

Technical Assistance Grant (TAG)
vs
Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC)

U.S. EPA – Region 2; December 2010

TAG is a \$50,000 grant that is awarded to help a group hire someone of their choosing to provide technical assistance to a group.

Whereas TASC services are provided by an EPA contractor, at this time, the firm Ecology and Economics, and there is no specific limit on the amount of assistance.

TAG can only be used for National Priorities List (NPL) Superfund sites

But, TASC can be used for NPL/Superfund Sites *as well as* other Hazardous waste cleanup actions like removal actions or cleanups administered under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, or RCRA.

There can only be one TAG at a time, per Superfund site.

But there *can* be more than two groups receiving TASC services, and there may be a group or groups receiving TASC services while yet another group holds the TAG.

If you live near a Superfund site, both of these programs are theoretically available.

TAG:

- Provides *money* so the group can hire someone to interpret and explain technical reports, site conditions, and EPA's proposed cleanup plans.
- The group is then responsible for sharing information with the community at large.
- The upshot of this is to build capacity of the group to provide input to EPA and to make decisions regarding their families.

TASC. This program provides services such as:

- Information Assistance:
 - develop and distribute fact sheets, brochures,
 - create maps
 - maintain a webpage
 - translation services
- Community Education
 - Community Needs Assessment
 - Workshops and seminars
 - Training materials (videos and audiovisuals)
 - Just-In-Time coaching for upcoming public meetings or to help with participation in decision-making process
- Technical Expertise

- Review and summarize meetings, reports, and documents
- Facilitate discussions between community members and other stakeholders
- Technical Assistance Needs Evaluation and Plan Development
 - Assist communities with needs evaluations
 - Develop technical assistance plans

Who is eligible to apply for both these programs

Eligibility requirements are different for TAG than for TASC.

For TAG:

- Only groups can apply for these grants.
- Group members must live near and be potentially affected by the Superfund Site
- Groups must be representative of the community and
- Must be non-profit and be incorporated (or in the process of becoming incorporated)
- So: Your neighborhood association, depending on its size and incorporation status may or may not be eligible for a TAG

For TASC

- Any group that is looking to share the benefits of the support they receive through TASC with the rest of the affected community can request TASC services, as long as they live in or near the affected area.

Academic institutions are not eligible for TAG.

In fact, other groups that are not eligible for TAGs include:

- potentially responsible parties (also called PRPs), representatives of a PRP or groups that receive money or services from PRPs.
- Groups that are not incorporated for the specific purpose of representing affected people.
- Townships or municipalities (also called political subdivisions)
- Groups affiliated with a national organization that has direct or indirect control over your group.

TAG has more restrictions, although keep in mind, all those restrictions are geared towards making sure that public money is going to help the local community that actually needs it.

TASC is much more open to groups that might feel shut out by the TAG process. If your group can identify a technical support need that isn't being met and that the community needs assistance with, chances are TASC might be able to help.

How do you apply for a TAG

The eligible group writes EPA what is called a "Letter of Intent." This letter identifies your group and states that you intend to apply for the TAG for your particular site. EPA then informs the rest of the community of your group's intentions through an advertisement in a local paper.

The rest of the community then has 30 days to either:

- 1) Join with your group to cooperate on the TAG, or
 - 2) Write their own letter of intent if they'd rather compete for the TAG.
- After that, each interested group has 30 days to complete their TAG applications.

If more than one group applies

EPA's preference is that groups work together if they can to form a cooperative coalition for the TAG. If that can't happen for whatever reason, EPA begins a selection process. During this time, EPA looks at each application individually for:

- Goals
- Plans for using the TAG money
- Concrete plans for how the group will share the information with the rest of the community for the good of the whole community.
- Workplan
- Budget
- Timeline and Existing resources

How long does it take to get a TAG

The TAG application process takes about 5 to 6 months from "Letter of Intent" to final award.

With TAGs your group gets to pick its own technical advisor

With certain conditions. The technical advisor must have demonstrated knowledge of hazardous waste issues; college or university training in the relevant fields; and must be able to communicate technical information to your community. EPA will provide your group with a list of sources for where you can begin your search for a qualified technical advisor.

If you get a TAG grant, but no one in the group has experience with managing a budget of \$50,000

In addition to hiring technical assistance, money from the TAG grant can be used to hire a grant administrator to help manager and administer the grant.

TAG money can also be used to:

- Purchase or rent office supplies to support the technical assistance service
- And to print newsletters or fact sheets to distribute information about the site, cleanup activities and opportunities for public input into decision-making.

TAG money cannot be used for lawsuits or other legal actions. In fact, there is a whole list of things that TAG money cannot be used for. Among the restricted uses are:

- Political activity and lobbying
- Social activities or ceremonies like a yearly picnic for your group or an awards banquet for group members. Included in this are group members meals, transportation, lodging, rentals, tips, etc.

- Group members' training and travel
- Gathering new data such as sampling or well-drilling
- Reopening final EPA decisions
- Resolving disputes with EPA
- Health studies or epidemiological studies, which are studies of disease in a community.

The reason behind all these restrictions is to protect the way that public money is spent.

How does EPA know how our group is spending the money

EPA attaches several requirements to a TAG. In order to make sure that the TAG is being administered properly, the group has to:

- Keep detailed financial records showing how TAG funds and matching portions are used.
- Ask EPA for reimbursement to pay your technical advisor on time and in full.
- Finally, the group must prepare and give quarterly progress reports to EPA; these reports detail spending and give evidence that the benefits of the TAG are being shared with the entire effected community.

If you see the the value in the TAG program, especially if your group is used to working with grants, but still it seems like a lot to have to go through

Its worth considering that if you are a member of a group and if you recognize that your community is in need of a specific type of technical assistance service – let's say printing educational brochures to raise awareness about the Superfund or RCRA site in your neighborhood – you don't have go through the processes of applying for a TAG to get the job done. TASC is probably better suited to your needs.

How do I get the TASC services

In order to receive TASC services, you don't need to go through a formal application process like you do with TAG. Basically, with TASC, your group has a list of responsibilities. First, you need to submit a written request for assistance to the regional office. In Region 2's case, you would write to me, Wanda Ayala. In that request you talk about the specific technical assistance service that you are requesting help with. EPA then makes arrangements with our contractor, at this time the firm Ecology and Economics (or E²), to provide the service you have requested.

After that, your group is responsible for:

- Attending and participating in meetings with the contractor
- Providing site background and current issues
- Helping to establish technical assistance project deadlines
- And reviewing contractor products.

Why is TASC so much easier than TAG?

Mostly because the group is being given services directly, instead of money.

Differences between the role of the TASC contractor and the technical advisor under TAG

Unlike a TAG technical advisor, the TASC contractor may be used to learn and represent the interests of the community. The TASC contractor may also be instrumental in repairing broken trust or operating in a neutral facilitator role.

Like the TAG technical advisor, the TASC contractor can also be used to facilitate or enhance the community's understanding of technical issues associated with the site.

A couple of important things

TAG can only be used for Superfund Sites, whereas TASC can be used at all sorts of removal and contamination sites

While both programs are valuable, TASC can be more flexible and involves an easier process, especially for groups that have a specific need but don't have experience with grants.

For both programs, you can visit our community resources section on the web at www.epa.gov/superfund/community/resources.htm. Or you can contact the Community Involvement Coordinator for your site, or contact Region 2's TASC Coordinator, me, Wanda Ayala.