

Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund 2017

Frequently Asked Questions

June 2017

- 1. What kind of agency or entity qualifies to be the recipient of the grant funds? Can a City or County receive the grant funds, or should another partner be the recipient?**

If all project partners meet the eligibility requirements, we do not have specific requirements about who can receive the grant funds. However, we encourage project partners to consider the most efficient and expeditious way to accomplish grant contracting and funds management tasks when they are choosing the partner that will perform in this role.

- 2. Can another local government serve as a community partner on the application if the lead applicant is also a local government?**

Yes, another local government (City or County) can serve as a community partner on the application if the lead applicant is a different local government.

- 3. Our nonprofit is the only community advocate for utility regulation that is working with our City Council. We are technically not part of the City Council or City staff, but we often submit filings and intervenor comments. Would we be eligible to apply for funding as the lead applicant?**

No, the lead applicant must be from a City or County government. Nonprofits, advocacy groups, municipal utilities, and other organizations are encouraged to be partners in a proposed project, but they cannot serve as the lead applicant.

- 4. Given that municipal utilities are themselves local government institutions, can someone responsible for sustainability and/or equity for a municipal utility serve as the lead applicant?**

No, someone employed by a municipal utility cannot serve as the lead applicant. Projects must have a city or county lead applicant. The project must be led by a City or County Equity or Sustainability Director or someone who performs a cross-departmental equity or sustainability function in a local city or county government. We recognize that each local government encompasses different roles, titles, and structures. If you are a City or County applicant that does not have a staff line for the traditional role of "Sustainability Director" or "Equity Director," then please document and explain the cross-departmental function of the person who you believe will fulfill the requirement.

- 5. We are a nonprofit that is partnering with a city on an application. The city's representative would be the lead applicant, but we would be doing most of the work and receiving most of the funds. Do you have guidelines or preferences about how the funds are distributed among project partners?**

Yes, it's fine for a project partner to fulfill a majority of the work, and, therefore, receive most of the funds. The lead applicant from a City or County is expected to be highly involved in project leadership, but they are not

required to serve as the project manager or the direct funds recipient, and they are not required to be the ultimate recipient of a majority of the total funds received. It is up to the project partners to determine appropriate allocation of funds.

6. Is there a "maximum allowed overhead" percentage for administration performed via university partnerships?

Grant funds will not pay for more than a 20% overhead rate for a university partner's administration fee. Universities often have a higher overhead rate (sometimes as high as 50%) but will usually reduce that rate if a grantor has a rate overhead cap. Please contact our Fund Manager, Maggie Ullman, at maggie@southeastssdn.org if you have any questions.

7. Do you have a time period for what's determined an acceptable match contribution? We are currently working with partners and have existing matches related to our project proposal. Can we use existing funds as a match?

A match is not required for this application. Successful applicants will show support from other entities, and that support might include a match. However, applicants cannot use past funding as a match for projects proposed for this current round of grant funds.

8. Can Federal funds, or funds from Local Power Companies be included as a match?

Yes, Federal funds and/or funds from Local Power Companies can be included as a match. We are happy to see an in-kind match and/or cash match from any entity.

9. Is the Southeast Sustainable Community Fund going to be an ongoing source of funding or will 2017 be the only year funds are available?

At this time, we only have a commitment to deliver five to seven (5-7) two-year grants.

10. What is the time frame for announcing the winners?

The final application is due by 5pm EST on September 5. Grant award recipients will be notified by October 13. The public grant award announcement date is December 11.

11. When will funding be distributed?

Funding will be distributed no later than December 31, 2017.

12. Can we request different funding amounts for Year One and Year Two?

Yes, the funding levels for Year One and Year Two can be different. For example, Year One funding request can be \$75,000, and Year Two funding request can be \$150,000. However, all project requests must be equal to or above \$75,000. We set this minimum request amount to ensure that a project's scope and size are substantial enough to produce significant impact and effectively scale up.

13. We are preparing a Letter of Interest (LOI), and we realize that we may have further refinements and additional organizing to do between the LOI deadline and the final application deadline on September 5. Is it okay if the funding request in the LOI and the final application differ?

Yes, the funding request in the LOI and the final funding request can differ. We do not expect everything in the LOI to be fully solidified, and we understand there may be significant refinement of your project after you submit the LOI.

14. In the Letter of Interest (LOI), can we list all possible partners without having confirmed commitments from all of them?

Yes, please list all the partners you plan to work with throughout the project. We do not expect to see firm commitments from all your partners at this stage.

15. How does the final application process work? Will you use the Letter of Interest (LOI) to invite entities to apply, or is the final application opportunity open to anyone who submits an LOI?

As long as applicants meet the eligibility requirements specified in the RFP and submit an LOI by the deadline, they will be able to submit a final application. We will not review applications that do not submit an LOI by the July 6 deadline. To ensure we are receiving successful final applications, we will provide feedback to applicants based on the information in their LOIs, and we will provide another technical assistance period between the LOI due date and the application due date on September 5. We will work with applicants to determine the best path forward for specific project ideas.

16. Will you provide examples of projects that would be eligible?

The RFP provides detailed information about project eligibility and gives some examples of eligible projects. The following project descriptions should help advance your understanding about the types of projects that are eligible:

Example #1: In support of a recently adopted municipal program to reduce negative stormwater impacts, a city applies for funding to forge a partnership with the impacted neighborhoods, the water utility, and a job training organization. Most of the community's residents are minorities and have lower incomes. The city will work with neighborhood associations and the job training partner to train and employ people from the community to install and maintain a variety of green infrastructure measures. SSCF funds will pay for development of the job training program and salaries for green infrastructure trainees. Matching funds will be provided by the city for the salary of the city sustainability planner and by the local water utility for the materials cost of the rain gardens and for personnel who will quantify the impact of the project on stormwater flow rates and related problems.

Example #2: A county is partnering with a community health organization and a home weatherization agency to include indoor air quality and other health-related measures in the local weatherization program. SSCF is specifically funding the partnering organizations to develop an effective health-related weatherization protocol, to train weatherization and other local personnel involved in energy programs, to conduct pre- and post-implementation health assessments, to prepare a final report and presentation on the results, and to advocate for the transition to the new protocol. Matching funds will provide materials and labor for the weatherization activities to include the health-related measures in the retrofitted homes, for attendees' time at

training programs, and for the salary of the Sustainability Director. A substantial percentage of the homeowners whose homes are being weatherized—as well as several of the local weatherization staff—are people of color.

17. What kind of projects will not qualify for funding? What are some examples of previously funded projects?

This is the first year of SSCF funding, so we cannot share any projects from previous years. The RFP describes projects that will not qualify for funding. Non-eligible projects include traditional environmental programming, such as recycling or solid waste management, brownfield remediation, and upgrades or maintenance of transportation infrastructure. Projects that seek funding solely for the design, purchase, or installation of sustainability measures on local government or nonprofit buildings, such as lighting retrofits in municipal buildings or solar photovoltaics on municipal land, are not eligible for grant funding.

18. Our City is seeking to develop a City-wide sustainability plan to address climate change and pollution. Will you fund projects that build new partnerships, generate strategies, and develop plans to achieve a particular climate change goal around energy and water? Or does the project need to be solely focused on implementation?

We will fund projects that include building new partnerships, generating strategies, and other planning-related activities, but successful project applications will also show how these activities lead to implementation and clear results. We will not fund stand-alone planning or strategy development activities that have no tie to implementation. A successful planning element of a project will also show a link to an existing policy, plan, or program within your municipality (e.g., a resolution recently passed by the city council that supports the plan or project).

19. Can the funding be used to develop a regional sustainability plan that focuses on adaptation and resilience?

The general geographic focus of these funds is local, community-based projects. While we would fund planning activities and strategy development, we are seeking to fund implementation activities at a local level. Any regional planning activities must show a clear tie to implementation strategies that address climate change, are equitable and inclusive, and affect policy at the local level. Local solutions can ultimately be scaled up and applied to other communities, thus increasing the impact.

20. We are considering applying a for a project that focuses primarily on energy and climate change and less on water. Is there a cap on the number of energy-related or water-related project applications that will be accepted and/or funded?

No, there will not be a cap on the number of energy or water project proposals we accept or fund. We welcome any number of projects focused specifically on either issue.

21. When considering the need to involve a target community in the development and design of the project, can we incorporate feedback mechanisms (like focus groups or surveys) once the project has started to help us adjust the design, or does this type of engagement need to happen before submission of the application?

Feedback mechanisms like focus groups or surveys are good approaches for engaging target audiences. These engagement and feedback activities can happen before the project, but they could also be included as part of the project proposal's design and included in the funding request.

- 22. We are working with a job training organization that has a long history in our project's target community. The organization supports our project, and we have already engaged the community in the project's design. Does this meet your expectations of involvement of stakeholders?**

The initial involvement of partner organizations and community members around the development of the project's concept is a good starting point. However, engagement and coordination with such partners and the community members before, during, and after the conceptualization phase are crucial. To be successful, the project must demonstrate ongoing involvement, buy-in, and support from partners and target communities during the project's development and implementation phases.

- 23. Do you prefer that proposed projects focus on serving a specific neighborhood, or should they expand to have a broader, City-wide reach?**

We do not have a preference about the specific size or placement of the community that the project reaches within your City or County. What is important is that the project serves your priority stakeholders and that it works to equitably achieve its strategies and goals within that neighborhood or city.

- 24. Are there restrictions on whether the funds are spent on public or private property?**

There are no explicit restrictions about use of funds for public or private property, as long as the project meets all the other eligibility requirements.