

Discussion Memo

Background

On [December 13, 2024 \(Item 11\)](#), the Board of Directors approved the Cycle 6 Smart Growth Incentive Program (SGIP) call for projects, allocating \$45 million for Capital, Planning, and Climate Action Planning initiatives. The 90-day application window opened on January 6, 2025, and closed on April 11, 2025. SANDAG received 46 applications requesting over \$79 million from 15 cities and the County of San Diego. One application received was ultimately rescinded by the applicant after securing alternative funding, leaving a total of 45 projects for consideration.

Geographic Funding Distribution

In 2023, the Transportation Committee (TC) directed staff to analyze the grant award process, specifically focusing on the geographic distribution of funding to prevent overconcentration of awards to a single applicant. Following staff's review, the TC on [July 21, 2023 \(Item 9\)](#) and the Regional Planning Committee (RPC) on [December 1, 2023 \(Item 4\)](#) recommended that geographic funding distribution be a key consideration in future grant cycles.

Geographic distribution was subsequently discussed with various working groups and committees throughout 2024 during the development of the SGIP Cycle 6 call for projects, as listed below:

- June 13, 2024 - Mobility Working Group ([Item 5](#))
- June 20, 2024 - Sustainable Communities Working Group ([Item 3](#))
- June 27, 2024 - Social Equity Working Group ([Item 5](#))
- July 19, 2024 - Transportation Committee ([Item 9](#))
- September 6, 2024 - Regional Planning Committee ([Item 4](#))
- November 13, 2024 – Independent Taxpayer Oversight Committee ([Item 9](#))

On [December 13, 2024 \(Item 11\)](#), the Board of Directors approved the SGIP Cycle 6 call for projects, which officially incorporated geographic funding distribution. The approved scoring process for awarding funds is based on a descending Total Application Score order with two key steps:

1. For each project type, funding is first allocated in descending order to all applicants with a score of 50 points or higher. This continues until all such applicants have received funding for at least one project, or until funds are exhausted.
2. If funding remains after the first step, additional applications will be recommended for funding in descending score order until the available funding is fully depleted.

Project Eligibility Review

Once all applications are received, they are evaluated internally using project eligibility screening criteria. The screening criteria was included as part of the call for projects approved by the Board of Directors on December 13, 2024. For the SGIP Cycle 6 call for projects, staff identified two projects whose eligibility warranted input from the Independent Taxpayer Oversight Committee (ITOC). These two projects were included and scored as part of the evaluation process. Following the evaluation process, one of the Planning projects—the City of Escondido's Affordable Housing Trust Fund—was recommended for funding.

The City of Escondido project aims to establish a trust fund, associated procedures, and an in-lieu fee ordinance to support affordable housing development. While the project expands housing options, the application does not include transportation infrastructure improvements as required by Section C.3. of the TransNet Extension & Ordinance, which mandates funding for *transportation-related infrastructure*

improvements that integrate transportation and land use. The project relies on existing infrastructure rather than developing new transportation infrastructure to support future housing.

On [September 10, 2025 \(Item 4\)](#), ITOC reviewed the project and, while recognizing its merits and location within a transit area, recommended that the Board find the project ineligible because it did not align with the Ordinance's intent to fund transportation-related infrastructure development.

The Transportation Committee is asked to consider ITOC's recommendation regarding the City of Escondido project's eligibility. If the project is not recommended for funding, its grant award amount will be reallocated to the Capital Project category.

Since ITOC's recommendation, staff have taken steps to do a comprehensive re-evaluation of the grants distribution process. The eligibility screening was noted as needing improvements to avoid ineligible projects from being put through the evaluation process and to ensure applicants understand the eligibility requirements of each grant program. Moving forward, staff will implement a more thorough screening process to determine eligibility, which will include further emphasis to applicants on the eligibility requirements and guidance from general counsel on the best approach to determining project eligibility prior to scoring applications.

Evaluation Process

An external evaluation panel was established for each project category (Capital, Planning, and Climate Action Planning), and members were screened for conflicts of interest. Panel members were selected from local agencies, Caltrans, transit authorities, and non-profits, bringing diverse expertise in transportation, planning, and sustainability.

Panels (three members for Planning/Climate Action Planning projects; five for Capital projects) received comprehensive training and materials, then independently scored applications over a 2–4-week period in July 2025 using the evaluation criteria established in the SGIP Cycle 6 Call for Projects.

Following independent scoring, post-evaluation debrief meetings were held in July – August 2025 to discuss project merits. A project's final qualitative score was determined by averaging panel members' scores. For the final scoring step, SANDAG Grants staff provided quantitative scores to generate the final total score for each application in August 2025.

Re-Evaluation Process

A re-evaluation of the SGIP scoring process was initiated following the identification of a capital scoring discrepancy ahead of the October 3, 2025, RPC meeting. Staff identified several specific issues through the re-evaluation:

- Excel Spreadsheet Error – The erroneous deletion of a scoring row under “Matching Funds” within the Capital Scoring Workbook resulted in an inaccurate descending score order. This was corrected and led to score increases for nine projects.
- Inconsistent Board Policy 33 Responses – Seven agencies provided inconsistent responses to Board Policy 33 questions. While 33 total inconsistencies were found, these errors did not ultimately impact any final scores.
- Manual Input Errors – Manual input errors from scoring proximity project maps and project feasibility criteria led to the identification of mistakes. Six scores were adjusted following reassessment.
- Process Improvements – Inconsistencies were found with the scoring of the safety criteria. Correcting the errors resulted in five projects having their scores adjusted.

The SANDAG Data Science team conducted a Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) review of the re-evaluated scoring workbooks on November 3, 2025. Nine QA/QC findings were identified and addressed by Grants staff, confirming the completion and integrity of the final scoring data.

Internal Peer Review Panel Recommended Future Corrective Actions

To prevent future discrepancies, an internal Peer Review Panel (PRP) of ten SANDAG staff from planning, grants, data science, and finance departments was convened on October 22, 2025. This panel discussed evaluation procedures and identified corrective actions aimed at improving future grant cycles and minimizing errors. The corrective actions fell under three categories:

1. **Process Improvements:** Conduct a comprehensive review of grant programs led by other agencies to identify best practices that can be applied to SANDAG grant programs; streamline and clarify the application questions to reduce applicant errors; and improve the screening and evaluation process.
2. **Automation Opportunities:** Automate the grant submission and review process where possible to reduce manual data entry and avoid input errors
3. **Data Integrity:** Complete additional staff reviews before finalizing scoring, and lock scoring sheets when the QA/QC process is complete.

Funding Recommendation for Planning and Climate Action Planning Projects

Following the re-evaluation, there were no changes to projects recommended for funding for the Planning and Climate Action Planning project categories. A total of 22 Planning and Climate Action Planning projects are recommended to receive approximately \$11.1 million of SGIP Cycle 6 funding. A detailed list of these projects and their recommended funding amounts is provided in Tables 1 and 2. Attachments 2–3 are the detailed Scoring Evaluation Workbooks for the Planning and Climate Action Planning projects.

Table 1: Planning Project Funding Recommendations			
Jurisdiction	Project Name	Requested Funding	Recommended Funding
National City	National City Downtown Specific Plan Update	\$500,000	\$500,000
San Diego	Otay Mesa-Nestor Community Plan Update	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
National City	Housing Supportive Infrastructure Assessment	\$599,000	\$599,000
Vista	City of Vista Active Transportation Plan	\$407,900	\$407,900
Lemon Grove	Lemon Grove Massachusetts Avenue Safe Routes to Transit Connectivity Plan	\$463,067	\$463,067
Lemon Grove	Lemon Grove Regional Bikeway Corridor Study	\$632,500	\$632,500
El Cajon	Parkway Specific Plan	\$650,000	\$650,000
San Diego	Balboa Park Master Plan: Connecting Parks, People and Places	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
El Cajon	Mixed Use Overlay	\$500,000	\$500,000
San Diego	Rancho Bernardo Community Plan Update	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
La Mesa	La Mesa Downtown Village Specific Plan	\$372,289	\$372,289
County	Buena Creek Specific Plan	\$751,500	\$751,500
San Marcos	San Marcos Boulevard Corridor Plan	\$782,175	\$782,175
Escondido	Affordable Housing Trust Fund*	\$315,000	\$315,000

Table 1: Planning Project Funding Recommendations			
Jurisdiction	Project Name	Requested Funding	Recommended Funding
Coronado	Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Needs Assessment & Master Plan	\$150,000	\$150,000
	TOTAL:	\$9,123,431	\$9,123,431

*- ITOC recommended that this project not be deemed eligible to the Board of Directors.

Table 2. Climate Action Planning Project Funding Recommendations			
Jurisdiction	Project Name	Requested Funding	Recommended Funding
San Diego	City of San Diego Climate Action Plan Update	\$400,000	\$400,000
Del Mar	Climate Action Plan Update and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory Project	\$164,000	\$164,000
Vista	Updating the City of Vista's Climate Action Plan	\$335,000	\$335,000
National City	National City Climate Action Plan Implementation Monitoring	\$234,500	\$234,500
Imperial Beach	Climate Action Plan Update	\$150,000	\$150,000
Solana Beach	Regional Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory Project	\$400,000	\$400,000
San Marcos	Climate Action Plan (CAP)	\$315,000	\$315,000
	TOTAL:	\$1,998,500	\$1,998,500