



## MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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### MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Officer

DATE: December 4, 2013

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item VIII: Consideration of resolution authorizing approval of application for grant funds from the Urban Waters Small Grants Program under the United States Environmental Protection Agency for the Safe Routes to the River: Phase 2 project.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing approval of application for grant funds from the Urban Waters Small Grants Program under the United States Environmental Protection Agency for the Safe Routes to the River: Phase 2 project.

Background: Urban Waters Small Grants Program under the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) will allocate a sum of \$1.6 million for projects that fund research, investigations, experiments, training, surveys, studies, and demonstrations that will advance the restoration of urban waters by improving water quality in urban areas through activities that also support community revitalization.

The Safe Routes to the River Project was originally launched as a collaboration with the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) and the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program from Q4-2012 to December 2013 and aimed at developing physical connections between the Los Angeles River and adjacent Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) sites. The project's goal was to facilitate and build upon current river efforts to enhance public access along the River, while engaging key partners including LAUSD. Special emphasis was directed to catalyze the current river efforts through focus upon remaining gaps. Four demonstration pilot school sites were selected, these are high schools located in the Los Angeles neighborhoods of Canoga Park, Reseda, Los Feliz, and Elysian Valley.

During the summer of 2013, the project engaged cohorts of students from the pilot sites to participate in an 8-week community-based environmental planning and design process that developed youth-led conceptual designs for safe routes and

urban trails from LAUSD sites to the River. The students were introduced to data collection and walking audits, mapping techniques, community outreach, analysis and conceptual design development, and public presentations. Each week also included guest presentations from officials, community members, and design/planning professionals to discuss River issues and career/field exploration. In parallel with the student efforts, MRCA and RTCA staff conducted stakeholder engagement, site analysis, design, implementation recommendations. At the culmination of the project, MRCA and RTCA staff are preparing a document that recommends planning and design strategies for physical connections and access enhancements for the four pilot sites.

The scope proposed in the Urban Waters Small Grants application is to continue a second phase of the Safe Routes to the River. If the application is successful, the project will include further in-depth engagement of LAUSD students and the community targeting the audience to become River Ambassadors that are aware of river, water quality, and watershed issues and are capable to introduce river awareness and stewardship in their community. MRCA staff will develop this program to further the recommendations of the locations identified during the project's Phase 1.