



Technical Assistance Grant

Overview

A Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) provides funding to community groups to contract with an independent technical advisor who can interpret and explain technical reports, site conditions, and EPA's proposed cleanup proposals and decisions to the community. In addition to site-related technical information, the technical advisor can help the community understand site-related public health, redevelopment, and relocation issues, under certain circumstances. Such independent technical assistance helps the community voice its concerns and preferences on site issues and participate more substantively in site decisions.

Only communities affected by a National Priorities List (NPL) site or a site proposed for the NPL, where a response action under CERCLA is underway, are eligible to receive a TAG. Initial awards of up to \$50,000 per site are available. Additional TAG funds may be awarded if a recipient managed previous funds effectively and if the site meets at least three criteria in the TAG regulations (under 40 CFR §35.4065(2)). However, only one TAG can be awarded per site at a time. Because of this limitation, EPA encourages coalitions among competing applicant groups. When awarding a TAG, EPA also considers how well an applicant represents the diverse interests and concerns of community members affected by the site.

Why This Is Important

The grant is important because Congress created the TAG program in the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA) to ensure that the people whose lives were affected by abandoned hazardous wastes could understand site conditions, information and actions. Technical assistance provided through the TAG enables communities to better understand site documents and technical issues and thereby enhances their ability to express preferences and concerns about site cleanup actions in the same manner as responsible parties and other agencies. The National Contingency Plan (NCP), at 40 CFR §300.430(c)(2)(iv), requires "informing the community of the availability of technical assistance grants." This is required for facilities listed on the

This and all tools in the Community Involvement Toolkit should be used in conjunction with the [Community Involvement Handbook](#), which provides guidance to EPA staff on how EPA typically plans and implements community involvement activities at Superfund sites.

NPL or sites proposed for the NPL, where a response action under CERCLA is underway. EPA also must provide formal [public notice](#) when a community group submits a letter of intent (LOI) to apply for a TAG. Per regulation, this is done by publishing a notice in a local newspaper of general circulation.

Implementation

Informing the Community

EPA should inform communities that TAGs are available as early as possible. At the beginning of EPA's involvement at an eligible site, the community involvement coordinator (CIC) should conduct outreach to the community and may want to consider conducting a [technical assistance needs assessment](#) (TANA) to determine what type of technical assistance may be most helpful. An ideal time (though not the only time) to conduct a TANA is during the [community involvement plan](#) (CIP) process. EPA is required to inform the community of the availability of a TAG, but the Agency also may offer other types of technical assistance to the community (see the [Summary of Technical Assistance](#) tool).

Although TAGs are available at any time during the Superfund process, they are usually most effective during the remedial investigation and feasibility study (RI/FS) or pre-Record of Decision (ROD) stage, when most of the decisions about the cleanup are made.

TAGs are subject to a number of regulatory and policy requirements, including requirements related to how EPA advertises the availability of a TAG. (Consult the [TAG website](#), which includes useful information, including a link to TAG regulations.) CICs should work with the Regional TAG coordinator, who can help them introduce the TAG program to the commu-



nity and ensure the correct information is provided. CICs should work closely with the Regional TAG coordinator to ensure regulatory and policy requirements are not overlooked. In many EPA Regions, the TAG coordinator has prepared TAG information that the CIC can provide to the community. The Regional TAG coordinator also may present the TAG information during public meetings or community group meetings.

The CIC should inform the community about the TAG through numerous outreach channels, such as in flyers or site [*fact sheets*](#), presentations during [*public meetings*](#) and [*public availabilities/poster sessions*](#), informal meetings with community groups, and EPA's site profile pages. Once a community group has expressed interest in applying for a TAG in a letter of intent to EPA, the Agency must advertise TAG availability via a public notice in the local newspaper. This gives other groups in the community an opportunity to express interest in applying for the TAG or forming a coalition with the original group. EPA can award only one TAG per site at a time.

Eligible Groups

The TAG regulations outline specific eligibility requirements. To be eligible, a community group must be an organization composed of individuals affected (or potentially affected) by a release at a facility listed on the NPL or at a site proposed for the NPL, where a response action under CERCLA is underway. The applicant group must demonstrate minimum administrative and record-keeping capabilities.

TAG regulations specifically exclude categories of entities from eligibility. Groups excluded from eligibility are potentially responsible parties (PRPs) or groups representing or receiving money or services from a PRP; universities and other academic institutions; city, county, and local governments, tribes or other political subdivisions; and national organizations or their affiliates. In addition, any group established or sustained by one of these entities is ineligible for a TAG.

Other Key Grant Requirements

An eligible community group must incorporate as a nonprofit corporation for the purpose of participating in decision-making at the Superfund site for which the

TAG is awarded. At the time of the award, the recipient group must either be incorporated as a nonprofit or demonstrate that it has taken all necessary and appropriate steps to do so. The recipient must show proof of incorporation before its first reimbursement request or before receiving an initial advance payment under the grant.

Cost sharing is required unless waived by EPA. The recipient must contribute 20 percent of the total project cost of the TAG. The matching-share requirement can be met with cash or in-kind contributions, usually through volunteer time and donated in-kind services. EPA can waive or partially waive this requirement under specific circumstances.

A portion of the TAG funds may be used for administrative costs, such as developing newsletters, purchasing general supplies, and procuring a grant administrator to manage the grant. However, most, if not all, of the funds awarded to the recipient group must be used to procure a technical advisor or advisors. TAG funds cannot be used for travel expenses; underwriting legal actions, political activities, or lobbying; social activities; fundraising; tuition or training (with the exception of one-time health and safety training for the technical advisor); or creating new information, such as soil and groundwater sampling or medical testing.

Because a TAG is a federal grant, the recipient group is responsible for ensuring its activities comply with federal as well as EPA grant regulations and policies. The TAG group is responsible for managing their grant, maintaining records, and contracting with (and paying) the technical advisor.

TAG recipient groups are required to perform outreach to keep the broader community apprised of the information prepared by the TAG technical advisor. To accomplish this, the group should have a plan for disseminating information from the technical advisor to the broader community.

TAG Application Process

The CIC usually plays a supportive role in the TAG application process, but should be familiar with the entire process. The CIC often assists the Regional TAG coordinator, responds to questions from the community, and often serves on the TAG application review panel.



The TAG application and award process is divided into a few distinct stages: First, the LOI stage; second, the application stage; and third, the review and decision stage. Before a community group begins the TAG application process, it should be encouraged to contact the Regional TAG coordinator. The Regional TAG coordinator will assist the group with any questions or concerns it has throughout the application process. (For a current list of TAG coordinators, see the “Contact Us” tab on the TAG website.) If a community group wants to apply for a TAG after discussing the TAG program with the CIC and the Regional TAG coordinator, it should submit an LOI to EPA stating that it intends to apply for a TAG.

The TAG application and award process begins when EPA receives an LOI. The CIC or other members of the site team sometimes assist the Regional TAG coordinator in determining whether the applicant group is eligible to apply for a TAG. If the applicant is found to be ineligible, EPA will notify the applicant in writing.

Upon receipt of an LOI from an eligible group, EPA must publish a formal public notice in a local newspaper informing other potential applicants that they have 30 days to contact the group submitting the first LOI to form a coalition or to submit their own separate LOI. EPA encourages formation of a coalition whenever more than one community group is interested in applying for the TAG. It is important that potential applicants understand that EPA will review only the applications of groups that submitted LOIs within this 30-day period. If the responsibility for posting the notice in the local newspaper falls to the CIC (or other on-site staff), he or she should check with the Regional TAG coordinator before posting it. The TAG program has some standard language that should be included in the notice.

Once the 30-day period to submit LOIs is over, a second 30-day period to submit applications begins. Any group seeking the TAG must submit its application within this second 30-day period. However, a group may request a time extension from EPA if more time is required. Extensions frequently are requested and granted. If an extension is granted, all groups intending to submit applications for a site must be informed of and given the extension.

Application information with step-by-step instructions with examples is available on EPA’s TAG

website, but CICs should strongly advise potential applicants to contact and work with the Regional TAG coordinator. Interested groups should follow the instructions provided by the Regional TAG coordinator for submitting the application through [Grants.gov](https://www.epa.gov/grants).

When TAG applications are received by the Regional TAG coordinator, they are reviewed for completeness and basic eligibility. If the application requires additional information or clarification, the Regional TAG coordinator will send a comment letter to the applicant. The applicant then has 90 days to submit a revised application. This process may occur several times before the application is considered complete.

Once an application is considered complete, it will be evaluated by the Regional TAG coordinator, the grant specialist, and often, members of the site team (e.g., CIC and remedial project manager [RPM]). EPA staff working at the site are in a better position to evaluate the parts of the application that address the technical needs of the community, whether or not the group represents the diversity of interests in the affected community, and the group’s inclusiveness and ability to communicate with the broader community.

After the grant is awarded, the CIC’s involvement with the TAG recipient and its technical advisor continues. In EPA Regions where the TAG coordinator is not a CIC, the CIC and RPM typically interact with the TAG recipient and the technical advisor throughout community involvement activities, while the Regional TAG coordinator or project officer administers the financial and reporting aspects of the grant.

Tips

- The community should be informed of TAG availability at the beginning of the remedial process. Information about TAG availability should be repeated throughout the process if there isn’t a TAG for the site.
- CICs should also work closely with their Regional TAG coordinators to ensure that all regulations and policies are followed.
- CICs should ensure that communities are aware that TAG technical advisors can provide technical assistance to communities for [reuse and redevelopment](#)



planning. EPA-supported [community advisory groups](#) (CAGs) and community members aided by technical advisors funded through the TAG program or provided through EPA's Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) program contract can be key participants in the site reuse and redevelopment planning process.

Other Sources of Information

- Superfund program [TAG website](#) for all program-specific materials and relevant regulations and for a list of current Regional TAG coordinators.
- [Office of Grants and Debarment website](#) for general information on grants, grant policies, and regulations, and the most recent grant forms.