EPA COMMUNITY CHANGE GRANTS EXPLAINER

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WHAT IS EPA'S COMMUNITY CHANGE PROGRAM?

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Community Change Grants (CCG) program invests $2 billion of Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding to support projects that reduce pollution, increase community climate resilience, and create meaningful community engagement in those communities that are most adversely and disproportionately harmed by climate change, legacy pollution, and historical disinvestment. The program creates a new funding opportunity to launch impactful projects—such as community resilience hubs or clean energy schools—that advance environmental and climate justice. And for essentially the very first time, the federal government has offered this money directly to communities.

THIS PROGRAM HAS TWO TRACKS:

Track I, Community-Driven Investments for Change, contains $1.96 billion for approximately 150 awards of $10 to $20 million each. **Track II, Meaningful Engagement for Equitable Governance,** contains $40 million for 20 awards ranging from $1 to $3 million each.

WHAT IS THE APPLICATION TIMELINE?
Apply as soon as possible!

Applications are being accepted on a rolling basis until November 21, 2024. Also, if you apply early and your project is not initially selected, there may be time to resubmit an updated application after a debriefing with EPA.

As a first step, applicants are required to register with both the System for Award Management (SAM) to receive a "unique entity identification" number, and with grants.gov. This process can take several weeks or more, which is another reason to begin the application process soon.
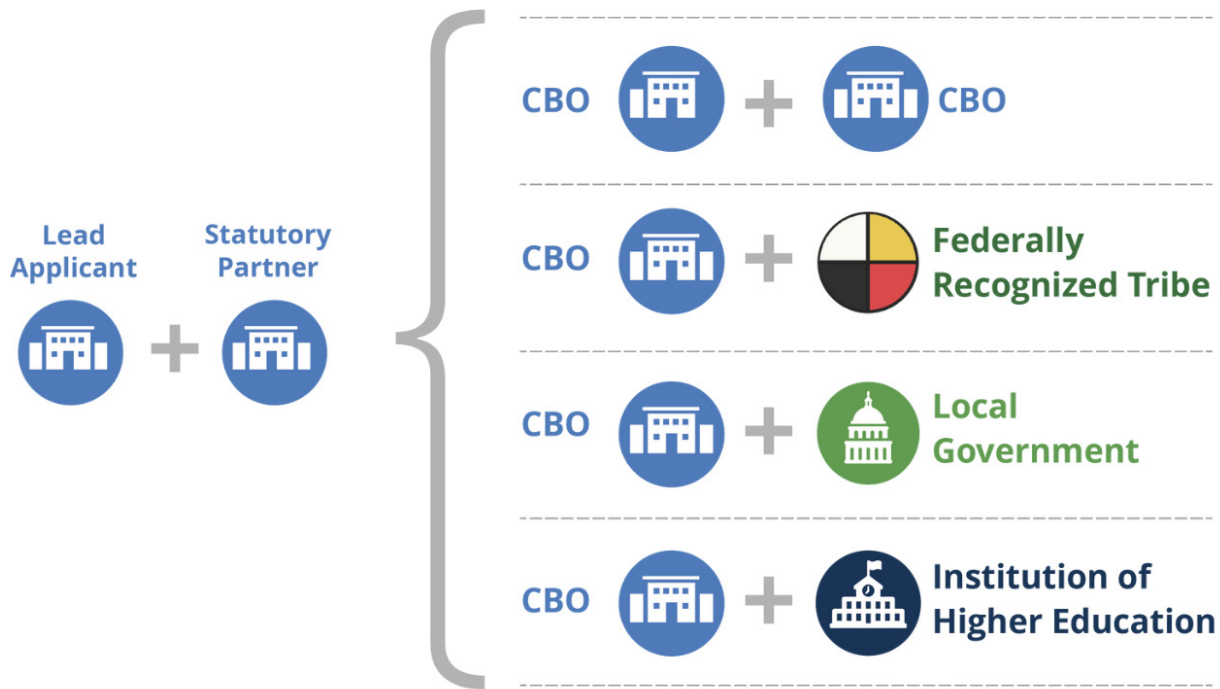
WHAT ARE THE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS?

Track 1 applications must include at least one project aligned with an approved Climate Action Strategy and one aligned with a Pollution Reduction Strategy, as outlined in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). Projects must engage the community and include a collaborative governance plan. **Track 2 applications** must help build the capacity of communities that the EPA designates as disadvantaged to engage in governmental processes that benefit communities. More information can be found on the EPA's Community Change Grants webpage.

In addition:

- Projects must comply with all content and submission requirements.
- Projects must be completed within 3 years.
- Applicants must demonstrate that the projects in their application will benefit a disadvantaged community as defined by the EPA.

- At least one of the applicants must be a Community-Based Organization (CBO), which is a non-profit, non-governmental, or charitable organization that represents community needs and works to meet them. A CBO can partner with another CBO, a local government, an institution of higher education, or a federally recognized Tribe. (However, EPA has stressed the importance of including at least one municipal partner, if possible.)

Note: While the CBO does not have to be the "Lead Applicant," all statutory partnerships must include a CBO.

Graphic: Great Lakes Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center

WHAT ARE THE PARTNERSHIP REQUIREMENTS?

The applicant partnership is called a "statutory partnership" and key requirements must be met. The two partners are called the "Lead Applicant" and the "Statutory Partner." Submitted applications must include a signed Statutory Partnership Agreement (SPA) specifying the project roles and responsibilities of the Lead Applicant and Statutory Partner.

While some Community Based Organizations have experience partnering with local governments on project development (e.g. developing a community resilience hub), for others this will be a new experience. The same may be true for local governments, institutions of higher learning, and Tribes wishing to identify CBO's with whom to partner. Tribes, and institutions of higher learning wishing to identify potential Community-Based Organization with whom to partner. The Community Change Grants Technical Assistance Program can provide capacity building support in the area of developing partnerships and forming governance structures. More information is provided below in the technical assistance section.

WHAT TYPES OF PROJECTS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING?

▶ TRACK 1: Community-Driven Investments for Change

Below are **two potential projects** that serve as examples of large-scale $10 to $20 million projects that could be completed within three years and that can be applied for under Track 1 of the Community Change Grant program.

These are followed by a list of **specific categories of eligible projects,** with an example of a qualifying project under each. This list was developed by one of EPA's regional Environmental Justice Thriving Community Technical Assistance Centers.

POTENTIAL EXAMPLES OF EXISTING PROJECTS THAT COULD BE ELIGIBLE FOR CONSIDERATION FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE GRANT FUNDING:

Potential Project #1:

A school district could partner with a community-based organization (or vice versa) to install geothermal heating and cooling on several campuses. This would reduce the district's fossil fuel use and save money on energy bills that can be reinvested in students and classrooms. St. Paul Public Schools offers an example of a district that is transitioning to geothermal heating and cooling.

Potential Project #2

Community resilience hubs, which provide shelter and services to people impacted by climate and other disasters, are growing in number across the country as superstorms, heat waves, and wildfires increase. They often feature solar plus battery storage, and electric heating and cooling so that they can maintain power when the electricity grid fails. There is a strong track record of cities and counties partnering with community-based organizations to build resilience hubs. The City of Baltimore has an excellent resilience hub network, and defines these hubs as "trust, service-based non-profit community organizations (including faith-based) with strong leadership located in under-resourced neighborhoods." Other communities could seek to replicate Baltimore's model through the Community Change Grant program.

COMMUNITY CHANGE GRANT CATEGORIES ELIGIBLE FOR TRACK 1 AND TRACK 2 FUNDS*

Track 1: Climate Action Focus

- **Green Infrastructure & Nature-Based Solutions.** Example: Plant trees in your community to build climate resilience and sequester carbon.
- **Mobility and Transportation Options.** Example: Implement "Complete Streets" projects to improve walkability, bikeability, transit use, and disability access.
- **Energy-Efficient, Healthy, and Resilient Housing & Buildings.** Example: Install energy efficiency measures (e.g., insulation, double/triple glazed windows, "cool roof", etc) and energy management systems in public buildings, like schools and libraries.
- **Microgrid Installation.** Example: Install microgrids with onsite renewable energy generation and battery storage.
- **Community Resilience Hubs.** Create or upgrade community facilities, such as schools or community centers, with solar plus onsite storage to provide shelter and serve community needs during emergencies.
- **Brownfield Redevelopment.** Example: Acquire land to enable a brownfield redevelopment that has emissions mitigation and/or climate resilience benefits.
- **Waste Reduction & Management.** Example: Implement a community-scale composting program that includes an educational campaign.
- **Workforce Development.** Example: Support the development of career pathways for electricians, pipefitters, and other skilled trades that support building electrification, renewable energy, etc.

Track 1: Pollution Reduction Focus

- **Indoor Air Quality and Community Health.** Example: Install/ upgrade/ replace HVAC and/ or filtration systems in public buildings (e.g. schools).
- **Outdoor Air Quality and Community Health.** Example: Perform targeted infrastructure upgrades such as private-side lead lines during full lead service line replacement.

- **Clean Water Infrastructure.** Example: Perform targeted infrastructure upgrades, such as septic-to-sewer conversions, that connect homes to nearby community water systems.
- **Hazardous Waste Management.** Example: Reduce demand for single-use plastic products by installing public water bottle filling stations, phasing out unnecessary single-use plastics, etc.

Track 2: Meaningful Engagement for Equitable Governance

- **Educational and Training Programs.** Example: Develop a program to train community members to effectively participate in advisory boards or other bodies that engage in climate-related policymaking.
- **Environmental Advisory Boards (EABs).** Example: Facilitate engagement of disadvantaged communities in governmental processes such as upgrading community infrastructure projects to reduce pollution.
- **Collaborative Governance Activities.** Example: Facilitate the engagement of disadvantaged communities in governmental processes such as developing community benefits agreements.
- **Participation in Governmental Funding and Budgeting Processes.** Example: Design a program to assist communities in developing and evaluating proposals for public project funding to support environmental justice and climate gains.

YOU AREN'T ALONE—TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE

The EPA is providing comprehensive Community Change Grant Technical Assistance to ensure that applicants unfamiliar with the federal grant application program can be successful. After reviewing the content on the website, an important step is filling out this Community Change Grant Technical Assistance intake form. You can call 1 (800) 540-8123 to make a TA request or ask questions.

The Environmental Protection Network provides a comprehensive step-by-step guide to the application process and has staff available to help you through it for free.

NRDC's Justice 40 team has contracted a grant writer to help community organizations connect with technical assistance providers and provide matchmaking opportunities for organizations that need connections in order to apply. They are asking organizations seeking technical assistance to fill out the form here.

Lawyers for Good Government has a federal funding resources page that will soon include a Statutory Partnership Agreement template.

WHAT ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP NAVIGATE THE APPLICATION PROCESS?

- Application Process for EPA's Community Change Grants Track I – Environmental Protection Network.
- Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grants Program Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Frequently Asked Questions.