



# CENTER FOR CREATIVE LAND RECYCLING

RECLAIM. CONNECT. TRANSFORM.

## How to Get Started on Your EPA Brownfield Grants NOW

US EPA Brownfield grants are often a significant source of funding for the assessment and cleanup of sites with potential environmental contamination. This year, historic levels of funding from the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law \(BIL\)](#) means more grants and significantly larger grant awards, making it a good investment to submit an application. In our 20 years of experience [reviewing draft EPA brownfield grant applications](#), the Center for Creative Land Recycling (CCLR) has found that those who get started early (and we mean 6-12 months prior) have a greater chance of success. Keep reading for our Top Three Tips for getting started on your application now!

### The Basics of EPA Brownfield Grants

Grants given out by the U.S. EPA Brownfields Program cover an array of planning, assessment, and cleanup activities on ***properties with potential or perceived contamination***. This is an important factor because it means ***basically any property with a previous use can utilize brownfields funds***. EPA brownfields grants are divided into several types and may be referred to as MARC, ARC, or MAC depending on the grant types available in a fiscal year:

- **Multipurpose:** funding to conduct a range of eligible assessment and cleanup activities at one or more brownfield sites in a target area.
- **Assessment Grants:** funding for brownfield inventories, planning, environmental assessments, and community outreach

- **Revolving Loan Fund (RLF):** funding to capitalize loans that are used to clean up brownfield sites.
- **Cleanup:** funding to carry out cleanup activities at brownfield sites owned by the applicant.

EPA also administers [Job Training grants](#) and [State and Tribal Response Program grants](#), which will not be the primary focus of this article; however, you can find more information by clicking on the links above.

Submitted applications are first evaluated for whether or not they pass the **threshold criteria** for applicant and site eligibility. Evaluate the threshold criteria for your type of grant to ensure that any issue around ownership, site accessibility, liability, and All Appropriate Inquiry has been satisfied. [Contact your Regional EPA Brownfields office](#) with any questions about the threshold criteria. All applicants also need a Unique Entity ID through SAM.gov. View the Additional Resources section at the end of the blog for information on how to apply for a SAMS.gov number and other items you will need in advance to be eligible for a grant. If they pass threshold, they are then graded in a national competition and scored on a point system.

There is no requirement that a certain number of projects in each state or EPA region are funded. Over the years, applications have had an average success rate of approximately 30%. The [FAQs for each fiscal year](#) have a great deal of background information which is applicable year to year including logistics of submitting an application, definitions, and applicant eligibility. We recommend you review both the FAQs and [guidelines from previous years](#), as well as past successful grants (see examples in Additional Resource section at the end of the blog) to get a sense of what it takes to submit an application.

Once the guidelines are released, EPA staff is unable to answer most questions regarding the solicitation – but CCLR can! Send us your draft application for [our review](#), a service that is completely free for communities in EPA Regions 9 and 10. Applications reviewed by CCLR are on average twice as successful as applications overall. Start working on your grant application **now** so you have time to send it to us for expert review – there is no limit to the amount of drafts!

## What We Know About the Upcoming Round

The previous round of grants was for FY2022, with applications submitted in December 2021 and awards that were just announced on May 12, 2022.

The [latest information from EPA](#) suggests that the next round for Multipurpose, Assessment, RLF, and Cleanup (MARC) grants will open in September 2022, with applications due in November. For Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) grants, the non-competitive solicitation for additional funding closed on March 18, 2022. All of the funding for the MARC grants are from a combination of the regular annual appropriation and the new Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).

Early indications are that this round will be significantly different from past MARC grant solicitations. Below are a few highlights about what we know so far:

- **Size of grants:** Awards may be 10 to 50 times larger than in previous years, depending on the type of grant. EPA has announced the possibility of grants up to \$10M for Multipurpose and Assessment grants and \$5M for Cleanup and RLF grants.
- **No cost share requirement:** EPA has indicated there will be no cost share requirement for MARC grants. In previous years, there has been a 20% requirement for Cleanup and RLF grants and \$40,000 for Multipurpose grants.
- **RLF solicitations:** There is an [open solicitation for existing grantees](#) to request additional funds. EPA has also indicated that an RLF solicitation will

be included with Multipurpose, Assessment, and Cleanup grants in the fall. This is unusual as generally only three out of four types of grants are open at a time.

Though it's hard to know the number of grants that will be awarded or how great demand will be, the EPA grants are generally very competitive, with only about a third of applications awarded. With such large grants at stake this year, it is in your best interest to start early to write your best application ever!

### **CCLR's Top 3 Advance Planning Tips for a Successful Application**

#### **1. Gather Your Champion Team**

Seasoned brownfielders know they can't complete redevelopment projects alone. Whether or not you will need to include a Memorandum of Agreement or names and affiliations of community partners in your grant, creating your team intentionally will absolutely pay off – especially in the Programmatic Capability section of the application. Take the time now to connect with potential partners (internally and externally) who can help you throughout the life of your project. Identify roles and responsibilities (project manager, finance, outreach, etc.) and gather info about their backgrounds, experience and skillsets, which speak to their qualifications for administering and managing the grant should it be awarded. Meet regularly as a team and build your common vision and outcomes for the project.

It is also time to consider who will be the project's "champion." Over decades of experience in brownfields redevelopment, CCLR has witnessed the success of projects that have one key point person who is committed to moving the project forward. Projects often stall when the team isn't in place or there is no clear champion whose vision drives success. The champion's role is integral to success.

#### **2. Plan the Big Picture**

A good MARC grant application depends heavily on a compelling narrative with a defined “story arc”. Even though grant narratives may seem like dry text, yours shouldn’t be. The application is the chance to tell a compelling story of not only your project, but also the community and how it could benefit from the completion of the project. How did the property come to be a brownfield and what has the impact been on the economy, environment and well-being of the community? What steps have you already taken? How will receiving the funds help the project move forward and leverage other funding opportunities? Who will benefit from the project and how will it make a difference in the community? Discuss these key points with your team and write down succinct answers that will be easy to insert into the appropriate section of the application when the time comes. How the project affects the community may vary widely; make sure you capture many different perspectives, especially those experiencing environmental justice issues.

While organizing your story, take the time to organize your supporting documentation. Ensure both you and the rest of the team have access to the project materials. Though the exact requirements for applications change slightly year to year, you can get a good sense of what kinds of materials and data you will need by reviewing [solicitations](#) and the [extensive FAQ](#) from previous years. Remember to look at local and regional planning documents such as comprehensive plans, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) or other documents that illustrate how the project will affect the larger goals of the community, region and possibly state goals.

### **3. Communicate the Need**

One of the most important pieces of the grant narrative is the “Community Need” section. It is one of the most heavily weighted in the scoring for previous rounds, making up approximately 40% of total points available. You must show that the project will change the community for the better and highlight how it ties into community goals or other plans previously created by the community. Part of your story narrative will fit into this section. What would happen if an award was not

received? Can the community show that it has made efforts to “move the needle”, but has reached a point where it can make no more headway unless it receives funding? We highly recommend reviewing [successful grant applications from previous years](#) to get a sense of how applicants addressed community need (as well as the other sections!)

With a renewed national prioritization of environmental justice, we anticipate even more prioritization of funding for communities where the need is greatest. How will the project support environmental justice communities that disproportionately feel the impacts of past site uses? How will this project address or help to address equity and social issues which have historically been impacted by the property?

Metrics are crucial in communicating the need and impact to address environmental justice. You will need to share environmental, social, demographic, and health indicators that show significant need for mitigation of contamination as well as a lack of funding. You must have metrics to back up any claims about the community or impacted populations. Some key metrics include demographics of the impacted area, focusing on children, seniors, minorities, and low income communities; instances of disease greater than average; high levels of poverty or unemployment, residential proximity to a site and other metrics showing historical or current land use that is detrimental to the community. Familiarize yourself with [EPA’s EJScreen: Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool](#), [American Community Survey](#), and other data sources to quickly find statistics that support your narrative after the solicitation is launched.

## **Additional Resources**

Despite the many changes of this cycle, there are still many activities that you can begin now to get a head start and have the best chance of success. Following the tips above will give you a great start. EPA and CCLR have also created a number of

resources which highlight what you can get started on before the guidelines for this round are out.

Don't forget that CCLR is available to answer questions **now** and to review your grant applications after the guidelines have been released! Grant applications reviewed by CCLR have twice the success rate of applications overall – CCLR had a 95% rate of success with the FY22 awardees recently announced. [Contact us today](#).

- [Successful grant applications from previous years](#): Highly recommended to get a sense of how successful applicants addressed, explained and presented information in the various sections of the application – this cannot be stressed enough, especially if you are not well versed in grant writing.
- **Schedule a debrief**: If you applied unsuccessfully in previous rounds, schedule a call with EPA for insights on what you can do better the next time you apply. [Contact your Regional Brownfields office](#) for more information. Additionally, CCLR can also take a look to provide additional insights and suggestions.
- [Getting Started Early](#): EPA's guide to getting started early expands on many of the points touched on here. Most successful grantees have gone through numerous iterations and continuously review it to see how it can be improved and strengthened.
- [FAQs from previous years](#): Extensive list of the most frequently asked questions.
- review to ensure you can comply with the pre-award requirements, including creation of a work plan prior to signing the Cooperative Agreement.
- [EPA EJScreen: Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool](#): Tool for finding data on the environmental justice areas surrounding your project, including pollution and sources, socioeconomic indicators, health disparities and more
- [MARC Grant solicitations from previous years](#): Review the closed solicitation guidelines to get a sense of what the requirements are for

applications, especially ensuring that all threshold criteria are met. No sense in putting a ton of time into an application and then realize the project doesn't meet them

- [FY22 EPA ARC Grant Writing Webinar](#): Watch the latest webinar to learn about the grants in a video format. It might be for FY22, but the information around the actual writing is still pertinent and valuable.
- [Programmatic Requirements for Brownfield Grants](#): This document covers several important regulations that grant recipients must comply with after their grant is awarded. Evaluate these requirements to ensure you have the capacity to comply with all of them

### **Unique Entity ID (UEID) through SAM.gov.**

1. If your entity is already registered in SAM.gov, you are automatically assigned a UEID following account validation.
2. If you register your entity in SAM after April 4, 2022, entity validation will take place internally in SAM, and a DUNS number will not be required.

### Resources:

1. [US General Services Administration Presentation on Transition](#)
2. [US General Services Administration Webinar on Transition](#)
3. [FSD.gov Help for the Transition from UEI \(DUNS\) to UEI \(SAM\)](#)
4. [How Grants.gov is Handling the Transition](#)