

FY10 Municipal Planning Grant (MPG)

Program Description

Program Overview

For fiscal year 2010, the Department of Economic, Housing and Community Development (DEHCD, formerly DHCA) will grant approximately \$250,000 to municipalities to promote community planning, revitalization and development activities that maintain Vermont's land use goal of compact settlements separated by rural lands.

The Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) program funds a wide range of municipal planning projects as allowed by 24 V.S.A. §4306 (b). This year, due to reduced funding, grant priority will be given to: bylaw updates that bring them into conformance with the municipal plan (a 2011 statutory requirement); municipal plans and updates that are addressing a demonstrated need; and studies leading to growth center and Vermont neighborhood designations.

Grant funds are regionally apportioned, based on the percentage of municipalities with confirmed planning processes within each of the [11 Regional Planning Commission \(RPC\) regions](#). Eligible municipalities compete within their region for grant funding. Funding decisions are made by the DEHCD Commissioner, based on the competitive criteria listed under Grant Selection Process below.

Grant-Related Dates:

RPC Confirmation of Municipal Planning Process: by April, 30 2010.

Application Deadline: April 30, 2010.

Award Decisions: Late May, 2010.

Mid-project Report Due: February 28, 2011.

Project Completion and All Funds Spent: November 8, 2011.

Final Report and Products Submitted: Electronically (or postmarked) by December 13, 2011.

MPG projects must be completed within 18 months. No time extensions are granted.

Who Can Apply?

Municipalities with a local planning process that has been confirmed by April 30, 2010 are eligible to apply for grants of up to \$15,000. Municipal confirmation includes formal plan approval by the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) as required by 24 V.S.A. §4350.

Municipalities without a confirmed local planning process may apply but only to create a municipal plan intended for regional confirmation.

Municipal organizations other than the planning commission (such as the conservation commission or the downtown revitalization organization) may apply for a grant, but only with prior approval of the planning commission and selectboard. Each municipality may submit only one application per year.

More than one municipality may apply jointly for a consortium application (up to \$25,000). Consortia applications must address a shared issue and must identify a lead municipality to administer the project and the funding. All municipalities in a consortium must have a confirmed local planning process by April 30, 2010. None may apply for an individual MPG the same year.

Funding Available

Municipalities may apply for any dollar amount between \$1,500 and \$15,000, and consortia may apply for up to \$25,000. There is currently no local match funding required.

Municipalities with large, multi-year projects are encouraged to break projects into related, standalone phases that each produce a particular product upon completion — then apply for one phase each year. However, because funds are allocated competitively each year, MPG support for subsequent phases cannot be guaranteed.

DEHCD reserves the right to award less than the amount of the municipality's request, based on availability of funds.

Eligible Activities

The Municipal Planning Grant program supports a range of projects relating to planning and land use and promotes cooperation, collaboration and the exchange of ideas. Eligible projects must have a clear connection to planning and implementation of the municipal plan.

Funds may be used (but are not limited) to:

- Underwrite expenses for public meetings and hearings, informational workshops, citizen surveys, outreach and notification costs;
- Support research, data collection, capacity studies, inventories and mapping.
- Pay planning and zoning staff for work on grant project *if it is beyond their normal duties*;
- Pay consultants, administrative staff, interns, regional planning commission staff, or legal fees associated with the project;
- Purchase development rights, easements, and titles of properties for housing and conservation purposes identified in the municipal plan;
- Purchase materials needed to produce a plan, bylaw, or implement or administer the project, like writing supplies, maps and copies.
- Ancient Roads studies

Funds may **not** be used to:

- Support political activities;
- Pay Regional Planning Commission dues;
- Reimburse expenses made before the grant is awarded;
- Subsidize tax mapping (see Mapping Notes below);
- Pay planning commission members; staff for performance of their normal duties;
- Capitalize a “reserve” fund for use beyond the grant period;
- Purchase computer hardware or other equipment.

MAPPING NOTES:

- Parcel mapping projects are only eligible if there is a clear connection to planning and other Chapter 117-related activities and involve creating GIS parcel layers as part of a larger planning project. We do not fund mapping for property tax assessment purposes. For parcel mapping projects, please allocate the percentage of anticipated use for tax purposes from other funding sources.
- GIS mapping must follow applicable [VGIS data guidelines or standards](#).

SINGLE PROJECT:

Only one project can be funded. If multiple products with multiple consultants are proposed, an application is likely to be considered as having more than one project. Updates of town plans and bylaws are usually considered two separate projects and typically require separate applications. However, there are specific instances when an update of both the plan and bylaws make sense as one project. For example, if a Planning Commission wishes to update a section of the municipal plan relating to energy planning, and simultaneously update its bylaws dealing with energy efficiency, this could be proposed as a single project eligible for a MPG.

Grant Selection Process (Competitive Criteria)

DEHCD uses competitive criteria and statewide priorities to score and rank applications. The statewide priorities are updated annually to comply with policy initiatives or legislation. Grants are awarded based on the application scores and the amount of grant funds available within the respective regions. The DEHCD Commissioner reserves the sole right and responsibility to allocate grant resources.

Applications are scored using the following statewide priorities and criteria:

1. **Application Quality – Up to 15 points**
The application is complete, well-written, internally consistent, and realistic; it describes a single, clearly defined project.
2. **Realistic Work Plan & Budget – Up to 20 points**
The work plan is well developed and tasks are appropriate for the proposed budget. Costs are well-documented. For multi-phased projects, the first phase has been well executed and subsequent phases are well-defined.
3. **Clear Linkage of Proposed Project to the Municipal Plan / Demonstrated Need for Municipal Plan Update – Up to 20 points**
For bylaw, capital budget, special studies and other types of projects, the project implements ideas and actions set forth within the municipal plan. Language within the plan that describes the project or elements of the project is included with the application. If the project is for a new or updated municipal plan, the plan or update will address pressing planning concerns in the community and the need is well-articulated. (A recently expired plan or pending expiration of a plan alone is not considered a pressing planning concern.)

4. **Citizen Participation / Partnerships & Outreach – Up to 15 points**
Includes citizen participation activities intended to educate and involve the public in planning as appropriate to the project, and demonstrates cooperation or coordination with relevant local and/or regional organizations and partners.
5. **Statewide Priorities – Up to 30 points**
 - Update of municipal bylaws for the purpose of bringing bylaws into conformance with the municipal plan by 2011 as required in 24 V.S.A. §4401 & §4481.
 - Developing or updating a Municipal Plan that addresses pressing planning concerns in the community. (A recently expired plan or pending expiration of a plan alone is not considered a priority.)
 - Studies or activities furthering growth center planning that will help meet requirements for designation [24 V.S.A. § 2793c].
 - Studies or activities leading to a Vermont Neighborhoods designation application [24 V.S.A. § 2793d].

Bonus Points: Projects within and related to a designated downtown, village center or new town center are eligible for bonus points (20 points for downtowns and 10 for other designations).

NOTE:

- Poor administrative performance on previous MPG grants may affect the competitiveness of an application.
- When one out of equal scoring applications needs to be selected for funding, preference will be given to the municipality without a recent Municipal Planning Grant, or for plans/bylaws that are most out-of-date. Otherwise these factors will not influence ranking of applications.
- Experience has shown that funding the development of plans and bylaws to include “adopted” versions as a deliverable product is not realistic. Municipal planning and achieving community consensus takes time. Applicants are therefore encouraged to use the grant for activities leading up to (and including) distribution of a draft plan or bylaw for the first required public hearing by the planning commission.
- Municipal plans expire every five years unless they are readopted [24 V.S.A. § 4387]. While municipalities are encouraged to fully address any concerns facing the community in every plan update, when no significant changes in the plan are needed at the five year interval, municipalities may choose to update just the data presented in the plan and to readopt it. Simple re-adoption can usually be accomplished by volunteer planning commissions without additional assistance and will not be considered a priority for Municipal Planning Grants.

Grant Awards and Administration

Award notices are sent via email to successful applicants through the online Grants Management System. In the event of partial funding, applicants are required to submit a modified work plan and budget. Grant agreements and other required documents will be made

available shortly thereafter. Completion and electronic submittal of these forms will be required for payment. All grants management forms and instructions will be available through the grants management system. Details of payment and reporting are as follows:

First Payment – Upon execution of the grant agreement, requisition may be made for an advance payment of 40% of the award.

Second Payment – Mid-project reports are due February 28, 2011. Requisition for 30% of the award may be submitted along with the progress report.

Final or Close Out Reimbursement – Up to 30% of the award is made on a *reimbursement basis*. The reimbursement is made when the project and its deliverables are complete as detailed in Attachment A of the grant agreement, the expenditures are properly budgeted and documented (copies of invoices and canceled checks or a detailed transaction report), showing that the funds were spent for the purposes specified in the grant agreement. Invoices must show that grantees have spent or obligated all grant funds no later than November 8, 2011. Unused, ineligible or undocumented costs must be returned.

While grant activities must be completed by November 8, 2011, grantees have up to one month after that date to assemble the final report. Final reports must be submitted no later than December 13, 2012 to receive the final payment.

Minor alterations to the work plan or the approved budget may be allowed but only upon request and approval from DEHCD. Substantial alterations are not allowed and the end product must remain the same.

No grant extensions are offered. Projects that cannot be completed within the grant period under the terms of the grant agreement are closed out. The grant will cover eligible work completed and documented costs, however, ineligible or undocumented costs must be returned.

All final products and public communication must acknowledge funding from the Municipal Planning Grant Program, administered by the Vermont Department of Economic, Housing & Community Development, Agency of Commerce & Community Development. This helps increase the likelihood that grant funding will be available in future years.