



CITY OF HARRISONBURG  
**FINANCE  
& PURCHASING**

409 SOUTH MAIN STREET, 3RD FLOOR  
HARRISONBURG, VA 22801

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**To: Ande Banks, City Manager**

**From: Luke Morgan, Grants and Programs Analyst; Keith Thomas, Environmental and Sustainability Manager**

**Subject: Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grant Program**

**Date: July 15, 2024**

**Summary:**

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Environmental and Climate Justice Community Change Grant Program (Community Change Grants or CCGs) is funded by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and will support community-driven projects that address climate challenges, reduce pollution, and strengthen communities through thoughtful implementation. City staff plan to apply to the CCG program for a minimum of \$1 million to support the environmental and sustainability education of disadvantaged populations in the City, to implement a comprehensive community engagement strategy to receive community feedback on the City's Environmental Action Plan (EAP), and to incorporate the community's feedback into the development of the EAP's action plans and targets. The EPA requires all applicants to have a Statutory Partner formalized by an official agreement in order to apply. City staff have identified Church World Service as the Statutory Partner due to this organization's mission and communities with which it works. City staff have also identified several potential collaborating entities to strengthen the grant application. While applications are accepted by a rolling deadline until November 21, 2024, City staff plan to apply by August 15, 2024, to provide time to receive feedback from the EPA.

**Background:**

CCGs stem from the IRA, which established the Environmental and Climate Justice Program (ECJP). Under the ECJP, the EPA received \$3 billion to help disadvantaged communities address a range of environmental and climate justice issues. The Community Change Grants are the final and most comprehensive part of the EPA's implementation of ECJP IRA funding.

The EPA plans to award approximately \$2 billion through CCGs, subject to funding availability, the quality of applications received, EPA priorities, and other considerations. Applications will be evaluated under two separate tracks:

- **Track I: Community-Driven Investments for Change** will focus on multi-faceted applications with Climate Action and Pollution Reduction Strategies to improve environmental, climate, and resilience conditions in disadvantaged communities over three years. Awards under Track I are expected to be \$10-20 million each and cannot exceed \$20 million.
- **Track II: Meaningful Engagement for Equitable Governance** will support the engagement of disadvantaged communities in governmental processes to advance environmental and climate justice over three years. Awards under Track II are expected to be \$1-3 million each, cannot exceed \$3 million, and require no matching funds.

City staff plan to apply for a CCG under Track II – Meaningful Engagement for Equitable Governance, requesting approximately \$1 million. Track II projects aim to break down barriers to community participation in government processes affecting environmental and climate justice. The EPA emphasizes that applications should focus on providing disadvantaged communities with information about issues that impact them directly while creating mechanisms for the government to gather input to ensure community needs inform decision-making and are integrated into government processes and policies. Effective projects should involve partnerships between community organizations, governments, philanthropic organizations, the private sector, and third-party facilitators and evaluators. Any funded project will have a three-year implementation period.



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Due to its participation in the Community Connectors Grant Program, the City is eligible for pro bono technical assistance on the CCG application from the Environmental Protection Network (EPN). City staff has requested technical assistance from the EPN for application review prior to submission.

### **Statutory Partner**

Under the CCG program, the City is not eligible to apply independently. The CCG program requires all applications to include a statutory partnership composed of one Lead Applicant and one Statutory Partner, which must be a nonprofit Community-Based Organization (CBO). As the Lead Applicant, the City will enter into a subaward with the Statutory Partner if it is awarded a grant. After careful consideration, the City has chosen to work with Church World Service Harrisonburg as the Statutory Partner due to their nonprofit status, capacity to manage federal funding, and mission of serving disadvantaged communities.

### **Collaborating Entities**

To ensure effective grant performance and meet the objectives of the Community Change Grants, the City will rely on subawards to other organizations to implement and perform specific grant project activities identified in the application. These organizations, including the Statutory Partners, are collectively referred to as Collaborating Entities. The City has contacted multiple potential Collaborating Entities and is working to outline the scope of these collaborations. Below are the unconfirmed Collaborating Entities City staff have contacted so far:

- Harrisonburg City Public Schools
- NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center
- COSPU
- Climate Action Alliance of the Valley
- The Sierra Club
- NENA

### **Proposed Project Scope**

In developing the proposed project scope, City staff focused on the question: “How does Harrisonburg reach its Community Goals and develop and implement its Environmental Action Plan while building an equitable and inclusive city-wide response by 2050?” Staff propose a project with three main objectives:

#### **1. Develop a Comprehensive Community Education Program**

Conduct community engagement to assess residents’ understanding of their personal actions’ impact on environmental change and educate them on making appropriate changes. Effective community education will require research into effective communication tools and messaging preferences within the community to inform program and material development. Education efforts will incorporate climate change/environmental education for underserved communities, utilizing high-quality storytelling and visualizations. The support of the CBO and other collaborating entities will be crucial to reach disadvantaged communities and ensure the trustworthiness of the messaging.

#### **2. Implement a Comprehensive Community Engagement Effort**

Conduct a comprehensive assessment to understand the specific concerns and priorities of disadvantaged communities regarding environmental and sustainability issues, using surveys, focus groups, and interviews to gather input directly from community members. This assessment will include a public meeting for each Focus Area in the EAP and Community Goals, with materials translated into multiple languages and necessary equipment and services to support outreach. Grant funds can be used to compensate participants for their time. A consultant will be procured to assist with community engagement implementation, organizing and managing outreach. Cultural Competency and Sensitivity Training will be developed for City staff to ensure appropriate engagement with community members.

#### **3. Incorporate the Community in Developing Action Plans and Setting Targets**



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Using feedback from the community engagement process, the consultant team will work with City staff, the CBO, and Collaborating Entities to develop a plan mapping the City's actions and pathways to reach the Community Goals and EAP targets. The plan will consider best practices for local government strategies and utilize modeling to estimate impacts of strategies, identifying scientifically based goals, potential projects, and policy changes benefiting disadvantaged communities. The plan and a prioritization framework for recommended actions will be presented to City Council for approval and adoption.

### **Application Timeline**

Applications to the CCG program are due on November 21, 2024; however, the EPA is accepting applications on a rolling basis until the final due date. Applicants who submit early enough can receive feedback and an opportunity to revise their application and resubmit if their project was not awarded following their first submission. The City's proposed application timeline is as follows:

<b>June 3 – 7:</b>	City staff meet to develop project scope and identify potential CEs
<b>June 10 – 14:</b>	Staff solicit feedback on scope from CWS and CEs
<b>June 17-21:</b>	Incorporate feedback from CWS and CEs into the City's scope
<b>June 24 – 28:</b>	Final meeting with CWS before August to solicit feedback on scope
<b>July 1 – 22:</b>	City staff develop application documents with partners
<b>July 23:</b>	Informational presentation to City Council
<b>July 23 – August 1:</b>	Finalize application documents
<b>August 1:</b>	Submit application to the EPA
<b>August – October:</b>	Potential revisions if not awarded
<b>November 21:</b>	Final application deadline