Blue Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake

DRAFT Peer Review Process

REVISED.May.87?.868❶

Background

Since 2018, the Blue Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake (Committee) has worked to improve the health of Clear Lake itself, its species and the surrounding basin, and for the communities and cultures dependent on the health of the environment. To date, this has resulted in over $13 million in allocations from the State of California for research projects, on-the-ground restoration work, and environmental education to improve the health of Clear Lake and its communities. As project proposals become more complex (with larger funding requests), the Committee recommends the implementation of a peer review and peer advice to ensure proposals will meet their state goals, the goals of the Committee as a whole, and demonstrate clear justification for significant public investment.

Peer review and peer advice are essential tools to determine the likely efficacy of environmental restoration proposals based on the best available science prior to funding or implementation of the project in question, and after a project is implemented to determine whether the proposal achieved its stated goal, as well as the goals and proposal requirements of the Committee (**see page 6**). Generally, peer review is carried out by an independent panel of experts with expertise in fields applicable to the proposal in question (i.e., a proposal for HAB mitigation would require a panel of experts with knowledge in lake science and water quality, while an erosion control proposal may require a panel including geologists, forestry specialists, etc.).

The Committee welcomes requests for peer review and advice. Reviews typically consider work that is complete or near-complete, while advice focuses on work in earlier stages of proposal development before funding and implementation. The Committee recommends whether a review or advice panel should be conducted, and plays a critical oversight role throughout the process. Two key features of the review and advice process are **independence** and **transparency**. Independence is maintained by the Committee and its parent agency, the California Natural Resources Agency (Resources), acting as an intermediary between the requesting party and the reviewers; transparency is maintained by publicly sharing materials and reviewer feedback to the public via the Committee website, during public meetings, and as attachments to proposals considered for funding and implementation.

Following peer review or advice, the Committee will consider expert panel outcomes to determine whether a proposal is sufficient to recommend funding, insufficient/requiring modification to meet state goals, or deficient and inappropriate for funding at this time.

Peer Review/Advice Process

Selection of appropriate peer review experts is a key first step in the peer review or advice process.

As noted above, reviewers should be independent of any proposal brought to the Committee for its consideration. To ensure independence, the Committee recommends relying on the significant expertise of the Resources for identifying experts specific to the proposal(s) in question. Prior to the launch of a peer review process, Resources should provide Committee members with each reviewer's curriculum vitae/an overview of the reviewers' qualifications. As the panel is established, reviewers would be entitled to a stipend for their participation in this process.

Once experts are identified, reviewers will be asked to consider the proposal(s) based on a series of questions designed to determine the likely efficacy of the project being proposed (**see page 4 below**). The Committee retains decision making authority for approval of all proposals and a recommendation to fund them to Resources, regardless of peer review outcomes. This process is intended to be another data point to help guide these decisions, but is not in lieu of the technical, social, economic, and community expertise of Committee members.

Questions for Committee Consideration September 24, 2025

1. What additional guidance can the Committee provide to ensure the independence and transparency of the peer review process? Ex: conflict of interest guidance or certification.

   - The Committee proposal review process has grown organically since its inception, and we don't want to hand over actual approval of proposals over to an independent panel.
   - Tribal sovereignty and the active inclusion of the seven sovereign Tribal Nations in Lake County must be considered in the peer review process, per proposal requirement #4 in the "Project Proposal Requirements/Criteria" approved by the Committee (**see page 6 below**).

2. If reviewers deem proposal budgets insufficient for completion of the entire project, can the Committee recommend partial funding for critical components of the proposal?
   - The Committee did not provide guidance on this question on May 21st.

3. Should reviewers conduct their work independently, or as part of a collaborative panel?

- Committee members and experts from UC Davis suggested peer review can be run in either fashion. Although the actual *review* of proposals and research outcome is generally done independently, reviewers are at times asked to convene to discuss their rankings.
- Experts involved in previous peer review processes did note that potential reviewers have limited availability, and cautioned that convening a collaborative panel will take more time than conducting individual review. Individual review can happen fairly quickly (especially given the typical length of proposals to the Committee).

4. How can Tribal governments provide guidance on recommended reviewers to incorporate indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the review process?
- The Committee's goals and proposal requirements (**see page 6 below**) explicitly require the inclusion of Tribes in the development and implementation of projects. Peer reviewers should consider the degree to which a proposal addresses this requirement.

5. Should the Committee recommend peer review for all proposals as part of the Committee process, or as part of the CNRA contracting process before funding agreements are finalized?

- The peer review process could be used to prioritize *current* projects to utilize the limited funding based on the best current science. This would not *remove* any projects already approved by the Committee for consideration of funding, but create a funding order based on current funding availability.
- Peer review should be used for future proposals.

SAMPLE Instructions and Questions to Reviewers[1]

Please provide a brief written summary of your findings for each criterion listed on the next two pages. Please provide an overall numerical rating of the proposal based on your review on the last page (not with the comment portion of your review). Note that providing individual scores for each question is optional. Only the overall numerical rating is required. Please do not report numerical ratings with greater than two significant figures. Use the rating definitions below to determine your overall rating. Please provide a brief written justification for your overall rating.

Rating	Definition
5 – 5.9 (Superior)	All aspects of the proposal are clear and well described. All technical review criteria are affirmatively met and there is a high probability of success. No substantive flaws are noted, although some minor errors or omissions may be noted.
4 – 4.9 (Good)	All aspects of the proposal are clear and well described. A majority of the technical review criteria are affirmatively met, although there may be some minor questions related to some aspects of the proposal. Reviewers may identify one substantive flaw, but there is a clear resolution to that flaw. Some minor errors or omissions also may be noted.
3 – 3.9 (Average)	The proposal is sound overall, but some deficiencies are noted. Reviewers may identify up to two substantive critical flaws, and at least half of the technical review criteria are affirmatively met.
2 – 2.9 (Below Average)	The proposal presents a cogent description of the project but serious deficiencies are noted. Reviewers may identify three or more substantive critical flaws, and less than half of the technical review criteria are affirmatively met.
1 - 1.9 (Inferior)	The proposal does not present a cogent description of the project and serious deficiencies are noted. Reviewers may identify three or more substantive critical flaws, and less than half of the technical review criteria are affirmatively met.

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[1] Modified from the Nevada Lake Tahoe License Plate Program Grant Review Technical Advisory Committee Evaluation Criteria. https://lands.nv.gov/uploads/documents/Grant_Procedures_2025.pdf

Proposal Title: **Date:**

1. Goals. Are the goals, objectives, and hypotheses clearly stated and internally consistent? Is the idea timely and important? Does the proposal directly address the Committee's stated goals, including all issues related to Tribal governance and the incorporation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge where applicable?

Reviewer Comment:

2. Justification. Is the study justified relative to existing knowledge/is the project supported by applicable case studies in California?   Is the conceptual basis clearly stated in the proposal, and does it explain the underlying basis for the proposed work?

Reviewer Comment:

3. Approach. Is the approach well designed and appropriate for meeting the objectives of the project? Is the project likely to generate novel information, methodologies, or approaches? If the project is a physical capital improvement or restoration effort, is there a clear monitoring plan prior to, during, and following implementation?

Reviewer Comment:

4. Feasibility. Is the approach fully documented and technically feasible? Are the underlying assumptions reasonable? What is the likelihood of success? Are the scale, budget, and timeline of the project consistent with the goals and objectives and within the grasp of the proposal team?

Reviewer Comment:

5. Products. Is the project likely to yield products of value? Are interpretative (or interpretable) outcomes likely from this project? Is an adequate plan provided for review and revision of draft products? For scientific research projects, will the information ultimately be useful to decision makers?

Reviewer Comment:

6. Capabilities. What is the track record of the project team in terms of their past work? Is the project team qualified to efficiently and effectively implement the proposed project? Do they have the infrastructure and other aspects of support necessary to accomplish the project?

Reviewer Comment:

7. Overall Rating: Please provide a numerical score using the rating table below and provide a brief justification for your overall rating:

Reviewer Overall Rating:

Reviewer Comment:

Overall Proposal Rating Value (see rating definitions in the table above):

	Rating Value
Question 1 (optional)	
Question 2 (optional)	
Question 3 (optional)	
Question 4 (optional)	
Question 5 (optional)	
Question 6 (optional)	
OVERALL Rating (required)	

Blue Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake

Project Proposal Requirements/Criteria

December 14, 2022

The Blue Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake (Committee) Vision and Goals serve as "guiding principles" for Committee activities, providing "sideboards" for project proposals brought to the Committee for eventual funding and implementation. This document provides suggested proposal requirements, reporting standards, and a timeline for proposal submission at the request of Committee members. This document was approved by all members present at the Committee's December 13, 2022 meeting.

Only those projects designed to achieve elements of the Vision should move forward. To the greatest extent possible, the Committee should seek to approve projects which create a cohesive path forward for achieving that vision; however, it is assumed that some individual projects may address aspects of the Vision absent a direct link to other projects.

For all project proposals seeking Proposition 68 funds must follow the Proposition 68 Specified River Parkways Grant Guidelines/Procedural Guide available [here](#).

1. Proposal Requirements

The following requirements will be used to develop a prioritization system for the Committee's consideration as it considers proposals. Depending on the type of proposal under consideration (i.e., environmental restoration, nutrient management, environmental education, etc.) not all requirements will apply. As projects are submitted for consideration, each Committee member is expected to consider how well the project addresses the items below.

Primary Requirements. These are critical for the Committee's consideration of each proposal:

1. Does the project contribute to improving the physical and biological health of Clear Lake?
2. Does the proposal describe baseline conditions (the current state) and goals (desired future state) it seeks to achieve?
3. How does the project demonstrate progress towards achieving the Committee's vision?
4. How will the seven Native American Tribes in Lake County be actively included in project design and implementation (starting with project concept development)?
5. How will the fully implemented project be maintained in the long-term with the local community?

Secondary Requirements. To the greatest extent possible, proposals should also:

6. Describe how the project is expected to improve or impact the Lake County economy.
7. Describe the outreach/community engagement necessary to build understanding of and support for the project. This may include (but is not limited to) a description of who will be engaged, and which existing groups will collaborate to increase project awareness/community buy-in.
8. Identify all local, state, and federal permitting requirements (including environmental review through NEPA/CEQA) required for project implementation. Describe a process for coordinating with appropriate local, state, and federal agencies.
9. Describe how the proposal uses existing research in its design and outline how the work leverages/builds on past and current research outcomes.
10. Use existing data to the maximum extent feasible *OR* describe specific data gaps expected to be filled through project implementation.
11. Describe the proposing entity's experience on similar projects.

12. Informational only: Describe whether the project seeks to address an issue under existing statutory or regulatory responsibilities of the entity leading the effort, and why the issue has not been resolved previously (i.e., lack of alternative funding sources, staff resources, local expertise, etc.).

2. **Project Reporting Standards**

Specific reporting requirements will be dictated in contract agreements after proposals are approved by the Committee and funded by the State, but at a minimum should include:

1. Written and verbal quarterly updates to the Committee on project implementation progress including status of deliverables/deadlines.
2. Quarterly updates to the Committee and Resources on community outreach/engagement and Tribal consultation. Which Tribes were consulted? Why weren't other Clear Lake Tribes contacted?
3. A plan for data management, submittal, and open sharing with all project collaborators and interested stakeholders throughout the life of the project, and post-project data ownership. Include specific discussion and plan for managing sensitive Tribal data.
4. Final report after project implementation.
5. Post-project monitoring updates.