

# Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund 2019 Request for Proposals (RFP)

**Issued April 12, 2019**

***A Letter of Intent (LOI) must be submitted by 5pm EST on June 24, 2019***

***Shortlist finalists will be notified by 5pm EST on July 26, 2019***

***Grant awards will be announced by 5pm EST on November 8, 2019***

The Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund (SSCF) announces a third round of funding for local communities in the southeastern United States. Grants will be awarded to local partnerships to advance local government policy, plans, or programs that will create equitable and sustainable energy and/or water initiatives. Grants are restricted to the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Applicants do not have to be members of the Southeast Sustainability Directors Network (SSDN); however, grantees are required to work with SSDN in a variety of outreach and educational areas. The 2019 RFP will result in five to seven grants of approximately \$75,000 to \$150,000 per year for two years (2020-2021). Funding for Year Two is contingent on Year One performance. For more information:

- Visit the SSCF webpage ([www.southeastsdn.org/grants](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants)),
- Register for an informational webinar by visiting the webpage above:
  - **3pm EST / 2pm CST on Thursday, April 25, 2019 and/or**
  - **11am EST / 10am CST on Thursday, May 23, 2019**
- Contact Meg Jamison, SSCF Program Manager, at [meg@southeastsdn.org](mailto:meg@southeastsdn.org).

## 1. Fund Background

The Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund (SSCF) is a partnership between [The Kendeda Fund](#) and the [Southeast Sustainability Directors Network](#) (SSDN). The Kendeda Fund supports the dignity of individuals and the sustainability of communities through investments in transformative leaders and ideas. SSDN is a membership network of sustainability officials representing nearly 45 local governments in the southeastern United States. SSDN members share ideas and collaborate to accelerate the adoption of sustainable best practices across the region. SSDN's mission is to build capacity for community sustainability in the Southeast.

## 2. Fund Purpose

Innovation toward sustainable and equitable outcomes in the Southeast often comes with the on-the-ground experience of navigating the uncharted path for *how* to implement sustainability strategies in a way that aligns with local values and context. The purpose of the Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund is to accelerate the adoption

of sustainable best practices in southeastern communities by funding projects that implement local sustainability solutions, while leveraging the SSDN network to help others learn from grantee experiences and success stories. The fund provides key levers with which to expedite the way that local governments can drive the advancement of sustainable best practices:

1. Demonstration of proof-of-concept within the Southeast context: citizens on the ground need success stories from within the region to make the case for leadership support.
2. Accessibility to implementation funding: Southeast communities are historically and chronically under-resourced and local government sustainability efforts need access to funding sources.

The SSCF supports community partnerships working on sustainable and equitable projects focused on the following six areas. Applicants should focus on these areas in their project design and application materials.

1. Mitigating and/ or adapting to climate change through sustainable energy and/or water initiatives
2. Fostering equity and inclusiveness
3. Leveraging community partnerships
4. Strengthening local government commitment
5. Demonstrating scalable solutions
6. Demonstrating innovation

### **3. Funding Amounts and Grant Project Timelines**

The 2019 RFP will result in five to seven two-year grants that range from \$75,000 to \$150,000 per year. Grants will be issued in one-year increments, and Year Two funding will only be provided after the grantee demonstrates successful performance toward Year One project milestones. Grantees have two years to complete all stated milestones, deliver results, and spend all grant funds. Project costs associated with this grant are not to exceed \$150,000 in either grant project year, and two-year funding should not exceed \$300,000.

### **4. Eligibility Requirements and Scoring Criteria**

Proposals that meet all eligibility requirements will be considered for funding using the RFP's scoring criteria:

#### **Eligible Applicants**

- **Southeast U.S. Community:** This funding opportunity is open to any community located in the Southeast, including SSDN and non-SSDN members. For the purpose of this RFP, the Southeast includes Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Statewide or Southeast region-wide efforts are not eligible.
- **City or County Lead Applicant:** Projects must be led by one of three types of applicants representing a city or county government: (1) An Equity Director, or (2) a Sustainability Director, or (3) someone who performs a cross-departmental equity or sustainability function. If the lead applicant is the latter of the three types of applicant, they will be required to submit a short paragraph with their application materials that describes the duties and cross-department function of their position related to equity and/or sustainability. The lead

applicant is expected to be highly involved in project leadership, but they are not required to be the project manager or the funds recipient. Applicants are allowed to have a non-municipal nonprofit partner receive funds and perform fiscal management for the project. Regional planning organizations, councils of governments, municipal utilities, and/or school districts are encouraged to be partners in a proposed project, but cannot serve as the lead applicant. Please note that in the 2019 RFP, this eligibility requirement is included in the selection criteria under “Local Government Commitment”.

Note: Applicants that do not submit proposals in the correct format and who do not follow all submission guidelines will not be eligible for consideration.

**Grant Application Scoring Criteria**

Letters of Intent and Grant Applications will be scored using the following scoring criteria. Each of the criteria are weighted differently and should guide applicants as they craft different sections of their proposals.

**ROUND THREE (2019)**

<b>Scoring Criteria</b> <i>(up to 135 available points)</i>	<b>Points</b>
<b>Project Design and Milestones:</b> How well does the proposal define the need within local context and how well does it align with the goals of the SSCF? Does it clearly propose a solution, and clearly state the expected outcomes, with a path to get there? How realistic are the timeframe and milestones?	20
<b>Impact on Community Sustainability:</b> How impactful will the project outcomes be in mitigating or adapting to climate change in the community? How widespread will the project’s impact be? Can it be scaled to reach other communities?	20
<b>Community Partnerships:</b> Does the lead applicant include at least one local community partner in the project? Does the partner have a successful history of working with the local community, experience with inclusive engagement and outreach strategies, and/or technical expertise related to developing climate change solutions? How well does the partnership leverage community expertise and resources?	20
<b>Equity and Inclusiveness:</b> What is the extent of meaningful involvement of populations, including people of color, people with low incomes, and/or residents from immigrant or refugee communities, in shaping project design and implementation? Will the proposed project create wealth building opportunities and/or expand educational opportunities for key stakeholders?	20
<b>Innovation:</b> Does the project describe the regional context for the project’s innovation? Does it apply a new or creative idea to address the problem and/or to meet community needs?	20
<b>Local Government Commitment:</b> Has the local government taken internal steps to advance sustainability and/or equity within the local government? How well does this project advance and support an adopted local government policy, plan, or program? Are there supporting resolutions or adopted policies that support this project?	15
<b>Metrics:</b> Does the project clearly define success? Will the project measure both outcomes and outputs? Can impact be measured within the time frame of the project?	10
<b>Budget and Match:</b> How realistic is the budget? Does the budget provide clarity on how the funds will be used? How significantly does the cash or in-kind match add to the project’s potential for success?	10

### **Further Description of Grant Application Scoring Criteria**

**Project Design & Milestones:** Proposals must clearly highlight the need for the project within the local community and state the solution and expected outcomes of the project as they relate to the SSCF goals. Projects should be primarily focused on implementation. Proposals that focus solely, or the majority of their time, on planning efforts will not be considered for funding. Project design should demonstrate a clear and realistic timeframe and workflow by lead applicants and partners. Milestones within the project's time frame should be clearly measured and clearly described in the proposal. The design should clearly show that progress will move forward by meeting specific milestones and demonstrate how those milestones will be met. Applicants are highly encouraged to design projects so that they have the potential to be replicated and/or become a regional best practice.

**Impact on Community Sustainability:** Projects must mitigate or adapt to climate change through sustainable energy and/or water initiatives. Proposals should detail the aspect of climate change mitigation and/or adaptation they intend to address (e.g. energy efficiency, renewable energy, water efficiency, green infrastructure, etc.), how they plan to use or model best practices, and/or create replicable solutions. Applicants are encouraged to seek technical expertise through partnerships or contracted professionals to ensure best practices and appropriate technology are applied to project design and implementation. Projects that seek funding *solely* for the design, purchase, or installation of sustainability measures are not eligible for grant funding. Design, purchase, or installation of individual sustainability measures may be funded when integrated into a larger project that meets all of the eligibility requirements.

**Community Partnerships:** Projects must leverage community support through partnerships. Proposals must have at least one local community partner included in the application in addition to the lead applicant. Local community partners must work in the neighborhood/community/city/county in which the project will take place. Partners must demonstrate their commitment to the partnership by detailing the role they will play and how the partnership will improve outcomes of the proposed project. Ideal community partners will have a successful history of working with the community and/or key stakeholders, experience with inclusive engagement and outreach strategies, and/or technical expertise related to developing climate change solutions. SSDN recognizes that each project will require different partners based on the local context, but each application should demonstrate an equitable approach, and make every effort to develop and implement a project in partnership with the community, not for the community. The strength of the partnership and the leverage the partnership provides will be evaluated through the scoring criteria.

**Equity and Inclusiveness:** SSDN believes that climate change will have disproportionate negative effects on people with low income and communities of color. Projects must engage and benefit populations that are high risk related to climate impacts and highest in need of and access to solutions, such as people of color, people with low incomes, and/or people of immigrant and refugee communities, and other community members as deemed appropriate within the local context. Proposals must clearly identify the population served by the project, and how they will be impacted by the project in both the near term and long term. Projects should seek to fulfill an immediate need, but also provide people with long-term economic opportunity, leadership, knowledge, skills development, and increased opportunity to withstand climate impacts. Applicants are highly encouraged to involve local stakeholders in the shaping of the project's design and implementation, and should demonstrate how this will happen, or has happened, in their proposal. Applicants are encouraged to share demographic information, maps, images or other data that demonstrate the need for the project in the target population and clearly describe the local context for

the selection committee.

**Innovation:** Innovation involves the identification, development and scaling of new ways to solve a problem or take advantage of an opportunity. Innovation can take the form of a practice, program, policy, tool, performance standards, practice and/or organizational model. Projects must pursue innovation, whether is through creative problem solving, a new solution and/or a unique approach to a shared problem. SSDN understands that innovation looks different in each part of the Southeast and encourages applicants to describe the local context for the innovation they are pursuing. As projects chart new territory, SSDN acknowledges that innovation implies a certain level of risk. Applicants should know that risks in proposals are acceptable, so long as the project design and plan are clear and demonstrate a thoughtful approach for achieving appropriate outcomes.

**Local Government Commitment:** Strong local government leadership is important for collaborative community initiatives to thrive. Therefore, projects need to show what existing support the local government has provided to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and/or equity initiatives. This support could include plans, policies or programs that support sustainability and/or equity, the establishment of an office or department for equity and/or sustainability, hiring of a Sustainability/Equity Director or Officer, or other relevant actions. Applicants should show how the proposed project will advance any local government policies, plans, or programs (If available, please link to or attach documentation of the policy, plan, or program information). Examples include a Climate Action Plan; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan; Clean Energy Plan; Sustainability Plan, etc. If the lead applicant is not a Sustainability or Equity Director, please use this section to explain how the lead applicant serves a cross departmental role to advance sustainability in their role.

**Budget and Project Match:** While a dollar match is not required, successful applicants will demonstrate in-kind and/or cash support that enhances the project. In-kind support can include personnel time donated to the project, as well as donated services, equipment, and materials. For example, if a utility offers cash rebates for installed measures, the value of the cash rebates are a cash match. If an organization will host a series of workshops in a local neighborhood, the value of the personnel time to organize and lead workshops is an in-kind match. Applicants must document the value of their matching in-kind and/or cash resources, if available.

**Metrics:** Proposals must have a clear definition of success and must clearly identify metrics to demonstrate the outputs (e.g. number of individuals to receive job training) and outcomes (e.g. number of individuals to be placed in full time employment as a result of the job training and placement efforts of the project).

### **Examples of Eligible Projects**

Examples of eligible water projects include, but are not limited to those that address stormwater, sea level rise, and/or drought adaptation strategies. Examples of eligible energy projects include, but are not limited to, demand-side management, energy efficiency and/or renewable energy solutions. Sample eligible project summaries can be found below, and previously funded projects can be found at [www.southeastssdn.org/grants/](http://www.southeastssdn.org/grants/):

- *Residents have developed a series of priorities for making a local neighborhood more resilient to climate change. Project partners will work with the neighborhood to make their priorities a reality, and will take steps to lower energy and water utility costs, reduce the environmental impact of homes, and maintain tree*

canopies. Youth and community members will be trained to help in these efforts, equipping neighbors with the expertise to withstand environmental challenges and create a safer, healthier neighborhood.

- Many neighborhoods in a large, urban coastal city are highly vulnerable to repetitive flood loss. To address this challenge, project partners will implement green infrastructure projects in the neighborhoods with the highest flood risk. Connecting a green jobs training program, faith-based leaders and neighborhood residents, the project will use innovative tools to identify opportunities to scale up effective green infrastructure retrofit techniques. The approach focuses on giving local community members the tools they need to identify opportunities to mitigate flooding in their own neighborhoods.
- Recently a hurricane caused significant damage to a city’s tree canopy and neighborhoods, costing millions in tree debris removal and unknown losses in water storage from mature trees. As the region experiences weather extremes, the local government looks to tree canopies and green infrastructure to improve the community’s resilience to the effects of major storm events at a very local level. This project will create urban tree nurseries and green infrastructure pilot projects on City-owned vacant lots through a green job training program. A portion of the plantings will become permanent green infrastructure, and a portion will be used in City rights of way, in the process creating pocket parks for the enjoyment of the surrounding communities.
- A city is partnering with its local utility, a weatherization nonprofit, and other nonprofit organizations to offer 150 free residential energy efficiency upgrades for local residents that cannot afford or qualify for on-bill financing or conventional loans. The partners will provide homeowners with low income the most effective tools for achieving appreciable reductions in energy use and costs. The project will focus on creative ways to achieve financial sustainability, through customer donations, on-bill employee donations from the municipally-owned utility and the local nonprofit’s engagement to leverage community support to match those contributions. The utility and its certified contractor network of businesses will work together to train and employ members of the low-income community in its energy efficiency programs.

**Non-Eligible Projects**

Projects that do not come from applicants in the nine identified Southeastern states highlighted in this RFP will not be considered for funding. Local government applicants must represent city or county governments. School districts, regional government, metropolitan planning agencies, and/or local electric or water utilities may not serve as the lead applicant. Projects that do not meet the project eligibility criteria will not be considered for funding. The Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund is not intended to fund traditional environmental projects, nor is it intended to provide funding solely for the design, purchase or installation of sustainability measures on local government or nonprofit buildings. Projects that are predominantly focused on planning activities with little implementation activity will not be considered for funding. Some examples of non-eligible projects include:

Lighting retrofits in municipal buildings	Urban agriculture or community gardening projects
Recycling or solid waste management projects	Park or greenways design and/or development projects
Brownfield remediation projects	Development of a climate action or sustainability plan
Transportation-focused projects	Solar photovoltaic development on municipal land

A lead applicant may only submit one proposal. If two communities are collaborating on a project (e.g. a Sustainability Director from a city and the Sustainability Director from its county are working together on a project

proposal), there can be only one submission for the proposed project, with one lead applicant. An organization may be a partner in multiple proposals, however, matching resources, whether in-kind or cash, must be unique to each proposal submitted. Furthermore, SSCF will not reimburse any expenses for the preparation and submittal of a proposal. The intent is to streamline the RFP process to minimize the time and resources required for submittal.

## 5. Grant Process and Timeline

### Grant Selection Process:

In 2019, the grant application and selection process will include a Letter of Intent (LOI) and a Final Application. The RFP opens April 12, 2019. Any applicant that meets the eligibility criteria may submit an LOI and LOI Budget by the deadline, June 24, 2019. **In 2019, the LOI Phase is an elimination round.** The Final Application Phase begins on July 26, 2019, when a shortlist of finalists will be invited to submit grant applications. **Successful grantees will be notified by November 8, 2019.**

The Round Three application process will include the following timeline:

2019 Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund Application Process	
April 12, 2019	Distribute RFP
April 12, 2019 – June 24, 2019	SSCF staff technical assistance for self-selecting applicants
April 25, 2019 at 3pm EST	RFP informational webinar 1
May 23, 2019 at 11:00 am EST	RFP informational webinar 2
June 24, 2019; 5:00 pm EST	DEADLINE for applicants to submit LOI
July 26, 2019	Shortlist finalist notified
October 7, 2019; 5:00 pm EST	DEADLINE for shortlist applicants to submit final application
November 8, 2019	Successful grantees notified
December 12, 2019	Public grant award announcement

**Details about the application process and materials required to submit an LOI and Final Application follow.**

**Important note:** The SSCF Application Portal uses Google Forms to accept LOI and Final Application submissions. If you DO NOT have access to Google, please email Meg Jamison at [meg@southeastsdn.org](mailto:meg@southeastsdn.org) for submission instructions before June 24, 2019. All applicants must submit LOIs and Final Applications using the exact format outlined for each submission, or they may be disqualified from the application process.

**Letter of Intent (LOI):** The required Letter of Intent Template can be downloaded at [www.southeastsdn.org/grants](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants). This template enables applicants to be concise and specific with their responses. Letters of support are discouraged. You may choose to upload images, maps, articles or supplemental materials that clearly support your application in the grant application portal. Videos and superfluous graphics are not encouraged. LOIs are to be no more than five pages, and should be uploaded electronically via Google Forms at [www.southeastsdn.org/grants](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants) in Microsoft Word format. Budget templates are considered attachments, and are not included in five page maximum.

**Letter of Intent (LOI) Budget:** The required LOI Budget Template can be downloaded at

[www.southeastsdn.org](http://www.southeastsdn.org)

[www.southeastsdn.org/grants](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants). This budget's purpose is to provide a big picture overview of the project's budget needs, and needs to clearly outline the major expenses and matching funds for each funding year. Typical major expense categories include personnel/labor, materials, communications, design, transportation, equipment, and other categories as appropriate. Add or remove expense categories as needed. LOI Budgets are to be uploaded electronically to [www.southeastsdn.org/grants](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants) in Microsoft Excel format.

**The deadline to submit an LOI and LOI Budget is 5:00 pm EST on Thursday, June 24, 2019.**

**Final Grant Application:** The Final Grant Application will be by invitation only. Invitations to submit a proposal will be offered to no more than ten of the LOI applicants. Templates for the application can be found at [www.southeastsdn.org/grants](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants). The template asks applicants to provide more detail on projects budget, activities, strategy, outputs, milestones, and budget. Letters of support are discouraged. Key partners must clearly state their role and/or any in-kind or cash match they will be contributing in the application and/or budget. Nonprofit partners that plan to serve as fiscal agents must include an IRS nonprofit affirmation letter with the final application, submitted as an attachment. Grant Applications are to be no more than eight pages, and should be uploaded electronically to [www.southeastsdn.org/grants](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants) in Microsoft Word format. Applications in other formats will not be accepted. Budget templates are considered attachments, and are not included in eight page maximum.

**Final Grant Application Budget:** The required Final Grant Application Budget template can be downloaded at [www.southeastsdn.org/grants](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants). The budget needs to clearly delineate and describe expenses and matching funds for each funding year. Applicants should be as detailed as possible when describing expenses, highlighting specific estimates for things like equipment rental or purchase costs, labor rates and hours, contractor costs, and materials. Add or remove expense categories as needed. Grant Budgets are to be uploaded electronically to [www.southeastsdn.org/grants](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants) in Microsoft Excel format.

**The deadline to submit a Final Grant Application and Final Grant Budget is 5:00 pm EST on October 7, 2019.**

**SSDN will not accept late submissions.**

## 6. LOI Applicant Calls

**Introductory calls:** Applicants who plan to submit a LOI and/or Final Grant Application are invited and highly encouraged to schedule a 30 minute call with SSCF program staff before submitting. The purpose of this call is to allow applicants the chance to introduce their applicant team, provide in-person explanation of their project proposal and allow them to get any immediate feedback. The call will also allow SSCF program staff to better channel applicant technical assistance. Please email Meg Jamison to schedule this call at [meg@southeastsdn.org](mailto:meg@southeastsdn.org).

## 7. Technical Assistance for Proposal Development

**Informational Webinars:** Two informational webinars about this RFP will be held during the application period. Participation is encouraged but is not mandatory. Pre-registration is required. The webinars will be led by SSCF program staff and will review grant requirements, timelines, and will also allow participants to ask questions of technical experts. Recordings of the webinars will be posted on [www.southeastsdn.org/grants](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants) after each call. Visit the webpage to register for one of the webinars. Participation in webinars is optional. Both webinars will review the

same content, and recordings will be posted online after each session.

**Thursday, April 25, 2019 at 3:00pm EST / 2:00pm (60 minutes) CST AND/OR**

**Thursday, May 23, 2019 at 11:00am EST / 10:00am CST (60 minutes)**

**Technical Assistance:** During the LOI phase of the application process, SSCF staff are available to respond to written questions, to review draft materials, and/or to schedule thirty minute one-on-one calls with a proposal team. **Applicants are highly encouraged to seek one-on-one technical assistance.** Applicants will have access to technical assistance calls or emails with a **Technical Advisory Committee**, a group of experts in energy efficiency, water, equity, climate resilience, project management and program development. Bios for Technical Advisory Committee members can be found at [www.southeastsdn.org/grants/](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants/). **Calls with technical experts are scheduled only by emailing SSCF Program Manager, Meg Jamison, [meg@southeastsdn.org](mailto:meg@southeastsdn.org), who will set up the best communication method between applicants and technical experts.**

## 7. Reporting Requirements

There are three types of reporting requirements for grantees:

### Storytelling

- Grantees will be required to capture and share project successes in ways that are relatable/instructive to the general public. Examples include written feature stories and participant profiles, photos, audio recordings, videos, and/or local media coverage. Storytelling submissions are required once each year of the project and will be submitted with grant reports. These submissions do not need to be technical or expensive: using a phone to capture photos or video is sufficient. Capturing the first day of a program launch or filming 30-second interviews from a stakeholder focus group may be all it takes to translate the impact of your project to others in a more accessible way than a written grant report.

### Progress Reporting

- **Year One Milestone Performance Report.** In the final quarter of Year One, grantees will submit to the Program Manager a written Year One progress report, of no more than four pages, that will document progress on project milestones, performance, Year One budget, photos and storytelling examples, as well as Year Two funding needs and milestones. This will be the basis for a Year Two funding discussion call.
- **Year Two Funding Discussion Call or Site Visit.** Lead grantees (and team members, if desired) will have a call or onsite interview/site visit with the SSCF Program Manager to discuss Year One performance, Year One budget reporting, and Year Two funding needs after the Year One progress report is submitted.
- **Final Report.** At the end of the grant period, grantees will submit a brief final report to the Program Manager. This report will be between five and ten pages and will include three deliverables: 1. A final grant report that describes outcomes, impact, follow on work planned, funds leveraged, and lessons learned; 2. A detailed record of grant fund expenditures, including a comparison of original budget to actual expenditures; 3. Any materials created for this grant project that demonstrate the project outputs and/or outcomes in a way that could help SSCF share the success of the grant program with other communities and other funders or other storytelling examples.

### Peer Learning

- **SSDN Webinar and/or In-Person Meeting on Project Results and Lessons Learned.** The lead grantee will be

asked to make a presentation about their project during a SSDN webinar or at an in-person meeting. The presentation will include project results, lessons learned, and key takeaways, etc. Travel expenses for this presentation will be covered separately from the grant funding.

- **Quarterly Peer Learning Progress Calls.** The lead grantee (and key team members, if desired) is required to participate in quarterly peer learning progress calls with their grantee cohort. The purpose of these calls is to share updates on progress, learn about each other's projects, and troubleshoot challenges together. Peer Learning Progress Calls will be scheduled after grants are awarded.

## Appendix

These following templates can be found at [www.southeastsdn.org/grants](http://www.southeastsdn.org/grants):

- **RFP Attachment 1: Letter of Intent Template**
- **RFP Attachment 2: Letter of Intent Budget**
- **RFP Attachment 3: Grant Application Template**
- **RFP Attachment 4: Grant Budget Template**