



NEW YORK STATE GRANT WRITING

A Guidebook for Local Officials

2015



**Environmental
Finance
Center**

Syracuse University





PREFACE

This guidebook is intended to aid local officials in understanding the grant writing process. Grant writing tips, logistics, and formatting are presented in the beginning of this guidebook, as well as resources for grant funding. The basic anatomy of a grant proposal is presented and described, followed by a section on how the grant writing process will help with the navigation and application to the Consolidated Funding Application (CFA).

Information for this guide was tailored and consolidated to meet the needs of small, rural municipalities. The primary source used in the generation of this document, and from which all in-text quotations were derived, is the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance general information on Grant Writing, accessed 3/2014.

This tool was created by the Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center (Syracuse EFC), with support from the USDA Rural Development. Located at the Syracuse University Center for Sustainable Community Solutions (CSCS), Syracuse EFC enhances the administrative and financial capacities of state and local government officials, nonprofit organizations, and private sectors to make change toward improved environmental infrastructure and quality of life.

Syracuse EFC facilitates the development of sustainable and resilient communities across US EPA Region 2 (New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, and eight tribal nations), across the US, and internationally.

More information can be found at efc.syracusecoe.org/efc



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WHAT IS A GRANT?

A grant is a type of funding assistance for a particular purpose. Grants may distribute taxpayer dollars or donated funds to causes addressed by the government or private industry; they provide a means of transferring funds from one agency to the other. Grants are typically for a specific, stated purpose, i.e. disaster relief; they often have specific guidelines for application and project proposals, and require reporting.

Funding mechanisms for grant money may be in the form of direct payment, reimbursement, or by means of a revolving loan fund.

SHOULD YOU SEEK GRANT FUNDING?

Yes! Grant funding can help bridge funding gaps for municipalities to fulfill their goals. Without grant assistance, it may be more difficult to obtain your goals. The grant writing processes may also help a municipality put their plan onto paper, further developing the plan with clear objectives and methods to meet those objectives.

The grant writing process may be labor intensive, and it is usually very competitive to obtain grants, but this shouldn't be a deterrent. Grant writing can be learned. Unfunded project proposals should not be wasted; they can be reused by making necessary adjustments and corrections, then resubmitted for other grant funding opportunities.

IDEA DEVELOPMENT

Proposal development is an important step for any municipality, as the process will result with clearly expressed ideas and objectives with supporting methodology and an evaluation process. Regardless of if the proposal is funded the first time around, the proposal can serve as a great starting point should another opportunity arise.

The first step in proposal development is to involve all stakeholders and agree on the actual problem at hand to be addressed. For municipalities, this includes community members and organizations within the community. Cultivate community support for new ideas by distributing an excerpt in the local newspaper. This may get others actively involved who have expertise in the field that the proposal is addressing, and it



may also generate new ideas and constructive feedback.

For the grant writing process to continue, a clear statement and description of the problem or situation should be agreed upon, as well as the impact of the problem on the society and economy. All parties should agree on solutions to the problem or situation.

Determine if the idea has previously been developed within the applicants' locality; if a similar program or project has previously been funded, the funder may perceive a duplication of effort. "Significant differences or improvements in the proposed project's goals" should be clearly established if the project will be pursued further. "Check with legislators, area government agencies and related public and private agencies which may currently have grant awards or contracts to do similar work" to see if similar projects already exist.

There are three main sources of grants:

- 1 The government:** Grant funding may be available at many different levels, including federal, state, and local governments.
 - 2 Private:** Businesses and corporations offer grant funding from time to time, often for a very specified objective.
 - 3 Foundations:** Community groups and small organizations benefit greatly from foundation grants, as they often require less detail for the application process.
- Syracuse EFC Funding Guides: Find these Funding Guides, which include a comprehensive list of funding opportunities on capital improvement projects, sustainable materials management projects, and agricultural projects, by visiting Syracuse EFC's webpage: efc.syracusecoe.org. Once on the webpage, under the "Resources" tab, you will find funding opportunities.
 - Search and apply for federal grants through grants.gov.
 - The Catalog of Federal and Domestic Assistance (CFDA): Includes opportunities for grants, loans, business and nonfinancial help. Search for programs here: <https://www.cfdagov/>



- Align with your Regional Economic Development Council’s (REDC) strategic plan, and apply for funding through the Consolidated Funding Application (CFA). Guidance through the CFA is presented at the end of this guidebook.

“Both the applicant and the grantor agency should have the same interests, intentions, and needs if a proposal is to be considered an acceptable candidate for funding.” Grant application kits can be requested by contacting the person identified in the Information/Contacts section of the solicitation. Contacting the grantor agency is beneficial as the applicant can form a relationship with these personnel to which questions regarding proposal advice, suggestions, and criticisms can be asked.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

For municipalities seeking grant funding there should be community support for the proposal project, as the mission of a municipality is to serve the community. Most often, community support needs to be expressed in writing to be submitted with the grant application. These letters of support can persuade grantor agencies to fund a municipality’s project, therefore, the community members writing letter of support should be reputable. Individuals or groups within the community that could be considered to write letters of support include (but are not limited to) academics, politicians, public officials, professionals, organizations, and government agencies. Be sure to give all parties ample time to generate their letters of support.

WHILE WRITING YOUR PROPOSAL...

Language, Content, and Style

The purpose of the grant application is to persuade the granting agency that the project seeking funds is legitimate and necessary. The applicant should write in a style where the intent is to inform the reader; no biased language should be used and no unsubstantiated opinions should be stated. First person narration should not be used. The level of vocabulary should be appropriate for the level of the funding source, and the type of language should be appropriate for the type of project. Data used should be current, from a reputable source, and cited.



The proposal should be scannable; meaning that pages should not be solid text, there should be bullet points, graphics where appropriate, headings, subheadings, and bold and underline font. Each introductory sentence of each paragraph should be succinct, as it may be all the funder reads.

Follow Instructions, Requirements, and Guidelines

This sounds like a 'no-brainer,' but many applications are rejected simply because they have not followed instructions. An easy to follow method for making sure all guidelines and instructions are followed is to create a checklist. Sometimes, the funding agency will provide one for applicants, but in the event that there is not one provided, make one.

Requirements differ from grant to grant, so become familiarized with the specific grant that the municipality is targeting. All parties involved in the proposal should print and read the guidelines, then at the end of the process, check one more time to make sure everything is as it should be! "If questions pertaining to grant requirements or simply for clarification, contact the person listed on the grant description for assistance!" Sometimes, the granting agency will initially only require a brief proposal, and will then request more information later once they are interested in the proposed project. Other agencies require all information at one instance, which may include financial statements, proof of ability to accept government grants and more.

Eligibility

Before beginning the labors of applying for a specific grant, make sure the municipality meets the eligibility requirements. In each Call for Proposals there is an "Applicant Eligibility" section, which should be read and understood immediately. While the municipality may meet eligibility requirements, the project scope may not. Services or involvement of others may be required of the municipality in order to be eligible for grant funds. If there are questions about the municipality's eligibility, contact the program officer of the granting agency. The more contact with the program officer, the more an applicant will know about writing a grant proposal for a municipal project.



Review

Attending a grant workshop may be extremely helpful for those without prior grant proposal writing experience. This may be an opportunity to talk with program decision-makers, collaborate with others, and gain feedback on your grant proposal. What also may be helpful is to seek expert help. "Expert" help could mean an expert in the field in which the grant funding is available, or simply an expert in grant writing. Either way, external opinions and views about the proposal are valuable.

Once a proposal summary is complete, the applicant may then be able to submit it for review from the program officer of the granting agency. This type of contact may be unfavorable by the agency, so be sure to ask if this is appropriate and allowed first. This type of review may also be helpful as the reviewer may suggest other agencies that the proposal would more appropriately submitted to for funding.

Deadlines and Delivery

The development of project proposals should be timed to meet project deadlines as they are typically not negotiable. However, "some programs have more than one application deadline during the fiscal year." The granting agency will usually specify how to send and address proposals to the granting agency. The organization of the proposal and associated documents should be neat and packaged appropriately. Attractive and professional proposals leave a positive impression on the reader.

Components of a Grant Proposal

The components of a grant proposal presented here may not be in the order required by the granting agency. Follow the guidelines and instructions presented in the grant application for specific order of components/ sections.

1 Cover Page

2 Table of Contents

3 Project Summary

4 Introduction to the municipality

5 Problem statement

6 Project objectives

7 Project methods or design

8 Project evaluation

9 Future funding

10 Project budget

11 Appendices



Cover Page

A cover page should be included with all proposals to granting agencies. The cover page, sometimes called a title page, contents may be specified by the granting agency. In cases where contents are not specified, information should include the name of the grant and the project title, contact information for the municipality that includes the name of the Principal Investigator and the date of submission.

Project Summary

The project summary, or sometimes called the executive summary, is the overall summary of the project proposal, including objectives for which funding is being requested. This should appear at the beginning of the proposal. This section should be no longer than a few paragraphs and may be all that the reviewers read to determine if the project will be considered any further. In order for this section to encompass all areas discussed in the grant proposal, it is typically the last section prepared. This section could serve as a stand-alone document itself. Specifically, include a brief statement of the problem or need to be addressed, a short description of the solution, an explanation of funding requirements, and address the capabilities of the municipality and its partners pertinent to carrying out this project.

Introduction to the Municipality

This may not be the next required section, but this section will be present whether in its entirety as a separate section, within a section, or as an appendix.

Grant proposals typically require an applicant's credentials, which is a resume of sorts, in paragraph form to highlight the applicant's capacity to implement the proposed project. A summary of experience will demonstrate proof of the ability of the applicant to carry out operations, and will include past and present related projects and activities. Other notable credentials include descriptions of key employees and board members who will be involved in the project, "the organization's goals, philosophy, track record with other grantors, and any success stories" as well as any data that is "relevant to the goals of the Federal grantor agency" which will "establish the applicant's credibility."



The Problem Statement

This section should be short and concise, using persuasive language. Describing the problem as the funder would find beneficial, the applicant may want to use language presented in the grant application. The problem statement is sometimes referred to as the statement of need and should be a succinct and well-supported statement of the problem to be addressed. The problem to be addressed is, after all, ultimately the purpose for the proposal. There should also be direct statements as to how the problem will be addressed or resolved. Beneficiaries should also be identified; who they are and how they will benefit from the project.

Next, facts and evidence supporting the need for this project should be presented. The facts selected should be accurate and specific. Present evidence of the issue, both qualitative and quantitative data, if available. Data subject to be collected and presented include historical, geographical, factual, statistical and philosophical information. Public and private libraries may be sources of information. If a needs assessment was conducted, state the findings.

Establishing that the municipality understands the problem and can reasonably address it should be presented. State how the municipality came to realize the problem exists and what is currently being done to address the problem. State here exactly what the funding will be used for, and once the funding is exhausted, how will the project be affected.

Project Objectives

Project objectives are SMART (specific, measurable, accurate, relevant, timely) outcomes of the stated goals. The objectives will define specific activities and methods carried out in the project. Therefore, project objectives will most likely be used to evaluate project success or progress. Objectives will address who, what, when, where, and how much aspects of the project.

Objectives are often confused with goals. Goals may be abstract and conceptual. For example, a goal may be to alleviate pressure on existing wastewater infrastructure. In contrast, an objective of this goal



would be to reduce stormwater entering the wastewater system by 10% within 8 months by use of rain gardens. Here, the goal is abstract while the objective has a set time frame (8 months), and measurable (10%).

Project Methods and Design

The project methods include how the applicant will actually resolve the problem and achieve objectives. What will be addressed; here is the how, when and why of the project.

How will objectives be carried out? Provide a detailed description of how the project will be carried out from start to finish and how it will solve the problem (inputs and outputs). This would include activities, tasks, logistics, and who is responsible for those tasks and logistics. Identify facilities, transportation and other support services that will be required (throughputs). What may also be required by the grant application is a description of the staffing and administration which will be involved in the project.

When will this project occur? Present an orderly account for the timing of tasks. Here a timetable or flowchart will be a nice added visual for the decision maker. "This type of procedure will help to conceptualize both the scope and detail of the project."

Why and how is this project necessary and unique? This will be to address or justify the chosen methods. Literature, expert testimony, and examples of other successful projects that used the chosen methods may be referenced here. "A Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) chart could be useful and supportive in justifying some proposals." "Highlight the innovative features of the proposal which could be considered distinct from other proposals under consideration." "Whenever possible, use appendices to provide details, supplementary data, references, and information requiring in-depth analysis. These types of data, although supportive of the proposal, if included in the body of the design, could detract from its readability. Appendices provide the proposal reader with immediate access to details if and when clarification of an idea, sequence or conclusion is required. Time tables, work plans, schedules, activities, methodologies, legal papers, personal vitae, letters of support, and endorsements are examples of appendices."



Evaluation Method

The applicant will need to determine how the successful completion of the project and intended outcomes will be measured. The grantor may predetermine methods for evaluating success. Regardless, the applicant should recognize the benefit of project evaluation for continued success in the future. A staff member should be tasked with internal evaluation, or the applicant may choose to hire an evaluation firm.

There are two components to evaluating project success. First, the product evaluation will evaluate the activity in terms of satisfaction of the objectives. Second, the process evaluation will “address how the project was conducted, in terms of consistency with the stated plan of action and the effectiveness of the various activities within the plan.” Essentially, the applicant will need to describe what will be evaluated, who will evaluate the activity in terms of needs, objectives, methods and budget, detail when the data will be compiled, and how the evaluation will be conducted. Data should be collected throughout the project timeline.

Evaluation design is highlighted as an appropriate and thorough way to carry out a project. Therefore, creation of a strong evaluation design is recommended. This can be accomplished through a thorough literature review or even a pilot study to analyze the relationship and facts within the project. However, specific techniques for evaluation may be presented in the grant application.

Future Funding

Project implementation may extend beyond the resources of the grant sought after. A plan should be explained for continuing this project with future funding, whether the continuation of the project is for maintenance or other future expenditures.

Project Budget

Overall, a budget will outline details of the total project total, provides sources and amounts of in-kind or cash matches, provide a breakdown of project costs by expenditure category, and provide copies of estimates for project costs and professional services. Standard budget components include, but are not limited to



description/ estimation of dollar amounts allocated to personnel, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, contractual, other direct costs, and administrative costs (indirect expenses). Budget adjustments may sometimes be “made after the grant award, but this can be a lengthy process.”

“A well-prepared budget justifies all expenses and is consistent with the proposal narrative. Some areas in need of an evaluation for consistency are:

- 1 the salaries in the proposal in relation to those of the applicant organization should be similar;
- 2 if new staff persons are being hired, additional space and equipment should be considered, as necessary
- 3 if the budget calls for an equipment purchase, it should be the type allowed by the grantor agency;
- 4 if additional space is rented, the increase in insurance should be supported;
- 5 if an indirect cost rate applies to the proposal, the division between direct and indirect costs should not be in conflict, and the aggregate budget totals should refer directly to the approved formula; and
- 6 if matching costs are required, the contributors to the matching fund should be taken out of the budget unless otherwise specified in the application instructions.” It is important to consider that the total grant award may not support the entire project, and also to consider inflation when projecting costs of certain line items.

Appendices

The use and inclusion of appendices can be used as a way to streamline the grant proposal, yet include all pertinent information. For example, planning documents such as surveys, maps, and studies may be included at the end of the grant proposal as an appendix rather than inserting all of these documents into the methods section of the proposal. Other relevant appendices include supporting documents, letters of support, lists of project partners, drawings, and other relevant media relating to the project.



THE CONSOLIDATED FUNDING APPLICATION

The Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) was developed by Governor Cuomo to improve the state's economic development model, and its purpose is to streamline and expedite the grant application process. It allows for applicants to access multiple state funding sources through one online application; applicants no longer need to navigate through multiple agencies and fill out multiple applications!

Projects eligible through the CFA include:

Community development, direct assistance to businesses and other organizations, waterfront revitalization, energy, environmental improvements, sustainability, education and workforce development, agricultural economic development and low-cost financing. Previously awarded projects can be found on the Regional Economic Development Councils Webpage: regionalcouncils.ny.gov

Agencies offering funding through the CFA:

26 programs were available through 13 state agencies in 2013, including Empire State Development, NYS Canal Corporation, NYS Energy Research and Development Authority, Environmental Facilities Corporation, Homes and Community Renewal, Department of Labor, Parks, Department of State, Office of National and Community Service, Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Higher Education Services Corporation, Department of Environmental Conservation and Council on the Arts.

Application Assistance

- Guidance for applying to specific programs can be found on the CFA homepage under "CFA Resource Manual." Each program summary provides a description of funding available, types of eligible applicants, eligible and ineligible activities, program benefit requirements, pre-application requirements (if any), successful application requirements, funding priorities, selection criteria, program criteria (with total available points), award criteria details, eligible area, city, county population limits or population target types, project term completion dates, matching fund requirements (if any), and additional resources.



- Public workshops are held by each Regional Council are to help with the application process. In 2013, four workshops were held in each region, in various locations throughout the region and at various times. To ensure finding workshops in the future, search the REDC webpage (regionalcouncils.ny.gov) for “CFA workshops.”
- Applicants may access their Regional Council through email. Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) were developed for each of the 10 regions of New York State in 2011; each tasked with the creation of a strategic plan for their specific region. Aligning applications with the Regions priority projects is highly recommended as the region has the responsibility of identifying projects that aligns with its priorities. Therefore, aligning a project with the priorities of the Regional Council will give the project the greatest chance of funding. Priority projects may also be found in the Regional Council Strategic Plan for each specific region. Contacting your Regional Council for CFA guidance is recommended.

Contact for each council is as follows:

Capital Region: CFARegion1@ny.gov

Central New York: CFARegion2@ny.gov

Finger Lakes: CFARegion3@ny.gov

Long Island: CFARegion4@ny.gov

Mid-Hudson: CFARegion5@ny.gov

Mohawk Valley: CFARegion6@ny.gov

New York City: CFARegion7@ny.gov

North Country: CFARegion8@ny.gov

Southern Tier: CFARegion9@ny.gov

Western New York: CFARegion10@ny.gov

- Frequently asked questions can be found at: regionalcouncils.ny.gov/faq.



Scoring

Each Regional Council will assign a score for applications based on how the application implements the regional strategic plan. A range of 0-20 points are assigned, with 20 points being awarded to proposals which are identified as priority projects by the Regional Council. The Regional Council endorsement is worth 20% of the total scoring, leaving 80% for each specific Agency Review. If multiple regions are encompassed by the application, each region will provide a score.

Example of Agency Review Scoring Criteria

Selection Criteria for NYS DEC/EFC Wastewater Infrastructure Engineering Planning Grant

	Points Assigned	Criteria
Regional Economic Development Priority	20	Alignment with the goals and priorities of its REDC
Performance Measures	40	Severity of existing water quality impairments
Strategies	24	Proposed project is required by a Consent Order, SPDES permit or TMDL
Process	8	Local commitment
Vision	4	Planning project is identified in a formally adopted plan
NYS DEC Regional Priority	4	Alignment with the goals and priorities of the DEC region where the project is located



How to apply

Go to regionalcouncils.ny.gov and click the “Consolidated Funding Application” tab. For a step-by-step guide with associated screenshots on how to navigate the CFA, click on the “CFA Application Manual” tab. Applicants may reapply for funding if projects were not funded in previous CFA rounds.

Steps involved in the CFA

- 1 Registration will be verified and the applicant will receive a project specific token (similar to a password). This token is used to access your application; you will receive a separate token and applicant number for each project as each project needs to be registered separately.
- 2 Select project category.
- 3 Select project type. Multiple project types may be selected.
- 4 Add or remove programs for which you may potentially qualify.
- 5 Answer threshold questions which will determine project eligibility for CFA funding.
- 6 Select the region in which your project is located.
- 7 Required and optional documents: must be in PDF format and cannot be larger than 5MBs
***You may NOT send hard copies**
- 8 Answer a questionnaire of program specific questions.
- 9 Complete the Certification section and verify information entered is correct
- 10 Request funding amount if your application requires a dollar amount to be entered. Also, you will have to enter a budget with funding details for each program on your application.
- 11 Review and answer any unanswered questions; all questions must be answered for the application to be finalized.
- 12 Finalize and submit the application; applicant will receive an email acknowledging submission.



Timeline

In 2013, CFA solicitation was open for 3 months from Mid-June to Mid-August.

RESOURCES FOR GRANT WRITING

The Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center: Contact Khris Dodson, Associate Director, at kadodson@syr.edu, or (315) 443-8818.

Appalachian Regional Commission's General Information on Grants and Funding: www.arc.gov.

U.S. Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand has a variety of grant guidebooks available at: www.gillibrand.senate.gov/services/grants_central/.

UC Santa Barbara Library has information on writing, the development of grants, and tips for success at: guides.library.ucsb.edu/

The Foundation Center has online tutorials for grant writing: foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/shortcourse/index.html

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To reach us via the NYS Relay Service, please dial 7-1-1.



