

Department of Environmental Conservation

Climate Smart Communities (CSC) Grant Program

Q. If a municipality has an open CSC grant contract, are they eligible to apply for funding in this round?

A. Yes.

Q. Can a municipality apply for and be awarded more than one project? For instance, an implementation project and a certification action? Or two certification actions?

A. Yes. As per page 2 of the RFA, "Applicants may submit several applications, but no more than one application may be submitted for the same project or project location."

Q. If a municipality can apply for multiple projects, will that impact the application scoring?

A. No, submitting multiple applications will not impact the scoring. Each application will be scored individually according to the criteria laid out in the RFA.

Q. If a municipality has received funding for a certification action, can they apply again under the same certification action to further the work? For example, a County received funding for a county-wide natural resource inventory. Can they apply to fund more detailed municipal inventories?

A. Yes, it is an option to fund different phases of a project or for follow-up projects that are more detailed than the initial project. In order to score well, the application should clearly explain the relationship between the proposed project and the prior/funded project(s).

Q. We are in the process of building a large solar canopy and power storage system at a train station parking lot. It occurred to me that the system could serve an extra purpose if it included an "islanding" capability wherein it would provide emergency power to the cell tower at the end of the train station parking lot. During the August 2020 storm, the tower's backup generator ran out of fuel and was out of service for 2-3 days during the 5-day local power outage. In the present design, our system would disconnect from the grid and shut down for safety. But if an automatic transfer switch (ATS) and appropriate wiring were made part of the system, it could supply the cell tower, EV charging stations, lighting under the canopies and serve as a secure gathering point for emergency personnel and/or evacuees during the night. We could also add a kiosk for people to re-charge their cell phones and other portable electronics. Would an application to cover the ATS, switchgear, etc. be eligible under implementation.

A. This project is eligible as long as the grant budget is limited to the equipment necessary for

the facility to operate during a grid failure (e.g., switchgear), rather than the solar panels, storage system, or canopy. The kiosk for charging would also be an eligible expense.

Q. ARPA funds eligible for match? They do come from the Federal government, but are considered municipal funds at some point, correct?

A. All funds that originate at the federal level are NOT eligible as match for DEC's CSC grants, including funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, American Recovery Act, and American Rescue Plan Act.

Q. Our village has a problem with drainage. When we have large storms the village drains tend to overflow and create flooding. I know the Climate Smart Grant is more geared toward environmental and coastal issues; however, I was wondering if you knew of any other grants available for the problem we are experiencing? We would need to get an engineering study done to move this forward and would like to find a grant that would include that component.

A. If you can attribute the flooding to climate change (e.g., increased precipitation) the project may qualify for a CSC grant. The request for applications is available on our funding page at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/109181.html> and the CFA questions for the CSC program is available here <https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/cfa/programQuestions.cfm?programId=593>. The DEC Division of Water has a program that is geared toward water quality and habitat. You can find links to all DEC grant programs at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/grants.html>. Division of Water also has a grant for engineering, you can write to them for additional information at DOWinformation@dec.ny.gov.

Q. Would a city housing authority or sewer district be eligible to apply?

A. No, authorities and special districts are not eligible applicants.

Q. Can we apply for a grant for a project that is beginning construction or design this year?

A. Per the request for application, the contract period will be 3/15/23 – 3/14/28. Only work completed during this time period is eligible. Engineering work can be started now, but it will not be eligible for grant funds or as match.

Q. Page 9 of the 2022 Climate Smart Communities Grant RFA states that "certification projects focus on assessments, inventories, and planning activities that are part of becoming a certified Climate Smart Community (emphasis added)". If our municipality is currently certified, is it precluded from applying for one or more of the listed certification actions eligible for funding?

A. If municipality is currently a certified CSC, it is NOT precluded from applying for a CSC grant. All local governments in NYS are eligible to apply for DEC's CSC grants.

Q. I reviewed the CFA program offerings for my municipalities as detailed in the 2022 Available CFA Resources guide and was surprised to see nothing from NYSDEC or the Environmental Facilities Corporation. Are these grant rounds not being held anymore? Or are they just outside the CFA from now on?

A. The DEC grants have shifted to being a “standalone” program offered via the CFA. These programs are not described in the REDC “Available Resources” guidebook but can be located here: <https://cfaresources.ny.gov/standalone-cfa-programs>. See the Office of Climate Change Grant Funding page is the best source for details about the 2022 round of the CSC grants: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/109181.html#CSC>.

Q. Would a sludge digestion project be eligible? Our landfill is close to full and we are looking at alternatives to landfilling.

A. Potentially. It would depend on the projects ability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The application must estimate current emissions due to landfilling and project the reduction due to sludge digestion. Applicants interested in this type of project should look closely at the scoring criteria in the RFA and be sure they can create a proposal that will score well, especially in light of the criteria related to the estimated greenhouse gas reduction benefits. Energy components of the sludge digestion process cannot be funded through Climate Smart Communities.

Q. A village is experiencing severe flooding due to siltation around a bridge. Studies of the stream corridor are currently underway, but more funding is required. It is anticipated that natural vegetative erosion control will be necessary. Will this project qualify for a CSC grant?

A. The implementation portion is eligible. The applicant will need to make a connection between the problems encountered and climate change. Projections and data will be required to show how climate changes in the area exacerbate the current issue. Analysis of how the project will alleviate the problem long term are also required. Applicants interested in this type of project should look closely at the scoring criteria in the RFA.

Q. The County would like to take a hard look at how the current waste management practices could be modified to handle organic materials and food waste better. Is this project eligible for a CSC grant?

A. This project is eligible for a grant in the certification category. The project will have to include the required components of CSC certification action PE5 Action: Organics Management Plan, which can be found at <https://climatesmart.ny.gov/actions-certification/actions/#open/action/158>.

Q. Could purchasing equipment for home composting systems (i.e. compost bins) to be provided to local citizens eligible for funding as an implementation mitigation project?

A. Purchase of composting bins etc. for a local program to encourage home composting is eligible as long as it is a component of an ongoing program. For example, holding two composting workshops annually for three years. The process and calculations used to determine the projects impact on greenhouse gas emissions will have to be well documented. It is important to be very detailed and about the assumptions made in calculating reductions. Applicants interested in this type of project should look closely at the scoring criteria in the RFA.

Q. Is there grant support available for community refrigerant management through the Climate Smart Communities (CSC) program?

A. Yes, the CSC program does include funding for municipal refrigerant management projects. See the RFA for details. There are a few additional refrigerant resources on the Office of Climate Change funding page at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/109181.html> .

Q. My firm is investigating possible grant opportunities for a town project and are trying to determine if the Climate Smart Communities Grant program is funded through the state, or a federal grant. Other grants that we are looking at cannot be matched with federal funds, so we are trying to figure out the funding source of all the grants we are investigating.

A. The Climate Smart Communities grants are funded through the NYS Environmental Protection Fund, which are New York State dollars. However, the required match cannot be composed of federal funds or other State funds.

Q. We are looking to construct a cold storage unit that would be used by local non-profits and food pantries. I wanted to confirm whether this would be an eligible project under the Refrigerant Management category?

A. This project would be a better fit under the Reduction of Organic Waste category. The second bullet under this category in the RFA states “Increasing edible food donated to the hungry, e.g., establishment or expansion of food-donation programs, purchase and installation of storage equipment for food, purchase and use of edible-food collection vehicles, and infrastructure for the storage and management of edible food.”

Q. Where can I find information about the CSC Program?

A. The DEC’s CSC Grant Program website is <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/109181.html>
Information about the CSC Certification Program is at <https://climatesmart.ny.gov>.

Q. Where can I find the application for the CSC Grant?

A. To apply for the CSC Grant Program one must complete the Consolidated Funding Application, often referred to as the CFA. Several other state agencies offer grant

funding opportunities through the CFA. The web page for the CFA is <https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/cfa/>. An account log-on and password are required.

Q. Can a non-profit apply for a CSC grant?

A. No, a non-profit is not an eligible applicant. The only eligible entities are municipalities of the State of New York. For the purpose of this Request for Applications (RFA), a municipality is defined as a county, city, town, village, or borough of the city of New York. However, a non-profit may join with a municipality to complete a project. The municipality would be the applicant, sign the contract with the state, and receive the grant funds. Letters or other written agreements signed by all parties, substantiating the collaboration are required at the time of application. See RFA for details.

Q. Are applicants required to become certified under the CSC program to be eligible for funding?

A. No, applicants not required to be a certified or registered Climate Smart Community in order to be eligible to apply for funding. However, participating municipalities do have a slight advantage in the scoring of applications. See RFA for details. To check if your municipality is a certified or registered Climate Smart Community, go to <https://climatesmart.ny.gov/actions-certification/participating-communities/> . In addition, if a municipality receives a CSC grant, they are not required to become a certified or registered Climate Smart Community.

Q. If a municipality received a CSC grant award in the last round, is the municipality precluded from applying in the current round?

A. No, the municipality may apply again as long as the application is for a new project or a later phase of a previously awarded project. At this time, there are no limits on the number of applications a municipality may submit or grant awards they may receive. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis, based on which applications receive the highest scores. For more information, see the RFA.

Q. Does the project have to show the breakdown of how the grant will be utilized?

A. Yes, in order to be competitive, the application must describe the project in detail, list all tasks, cost per task, a budget summary, and the breakdown of local match funds versus state grant funds. Templates for work plans and budgets can be found on the CSC Grant

Program page at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/109181.html> . Scroll down to the Applying for CSC Grants section to access links to the work plan and budget templates.

Q. Is volunteer time, such as serving on sustainability committees or climate smart task forces, an appropriate use for local match for the CSC Grant Program? If so what is the acceptable hourly volunteer rate?

A. Yes, volunteertime is an eligible form of local match. Volunteer time is defined as unskilled labor or work performed by professionals or skilled laborers directly on a project in an area outside their area of expertise. Values for volunteer time must be computed at the minimum wage at the time the work is performed. However, if an individual with a specific skill set, such as legal or engineering, were to apply that skill set to your project and offer those services in-kind to the project, their time may be valued at the standard professional billing rate; this is referred to as donated professional services. These hours, both general and professional, should clearly correspond to specific tasks within the work plan and be properly tracked and catalogued in a time sheet format (date, time, task performed, signature, etc.).

Q. What is the earliest date that work can be reimbursed by the grant funds?

A. March 15, 2022 for the 2021 round.

Q. Please clarify what the required climate change mitigation easement is intended to ensure.

A. If the municipality does not own the property where the grant funded project will take place, the Climate Change Mitigation Easement will be required for a period of no less than ten years or the anticipated life of the project. The easement will guarantee 1) that the property will provide the funded public benefit; 2) the property will be accessible to the municipality for the purpose of erecting and maintaining the funded use; 3) the property will be used to achieve climate protection and mitigation goals pursuant to Environmental Conservation Law Article 54 Title 15, Climate Smart Community Projects; and 4) the property will provide data and information to the municipality as specified in the grant contract or will grant the municipality access to the property on a regular basis to collect said data.

Q. Does the grant include the purchasing of electric vehicle(s)?

A. No, rebates for purchase or lease of electric vehicles are available through the DEC's Zero

Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Rebate Program. More information about this program is available at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/109181.html#ZEV> .

Q. Would the development of a specialized flood warning system and evacuation plan, as well as a plan for how to address a failure in a flood prevention system, be considered as suitable for application under the implementation category or the certification category?

A. The certification category of the CSC grants provides funding for certain types of plans, inventories, assessments, and strategy development. Installation of a flood warning system is eligible for funding under the implementation category. See the RFA for description of the project types.

Q. My community is experiencing recurring flooding along the river that is causing erosion. This erosion is threatening the drinking water supply line that runs underneath the river. Can we use implementation funds to protect the drinking water line or erect a water tower to provide water to the community from a different source?

A. Yes, eligible adaptation implementation projects include any project designed to provide a meaningful reduction of risk to residents, infrastructure, and/or natural resources from hazards projected to become more severe or frequent as a result of climate change. Flood risk reduction projects may include strategic relocation or retrofit of vulnerable critical municipal facilities or infrastructure to reduce future climate-change induced risks to those facilities.

Q. Are food scraps drop off locations an eligible project type in the CSC Grant program?

A. Yes, this project is consistent with the goal of diverting organic waste and thereby reducing methane from landfills and has been awarded in the past. See the CSC Grants Program webpage at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/109181.html> for a list of projects awarded in previous years for examples of project types.

Q. Is brush waste included in the “Reduction of Organics Waste” category, or does that have to be specifically food waste?

A. Yes, brush and yard waste can be part of a composting program. However, the estimated greenhouse gas reduction benefits of a brush-focused proposal are likely to be lower than a proposal focused on food scraps. Food waste breaks down much faster than woody brush

and produces more methane as it moves along the waste stream. Applicants interested in this type of project should look closely at the scoring criteria in the RFA and be sure they can create a proposal that will score well, especially in light of the criteria related to the estimated greenhouse gas reduction benefits. Some municipal programs have successfully paired woody brush waste with food scraps to create a balanced composting program.

Q. Would a project that converts food waste to biogas to be used in vehicles qualify as an eligible project type in the CSC Grant program?

A. Yes, it would be an eligible project. However, the probability of funding would depend on the specifics of the project (e.g., the type of biogas process) and how well the application describes the ability of the project to decrease greenhouse gas emissions from the waste sector while also taking into account emissions from the vehicles using the biogas and the displacement of fossil fuel emissions from vehicle. Applicants interested in this type of project should look closely at the scoring criteria in the RFA and be sure they can create a proposal that will score well, especially in light of the criteria related to the estimated greenhouse gas reduction benefits.

Q. I am interested in comprehensive planning for my community. Is comprehensive planning an eligible project type in the CSC Grant program?

A. The certification category of the CSC grants provides funding for certain types of plans, inventories, assessments, and strategy development. One of the eligible project types under the certification category of the CSC grants is called PE6 Action: Comprehensive Plan with Sustainability Elements. More information about this project type is available at <https://climatesmart.ny.gov/actions-certification/actions/#open/action/66>.

Q. We are considering the creation of a master facilities plan that will act as a roadmap to bring all our building stock to at least 30% better than energy code (and possibly even net zero energy). Would a plan like this be eligible for consideration under the CSC Grant Program?

A. The certification category of the CSC grants provides funding for certain types of plans, inventories, assessments, and strategy development. An application that included the development of a master facilities plan (for reducing energy use local government buildings) would likely score better if the plan was part of a larger project that included the following two components, which are two of the eligible project types under the certification grant

category: PE2 Action: Government Operations GHG Inventory (<https://climatesmart.ny.gov/actions-certification/actions/#open/action/6>) and PE2 Action: Government Operations Climate Action Plan (<https://climatesmart.ny.gov/actions-certification/actions/#open/action/10>).

While CSC grant funds can be used for plans related to buildings, CSC grants cannot be used to pay for implementation projects that are focused on greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation related to the power sector (e.g., upgrades to buildings that result in reduced use of electricity). As a result, a municipality that received CSC funds for the development of a master facilities plan would need to seek funds from other sources to implement that plan and complete any building upgrades named in that plan.

Q. The RFA references that applications for GHG mitigation implementation projects require a GHG inventory; however, most GHG inventories have typically de-emphasized the emissions associated with refrigerants. Could an applicant submit their own inventory of refrigerants and equipment including leakage rates from previous years to assess how effective their proposed solution would be?

A. Yes, applicants are encouraged to gather as much information as possible and create an inventory of refrigerants, equipment, and estimated leakage rates from previous years, especially if refrigerants were not included in a prior greenhouse gas inventory. In addition, previous greenhouse gas inventories should be checked for an “Industrial Processes” section; these sections often list refrigerants as hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) emissions and/or as ozone depleting substances (ODS) substitutes. For more information on refrigerants and what municipalities can do about the problem, see the CSC refrigerants fact sheet: http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration_pdf/cscrefrig.pdf