

# GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

January 2025



## Eligibility Criteria

**Q: Is this program exclusively for San Francisco residents and businesses, or will you consider applications from organizations or people not located in SF but have property within SF?**

A: This grant program is exclusive to locations that connect to an SFPUC-operated sewer system. We will consider applications for any property that is connected to the SFPUC system, regardless of if the applicant is located in SF.

**Q: Can the grant accommodate bundling sites and/or aggregate funding?**

A: If a single applicant wants to bundle sites for multiple eligible projects, please email the grant team explaining why bundling would be better than separate applications. For adjacent properties on different parcels that collectively manage stormwater under a single project concept, the grant team may consider these projects on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, the grant may be part of a larger project, but only green infrastructure elements are eligible for grant funding.

**Q: Can an entity, such as a HOA, apply for a grant by managing stormwater from multiple rooftops, driveways and roadways?**

A: Yes, however the legal property owner of both the location of the green infrastructure facility and the associated drainage areas must be willing to sign the Grant Agreement.

**Q: Does the Green Infrastructure Grant Program fund projects in the public right-of-way?**

A: Yes! The Green Infrastructure Grant Program now funds projects in the public right-of-way as of the Fall 2024 application cycle.

**Q: Are Sunnydale and parts of Visitacion Valley a Separate Storm Sewer Area?**

A: Sunnydale and Visitacion Valley are within the SFPUC combined sewer system area.

**Q: Is PUC land eligible for this program?**

A: An SFPUC parcel that meets the eligibility criteria, may be considered.

**Q: Are sites on Recreation and Parks Department property eligible for this grant?**

A: Yes, as long as they connect to an SFPUC owned or operated sewer system.

**Q: Are churches/convents eligible for this opportunity?**

A: Absolutely, any property that meets the eligibility criteria which is based on the 0.5-acre impervious size and connected to an SFPUC owned or operated sewer system.

**Q: If you're an active grantee, can you still apply for another project site?**

A: Yes, as long as you continue to meet the minimum program eligibility requirement for being in good standing in all active GI Grant projects.

**Q: Can we use a sloped concrete area as part of our DMA if we ensure the runoff goes directly into a newly constructed rain garden?**

A: Yes. This would count towards DMA if directed to a green infrastructure facility.

**Q: Is permeable pavement ADA compliant?**

A: Yes, there are types of permeable pavement that are ADA compliant and can be used for wheelchair paths.

## **Relationship to Other SFPUC Grants and Policies**

**Q: How is this program different than the Urban Watershed Stewardship Grant Program?**

A: The UWSG Program provides funding for community-based public improvement projects that help manage stormwater using green infrastructure. The maximum grant amount is \$100,000 and it does not have a minimum performance requirement. Currently, the SFPUC is updating the UWSG Program and is not accepting applications at this time. More information can be found about this grant and other SFPUC grants at [sfpuc.gov/programs/grants](http://sfpuc.gov/programs/grants).

**Q: Can an applicant apply and be awarded different SFPUC grants?**

A: Yes, receiving a green infrastructure grant does not restrict award of other SFPUC grants, listed here: [sfpuc.gov/programs/grants](https://sfpuc.gov/programs/grants).

**Q: Can a project that is required to build green infrastructure to comply with the Stormwater Management Ordinance (SMO) apply for the grant?**

A: The GI Grant cannot be used to pay for regulatory compliance. In general, new development projects that trigger the SMO are not eligible for grant funds because GIGP is intended for retrofit projects.

However, the SFPUC may consider funding projects that provide additional stormwater management above and beyond the performance required for SMO compliance.

For projects complying with the SMO, the following conditions must be met to be eligible for a GI Grant:

1. The proposed green infrastructure must be an entirely separate and fully independent system (“Addition”) that manages an otherwise unmanaged portion of a project with documented SMO compliance (“Baseline”); and
2. The separately managed Addition to a project site must not be connected to, or dependent on, a green infrastructure facility required for Baseline SMO compliance; and
3. The Project must receive Preliminary SCP approval for the corresponding Baseline stormwater management system before a GI Grant can be awarded.

## Construction Stage

**Q: Are there any schedule limits on when construction must start after award?**

A: Yes, construction must start within two years from the date of signing the Grant Agreement.

**Q: Are there any restrictions on the construction duration?**

A: Grantees will be responsible for completing the construction of the project within the timeframe specified at time of application. Any grant extensions must be requested in writing and approved by the grant administrator. However, construction durations vary per project depending on project size and complexity.

**Q: Does my contractor have to pay prevailing wages?**

A: Yes, as explained in Article 4 of the [Grant Agreement](#), your selected contractor must pay prevailing wages and register with the California Department of Industrial Relations (DIR). Please let any contractors interested in bidding on the project know:

“This Project is subject to compliance monitoring and enforcement of prevailing wage requirements by the California Department of Industrial Relations (“DIR”) and the San Francisco Office of Labor Standards Enforcement. No contractor or subcontractor may work on this project unless registered with the DIR per California Labor Code Section 1725.5 [with limited exceptions from this requirement for bid purposes only under California Labor Code Section 1771.1(a)].”

Do not sign a construction contract with a contractor until they have sent you their DIR number and the SFPUC has verified it. If an interested contractor is not currently registered with DIR, please inform them of these requirements and other requirements associated with DIR and prevailing wage compliance.

Additionally, any prevailing wage covered work must be entered into the City’s online Certified Payroll Reporting system. For more information, you can direct the contractor to the Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE) <https://sfgov.org/olse/>.

## **Maintenance and Inspection**

**Q: How will the 20-year Grant Agreement be enforced if the grant manager (such as a non-profit) is no longer involved in the project?**

A: Both the grant manager and property owner must sign the grant agreement. The property owner is solely responsible for the maintenance of the green infrastructure for the duration of the grant agreement.

**Q: Is the 20-year Grant Agreement an easement?**

A: No. The Green Infrastructure Grant Agreement includes a Declaration of Deed Restriction ensuring the 20 years of maintenance travels with the property. It does not provide any ownership to the SFPUC.

**Q: How much does 20-years of maintenance cost?**

A: Maintenance costs will vary by several factors including BMP type and size, location, and site usage. Property owners with completed GI projects can apply for the Stormwater Credit Program, which offers a bill reduction on the stormwater component of your sewer bill. This monthly credit can help offset maintenance costs.

**Q: What happens to maintenance of the BMP after 20 years?**

A: The grant obligation is considered fulfilled. The owner may continue to maintain, rehabilitate or remove the infrastructure at that time.

**Q: In a multi-owner complex or neighborhood, who would be the project owner responsible for maintenance?**

A: If there is more than one property owner for the locations of the green infrastructure and associated drainage areas, all owners must sign the Grant Agreement and be responsible for maintenance.

**Q: Will SFPUC review the installation/implementation of the GI at the end of construction, or at any point during the 20-year maintenance period?**

A: Yes, we will have periodic inspections during construction and at the completion of construction, as well as during the 20-year maintenance period.

**Q: Since the GI Grant does not cover ongoing maintenance costs, are there other resources available to assist property owners and community members in meeting the 20-year maintenance requirement?**

A: Yes! The SFPUC offers free Maintenance Training to property owners and community members that can be tailored to your individual project's maintenance needs. There are lots of ways projects can look to reduce overall maintenance requirements through the project design, such as grouping green infrastructure with other planned improvements and selecting specific GI-types that work best with the type of maintenance resources available for a site. In addition, the Stormwater Credit Program offers a bill reduction to on the stormwater component of your sewer bill for managing stormwater runoff. This monthly credit can help offset maintenance costs.

## Grant Funding

**Q: Can every project get the maximum grant amount per impervious acre managed? How do you determine how much you will award each project?**

A: The grant amount each project receives is dependent on the amount of impervious surface it can manage AND the concept design and corresponding budget. BMP type, soil permeability, and site conditions all impact project costs. Your requested budget will be reviewed for consistency with your concept design and industry standard costs for San Francisco.

**Q: What can the grant funds be used for?**

A: The grant is designed to cover the full cost of designing and constructing green infrastructure. Other site improvements not related to the green infrastructure would not be covered. Please refer to the eligible and ineligible costs section of the Program Guidelines for more information.

**Q: Is the cost of ongoing maintenance eligible for grant funding?**

A: No, ongoing maintenance is not eligible for grant funding. It is the responsibility of the property owner.

**Q: Is educational programming or training an eligible cost?**

A: Ongoing programming and training are not eligible costs. However, educational elements related to stormwater management, watersheds, and the city's sewer system are eligible for grant funding. These elements may include signage, graphics, murals and other types of artwork.

**Q: Are there other grants to help pay for ineligible costs, such as benches?**

A: Yes, applicants are encouraged to look into other programs outside of the SFPUC to support the delivery of a successful project.

**Q: Will the grant cover the cost of required permits and environmental reviews?**

A: Yes, as all construction permits and environmental review costs are eligible soft cost expenses. However, no more than 30% of the total grant amount may be used for non-construction activities.

**Q: Would the cost of replacement plants be reimbursed? Could it be a line item in the grant application for funding?**

A: No. Replacement of plants is considered an ongoing maintenance cost and is the responsibility of the property owner.

**Q: What assistance is available if there are performance issues after the project is built?**

A: The property owner is responsible for ensuring the system is performing for the duration of the grant. However, SFPUC staff will conduct inspections throughout the grant duration and will be available to provide technical assistance if required.

**Q: Is the limit for the grant request linked to the organization's income or solely based on the cost of the project?**

A: The grant is a performance-based award system. A person or organization's income does not factor into the award.

**Q: What if the construction costs increase between when I sign the grant agreement and when the project goes into construction?**

A: Grantees may request additional funding for construction through a Grant Amendment. Grantees must submit written evidence of construction bid overages and show a good faith effort to collect at least 3 competitive bids. Each of the bids should be above the maximum cost per acre at the time of grant application.

Grant Amendments may also increase funding for green infrastructure-related change orders that arise during construction due to compensable, unforeseen site conditions, such as unknown utility infrastructure. For more information, see the "Criteria for Grant Amendments" section of the [Grant Agreement](#).

**Q: Is there a matching funds requirement?**

A: No, there is no match requirement for this program. However, the grantee may have to be able to front the final 10% retention payment until final completion of the project. Please see the grant disbursement section of the grant agreement for more information. Additionally, projects typically include many nongreen infrastructure elements (benches, play equipment, public amenities) that cannot be funded through this grant, and many grantees are aggregating funding sources to deliver more comprehensive projects.

## Co-benefit Opportunities

### Q: How are EJ areas defined?

A: The GI Grant Program Map uses the [SF Environmental Justice Communities Map](#) developed by SF Planning as part of the Environmental Justice Framework in 2022. The Environmental Justice Communities Map (EJ Communities Map) describes areas of San Francisco that have higher pollution and are predominately low- income. This map is based on CalEnviroScreen, a tool created by CalEPA & OEHHA that maps California communities that are most affected by pollution and other health risks. The EJ Communities Map includes additional local data on pollution and demographics. Environmental Justice Communities (EJ Communities), in red, are defined as the areas with the top 30% of cumulative environmental and socioeconomic vulnerability across the city.

### Q: Can you expand on why environmental justice areas are considered a co-benefit?

A: The SFPUC is proud to be the first public utility in the nation to adopt an Environmental Justice Policy (the “EJ Policy” 2009) and a Community Benefits Policy (the “CB Policy” 2011) which seek to ensure the inclusion of environmental and community interests by being a good neighbor to all who are directly affected by PUC operations, programs or policies. By supporting projects in EJ communities, the grant program provides critical investments in our infrastructure while delivering environmental and community benefits to people and places that have historically faced more pollution and less greening.

### Q: Is there a public access requirement for private property projects?

A: Public access is not required, but highly encouraged as a co-benefit in the grant award process.

### Q: How can we begin to calculate how much water (per unit) and dollars will be saved by putting in such infrastructure?

A: If your project proposes rainwater harvesting, you can use SFPUC’s current rates for water to estimate the cost savings of the harvested rainwater. The GI Grant Application performance tab includes an estimate of your future Stormwater Credit. You can also visit the Stormwater Credit website for a calculator tool to estimate future credits: [Stormwater Charge Lookup](#).

## Application Stage

**Q: Who is eligible to be lead applicant? Must they be a 503(c)?**

A: Applicants (or Grantees) may be a property owner, a for-profit or non-profit entity, an individual or a governmental entity, as long as the team meets the experience requirements. They do not need to be a 503(c), but please note grants are taxable income to private for-profit entities.

**Q: Are contractors required to have GI experience?**

A: No. However, someone on the grant team must have GI experience. There is also contractor training available for free through the SFPUC and is strongly encouraged.

**Q: Can the Project Manager be the Project Engineer?**

A: Yes, any member of the project team can serve as the Project Manager.

**Q: For licensed professionals, is it either an engineer or a landscape architect?**

A: Correct, engineer and/or landscape architect.

**Q: If the grantee is not the property owner, do they also have to sign the grant agreement?**

A: Yes, both the grantee and the property owner will need to co-sign the agreement. Only the property owner will sign the Deed Restriction and be responsible for ongoing maintenance.

**Q: When is the next round of applications due if we do not make the application deadline?**

A: We hold two application cycles each year, and you are welcome to submit your application in the following spring or fall cycle. Be sure to sign up for our [mailing list](#) to receive notifications when the application cycles open.

**Q: Is there a designer we can work with to show the suggested improvements?**

A: We have a list of green infrastructure vendors that provide design and construction services on our website available here: [www.sfpuc.org/gigrants](http://www.sfpuc.org/gigrants).

**Q: Are applicants allowed to use vendors not on the GI vendor list?**

A: Yes! The list is an informational resource only and is intended to help grantees identify potential resources. The SFPUC in no way endorses or requires the use of any vendors identified on the list.

**Q: Can a grant team include a City agency like SF Planning or DPW?**

A: Yes. We have had previous grant projects with RPD and SFUSD.

**Q: I'm a contractor that is interested in working with a property owner. How do I identify a property owner to work with and when should I reach out to SFPUC for technical assistance?**

A: We recommend identifying large properties in San Francisco with at least 0.5 acres of impervious surface and reaching out to landowners directly. You can also use our [Program Map](#) to measure areas and view high priority Environmental Justice Communities, soil conditions, and high priority areas for Heat and Flood Resilience. After you have established a contact with the landowner, please feel welcome to reach out to the GI Grants Technical Assistance Team to schedule a site visit or Green Infrastructure Opportunities Assessment.

**Q: What application assistance do project teams have access to?**

A: The SFPUC has a technical assistance program that can help applicants understand the stormwater opportunities on their site through site visits and in-person meetings. However, applicants will be responsible for assembling their grant teams, creating the concept designs and applying for the grant.

**Q: What would a site visit prior to application entail?**

A: Members from the SFPUC technical team will meet potential project teams onsite to evaluate stormwater management opportunities and constraints. Technical teams can help identify potential drainage management areas, recommend BMP types, and answer any questions that come up during the site visit.

**Q: Are webinar presentations recorded and available online?**

A: Yes, webinar recordings, the Guidebook, Application, grant agreement, and example projects are available at the Green Infrastructure Grant Program web page.

Q: For submission, is it allowable to email a download link (Dropbox, WeTransfer, etc.) if the file size is larger than 10MB?

A: If you think it will not fit in an email or two, you can email [gigrants@sfwater.org](mailto:gigrants@sfwater.org) and request a link to a fileshare that the PUC hosts.