



Local Community Benefits Fund: Benicia Catalyst Grant Awards

Community Equity, Health, and Justice Committee

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Recommended Action

None; the Committee will discuss this item, but no action is requested at this time. Air District staff will present Benicia Catalyst Grant award recommendations to the Board of Directors in September 2026 for the Board's consideration and adoption.

Outline

- Local Community Benefits Fund Overview
- Application Scoring & Review Process
- Eligible Benicia Catalyst Grant Applications
- Considerations for Award & Proposed Next Steps

Program Goals

- The Local Community Benefits Fund reinvests penalties and mitigation funds in the specific communities affected by the air quality violations
- Goals:
 - **Reduce air pollution or mitigate air pollution impacts, improve public health outcomes, and build economic resilience** for a just transition away from the harmful effects of a fossil-fuel-based economy
 - Advance **integrated projects to holistically meet community needs**
 - Strengthen **community-led and collaborative** solutions

Core Strategies

Reduce Air
Pollution and
Improve
Health
Outcomes

Build
Economic
Resilience for
a Just
Transition

Benicia and Surrounding Communities: Available Funding

- The Local Community Benefits Fund for Benicia and Surrounding Communities has **\$63,246,081** in available funding
 - In October 2024, the Air District and the California Air Resources Board fined Valero Refining Company for air quality violations, resulting in \$60,011,061 in available funds
 - In April 2026, the Air District fined Valero Refining Company for air quality violations, resulting in an additional \$2,250,000 in available funds

Grant Awards

	Seed	Opportunity	Catalyst
Total Funding	\$63,246,081		
Anticipated Awards	1 - 5 grant awards anticipated	1 - 5 grant awards anticipated	1 – 3 grant awards anticipated
Grant Size	\$100,000 - \$200,000	\$500,000 - \$5 M	\$10 M - \$40 M
Grant Term	Up to 2 years	Up to 3 years	Up to 5 years
Eligible Applicants	Open to 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations, no Co-Applicants	Lead Applicant must partner with at least 1 Co-Applicant(s)	Exemption: no Co-Applicant required
Eligible Communities	Benicia and surrounding communities	Benicia and surrounding communities	Benicia

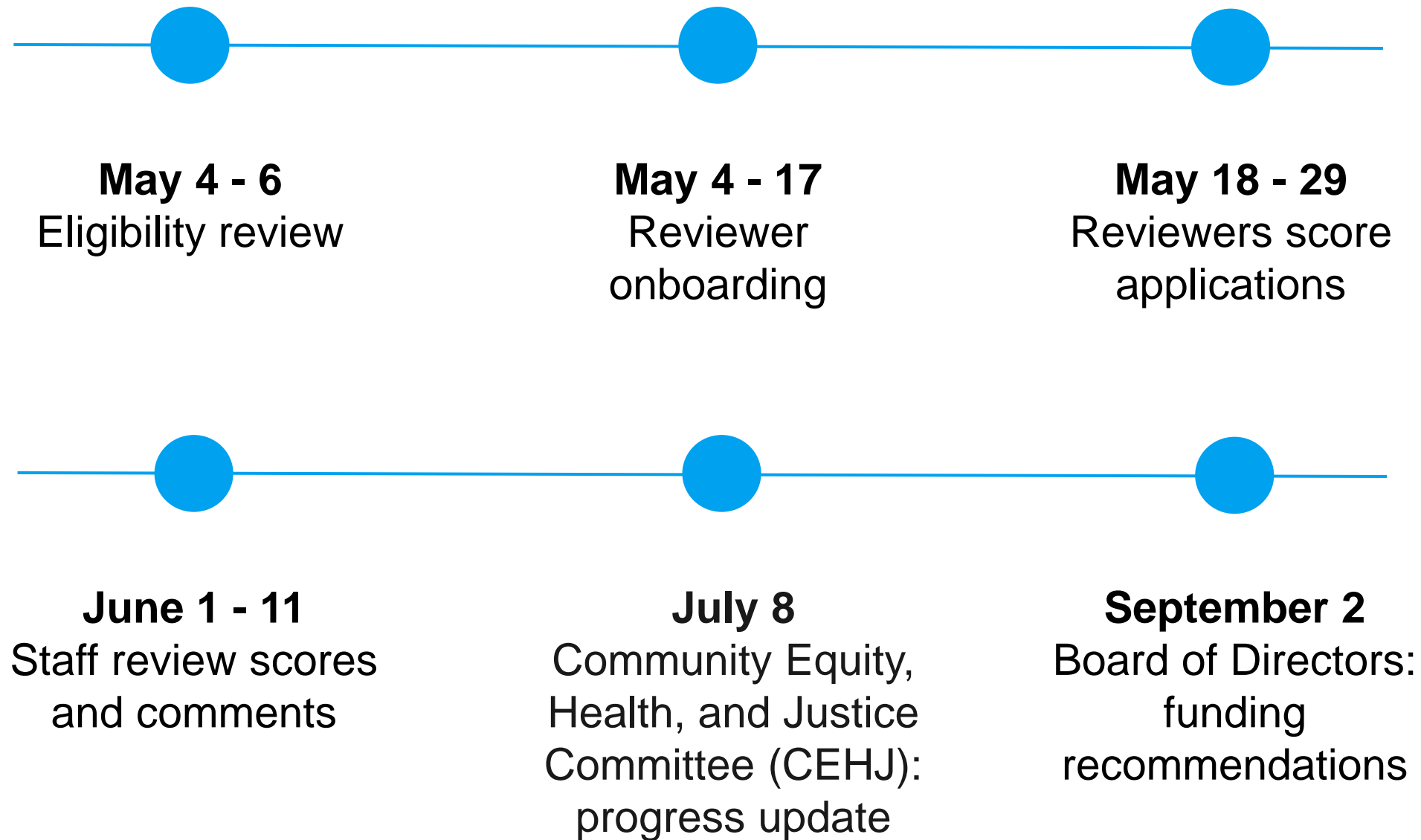
Catalyst Grant

- **Funds multi-stakeholder collaboration over multiple projects** that address diverse community needs
- Grant size ranges between **\$10 - \$40 M**
- Grant terms up to five years
- In recognition of the unique circumstances surrounding the refinery closure in Benicia, the Air District offered two exemptions for Benicia:
 - The partnership requirements in Section 4.1 of the Grant Guidelines are waived for the Catalyst Grant in Benicia
 - The Air District may expedite the review of Catalyst Grant applications

Applications Received

- The Air District received 3 total grant applications for the Benicia Catalyst Grant category
 - 1 application received did not meet eligibility review thresholds per the Guidelines, was deemed ineligible, and did not advance for review
- The 2 applications that advanced past eligibility review together submitted 7 project proposals, collectively totaling \$65,770,910 in funding requested

Review Timeline



Application Review Process

Both eligible applications were evaluated through a multi-stage review process by Air District staff, a consultant partner, and community and technical reviewers

- **Completeness Check:** Air District staff identify missing or incomplete items from applicants, applicants re-submit materials within 48 hours (two business days)
- **Eligibility Review:** Air District staff and consultant partner Ground Works Consulting reviewed materials for eligibility per Grant Guidelines
 - Applicant type eligibility
 - Geographic eligibility
 - Project eligibility
 - Documented financial capacity to manage grant funds

Community & Technical Reviewers

- Both eligible Benicia Catalyst Grant applications were scored by 6 Reviewers using the published scoring rubric
 - **Community Reviewers** (2): recruited through application process, using criteria such as relevant experience and expertise, community connection and rootedness, and community-focused vision for program impact
 - **Technical Reviewers** (4): recruited from Air District staff (3) and California Air Resources Board (1)

Application Scoring

- Reviewers completed confidentiality and conflict-of-interest forms
- Consultant Ground Works Consulting provided training on the scoring criteria and bias awareness
- Each Reviewer independently scored applications using the provided scoring criteria; Reviewers met twice for facilitated check-ins to surface clarifying questions, share perspectives, and listen to insights

NOTE: Alignment of Reviewers' scores and comments was neither required nor expected.

Scoring Rubric

Project Narrative (<i>Seed, Opportunity and Catalyst Grants</i>)		
Strategy Alignment	Clear and compelling alignment with one of the Local Community Benefit Fund's strategies	10
Community Need	Identification of specific community needs rooted in community engagement	10
Community Impact	Feasible project approach to addressing identified community needs and challenges	10
Community Engagement	Specific community engagement strategies during project implementation	10
Measurable Outcomes	Specific, feasible, meaningful, and measurable outcomes tied to Local Community Benefits Fund Program Goals with clear indicators	10
Workplan	Detailed Measurable Outcomes Plan linking measurable outcomes to project tasks and milestones	10
Budget	Reasonable and justified budget sufficient to achieve identified measurable outcomes	10
Project Lead Capacity	Demonstrated management capacity, dedicated staffing/resources and experience necessary to complete the proposed project	10
Alignment with Local, Regional or State Priorities	Demonstrated support from and alignment with existing community, local, regional or statewide priorities or initiatives	10
Project Readiness	Identification of necessary permits, approvals, and site control with concrete steps to obtain them, where applicable	10
		<u>100</u>

Overall Narrative (<i>Opportunity and Catalyst Grants</i>)		
Proposal Vision	Overall vision aligned with the Local Community Benefits Fund Program Goals and community needs	10
Partnership Composition	Multi-stakeholder partnerships rooted in community priorities and leadership with demonstrated organizational connections to the community	10
Partnership Co-Management Structure	Meaningful co-management structures with clear roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes that outline how partners will collaborate	10
Lead Applicant Management Capacity	Demonstrated ability and dedicated resources to oversee overall implementation	10
Lead Applicant Financial Capacity	Demonstrated ability to manage public funds efficiently with clear financial management and tracking practices	10
		<u>50</u>

NOTE: Benicia Catalyst Grant applications are exempt from the Co-Applicant requirement for Catalyst Grants. Therefore, Benicia Catalyst Grant applications are scored out of 130 points total, rather than the 150 points total.

Detailed Scoring Rubric

1. Strategy Alignment	
<p>Does the project demonstrate a clear and compelling alignment tied to one of the Local Community Benefit Fund's strategies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce air pollution and improve health outcomes • Build economic resilience for a just transition <p>Source:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Narrative - Q1 (Project Summary) • Project Narrative - Q2 (Strategy Alignment) 	
Score range	Description
9-10 (Excellent)	Clear and compelling overall vision aligned to one of the Local Community Benefits Fund's core strategies. The connection between the project and the strategy is specific, direct, and well-articulated – no ambiguity about which strategy is being advanced or how.
7-8 (Good)	Good alignment with one of the Fund's strategies. The project vision is clear but may lack some specificity in how the project activities directly advance the strategy.
5-6 (Adequate)	Some alignment with a Fund strategy is present but the connection is vague or generic, or the project description does not make a strong case for why this strategy fits.
3-4 (Insufficient)	The project claims alignment with a strategy but the connection is weak, unclear, or superficial. The strategy feels tacked on rather than central to the project design.
0-2 (Poor)	Little to no demonstrated alignment with either Fund strategy. Project vision is absent, unclear, or entirely disconnected from the program's goals.

Eligible Applications

- Two applications advanced past eligibility review, collectively totaling \$65,770,910 in funding requested:
 - Benicia Unified School District
 - City of Benicia
- Both applicants engaged with the technical assistance provider, Environmental Protection Network (EPN), to understand program requirements and strengthen their applications:
 - An Environmental Protection Agency alumni in EPN's network reviewed an applicant draft proposal and provided feedback
 - EPN discussed scope eligibility and strategy alignment with an applicant

Benicia Unified School District (BUSD)

Project	Summary	Funding Request	Average Score
Healthy Campuses	“BUSD proposes a comprehensive suite of facility transformations designed to eliminate fossil fuel dependency while creating a "safety shield" for student and staff health.”	\$15,515,869	81 / 100
Student Wellness	“The project will implement coordinated outreach, early identification, and care navigation for students experiencing illness—particularly those affected by respiratory conditions such as asthma and allergies”	\$6,304,400	66 / 100
Career Pathways	"Expand its current Career Technical Education Pathways program by adding an Environmental Resources Pathway and a Biotechnology Pathway as part of the BUSD Clean Future Initiative.”	\$3,950,641	75 / 100
<i>Overall Narrative</i>			28 / 30
Total Score			102 / 130
\$ Request		\$25,770,910	

City of Benicia

Project	Summary	Funding Request	Average Score
Clean Energy	"The City Center Community Resilience Campus (Phase 1) brings Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) electrification, solar system modernization, and consolidated backup power."	\$7,182,512.5	61 / 100
Clean Mobility	"The Clean Mobility Project advances two parallel goals: transitioning city-owned vehicles and infrastructure toward clean energy and making it safer and more practical for Benicia residents to get around without a car."	\$5,886,442.5	57 / 100
Just Economic Transition	"Four outcomes define success for this project: the Industrial Park stays economically active during the transition; the City's land use policy is updated in time to shape what comes next; the refinery site's decommissioning follows a structured, public process; and the Industrial Safety Ordinance program keeps protecting residents throughout."	\$11,430,924.5	59 / 100
Promoting Community Health	"The project supports energy transition by replacing reactive spending — emergency wildfire response, deferred park maintenance, crisis-driven fleet repair — with planned, preventive investment that lowers long-term costs and protects the health of Benicia's workforce and families."	\$15,500,120.5	57 / 100
<i>Overall Narrative</i>			23 / 30
Total Score			81.5 / 130
\$ Request		\$40,000,000	

Application Submissions: Strengths

Reduce Air Pollution and Improve Health Outcomes

- Project proposals to reduce exposure to indoor air pollution by increasing filtration and reducing emissions, such as envelope air sealing and zero NOx (nitrogen oxide) heat pumps
- Project proposals to reduce the emissions of criteria pollutants or air toxics through activities such as the installation of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements, and tree planting

Build Economic Resilience for a Just Transition

- Environmental student career pathways and training
- Redevelopment coordination for industrial and polluted properties
- Economic development planning to advance economic diversification and attract clean and green businesses

Application Submissions: Weaknesses

- Acquisition and/or maintenance of fossil-fuel powered appliances, building systems, and infrastructure (e.g., diesel generators, gas-powered vehicles, gas-powered Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC))
- Deferred maintenance activities with indirect and unclear impact to air quality improvements
- Activities lacking concrete, tangible, and measurable outcomes aligned with the program strategies and the proposed budget
- Overreliance on consultants and subcontractors

Considerations for Award

- Fund activities with **concrete, tangible, and measurable outcomes** aligned with the program goals and the proposed budget
- Prioritize funding that **remains within the community** (e.g., reduce consultant costs)
- Ensure **no duplicative funding** and establish clear associated documentation
- **Do not fund the acquisition and/or maintenance of fossil-fuel** powered appliances, building systems, and infrastructure (e.g., diesel generators, gas-powered appliances and vehicles)

Proposed Next Steps

- Air District staff proposes working with both applicants to refine project scopes, workplans, and budgets to maximize community impact to Benicia residents; ensure successful, timely project outcomes; and steward fiscally responsible usage of funds
- Applicants will be asked to re-submit abridged application materials for Air District consideration
- Staff proposes to present grant award recommendations, based on the revised application scopes, at the September Board of Directors meeting

Recommended Action

None; the Committee will discuss this item, but no action is requested at this time. Air District staff will present Benicia Catalyst Grant award recommendations to the Board of Directors in September 2026 for the Board's consideration and adoption.

Questions & Discussion

For more information:

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