LNC Class 31 Environment Session
Environmental Grants Team Exercise

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Overview

An environmental disaster in NC has affected a large portion of the state. The event caused devastation, lives were lost, and the clean-up is costly to private industry as well as to the public. Remediation is a years-long process that, in part, results in creating a permanent grant program to fund environmental protection projects. This annual allocation of funding is intended to improve NC's environment and address environmental challenges faced by NC communities.

The Goal

In this exercise, your team is the review committee charged with reviewing this year's grant applications. You must as a group make the hard decision of which projects to support. You must make your decisions based on the following criteria so that, if needed, your awards can stand up to public scrutiny (no conflicts of interest, no pet projects).

Twice as many grant applications are received every year as there is money available ($2M+/- in grant requests are received each cycle but only $1,000,000 can be awarded). You may choose to support projects at the full amount, a partial amount, or not at all.

Evaluation Criteria

Applicant Criteria

Applicants must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on conservation, preservation, or restoration of North Carolina's environmental and natural resources. Federal, state, and local governments as well as institutes of higher learning may also apply.

Project Criteria

Project proposals should fall within the following categories:

1. LAND ACQUISITIONS AND CONSERVATION EASEMENT projects that permanently protect environmentally significant land.
2. RESEARCH, PLANNING, AND EDUCATION projects that identify changes to North Carolina's environment, can inform where future environmental efforts should be focused, and can deepen the public's interest in their role in protecting North Carolina's natural resources.
3. CONSTRUCTION, REMEDIATION, AND RESTORATION projects that through construction and maintenance of wetlands, stream restorations, the installation of stormwater best management practices, or other measures improve impaired waters for communities.

Scoring/Decision Criteria

The following criteria must be used to prioritize the strength of each project proposal. In addition to the above applicant and project criteria, all projects under consideration by your team should:

- Geography: Directly improve water quality in the Cape Fear, Lumber, Neuse, Tar-Pamlico, or White Oak River Basins. These river basins are top grant priorities. While projects in other river basins can be considered, the rationale for funding must be truly compelling. Locate NC river basins here.
- Community Need: Take place in or focus on benefiting underserved or overburdened communities

Available Funding

Your team may award up to $1,000,000 divided across the nine proposals. The nine proposals represent a total funding request of $2,200,000.

Instructions

As a team, use the project descriptions and grant requests below to determine how strongly each proposal meets the criteria using the following scoring system: Weak (1), Moderate (2), Strong (3). Use the scoring sheet to track your responses and funding recommendations. Your funding recommendations should reflect your scores. Your team has the option of awarding full, partial, or no grant funds. Awarding partial grants may allow you to spread funds over more projects, but with less impact.

Project Descriptions and Grant Requests

A. An indigenous tribe with non-profit status requests $150,000 to underwrite a study needed to improve water quality along a creek that runs through their community in the White Oak River basin. The site is not only important to tribal members because of its natural and recreational value, but also because the area has high cultural importance.

B. A private liberal arts college in the Cape Fear River Basin requests $200,000 to support a summer STEM program. Students can enroll for free in the outdoor program, where they will learn hands-on environmental science while camping and backpacking. The program recruits high school students from Title 1 schools.

C. A non-profit focused on agricultural best practices requests $250,000 to install flood-mitigating structures on 3 privately owned farms in the Neuse River Basin. The demonstration is meant to encourage other farmers to install the measures on their property, disseminating better flood-mitigating practices across the watershed.

D. A public university requests $100,000 to research the long-term changes to water quality off the coast as a result of both increasingly severe storms like hurricanes but also more frequent sunny day flooding upstream. The resulting data will be used to better manage coastal ecosystems for commercial and recreational fishing. The data may also reveal potential adverse impacts to NC's tourism economy.

E. A private nonprofit K-12 school in an underserved, low-income county in the Roanoke River watershed requests $150,000 to construct a hands-on farm to fork teaching lab where students will learn to grow greenhouse vegetables. The lab will demonstrate potential pathways to addressing food insecurity in rural communities and introduce youth to career paths in agriculture.

F. A local government in the French Broad watershed requests $350,000 to cover the cost of planning, engineering, and restoring to its natural state a heavily modified stream that has become increasingly vulnerable to flood events. The events are causing disruptions to public infrastructure and significant damage to private property. The town has been included in four federal disaster declarations over the past six years.

G. A nonprofit watchdog organization requests $200,000 to identify fecal bacteria and PFAS contamination in the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico River Basins. The group will use the funds to do water quality testing and make the results publicly available. If contaminants are identified, they plan to lobby state agencies, local government, and/or private industry to address the problem.

H. A non-profit land trust in the Catawba River Basin requests $500,000 to purchase a 150-acre permanent conservation easement at the river's headwaters. The river provides drinking water for millions of people in the region, so protecting the headwaters and a buffer of land along the river corridor is a high priority. The project will also improve important trout habitat. The property has been in the landowner's family for generations and will remain in private ownership but the easement will permanently extinguish all future development rights. Farming, forestry, hunting and fishing can continue.

I. As North Carolina's population grows, the need for publicly accessible parklands has soared. Especially during COVID, many of NC's parks were overrun with visitors. A statewide conservation organization requests $300,000 towards the acquisition of 3,000 acres that will expand one of NC's State Parks along the Yadkin River.

Environmental Grants Simulation Scorecard

Working together in your Learning Teams, use the scorecard below to capture your evaluation and funding recommendation for each of the proposals. Refer to the simulation packet for details of the evaluation criteria for each category.

	Proposal A	**Proposal B**	**Proposal C**	**Proposal D**	**Proposal E**	**Proposal F**	**Proposal G**	**Proposal H**	**Proposal I**
Meets applicant criteria (Y/N)									
Meets project criteria (1-3)									
Meets scoring/decision criteria for **geography** (1-3)									
Meets scoring/decision criteria for **community need** (1-3)									
Total team score (3-27)									
Funding request	$150,000	$200,000	$250,000	$100,000	$150,000	$350,000	$200,000	$500,000	$300,000
Funding recommendation (Can be full, partial, or none) Total to distribute: $1,000,000	$	$	$	$	$	$	$	$	$

How many grants did you fund? _____

What was your maximum grant? _____

What was your minimum grant? _____

What did your team consider the strongest proposal? _____