

EPA Community Change Grants Brief

What is the Opportunity?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently released a call for grant proposals or “Notice of Funding Opportunity” (NOFO) for its Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grants Program. This program has a collective budget of over \$2 billion which EPA expects to award in two tracks:

Track 1: “Community-Driven Investments for Change” focuses on projects to improve the environmental, climate, and resilience conditions affecting disadvantaged communities. The EPA expects to fund roughly 150 projects in this track with awards ranging in value from \$10-20 million, with a maximum award value of \$20 million.¹

Track 2: “Meaningful Engagement for Equitable Governance” focuses on efforts to engage disadvantaged communities in governmental processes to advance environmental and climate justice. The EPA expects to fund roughly 20 projects in this track with awards ranging in value from \$1-3 million, with a maximum award value of \$3 million.

The EPA describes the objectives for Track 1 projects as:

- Increase community resilience through climate action activities
- Reduce local pollution to improve public health
- Center meaningful community engagement
- Build community strength
- Reach priority populations
- Maximize integration across projects

Possible projects could first address:

- Green Infrastructure and Nature-Based Solutions
- Mobility and Transportation Options for Preventing Air Pollution and Improving Public Health and Climate Resilience
- Energy-Efficient, Healthy, and Resilient Housing and Buildings
- Microgrid Installation for Community Energy Resilience
- Community Resilience Hubs
- Brownfield Redevelopment for Emissions Reduction and Climate Resilience
- Waste Reduction and Management to Support a Circular Economy
- Workforce Development Programs for Occupations that Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Air Pollutants

In tandem with one of the strategies above, projects should also address one of the follow:

- Indoor Air Quality and Community Health Improvements
- Outdoor Air Quality and Community Health Improvements
- Clean Water Infrastructure to Reduce Pollution Exposure and Increase Overall System Resilience
- Safe Management and Disposal of Solid and Hazardous Waste

The EPA has offered some of the following as examples of possible projects:

- **Mitigate urban heat islands** through reflective surfaces and shade trees or other vegetation, including preparing planting sites and establishing and caring for trees and other vegetation.

¹ This brief focuses primarily on Track 1 because of it represents the vast majority of funding to be awarded.

- Implement “**Complete Streets**” projects to improve walkability, bike-ability, and transit use, including improved access for people with disabilities. projects to improve walkability, bike-ability, and transit use, including improved access for people with disabilities that reduce vehicle miles traveled and related air pollution.
- **Install or retrofit homes or multi-family housing** with higher-efficiency electric heating, cooling, and cooking systems (e.g., heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, electric and induction stoves, electric clothes dryers).
- Install **microgrids** with onsite renewable energy generation and storage.
- **Assess** the most acute **climate risks facing a community** (e.g., extreme heat, flooding, wildfire), identify where the community has gaps in its resilience strategy, then design a plan to mitigate specific risks by **creating or upgrading community facilities to serve as resilience hubs** that remain operable during an emergency.
- **Build and/or upgrade existing structures** and sites to improve community use while **reducing GHG emissions and/or improving climate resilience**.
- Implement a **community-scale composting program to reduce emissions from food waste** that includes an educational campaign to inform Project Area residents about climate benefits of reducing food waste.
- Propose **workforce development programs that will help reduce GHG emissions** and other air pollutants to benefit disadvantaged communities.

Which Organizations Can Apply?

In order to be considered for funding under this program, the project must be submitted by a partnership of two organizations, led by a **Community Benefit Organization (CBO)**. A CBO is a nonprofit organization which exists “mainly for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purpose in the public interest and is not organized primarily for profit.” It must be able to provide documentation from the Internal Revenue Service that it is “exempt from taxation under Section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code.” It must also be able to demonstrate the relationship it has in/to the community it serves. The second organization in the partnership may be another CBO; a unit of local government including a county, municipality, school district, or public authority; or institution of higher education.

The project the applicant proposes must benefit an EPA IRA Disadvantaged Community, the GIS Tool documenting which can be found [EPA IRA Disadvantaged Communities \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com). The EPA’s map includes all disadvantaged community census tracts determined through the White House’s Justice40 Initiative.

What are Important Considerations for Applicants?

Though not explicitly phrased as such in the NOFO, the EPA is looking for “**shovel ready**” projects for fundings awarded particularly under Track 1. Funded projects are expected to begin within 120 days of the award. All projects must complete within 3 years (end date 11/21/26)

Applicants interested in submitting a proposal **may be able to receive technical assistance** with the proposal from the EPA by filing out a request form: [Community Change Grants Technical Assistance Request Form | US EPA](#).

Applications are being accepted on a rolling basis through November 21st, 2024 (11/21/24). The EAP expects to begin funding the first awards in March of 2024 and therefore the first projects will be underway by May or June of 2024.

To submit an application, applicants must do so through [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and must have [SAM.gov](https://www.sam.gov) account as well. This can be a time-consuming process and even text within the NOFO stresses the need not to wait for the last minute for account creation and application submission.

Where is there More Information?

The full Notice of Funding Opportunity can be found here: [EPA Community Change Grants Notice of Funding Opportunity November 2023](#)

Additional information can be found through this webinar, published by the EPA: [Community Change Grants Notice of Funding Opportunity Webinar - December 7, 2023 - YouTube](#)