# Project Review Process

This chapter provides guidance to the RWMG on processes and procedures for identifying projects to be included in the IRWMP that are suitable for funding by either theDWR’s Implementation Grant program or other funding opportunities. This process is intended to be transparent and understandable, and be readily available for regional stakeholders and public review. The result of the project review process is the production of a list of prioritized (tiered) implementation projects. The tiers are based on the project’s readiness to proceed and described later in this chapter. **Figure 6‑1** illustrates the overall project review process that will be discussed in this chapter.



Figure 6‑1 Project Review Process

The project review process satisfies four key functions:

* Develop a process for project proponents to submit potential projects for inclusion in the IRWMP (project identification and solicitation)
* Identify procedures to review and select projects that can implement the IRWMP (project selection)
* Develop a process to inform or communicate the list of selected projects to stakeholders and the public (publishing the project list)
* Provide a process to rank and select the most promising projects to include in grant applications that are scored and funded as a group (rather than individually).

As there are continual efforts by RWMG members and interested stakeholders to develop new projects and improve existing projects, the list of projects included in this chapter is not intended to be the final list. An updated list will be available on the RWMG’s website (<http://www.southernsierrarwmg.org/>) as adopted by the RWMG annually, or more frequent if deemed necessary.

It is also noted that the IRWM Plan Guidelines and Standards have added more detail to the requirements for evaluating a project’s contribution to climate-change adaptation.

* *Include potential effects of Climate Change on the region and consider if adaptations to the water management system are necessary*.

This is central to IRWM planning in the southern Sierra, given the steep elevation and temperature gradients in the Sierra, and changes in water balances that will ensue as the region’s climate continues to warm.

* *Consider the contribution of the project to adapting to identified system vulnerabilities to climate change effects on the region*.

Adaptation and resiliency to projected changes in weather, flooding and drought are central to water security in the region.

* *Consider changes in the amount, intensity, timing, quality and variability of runoff and recharge*.

This is one of the key changes that will result as warming temperatues affect precipitation from snowpacks, growing seasons, soil drying, wildfire, and water demand by communities.

* *Consider the effects of sea level rise on water supply conditions and identify suitable adaptation measures*.

This is of lesser concern as a direct impact, given that the minimum elevation in the Southern Sierra IRWM is about 600 ft. The lower part of the San Joaquin R. watershed, which lies outside the IRWM planning area, is 340 ft near Millerton Lake; however, sea level is currently not projected to rise that high this century. Pine Flat Lake, Lake Kaweah, and Lake Success are formed by dams above 600 ft elevation.

Further, new criteria address how proposed projects reduce greenhouse gases, relative to alternatives. These analyses can be done in parallel with, or part of, economic analyses.

## Identification and Solicitation of Projects

The RWMG has been identifying potential projects since 2008. Several requests for project ideas were made during the development of this IRWMP. The current project list is found in **Appendix G**. The RWMG has and will encourage all types of projects and programs provided they address at least one of the IRWMP’s Regional Goals and at least one the Measurable Objectives methods for that goal. (**Chapter 4**). As indicated in Chapter 4, the Regional Goals are broad statements indicating the purpose of the IRWMP, and the Measureable Objectives are more specific actions to help achieve the goals. These goals and objectives are intended to address water management and ecosystem problems and conflicts in the Region. The goals are considered coequal and therefore projects will be accepted that address any one of the goals.

The RWMG policies require that projects be submitted and approved for the project list before they can be considered for an IRWMP grant application. This is intended to require stakeholders to carefully plan and document their projects in advance, and prevent stakeholders from conceiving projects on short notice only because funding becomes available.

The following three-step process has been developed for identification and solicitation of projects. These steps are intended to standardize the procedures and allow for an efficient review process. These steps include:

1. Call for Projects
2. Review by Projects Workgroup or the Coordinating Committee and approval by the RWMG
3. Project(s) added to the Project List

The project list is typically updated annually, although projects can be submitted at any time.

### Step 1 - Call for Projects

The RWMG will, from time to time, release a ‘Call for Projects’. A call for projects could be made when specific grant programs are announced, when revised goals or objectives are published, or simply on a periodic basis, such as every year, to keep the list current. This call will be made through several communication tools including:

* Announcements at regularly scheduled RWMG and Coordinating Committee meetings
* Announcements at members and stakeholders agency board and management meetings
* E-mails to stakeholders and interested stakeholders
* Posting the Call for Projects on the RWMG website

This process is open to any project satisfying the criteria previously discussed, regardless of the current status of the project. Projects at the conceptual level are encouraged and will be added to the list to help prevent duplication of effort and to foster project integration and development, especially if the project encompasses more than one watershed and/or user stakeholder group. Projects must be submitted by either a member or interested stakeholder.

Project proponents are asked to complete a Project Information Form. The form requires proponents to include basic information generally associated with State grant applications criteria. This information requires at a minimum the following:

* Project name
* Project proponent(s)
* Project location
* Project size
* Project development status (conceptual, planning, feasibility study, preliminary design)
* Background description
* Project workplan
* What is the Primary IRWMP goal that applies to the project?
* What are the performance measures and monitoring methods to verify that it meets objectives?
* Identify secondary IRWMP goals or measurable objectives met by the project
* Which Resources Management Strategies is the project related to?
* How does the project provide specific benefits to disadvantaged community (DAC) water issues? If so are there any Environmental Justice concerns?

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of criteria to be addressed, but a representative list that may apply to a specific project. The RWMG may add or modify the form and the information requested in the future. For instance, developing reliliency to severe drought or long-term climate change is reflected in some new Federal, State or local grant funding programs and may bring additional criteria to the planning process.

The current version of the Project Description Form is included in **Appendix H**. The form can be obtained on the RWMG website (<http://www.southernsierrarwmg.org/>). The form can either be hand delivered at a RWMG meeting, or mailed/emailed to the contact listed on the RWMG website.

### Step 2 - Review of Project Information Form

The Projects Workgroup or the Coordinating Committee will review each project information form for content and consistency. The Projects Workgroup will confirm the accuracy and reasonableness of the submitted information. If necessary, the Projects Workgroup will request clarifying information from the project proponents. Also, during this step the Workgroup will consider if the project is suitable for possible project integration, regional application, multiple benefits, and other strategic project efforts that could address IRWMP objectives. The review process will include evaluation of several criteria to meet current state funding requirements, such as:

* The technical feasibility of the project
* Specific benefits to critical water issues for Native American Tribal communities
* Project cost and financing
* Economical feasibility (long-term)
* Contribution to regional sustainability
* Project status
* Climate change impacts and contributions to mitigation or resiliency

These criteria and other are included on the SSRWMG scoring criteria, included in **Appendix I**. The projects will not be ranked numerically, but will be identified as suitable for the Project List (yes or no), and placed into one of three tiers, as defined below:

Tier 1: Project is ready for implementation, has a project proponent, and a completed Project Information Form

Tier 2: Project is not ready for implementation, but has a full or partially completed Project Information Form

Tier 3: Project is conceptual without a proponent and no Project Information Form. Tier 3 Projects are simply listed by name. They are listed to reduce the potential for duplication, and to provide information concerning potential project integration opportunities for regional projects.

### Step 3 - Publishing the Project List

Updated project lists will be posted on the RWMG website and emailed to members and interested stakeholders. The current tiered list of implementation projects is provided in **Appendix G.**

## Project Prioritization for Specific Funding Opportunities

While the project list is continually being updated, there is need for project prioritization when specific grant opportunities arise. (Reference Appendix L for a list of potential grants programs and funding opportunities.) This is necessary for certain DWR grants that score applications based on the collective merit of all proposed projects. These applications are funded as a whole, and not individually by project. Currently, the IRWMP Implementation Grants are reviewed and funded this way. This necessitates a process to identify projects that are not ready for a grant application or have marginal benefits, and that could prevent an application package from being scored well. The RWMG has developed the following eight step process for project prioritization based on funding opportunities.

### Presentation of Funding Opportunity Information

In addition to IRWMP funding opportunities, the RWMG considers many other funding options. Funding opportunity information is brought to the RWMG by members, interested stakeholders, consultants and other stakeholders. It is important that a basic understanding of the opportunity, project eligibility and selection criteria is disseminated within the Region. These opportunities come from a variety of sources for a wide range of projects and programs. The RWMG, through its regular meetings, and communication by e-mail and website, provides a clearinghouse for disseminating information on these opportunities. At its regular Coordinating Committee and RWMG meetings, funding opportunities from various sources can/will be presented to all participants, and are communicated to the Region through meeting minutes available on the RWMG website as well as by direct email.

### Establish Projects Workgroup (Workgroup)

Upon the decision to consider pursuing a funding opportunity that requires project prioritization, a ProjectsWorkgroup is selected by the RWMG. The Workgroup shall have at least three and no more than seven individuals (members or interested stakeholders). The Workgroup works with the RWMG to develop Scoring Criteria that is tailored to the specific funding opportunity and a template form is developed. The template form also includes a scoring matrix based on the information required. The scoring matrix typically matches that of the funding opportunity, with the addition of other categories that specifically address the regional goals and objectives. The scoring matrix will be similar to the one included in **Appendix I**. At a minimum, the scoring matrix will address the following topics:

* Grant specific requirements
* Project Sponsor
* Applicants’ status in adopting IRWMP
* List of each applicable IRWMP Measurable Objective (Table 4.2), how the project applies, and a description or estimate of the benefit
* Relation to relevant resource management strategies
* Benefits to DACs
* Environmental justice concerns
* Current project status and detailed schedule for completion
* Workplan
* Technical feasibility
* Economic feasibility
* Funding of local cost share (if required)
* Strategic implementation of plan and project merit
* Climate change and greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction and adaptative management considerations to reduce vulnerabilities, particularly in the water sector.

The Region does not receive water from the Delta, so reducing dependence on Delta supplies is not a relevant issue. The Region is also not susceptible to or a major contributor to sea level rise, so projects’ ability to minimize effects of SLR is also not a relevant issue, except insofar as generally reducing GHG.

Stakeholders submitting proposed projects must also have adopted the IRWMP prior to being considered for inclusion in IRWM grant applications. Adoption should occur before the pre-application process. Stakeholders are discouraged from adopting the IRWMP only when an attractive grant application surfaces, and should consider adoption when they initially become involved with the group.

### Project Information Request

The Workgroup provides information regarding the grant to members and interested stakeholders. An email announcement will be made, and typically a portion of a RWMG meeting, or if needed a separate workshop, will be held to educate project proponents on the funding requirements. Stakeholders interested in submitting a grant application are asked to submit a Pre-Application (see **Appendix J** for an outline of the Pre-application). As a general guideline, stakeholders should make efforts to keep the Pre-application between 5 and 10 pages, excluding attachments and appendices. The Pre-Applications can be submitted by email, mail, hand delivered, or through the RWMG web site. The purpose of the Pre-application is to:

1. Provide the group sufficient information to rank the project and see if it is suitable for a grant application;
2. Shows commitment on part of the applicant;
3. Helps the applicant further evaluate their project and determine if they are ready for a grant application; and
4. Provides the applications a head start on developing full application materials.

### Project Prioritization by Workgroup

Applicants submit Pre-applications to the Workgroup before a strict deadline. The Workgroup members then individually score each project. Workgroup l members will be excluded from reviewing Pre-applications if they represent or are employed by the agency submitting the application. After scoring each project, the Workgroup meets to review the scores and provide a prioritized project list based on the scoring. The Workgroup then presents the prioritized list to the Coordinating Committee and RWMG. This can be done by email notification or through the RWMG website, and may also be presented at a separate meeting.

Each project will be given due consideration through a collaborative process. Important consideration points will include feasibility, economics, benefits to the Region and project readiness. Project readiness is very important because an applicant must prove they have sufficient information to prepare a competitive grant application.

### Recommendation of Projects to be Included in Funding Application

The prioritized project list may include more projects or funding requested than is eligible or reasonable to submit for the specific funding opportunity. The Workgroup will consider and develop a recommended list of projects based on the prioritized scoring that should be included in the funding application request. It is possible that a highly prioritized project may not be able to proceed with the application or be initiated within the required timeframe. As part of this step, the Workgroup will then solicit confirmation from each of the recommended project proponents, ensure they can proceed with the effort required to prepare the application, and discuss possible mechanisms to assist with the application. An agreement for funding of the application process, and legal review of funding contracts (master agreement and sub-agreements), will be developed amongst the applicants and included in the Workgroup’s final recommendation.

### Coordinating Committee Recommendation

The Workgroup’s recommended project list for a grant application will be presented to the Coordinating Committee for discussion, consideration, and a recommendation to the RWMG.

### Workgroup Approval

The Coordinating Committee’s recommendation will be presented to the RWMG, and the RWMG will make the final decision for approval of the projects to be included in the funding application.

### Funding Application Development and Submission

Following approval by the RWMG, the project proponents will complete and submit grant applications to the funding agency.

## Conceptual Grant Application Schedule

The DWR typically provides estimated deadlines and draft Proposal Solicitation Packages (PSP) six months before a final grant deadline. The RWMG should start the process as soon as preliminary information is available. **Table** **6.1** shows a conceptual schedule for responding to a grant solicitation. This schedule is just a guide, but following it will provide sufficient time to select the best projects and prepare a competitive grant application. An important step in preparing a successful IRWMP grant application is starting early, and the time to combine multiple applications into a single document is often underestimated.

Table 6.1 - Conceptual Schedule for Submitting IRWMP Grant Applications

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Days prior to Final Deadline** |
| Review Draft PSP and identify potential projects | Before 90 |
| Prepare and submit Project Description Forms | Before 90 |
| RWMG reviews Project Descriptions and selects likely projects for Pre-Applications | 90 |
| Prepare Pre-Applications | 90-60 |
| RWMG reviews Pre-Applications and selects best projects | 60 |
| Complete individual grant applications | 60-21 |
| Combine individual grant applications into single application  | 21-0 |