based funder, we support organizations and projects that share our values, shown here.

We approach grantmaking with humility and respect, aspiring to create an approachable, efficient, and effective grant process for you. Our partners are busy dreaming up and doing important work in and with their communities. Accessing GOCO's staff and resources should be simple. We try to limit the time and effort our partners spend preparing grant proposals and reports. We hope to be a partner in the process of project development, seeking to elevate positive project impacts and supporting partners end to end – from creating competitive grant proposals for planning and multiple phases of implementation, all the way through to producing transformational outcomes.

Like many funders, we seek to upend the unequal power dynamic that has existed between funders and grantees. Our partners know their communities best, and so our approach emphasizes broad-based, community-led efforts and encourages partners to secure active participation from their communities in all aspects of project development.

For the first time in 30 years, GOCO is operating under a regional model with officers representing seven distinct regions of the state. These staff create connections to local communities and build relationships, allowing for better understanding of needs, opportunities, and challenges.

We appreciate that a values- and relationship-driven approach to funding will be a learning process, which is why we listen carefully to new and diverse ideas; measure and evaluate with a learning mindset; and encourage ourselves and our partners to adapt and evolve, as appropriate.

Working at a statewide level affords us the opportunity and privilege to experience trends and see movement at-scale. Today and throughout our history, we've seen the benefits of collaboration. We think of ourselves as true collaborators and hope you will, too.

PROGRAM VALUES



RESOURCE CONSERVATION

We value strategic land conservation and resource protection work.



OUTDOOR STEWARDSHIP

We support sustainability and improvements to the state's natural and recreational resources.



COMMUNITY VITALITY

We invest in conservation and outdoor recreation efforts that support communities and quality of life.



EQUITABLE ACCESS

We partner with communities to break down barriers to the outdoors.



YOUTH CONNECTIONS

We support projects and programs that help children and families get outside more

Intro to the Grantmaking Process

Our partners *care* – about their communities, their jobs, their projects. They spend countless hours in conversations and meetings; writing and rewriting project plans and grant applications; seeking feedback; and garnering project support. We aim to match their diligence and dedication with a grantmaking process that works with them and for them. We help our partners position their proposals for success, direct resources to optimally benefit their projects, and spend less time framing opportunities that will be less competitive in our process. We wish we had the resources to fund every project, but short of that, hope that this process helps partners make the most of their ideas and valuable time.

Start with a Concept

In lieu of submitting full grant applications from the get-go, our partners submit concept papers, pitching project ideas efficiently. GOCO's concept proposal forms ask only for the details we need to make informed decisions, and the short narrative format helps partners present project information in a concise and compelling manner.

Partners engage with our regional program officers early and often in the process to receive feedback, make iterative improvements to concepts, and help increase the competitiveness of their proposals. The officers provide guidance and encourage communities to leverage local assets that can contribute to improved outcomes. This guidance is shaped by collaborative, intensive internal meetings in which program staff share project ideas and best practices, compare projects from different regions, and discuss project nuances.

The program team accepts concept proposals three times per year for GOCO's base programs. The review process for concept papers is time sensitive. Concepts must be advanced in a timely manner to allow time for partners to develop full applications. Because of this, concept paper review is performed by staff and does not involve outside reviewers. Staff provides the GOCO board with a list of submitted concept papers, access to the full text of all materials, and a list of the subset of concepts recommended to submit full applications. Staff encourages and receives board member questions and feedback at this stage as well.

On to Full Application

The most competitive concepts are invited to advance, and at the application stage, partners can elaborate on their project proposal, respond to feedback received during concept review, and provide additional attachments and indications of support.

Applications undergo a peer review process. GOCO selects peer reviewers for their knowledge, skills, and expertise related to our mission and program outcomes. We strive to develop groups of 3-4 reviewers who represent subject matter, geographic, gender, and ethnic diversity. To reduce conflicts of interest, GOCO tries to recruit reviewers who do not represent grant-eligible entities and instead select other funders, state/federal agency reps, etc. That said, GOCO may select a reviewer from an eligible entity as long as the entity did not submit a proposal during that grant cycle.

Peer reviewers guide GOCO's award recommendations and ensure a fair and balanced process. While GOCO staff may have greater familiarity with our mission, vision, and program values, peer reviewers may expose latent biases that could emerge from a completely internal process.

REVIEW CONSIDERATIONS

1. Impact for community and/or visitors
2. Ability to drive local, regional, or statewide economic development
3. Advancement of community-directed outcomes or community-centered process
4. Takes advantage of strategic partnerships as opposed to a unilateral approach
5. Leverages other resources/finances
6. Fit with grant program vs. other grant resources available beyond GOCO
7. Contribution toward one or more of GOCO's program values (and degree of contribution)
8. Extraneous factors, e.g., natural disasters, pandemics, etc.
9. Geographic diversity (or programmatic, outcome, or other diversity)
10. Ability of and our confidence in the applicant and partners
11. Compelling urgency to complete project
12. Scale of the impact relative to the project cost and community served

The GOCO board's programs committee receives the slate of projects recommended for funding for their consideration, with staff providing a high-level overview of anticipated outcomes and a region-by-region summary. The full GOCO board makes award recommendations three times annually via a consent agenda.

Grant Review Process

Our reviewers contemplate a spectrum of considerations when determining the merit of a project. Considerations are not ranked, scored, or weighted; rather, they provide a framework for project evaluation and allow reviewers to determine how much significance a certain consideration plays into the overall project assessment. Context also informs the review process and plays an important role, as projects are more complex than what appears within a five-page narrative. Reviewers discuss what they know of the project, the community it benefits, and other relevant information. These considerations have bearing on project recommendations.

Reviewers initially score and rank proposals to provide a starting point for discussion during a review meeting, but there is no final score or rank. All applicants receive thoughtful feedback from the evaluators, with ideas and recommendations for strengthening proposals in the future. Reviewer meetings provide an opportunity for in-depth project discussions, weighing considerations across regions, programs, and program values.

Be in Touch

We encourage you to connect with [GOCO staff](#). [Here](#) is a map of contacts by region. For active or closed grants, please contact a grants officer. GOCO is an ever-evolving organization that's only

successful when you are. We welcome constructive criticism of our approach. And we thank you for your passion and dedication to Colorado's great outdoors!