Applying for a Technical Assistance Grant (TAG): Steps and Tips for Completing an Application

Introduction

A Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) can help your community participate in Superfund cleanup decision-making. An initial grant of up to $50,000 is available to qualified community groups. This funding enables community groups to hire their own technical advisor to interpret and explain technical reports, site conditions, and EPA's proposed actions. TAG technical advisors also can help you comment on a range of cleanup issues and activities, including redevelopment and reuse, public health concerns, and site five-year reviews. Such independent technical assistance helps the community voice its concerns and preferences on site issues and participate more substantively in site decisions.

If you are interested in applying for a TAG, the first step is to contact your Regional TAG Coordinator to determine if the site is currently eligible for a TAG or if there is already a TAG awarded before spending time completing the required paperwork. To be eligible, the site must be either listed on the National Priorities Site List (NPL) or proposed for the NPL with a response action underway. There can only be one TAG awarded at a time at a site. Your Regional TAG Coordinator and this application guide will help you determine if your group is eligible.

Once you've contacted your Regional TAG Coordinator, determined your group is eligible, and decided to apply for a TAG, you can use this guide to help you prepare your TAG application.

It is advisable to read this guide for tips and information on the application process before you begin your application for a TAG. It can help you prepare a TAG application that includes all the information EPA needs to evaluate your group's eligibility, ability, and plans to manage a TAG.

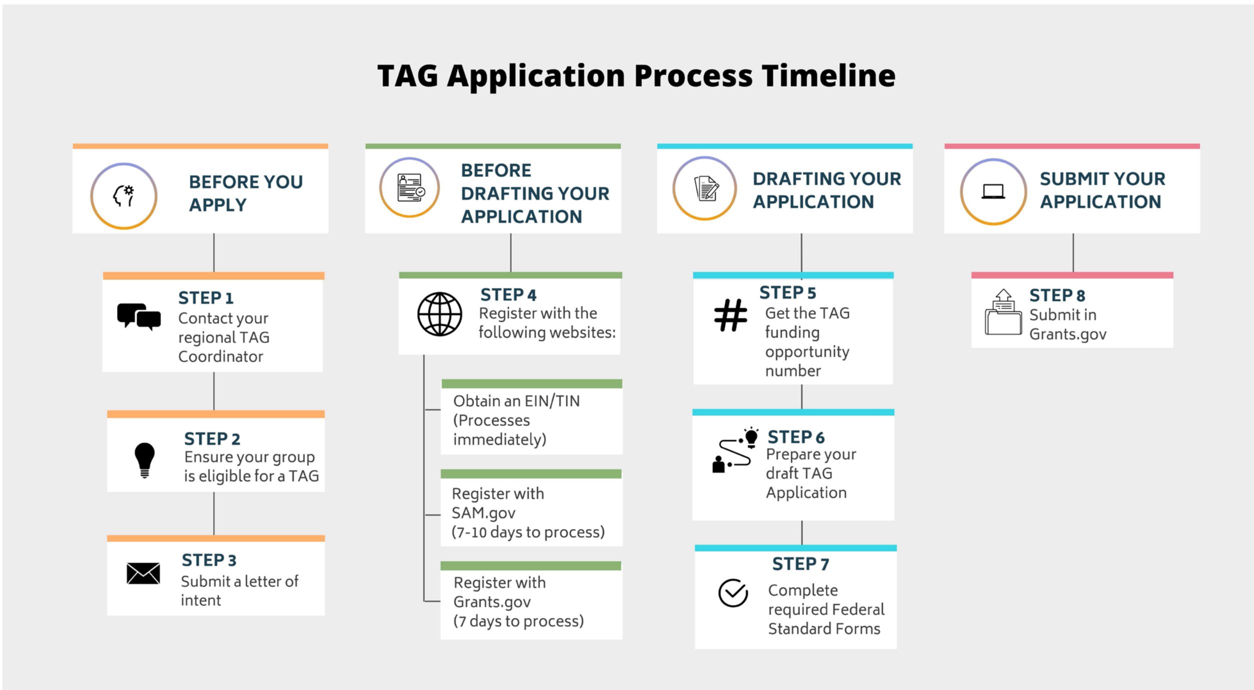
This guide includes:

- A description of key steps for developing and submitting an application.
- A description of the sections in the TAG application.
- A description of required standard forms.
- Tips for preparing the project and budget narratives in your TAG application.

> This guide provides tips and information for completing a TAG Application. The separate Woodtown TAG Sample Application Package provides detailed examples of a completed TAG application.

TAG Application: Key Steps in the Process

Below are the key steps in the TAG application process. These steps should be completed (in order) ***BEFORE*** submitting your TAG application.



Step 1 – Contact your Regional TAG Coordinator.

Contact the Regional TAG Coordinator for the EPA Region where the Superfund site is located. Your TAG Coordinator can answer questions and act as a guide throughout the application process. To find your TAG Coordinator, visit the "contact us" section on the TAG website.

> Get to know the Regional TAG Coordinator for your Superfund site. Your TAG Coordinator can help you through the application process.

Step 2 – Make sure that your group is eligible to receive a TAG.

Consult the *Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) Program: Factsheet* and EPA's TAG website for information about who is eligible to receive a TAG. Also, talk with your Regional TAG Coordinator to determine your group's eligibility. EPA's TAG regulations at 40 CFR 35.4020 provide eligibility information. The full TAG regulations can be found at 40 CFR Part 35, Subpart M.

> The application process takes a lot of time. Make sure your group is eligible before starting.

Step 3 – Prepare and submit a letter of intent to your EPA Regional Office.

You must first submit a Letter of Intent to start the TAG application process.

Before you prepare and submit your application, your group must email or mail a letter of intent (LOI) to your EPA Regional Office stating your intent to apply. **EPA will not review a TAG application unless the applicant group has submitted an LOI.** Include the following information:

- Name of your group.
- Contact person for your group, with address, daytime telephone number, and email address.
- Name of the Superfund site for which you are seeking a TAG.

Ask your TAG Regional Coordinator for the proper email or physical address for sending your LOI.
See the fictional Woodtown TAG Sample Application Package example for a sample application and LOI.

Step 4 – Get registered well in advance of submitting your TAG application.

Registration takes time. You CANNOT register in Grants.gov until you have registered in SAM.gov and have been assigned a Unique Entity ID (UEI). SAM.gov can take 10 days to process and Grants.gov can take a week.

You will need to register in the systems and websites below before you can apply for a TAG. Register in the order below since each site will need information from the previous registration.

1. Internal Revenue Service Employer Identification Number (EIN)
2. System for Award Management (SAM.gov)
3. Grants.gov

Your group will need to get an Employer Identification Number (EIN) or Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Once you have obtained a TIN or EIN, you will need to complete an entity registration with the federal government's System for Award Management (SAM) at SAM.gov. You will not be able to register with SAM without a TIN or EIN. When you are completing your entity registration in SAM.gov, you will be assigned a Unique Entity ID (UEI). You will not be able to submit your application in Grants.gov without a Unique Entity ID (UEI) and SAM.gov entity registration.

4.1. Obtain an EIN/TIN

From the EIN page on the IRS website: An EIN "is also known as a Federal Tax Identification Number, and is used to identify a business entity. Generally, businesses need an EIN. You may apply for an EIN in various ways, and now you may apply online. ***This is a free service offered by the Internal Revenue Service and you can get your EIN immediately.***

4.2. Register with SAM.gov

Registration is free and will take 7 to 10 days to process. You will need to designate an authorized representative for your group, who will complete the registration with SAM and Grants.gov. SAM also requires a notarized letter naming your group's administrator. The letter is required within 60 days after registration activation. Visit SAM.gov to register. When your group is registering with SAM, you will be assigned a Unique Entity ID (UEI). **Please keep your original records on how you registered your group. SAM requires your group registration information to match exactly with how your entity is registered with the IRS.**

4.3. Register with Grants.gov

Once you have registered with SAM.gov and have your assigned UEI, your group's authorized representative must complete a one-time Grants.gov registration process. The registration is free. Visit the Grants.gov registration page for more information on how to register.

Remember: The Grants.gov registration process can take up to one week to complete, so you must register well before you plan to prepare and submit your final TAG application.

Requesting an exception to the Grants.gov submission requirement

If your group has limited or no internet access, you may request an exception to the requirement to submit your application through Grants.gov. The process for requesting an exception can be found on the EPA Grants website. Talk to your TAG Coordinator if you are unable to access the website or if you need help after reviewing the exception information in the link.

Please note, EPA must receive Grants.gov exception requests at least 15 calendar days before the application due date. This deadline would be 45 days after the date of EPA's newspaper notice requesting TAG letters of intent.

WARNING: Don't be fooled by look-alike registration sites that ask for payments. **SAM.gov and Grants.gov are *FREE***. Contact your Regional TAG Coordinator if you are uncertain about any sites.

Step 5 – Get the TAG Funding Opportunity Number.

When you are ready to begin writing and submitting your TAG application, contact your Regional TAG Coordinator for:

- The Funding Opportunity Number (FON) for the TAG.
- The title of the Funding Opportunity.
- Assistance with locating the application package associated with the FON in Grants.gov.

You need this information to submit your application in Grants.gov.

Step 6 – Complete your TAG Application.

The TAG application has two parts:

- Project Narrative with budget information
- Required Standard Forms

See the Woodtown TAG Sample Application Package for examples on how to prepare a project narrative and budget information.

Tips for Preparing a Project Narrative

The project narrative is your work plan. It is a critical part of your TAG application. Your project narrative describes your group and demonstrates how you will responsibly manage TAG funds.

The project narrative includes:

- Section 1 – Group Qualifications
- Section 2 – Information Sharing
  - Section 2A: Plan for Informing the Community
  - Section 2B: Plan for Working with the Technical Advisor
    - Technical Advisor Work Plan
    - Technical Advisor Tasks and Costs
- Section 3 – Environmental Results, Outputs, and Outcomes

You will need to upload your **completed** project narrative file under the Mandatory Project Narrative File field on the Project Narrative File Form.

Your **project narrative** helps EPA determine if your group:

- is eligible,
- will use the TAG funds correctly, and
- will share information with the rest of your community.

Check with the site Remedial Project Manager to obtain projected list of site documents and activities. Your plan must reflect upcoming site work and documents.

Tips for Preparing Budget Information

Although the Superfund cleanup process can last for many years, your initial grant project period covers a shorter period of time negotiated between your group and EPA. Your project narrative and detailed budget must show estimated costs only for your planned project period and within the $50,000 federal share limit. Give careful thought to the budget because changing it later may require written approval from EPA and a modification to your grant.

You must provide a budget outline in the SF-424A form. You will need to provide a summary of your budget costs by type of activity and note which costs will be covered by TAG award funds (federal) or the group's matching contribution (See 40 CFR 35.4130). If you need advance funds, you will need to state this in your budget and specify estimated expenses (See 40 CFR 35.4090).

For a sample budget, see the Woodtown TAG Sample Application Package. The format shown is only a suggestion. You may develop a different format, as long as all the required information is included.

IMPORTANT: Does your group need advance funds?

You may be able to obtain a one-time advance of up to $5,000 to cover some costs associated with TAG startup, such as funds to establish a bank account, purchase supplies, or pay office rent. ***If needed, you MUST include advance funds information in your initial application budget.*** This funding is not available until the award is made and your group provides proof of incorporation as a nonprofit organization. Let your Regional TAG Coordinator know if you think your group will need advance funds.

Step 7 – Complete required federal standard forms.

Reminder: Get your Funding Opportunity Number (FON) from your TAG Coordinator. You will find the required forms on Grants.gov.

The standard forms you need to include in your TAG application package are available at Grants.gov under the TAG Funding Opportunity Number (FON) (Step 6, above). You will need to fill out the following forms and information for your TAG application on Grants.gov under the Funding Opportunity.

1. Standard Form (SF) 424 – *Application for Federal Assistance*
2. Project Narrative Attachment Form (this is where you attach your Project Narrative and Detailed Budget)
3. SF 424A – *Budget Information - Non-Construction Programs*
4. EPA Form 4700-4 – *Pre-award Compliance Review Report for Applicants Requesting Federal Financial Assistance*
5. EPA Form 5700-54 – *Key Contacts Form*

Instructions are included in the forms.

Prior to submission in grants.gov, please reach out to your regional TAG coordinator to see if they would like to review a final draft of the TAG application but note that intergovernmental review is not required.

Step 8 – Complete and submit your TAG application through Grants.gov.

When you've completed all parts of your application, you are ready to submit it to EPA. Unless your group received an exemption, TAG applications must be submitted electronically through the Grants.gov website (See Step 4.B above for information regarding exemptions). The Grants.gov website provides instructions for completing the application and uploading all required documents and forms.

Grants.gov forwards your application to EPA. Grants.gov will send confirmation emails and it may be beneficial to forward these emails to your regional TAG coordinator to assist in tracking the TAG application.

If you have any questions throughout the TAG process, reach out to your TAG coordinator.

Note: As of August 27, 2021, the intergovernmental review requirement in the TAG regulations is no longer in effect because the TAG program was granted a class exception from the TAG regulations.

Project Narrative Outline

This document provides an outline to help you organize your project narrative. The outline and questions below cover some of the most important information EPA will look for in your narrative. You may use this section as a guide for preparing your project narrative, but this is not a required application form. ***Using this outline and answering all of the questions below will help ensure that your project narrative addresses the most important points.***

SECTION 1. GROUP QUALIFICATIONS

The information in this section tells EPA about your group and its eligibility for a TAG.

Section 1A: Group Eligibility

1. Using the checkboxes below, indicate if your group has ties to any potentially responsible parties (PRPs) at the site. Please provide a detailed explanation for any "yes" answers in the comments section below question 2. (See the TAG regulations at [40 CFR 35.4020]() and [40 CFR 35.4045]().)

   NOTE: If you do not have a complete list of PRPs for your site, contact the Remedial Project Manager (RPM) or Community Involvement Coordinator (CIC) for the site.

Yes	No	
☐	☐	Are any members of your group potentially responsible parties (PRPs) for the Superfund site?
☐	☐	Was your group established by or does it represent a PRP?
☐	☐	Does anyone in your group have financial involvement with a PRP (other than as an employee or contractor?)
☐	☐	Does your group presently receive money or services from a PRP?

2. ☐ ☐ Was your group established, or is it sustained, by an "ineligible entity", or are any ineligible entities represented by your group? (check all that apply):
   - ○ A PRP?
   - ○ A national organization?
   - ○ An academic institution?
   - ○ A political subdivision?

   Comments: (If you answered "yes" to any of the questions above, please explain here).

3. How many members are in your group? ___________________________

Yes No

4. ☐ ☐ Is your group incorporated (or planning to incorporate) as a non-profit organization for the specific purpose of representing affected individuals at the site?

OR

☐ ☐ Was your group previously incorporated for another purpose?

☐ ☐ If your group was previously incorporated for another purpose, does it include all the individuals and groups who joined in applying for the TAG?

Please provide additional information about how your group was formed and the history of your group's involvement at the site. If your group developed out of a coalition of other groups, also include the names of these groups and why they joined together.

Section 1B: Responsibility Requirements

1. ***Administrative and Management Capabilities***

   Please describe the organizational structure of your group, the procedures your group will follow in managing a TAG, and the roles and responsibilities of members. In your application you must clearly define the individuals responsible for the following activities:

   - Managing TAG funds and keeping financial records.
   - Directing or overseeing the grant administrator.
   - Developing the technical advisor and other contracts.
   - Selecting the technical advisor and (if contracted) grant administrator.
   - Directing the activities of the technical advisor.
   - Making decisions about group activities and actions.
   - Completing other administrative requirements (such as reporting and invoicing).
   - Leadership and management succession plan (recommended).

   (For more details see the Uniform Grant Guidance (UGG) at 2 CFR 200.302.)

   NOTE: If available, please attach your group's bylaws to your TAG application package.

2. ***Resources for Project Completion***

   Explain how your group will provide the required matching share, which is 20 percent of the total project costs. The matching share can include cash or in-kind contributions. In-kind contributions include property or services that benefit this grant program and are contributed by non-Federal third parties without charge to the grantee or by a cost-type contractor under the grant agreement. Include any plans that your group has for in-kind contributions (such as volunteered services or donations) or for fund-raising and obtaining cash. (See the UGG at 2 CFR 200.302 and 2 CFR 200.306, and TAG Regulations 40 CFR 35.4050.)

   NOTE: *Talk to your Regional TAG Coordinator if you think that your group cannot meet the matching share requirement. (In rare cases, this requirement can be waived.* See *40 CFR 35.4055.)*

Meeting the 20 Percent Matching Share Requirement

Your group's matching share ***MUST*** be included and broken out in your project budget. Matching shares can include in-kind services and donated supplies. ALL matching shares must be documented in your grant files.

In-kind services, such as:

- A bookkeeper's assistance keeping your group's financial records and preparing required financial reports.
- A lawyer's aid in drafting a contract for your technical advisor.
- Your project manager's oversight of contracts.
- A group member's efforts to produce a group newsletter or website. For example, having a volunteer upload TA reports and photographs to your website. If the common rate for website design in your area is $50/hour, you may charge this as an in-kind contribution.
- The time spent by group representatives (such as board members) attending site-related meetings.

Donated Resources, such as:

- Use of equipment (such as a computer or copier) and office space.
- Office supplies.
- Photocopying, printing, and postage.
- Hosting fee for websites.
- Meeting space. For example, using the public library community room as a meeting space, which is available for free to local non-profits. If it normally costs $50/hour to rent the space, you can count it as $100 in-kind for a two-hour meeting.
- Other costs in your TAG application that are approved by EPA.

Things to know about in-kind contributions:

- ***In-kind contributions must be included in your application budget AND approved by EPA.***
- The value of equipment, such as a computer donated to the project, is based on fair market value for purchase or rental of the item, BUT ***only the portion of the property's use that you can directly attribute to the TAG project counts as an in-kind contribution.*** For example, a computer may cost $600, but is only used for TAG project work 1/3 of the time. This means only 1/3 of the computer's cost, or $200, can be counted as a TAG in-kind contribution.
- The value of donated office space or space for meetings must not exceed the fair rental value of similar space in a privately-owned building in your community. If donated space is used for other activities than the TAG project, only the portion used for the TAG project counts as an in-kind contribution.
- The value of services donated to the project is based on the price you would pay for similar work in your organization or near your location.
- Your records should show how the value of all in-kind donations were estimated.
- Do not mix TAG project costs with other costs that are not related to the TAG project.

3. ***Performance Record***

Describe your group's past performance satisfactorily completing projects and contracts.

NOTE: *If your group has no past experience, you will receive a neutral rating on this criteria, EPA will evaluate your application based on the description, budget, and schedule you provide in the project narrative and the budget narrative.*

4. ***Accounting and Auditing Procedures***
   Describe how your group plans to keep records and the accounting procedures it will use to manage TAG funds. Identify the member of your group who will maintain your financial records.

   (See EPA Grants Management Training for Applicants and Recipients Module 3, the reporting and recordkeeping requirements at 2 CFR Part 1500, and the TAG Regulations at 40 CFR 35.4175)

5. ***Incorporation***
   Is your group incorporated specifically for the purpose of addressing problems at this site?
   ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
   If not, what steps is your group taking to incorporate for grant-related purposes?
   NOTE: *(Your group does not have to be incorporated at the time you submit your TAG application, but you will have to provide documentation of incorporation before you can receive any TAG funds.)*

Section 1C: Group Issues and Objectives
(See TAG Regulations at 40 CFR 35.4155(a).)

1. How many members of your group are affected by the site?

2. ***Health, Economic, and Environmental Effects***
   Describe the ways in which group members and those they represent are affected by contamination at the site, including actual or potential health threats posed to them and economic and environmental effects felt by them.

3. ***Applicant Group Composition and Representativeness***
   Provide a brief picture of the community represented by your group. Describe the diversity of community organizations and individuals represented by your group, while also highlighting the ways your group represents individuals affected by the site. For example, applicants may want to include socio demographic information such as underserved or disadvantaged, non-English speaking communities. Census.gov and EPA's EJ SCREEN may be helpful tools.

   NOTE: *Since there can be only one TAG awarded for a site, EPA encourages all community organizations that are interested in applying for the TAG to form a coalition group and submit a single application, whenever possible. If your organization was formed by creating a coalition with one or more other groups in the community, note that in this narrative.*

SECTION 2. INFORMATION SHARING

(See TAG Regulations at [40 CFR 35.4155(c)]).

Section 2A: Plan for Informing the Community

In this section, describe how your group will conduct outreach to the overall community, including:

- How information from the technical advisor, as well as other information collected through the TAG project, will be shared with the community members outside of your group.
- How feedback will be received from community members outside of your group.
- How information will be communicated from the community back to the technical advisor and site team.
- Specific products or activities you plan to use to complete these activities (public meetings, newsletters, websites, etc.).
- Plan for ensuring community questions and concerns outside of your group are addressed by the technical advisor.
- How you plan to address any language barriers within the community.

Section 2B: Plan for Working with the Technical Advisor

Use this section to describe your plan for using TAG funds to work with your technical advisor to participate in each stage in the Superfund cleanup process at your site.

1. **Technical Advisor Work Plan (Part 1) –** Explain in a narrative how your group plans to use a technical advisor, following the information provided in the box below.

Technical Advisor Work Plan
Your Technical Advisor Work Plan must include: • The list of tasks you want your technical advisor to perform, such as review of a site technical document and providing comments to the TAG recipient and external community members. • The estimated amount of time (hours) your technical advisor will need to complete each of these tasks. • The products you expect the advisor to provide (for example, memoranda, fact sheets, or community presentations). • A description of how your technical advisor will work with the group's board of directors, if applicable, and the project manager. In general, technical advisor activities that are eligible for funding under a TAG include: • Reviewing and interpreting site-related documents. • Developing a summary of and identifying issues or concerns for site documents. • Participating in site visits to gain a better understanding of site activities. • Traveling to EPA meetings, state agency meetings, PRP meetings, and or other federal agency meetings directly related to site issues and activities. • Meeting with your group to explain technical information. • Helping your group communicate site-related concerns to EPA. • Communicating technical information to the rest of the community and answering their questions. • Participating in health and safety training, if necessary. • Evaluate site reuse options.

2. **Schedule of Technical Advisor Tasks and Costs (Part 2) –** Prepare a list of tasks to be completed by your technical advisor and the estimated cost of each. See the Woodtown TAG Sample Application Package for examples. You may develop your budget using a different format, as long as all information provided in the example budget is included.

SECTION 3. ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

This section of your application addresses EPA's Environmental Results Policy (EPA Order 5700.7A1), which requires that all work funded by assistance agreements (including TAGs) further EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment. Because TAGs are part of the Superfund Program, your project should align with Objective 6.1 of the EPA 2022-2026 Strategic Plan titled Clean Up and Restore Land for Productive Uses and Healthy Communities. The activities and products produced under your TAG project (outputs) should lead to results or effects (outcomes) that further the overall goals set by EPA's Superfund Program.

1. **Describe how your TAG will align with the following EPA strategic plan objective for the Superfund program:**

   EPA Strategic Plan

   Goal 6: "Safeguard and Revitalize Communities."

   Objective 6.1: "Clean Up and Restore Land for Productive Uses and Healthy Communities."

   Under Goal 6, Objective 6.1, EPA states "Together with federal, Tribal, and state partners, EPA's cleanup programs will reduce risks to human health and the environment while also returning them to productive reuse and providing economic and additional environmental benefits" (page 62). EPA "will collaborate with its partners to clean up sites and return them to productive use, and involve people in decisions that affect their environment or health, especially communities with environmental justice concerns," (page 63) and "EPA will partner with communities to ensure that their concerns are identified and accounted for while working with Tribal, state, local, and other stakeholders" (page 63).

   Description of how the project aligns with Objective 6.1:
   A TAG is intended to benefit the broad community affected by a Superfund site. If the community faces environmental justice challenges, a TAG may help address the hardships associated with these concerns. As a TAG recipient, your group is the steward of this benefit. It is the TAG group's role to share your technical advisor's information to assist the broader community in better understanding technical issues and information that affect EPA's cleanup decisions. When community members understand EPA's technical documents, data and discussions, they are able to more effectively provide their comments and concerns on the technical and scientific nature of EPA's proposals and conclusions.

2. **Create a table with specific information about the activities and products produced by your TAG.** The template found in the Woodtown TAG Sample Application Package can be used to create a table providing specific information about the activities and products that will be produced with your TAG.

   In the first column, list your **outputs**, the activities/products you described in Section 2 (Information Sharing) and the tasks outlined in your group's Technical Advisor Workplan.

In the second column, provide **measures**, or performance indicators for the outputs your TAG expects to produce (measures might include number of newsletters you will produce or the number of meetings held and the attendance at each). Also, include an expected **timeline** or delivery date for each output/activity. (For the application, you need only to identify these measures. You will report the actual numbers of each in your progress reports once your TAG project is underway.)

In the third column, list the expected **outcomes** (the result or the effect of the output). Your TAG group may not be able to achieve all the outcomes stated in its work plan, but you must be able to report progress. Outcomes can be measured in numbers and statistics, called quantitative measurements, or through descriptions, called qualitative measurements.

NOTE: *You must be able to measure your progress toward achieving the outputs/outcomes in quarterly progress reports submitted throughout your TAG project.*