

Getting Started Early On Preparing Your Assessment, Revolving Loan Fund, and Cleanup Proposal

Every year, the [Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization](#) (OBLR) receives numerous inquiries regarding preparation of proposals for the Assessment, Revolving Loan Fund, and Cleanup (ARC) grant competitions. Many potential applicants find that it is difficult to prepare their proposals in only 60 days, the typical amount of time the Request for Proposals (RFP) allows from publication until the proposals are due. While the RFP is on schedule to be available in early fall, there are still many activities that applicants can perform in advance of the RFP (commonly referred to as the “guidelines”) being made publicly available. We have listed many of these activities below.

GENERAL

- **Learn how to submit a proposal via www.grants.gov.** All proposals must be submitted via www.grants.gov.
 - Applicants should obtain their organization’s DUNS number and register in www.sam.gov now. Even if an applicant is already registered in www.sam.gov, the applicant must make sure the account is active.
 - Review the [Applicant Tools & Tips](#) on the www.grants.gov website.
 - Proposals that are not successfully received will be considered a late submission and will be rejected.
- **Review the last ARC Guidelines and Frequent Asked Questions (FAQs)** - While the new guidelines will differ from the previous year, the guidelines generally remain the same from year to year as many of the criteria and requirements come directly from the Brownfields statute. Reading the guidelines, thinking through and gathering the information required, and even putting together the plan for your brownfields program and brownfields project will give you a step up when it comes to preparing your proposal. Previous year’s guidelines and FAQs are available on the OBLR website at https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-08/documents/fy17_faqs.pdf
- **Establish the framework (core elements) of your brownfields program.** Think about the needs and goals of your community. How best could your community accomplish these goals? Would an assessment grant help your community to achieve these goals? Do you have the manpower to manage a grant? If not, perhaps a Targeted Brownfield Assessment may be a better option for your community or being part of an assessment coalition. Once you establish the framework, it will be easier to determine the next steps you need to take and begin implementing those steps.
- **Establish the needed partnerships.** Determine whether your community should apply as an individual or a coalition. If you are applying as a coalition, identify who will be part of the coalition, who will be the lead coalition member and manage the cooperative agreement, and who will be members. Also, be sure to discuss what each coalition member’s role will be in the program. Once all that is determined, document your agreement through a memorandum of understanding/agreement.
- **Check out OBLR’s Technical Assistance to Brownfield Communities (TAB) providers.** The EPA’s [TAB Program](#) provides technical assistance to communities and other stakeholders on brownfields issues with the goal of increasing the community's understanding and involvement in brownfield cleanup and revitalization, and helping to move brownfields sites forward toward cleanup and reuse.

- **State Letter.** Request your state letter indicating that the state knows about your plan to submit a proposal. Note: This can be done early, but should not be done so early that the letter is not from the current year.

THRESHOLD CRITERIA

- **Applicant Eligibility.** Begin gathering the necessary information to document your eligibility status. Contact U.S. EPA Brownfields regional staff if an eligibility question arises. A list of the Brownfield regional staff for your region can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/brownfields-contacts-epa-regional-offices>.
- **Site Eligibility.** Prepare your defenses to CERCLA liability and request state determination for petroleum site eligibility. Non-tribal applicants must provide the information required for a petroleum site eligibility determination to their state, so the state can make the necessary determination on petroleum site eligibility.
 - **Site Ownership.** For cleanup grant proposals, acquire ownership of the site. Remember, applicants must be the sole owner of the site that is the subject of its cleanup grant proposal in order to be eligible to receive a cleanup grant.
 - **Draft Analysis of Brownfield Cleanup Alternatives (ABCA).** For cleanup grant proposals, begin working on your draft ABCA which briefly summarizes information about the site and contamination issues, cleanup standards, applicable laws, cleanup alternatives considered, and the proposed cleanup remedy. This will allow you to see if there are critical data gaps so you can begin filling in those gaps and have the draft ABCA ready to go by the proposal due date.

RANKING CRITERIA

- **Review the Ranking Criteria.** Applicants are encouraged to use the most recent guidelines found at <https://www.epa.gov/brownfields/apply-brownfields-grant-funding> as a guide to begin gathering information and drafting their proposal. When the new guidelines are posted, the applicant can then use the time prior to the submission deadline to organize the information into the required format, fill in any missing details, and further strengthen their proposal.
 - **Grant Proposal Framework/Outline.** You should begin by developing a framework or outline of your grant proposal. Think about the story your community wants to tell, and begin gathering the data needed to tell that story.
 - **Community Need.** While the actual language in the new guidelines may vary slightly, EPA will be interested in seeing how brownfields have impacted your community, particularly sensitive or at risk populations. If applying for an assessment grant, you should be selecting a target area of your community that will be the focus of your proposal. You will need to gather data on demographics for the target area, your community and state. EPA will also want to know about the community's financial needs and their ability/inability to draw upon other resources to handle the brownfields in their community. Think about these issues and begin gathering specific data and information on brownfield sites in your community so that you can speak to this topic with some specificity.

- **Project Description.** Start working with your brownfield partners to identify and develop the program/project that will be the subject of the grant. For assessment grants, you should begin discussions early with key partners about your project area and how you envision your program operating. Decide the focus of your grant and what sites you want to prioritize or the process you will use to prioritize sites if that will be done after the project starts. Start thinking about how many and what type of sites you plan to address with the grant funding and other key aspects of your program. As more details of your program are developed, you should be able to start drafting a budget outlining how much it will cost to perform the work described.

In addition, you should start looking for ways to leverage additional project funding. Begin capturing these resources so that they can be added to the grant proposal. If you have already leveraged funding for the project, begin gathering documentation (letters, emails, etc...) that document the leveraged funding. Ask partner organizations that plan to provide resources for letters that document the specific contribution they plan to provide. Gathering these documents now will save time later, and ensure you have the necessary attachments to document your firm, leveraged commitments.

- **Community Engagement and Partnerships.** Each applicant is required to incorporate community involvement into their grant, and to notify the community that they are planning to apply for a brownfields grant. Start working with your community **early** to establish a process and procedures for engaging their community. These efforts can begin well in advance of the grant application. The same goes for establishing partnerships that are critical to the success of your program. Begin identifying and forming these partnerships early in the process.
- **Project Benefits.** Begin identifying the health, environmental, economic, and other long-term benefits of addressing brownfield sites in your community, or if applying for cleanup grants, benefits of cleaning up the site. Thinking about the benefits in advance will facilitate your ability to identify and articulate these benefits in your proposal.
- **Programmatic Capability/Past Performance.** Begin gathering information on any past grants you have received and your accomplishments and performance under these grants. If you had performance problems on past grants, identify the issues and put in place corrective actions, so that any performance issues are resolved by the time you apply for the brownfield grant. Also, think about how you will track and measure the progress of your project if awarded a grant.

We hope that using these tips to get started preparing your proposal early will facilitate your efforts in the preparation of a thorough, thoughtful, timely, and most importantly, successful proposal. If you have questions, please contact your [EPA Regional Brownfields staff](#) or [Jerry Minor-Gordon](#) (OBLR's lead for the Brownfields ARC grant competition).