

Getting Started Early On Preparing Your Assessment/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 publically available. We have listed many of these activities below. We hope that using this list to get started preparing your assessment and/or cleanup proposal early will facilitate your efforts in the preparation of a thorough, thoughtful, timely, and most importantly, successful proposal.

NOTE: For the FY15 grant competition, only Assessment Grant and Cleanup Grant solicitations will be issued. A solicitation for new Revolving Loan Fund Grants will not be issued in FY15. EPA will solicit requests from existing, high performing RLF grantees through a Federal Register notice for supplemental RLF funding.

GENERAL

- **Review last year's ARC Guidelines** - While there will be some changes between the FY14 and FY15 Guidelines, the Guidelines 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.
- **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, maybe 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.

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 <http://www.epa.gov/swerosps/bf/corcntct.htm>
- **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.
- **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.
- **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 FY14 Guidelines found at <http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/news/index.htm> as a guide to begin gathering information and drafting their proposal. When the FY15 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.** Applicants should begin by developing a framework or outline of their grant proposal. Think about the story your community wants to tell, and begin gathering the data you need in order to tell that story.
 - **Community Need.** While the actual language in the FY15 Guidelines may vary slightly, EPA will be interested in seeing how brownfields have impacted your community,

particularly sensitive or at risk populations. EPA will also want to hear about the community's financial needs and their ability/inability to draw upon other resources to handle the brownfields in their community. Applicants should be thinking about these issues and begin gathering specific data and information on brownfield sites in their community so that they 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 of how much it will cost to perform the work described.

In addition, applicants should start looking for ways they can leverage additional project funding. Begin capturing these data so that it 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 in-kind support for letters that document the specific in-kind support 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 brownfield grant. The applicant should start working with their 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.** Applicants should begin identifying the health, environmental, infrastructure reuse, economic, and other long term benefits of addressing brownfield sites in their 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.

- **Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB).** The TAB Program funds 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. Applicants can begin by contacting brownfields TAB grantee supporting their area - New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) (Regions 1 and 3); Kansas State University (KSU) (Regions 5-8), and Center for Creative Land Recycling (CCLR) (Regions 2, 4, 9 & 10) to request assistance in preparing proposal applications. Information on the TAB Program can be found at http://epa.gov/brownfields/grant_info/tab.htm.

We hope that these suggestions of how to start working on your brownfield ARC grant proposal early will assist you in submitting your proposal. Should you have any questions, please contact Jerry Minor-Gordon @ minor-gordon.jerry@epa.gov.