

Grant Writing Support Tips for Ambassadors and Federal Urban Waters Partners

Purpose: This document provides guidance to Ambassadors and federal employees representing their agency in a local Urban Waters partnership on how to identify funding opportunities and assist in preparing grant applications. It seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- What can Ambassadors and federal agency partners do to help state and local partners seek grant funds?
- What are the limitations on grant seeking help that Ambassadors and federal partners can provide?
- What should Ambassadors do/not do to help provide training?
- What language should Ambassadors use to contact their funding agency for clarification?

Improving Grant Writing Capacity through the Urban Waters Partnership

One of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership's (UWFP) key roles has been to foster partners' ability to achieve their Urban Waters-related goals. To help do this, the Ambassador and the core federal team may work to compile and share funding opportunities, provide grant guidance and assistance as appropriate, and promote collaboration.

How can Ambassadors work with local partners to prepare grant applications?

UWFP Ambassadors can take the following approaches to provide grant writing assistance:

- **Coordinate a grant writing workshop**—Ambassadors are encouraged to assist in coordinating a grant writing workshop and to invite speakers to share information regarding [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). Many Urban Waters locations have developed grant workshop presentations and, depending on audience experience, presentations can be specific to target audience needs. The Ambassador can reach out to federal leads regarding resources available to the UW partnership. If an Ambassador is unable to coordinate a grant writing workshop, the Ambassador can seek contractor support for assistance. The Ambassador can also research and identify potential funding opportunities to gain contractor support.
- **Compile and share funding opportunities with partners**—The Ambassador and core federal partners identify, compile and share funding opportunities that may further partners' Urban Waters-related goals and projects. The national bi-weekly newsletter and many local Urban Waters partnership e-newsletters feature a regular "Funding Opportunities" section. Further, special email alerts can be scheduled for especially relevant or time-sensitive opportunities. Funding opportunities are also announced and/or discussed at partnership meetings.
- **Provide grant guidance and assistance**—Partners sometimes need help preparing quality proposals, connecting with partners, or managing and reporting on grants. While the Ambassador and federal leads cannot complete this work for the partner, they can provide guidance, such as reviewing grant applications and contacting partners about grant opportunities. As an example, the Northwest Indiana team often helps partners identify ways to meet match requirements to obtain grants, particularly when in-kind match is allowable. Ambassadors may also help develop a proposal narrative if this type of assistance is offered to all partners equally and conflicts of interest are carefully avoided.

It is important to note that federal employees never assist in developing or reviewing grant proposals for funding from their home agency and/or department. Federal partners are cognizant of their agency conflict of interest rules and always follow those carefully. Because the UWFP includes multiple agencies,

at least one partner is typically unconnected to the funding agency and able to provide assistance. (Please see section below: *In what cases should an Ambassador avoid providing grant application assistance?*)

- **Promote collaboration**—Local capacity to obtain grants can be limited by the ability of small organizations to administer large grants. Similarly, the funding range for certain grants often exceeds the amount required for individual projects. For this reason, local partnerships can work to increase regional capacity by promoting collaboration among organizations to share resources and expertise, combine similar projects, and work together to prepare and administer grants.

In what cases should an Ambassador avoid providing grant application assistance?

Based on how the Ambassador position is funded, there are limits on the extent to which Ambassadors can provide direct grant writing assistance to local partners. If the Ambassador position is federally-funded, the Ambassador may be prohibited from writing or helping to prepare any grant application, no matter the funding source, or may only be prohibited from helping with proposals intended for their own agency. If the Ambassador works for a nonprofit that is funded through a federal grant, the individual may not write or prepare a grant application, unless approved by the agency funding their position. In some cases, it may make sense for Ambassadors to raise this issue at a partnership meeting to find out what grant seeking support would be helpful and what conflicts of interest the partners are most concerned about.

While the partnership often participates in grant-funded projects, letters of support are rarely issued, and Urban Waters is rarely listed as a formal partner. Given the range of federal agencies engaged in the UWFP, it is often inappropriate to issue letters of support for federal funding. For example, more than 60 organizations are part of the Northwest Indiana Partnership, and the team is careful to not advocate for one project or partner over another.

What language should Ambassadors use to contact their funding agency for clarification?

If any questions arise, contact your funding agency for clarification on the extent to which you can provide guidance. If your Ambassador position is funded through EPA, check with EPA Headquarters' Urban Waters team and/or EPA's grant office for further information or clarification. When contacting the grant office, here is some example language you can use:

- Can an employee/grant-funded person/contract-funded person (etc.) assist partners with applications for grant funding from our agency?
- Can an [employee] assist partners with applications for grant funding from other federal agencies or other nongovernmental organizations?

The goal is to determine: Is there a concern of a conflict of interest or favoritism legally or even optically (appearance)?

Summary: How Ambassadors Can Provide Grant Writing Support

In conclusion, Ambassadors and Urban Waters leads can assist with grant applications through (1) coordinating grant writing workshops, (2) compiling and sharing funding opportunities, (3) promoting partner collaboration, and (4) providing grant writing guidance. However, Ambassadors cannot directly write or prepare a grant application, and typically cannot issue letters of support for funding. When providing grant writing assistance, Ambassadors and leads must be cognizant of, and avoid, potential conflicts of interest.