Sustainability Small Grant Frequently Asked Questions

Can individuals (not affiliated with an organization) apply for and receive grant funds?
Yes, anyone may apply regardless of organizational affiliation. However, individuals must be aware that the money received through this grant must be claimed on your yearly taxes. Since grant funding is only reimbursable upon completion of the project, individuals are also responsible for any up-front costs associated with the project prior to reimbursement.

What is a fiscal sponsor, and do I need one to apply?
A fiscal sponsor can be any individual or registered non-profit that provides financial support for the up-front costs associated with the project. If an individual applicant chooses to partner with a fiscal sponsor, that sponsor will be the main point of contact for contracting and receiving reimbursement of grant funds. Upon completion of the project, reimbursed funds will be distributed to the fiscal sponsor and not the individual applicant. Applicants are not required to partner with a fiscal sponsor, but are encouraged to do so.

When will I learn if I’ve been awarded a Sustainability Small Grant?
Applications for Sustainability Small Grants are reviewed on a quarterly basis. The Sustainable Tacoma Commission meets on the third Thursday of each month, and will review all received applications at the first meeting following each quarterly deadline. Award notifications will be sent no later than 30 days following each quarterly deadline.

Can I start my project before being awarded?
Applicants may begin their project whenever they would like. However, any expenses made prior to the grant award date will not be eligible for reimbursement. The award date will be clearly indicated on your award letter, and will also determine the timeline for contracting and project completion.

How often can I apply for and/or receive a Sustainability Small Grant?
Individuals or organizations may only be awarded one Sustainability Small Grant in a 12 month period. However, if an application is not accepted or approved and no funding is awarded, that individual or organization may re-apply again as soon as they like. If a grant is awarded, but the project is later delayed or cancelled and no funding was distributed, that individual or organization may also re-apply as soon as they like.

What can grant money be used for?
Grant money can be applied toward costs identified in the approved project budget, submitted with your grant application. These costs may include materials, transportation, equipment rental, and other approved expenses. Up to 10% of grant may be spent on food. Up to 20% may be spent on overhead or general administrative costs. The grant may not be used to fund computers, digital cameras, video cameras, or other portable electronics. The grant may not be used to fund alcohol or drug purchases. Please reference the Sustainability Small Grant Overview document for a detailed list of prohibited expenses and activities.
How do I submit invoices for reimbursement?
Effective in 2021, all grant recipients will need to create an account and become a “vendor” in SAP Ariba - online software the City of Tacoma now uses for all contracting and funding transactions. This process will take place during the initial contracting phase of your grant award. If you or your fiscal sponsor have conducted business with the City of Tacoma in the past, you may already be signed up as a vendor in Ariba. All invoices must be directly uploaded to Ariba by the grant recipient or fiscal sponsor. No invoices sent via email will be accepted. City staff will be available to answer questions and assist with the process of getting set-up in Ariba after grants have been awarded.

I have submitted my invoice through Ariba. When can I expect to receive the funds?
Once you have submitted an invoice through Ariba, funds will be distributed 30 days from the invoice date. Funds will be distributed directly to the individual or organization listed on the Sustainability Small Grant contract.

I do not have regular access to a computer or the internet. Can I still apply?
Yes. Office of Environmental Policy staff will be available to assist and explore accommodations that allow all community members to apply and navigate the award process. If you have difficulty with the application process or require accommodation, please contact us at sustainability@cityoftacoma.org or (253) 591-5172 prior to submitting your application.

What if I do not complete my project within one year of my grant award date?
Sustainability Small Grant contracts are only valid for one year following your award date. If you do not complete your project before your contract expires, invoices received after that date will not be eligible for reimbursement. Contract extensions may be available on a case-by-case basis, but justification for why an extension is needed must be communicated to City of Tacoma staff members prior to your contract expiration date.

What does it mean for a project to benefit Environmental Services’ three utilities (Surface Water, Solid Waste, and Wastewater)?
Projects that benefit one or more of the three utilities may help protect and restore our natural resources, or help keep our city clean, safe, and livable. Surface Water benefits are those that help to keep pollution from flowing from the built environment untreated into lakes, streams, rivers, and Puget Sound. Solid Waste benefits include reducing waste generation and promoting landfill diversion through recycling, composting, or waste prevention. Wastewater is what goes down our drains and needs to be treated before re-entering the natural environment. Wastewater benefits would help ensure that our sewer systems are properly cared for, and that only correct items find their way down the drain.

What does it mean for a project to promote regional climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts?
Projects that address climate change either help our community adapt to the impacts or mitigate the causes of climate change. Most projects that address environmental sustainability issues in our community do have a connection to either climate adaptation or mitigation. Project examples that promote climate change adaptation might include installing rain gardens to reduce the risk of flooding, and planting trees to reduce the urban heat island effect. Projects that promote climate change mitigation might include promotion of public transit as a form of sustainable transportation instead of driving, or educating businesses about options to switch from natural gas to electric heating.

Who should I contact for questions about the application, program eligibility, or other information related to Sustainability Small Grants?
Contact the Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability at sustainability@cityoftacoma.org or (253) 591-5172.