



MASSACHUSETTS RECREATIONAL TRAILS ADVISORY BOARD

January 21, 2020

Conference Call

7:00 – 8:00pm

Members Present with Representation:

Tom Chamberland, Chair - Local Land Trust/Non-Profits
Bill Boles – Mountain Biking
Tim Craig – Youth Corps
Marianne Iarossi – Municipal Trail Planners
Becky Kalagher – Equestrians
Bridget Likely – Hiking
Aaron North – Hiking
Dick O'Brien – Community Trails and Greenways Groups
Larry Tucker – Snowmobiling
Mike White – 4-Wheel Drive Clubs
Dick Williamson – Bicycling/Rail Trails

Liaisons:

Amanda Lewis – DCR MassTrails
Libby Knott – DCR MassTrails
Scott Morrill – EOEEA OHV Coordinator

Meeting Minutes:

- Approve Minutes from October 8, 2019 meeting
Mike W. reminded the board that it was to discuss nominations for a Vice at tonight's meeting. The discussion has been added to the "Other Business" section below. Motion to accept meeting minutes from October 8, 2019 meeting; seconded and unanimous approval.
- Date for Review Meeting
Saturday, March 14 is the date of the 2020 MassTrails Grants Program review meeting. Please put the date on your calendar with an estimated meeting duration of 9am to 4pm. Libby will send a meeting invitation out soon. If you are not able to take part, please notify Amanda.

The meeting will take place on the 2nd Floor at the Town of Sturbridge's Center Office Building, 301 Main Street, Sturbridge, MA. There is parking in the rear of the building. We will be the only people using the building that day, so if we need to double up in the parking area it will be fine to do so.

The room we will use has call-in capabilities in case some members need to call in rather than participate in person. And if you cannot participate on this day, you are still able to review grants beforehand. Your input will be shared with all at the review day.



Amanda will provide lunch. Please plan on bringing your own drinks.

- 2019 Grant Round Review Process Discussion

The pre-call exercise sent out asked each member to review 3 grant applications from the 2019 round in order to spark everyone's thinking on any issues, questions, or concerns with the process as we prepare for the 2020 review.

Both the Grant Application and Scoring Rubric have been updated for the 2020 grant round based on previous feedback at our June 2019 meeting, as well as feedback from the Inter Agency Trails Team. The new versions are what you received for the exercise.

The exercise was to help ensure that each MARTAB member understands the grant program and the application process, which are important aspects in preparation for a successful review process. It is critical that each member understands how to use the Scoring Rubric. If you need more help, get in touch with Amanda for specific questions, and/or individualized help and clarification.

Once the February 1 application deadline has passed, Amanda and Libby will process the applications that were received. They will then distribute all eligible, qualifying applications out to members for review. Amanda will send along notes to help guide your review process but suggests that for each application, you read the entire application before applying the Scoring Rubric to it. That will help you understand the grant's unique qualifications, contexts, goals, and challenges. During this initial review, absolute strengths as well as gross weaknesses will stand out. These will in turn facilitate your review. Looking at each application as a whole is a good jumping off point and provides a foundation of understanding of the individual project.

After a thorough reading of the application, then you can dig into the weeds and the details of each. It is then that you will want to go point by point through the Scoring Rubric and synthesize the application's information to apply an appropriate score to each of the Rubric's criteria.

As you make your way through each application, please take plentiful notes in the comments section. Since we meet later as a board to award the grants, it is a vital tool to have at hand to help recall what your initial thoughts were when you scored each. Additionally, Amanda will often get inquiries from applicants who did not receive an award asking for guidance on what they can do in the future to enhance their application and chances. These inquiries can come months after the application process. Your comments are essential in being able to go back and gather information and feedback to share with applicants.

As a reminder, it is inevitable that applicants will forget or omit items. Only professional, seasoned grant writers will get an application perfect! You can expect missing information. Just make a note/comment for each missing piece and we can address its implications on the review day.



Questions / Feedback during the call

Q: Why does the Scoring Rubric not correspond in a one-to-one relationship to the Application questions?

A: It is not possible to correspond directly as the application on a whole should be read with the answers to each question complementing and synthesizing with others to form an overall narrative and project description. Some questions are more correlated to the Rubric's criteria, while others are not. To fairly and thoroughly evaluate each application it is not possible to create a Rubric Criteria that covers every item in a relational manner. Critical analysis and synthesis of information during the review process is the best process we can apply when scoring.

Q: What do we do with the other items submitted along with the application?

A: Review everything! The supporting documents add quite a bit of information and detail on top of the application narrative. This is where you'll find a budget, maps, land ownership / easement letters, etc.

Q: Do we fund pure planning activities?

A: No. We will, however, fund activities that lead to construction (e.g., engineering / design / permitting) but not solely planning activities.

Q: How are the state capital funded awards decided?

A: After the application deadline, Amanda and Libby will sort through everything submitted and send all qualifying applications out to MARTAB members for review. Additionally, they will sort out all proposed shared-use pathway projects. These shared-use pathway applications will be reviewed by the Inter Agency Trails Team. Shared-use pathway applications selected for state capital funds after review by the Inter Agency Trails Team will then not be eligible for RTP consideration.

Q: What can I use as a resource during the review process in addition to the applicant's application and other supporting documents?

A: Many things! You can use census information, GIS, Google Earth, City Data, Environmental Justice Community information, look at an organization's website, etc. It does not hurt to perform a bit of due diligence during your reviewing. **What you are not allowed to do is contact the applicant for additional information.** That would give the applicant an unfair advantage over other applicants.

Q: Is there an online tool to help us gauge a cost benefits analysis for each project?

A: Dick O'Brien tasked himself to ask other trail builders if there is an "Average Cost of Trail Construction" tool they can share with us. However, it was cautioned that sometimes analysis is not as simple as using a generalized tool since all projects are different in scope, context, physical constraints, permitting required, etc. Any such tool should be used with this in mind.

Q: What are some of the key questions to answer when evaluating the Environmental Justice question?

A: 1. What Environmental Justice Community (EJC) will this trail help?



2. How will it help? (i.e., recreational opportunity, connecting neighbors to schools and services, providing a safe transportation corridor that is an alternative to a roadway, etc.)
3. What is the true proximity of the trail to the EJC? Does the trail run through the EJC; adjacent to it; or at a distance that may not really have a quantifiable positive impact for the EJC?
4. Have we given funds to this EJC / area / organization before?
5. What populations will be served by this trail? (i.e., underserved, low-income, elderly, people of color, school-aged, etc.)

AS A NOTE: You can give a score of zero on the Rubric if the applicant does not address or answer this section. That is okay. If, during your review you have any question about an application please contact Amanda. She can help answer that question and give you guidance in how to apply the Rubric in a given situation.

Post Review Process

After the March grant review day, we will plan a separate meeting to discuss this year's review process to collect immediate feedback while it is still fresh in everyone's mind. This can be a collective meeting of all MARTAB members, or a subcommittee – however best we decide to do it, the date of which can be determined at the March 14 review day.

- Approval of Updated Bylaws

MARTAB members reviewed the proposed Conflict of Interest language that the DCR legal department has asked us to add to the Bylaws. The overall goal is to create a grant review process that is the epitome of transparency and fairness, and will hold up under scrutiny and audit.

With regard to Item 2: In past years, any MARTAB member with an interest in a grant application/project was allowed to answer questions regarding the project. The new language will no longer allow this. The underlying reasoning is that that old practice created an unfair advantage in that the application in question was able to have more information presented in its favor than other applications that had only their paper submittal for members' review.

With regard to Item 3: Likewise, this is a very different course of action from past years. When reviewing an application, any MARTAB member with an interest in that particular project will be required to exit the room during the review and discussion of that application.

With regard to membership in trails-minded organizations: It was noted that many of the review team and MARTAB members have supporting membership in organizations that apply for MassTrails grants. The example given was a MARTAB member who pays a nominal membership fee to a non-profit that in turn is an applicant up for review. As a mere supporting member (e.g., Trustees, Trust for Public Land, AMC, etc.) does that preclude you from participating in the review of an application from that organization? The thought being that you are a supporting not acting or



governing member, nor do you financially benefit from the group's successful awarding of a MassTrails grant. Where is the line drawn in this regard? This is a very valid question that could not be answered during our call. To resolve this, Amanda and Libby will look into a solution that both keeps with the desired transparency and does not overreach its intent.

Amanda will look to other RTP programs for some insight and guidance. Once we have what seems to be a workable solution, we will have a special meeting to review and adopt the language. We will also discuss the agenda items below at that time.

- Other Business

Each of the items below was tabled due to time constraints. We will take up and address these business items in future communications and/or meetings.

1. Trails Fest – MARTAB Sponsorship
2. Legislative Trail Caucus
3. Nominations for Vice Chair

Meeting Adjourned 8:15pm