SUBJECT: Circuit Rider Grant Program Policy

EFFECTIVE DATE: 03/24/2017

REVISED DATE: 04/13/2017, 8/4/2017, 11/13/2017

BACKGROUND: This document explains DCNR’s Circuit Rider Grant Program. The information provided is intended to help determine if your organization has a realistic and viable Circuit Rider Grant application. After reviewing this information and before completing a grant application, please discuss your project with your BRC Regional Advisor.

POLICY:

1. Circuit Rider Project Objectives

   BRC provides financial assistance for county, regional or multi-municipal organizations to hire a professional full-time recreation and/or conservation staff person. The Circuit Rider’s purpose is to coordinate, compliment, initiate and expand new programs and services either countywide or across multiple municipalities that individually do not have the financial resources to hire a professional staff person. The intended result of such a hiring is the increased ability of county and local officials to more efficiently and effectively meet their recreation, and conservation needs. The project encourages intergovernmental cooperation through a written agreement that enables communities and organizations to pool their financial resources to support the full-time professional staff person.

2. Eligible Applicants and Projects

   To be eligible for Circuit Rider grant funding, two or more municipalities must cooperate in an intergovernmental or regional effort and provide the required local cash match for the project. The application must come from one municipality, a council of government, an authority created under the Municipal Authorities Act, or an official agency created under the Intergovernmental Cooperation Law (Chapter 23 of Act 1966-177, formerly Act 180). A single county can be eligible without an intergovernmental agreement provided the county is undertaking or has completed the appropriate recreation and/or greenway planning and will be providing services countywide to residents and municipalities.
3. **Examples of Eligible Circuit Rider Projects**

- The first full-time professional recreation director is hired to expand recreation program offerings for a multi-municipal agency or county.
- A recreation and parks executive director is hired to manage an existing agency that expands beyond a single municipality’s services and boundaries to integrate the efforts of an adjacent municipality and foster additional cooperation within a regional school district.
- An established recreation and park department serving one municipality hires a recreation program coordinator to provide contracted recreation services to two or more municipalities.
- A county greenway and open space coordinator is hired to help implement a county greenway and open space network plan.
- A new agency is created through a cooperative agreement between a school district and municipality.

4. **Special Requirements and Conditions**

- **Peer Review:** In most situations, the BRC will require a peer review to be successfully completed under our Peer grant program before approving an application for Circuit Rider funding. More information on the Peer Grant Program can be found on the DCNR website.

- **Grant Application:** Circuit Rider applications are accepted at any time. Eligible applicants include a single county, one municipality on behalf of at least one other, a council of governments, an authority, or an official agency created under the Intergovernmental Cooperation Law.

- **Approval Process:** To request a Circuit Rider grant, a community should contact their DCNR Regional Advisor to discuss the project and determine if a Circuit Rider grant is appropriate. If need and suitability are determined, the applicant will work with the DCNR Central Office Circuit Rider Project Manager to develop the first-year budget, draft job description, and when applicable an intergovernmental agreement. Note: These documents are typically produced through a peer project. Once these documents have been approved the applicant can submit a Circuit Rider grant application through the DCNR Grants Portal. If selected for funding, the BRC will approve the grant request, provide a grant agreement and work with the grantee to begin the hiring process.

- **Requesting Funds:** Prior to hiring the Circuit Rider and once the grant agreement has been fully executed, a payment of 50% of the first-year grant funds can be processed. After the Circuit Rider has been hired the grantee can request an additional 40% of the first year grant funds. Both payment requests can be made with the Partial Payment Request Form which can be found on the DCNR website. The final 10% of the annual grant award will be withheld until the all required year-end closeout documentation has been received and approved.

- **Continued Funding:** Grant funding in the second, third and fourth years is contingent on the grantee/Circuit Rider’s performance in the previous year(s) of the project, submission
of acceptable requests for additional funding, and the BRC receiving an appropriation of grant funds.

- **Project Closeout Requirements:** BRC closes out each individual year of the grant agreement throughout the life of the project. By doing so the grant agreement is reconciled and amended annually. The grantee must submit the following information in order to reconcile and close out years one through three:
  - **Request for Funding of Circuit Rider Salary**
    - **Note:** This form must be submitted at least three months before the start of the subsequent year. This allows the Bureau’s contracting section to prepare and route the necessary grant agreement amendment.
  - **Circuit Rider Year End Payment Request Form**
    - **Note:** The Bureau, at its sole discretion, may request additional detailed payroll or other supporting documentation.
  - A copy of the Circuit Rider’s annual personnel evaluation.
  - A statement from the Circuit Rider certifying that he/she has received all agreed upon benefits for the previous year.
  - A written report, no longer than three pages, that generally contains the following information:
    1. Goals and objectives, along with a status report on the ones that were completed or unachieved.
    2. Accomplishments
    3. Challenges
    4. Programs
    5. Marketing
    6. Budget
    7. Recreation program report
    8. Training programs attended
    9. Training programs requested for the next year.
    10. DCNR assistance: How can BRC do a better job?

- **Year Four and Required Final Project Closeout Documents**
  The final 10% of year four funding is withheld until all required closeout documentation has been received and approved by BRC. The grantee must submit the following information to close out the project:
  - A properly completed **Final Payment Request Form** for Planning and Partnership Projects.
  - A final report that summarizes four years of accomplishments as well as the following:
    1. Elaborate on whether the cooperative effort helped encourage other areas of intergovernmental cooperation.
    2. Budget for year five and beyond if available.
3. Discuss if the cooperative effort has become a valued service, which groups gained the most, what benefits were received by the overall community, and what would happen if the agency folded.

4. Attach a recreation program report, the most recent newsletter, annual report, strategic plan, and any other comprehensive documents.

5. Elaborate on how BRC can better assist with the Circuit Rider program and what challenges were experienced with the program. Honest feedback is appreciated and valued.

- **Eligible project costs:** These include only the Circuit Rider’s salary and Bureau approved training and mentoring expenses as follows:
  
  ◇ **First year**---one hundred percent (100%) of gross salary.
  ◇ **Second year**---seventy-five percent (75%) of gross salary.
  ◇ **Third year**---fifty percent (50%) of gross salary.
  ◇ **Fourth year**---twenty-five percent (25%) of gross salary.
  ◇ In year five and beyond, the Bureau expects the local effort to continue on its own.
  ◇ **Training Expenses** – Up to $2,000 is available for Bureau approved training expenses over the four years of funding. Typically, $1,000/year is requested in years 1 and 2.
  ◇ **Mentoring Expenses** – Up to $1,500 is available for mentoring of the Circuit Rider, strategic planning and board development by a Bureau approved mentor. This funding is typically made available in the first year.
  ◇ **Local Match** - Participating partners must provide local funds to cover the Circuit Rider’s employee benefits for all four years, the balance of the salary in the second, third and fourth years, and normal support services. Examples of typical project costs not covered by the grant include:
    
  ➢ Up-front costs for developing the intergovernmental written agreement (legal fees), job description and advertisement, conducting interviews, and meeting advertisements;
    
  ➢ Fringe benefits for the Circuit Rider (fringe benefits generally include life and health insurance, worker’s compensation, unemployment compensation, and pension plan);
    
  ➢ Office arrangements, equipment and supplies, clerical assistance and the initial start-up costs such as a phone and separate phone line, stationary, mileage, travel expenses, training, the establishment, and upkeep of separate bank accounts for the grant as well as an account for the contributions from participating municipalities and revenues generated from programs as part of the cooperative effort; and,
    
  ➢ Liability insurance for board, director, and program participants (check insurance policies with each municipality to evaluate coverage options), and program expenses.
5. Other Project Information

- **Budget Considerations**: Grantees must consider and budget for the programs that this Circuit Rider will provide and determine whether local funds are needed to cover expenses. Some programs like adult classes generate sufficient revenue to cover their costs while others, however, do not. For example, a summer playground program traditionally receives local tax support in many communities. These costs should be budgeted. It is not realistic to expect to offer only programs that cover all their costs. There may be residents in every municipality who cannot afford to pay to participate in the programs yet these individuals should not be excluded from participation. Support from foundations, local businesses, friends groups, etc. often can provide scholarships for programs.

- **In-kind Services**: Providing office space, clerical support, etc. is not considered as an eligible match for the salary. However, these in-kind services are opportunities to decrease the overall Circuit Rider expenses.

- **Project Budgeting**: Grantees must consider the projected operating costs for the following year in their annual budgeting process. We have found that the Circuit Rider budget process rarely follows the calendar year or local government’s budget cycle. For the first year, project costs will not be incurred immediately. It can take up to six (6) months from the time a Circuit Rider grant is received to the actual start of the Circuit Rider. Below is a typical cycle:

  - **2017**: Receive grant award in March, director hired October 1, 2017 and Year 1 starts.
  - **2018**: Year 1 ends September 30, 2018 and Year 2 begins October 1, 2018 with increased local share.
  - **2019**: Year 2 ends September 30, 2019 and Year 3 October 1, 2019 begins with increased local share.
  - **2020**: Year 3: In the fall of 2020 municipalities should evaluate continued participation in the intergovernmental effort without Bureau funds after 2021.
  - **2021**: Year 4 and DCNR funding ends September 30, 2021. Agency may need an increase in local funding to continue without Bureau funds.

- **Circuit Rider Salary**: The BRC has found that such positions require considerable maturity and experience. Circuit Riders are expected to organize a new department, develop new programs, and often oversee the acquisition of land and development of new facilities. In addition, they are expected to foster cooperation between several municipalities where there may have been little or none before this effort on any issue. The skills needed to assume such a position exceed those of a recent college graduate. We recommend the hiring of a professional with not only a degree in recreation and parks but also several years of experience working in the field. Holding certification as a parks and recreation professional is desirable. This will require budgeting for a competitive salary. While there are geographical differences and varying local salary scales, our experience indicates that to attract a qualified professional, an annual starting salary range of approximately $40,000 - $60,000 is recommended.
6. **Role of BRC Staff**

The BRC will provide technical assistance in the following areas:

- Developing a local intergovernmental agreement and related arrangements
- Developing the local job description
- Personnel recruitment and selection
- Employee and program/project performance evaluation
- Ongoing technical assistance

7. **Typical Selection Process**

BRC will assist with the recruitment and selection of a Circuit Rider professional and will provide a general job description along with the minimum education and experience requirements. However, participating municipalities may set more stringent standards. The typical selection process is as follows:

- The selection committee is appointed.
- Job description is developed by the selection committee (if not already developed in a Peer study.)
- Job is advertised.
- Committee interviews top candidates.
- Committee makes hiring recommendation to DCNR.
- Once DCNR approves, the committee extends an offer of employment
  - If the candidate does not accept the position, the grantee should contact BRC to discuss next steps (ex. make an offer to second choice, re-advertise, etc.)

This policy remains in effect until revised or rescinded.