

Winning Strategies for Cities to Access Community Change Grants

The [Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grants](#) program will provide \$2 billion to community-based organizations (CBOs) that work in partnership with local or Tribal governments, other CBOs, and/or high-education institutions to undertake community-driven initiatives in disadvantaged areas, especially those disproportionately impacted by climate change and pollution. These grants can be used for community-led projects as varied as preparing for and mitigating against extreme weather, reducing urban heat islands, reducing indoor air pollution, and expanding low- and no-emissions vehicles and technologies within disadvantaged communities.

Community Change Grants are part of a suite of [Environmental Justice Grant Programs](#) offered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) which provide financial and technical assistance to carry out environmental and climate justice activities that will benefit underserved and overburdened communities.

Community Change grants can be used for activities like:

- Climate resilience and adaptation.
- Mitigating climate and health risks from urban heat islands, extreme heat, wood heater emissions, and wildfire events.
- Community-led air and other (including water and waste) pollution monitoring, prevention, and remediation.
- Investments in low- and zero-emission and resilient technologies and related infrastructure.
- Workforce development that supports the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutants.
- Reducing indoor toxics and indoor air pollution.
- Facilitating the engagement of disadvantaged communities in State and Federal advisory groups, workshops, rulemakings, and other public processes.

This grant program has 2 tracks:

- Track I includes awards of \$10-20 million for projects that involve the activities described above.
- Track II awards will be \$1-3 million and will be used for engaging disadvantaged communities to advance environmental and climate justice, especially through involving these communities in government decision-making.

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Strategies 3 and 4 below apply only to Track I grants for projects, but the remaining strategies apply to both tracks.

Before you begin the application process:

Track 1
Track 2

#1 Develop collaborative partnerships with local CBOs (Track I and II)

One unique feature of the Community Change Grant Program is that applicants must be a partnership of:

- two community-based non-profit organizations; or
- a community-based non-profit organization and a Federally-Recognized Tribe, a local government, or an institution of higher education.

Ideally, this collaboration would be a pre-existing partnership rather than one set up just for the purposes of the grant application. But in the event that local governments and CBOs are coming together for the first time, partners will want to spend significant time building relationships and developing trust. These resources may be helpful for this process:

- [Institute for Local Government's resources for partnering with CBOs](#)
- [NLC: 3 ways local governments and CBOs can partner on sustainability](#)
- [Results for America: Opportunity Accelerator](#)

Either organization in the partnership can be the lead applicant, a role which comes with certain financial, grant management, and reporting responsibilities. For the purposes of this grant program, a CBO must be a nonprofit and an organization that "supports and/or represents a community and/or certain populations within a community through engagement, education, and other related services provided to individual community residents and community stakeholders."

During the application process:

Track 1
Track 2

#2 Take advantage of EPA technical assistance for project planning and application development (Track I and II)

After receiving feedback from the community that CBOs need support and capacity building, the EPA is providing technical assistance and capacity-building support to interested, eligible applicants for all phases of their Community Change Grant. This includes support for writing applications and planning and developing projects.

To request technical assistance for preparing a Community Change Grant application, you can fill out the EPA's [request form](#) or call 1 (800) 540-8123. There is also a [technical assistance website](#) for environmental justice grant programs. Language assistance support can be accessed at EJ_TechAssist@epa.gov.

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Track 1

#3 Make a realistic assessment of your project's readiness (Track I only)

Community Change Grants for both tracks must be completed within 3 years and the EPA was very clear that no extensions would be granted. Track I applicants will need to demonstrate that they are ready to meet this deadline and also to initiate grant activities upon receipt of funds or no later than 120 days post-receipt.

Before applying for a grant, Track II partnerships should work together to obtain necessary permits and approvals from local or state government authorities or relevant private entities, have a plan for grant compliance and reporting, socialize their plans with relevant stakeholders and undertake meaningful community engagement, and have financing secured.

Track 1

#4 Be sure to note in your application if you are serving a targeted investment area (Track I only)

In an effort to ensure that communities "with unique circumstances, geography, and needs can equitably compete for funding," the EPA has identified 5 Targeted Investment Areas (TIA):

- Tribes in Alaska
- Tribes in the Continental United States and Hawaii
- U.S. Territories, including Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands.
- Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities
- U.S. Southern Border Communities.

Additional details, such as definitions of each of the TIAs as well as minimum amounts reserved for each community type are included in the [NOFO](#).

Track 2

After your initial submission:

#5 Take advantage of the extended timeline and ability to enter a revised submission (Track I and II)

Unlike typical grant programs where grant applications are due within 60-90 days, applications are accepted for Community Change Grants on a rolling basis for a 12-month period. The EPA also allows unsuccessful applicants to request a debriefing with the agency to understand how their application can be improved and to resubmit a revised version by the November 21, 2024 deadline.

NOFO application deadline: November 21, 2024