

Tips for Applicants to EPA's Environmental Justice Small Grants Program

January, 2011

EJ Small Grants Program at a Glance

Projects funded:

Non-Research: To support activities designed to educate, empower and enable communities to understand the environmental and public health issues and to identify ways to address these issues at the local level.

Research: Research activities related to Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, Section 311(c) (CERCLA)- To support activities of a research nature only that examine issues related to a community's exposure to multiple environmental harms and risks, i.e., survey, research, collecting and analyzing data which will be used to expand scientific knowledge or understanding of the subject studied. The EPA has interpreted "research" to include studies that extend to socioeconomic, institutional, and public policy issues, as well as the "natural" sciences.

- EPA expects to award 1-4 grants for non-research projects and 1-4 grants nationwide, in amounts per award of up to \$25,000 and \$50,000 respectively.
- Incorporated non-profit community-based organizations, federally-recognized tribes, and tribal organizations are eligible to apply. Organizations must be located in the same state as the proposed project, and applicants must demonstrate that they have worked directly with the affected community (see RFA for additional requirements).
- The 2011 Solicitation opened January 28, 2011. **Applications are due March 31, 2011.**
- Find the Request for Applications online at: <http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/grants/ej-smgrants.html>.
- For more information, contact EPA Region 9 Environmental Justice Coordinator, Sharon Murray, murray.sharon@epa.gov, (415) 947-4250 or Office of Environmental Justice EJ Grants Coordinator: Sheila Lewis, lewis.sheila@epa.gov, (202) 564-0152

Applying for an EJ Grant: Key Sections in the Request for Proposals

Section	What You'll Learn
I. Funding Opportunity Description	Basic information about the grant program, goals, and new focus areas.
II. Award Information	How much funding is available and how many awards are expected to be made (these numbers are approximates).
III. Eligibility Information	Whether your organization is eligible to apply for funding.
IV. Application and Submission Information	<p>What you should include in your application/proposal.</p> <p>What to include and how to format your application/proposal, how to submit your application and requirements for font size and number of pages. This section also indicates the deadline for submitting an application/proposal.</p> <p>NOTE: This section will contain information about "pre-application assistance," conference calls where you can ask questions about threshold eligibility criteria, administrative issues related to the submission of the proposal, and clarification about the announcement.</p>
V. Application Review Information	How your application will be reviewed and the criteria that will be used to score your application. Pay close attention to the chart outlining proposal "criteria" and "maximum points per criterion" (page ____).

How Applications are Reviewed, Scored, and Ranked

1. EPA's Headquarters Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) receives all the applications.
2. OEJ screens each application for the Threshold Eligibility Requirements described in Section III of the RFA.
3. OEJ sends the eligible applications to the appropriate Regional Office where the project is located; Region 9's office is in San Francisco.
4. The Regional Office assembles a review panel of EPA staff from diverse programs throughout the Region.
5. Each reviewer on the panel independently reviews each application and scores it using the point values defined in Section V., Evaluation Criteria. The maximum total score a project can receive is 100 points.
* **NOTE:** reviewers must limit their review to information contained in the application and are not permitted to consider outside information about a project or organization, except under the criteria "Past Performance Reporting On Outputs and Outcomes."
6. The regional review panel finalizes their scores, averages them across all reviewers, and creates a ranked list of projects.
7. Projects are funded in order of rank depending on the total available funds.
8. EPA will notify applicants about the status of their application when the review and selection process is complete. Those not selected may ask for an oral debriefing.

Common Errors and Places Where Points are Lost

Problem	Solution/Tips
Incomplete applications (e.g., missing forms)	Double check the list of forms required in Section IV.
Application goes over page limit	Reviewers can't review any pages past the required page limit; be concise.
Disorganized writing	Make it easy for the reviewer to see what you want to do and why. Make sure you address each of the evaluation criteria. Also see Grant Writing Tips at epa.gov/ogd/recipient/tips.htm
Results (outputs/outcomes) are fuzzy and ill defined.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Spend time detailing your project's outputs and outcomes.- Logic models can help clearly show the timeline, outputs, and outputs for your project. Background and templates: http://yosemite.epa.gov/R10/ECOCOMM.NSF/webpage/measuring+environmental+results- See Measurement Tips for Community Projects: epa.gov/CARE/library/CARE_Measurement_Tips.pdf

How to Submit an Application

You can submit an application via mail, email, or electronically through Grants.gov. Directions for registering on grants.gov and submitting your application are provided in the full text of the RfA. All completed applications must be postmarked by USPS, date-stamped by courier service or received via Email by 11:59 p.m., March 31, 2011.

Where to Get More Information

EPA Region 9's EJ Website & Email List	epa.gov/region9/ej/ (click on "contacts" for phone numbers and to sign up for our email list)
EPA's National Environmental Justice Website	www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice
Grant Writing Tips	epa.gov/ogd/recipient/tips.htm

Frequently Asked Questions about Budget: What's Allowed?

NOTE: if your question is not addressed here, please see the Cost Principles for Nonprofit organizations (2 CFR 230, Appendix B (33) (online at http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_10/2cfr230_10.html).

1. Can federal grant funds be used to pay for the cost of transportation for project participants to get to and from their homes or workplaces to meetings?

Direct costs for items such as stipends or subsistence allowances, travel allowances, and registration fees paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees (but not employees) in connection with meetings, conferences, symposia, or training projects, are allowed pending approval by EPA. Your Work Plan should describe how these costs directly supports outputs and outcomes of the project.

2. Can we use federal grant funds to pay for food at meetings?

If the costs are reasonable and necessary for the activity, light refreshments or meals are allowable at meetings, conferences, training workshops, and outreach events. Talk to your project officer about restrictions.

3. Can we use federal grant funds to pay for child care to support participation at meetings?

If your Work Plan demonstrates that the child care is necessary for the completion of the project, and you receive prior approval from EPA, child care is an allowable cost.

4. What are the requirements for a grantee to provide stipends to support participation in a project?

According to the Cost Principles for Nonprofit organizations, participant support costs "are direct costs for items such as stipends or subsistence allowances...paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees (but not employees) in connection with meetings, conferences, symposia, or training projects. These costs are allowable with the prior approval of the awarding agency." In order for EPA to approve these costs, you need provide the following assurances and information:

- a. Description in the Work Plan narrative of how stipends support the goals and objectives of the grant program and specific Work Plan task(s) or output(s)/outcome(s).
- b. Written assurance that the organization has administrative policies and procedures governing the selection and/or hiring of stipend recipients.
- c. Written assurance that you have an adequate financial tracking system to record hours kept by, and payments remitted to, recipients of the stipend.
- d. A written explanation of the rationale for determining the amount of the stipend (e.g., dollar amount per hour or per day).

If your organization does not have written policies/procedures and a financial tracking system, you will need to develop them. While they are being developed, you will not be able to draw down funds to pay for stipends. The following term and condition will be included on your Assistance Agreement:

"The recipient will provide to EPA a copy of applicable section(s) from its official administrative and financial policies and procedures, which fully describe the management and tracking of stipends. The recipient's written policies and procedures must comply with 40 CFR Part 30.21 and 2 CFR Part 230. These costs may not be drawn down until the recipient receives and accepts EPA's written approval."

5. Can we purchase small electronic equipment (such as video recorders, digital cameras, or laptops) with EJ grant funding? If the item(s) cost less than \$5,000, what category would it fall under in the budget?

Yes, if your Work Plan describes a clear connection between the equipment and the project's outputs/outcomes.

For Federal purposes, equipment is defined as an item with a unit acquisition cost of \$5,000 or greater and a useful life of more than one year. Each item of equipment and its cost must be identified. Generally, small electronic items costing less than \$5,000 should be included in the "supplies" category.