



Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund 2017

Frequently Asked Questions

May 2017

Q 1] My local government does not have an Equity Director, Sustainability Director, or a person with the sole responsibility of performing cross-departmental equity or sustainability functions. Instead, people in various departments/divisions perform these functions as part of a broader span of duties. For instance, a community planner in the Community Development Division often works with staff from other departments on city initiatives related to stormwater or parks. As someone who performs “cross-departmental equity or sustainability functions,” would such a person fulfill the requirement for a lead applicant?

A 1] We recognize that each local government encompasses different roles, titles, and structures. If you are an applicant that does not have a staff line for the traditional role of “Sustainability Director” or “Equity Director,” then document and explain the cross-departmental function of the person who you believe will fulfill the requirement. You should give examples and explain how this person is prepared and supported to deliver cross-functional results in support of the proposed project. We will determine if that person qualifies you to be a lead applicant.

Q 2] I work in a municipal utility that is housed within my county government’s Finance Department. Can our municipal utility be considered a lead applicant?

A 2] If someone from within the municipal utility housed within the county government performs an equity or sustainability function that integrates the municipal utility with other county government departments, then it is possible that the municipal utility could serve as the lead applicant. The lead applicant must be from within a local government and must support the local government in their sustainability and/or equity initiatives.

Q 3] If two local governments are working on a shared initiative, can they both apply for separate grants for that initiative or would they need to do a joint application?

A 3] Two awards will not be made for the same initiative. If it’s a joint initiative, the two local governments should submit one application that shows that their project priorities are in alignment. Two local governments can participate on the same project, in this case one should serve as the lead applicant and the other would be a project partner.

Q 4] Does the lead applicant need to be employed through local government? Some local governments do not have the tax base to support more employees and do not have the capacity to take on additional roles.



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A 4] Yes, the lead applicant must be employed through the local government. We are seeking applications from communities that have dedicated resources to their sustainability and equity initiatives. We recognize this fund may not be a fit for all communities.

Q 5] If three or four community groups approach the local government about partnering on a grant, is it then up to the local government to choose the partners it wants to work with?

A 5] The lead applicant needs to be from a local government. It is up to the local government/ lead applicant to choose the partners it wants to work with and then include them in the grant application.

Q 6] Would my local school district count as a local government for the purposes of being a lead applicant?

A 6] No, we will not accept applications from local school districts as the lead applicant. We consider local governments to include city and county municipalities. Local school districts are welcome to serve as project partners with the lead applicant.

Q 7] Can a local partner for this grant be based in a different state from the lead applicant? For example, can an Atlanta partner work with a local government from North Carolina?

A 7] To be a successful applicant, you must demonstrate that you have at least one local, place-based partner. For the purposes of this grant, we consider “local” to be adjacent to the lead applicant’s jurisdiction and within the same state or neighboring state. Any additional partners (from within and outside the state) are encouraged.

Q 8] Can a nonprofit partner of the lead applicant perform some of the management, technical assistance, and oversight of the grant, and/or receive grant funds?

A 8] Yes. We encourage sharing of responsibility among partners. Please use the table in the application template to clearly describe roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, we encourage nonprofit partners to receive the grant funds if the lead applicant has a lengthy process for receiving and spending grant funds.

Q 9] Can a metropolitan planning organization or regional planning organization be a lead applicant?

A 9] No, metropolitan planning and regional planning organizations cannot be lead applicants. They can, however, be project partners.



Q 10] Are there any restrictions on how grant funds are spent? Can a grantee use the funding to hire staff or pay a consultant?

A 10] The only explicit restriction about use of grant funds is a restriction on using funds for reimbursing expenses incurred when writing the proposal. Funds may be used to hire staff or pay a consultant. Make sure that you clearly articulate the relevance and relationship of expenses to project milestones and goals.

Q 11] Will I be able to subcontract part of the project work to a partner using the grant funds?

A 11] Yes, grant funds may be used to pay for subcontracting work to partners. For example, if you are awarded and receive grant funds, you will be allowed to use those funds to hire a partner to perform some of the project's work.

Q 12] Will I be discouraged or encouraged to apply based on the letter of intent (LOI) I submit in July?

A 12] Yes, the intention of the LOI is to help us understand your proposed project before the final application is due, so that we can provide guidance to improve the quality of final applications. If, after reading your LOI, we determine that your project is not eligible, we will notify you.

Q 13] What does "significant" in-kind/cash support mean? Are you looking for at least a 1:1 ratio?

A 13] While we don't have a requirement for a match or a specific match ratio, we recognize that transformative projects take substantial resources. Applications will be scored using the criteria point system in the RFP. When designing your project, consider the relative value of the points awarded for project matches.

Q 14] How do you value the project match from non-local sources? For example, will you accept a match for a project utilizing resources from a national foundation or a national government agency such as the Department of Energy?

A 14] We are happy to see an in-kind match and/ or cash match from any entity.

Q 15] What does an ideal partnership look like? Is a partnership within the lead applicant organization acceptable?

A 15] Partnerships from within the local government lead applicant (e.g., a Public Works Department and Finance Department from within a city) will not qualify you for this grant. For the purposes of this grant project, the lead applicant must have at least one formal partnership with a community organization, but we recognize that the project lead will also have many relevant project partners within its local government.



We do not have an “ideal” partnership in mind. We encourage you to form partnerships with organizations that have resources and influence, as well as insight into the problem you’re trying to solve. Projects with multiple partners all working toward a common goal, with skin in the game, will deliver a better result. In your application, please explain how the partner(s) will be involved in the development, design, and implementation of the project. The extent of the partnership must go beyond a letter of support during the application phase.

Q 16] Can the funds be used to put local government sustainability infrastructure in place?

A 16] The answer to this question depends on the project, so we encourage you to reach out to us with questions at maggie@southeastSDN.org about specific project ideas. Here is one example:

- A project to replace streetlights with LED fixtures to improve visibility, decrease crime, and reduce energy usage is an example of an infrastructure improvement project that might be eligible—as long as it incorporates elements that clearly address all the other eligibility requirements.

Q 17] Can I use grant funds to provide incentives to members of lower-wealth communities to implement water-saving or energy-saving measures? For example, what if we want to provide bicycles to allow school kids to better utilize a new trail system (meaning there would be fewer cars on the road)—or we plan to offer incentives for multifamily residential property owners to do energy efficiency upgrades for residents?

A 17] Grant funds can be used to provide incentives to members of lower-wealth communities to implement water-saving or energy-saving measures. However, the example of using bicycles to allow school kids to better use a new trail system would not qualify because it is transportation-focused. On the other hand, the example of using incentives for multifamily residential property owners to do energy efficiency upgrades would be considered eligible. The approach must be energy-focused or water-focused.

Q 18] Do climate mitigation or adaptation projects require a water or energy element?

A 18] We understand that climate adaptation projects may entail other initiatives (like waste reduction efforts to reduce landfill gases or alternative commute programs to reduce tailpipe emissions), but we are only seeking to fund climate mitigation or adaptation projects that are focused on water and/or energy elements.

Q 19] How do you define water initiatives? Is addressing sea level rise or stormwater included?

A 19] While we don’t have a specific definition of a water initiative, we can say that addressing sea level rise or stormwater would be an eligible water initiative, as would green infrastructure. Examples of eligible energy initiatives include demand-side management, renewable energy, and/or energy efficiency.