

Technical Advisory Council Aug. 7, 2026

Item 7: Block Grants & Regional Coordination

Introduction

Block grants are flexible, formula-based, or regionally allocated funds that allow local and regional entities to carry out broad, multi-benefit climate resilience and community capacity-building activities. In California, block –grant-style programs such as the California Department of Food and Agriculture’s Healthy Soils Program or the Department of Conservation’s Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) Program, along with regional conservancy grants, have become central to supporting cross-jurisdictional resilience planning and implementation.

What are block grants? How do they work?

Block grants provide lump-sum allocations to intermediaries such as regional collaboratives, conservancies, Tribes, and counties who then conduct planning, coordination, and subgranting. These grants reduce administrative burden and enable regional entities to set priorities, develop project pipelines, coordinate permitting, and align local objectives with statewide climate goals.

Benefits

Block grants support climate adaptation by funding cross-boundary coordination and landscape-scale planning that individual jurisdictions cannot achieve alone. Benefits include enhanced alignment across agencies, stronger workforce and technical capacity, support for disadvantaged and Tribal communities, and the ability to develop shovel-ready resilience projects.

- **Regional Scale:** Supports large-scale strategies such as watershed planning, wildfire resilience, and ecosystem restoration beyond single-jurisdiction boundaries.
- **Capacity Building:** Funds enable staffing, governance formation, and planning frameworks that regional actors often lack.
- **Pipeline Creation:** Encourages development of shovel-ready climate projects, tied to metrics and readiness, boosting implementation likelihood.
- **Multi-Benefit & Equity Focus:** Deploys resources for social, environmental, and community outcomes often targeting disadvantaged or Tribal communities.

Challenges and Limitations

Scaling block grants statewide requires overcoming challenges including uneven regional governance capacity, reliance on annual state appropriations, varying administrative readiness, and the need for stronger accountability and evaluation frameworks. Smaller jurisdictions may face barriers related to staffing, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance, and grant administration.

- **Governance Variability:** Inconsistent regional priorities and capacity lead to fragmented outcomes across areas.
- **Accountability Gaps:** Broad uses require stronger metrics to ensure performance and equitable impact.
- **Funding Volatility:** Reliance on annual appropriations such as California's recent climate-related allocations risks planning discontinuities.
- **Administrative Burden:** Although simplified, recipients still need to manage planning, CEQA compliance, stakeholder outreach, and sub-granting processes.

Examples

- **Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) Program**, administered by the California Department of Conservation, strengthens local and regional capacity to manage forests, reduce wildfire risk, and enhance community resilience. Established in 2018 as a pilot program in select fire-prone areas, RFFC was expanded in 2022 to be statewide. RFFC provides non-competitive block grants to regional entities (Regional Block Grantees) and eligible coordinating organizations (Statewide Block Grantees) to support:
 - Regional priority plans, which identify urgent wildfire resilience needs, prioritize projects, and coordinate local stakeholders, Tribes, and agencies;
 - Capacity building for local partners;
 - Implementation of demonstration projects; and,
 - Workforce training and education.

RFFC has been effective in scaling wildfire resilience efforts across California, and its integration with the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan and other state initiatives has amplified its impact.

- **North Coast Resource Partnership** is a long-term collaborative initiative among Northern California Tribes, counties and diverse partners to enhance watersheds, communities, and quality of life in the North Coast region. The partnership covers 19,000 square miles and includes Tribal lands and seven counties. Since 2004, the partnership has engaged in collaborative, integrated planning and project implementation, investing over \$120 million in hundreds of projects. The partnership:
 - Provides regional collaborative infrastructure to ensure cross-boundary collaboration;

- Supports data-driven decision-making through data collection and assessments;
- Maintains a “pipeline” of priority projects and activities;
- Shares information with funders and decision-makers regarding essential investments, needs, and priorities in the North Coast region;
- Supports partners in the region with technical assistance and capacity building;
- Advocates for, manages, and allocates grant funding that reflects the priorities and needs of North Coast communities;
- Reports on progress for an array of performance metrics, for individual projects and at the scale of the entire region.

The partnership’s track record of mobilizing diverse partners, leveraging data, strategically planning for the region, and directing funding to regional priorities has positioned it as a model for regional environmental and community resilience partnerships.

- **Delta Conservancy**, established in 2009, acts as a primary state agency to implement ecosystem restoration in the Delta and to support efforts that advance environmental protection and the economic well-being of Delta residents. It seeks to achieve this mission through strategic planning, funding allocation, and coordination with local communities, interest groups, and state and federal agencies in the region. The Delta Conservancy administers Propositions 1, 68, and 4 bond-funded grants and one-time Climate, Access & Resource (CAR) General Fund allocations for ecosystem, water resilience, recreation, and cultural access.

Background Materials

- Regional Forest & Fire Capacity Program (RFFC): <https://resources.ca.gov/Initiatives/Regional-Forest-and-Fire-Capacity>
- Delta Conservancy Grants: <https://deltaconservancy.ca.gov/grants/>
- North Coast Resource Partnership: <https://northcoastresourcepartnership.org/>