# Module 3 – Applying for a Grant

# Welcome

Welcome to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Grants and Debarment’s (OGD) “Applying for a Grant” training module.

This module provides information about applying for an EPA grant, including how to find grant opportunities, how to prepare and submit a grant application and budget, and an overview of the process EPA follows to review and evaluate applications and notify applicants.

Time needed to complete this module: Approximately 60 minutes.

# What You Will Learn

After you have completed this module, you will be familiar with:

* Finding grant opportunities
* Reviewing a solicitation announcement to determine eligibility and application requirements
* Developing an application and budget
* The process for submitting a grant application through Grants.gov
* How EPA evaluates applications and notifies successful and unsuccessful applicants

For this training, "grants" will be used as a general term to refer to both grants and cooperative agreements.

“What’s the difference between a grant and cooperative agreement?”

Depending on the nature of EPA’s involvement in a project, applicants will either receive a “grant” or a “cooperative agreement.”

A “grant” is an agreement when EPA is not involved in carrying out project activities.

In a cooperative agreement, EPA has substantial involvement in conducting project activities. The responsibilities shared between EPA and the recipient are clearly outlined and accepted before the agreement is awarded. “Substantial involvement” refers to close EPA collaboration with the recipient in executing the project scope of work, and the terms of the cooperative agreement will describe EPA’s anticipated involvement. A cooperative agreement does not give EPA the right to direct the recipient as if it were an EPA contractor providing services to the Agency.

# How to Navigate

Use the Back and Next buttons at the bottom right of the screen to proceed through the module.

You will proceed one slide at a time, although you can revisit slides at any time using the Menu navigation pane on the left. If you need to leave the module, the last slide to be completed will be saved, and you will be able to return to that location later.

# Finding a Grant Opportunity

Let’s begin by learning how you can find relevant grant opportunities.

# Where to Find Grant Opportunities

You can use several sites to identify EPA funding opportunities.

* The federal government’s grant opportunity website, known as Grants.gov
* EPA Program websites
* Assistance Listings, available through SAM.gov

We will review each of these sites in more detail.

# Grants.gov

[Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov/) is a centralized location for competitive federal funding opportunities. The website provides information on more than 1,000 grant programs and:

* Makes it easier to research and find federal grant opportunities
* Simplifies the grant application process
* Enables electronic grant application processing

You may also [subscribe](https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/manage-subscriptions.html) to receive e-mail notifications when new grant opportunities are announced on Grants.gov.

# How to Search Grants.gov

Grants.gov makes it easy to find open competitive grant opportunities because you can search on various criteria, including: type of applicant — for example, non-profit organizations; grant category, such as “Environment;” and by federal agency. EPA also posts non-competitive federal funding opportunities on Grants.gov; however, the opportunities are not searchable in the same way as competitive opportunities. EPA’s Program Offices provide instructions on how to apply on Grants.gov directly to the applicants of non-competitive opportunities.

## Searching Grants.gov

The search page provides a list of all opportunities that match the selected criteria.

Under Basic Search Criteria, you can search for specific opportunities by keyword, number, or CFDA.

You can also use the checkboxes to change the search criteria (filter).

## Viewing EPA Opportunities

To list open EPA grants and cooperative agreements, check the following:

* OPPORTUNITY STATUS:
  + Posted
* FUNDING INSTRUMENT TYPE
  + Cooperative agreement
  + Grant
* AGENCY
  + All Environmental Protection Agency

## Viewing Opportunity Details

Click on a listing to view additional details about the opportunity, including a synopsis, version history, and links to download related documents and the application package.

# EPA Program Websites

Many EPA programs post information about open competitive grant opportunities on their websites. For example, EPA’s [Environmental Education website](https://www.epa.gov/education/environmental-education-ee-grants) includes open solicitations as well as information on applicant eligibility, how to apply, notifications of upcoming webinars for applicants, and summaries of past grant awards.

# Assistance Listings

Each of the EPA’s nearly 100 active grant programs is listed on SAM.gov. Searching the [Assistance Listings in SAM.gov](https://sam.gov/content/assistance-listings) will help you find relevant EPA grant programs that may be of interest to your organization.

Each Assistance Listing provides detailed information about:

* Grant program objectives
* Types of eligible organizations
* Application and award procedures

Whether the program is competitive or non-competitive, it is important to point out that SAM.gov does not include announcements about open grant solicitations; it is only a listing of federal grant programs.

# Competitive Versus Non-Competitive Grant Opportunities

Let’s pause here for a moment to talk about the difference between competitive and non-competitive grants.

In an open competitive opportunity, EPA invites all eligible applicants to submit applications. The applications are reviewed and evaluated, and a selection decision is made. Non-competitive awards are typically made based on statutory, regulatory, or published program guidance allocation funding formulas for continuing environmental program support for units of government; other organizations are not invited to apply.

# EPA’s Competition Policy

It is EPA’s policy to promote competition to the maximum extent practicable in the award of grants. When grants are awarded competitively, EPA’s [Policy for Competition of Assistance Agreements](https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-order-57005a1-epas-policy-competition-assistance-agreements) requires that:

* The competitive process be fair and impartial
* All applicants be evaluated only on the criteria stated in the competitive solicitation announcement
* No applicant receives an unfair competitive advantage

Grants that are normally subject to the policy may be awarded non-competitively under limited circumstances, such as issues of national security.

# Reviewing Competitive Solicitation Announcements

Now that you have learned how to find open competitive solicitation announcements, let’s discuss the information that is included in the announcements.

# Reviewing Competitive Solicitation Announcements on Grants.gov

Once you have identified an open competitive grant opportunity on Grants.gov, click on the Funding Opportunity Number to learn more about the opportunity and application requirements. You will see a synopsis of the opportunity and links to related documents, including the full solicitation announcement.

# Competitive Solicitation Announcement Contents

Competitive solicitation announcements contain detailed information about a funding opportunity, including:

* Description of the opportunity, including background information (Section I)
* Award information, including the amount of funding available (Section II)
* Eligible applicants and cost sharing requirements (Section III)
* Required application contents and submittal instructions (Section IV)
* Application review information, including evaluation criteria (Section V)

It is very important that you review a solicitation announcement thoroughly to confirm that your organization is eligible to apply and that the opportunity is consistent with the expertise, interests, and mission of your organization.

# Eligibility Requirements

Each competitive solicitation announcement contains the programmatic description of the funding opportunity and sufficient information to help you make an informed decision about whether to submit an application.

As noted above, it is essential that you review the applicant eligibility information in Section III of the solicitation announcement to confirm that your organization is eligible to apply and that your organization can meet any cost share and matching funds requirements. These requirements specify the amount of funds a recipient must contribute to a grant award. We’ll cover cost share and matching funds in more detail later in this module.

# Threshold Eligibility

It is also important to ensure that your organization will meet other threshold eligibility criteria specified in Section III (C). Threshold eligibility criteria are requirements that will eliminate the proposal from consideration (for example, submitting proposals after the deadline or proposing projects that involve ineligible activities).

# Application Requirements

Once you decide that your organization meets the eligibility requirements, review the detailed application and submittal information that is outlined in Section IV of the solicitation announcement, which provides details about:

* Application submittal instructions, including the deadline
* Forms and documents that are required in the application
* Contents of the work plan or project narrative, and required format, if applicable
* Other relevant clauses and provisions

# Evaluation Criteria

You should also carefully review Section V of competitive solicitation announcements to become familiar with the evaluation criteria and the evaluation process. This section identifies the process and criteria that EPA will use to select applicants. Reviewing this information early will help you decide whether your project can meet EPA’s programmatic objectives. Understanding the evaluation criteria will also help you better tailor your application to align to EPA’s requirements.

# Preparing an Application

Now that you have decided to apply for a grant, let’s review some steps and tips for preparing your application.

# Grants.gov Registration

A one-time Grants.gov registration is required to apply for any federal funding opportunity. If your organization is not already registered with Grants.gov, start the process as soon as possible. Do not wait until you wish to apply for an opportunity!

Detailed instructions on the steps required for an organization to register on Grants.gov are available on the [Organization Applicant Registration](https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html) page.

To register with Grants.gov, you will need to ensure that your organization has registered with the federal government’s System for Award Management (SAM) and you will need your organization’s Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). [Obtaining a UEI and registering in SAM](https://sam.gov/content/entity-registration) is free and can take up to several weeks to complete. It is important to note that registering in SAM.gov is different than only obtaining a UEI (which only validates your organization's legal business name and address). Review the [Frequently Asked Questions](https://www.fsd.gov/gsafsd_sp?id=kb_article_view&sysparm_article=KB0051214&sys_kb_id=dd40f4ef1b9641d0937fa64ce54bcb7a&spa=1) to learn more.

# Registering an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR)

Take note that the electronic submission of your application through Grants.gov must be made by an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) of your institution who is registered with Grants.gov. AORs have the authority to sign grant applications for federal assistance and the required certifications and/or assurances that are necessary to fulfill the requirements of the application process.

If you have any questions or concerns about registering, contact Grants.gov [Applicant Support](https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/support.html).

# Preparing the Application Package

Applicants must submit their application electronically through Grants.gov. Grants.gov uses an online, cloud-based environment called “Workspace” to manage the application process. Workspace is optimized for applicants who are collaborating on an application. Application forms can either be completed online within a web browser or downloaded individually and uploaded to Workspace.

# Creating a Workspace

To create a Workspace and begin preparing your application package, locate the funding opportunity you are applying for, click on the “Package” tab, click on “Apply,” and then click on “Login to Apply Now” to log in. The Workspace you have created will include all of the mandatory forms that you are required to complete for that opportunity, as well as optional forms.

If you are applying for a non-competitive opportunity and are unsure of how to find the application package on Grants.gov, contact your EPA Project Officer or Program Contact for instructions.

Check out the Grants.gov webinar, [How to Create a Workspace](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOjwumQz0G8).

Learn how to [reuse workspace forms](https://youtu.be/BHL8RElRyQc) to make the grant application process more efficient.

This and other resources to help you use Workspace are available on the [Workspace Overview](https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/workspace-overview.html) page on Grants.gov.

# Completing the Standard Form 424

Grant applicants must complete the Standard Form (SF) 424 - Application for Federal Assistance as part of the initial application. This form collects basic information about the applicant (for example, name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, and type of applicant), a list of sources of proposed funding, and a description of the proposed project.

Make sure you access all standard forms using Workspace before you fill them out. Standard forms downloaded from other locations cannot be submitted with your Workspace application.

# Additional Standard Forms

Applicants may be required to complete other standard forms, either as part of the initial application or before the official award if they are selected for a grant. Additional standard forms that may be required as part of the application package include:

* SF-424A - Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs. This form summarizes the project budget for non-construction grant programs and includes a breakdown of proposed costs by various categories.
* SF-424C - Budget Information for Construction Programs. This form is used to budget and request grant funds for construction grant programs.
* SF-424D - Assurances for Construction Programs. This form is used to assure compliance with statutory requirements for construction grant programs.

Make sure you access all standard forms using Workspace before you fill them out. Standard forms downloaded from other locations cannot be submitted with your Workspace application.

# Budget Categories on the SF-424A

Budget categories on the SF-424A cover direct and indirect charges.

Direct charges are costs that can be assigned to a specific budget category.

Indirect costs are not readily identifiable with a particular activity but are necessary to the general operation of the organization and the conduct of the proposed project (such as general administration expenses).

Depending on the nature of the project being proposed, many applicants will not have costs in all of the budget categories.

Note that the SF-424A may not be required when the application is submitted through Grants.gov. However, if selected for award, the applicant will be required to complete this form before the official award is made.

View OGD’s [How to Develop a Budget](https://www.epa.gov/grants/how-develop-budget) training course for more information about key aspects of the grant budget development process.

Examples of Direct Charges

* Personnel: Estimate of employee salaries charged to the project based on projected hours and labor rates. Note that individual consultants are contractors and estimated costs should be included in the contractual category.
* Fringe Benefits: Personnel compensation (for example, health insurance or employer retirement contributions) other than direct income
* Travel: Includes the number of trips planned, destinations, number of travelers, and estimated cost of each trip. The travel category only includes trips by employees. Travel for non-employee program beneficiaries is classified as “participant support costs” and is included in the “Other” category.
* Equipment: Personal property having a useful life of more than 1 year and an acquisition cost of $5,000 or greater that will be purchased rather than leased.
* Supplies: Personal property under $5,000 per item, including laptop computers.
* Contractual: Services to be carried out by an individual or organization, other than the applicant, in the form of a procurement relationship. Note that anticipated costs for subawards of financial assistance are not classified as contractual even if your agreement with the subrecipient is referred to as a contract. Subaward costs are classified as “Other.”
* Construction: Allowable under project grants only if they are related to and necessary for an activity that is specifically authorized in an EPA statute.
* Other: Anticipated direct project charges that do not fit in other budget categories. Examples include subawards, participant support costs, or rental costs for space or equipment. Learn more about subawards on EPA’s [Subaward Policy](https://www.epa.gov/grants/grants-policy-issuance-gpi-16-01-epa-subaward-policy-epa-assistance-agreement-recipients) page or [Additional Resources and Training](https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-subaward-policy-additional-resources).

Learn more about Indirect Cost Rates – Recipients typically have a negotiated indirect cost rate with a cognizant federal agency. A 10% de-minimis rate is available for organizations that have never had a negotiated rate. More information about indirect costs and establishing an indirect cost rate is presented in Module 2 - Demonstrating Financial Management System and Internal Controls Capability.

# Additional Forms

EPA also requires applicants to prepare and submit other EPA forms as part of their application package. These include:

* EPA Form 4700-4 – Pre-award Compliance Review Report for All Applicants and Recipients Requesting Federal Financial Assistance. This form is used to collect information that helps EPA to determine whether applicants are developing projects, programs, and activities on a non-discriminatory basis.
* EPA Form 5700‑54 – Key Contacts Form. Collects contact information for individuals responsible for various aspects of the proposed work, including the authorized representative, payee, administrative contact, and investigators.
* Project Narrative Attachment Form – On this form, recipients are required to provide a narrative proposal, referred to as a work plan, that describes the proposed project and addresses the requirements outlined in the competitive solicitation announcement. For competitive awards, the required content of the work plan is described in Section IV of the competitive solicitation.

# Cost Share (Matching Funds)

Some EPA programs require grant applicants to provide a cost share or matching funds. A cost share is a non-federal contribution to a grant project, generally specified as the percentage of funding that the recipient (or third party) is required to contribute to the project. It may be specified as a percentage of the federal funds requested or as a percentage of the total cost of the project.

The cost share should be allocated by budget category and is captured in Column 2 under Section B of the SF-424A.

Note that in competitive situations if you voluntarily propose a cost share and receive an award, you are required to meet your cost share commitment.

# Cost Share (Matching Funds) Sources

Unless specifically authorized by federal law, recipients are not permitted to use funds received under another grant as the cost share for an EPA grant. For example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Community Development Block Grant program includes a specific regulation to allow funds to be used to meet cost share requirements on other federal grants ([24 CFR 570.201(g)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-24/subtitle-B/chapter-V/subchapter-C/part-570/subpart-C/section-570.201#p-570.201(g))).

In-kind contributions from third parties, which are voluntary contributions of goods or services, may be used to satisfy cost-sharing requirements.

The cost share/match must be for allowable costs and may be provided by the applicant or partner organization or institution (subawardees). The cost share/match may be provided in cash or by in-kind contributions. In-kind contributions often include salaries or other verifiable costs and this value must be carefully documented. In the case of salaries, applicants may use either minimum wage or fair market value.

If the cost share/match is provided by a partner organization (subawardee), the applicant is still responsible for proper accountability and documentation. A partner organization’s indirect cost/fringe generally may be used as cost share/match. Please note that an applicant’s and any subawardee’s indirect cost/fringe charges must be in accordance with a federally negotiated indirect cost rate under 2 CFR 200.414. Other federal grants may not be used as cost share/ match without specific statutory authority.

# Example 1: Cost Share Based on Federal Funds and Required Percentage of Total Project Cost

Suppose that a grant has $120,000 in federal funding available and the applicant is required to contribute 25 percent of the total project cost. The total project cost and cost share can be calculated using the following formulas:

**Total Project Cost = Federal Funding/ (1- Cost Match Requirement)**

* Total Project Cost = $120,000 / (1 – 0.25)
* Total Project Cost = $120,000 / (0.75)
* Total Project Cost = $160,000
  + Therefore, the minimum cost share is $40,000 or $160,000 - $120,000

# Example 2: Cost Share Based on Total Project Cost and Required Percentage of Total Project Cost

Suppose a grant has a total project cost of $160,000 and the applicant is required to contribute 25 percent of the total project cost. The cost share and maximum federal contribution can be calculated using the following formula:

**Cost Share = Total Project Cost \* Cost Match Requirement**

* Cost Share = %160,000 \* 0.25
* Cost Share = $40,000
  + Therefore, the maximum federal contribution is $120,000, or $160,000 - $40,000

# Preparing a Grant Work Plan or Project Narrative

The primary component of your grant application is the work plan (submitted using the Project Narrative Attachment) because it provides EPA’s basis for making an award. When applying under competitive opportunities, Section IV (Proposal and Submission Information) of the solicitation announcement outlines the information that is required in the work plan. You should read Section IV carefully.

For non-competitive opportunities, the appropriate program office will provide instruction on what needs to be included.

# General Contents of the Grant Work Plan

* Outline all activities to be performed under the grant; summarize deliverables; and include a schedule for milestones, project completion, and deliverables.
* Include a budget narrative that links the budget to work plan activities.
* Describe the need for the project, project objectives, project methods, and anticipated environmental results.
* Provide a framework for managing the project and performance measures for evaluating performance, including how they will be used to help track, measure, and report progress toward achieving the expected outputs and outcomes.
* Describe the approach, procedures, and controls for ensuring that awarded grant funds will be expended in a timely and efficient manner.

The work plan should also clearly address the evaluation criteria listed in the competitive solicitation announcement and explain how your project meets the criteria. It should clearly explain what you expect your project to accomplish, and it should make clear why your application is worthy of funding.

# Work Plan Requirements for Identifying Contractors

Note that EPA does not require that you identify contractors, including individual consultants, in your proposal. However, if you do identify contractors in your proposal, you must demonstrate that the contractors were selected in compliance with the competitive Procurement Standards in 2 CFR 200.317-326, even if you claim that the contractors are “partners” in the proposal. Otherwise, EPA cannot consider the contractor’s qualifications. EPA’s [Contracts and Subawards](https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-solicitation-clauses#contractssubawards) solicitation clause provides more information about partnerships, and the [Best Practice Guide for Procuring Services, Supplies, and Equipment Under EPA Assistance Agreements](https://www.epa.gov/grants/best-practice-guide-procuring-services-supplies-and-equipment-under-epa-assistance-agreements) can assist you in complying with procurement requirements.

# Work Plan Requirements for Identifying Subrecipients

You may, but are not required to, identify subrecipients in your work plan. You must ensure that proposed subawards comply with regulatory standards as implemented in EPA’s [Subaward Policy](https://www.epa.gov/grants/grants-policy-issuance-gpi-16-01-epa-subaward-policy-epa-assistance-agreement-recipients). In almost all cases, for-profit firms and individual consultants are not proper subrecipients. Profit firms and individual consultants would more likely be considered contractors.

# Demonstrating Environmental Results

Because EPA spends approximately half of its annual budget on grants, the Agency is committed to linking its grants to EPA performance goals and ensuring that the grant projects achieve environmental results. To accomplish this goal, EPA's [Policy for Environmental Results under EPA Assistance Agreements](https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-order-57007a1-epas-policy-environmental-results-under-epa-assistance-agreements) requires that applicants identify in work plans the outputs and outcomes that will be achieved under a proposed project and how they will be measured.

# Outputs and Outcomes

An **output** is an environmental activity, effort, or associated work products related to an environmental goal or objective that will be produced or provided over a period of time. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative, but must be measurable during a grant project period.

An **outcome** is the result, effect, or consequence that will occur as a result of an environmental activity under a grant. Outcomes may be environmental, behavioral, health-related, or programmatic, and may not necessarily be achievable within your grant’s project period.

Examples:

Outputs are measurable tasks accomplished by the recipient. For example:

* Distributing 5,000 informational newsletters about the importance of waste reduction and recycling.
* Conducting four town hall meetings.
* Removing 20,000 tons of toxic waste.

Outcomes are the results of these tasks and may not be easily measured. Some outcomes that might result from the outputs above are:

* Increased public awareness of (and participation in) recycling, as evidenced by a 20-ton reduction in solid waste per month and a 10-ton increase in collection of recycled materials per month.
* Improved understanding of public concerns and increased communication with the public, as evidenced by survey results showing a 30 percent increase in public understanding of and support for environmental efforts in the community.
* Improved general health in the community, as evidenced by a 5 percent reduction in local emergency room visits within 2 years and an overall reduction of cancer rates in the long term.

# Tips for Preparing Competitive Applications

When you prepare an application, you should:

* Carefully review the terms of the solicitation announcement and make sure that your application complies fully with the requirements.
* Confirm compliance with any threshold eligibility requirements and meet any cost share or matching requirements. (If you have questions about the requirements, contact the EPA Point of Contact listed in Section VII.)
* Be sure to address all of the evaluation criteria listed in Section V.
* Submit the application by the deadline specified. (EPA recommends that you do not wait until the deadline to submit – give yourself enough time to work out any unforeseen technical issues.)

REMEMBER: Detailed instructions for preparing and submitting applications are described in competitive solicitation announcements.

# How Can EPA Assist Applicants?

EPA’s Competition Policy defines what EPA can and cannot do when communicating with applicants while a grant solicitation competition is open.

EPA staff are permitted to:

* Answer applicants' questions about whether they are (or their project is) eligible for the solicitation
* Clarify information on administrative aspects of application submittals
* Respond to requests for clarification of the solicitation announcement

EPA staff cannot

* Review or comment on draft applications
* Provide information on the Agency's approach to evaluating applications beyond what is described in the solicitation announcement

# Submitting an Application

You are now ready to submit your application – let’s review how

# Submitting Your Application

After you have registered your organization with Grants.gov and prepared all of the information required by the solicitation announcement, you are ready to submit the application through your Grants.gov workspace. View the [Grants.gov Workspace Overview](https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/workspace-overview.html) website and the [Workspace Training Series](https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-training.html) for specific details about the submittal process, including how to check the application for errors. Once you are ready to submit, your organization’s AOR must click on the “Sign and Submit” button to officially submit the application.

# Confirming Your Submission

If you have successfully submitted your application, a confirmation page will open and the Workspace status will change to “Submitted.” Save a copy of this page for your records and note the Grants.gov application tracking number. You should also receive an e-mail confirming your submission. If you receive an error during the submittal process or if the confirmation page fails to open in your Internet browser, contact Grants.gov [Applicant Support](https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/support.html) immediately. Make note of the case number Grants.gov assigns your issue and make sure to follow the instructions in Section IV of the solicitation under “Transmission Difficulties.”

Note that successful submittal does not necessarily mean your application is eligible for award.

Submittal Status: When an application package is submitted successfully, the Status field in the Workspace Grant Tracking Numbers table will contain one of the following messages:

* **Validated**: This message means that the uploaded package does not have any field errors as determined by Grants.gov
* **Received by Agency**: This message means that EPA has retrieved the package from Grants.gov
* **Agency Tracking Number Assigned**: This message means that EPA has assigned the package a unique tracking number

# Correcting Errors in Applications Rejected by Grants.gov

If an application is rejected after it has been submitted because there were errors, the Status field will read “Rejected with Errors” and the “Reason for Rejection” section will display the specific errors.

If your application was rejected by Grants.gov, you must correct the errors and resubmit the application before the opportunity’s application deadline.

# EPA Evaluation and Notification

Let’s now discuss how EPA reviews and evaluates competitive applications and notifies applicants of their award status.

# Threshold Eligibility Review

Competitive applications submitted through Grants.gov are reviewed by the EPA Program Office that issued the solicitation announcement.

First, EPA conducts an initial threshold eligibility review. Applications that do not meet the threshold eligibility requirements are ineligible and eliminated from the evaluation review.

EPA will then evaluate all applications that meet the threshold eligibility requirements using the evaluation criteria listed in Section V of the solicitation announcement.

The initial threshold eligibility review confirms that the applicant is eligible for award and has submitted all of the required information.

For example, EPA establishes that the application includes the required forms that are described in the solicitation announcement, and that the applicant meets the eligibility criteria specified in the solicitation announcement.

# Evaluating and Ranking Applications

Each competitive solicitation announcement lists the evaluation criteria and process that will be used to score and rank applications in Section V. The criteria in the announcement are based on areas of importance and emphasis to be considered in the evaluation process.

If applicable, the solicitation will also:

* Include any evaluation criteria required by law, regulation, or agency policy
* Identify any program policy or other factors, other than the evaluation criteria, that may be considered in the award selection process (for example, geographical diversity or programmatic priorities)

# Application Reviewers

Generally, an EPA panel of qualified reviewers will evaluate competitive applications. However, panels may sometimes also include employees of other federal agencies and non-federal personnel. In all cases, **an EPA staff will make the final decision** on the selection of recipients. All reviewers and selection officials complete Conflict of Interest statements to ensure that they do not have a conflict of interest with regard to a particular applicant or application. Additionally, EPA has a [Conflict of Interest policy](https://www.epa.gov/grants/epas-final-financial-assistance-conflict-interest-policy) that applicants should review carefully to ensure they do not have an unfair competitive advantage in competing for EPA grants. EPA’s competitive solicitation announcements include a clause requiring an applicant to notify the EPA contact identified in Section VII of the solicitation of any actual or potential Conflicts of Interest.

# Selecting Applicants for Award

As noted earlier, evaluation panels review and rank applications based on the evaluation criteria and points that are specified in the competitive solicitation announcement. Reviewers document their scores for each evaluation criterion with a description to explain how the score was calculated.

Based on the application scoring, the panel provides its award recommendations to an EPA Selection Official, who will determine, based on the recommendations from the panel, which applicants will receive a grant award. When applicable, the Selection Official may also take into account other factors as described in Section V of the solicitation.

# Notifying Successful Applicants

EPA notifies successful applicants that their application has been selected for award and will be routed through EPA’s award process. EPA generally provides this notification via telephone, e-mail, or U.S. Postal Service. The notification will be made to the original signer of the SF-424 or the project contact listed in the application.

This notification, which informs the applicant that its application has been selected and is being recommended for award, is not an authorization to begin work.

# Authorization to Begin Grant Work

The official notification of an award will be made by the appropriate EPA Award Official. Applicants are cautioned that only an EPA Award Official is authorized to bind the Government to the expenditure of funds. The time between notification of selection and award of grant can take up to 90 days or longer. The time between notification of selection and award of a grant can take up to 90 days or longer. The award notice, signed by an EPA Award Official, is the authorizing document and will be provided through electronic or postal mail.

Selection does not guarantee an award will be made.

For example, statutory authorization, funding, or other issues discovered during the award process may affect the ability of EPA to make an award to an applicant. In addition, the successful applicant may need to prepare and submit additional documents and forms (for example, a work plan), which must be approved by EPA before the grant can officially be awarded.

# Notifying Unsuccessful Applicants

EPA is required to notify applicants in writing or by e-mail within 15 calendar days of the decision that their application was not selected for funding. The notification will specify the reason that an application was not selected, which may include:

* Determined to be ineligible based on the applicable statute, regulation, or solicitation announcement requirements
* Determined to be ineligible based on threshold eligibility criteria in the solicitation (for example, the organization is not an eligible entity)
* Not selected for award based on the ranking it received after it was evaluated against the evaluation criteria outlined in the solicitation

# Requesting a Debriefing

Unsuccessful applicants may request a debriefing to discuss with EPA more fully the reasons an application was not selected or was determined to be ineligible. The debriefing provides applicants an opportunity to obtain constructive feedback that can help improve future application submittals. Requests for debriefings must be received by EPA within 15 calendar days after the applicant receives the unsuccessful notification from EPA.

# Disputing Grant Competition Decisions

After a debriefing, unsuccessful applicants may file a dispute with EPA’s Grants Competition Disputes Decision Official (GCDDO). The GCDDO is an EPA employee who was not involved in the grant competition; he or she works outside of the EPA Program Office that conducted the competition.

EPA must receive a written dispute within 15 calendar days of the debriefing date. The dispute filing must include a detailed statement of the legal and factual basis for the dispute, the remedy the applicant is seeking, information on how to communicate with the applicant organization, and any relevant documentation.

Disputes may be filed only after a debriefing has been held. Additional details about dispute procedures can be found in [Appendix A of the Competition Policy](https://www.epa.gov/grants/epa-order-57005a1-epas-policy-competition-assistance-agreements).

What types of decisions can be disputed?

The GCDDO is required to consider disputes only on the following grounds:

* You do not agree with the determination that your organization or your proposed project is ineligible for funding based on the applicable statute, regulation, or announcement requirements; or
* You do not agree with the determination that your organization is not eligible for award consideration because your application or project did not meet the threshold eligibility requirements contained in the announcement.

Generally, the GCDDO will deny, without review, disputes based on questions raised about the score assigned to an application

# Reviewing What You Have Learned

You have reached the end of the module, so let’s review what you have learned

# What You Have Learned

You should now be familiar with how to:

* Find grant opportunities
* Review solicitation announcements to determine eligibility and application requirements
* Access an application package on Grants.gov
* Develop a complete application and budget
* Submit a grant application package through Grants.gov
* Request a debriefing and dispute a grant competition decision

# Thank you!

You have completed this module.

# Acronyms/Terms

Accurate Data:

The actual amount of income for grant project activities must be recorded when received.

Acquisition Cost of Equipment:

The net invoice price of the equipment, including the cost of any modifications, attachments, accessories, or auxiliary apparatus that are necessary to make the equipment usable for a grant project.

Administrative Advanced Monitoring (AAM):

Provides an in-depth assessment of a recipient’s written policies and procedures and includes transaction testing of a sample of drawdowns to ensure the recipient has the proper administrative and financial management systems in place to administer federal funds.

Administrative Baseline Monitoring:

Involves the review of a recipient’s compliance with the financial and administrative requirements and terms and conditions of a grant.

Administrative Capability Questionnaire:

EPA Form 6600-09

Administrative terms and conditions:

Address such matters as payments, statutory requirements, and required administrative reports.

Allocable costs:

The goods or services involved are chargeable or assignable to a cost objective in accordance with the relative benefits the grant receives.

Allowable costs:

Costs necessary and reasonable for the performance of the grant that are consistent with the policies and procedures that apply uniformly to both EPA grant activities and other activities of an organization.

Allowable travel costs:

Travel costs under a grant that are consistent with those normally allowed in like circumstances in an organization’s non-federally funded activities and in accordance with written travel reinforcement policies.

AOR:

Authorized Organization Representative

Appropriations:

Funds devoted to a purpose described in the appropriation act, funding for grants.

ASAP:

Automated Standard Application for Payments

Audits:

In-depth examinations of a grantee’s financial records, management systems, and work progress.

Authority:

Permission to award specific types of grants, described in environmental program statutes.

Authorizations:

Refers to the ability of the recipient’s financial management system to record, track, and document managerial/supervisory approvals, such as for payroll, travel, and purchases.

Awarding agency:

Refers to federal agency that made a specific award.

CFR:

Code of Federal Regulations

Closeout:

The systematic process EPA uses to determine that a recipient has completed all of the required.

CMIA:

Treasure-State Cash Management Improvement Act

Cognizant agency:

The federal agency with the largest dollar value of awards with an organization.

Competitive Grant Opportunities:

EPA generally invites all eligible applicants to submit applications. EPA reviews and evaluates applications against criteria disclosed in the competitive announcement and makes selections.

Complete Data:

The accounting system must record all transactions, even those that are unallowable under the grant.

Continuing Environmental Program (CEP) Grants:

Allotment of funds is initially made based on factors contained in a statute, regulation, or Agency guidance that provides EPA some discretion in selecting recipients and the amount of funding. Most CEP grants are awarded non-competitively to governmental units each year to support ongoing state, tribal and local environmental programs. Most CEP grants may also be called “categorical grants” because they can only be used for specific purposes authorized by a statute and are funded from a line item in the State and Tribal Assistance Grant appropriation.

Contract:

For the purpose of obtaining goods and services for a non-federal entity's own use, creates a procurement relationship with a contractor.

Contractor:

An individual, organization, or for-profit company that receives grant funding to provide goods or services for the grant recipient’s own use.

Cooperative agreement:

EPA has substantial involvement in conducting project activities. The responsibilities shared between EPA and the recipient are clearly outlined and accepted before the agreement is awarded.

COSO:

Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission

Current Data:

All income and costs must be posted in the accounting system at or as near to the time they are incurred as possible.

DBE:

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise

Direct Charges:

Costs that can be assigned to a specific budget category.

Discretionary Grants:

EOA retains considerable authority in selecting the recipient, determining the amount of the award, and/or negotiating and approving the grant work plan.

EPA:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

EPA Grants Specialist:

Main point of contact for any questions or communications of an administrative nature (which may include questions about forms, the budget, or administrative reports).

EPA Project Officer:

Main point of contact for any questions or communications related to the work being done under the project (including programmatic progress reports).

Equipment:

Under a grant, equipment is defined as personal property that has a useful life of more than 1 year and an acquisition cost of $5,000 of greater.

Expenditures:

Amount of money spent under the grant, including payments to subrecipients and contractors.

FAIN:

Federal program and federal award identification

FFR:

425 Federal Financial Report

GAAP:

Generally accepted accounting principles

GCDDO:

EPA’s Grants Competition Disputes Decision Official, an EPA employee who was not involved in the grant competition; he or she works outside of the EPA Program Office that conducted the competition.

GPI:

Grants Policy Issuance

Grant:

A legal instrument of financial assistance between a federal awarding agency and a non-federal entity used to enter into a relationship with the principal purpose of transferring anything of value from the federal awarding agency to a non-federal entity to carry out a public purpose as authorized by United States law.

Grant number:

Unique, eight-digit number (which is preceded by a one or two-character program code), how a grant will be identified in all documents and communications with EPA.

Indirect Costs:

Costs that are not readily identifiable with a particular activity but are necessary to the general operation of the organization and the conduct of the proposed project (such as general administration expenses).

Inputs:

Grant funds, matching funds, efforts of the recipient.

Interim reports:

Sometimes referred to as progress reports, summarize technical progress and activities completed under a grant.

LVFC:

EPA’s Las Vegas Finance Center

MBE:

Minority-owned Business Enterprise, a business concern that is at least 51 percent owned by one or more minority individuals, or, in the case of a publicly owned business, at least 51 percent of the stock is owned by one or more minority individuals, and whose daily business operations are managed and directed by one or more of the minority owners.

MTDC:

Modified total direct costs, refers to all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first $25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award).

Non-Competitive Grant Opportunities:

Made based on statutory, regulatory, or published program guidance allocation funding formulas for continuing environmental program support for units of government; other organizations are not invited to apply.

Non-Discretionary Grants:

Also known as formula grants, awarded primarily to state, tribal, and local governments. Congress directs these grants through an authorizing statute to one of more types of entities that meet the eligibility criteria. The amount of the grant is determined by a formula prescribed by the statute and implementing EPA regulations.

NPTCD:

The National Policy, Training and Compliance Division

Obligations:

When used in connection with a non-federal entity's use of funds under a federal award, refers to orders placed for property and services, contracts and subawards made, and similar transactions during a given period that require payment by the non-federal entity during the same or a future period.

OGD:

EPA’s Office of Grants and Debarment

OIG:

EPA’s Office of Inspector General, periodically examines EPA grants to ensure that grant funds are used efficiently and effectively.

OMB:

Office of Management and Budget

Outcome:

The result, effect, or consequence that will occur as a result of an environmental activity under a grant. Outcomes may be environmental, behavioral, health-related, or programmatic, and may not be necessarily achievable within your grants project period.

Output:

An environmental activity, effort, or associated work products related to an environmental goal or objective that will be produced or provided over a period of time. Outputs may be quantitative or qualitative, but must be measurable during a grant project period.

Participant support costs:

Stipends, travel allowances, and similar funds that support participation of an individual in a grant project.

Pass-through entity:

Primary grant recipient when subawards are made as part of a grant.

Personal Property:

Property of any kind, except real property, that has a physical existence (including equipment and supplies).

PI:

Program income, non-federal gross income that is directly generated by a grant-related activity and received by a recipient.

PII:

Personally identifiable information, PII means information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity, either alone or when combined with other personal or identifying information that is linked or linkable to a specific individual.

Procurement contractor:

An individual consultant, instructor or other expert who is not an employee of the recipient that receives grant funding to provide commercially available goods or services.

Programmatic Advanced Monitoring:

Provides an in-depth assessment of a grant’s programmatic and technical progress and management and how well the project is meeting expectations.

Programmatic Baseline Monitoring:

Involves the periodic review of a recipient’s progress in and compliance with, the scope of work, terms and conditions, and regulatory requirements of a specific award.

Programmatic terms and conditions:

Address the timing and content of progress reports and special performance requirements.

Prudence:

Exercising sound business judgment given a recipient’s responsibility to use federal funds efficiently.

RAIN:

Recipient/Applicant Information Notice

Reasonable costs:

In its nature or amount, it does not exceed what a prudent person would pay under the circumstances prevailing at the time the decision was made to incur the cost.

SAM:

Federal government’s System for Awards Management

SF:

Standard form

Single audit:

When an independent certified public accountant examines an organization’s entire operations, including ensuring that financial statements are presented in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles; assessing if internal controls are adequate to minimize risk of noncompliance; and verifying adherence to federal statutes, regulations, and the award terms and conditions.

Source documentation:

Invoices, receipts, bills. Online transaction confirmations, and other items.

Subaward:

When an organization receives an award of financial assistance from the pass-through entity to carry out part of the pass-through entity’s grant project.

Subrecipients:

Recipients of subawards.

Substantial involvement:

Refers to close EPA collaboration with the recipient in executing the project scope of work, and the terms of the cooperative agreement will describe EPA’s anticipated involvement.

Substantial involvement terms and conditions:

Refer to activities to be performed by EPA, usually the project officer.

Terms and Conditions:

Legal requirements imposed on a recipient by statute, regulation, program guidance, or the grant award itself. These conditions may apply to all grants or certain classes of grans, or they may be tailored for an individual award.

UEI:

Unique Entity Identifier

Unallowable costs:

Those that EPA will not reimburse as part of a grant.

Uniform Grants Guidance:

OMB’s regulations at 2 CFR 200 and EPA’s specific regulations at 2 CFR 1500. Provides useful information about grant requirements, such as standards for financial and program management and how to identify allowable costs.

Unit cost data:

An estimate of how much it costs an organization to complete a single activity when that activity recurs regularly.

Unobligated balances:

The total federal funds authorized under a grant minus the grant expenditures and any unliquidated obligations, which are obligations incurred, but not yet paid (including amounts due to subrecipients and contractors).

WBE:

Women-owned Business Enterprise

Workspace:

The online, cloud-based environment used by Grants.gov to manage the application process.