



March 27, 2023

SENT VIA: EMAIL

University of California
Climate Action Grant Program

SUBJECT: Sonoma State University application for Climate Action Grant Program

To Whom It May Concern:

Serving as Executive Director for the Russian River Watershed Association (RRWA), I am writing to express my enthusiastic support of the application submitted by Sonoma State University to the University of California's Climate Action Grant Program.

The RRWA is a coalition of ten public agencies in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties that have come together to coordinate regional programs in the Russian River Watershed for clean water, habitat restoration, and watershed enhancement. The RRWA provides support to communities throughout the watershed and works to enhance awareness of special studies and water resource programs funded through grants. Our primary tools for engaging the community are through managing regional programs and convening cross-agency public meetings of elected officials, technical working groups, community workshops, and educational outreach.

RRWA has been working with both the Center for Environmental Inquiry (CEI) and Sonoma Water for the last three years to establish the Education Into Action Model in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties. This model leverages community agency expertise, university student enthusiasm, and faculty knowledge in an interactive process to address urgent issues affecting our member agencies and their communities. The issues facing agencies are complex and often not addressed by local structures or funding allocations, and we view the interactions fostered by CEI as an important means of breaking down institutional silos. In addition, the enthusiasm of the university students (of all disciplines) that work on urgent issues is contagious and reinforces our belief that the issues facing local communities require more viewpoints than the "standard" STEM approach to investigating challenges.

We are pleased to report that our Board of Directors has approved a third year of funding for the Education Into Action Collaborative (Rising Waters) in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties. This funding will help with the following actionable research projects:

MEMBER AGENCIES

- City of Cloverdale
- City of Cotati
- City of Healdsburg
- City of Santa Rosa
- City of Sebastopol
- City of Ukiah
- County of Mendocino
- County of Sonoma
- Sonoma County Water Agency
- Town of Windsor

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1. **Water Sampling.** SSU will continue working with the City of Santa Rosa and the North Coast Water Quality Control Board to obtain and test water samples surrounding homeless encampments. The effort will be focused not only on documenting the effects of encampments on riparian areas, but also in trying to understand the effects of water quality on individuals experiencing homelessness. Additional faculty are planning on joining this effort, in a novel approach to use invertebrate sampling as an overall indicator of water quality. SSU will also engage with local leaders to place their samples in the context of samples previously collected in the region. RRWA will convene periodic regional forums to provide updates on the project and receive input.
2. **Social Media Campaign.** SSU Faculty / student teams will continue to develop a social media campaign. Materials appropriate for social media platforms as well as short videos appropriate for council and board meetings will be developed. The effort focuses on “humanizing” individuals experiencing homelessness, addressing myths surrounding efforts to assist those affected, and providing information regarding solutions. The students and faculty encourage interested community leaders to contact them with ideas, and also for short video interviews about working on these complex issues.
3. **Resource Mapping.** Resource mapping efforts during the 2023-24 season are focused on applying the results of the previous two years of effort. To date, databases of resources (restrooms, water fountains, etc.) have been developed, and an affordable cloud-based solution for sharing the information with decision makers and engaging the public has been identified. Plans for the 2023-24 season include identifying the appropriate county agency to hold the license for the cloud-based solution, and to populate the databases appropriately, SSU plans to formally roll out the solution after appropriate home agency is identified.
4. **Agency Alignment and Knowledge Mapping.** To date, faculty and student teams have identified 150-200 agencies and NGOs that spend money and time on homeless issues and water quality. Although the effort to obtain more feedback from organizations that are reluctant to go “on record” will continue, the focus in the 2023-24 season will be on making this information available and accessible to a larger county-wide audience. SSU will continue discussions with the Continuum of Care to synthesize the information in a format that is appropriate for County leaders and decision makers.
5. **Case Studies.** The Sanitation Options Report developed in Year 1 was quite detailed and compared several options for reducing the impact of individuals experiencing homelessness and alleviating the lack of access to sanitation. During 2023-24, SSU will work with the Continuum of Care to synthesize the information appropriately and ensure that it is in a format that is appropriate for County leaders and decision makers.

RRWA supports the continued productive collaboration of CEI and Sonoma Water to develop two Rising Waters Pilot Projects. Seed money provided by the Climate Action Grant will help in pilot project development and implementation. One project will involve managing riparian areas along the Russian River, and one will involve developing cross-agency tools to improve resource allocation and effectiveness within the Russian River watershed region. In addition, RRWA hopes to support expanding the collaboration to begin educating the community and

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community leaders on maintaining long-term water supplies within the watershed. We are eager to see the results of the statewide rollout of the Education Into Action Model.

Thank you in advance for considering grant funding for this important project. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, at cleanwater@rrwatershed.org or 707.508.3670.

Sincerely,



Andy Rodgers, Executive Director
Russian River Watershed Association