



CITY OF

NEWPORT BEACH

City Council Staff Report

January 27, 2026
Agenda Item No. 5

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Sean Levin, Recreation and Senior Services Director - 949-644-3151, slevin@newportbeachca.gov

PREPARED BY: Justin Schmillen, Recreation and Senior Services Deputy Director - 949-644-3160, jschmillen@newportbeachca.gov

TITLE: Resolution No. 2026-04: Authorizing the Filing of an Application for Grant Funding from the California Coastal Commission's Whale Tail Grants Program to Support the Fostering Interest in Nature Program

ABSTRACT:

The Recreation and Senior Services (RSS) Department is seeking authorization to file an application for grant funds under the California Coastal Commission's (CCC) Whale Tail Grants program to support the Fostering Interest in Nature (FiiN) program. If awarded, grant funds will be used to expand FiiN programming activities and opportunities to accommodate more students and to enhance the overall experience for each participant.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
- b) Adopt Resolution No. 2026-04: *A Resolution of the City Council of the City of Newport Beach, California, Authorizing the Filing of an Application for Grant Funding from the California Coastal Commission Whale Tail Grants Program to Support the Fostering Interest in Nature Program.*

DISCUSSION:

In 2015, the CCC approved the coastal development of the Lido House Hotel on the Balboa Peninsula. The CCC also approved in-lieu mitigation fees from the project to support the FiiN program and fulfill the provision of lower-cost overnight opportunities. FiiN is a free 3-day, 2-night outdoor educational camp program throughout Upper Newport Bay for fifth grade students from Title I schools in Orange County. The City of Newport (City) RSS Department oversees the program and contracts with the Newport Bay Conservancy to develop the curriculum, run educational activities, and provide overnight supervision. The City also has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with

the Newport Dunes to provide basecamp for the program and provide low-cost meals for attendees.

FiiN was provided with an initial budget of \$1.4 million in 2016, through funding from the Lido House Hotel project and the City. An additional \$203,406 was funded in 2024 from the Lido House Hotel expansion project. The City's MOU with the CCC conditions that activities take place throughout Upper Newport Bay to immerse a target of 3,000 students in a natural setting and the rich ecology of the surrounding ecosystem over a 10-year programming period. To date, FiiN has hosted over 2,000 students. The additional funding would be used to expand program opportunities, accommodate more students, and enhance the overall experience for each student.

The CCC, through its Whale Tail Grants program, provides grant funding to nonprofit organizations and qualifying public agencies of up to \$50,000 per applicant for projects that connect people to the California Coast and its watersheds through education, stewardship and outdoor experiences. Whale Tail Grants program funds align with FiiN program goals and would ensure the program is fully funded over the 10-year program period, fulfilling the MOU conditions with the CCC. A resolution from City Council providing support for and authority to submit a grant application, authority to enter into a contract with the CCC if the grant is awarded, and designation of an authorized representative is required to apply.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact related to this item.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the City Council find this action is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the City Council considers the item).

ATTACHMENT:

Attachment A – Resolution No. 2026-04