



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Frequently Asked Questions

Community Environmental Education Center Grant Opportunity

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New York State

Department of Environmental Conservation

Office of Environmental Justice

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Statewide Financial System (SFS)/Prequalification

Q: How do I send in my application?

A: All applicants must apply through the New York Statewide Financial System Vendor Portal. [New York State's Vendor Portal](#).

This includes answering all program questions and uploading completed and required program documents and forms (uploads in PDF form only). Paper applications will NOT be accepted for this grant opportunity. Late applications will not be accepted.

All Applicants must be Registered with SFS to submit an application. In addition to registration, not-for-profits must also be Prequalified at the time and date that the application is due. If you are not Prequalified at that time and date, your application will not be considered.

1. **Register:** If you do not have a login and if you are new to the SFS Vendor portal, and would like to establish an account for the purposes of doing business with the State of New York, contact the SFS Help Desk at 518-457-7717, 855-233-8363 or HelpDesk@sfs.ny.gov for more information. The NYS SFS Grants Management system offers a Vendor User Manual, training videos and webinars for bidders requiring assistance. Please visit <https://grantsmanagement.ny.gov/transition-SFS> to get started.
2. **Prequalify:** PLEASE DO NOT DELAY IN BEGINNING AND COMPLETING THE PREQUALIFICATION PROCESS. PLEASE VISIT THE GRANTS MANAGEMENT [Prequalification Page](#) TO GET STARTED.
 - a. All Applicants must be Prequalified in the SFS Grants Management System at the time and date that the application is due. Applications from non-prequalified entities will be rejected. **The system will not allow you to submit your bid.**
 - b. The state reserves 5 days to review submitted prequalification applications. Prequalification applications submitted to the state for review less than 5 days prior to review submitted prequalification applications. Prequalification applications submitted to the state for review less than 5 days prior to any OEJ grant application due date may not be considered.

Once registered, you will receive an email from the Statewide Financial System to your organization's designated point of contact's email address that includes your login information.

You may locate the RFA with the following steps:

1. Click on the "Search for Grant Opportunities" tile, or use this link: [Search for Grant Opportunities \(ny.gov\)](#)
2. Type "DEC" into the field "Search by Funding Agency" and click the blue "Search" button

Search by Funding Agency

3. Locate the line that says "EJCIG 11" and click on "EJ Community Impact Grant"

EJCIG 11	DEC01	EJ Community Impact Grant	Available	Not-For-Profit
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4. You may view a PDF of the RFA by clicking on the “View Grant Opportunity” button. The RFA will open in a separate tab on your browser.
 - a. Please review eligibility requirements carefully on the RFA before logging in to SFS and applying.
5. To begin your application, click the “Log into SFS and Apply for Grant.”
 - a. **Please note, staff with a *Bid Response Initiator* role can begin a bid, but only staff with the *Bid Response Submitter* role can submit the bid response.**

Eligibility

Q: Are community colleges eligible for the above grant opportunity, our revenue was just over 5 million last year?

A: Eligible bidders are discussed on page 4 of the RFA. Eligible bidders need to be either a Tribal nation or Not-For-Profit 501c organization. Eligible bidders must have a "total annual revenue that does not exceed \$5,000,000, based on the applicant's IRS Form 990 filing from the previous year (line 12)"

Fiscal Sponsors

Q: Can we partner with a larger organization as our Fiscal sponsor?

A: Per the RFA; fiscal sponsors do not need to meet the same eligibility requirements that are required for the application. Information on fiscal sponsors can be found in the RFA starting page 4.

Application (Bid) Submission

Q: Are tribes required to complete a prequalification application?

A: A tribal organization still has to register in SFS, but they do not need to prequalify.

Q: What are the text limits on questions?

A: Most text-based questions have a 4000-character limit however please read and review all the questions before answering and follow any question specific restrictions. Some questions must be under 250-characters

Q: What are the page limits for document uploads?

A: There are no page limits for the required components, however:

- all uploads must be in pdf format.

- pdf's must be unsecured and cannot have electronic signatures.
- pdf's must be less than 15mb.
- Each question that allows uploads only allows 1 attachment.

Q: Are there word count limits in SFS?

A: There are word count limits in the SFS answer boxes, however, please review all the questions before answering so that you are not repeating information or getting off topic. You will also have the opportunity to upload documents like a timeline that can be any length you would like

Q: Is this the template we should be using to develop our Work Plan for the CEEC Grant - or are there other resources / templates we should be consulting?

A: The new bidding system in SFS has the workplan section built in, you will also have an opportunity to upload supporting documentation for the workplan.

Q: Do you have a sample budget available showing the expected level of detail / itemization? The budget requests bids, is a single bid acceptable or is the expectation be triple bids?

A: SFS has a section for creating your budget and should provide some guidance. The amount of detail provided is up to the applicant and will count toward their cost effectiveness score. This information should be provided in the expenditure budget detail and the budget narrative for each section of the budget.

Cost effectiveness is an important part of your application that is worth up to 20% of an application score. What reviewers will look for is that the budget is well balanced, does not contain any extraneous expenses, and supports objectives, tasks and performance measures identified in the project work plan. In other words: How well does the budget demonstrate value for cost?

Applicants may compare the project costs to other similar work and explain the balance of expenses across proposed expenditure budget categories. To sufficiently respond to this question, applicants are encouraged to upload documentation to support specific budget items, such as standard government wage rates, current market prices for equipment and cost-estimates from potential contractors.

Q: Can I get a blank copy of the application form from DEC, or does that come from SFS after a registration is in place?

A: SFS is the only location for the application. There is no "Paper Copy"

Q: I am confused about the references to a workplan.

A: The Application system SFS was brand new for 2024 and unfortunately some of the wording in the RFA did not match the processes in SFS. When completing the application there is a section for you to complete and provide a workplan called Objectives/Tasks/ and Performance measures. The workplan was previously a document that bidders would upload for review but now the section is built into the application process this change caused some confusion during the RFA writing process.

Projects

Q: Can the grant be used to fund projects that do not have a set location such as a boat or mobile learning center?

A: Due to the competitive nature of the grant, we are not allowed to comment on project viability however the OEJ and DEC has funded mobile projects before, the Science Barge maintained by the organization Groundwork Hudson was partially funded through a grant from the OEJ.

One of the priorities for the CEEC is to be accessible and open to your community, you will be asked to defend, and then graded on, your site selection. If you believe that your project will be "accessible to the community and surrounding communities," as well as being a "good candidate for demonstration of environmental stewardship, exploration of the environment, and education," then we encourage you to apply.

Q: What documents are required when partnering with a municipality?

A: In the RFA on page 31 Appendix C there is a Sample Municipal Endorsement.

In addition, a letter of support or a Memorandum of Understanding stating that the Municipality is aware of and supportive of any desired uses by the organization, and if they're looking to make improvements to the facility in question, and their intent to do so under this grant opportunity.

We will also want firm details on who will maintain the center after the project is complete, what the expected lifespan of the project will be. This information will be required for the Post Construction and Maintenance question in the application.

Q: What is a Municipal Access agreement?

A: A Municipal Access Agreement is a legal document that details the access to a Municipal held property. You would have this document and agreement with the municipality. For example, if the property will be leased to your organization, then the lease agreement will need to be provided to us in addition to the Municipal endorsement

Q: Housing access and affordability are among the greatest challenges of our region. We have observed existing environmental education centers in New York States that provide on-site housing to their employees to support fiscal sustainability of the project and its employees. Will the DEC look favorably on project design and construction funds supporting the design and construction of cost-effective seasonal and/or year-round on-site housing for seasonal and year-round Environmental Education staff? We have a need for seasonal housing for seasonal workers and year-round housing for positions such as buildings and grounds caretaker and the environmental educational director.

A: Due to the competitive nature of the grant, we cannot comment on project ideas, please refer to page 3 of the RFA for possible project ideas. The CEEC should promote environmental exploration, discovery, and learning about the community's environment. You are responsible for making justifications for the usage of the proposed center.

Q: Can we set up a call to discuss our project?

A: Due to the competitive nature of the grant, we are not able to have meetings or calls discussing the nature of the proposed project with potential bidders. There is an open Questions and Answers period where we will be happy to answer any questions you have regarding bidder eligibility, eligible expenses, and any questions on the application process. If you do have any questions regarding the grant, please let me know and I will respond as best as I can.

Q: Will the DEC fund a floating facility under the CEEC grant?

A: The DEC has previously funded projects such as Groundwork Hudson's Science Barge, but please keep in mind the point of the CEEC is to fund an Environmental Education Center that is readily accessible to your community. It will be your responsibility to make the case for your project in the application.

Q: To what degree of flexibility is there within the grant for reallocating or raising budget items based on real costs?

A: Up to 10% of the total award amount can be moved. You also have the option of overspending in categories and paying the difference with funds from outside of the award. So, if you ask for \$5,000 for item A but it costs \$6,000, we will provide the \$5,000 based off the original budgeted proposal and you would be responsible for paying for the difference with outside funding. Alternatively, if you need to use the funds from the award, we could cover the \$6,000 but \$1,000 would have to be moved from a different category. We are only allowed to make moves like this for a maximum of 10% of the award amount across all categories.

Q: Do permits need to be in place prior to submission of the grant application, or are active applications sufficient?

A: The permitting that is required for your facility is not determined by the OEJ you will be responsible for determining what is required for your project and providing proof of those permits. Part of the Timeline should show that the needed permits and approvals in place and/or the applicant demonstrates plans and abilities for acquiring all necessary permits and approvals. Section 10 of the RFA also details that in order to receive reimbursement "Approved project design required permits and landowner permissions must be in place to submit a reimbursement request." There is quite a lot of information and requirements regarding permits in the RFA if you would like to look for more guidance.

Q: Do contractor and subcontractor bidding and awards need to be in place prior to the advance payment (considering the M/WBE targets and reporting requirements)

A: Our office does not issue the permits. Section 11 part-2 Permit Requirements) is stating that any contractors you hire and work you do are properly permitted. What permits are required will be up to you and your contractors to determine.

Q: Do contractor and subcontractor bidding and awards need to be in place prior to the advance payment (considering the M/WBE targets and reporting requirements)

A: This will depend on your timeline and workplan. If you do not have contractors in place, then you should show documentation that supports your expected expenditures on those services, either with proposals or similar projects.

Uploads

Q: What documents are required for a partnership with a municipality?

A: There is a sample Municipal endorsement in Appendix C of the RFA. However, there are no "correct" documents from a municipality. The documents that you will need depend on what sort of partnership you have with the municipality, for example if you are retrofitting a municipal owned building then we would need whatever contract and permissions you have regarding that retrofit. Or if you are leasing the space from the municipality then we would want a copy of the lease. If the project is dependent on being awarded the grant, then we would want a letter from the Municipality detailing what agreements will be made. Be sure to include a letter of support from the municipality regarding the project.

Q: Do we need to complete the mandatory Sexual Harassment Prevention Certification form?

A: Yes, the Sexual harassment Prevention Certification form is mandatory.

Sexual Harassment Prevention Certification*

State Finance Law §139-I **requires all applicants** of grant funding to certify that they have a written policy addressing sexual harassment prevention in the workplace and provide annual sexual harassment training (that meets the Department of Labor's model policy and training standards) to all its employees.

Applications that do not contain the certification will not be considered for award; provided however, that if the applicant cannot make the certification, the applicant may provide a signed statement with their application detailing the reasons why the certification cannot be made.

Applicants are required to sign and upload the Sexual Harassment Prevention Certification form or upload a signed statement with their application detailing the reasons why the certification cannot be made into the pre-submission uploads folder."

Q: would a non-employee volunteer need to sign the sexual harassment prevention certification form?

A: The form should be completed by the program director, "it certifies that their organization has implemented a written policy that addresses sexual harassment prevention in the workplace, and they provide annual sexual harassment training to all of their employees."

The form only needs to be completed by the organization's director; it does not need to be signed by the organization's employees.

Q: For permission to use the property in the case where the applicant intends to purchase the property, beyond its availability is there anything specific you need to see in the agreement between the landowner and the applicant? Will a letter of intent suffice? Or must there be a binder with a deposit.

A: The amount of supporting documentation you submit is up to you, there is no requirements, but reviewers will be more favorable to more concrete forms of documentation. If there is a written agreement to sell the property to your organization vs proof that the property is just available for sale, then the written agreement would be more favorable.

Q: The instructions for the CEEC application indicate that all uploads must be submitted as a single document per question, in PDF format. However, question #18 requests the upload of project site photos. Could you please clarify if multiple photo files can be uploaded individually for this question, or if all photos need to be consolidated into a single PDF file?

A: The grant process with SFS is new this year and not all of its restrictions were understood when we created the RFA as such some requests in the RFA did not match the instructions in the application process. IF you are able, you could convert your .jpeg images into a PDF and combine them in order to upload per SFS's request, however if you are unable to do that then you should be able to upload multiple images to the question. If you upload this way it will NOT affect your eligibility or the review process, but you should leave a comment explaining what you are doing. The reason single uploads are requested is due to the way SFS collates your documents. When there are multiple uploads and/or format types, the sequential documents can sometimes be skipped, however they are still accessible to the reviewers.

Funding

Q: Can Funds be used on a project that is already underway?

A: As long as the project meets all eligibility criteria then yes. However, Costs relating to the project that were incurred prior to the start date of the grant contract or after the termination date of the grant contract are ineligible.

Q: Can funding cover a portion of a larger project or does all funding need to come from the DEC?

A: The grant opportunity would be able to cover a portion of a larger project as long as it meets the eligibility criteria. Funding for the whole project will need to be reviewed and the project timeline will need to include the whole project, not just the portion funded by the OEJ. Projects are expected to prove their Long-Term Support and Benefits so a fully viable project will need to be submitted.

Q: Can funds be used to expand or renovate an existing Environmental Educational Center?

A: Yes, in the RFA section 9 page 22 under eligible expenses "Construction Enhancements" allow for costs directly associated with facility improvements.

Q: Are these funds likely to be made available on a yearly basis or is this a one-time program from the State?

A: The CEEC is the second time the Office of Environmental Justice has released funding for Environmental Education centers, and although there are no current plans to release further iterations of the grant, it is an incredibly popular offering. As such I cannot guarantee that funding will be made available in the future but due to the high demand there is a high likelihood a similar grant will be released in the future.

Q: Are soft costs (engineering and design) or potentially costs like erosion control, or green infrastructure improvements related to the proposed project eligible?

A: Eligible costs are covered in section 9 of the RFA page 22.

Eligible Project Expenditures

- **Contractual Services:** The value of services provided by responsible professional and technical personnel and consultants (i.e., engineering, and architectural services, surveys, plans and specifications, research, design and development of a project, consultant and legal services directly related to a project, feasibility study for a facility, archaeological field work, report writing, curation of artifacts and interpretation, etc.)

- **Construction enhancements:** costs directly associated with facility improvements.

- **Equipment/Furniture/Fixtures:** (purchase/rental) directly required to implement the project. Including the purchase of technology hardware.

- **Land acquisition costs:** eligible costs must enable the acquisition of the land and include appraisals by a certified appraiser, title searches, surveys and associated legal fees. The land must be owned by the grant applicant.

- **Grant administration up to 10% of total award.**

Q: The Guidelines and Bid Instructions references interpretive signage. May both interior and exterior educational/interpretive signage be included as part of the project costs?

A: Signage is not required; however, the grant will cover Equipment/Furniture/ and Fixtures as eligible expenses.

Q: Does your office anticipate that another round of funding will be offered in the future? If so, when?

A: The CEEC is the second time the Office of Environmental Justice has released funding for Environmental Education centers, and although there are no current plans to release further iterations of the grant, it is an incredibly popular offering. As such I cannot guarantee that funding will be made available in the future but due to the high demand there is a high likelihood a similar grant will be released in the future.

Q: Are items such as probeware, microscopes, and floodplain simulators eligible for funding or are they outside the scope of "technology hardware"?

A: The items you have described would fall under the Equipment/Furniture/Fixtures section of eligible expenses.

Other Questions

Q: what is considered an "academic institution"?

A: An educational institute can be any level of schooling, k-12 through university.

Q: Will there be a Webinar

A: We will not be hosting a webinar regarding this opportunity. All questions should be asked during the Q&A period.

Q: Is there a DEC/NYS consultant under contract to support nonprofit organizations located in NYS Disadvantaged Communities to provide technical assistance as we pursue this opportunity?

A: We here at the OEJ both distribute and administer the grants. Any questions regarding the application or application process can be sent to us. If there are technical issues during the application process, then the SFS help desk is available to assist.

Q: The RFP mentions “standard government wage rates” on page 20 of the RFP under “Appropriate and Cost-Effective Budgets.” Is this the same as Prevailing Wages? And if so, are the nonprofit organizations hiring construction contractors expected to pay prevailing wages?

A: Yes, contractors must have all the necessary licenses, approvals, and certifications currently required by the laws of any applicable local, state, or Federal government to perform the services or work, as applicable, pursuant to the Master Contract. This includes following NYS wage requirements.

Q: In regard to this evaluation criteria: Applicant provided more than one quote from vendors/contractors for the work to be completed, and the lowest cost estimate was used for the application: Does this apply to design professionals like architects and engineers? Are we expected to select an architectural and engineering firm based on lowest cost or past relevant experience and qualifications?

A: This will depend on where you are in your projects, The main thing that reviewers are going to be interested in is that you have done your due diligence in preparing for the project. When hiring contractors of any kind, multiple quotes are expected, if you chose a contractor that was not the lowest bid then justification should be made.

Q: In regard to this evaluation criteria: *Applicant provided more than one quote from vendors/contractors for the work to be completed, and the lowest cost estimate was used for the application: Are we expected to submit multiple construction cost estimates prior to design work at this proposal stage to be competitive and responsive to the Applicant Evaluation, Scoring and Selection criteria under appropriate and cost-effective budget? Would an estimated size of building and not-to-exceed cost per square foot of construction provided by an experienced, qualified architectural and engineering team to score favorably on the evaluation criteria “appropriate and cost-effective budget?”*

A: Cost effectiveness is an important part of your application that is worth 20 points. What reviewers will look for is that the budget is well balanced, does not contain any extraneous expenses, and supports objectives, tasks and performance measures identified in the project work plan. How well does the budget demonstrate value for cost?

Applicants may compare the project costs to other similar work and explain the balance of expenses across proposed expenditure budget categories. To sufficiently respond to this

question, applicants are encouraged to upload documentation to support specific budget items, such as standard government wage rates, current market prices for equipment and cost-estimates from potential contractors.

Q: Does the DEC have a sample budget template to work with as a starting point, demonstrating the level of detail expected for design and construction budget cost estimates?

A: The budget will be completed in SFS. The level of detail is up to the bidders. A sample will be provided upon request.

Q: May a newly constructed parking lot to access the proposed Community Environmental Education Center be included in the construction cost of the project?

A: The grant will NOT cover any costs incurred prior to the start date of the contract. However, a parking lot is still part of the facility and would be an eligible construction project.

Q: Will the Environmental Education Centers be required to meet certain NYS building codes? If so, which ones such as the NYS Energy Code of 2020 or the NYS Stretch Energy code?

A: On page 24 of the RFA.

Contractors agree to obtain all required permits, including but not limited to, local, state, and federal permits prior to the commencement of any project related work. The Contractor agrees that all work performed in relation to the project by the Contractor or its agents, representatives, or contractors will comply with all relevant federal, state, and local laws, rules, regulations and standards, zoning and building codes, ordinances, operating certificates for facilities, or licenses for an activity.

There are no additional restrictions or requirements.

Q: Will the Environmental Education Centers be expected or required to be built to LEED standards, certified by LEED, or another third-party green building program?

A: It is not required; however, it is a possible program usage.

Q: How complete do the plans need to be for a renovation project? Do construction/renovation projects need to be ready to build, or can they be in planning stage? We are in the planning and design stages.

A: The grants from the OEJ are structured to have a three-year lifespan, and you are allowed to propose a project that is at any point in its lifecycle. With a project that is in the early stages of its lifecycle such as the planning stage then you will need to be detailed in your objective's tasks and performance measures for the project. As for advice I'd recommend you set realistic relevant objectives that you will be able to complete over the lifecycle of the grant. You can also request budgetary items that are relevant to the early stages of a project, if you are not sure when you are going to begin

construction then don't request funds for contractors instead request funds for design architects. If you are looking to buy a building in your area, then do the research on estimated costs and frequency of availability.

Location

Q: Our Project or organization is not located in a DAC/PEJA. Can we still apply?

A: For the CEEC the Environmental Centers are not required to be in a DAC or PEJA however the centers and organizations are expected to be accessible to and serve a DAC/PEJA community. If the Location is outside one of these communities, we will want an explanation on how access will be provided. Organizations who apply are also expected to have a focus on environmental justice. The score that their application receives will be affected by their location to a DAC/PEJA and their history serving those communities. Information regarding conditions and scoring are in sections 5 and 6 of the RFA.

Q: Will the grant support a location that is leased or rented and not owned by the organization submitting the bid?

A: CEEC funds are eligible to cover the costs associated with

- Expansion or updating of a facility
- Purchasing of furniture, fixtures, and equipment
- Purchasing technological hardware

However, funds **CAN NOT** be used towards Indirect costs, such as overhead or operating expenses (space, rent, utilities, etc.) (Page 22 of the RFA). An explanation on how the Center's rent would be covered without using grant funding would need to be fully addressed.

Proof of land ownership or proof of permission will be required. (RFA page 12) If the property is not owned by the applicant – a formal written agreement between the applicant and landowner which allows the applicant access to the property, and represent the landowner, to accomplish the proposed project.

When completing the application, you will also be asked about the long-term Support and Benefits that your project will offer. "Points will be awarded to projects that demonstrate long-term sustainability and durability. Uploading supporting documentation is optional, but encouraged, to substantiate claims." (page 13 of RFA)

Q: We serve the residents of NYC, but the location of our proposed education center is outside of NYS. Would the DEC fund a location in another State?

A: The goal of the Community Environmental Education Center is to create a center that is open and accessible to the organization's entire community and surrounding communities year-round.

Proposed project locations that are outside of DAC or EJ communities must demonstrate how they will be accessible to the DAC and or EJ communities they serve. As such reference material that bidders use to determine their communities refer only to locations in NYS.