

**2024 Climate Smart Communities Grants  
CFA Questions & Answers – July 24, 2024**

**Q. Would building-installed solar plus battery be eligible as part of emergency preparedness (eg providing backup comms/charging for the community during outages—common design for resilience hubs)?**

A. Back-up battery systems or solar plus storage batteries are acceptable. However, in the case of solar storage, any excess energy generated cannot flow back to the grid as we are statutorily precluded from funding projects inside the power sector.

**Q. Are projects requesting reimbursement solely for land acquisition (I assume under the climate adaptation category) as a means to preserve open space eligible under CSC? Or are eligible land acquisition costs meant to be a component of a broader implementation project?**

A. We cannot fund land acquisition strictly for open space purposes. There must be a climate mitigation or adaptation component to the project. E.g., you could make an argument for carbon sequestration if the land is forested. However, this would need to include a plan for long-term management of the property for carbon sequestration as well as an estimate of how much carbon would be sequestered in the parcel over a period of time, such as 30 -50 years.

**Q. I need to get further clarification about the authorization resolution required as part of the application process.**

A. There is a statutory requirement in ECL Title 15 that requires “A municipality, upon the approval of its governing body, may submit an application...” If the County legislature has delegated authority to someone, or a department, to submit a grant application and certify the match through a resolution or a statute that could suffice. Please forward a copy for review.

**Q. If we install solar panels connected to a lithium-ion battery unit for backup power in a cooling center, is the solar panel installation an eligible cost for the application since backup generators that use fossil fuels are not permitted?**

A. If the solar panels in combination with the battery are acting strictly as backup power only, then yes. There cannot be any power flowing back to the grid.

**Q. Our village would like to apply for a CSC grant to create a cooling center in our Senior Center. We need to replace the A/C units that are currently not functioning and update the ones that are aged. We would like to replace the current units with heat pumps that would simultaneously cool the building but would also partially electrify the heating system in the building, offsetting the use of natural gas, and thereby reduce building emissions by 40-50%. Since heat pumps replace the cooling system in kind, but have this added benefit of emissions reduction for heating, we want to confirm that this is an eligible purchase for the application. It does not make sense to our engineer or our team that a heat pump option for a cooling center is excluded.**

A. The village can install a heat pump. However, it cannot be a variable refrigerant flow/variable

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refrigerant volume system. VRF systems are notorious for leaking HFCs from each joint, and HFCs are worse climate pollutants than CO<sub>2</sub>. The chosen system must use the lowest GWP available and also comply with Part 494 which is phasing out certain HFCs starting January 2024.

**Q. Are there grants available for a wind turbine project for a fire department?**

A. CSC grants are statutorily limited to “mitigation outside the power sector” therefore a wind turbine project is not an eligible project type.

**Q. I was just reading through the grading criteria for a certification grant. On page 32 of the RFP, item # 4 under Reasonableness of Costs states, “Are budget lines (not backup documents) detailed with information, such as: type of contractor and amount, construction vs design; title of personnel, hours expected, and hourly or annual rate; purpose and location of travel; list of materials, title and hourly rate of donated professional services, or number of volunteers and hours anticipated? Engineering costs allocated to grant cannot exceed 15% of the total grant amount requested in the application.” I did not see a limit to engineering costs under eligible expenses for the certification category. We are applying for a planning grant and therefore require engineering services.**

A. The eligible certification actions shouldn’t have a need for much engineering. Engineering typically comes into play in implementation. However, one may hire an engineering firm to complete planning and preliminary design tasks, which are not considered engineering for this program. This is exactly why the budget lines need to be detailed. E.g., H&M Engineering to provide planning services and preliminary design for preferred alternatives for Town walking and biking plan, \$100,000.

**Q. Our town is interested in installing clean energy infrastructure to charge electric lawn equipment and/or EVs in their municipal fleet. Guidance for the CSC program and listing of previous winners suggests that this is not an eligible project type, but I’d like to confirm.**

A. Statutorily, we can only fund projects “outside the power sector” (except in municipally owned low-income housing). Therefore, we cannot fund the installation of clean energy infrastructure.

**Q. We are very interested in applying for a CSC grant to reduce vehicle miles traveled. However, we need guidance on how to provide the necessary quantifiable evidence (e.g., model results, calculations, data) that demonstrates how the project will result in a meaningful reduction of GHG emissions?**

A. There is no standard method for doing this. The applicant should state their source(s) of data, method of calculation, assumptions made as part of the calculation method, and show the math. Most applicants have used a Florida DOT method to estimate the mode share shift. From that they estimate the amount of VMT reduced using local traffic data; convert that to gallons of gas saved and run that number through a GHG emissions reductions calculator.

**Q. We are applying for a certification grant to complete a PE7 Action: Climate Adaptation Plan. Our**

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**proposed project would complete a feasibility study to assess critical stream reaches and bridges for flood risks with an increase in high intensity storm events and identify solutions to adapt to climate change. In addition, we would assess upstream areas, where development is less dense, for nature-based resiliency solutions. We would also like to include model language to update our policies and plans to ensure they are consistent with identified solutions and further encourage adaptation strategies. We are writing to inquire if policy and plan updates can be included as part of a Climate Adaptation Plan.**

A. Yes, recommendations to changes in municipal policies and plans can be part of the strategies developed as part of the climate adaptation plan as long as all the actions other requirements are met. See <https://climatesmart.ny.gov/actions-certification/actions/#open/action/66> for a description of the action requirements, specifically sections B and E.

**Q. We would like clarification on the emergency preparedness category. Our Town has been evaluating its options for preserving access to residential communities that are experiencing increasingly frequent and severe flooding. The cost of road raising is prohibitive, and a determination has been made that a high-water rescue vehicle is necessary for public safety purposes. The vehicle will enable first responders to access the community and provide EMS transport to a waiting ambulance at times when the roadway is impassable to standard height vehicles due to flooding. It was unclear from the guidance if this project would be considered under the CSC program. It is absolutely an emergency preparedness measure that implements part of the Town's response program.**

A. Yes, this project is eligible. It is important to make a clear connection to climate change and the need for the vehicle in the application narrative and attachments. Unlike other parts of the application, there are not many specific questions related to this project type. Reviewers rely on the grantee to provide the relevant information to justify the need for the project.

**Q. Should the Town try to secure multiple estimates for the work or could they use recent/similar ones in addition to maybe one active one?**

A. It's always best to obtain several estimates for a piece of work and create a budget from that. It's standard to add about 20% to that number to account for inflation and unforeseen costs that may develop between application submission and starting the project, which is typically close to a year.

**Q. Our Town has an MHI for \$73,759, just \$4,744 away from a 20% local match as opposed to a 50% local match. Is there any wiggle room with these numbers? The Town has a disadvantaged community status of 51%.**

A. Unfortunately, there is no wiggle room when it comes to MHI; several municipalities will be close to the line. The 51% disadvantaged community status will lead to additional points in the scoring of the application.

**Q. Would a combination of certification planning actions, be a strong application for submission**

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**under the CFA? Specifically, the climate vulnerability assessment, climate adaptation plan, evaluate policies for climate resilience, and natural resources inventory.**

A. Yes, it's possible to complete 4 actions as part of one grant award. However, many municipalities underestimate the amount of work and the cost to complete multiple actions. Be sure to be realistic about the amount of work and the cost. It's difficult to justify scaling down a work plan in an executed contract when the application states all the work can be done for the budgeted amount.

**Q. What is the minimum project cost to receive an award, the RFA states “Minimum grant award - \$50,000” does that mean that the minimum project cost must be \$100,000?**

A. That is correct for a municipality with a 50% match requirement. For a community with a 20% match requirement the total project cost would be \$62,500.

**Q. Would a request for native trees, shrubs, and plants to mitigate lake pollution and erosion along our shore, and improve air quality, be an eligible project under the Climate Smart Communities Grant program?**

A. This program is a climate change centered program; therefore, the project must be for the purposes of either climate change adaptation or greenhouse gas mitigation. A comprehensive multi-year tree planting program, including maintenance, would be an eligible project type under either extreme heat preparation (adaptation) or greenhouse gas mitigation depending on the goals of the project. The trees need to be planted for climate change purposes and not strictly for erosion or water quality. However, if increased precipitation in the area is exacerbating those issues that can be discussed as a justification for the project. Refer to slides 30 – 31 from the recorded webinar posted on the REDC site ([2024 REDC Webinars and FAQs | Regional Economic Development Councils \(ny.gov\)](#)) and our grants page ([Grants For Climate Action - NYSDEC](#)).

**Q. I was wondering if we could utilize CSC funding for electric wheelchair vans to have within our public transportation fleet. I looked through the RFA and saw that reducing commuting distances and overall vehicle miles are a goal, and I am summing these public transportation vans would fit into that, but I wanted to confirm.**

A. The CSC grants cannot be used for electric vehicles. However, we do have a ZEV Rebate program, see the request for applications at <https://dec.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/2024zevcvrfafinal.pdf>

**Q. Would we be able to count federal transportation aid administered by NYSDOT through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) toward the required local match? What about New York State Touring Routes funding administered by NYSDOT?**

A. All State and federal funds are ineligible for match to the CSC grants. Match must be local dollars. The only State dollars considered local are CHIPS and AIM.

**Q. For cooling centers, there is a specification that generators cannot be fossil fuel powered. We are**

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**considering biodiesel powered generators, is this as an option?**

A. Biodiesel is not an option given the GHG reduction requirements under the Climate Act. Back-up battery systems or solar plus storage batteries are the current options; however, they may not be feasible in all situations.

**Q. Is there a limit on the number of open CSC or DEC grants an applicant can have?**

A. At this time, there is no limit to the number of open grants a municipality can have.

**Q. Is there a limit on the number of applications to the CSC program that DEC will consider from a single applicant through the CFA process?**

A. There is also no limit to the number of applications a municipality can submit as long as the applications are for different projects.

**Q. Would our Sewer District be qualified for this grant even though we're not a registered climate smart community.**

A sewer district is not an eligible applicant. The county would have to be the lead applicant and have a partnership agreement with the district. The county does not need to be registered or certified in the certification program to apply for a grant. See RFA for details <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/climate-change/resources-for-local-governments/grants-for-climate-action>

**Q. Would projects that update our wastewater infrastructure qualify for this grant?**

Work would have to be related to climate impacts, e.g., elevating the pumps inside the sewer plant to keep them running during a flood. See RFA for details <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/climate-change/resources-for-local-governments/grants-for-climate-action>

**Q. The 2024 CSCG RFA states: "The lead applicant must assume the responsibility for the project application, contract development and maintenance in SFS, performance of work consistent with this RFA, and compliance with all State, federal, and local laws, and compliance with the State of New York Master Contract for Grants." I am wondering if, while the lead applicant assumes the responsibility, can the action be completed by a formal partner on the project, rather than the lead applicant?**

A. The grantee is ultimately responsible for meeting all provisions of the master contract for grants and program requirements. The municipality can hire someone to complete work but must review and approve all the contractors work for accuracy before it is submitted to DEC. If there are errors, the municipality is responsible for compliance regardless of who completed the forms/work, etc.

**Q. We see from [this announcement](#), there was a proposal to allocate Bond act funding to the CSC**

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**implementation grants program. Was this approved, and is this new funding reflected in the current CSC grant budget (\$12.5M for 2024), or, does this mean there might be additional infusing of funding into the CSC implementation grants from the Bond Act?**

A. If DEC receives approval from Division of Budget to use Bond Act funds, we will add them to the program. This is likely to take a few months. The additional funding should be \$5M to \$10M.