








Rural Community Development (RCD) Training and Technical Assistance for Water and Wastewater Treatment

Opportunity number: HHS-2025-ACF-OCS-EF-0177



Contents

Before you begin	3
 Step 1: Review the Opportunity	<u>4</u>
Basic information	5
Eligibility	7
Program description	8
 Step 2: Get Ready to Apply	<u>14</u>
Get registered	15
Find the application package	16
Learn more	16
 Step 3: Prepare Your Application	<u>17</u>
Application contents and format	18
 Step 4: Learn About Review and Award	<u>29</u>
Application review	30
Award notices	37
 Step 5: Submit Your Application	<u>38</u>
Application submission and deadlines	39
Application checklist	41
 Step 6: Learn What Happens After Award	<u>42</u>
Post-award requirements and administration	43
 Contacts and Support	<u>45</u>
Modifications	48



Before you begin

If you believe you are a good candidate for this funding opportunity, secure your [SAM.gov](#) and [Grants.gov](#) registrations now. If you are already registered, make sure your registrations are active and up-to-date.

SAM.gov registration (this can take several weeks)

You must have an active account with SAM.gov. This includes having a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

[See Step 2: Get Ready to Apply](#)

Grants.gov registration (this can take several days)

You must have an active Grants.gov registration. Doing so requires a Login.gov registration as well.

[See Step 2: Get Ready to Apply](#)

Apply by the application due date

Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on September 5, 2025.



To help you find what you need, this NOFO uses internal links. In Adobe Reader, you can go back to where you were by pressing Alt + Left Arrow (Windows) or Command + Left Arrow (Mac) on your keyboard.



Step 1:

Review the Opportunity

In this step

Basic information	<u>5</u>
Eligibility	<u>7</u>
Program description	<u>8</u>

Basic information

Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

Office of Community Services

Division of Community Discretionary and Demonstration Programs

Funding training and technical assistance that supports improving and managing water and wastewater systems and enhancing organizational and management capacity.

Summary

The Rural Community Development (RCD) program funds training and technical assistance to low-income rural communities to develop and manage affordable, safe drinking water and wastewater treatment facilities.

RCD-funded training and technical assistance support drinking water and wastewater system improvements and the management of water and wastewater systems once they have been constructed or improved.

RCD-funded training and technical assistance can last days, weeks, months, or years, depending on the nature of drinking water and wastewater management conditions and the needs of individual communities.

The RCD program is expected to:

- Improve processes, procedures, and governance structures, enabling improved operation and management of drinking water and wastewater systems.
- Improve processes and procedures related to key functions of drinking water and wastewater service delivery.
- Strengthen compliance with government rules and regulations.
- Increase access to new sources of funding to support the mission.
- Achieve a high level of operational reliability and financial security for critical infrastructure (such as drinking water or wastewater infrastructure).
- Improve access to drinking water that meets public health guidelines (for example, the Safe Drinking Water Act or other federal or local regulations) in sufficient quantities to meet basic needs.



Have questions?
See [Contacts and Support](#).

Key facts

Opportunity name:

Rural Community Development (RCD) Training and Technical Assistance for Water and Wastewater Treatment

Opportunity number:

HHS-2025-ACF-OCS-EF-0177

Announcement type:

Initial

Federal assistance listing:

93.570

Statutory authority number:

Section 680(a)(3)(B) of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. 9921(a)(3)(B))

Key dates

Application submission deadline:

September 5, 2025

Expected project start date:

September 30, 2025

See [other submissions](#) for other time frames that may apply to this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

- Improve access to wastewater systems that adhere to public health guidelines (for example, the Clean Water Act or other federal or local regulations) and meet basic needs.

[Find more information about the RCD program.](#)

Funding details

Type: Grant

Expected total program funding: \$11,000,000

Total expected awards: 8

Minimum award amount for the first budget period (award floor): \$400,000

Maximum award amount for the first budget period (award ceiling): \$1,375,000

We plan to fund a five-year project period. Each project period has five one-year budget periods.

Non-competing continuation (NCC) awards

The grant will be awarded for a five-year project period consisting of five 12-month budget periods.

- The initial award will be for the first 12-month budget period.
- Subsequent budget periods will be awarded through an NCC award based on:
 - Submission and approval of annual NCC applications.
 - Availability of funds.
 - Satisfactory progress as determined by program staff based on review of performance progress reports.
 - On-time completion of grant reporting requirements.
 - A determination that the continued funding would be in the best interest of the federal government.

Awards made under this funding opportunity are subject to federal funds availability.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants

These types of organizations are eligible for an award:

- Private, nonprofit organizations (including tribal organizations) whose services span multiple contiguous states within a particular region of the country.

Individuals, including sole proprietorships, and foreign entities are not eligible.

Other eligibility criteria

You will be required to submit proof of your nonprofit status. See the accepted forms of proof in the [attachments](#) section.

Faith-based and community organizations that meet the eligibility requirements are eligible for awards under this funding opportunity.

Disqualification factors

We will review your application to make sure it meets these responsiveness requirements.

We won't consider an application that:

- Requests funding above the [award ceiling](#).
- Is submitted after the [deadline](#).
- Is from an individual, including a sole proprietorship, or a foreign entity.
- Is received in paper format that didn't have a previously approved exemption from ACF.

Application limits

If you submit the same application more than once under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), we will only acknowledge the last on-time submission.

Cost sharing

This program has no cost-sharing requirement. If you choose to include cost-sharing funds, we won't consider it during review. However, we will hold you accountable for any funds you add, including through reporting. If you don't provide your promised amount, we may have to decrease your award amount or use other enforcement actions.

Program description

Statutory authority

This program is authorized by Section 680(a)(3)(B) of the CSBG Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. 9921(a)(3)(B)).

Overview

RCD funds training and technical assistance for rural communities to support improving drinking water and wastewater systems and managing these systems once they have been constructed or improved.

RCD-funded training and technical assistance can last days, weeks, months, or years, depending on the nature of the drinking water and wastewater management conditions and the needs of individual communities.

RCD program objectives

The goal of the RCD program is to enhance the overall health of small, low-income rural communities and the well-being of their residents through training and technical assistance in support of the development and maintenance of drinking water and wastewater systems.

In addressing this goal for individuals with low incomes living in rural communities, the program will:

- Improve access to safe and affordable drinking water.
- Protect health and safety through the environmentally sound disposal of wastewater from homes and other facilities in the community.
- Resolve water or wastewater disposal issues that may result from low population or geographic isolation through cooperation among communities on a local or regional basis.
- Strengthen the water operator industry by providing drinking water supply and wastewater disposal training and technical assistance.
- Enhance the capacity of local communities and tribal organizations to manage and operate drinking water and wastewater systems that are operationally and fiscally sound.
- Support safe and affordable water systems that protect the health and safety of individuals with low incomes.

Expected outcomes

The RCD program is expected to produce the following outcomes:

- Enhanced ability to identify and address drinking water and wastewater-related issues, including infrastructure and accessibility needs.
- Improved access to safe drinking water supply and wastewater disposal services for families with low incomes.
- Sustained affordability of safe drinking water and wastewater disposal services in rural communities with low incomes.
- Comprehensive training for water operators to ensure compliance with federal and local regulations.
- Strengthened local capacity, governance structures, and expertise to establish and maintain necessary facilities.
- Increased economic opportunities for rural communities with low incomes by ensuring access to basic water and wastewater services.
- Effective use of technical assistance to attract additional public and private resources.
- Enhanced coordination of federal, state, and local agencies and financing programs to benefit low-income communities.
- Support for communities in establishing financial stability and reserves to maintain safe drinking water delivery and wastewater disposal systems.

Eligible activities

RCD funds may be used for training and technical assistance that provides expertise and capacity building to small, low-income rural communities to address the goals of the program and achieve the expected outcomes.

For example, RCD grants have supported the following:

- Facilitating the creation of a governing body where one did not exist to manage safe drinking water and wastewater facilities.
- Training water and wastewater system operators to improve the managerial and operational capacity of these systems. These trainings have been related to required certifications for drinking water and wastewater systems, remedial and regulatory issues, compliance, and construction management.
- Convening coordinating summits for system operators, managers, and other experts in the field.
- Supporting the completion and submission of applications for government or institutional funding to develop and improve safe drinking water and wastewater

facilities. This has included collecting data required by these funding sources (for example, by performing an income study of residents).

- Enhancing safety and security by providing technical trainings for system operators on wastewater discharge limits and water provision in emergency situations.
- Creating and carrying out plans to bring drinking water or wastewater systems into compliance with public health guidelines (for example, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Water Act, or other federal or local regulations) and supplying evidence of compliance to agencies that assess fees for noncompliance.
- Providing on-site technical assistance to identify, address, and resolve system safety and security issues, resulting in a plan to meet identified needs.
- Improving the capacity and efficiency of small rural drinking water and wastewater systems by facilitating agreements between entities to share operators, bookkeepers, engineers, and other services.
- Improving coordination among federal, state, and local agencies in drinking water and wastewater management by consolidating systems to better meet local needs.
- Supporting the implementation of technical improvements to increase drinking water and wastewater safety and system reliability to meet local demand.

Evaluation

If ACF identifies additional resources to fund a federal study of the funded Rural Community Development Training and Technical Assistance for Water and Wastewater Treatment activities, the recipient will be required to participate. The study would utilize an outside nonrecipient evaluation team and would focus on the processes, implementation, progress indicators, and quality improvement of funded activities.

NOTE: Consistent with the PRA of 1995 (44 U.S.C. 3501-3521), under this NOFO, the Office of Community Services will not conduct or sponsor—and a person is not required to respond to—a collection of information covered by such Act, unless it displays a currently valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. Rural Community Development Training and Technical Assistance for Water and Wastewater Treatment will obtain OMB approval for a federal study of the funded grant activities, as appropriate.

Definitions of terms

The following definitions apply throughout this NOFO. Please review these carefully before applying:

- **governance structure:** The policies, procedures, values, and long-term planning put in place by the board of directors or other governing entity to meet the mission of an organization.
- **low-income community:** A community where at least 20% of the total population lives below the poverty line, or the median family income does not exceed 80% of the statewide median family income as outlined in the [HHS Poverty Guidelines](#).
- **region:** A cohesive geographic area that is distinguished from other areas. For the purposes of this NOFO, a region consists of multiple contiguous states within the U.S.
- **rural community:** A defined rural area with a population typically less than 10,000, with a primary focus on areas with a population of 2,500 or fewer. RCD grants may serve communities with populations over 2,500 as long as the project activities continue to meet the goals and eligibility requirements of the RCD program.
- **training:** An organized activity aimed at relaying information or instructions to improve performance or attain a required level of knowledge or skill—in this case, knowledge or skill related to operating water or wastewater facilities.
- **technical assistance:** A problem-solving service provided by a specialist that is customized or tailored to the needs of a particular organization, entity, or community. Such services may be provided onsite, by telephone, or by other means of communication.
- **wastewater:** Any water from a residence or business that has been adversely affected in quality by environmental or nonenvironmental influences.
- **water system:** A publicly or privately owned system that either:
 - Provides water for human consumption in an incorporated or unincorporated area through pipes or other constructed conveyances to at least 15 service connections, or
 - Serves an average of at least 25 people for at least 60 days a year.

This includes community water systems, non-transient non-community water systems, and transient non-community water systems.

- **wastewater system:** A publicly or privately owned system that collects, treats, and disperses wastewater generated by a residence or business.

Funding policies and limitations

General policies

We will only make awards if this program receives funding. If Congress appropriates funds for this purpose, we will move forward with the review and award process.

Support beyond the first budget period will depend on:

- Appropriation of funds.
- Satisfactory progress in meeting your project's objectives.
- A decision that continued funding is in the government's best interest.

If we receive more funding for this program, we will consider:

- Funding more applicants.
- Extending the period of performance.
- Awarding supplemental funding.

ACF does not allow funds awarded under this NOFO to support any costs related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) activities, including research in support of such initiatives, and any other initiatives that discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin or another protected characteristic. This also includes any diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives, and any discriminatory equity ideology in violation of a Federal anti-discrimination law. The definition of "discriminatory equity ideology" is in Section 2(b) of Executive Order 14190 of January 29, 2025, which can be found here: [2025-02232.pdf](#).

For guidance on additional types of costs that we restrict or do not allow, see General Provisions for Selected Items of Costs of the Uniform Guidance, [45 CFR part 75](#) (or, starting October 1, 2025, [2 CFR part 200](#)).

Program-specific limitations and policies

We do not allow the following costs under this NOFO:

- Construction.
- Purchase of real property.
- Major renovation.

Indirect costs

Indirect costs are costs you charge across more than one project and cannot be easily separated by project.

To charge indirect costs you can select one of two methods:

Method 1—Approved rate. You currently have an indirect cost rate approved by your cognizant federal agency.

Method 2—*De minimis* rate. Per [2 CFR §200.414\(f\)](#), if you **do not** have a current federal negotiated indirect cost rate (including a provisional rate), you may elect to charge a *de minimis* rate. If you choose this method, costs included in the indirect cost pool must not be charged as direct costs. This rate is 15% of modified total direct costs (MTDC). See [2 CFR 200.1](#) for the definition of MTDC. You can use this rate indefinitely.

Subawards

As the prime recipient, you must maintain a substantive role in the project. We define a substantive role as conducting funded activities and providing services that are necessary and integral to completing the project. Monitoring your subrecipient's activities alone as described in [45 CFR 75.352](#) (or, starting October 1, 2025, [2 CFR 200.332](#)) is not a substantive role.

We do not fund awards where your role primarily serves as a conduit for passing funds to other organizations unless that arrangement is authorized by statute.

If they do not have one, all subrecipients must obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) through the System for Award Management (SAM.gov).

Subrecipients must meet the [eligibility requirements](#) of this NOFO.

Salary rate limitation

The salary rate limitation in the current appropriations act applies to this program. You may not use awarded funds to pay a salary at a higher rate than the rate for Executive Level II. For the Executive Level II salary, please see [guidance from the Office of Personnel Management on executive and senior-level employee pay](#).

The salary limitation reflects a person's base salary (including any portion of the salary that is paid for with indirect costs). It does not include fringe benefits or any income the person is allowed to earn outside of the duties of the applicant organization. This salary limitation also applies to subawards, contracts, and subcontracts under an ACF grant or cooperative agreement.



Step 2:

Get Ready to Apply

In this step

Get registered	<u>15</u>
Find the application package	<u>16</u>
Learn more	<u>16</u>

Get registered

SAM.gov

You must have an active account with SAM.gov. This includes having a Unique Entity Identifier. SAM.gov registration can take several weeks. Begin that process today.

To register, go to [SAM.gov Entity Registration](#) and select Get Started. From the same page, you can also select the Entity Registration Checklist for the information you will need to register.

When you register or update your SAM.gov registration, you must agree to the [financial assistance general certifications and representations \[PDF\]](#). You must agree to those for financial assistance specifically, as opposed to contracts, because the two sets of agreements are different. You will have to maintain your registration throughout the life of any award.

Grants.gov

You must also have an active account with [Grants.gov](#). You can see step-by-step instructions at the Grants.gov [Quick Start Guide for Applicants](#).

Need help? See [Contacts and Support](#).

Find the application package

The application package has all the forms you need to apply. You can find it online. Go to [Grants Search at Grants.gov](#) and search for opportunity number HHS-2025-ACF-OCS-EF-0177. Then select the Package tab.

After you select the opportunity, we recommend that you select the Subscribe button to get updates.

If you can't use Grants.gov to download application materials, you may request them from the [grants management contact](#).

If you are also unable to apply through Grants.gov, see the section on [exemptions for paper submissions](#).

Learn more

Visit [Applying for an ACF Grant Award](#) on the ACF Grants page.



Step 3:

Prepare Your Application

In this step

Application contents and format

18

Application contents and format

Application components

You will submit two files plus the [standard forms](#) in the application package.

See requirements for [other submissions](#).

Your organization's authorized official must certify your application.

File one

To submit file one, you will use the Project Narrative Attachment form found in the Grants.gov application package for this NOFO.

This file includes:

- Table of contents.
- Project summary, one page.
- Project narrative.
- Line-item budget and budget narrative.

File two

To submit file two, you will use the Other Attachments form found in the Grants.gov application package for this NOFO.

This file includes all [attachments](#).

Standard forms

The Grants.gov application package for this NOFO includes forms beyond those required for file one and file two. Complete all of these forms and submit through Grants.gov.

See the list of [standard forms](#).

Required format

Page limit for file one and file two combined: 200 pages.

File format: Portable Document Format (PDF) is recommended, but not required. ACF supports the following file formats when you attach files to the Project Narrative Attachment form and the Other Attachments form:

Accepted file formats

- Adobe PDF (.pdf)
- Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx)
- Microsoft Excel (.xls or .xlsx)
- Microsoft PowerPoint (.ppt)
- Image formats (.JPG, .GIF, .TIFF, or .BMP only)

Document formats

Paper size: 8 ½ inches x 11 inches

Margins: 1 inch all around

Language: English

If possible, include page numbers.

Do not include external links to information you want reviewers to assess because reviewers will score the application solely on information provided in the application.

Fonts

Font: Times New Roman

Color: Black

Size: 12-point font

Footnotes and text in tables and graphics may be 10-point.

Spacing

Table of contents: Must be single-spaced

Project summary: Must be single-spaced

Project narrative: Must be double-spaced

Line-item budget and budget narrative: Can be single-spaced

Attachments: Can be single-spaced

Tables and footnotes throughout: Can be single-spaced

See [disqualification factors](#) to understand what may disqualify your application from consideration.

Table of contents

At the beginning of file one, insert a table of contents that guides a reader through the contents of both files in your application. If possible, include links to the relevant content in file one.

Project summary

Provide a one-page summary of the project description. Do not cross-reference to other parts of your application. The summary must include:

- At the top, the project title, applicant name, address, phone numbers, email addresses, and any website URL.
- A brief description of the project, including the needs and population you will address, and your proposed services.

Project narrative

The project narrative is where you address all your proposed activities. It is a critical section of your application, which we evaluate using [merit review criteria](#) and rank based on application scores. Remember that substance and measurable outcomes are more important than length. We are particularly interested in project narratives that convey strategies for achieving intended performance. In it, you must:

- Explain how the project will meet the purpose of the NOFO, as described in the [program description section](#).
- Make sure your narrative is clear, concise, and complete.
- Use cross-referencing rather than repetition.
- Be sure to include any required supporting documents noted. You generally provide these in your [attachments](#).
- Use the headings and order of the sections that follow.

Geographic location

Provide the precise physical location of your project and boundaries of the area you will serve. If you will include any subrecipients in your project that will serve specific geographic areas, include their locations as well.

Need for assistance

Identify the problems you plan to solve. These problems could be physical, economic, social, financial, institutional, etc. To do so:

- Demonstrate the need, including the nature and scope of the problem.
- You may provide supporting documentation, such as testimonials, in an application appendix.
- Include any relevant data based on planning studies or needs assessments. You may refer to them in the endnotes or footnotes.
- Use demographic data and participant or beneficiary information where you can.

Objectives

State your main objectives and any sub-objectives. Address how the objectives stated relate to the overall purpose of this program as described in the [program objectives section](#) and describe how you will achieve the objectives.

Expected outcomes

Identify the outcomes you plan to achieve from the project. Outcomes should relate to the overall program as described in the [outcomes section of the program description](#). If research is part of the proposed work, outcomes must include hypothesized results and implications of the proposed research.

Approach

Outline your action plan. Describe the scope and describe in detail of how you will accomplish your proposed project. Account for all functions or activities you identify in your application.

Explain potential obstacles and challenges to accomplishing your project goals. Explain the strategies you will use to address them.

Your plan should do all of the following:

- Describe the specific types of training and technical assistance you will provide to support managerial, operational, or technical capacity for water and wastewater operators and system administrators.
- Describe the specific efforts you will make to increase access to funding, support critical infrastructure improvements, and strengthen compliance.
- Provide a clear, well-conceived implementation plan that describes how you will execute the proposed project. The activities identified in the implementation plan must be consistent with the activities described in the [program description](#) and cover all years of the project.
- For each proposed training and technical assistance activity, include a full description consistent with the project's scope, scale, and projected outcomes.
- Describe the resources required to execute each activity, including:
 - Key individuals who will work on the project.
 - Potential obstacles and challenges to accomplishing project goals, and strategies for addressing them.
 - Any competing activities that might reduce the availability of resources for the project.

If the project includes constructing facilities, identify and explain how the construction portion of the effort will be funded and paid for with non-RCD funding.

Project timeline and milestones

Provide a timeline for your project that includes milestones. To do so:

- Organize the information by task and subtask, showing related milestones.
- Provide monthly or quarterly quantitative projections for what you plan to accomplish and by when. For example, provide the number of people you plan to serve or the number of a certain activity you plan to complete by a specific date.
- Provide target dates for activities you can't quantify.
- Cover the full period of performance in your timeline.

Organizational capacity

Provide the following information for your full project team, including the applicant organization and any cooperating partners, contractors, and subrecipients.

Staff and position data

- Include biographical sketches with degree information, resumes, and descriptions of previous project experience. These should demonstrate that the identified staff are qualified and have the appropriate time commitment to carry out the proposed project activities.
- Provide evidence that your team has the relevant experience and expertise needed to carry out your project.
- Describe your team's experience (including any partnering organizations) with administering, developing, implementing, managing, and evaluating similar projects.
- Provide evidence that your team, including partnering organizations, has the organizational capability to fulfill their roles and functions effectively.
- State clearly whether all key project staff positions are filled. In cases where a key staff person has not yet been hired, include a position description, recruitment strategy, and estimated hiring timeline.

Subaward agreements

- Disclose your plan to enter into subaward agreements. If planning subawards, describe the work each subrecipient will complete.

Relevant experience

The evidence you provide must demonstrate experience supporting small, low-income rural communities within your identified service area.

- Provide evidence of relevant experience implementing projects of similar size, scope, service area, and nature. Include evidence of relevant experience within the past five years implementing at least three previous projects focused on

leveraging funds and providing technical assistance for rural water and wastewater systems. These projects must collectively demonstrate experience in the following four areas:

- Helping small, low-income rural communities use funds to permanently benefit their community facility needs.
 - Providing training on water or wastewater systems in small, low-income rural communities to improve performance.
 - Providing technical assistance related to establishing a governance structure that supports the management of safe water and wastewater facilities.
 - Providing technical assistance related to coordinating community members to support safe water and wastewater facilities.
- You will provide some supporting information in the [attachments section](#).

Current and pending funding support

Provide a list of your current and pending funding for ongoing projects and proposals. Include all sources, such as federal, state, and local governments, public or private foundations, and for-profit organizations.

Indicate which projects and proposals require committed time from the project director, principal investigator, or other key personnel of the project you are proposing in this application.

Show the total award amount, awarding entity, and the amount of time each key staff member will devote to each project.

Plan for oversight of federal award funds and activities

You must ensure proper award oversight. The regulation that governs this oversight is [45 CFR part 75](#) (or, starting October 1, 2025, [2 CFR part 200](#)). It includes standards for:

- Financial and program management.
- Property management.
- Procurement.
- Performance and financial monitoring and reporting.
- Subrecipient monitoring and management.
- Record retention and access.
- Remedies for noncompliance.
- Prior written approval.

Describe your framework to ensure proper oversight of federal funds and activities.

Include:

- A description of the governance, policies and procedures, and systems you use for record keeping and financial management.
- A description of the procedures to identify and mitigate risks and issues. These might include audit findings, continuous performance assessment findings, and monitoring.
- The key staff who will be responsible for maintaining oversight of program activities staff and any partners or subrecipients.

Protection of sensitive or confidential information

Describe how you will collect and safeguard protected personally identifiable information and other information that is considered sensitive. Make sure your approach is consistent with applicable federal, state, local, and tribal laws regarding privacy and obligations of confidentiality. Provide:

- The methods and systems you will use to ensure that you properly handle confidential and sensitive information including any subrecipients and/or contractors.
- A plan for the disposition of such information at the end of the period of performance.

For more information, see [45 CFR 75.303\(e\)](#) (or, starting October 1, 2025, [2 CFR 200.303\(e\)](#)).

Line-item budget and budget narrative

The line-item budget and budget justification support the information you provide in the Budget Information Standard Form SF-424A.

HHS now uses the definitions for [equipment](#) and [supplies](#) in 2 CFR 200.1. The new definitions change the threshold for equipment to the lesser of the recipient's capitalization level or \$10,000 and the threshold for supplies to below that amount.

Justify the costs you ask for and provide detail, including calculations for the "object class categories" in the Budget Information Standard Form. You will provide this information for each year of the period of performance. See information on [funding periods](#).

As you develop your budget, consider:

- If the costs are necessary, reasonable, allocable, and consistent with your project's purpose and activities.

- How you calculate your costs in ways that are clear and repeatable.
- The restrictions on spending funds. See the [funding policies and limitations](#).

Please also review the Standard Form instructions.

To create your line-item budget and justification, see [detailed budget instructions on our website](#).

In general, you must:

- Indicate the method you will use for your indirect cost rate. See the [indirect costs](#) section for further information.
- Include estimation methods, quantities, unit costs, and other similar quantitative detail necessary for the calculation to be duplicated.
- For any cost sharing, include a detailed listing of any funding sources identified in Block 18 of the SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance.
- For applicants planning to use subawards, if your subaward budget is more than 50 percent of total direct costs, justify why you are subawarding that portion of the project. Explain:
 - How you plan to maintain a substantive role in the project.
 - Why you cannot achieve your goals without the subrecipients' participation.

Proprietary or personally identifiable information

In your application, you may identify salary or other proprietary information or personally identifiable information. We will remove this information from applications before they go to reviewers.

If you have an [exemption for a paper submission](#), you can protect salary information and any proprietary information by placing that information only in the original application. You can remove the information from the copies, keeping summary information.

Attachments

You will upload attachments in Grants.gov using the Other Attachments form. These attachments are included in the overall application page limit, unless it says otherwise in this section.

Indirect cost agreement

If you include indirect costs in your budget using an approved rate, include a copy of your current agreement approved by your [cognizant agency for indirect costs](#). If you use the *de minimis* rate, you do not need to submit this attachment.

See the [indirect costs](#) section for more information.

Legal proof of nonprofit status

If your organization is a nonprofit, you need to attach proof. We will accept any of the following:

- A reference to your listing in the Internal Revenue Services' (IRS) most recent list of tax-exempt organizations.
- A copy of a current tax exemption certificate from the IRS.
- A letter from your state's tax department, attorney general, or another appropriate state official saying that your group is a nonprofit and that none of your net earnings go to private shareholders or others.
- A certified copy of your certificate of incorporation or similar document. This document must show that your group is a nonprofit.
- Any of these for a parent organization. Also include a statement signed by an official of the parent group that your organization is a nonprofit affiliate.

Organizational capacity supporting information

You must attach the following information to support the information in your [organizational capacity](#) section:

- Organizational charts, including all partners.
- Resumes, biographical sketches, or curricula vitae for all key personnel.
 - Resumes should be no more than two pages and identify the percentage of time that staff is available for the project.
- List of your board of directors.
- Financial statements adhering to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), if available, for up to the two most recently completed fiscal years (this requirement does not apply to start-up organizations).
- Audit reports or statements from certified public accountants or licensed public accountants, if available, for up to the two most recently completed fiscal years (this requirement does not apply to start-up organizations).
- Audit summary report including auditor's opinion, if applicable.
- Copy or description of your organization's fiscal control and accountability procedures.
- Copy or description of your organization's personnel policies.
- Information on compliance with federal, state, and local government standards.

Third-party agreements

You must submit agreements with all third parties involved in the project. Third parties include subrecipients, contractors, and other cooperating entities. Third-party agreements include letters of commitment, memoranda of understanding, and memoranda of agreement. We do not consider general letters of support to be third-party agreements.

Any such agreement must:

- Describe each party's roles and responsibilities for project activities.
- Describe the support and resources that the third party is committing to the proposed project.
- Be signed by the person in the third-party organization with the authority to make such commitments.
- If the agreement covers a loan transaction, include:
 - The purposes for the loan.
 - Interest rates and other fees.
 - Terms of the loan.
 - Repayment schedules.
 - Collateral security.
 - Default and collection procedures.
 - The signatures of the authorized officials of the lender and the borrower.

Letters of support

Attach statements from community, public, or commercial leaders that support your project. At minimum, each letter of support must identify the person writing the letter, the organization they represent, the date, and their reasons for supporting the project.

Standard forms

You will need to complete some other required standard forms. Upload the following forms at Grants.gov. You can find them in the NOFO [application package](#) or review them and their instructions at [Grants.gov Forms](#).

Forms	Submission requirement
Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)	With the application.
Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)	With the application.
Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)	With the application.
Key Contacts	With the application.
Grants.gov Lobbying Form	With the application or before award.
Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL)	If applicable based on instructions, with the application or before award.
Project/Performance Site Location(s) (SF-P/PSL)	With the application. Cite your primary location and up to 29 additional performance sites.

Important: public information

When filling out your SF-424 form, pay attention to Box 15: Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project.

We share what you put there with [USAspending](#). This is where the public goes to learn how the federal government spends their money.

Instead of just a title, insert a short description of your project and what it will do.

[See instructions and examples.](#)



Step 4:

Learn About Review and Award

In this step

Application review	<u>30</u>
Award notices	<u>37</u>

Application review

Initial review

We will review your application to make sure that it meets the responsiveness requirements listed in the [disqualification factors](#) section. If your application does not meet these requirements, we will disqualify it and we will not move it to the merit review phase.

We will let you know if your application is disqualified within 30 days of the application deadline. You won't receive any notice from ACF if your application failed Grants.gov validation checks.

If you submit more than two files in addition to your forms, we will remove the extra files. We will let you know if this happens.

We will also remove blurred or illegible pages and any file formats that are not supported.

We will not review any pages that exceed the page limit.

If your application fails to adhere to ACF's NOFO formatting, font, and page limitation requirements, we will adjust your application by removing pages from the application. We will remove the pages before the merit review and will not send them to reviewers.

If we do so, we will send you a letter after we make awards to notify you that we amended your application.

Merit review

A panel reviews all applications that pass the initial review. The panel members use the criteria in this section.

Our reviewers typically are not federal employees. See the section on [proprietary and personally identifiable information](#).

Criteria

Criterion	Total number of points = 100
1. Objectives and need for assistance	5 points
2. Expected outcomes	10 points
3. Project approach	20 points
4. Staff and position data (organizational capacity I)	15 points
5. Relevant experience (organizational capacity II)	25 points
6. Plan for oversight of federal award funds and activities	5 points
7. Letters of support	5 points
8. Budget and budget justification	15 points

1. Objectives and need for assistance

Maximum points: 5

The reviewers will assess how well you establish a clear need for the project, as outlined in the [need for assistance](#) and [objectives](#) sections of the project narrative.

Reviewers will assess how well you:

- Identify a project goal and location aligned with the RCD program's goal to support the development and maintenance of water and wastewater systems in small, low-income rural communities.
- Describe the region being served that will be impacted by the proposed project.
- Identify a problem that will be solved by the proposed project, including the target populations or communities impacted by the problem who will benefit from the project within the region the organization serves.
- Show a need for the project and provide details about the nature and scope of the problem, including water and wastewater treatment systems, management

training, and technical assistance needs of the small, low-income rural communities you will serve and how the project will address them.

2. Expected outcomes

Maximum points: 10

The reviewers will assess how well you show that the proposed project will produce permanent and measurable results, as outlined in the [expected outcomes](#) section of the project narrative.

Reviewers will assess how well your application demonstrates how the proposed project will result in:

- Enhanced ability to identify and address water and wastewater-related issues, including infrastructure and accessibility needs.
- Improved access to water supply and wastewater services for families with low incomes.
- Sustained affordability of water and wastewater services in rural communities with low incomes.
- Comprehensive training for water operators to ensure compliance with federal and local regulations.
- Strengthened local capacity, governance structures, and expertise to establish and maintain necessary facilities.
- Increased economic opportunities for rural communities with low incomes by improving access to basic water and wastewater services.
- Effective use of technical assistance to attract additional public and private resources.
- Enhanced coordination of federal, state, and local agencies and financing programs to benefit low-income communities.
- Support for communities in establishing financial stability and reserves to maintain water and wastewater systems.

3. Project approach

Maximum points: 20

The reviewers will assess how well you show that the project is likely to succeed and is ready to be implemented at the time of award, as outlined in the [approach](#) section of the project narrative.

Reviewers will assess how well you:

- Provide a clear and well-conceived overall approach to the project, with a sound implementation plan consistent with the expectations described in the [program description](#).
- Describe specific types of training and technical assistance you will provide to support managerial, operational, or technical capacity for water and wastewater operators and system administrators.
- Cover all years of the project, including a quarterly timeline and specific milestones to be achieved.
- Describe a plan that addresses the needs of the target populations and communities within the specific region.
- Identify critical issues or potential problems that might impact the project negatively and how project objectives can be reasonably attained despite such potential problems.
- Show that all activities to be funded by the award are necessary for the project's success and are consistent with the project's scope, scale, and projected outcomes.
- Identify any competing activities that might reduce the availability of the resources for this project.
- For projects that include construction of facilities, identify and explain how the construction portion of the effort will be funded and paid for with non-RCD funding.

4. Staff and position data

Maximum points: 15

The reviewer will assess how well you demonstrate that the identified staff are qualified to carry out the project, as outlined in the [organizational capacity](#) section of the project narrative.

Reviewers will assess how well you:

- Show that the identified staff are qualified to carry out the proposed project activities. The information you submit should include biographical sketches, degree information, resumes, and descriptions of previous project experience.
- Show that key staff can make an appropriate time commitment and have experience in supervision, finance, business development and management, and working with the target population. The discussion of staff experience must be detailed enough to allow reviewers to assess whether individuals' skills and experience will enable them to fulfill the tasks assigned to them.

- State clearly whether all key project staff positions are filled. In cases where a key staff person has not yet been hired, reviewers will assess your included position description, recruitment strategy, and estimated hiring timeline.

5. Relevant experience

Maximum points: 25

The reviewer will assess how well you demonstrate that your organization, along with any partners or subaward recipients, have the competency and overall experience to carry out the project, as outlined in the [organizational capacity](#) section of the project narrative.

Reviewers will assess how well you:

- Describe at least three previous projects undertaken within the last 5 years that demonstrate the ability to:
 - Help small, low-income rural communities use funds to permanently benefit their community facility needs.
 - Provide training related to water or wastewater systems in small, low-income rural communities to improve performance.
 - Provide technical assistance in establishing a governance structure that supports the management of safe water and wastewater facilities.
 - Provide technical assistance for coordinating community members to support safe water and wastewater facilities.
- Provide evidence that your experience supporting small, low-income communities is in a specific and clearly defined region.

6. Plan for oversight of federal award funds and activities

Maximum points: 5

The reviewer will assess how well you demonstrate sufficient capacity to successfully manage federal funds, as outlined in the [plan for oversight of federal award funds and activities](#) section of the project narrative.

Reviewers will assess how well you:

- Include a plan showing that you can responsibly manage the proposed federal funds and adequately protect funds through a financial management system that complies with 45 CFR Part 75.302.
- Identify staff responsible for overseeing program activities, staff, and partners and describe procedures and policies for overseeing staff, partners, and contractors.
- Describe organizational records systems that relate financial data to performance data by identifying the source and application of federal funds to:

- Show effective control over and accountability for funds.
- Compare outlays with budget amounts.
- Provide accounting records supported by source documentation.

7. Letters of support

Maximum points: 5

The reviewer will assess the extent to which the application demonstrates sufficient public support to successfully carry out the project, as outlined in the attachments section under [letters of support](#).

Reviewers will assess whether you include letters of support that:

- Describe government and community support for the project.
- Note any specific relationship the supporter might have with the applicant.
- Reference knowledge of the applicant's experience and qualifications in water and wastewater treatment.

8. Budget and budget justification

Maximum points: 15

The reviewer will assess the extent to which the budget for the project demonstrates you have sufficient funds available and that the planned expenditures are necessary, appropriate, and reasonable for the success of the project, as outlined in the [line-item budget and budget narrative](#) section.

Reviewers will assess how well you:

- Show that the amount of funds available for the project (RCD and non-RCD) matches the effort necessary to accomplish the activities, goals, and objectives of the project.
- Show that the financial estimates are grounded in solid assumptions and the necessity, reasonableness, and allocation of the proposed costs. Include a budget and budget justification that clearly links the proposed expenditures to the proposed activities necessary for accomplishing the project.
- Within the budget narrative, show in sufficient detail the appropriateness and reasonableness of the line items proposed and that the proposed budget is appropriate for accomplishing the proposed project. The application budget shows that program income is not necessary to meet the funding needs for implementing the project design.

We do not consider voluntary cost sharing during merit review.

Risk review

Before making an award, we review the risk that you will mismanage federal funds or fail to complete the project objectives. We need to make sure you've handled any past federal awards well and demonstrated sound business practices. We use SAM.gov [Responsibility/Qualification](#) to check this history for all awards likely to be over \$250,000.

If we find a significant risk, we may choose not to fund your application or to place specific conditions on the award.

For more details, see [45 CFR 75.205](#) (or, starting October 1, 2025, [2 CFR 200.206](#)).

Selection process

When making funding decisions, we consider:

- Merit review results. These are key in making decisions but are not the only factor.
- Organizations serving emerging, unserved, or underserved populations.
- The larger portfolio of agency-funded projects by considering geographic distribution.
- The past performance of the applicant.
- The application's compliance with this NOFO's prohibition on using funds awarded under this NOFO to support any costs related to:
 - Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) activities, including research in support of such initiatives,
 - Any other initiatives that discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin or another protected characteristic, and
 - Any diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives, and any discriminatory equity ideology in violation of a Federal anti-discrimination law. The definition of "discriminatory equity ideology" is in Section 2(b) of Executive Order 14190 of January 29, 2025, which can be found here: [2025-02232.pdf](#).

We may:

- Fund applications in whole or in part.
- Fund applications at a lower amount than requested.
- Decide not to allow a prime recipient to subaward if they may not be able to monitor and manage subrecipients properly.
- Decide not to fund a project with high start-up costs or unreasonably high operating costs.

- Choose not to fund applicants with management or financial problems.
- Designate your application as “approved but unfunded” if it was successful but there was not sufficient funding to make an award. You may receive funding if additional funds become available within the fiscal year.
- Choose to fund no applications under this NOFO.

We will not fund:

- A [disqualified application](#).
- An incomplete application.

Award notices

How we make awards

If you are successful, we will email or transmit through our grant systems a Notice of Award (NoA) to your authorized official. We will email you if your application is disqualified or unsuccessful.

The NoA is the only official award document. The NoA tells you about the amount of the award, important dates, and the terms and conditions you need to follow. Until you receive the NoA, you have not received an award. Project costs that you incur before you receive a NoA are at your risk.

By drawing down funds, you accept the terms and conditions of the award. The award incorporates the requirements of the program and funding authorities, the grant regulations, the Grants Policy Statement (GPS), and the NOFO.

If you want to know more about NoA contents, go to [Notice of Award at ACF's website](#).



Step 5:

Submit Your Application

In this step

Application submission and deadlines	<u>39</u>
Application checklist	<u>41</u>

Application submission and deadlines

Deadlines

Application

Due on September 5, 2025.

- For electronic submissions, the due time is 11:59 p.m. ET.
- If you receive an exemption from electronic submission, the due time is 4:30 p.m. ET. See the section on [exemptions for paper submissions](#).

Grants.gov creates a date and time record when it receives the application. If you submit the same application more than once, we will accept only the last on-time submission.

The grants management officer may extend an application due date based on emergency situations such as documented natural disasters or a verifiable widespread disruption of electric or mail service.

Submission methods

Grants.gov

You must submit your application through Grants.gov unless we give you an exemption for a paper submission. See information on [getting registered](#).

For instructions on how to submit in Grants.gov, see the [Quick Start Guide for Applicants](#). Make sure your application passes the Grants.gov validation checks. Do not encrypt, zip, or password-protect any files. We encourage you to leave yourself plenty of time to upload documents.

See [Contacts and Support](#) if you need help.

Issues with federal systems

If you experience a systems issue with Grants.gov or SAM.gov, please refer to [ACF's Policy for Applicants Experiencing Federal Systems Issues \[PDF\]](#).

Exemptions for paper submissions

We need to give you an exemption before you can apply on paper. See the [ACF Policy for Requesting an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission \[PDF\]](#).

Once we have approved your exemption, download your forms package under the Package tab in Grants.gov.

To submit your application, mail it to:

Tim Chappelle

Administration for Children and Families, Office of Community Services

OCS Operations Center

HHS-2025-ACF-OCS-EF-0177

1401 Mercantile Lane, Suite 401

Largo, MD 20774

Follow these requirements when you submit your paper application:

- Print your application and all copies one-sided.
- Submit one original and two copies of the complete application, including all required forms.
- Submit both the original and additional copies in a single package. If you plan to submit more than one application under this NOFO or others, you must submit them separately. Clearly label each package with the NOFO title and funding opportunity number. Your authorized organization official must sign the application. The original application must include an original signature.

Other submissions

Intergovernmental review

You will need to submit application information for intergovernmental review under [Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs](#). Under this order, states may design their own processes for obtaining, reviewing, and commenting on some applications. Some states have this process and others don't.

To find out your state's approach, see the [list of state single points of contact \[PDF\]](#). If you find a contact on the list for your state, contact them as soon as you can to learn their process. If you do not find a contact for your state, you don't need to do anything further.

This requirement never applies to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes or tribal organizations.

Application checklist

Make sure that you have everything you need to apply.

Component	Grants.gov form	Included in page limit?
File one: Narratives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Table of contents <input type="checkbox"/> Project summary <input type="checkbox"/> Project narrative <input type="checkbox"/> Line-item budget and budget narrative 	Use the Project Narrative Attachment form.	Yes Yes Yes Yes
File two: Attachments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Indirect cost agreement <input type="checkbox"/> Legal proof of nonprofit status <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational capacity supporting information <input type="checkbox"/> Third-party agreements <input type="checkbox"/> Letters of support 	Insert each in the Other Attachments form.	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes
Standard forms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424) <input type="checkbox"/> Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A) <input type="checkbox"/> Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B) <input type="checkbox"/> Key Contacts <input type="checkbox"/> Grants.gov Lobbying Form <input type="checkbox"/> Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL) <input type="checkbox"/> Project/Performance Site Location(s) (SF-P/PSL) 	Upload using each required form.	No No No No No No No



Step 6:

Learn What Happens After Award

In this step

Post-award requirements and administration [43](#)

Post-award requirements and administration

Administrative and national policy requirements

There are important rules you'll need to follow if you get an award. You must follow:

- All terms and conditions in the Notice of Award, including the [ACF Standard Terms and Conditions](#) and, if applicable, any program-specific terms and conditions. We incorporate this NOFO by reference.
- The rules listed in [45 CFR part 75](#), Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for HHS Awards in effect at the time of award and any updates, or any superseding regulations.
 - Effective October 1, 2024, HHS adopted the following superseding provisions:
 - [2 CFR 200.1](#), Definitions, Modified Total Direct Cost.
 - [2 CFR 200.1](#), Definitions, Equipment.
 - [2 CFR 200.1](#), Definitions, Supplies.
 - [2 CFR 200.313\(e\)](#), Equipment, Disposition.
 - [2 CFR 200.314\(a\)](#), Supplies.
 - [2 CFR 200.320](#), Methods of procurement to be followed.
 - [2 CFR 200.333](#), Fixed amount subawards.
 - [2 CFR 200.344](#), Closeout.
 - [2 CFR 200.414\(f\)](#), Indirect (F&A) costs.
 - [2 CFR 200.501](#), Audit requirements.
 - Effective October 1, 2025, HHS will adopt the remaining 2 CFR part 200 provisions and the HHS-specific modifications located in 2 CFR part 300.
- The HHS [Grants Policy Statement \(GPS\) \[PDF\]](#). This document has terms and conditions tied to your award. If there are any exceptions to the GPS, they'll be listed in your Notice of Award.
- All federal statutes and regulations relevant to federal financial assistance, including those highlighted in the [HHS Administrative and National Policy Requirements \[PDF\]](#) and the [ACF Administrative and National Policy Requirements](#).
- [45 CFR Part 87 Appendix B, Equal Treatment for Faith-Based Organizations](#).

- Applicable program statute and regulations at Section 680(a)(3)(B) of the CSBG Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. 9921(a)(3)(B)).

Reporting

As a recipient, you will have to submit performance and financial reports. To learn more about reporting, see [Reporting at the ACF website](#).

- Performance report form: ACF-OGM-PPR
 - Performance report frequency: Semiannually
- Financial report form: SF-425 FFR
 - Financial report frequency: Semiannually



Contacts and Support

In this step

Agency contacts	<u>46</u>
Grants.gov	<u>46</u>
SAM.gov	<u>46</u>
Reference websites	<u>46</u>
Paperwork Reduction Act disclaimer	<u>47</u>

Agency contacts

Program

Olivia Barfield

ocstech@reviewops.org

Grants management

Tim Chappelle

ocstech@reviewops.org

Grants.gov

Grants.gov provides 24/7 support. You can call 1-800-518-4726 or email support@grants.gov. Hold on to your ticket number.

SAM.gov

If you need help, you can call 1-866-606-8220 or live chat with the [Federal Service Desk](#).

Reference websites

- [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\)](#)
- [Administration for Children and Families \(ACF\)](#)
- [Grants.gov](#)
- [Applying for an ACF Grant Award](#)
- [Grants.gov Accessibility Information](#)
- [Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\)](#)
- [United States Code \(U.S.C.\)](#)
- [Office of Community Services \(OCS\)](#)
- [Award Terms and Conditions](#) (see also the [ACF Standard Terms and Conditions \[PDF\]](#))
- [ACF Administrative and National Policy Requirements](#)
- [ACF Property Guidance](#)

Paperwork Reduction Act disclaimer

As required by the Paperwork Reduction Act, 44 U.S.C. 3501-3521, the public reporting burden for the project description (project narrative, line-item budget, and justification) is estimated to average 60 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering, and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection information. The project description information collection is approved under OMB control number 0970-0139, which expires March 31, 2026. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Modifications

Modification Description	Updated Date