



United States Department of Agriculture
Rural Development, Rural Utilities Service

Application Guide

for

Technical Assistance and Training for Innovative Regional Wastewater Treatment Solutions Grant Pilot Program

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Table of Contents

Section 1: The Technical Assistance and Training for Innovative Regional Wastewater Treatment Solutions Grant Pilot Program	4
1.1 Introduction	4
1.2 Authorization	5
1.3 Available funding	5
1.4 TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program Contacts.....	5
1.5 TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program Resources online	5
Section 2: General Considerations for the TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program	5
2.1 Eligible Organizations	5
2.2 Eligible Grant Purposes	6
2.3 Ineligible Grant Purposes	7
2.4 Security Requirements	8
Section 3: Application Submission Process	8
3.1 Electronic Filing of Applications	8
3.2 DUNS Number Requirement.....	8
3.3 Deadlines for Grant Applications	9
Section 4: Requirements for a Completed Grant	9
4.1 Preparing the Application	9
4.2 Required Forms	9
4.3 Project Proposal	10
1. Proposed Services	11
2. Area(s) to be Served	11
3. Project Goals and Objectives.....	11
4. Project Narrative.....	11
5. Work Plan.....	11
6. Budget and Budget Justification.....	12
4.4 Required Information Not Found on Standard Application Forms	12
1. Evidence of Legal Existence	12
2. IRS Tax exempt Status	12

3. Debarment and Suspension Rules.....	12
4. Drug-free Workplace Requirements	12
5. Audit	12
6. Financial statements	12
7. List of Directors and Officers	13
8. Other Organizational Documents	13
4.5 Additional Information Not Found on Standard Application Forms	13
Section 5: Application Review Process	13
5.1 Receipt Acknowledgment.....	13
5.2 Evaluating the Application.....	13
5.3 Scoring Criteria	13
5.4 Application Selection.....	15
5.5 Possible RUS Actions on the Application.....	15
5.6 Appeals Process	16
Appendix—Rules and Regulations	16

The information requested in these guidelines is being collected and used by the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to determine eligibility for grants and to meet reporting requirements. According to the Paperwork Reduction Act, as amended, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0572-0112. Public burden reporting for this collection of information is estimated to be three hours per response, including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.

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PLEASE DO NOT SEND COMPLETED FORMS TO THE ABOVE ADDRESSES.

Section 1: The Technical Assistance and Training for Innovative Regional Wastewater Treatment Solutions Grant Pilot Program

1.1 Introduction

Wastewater systems are basic and vital to both health and economic development. With environmentally sound waste disposal, rural communities can attract families and businesses that will invest in the community and improve the quality of life for all residents. Without safe and clean wastewater facilities, communities cannot sustain economic development or ensure the mitigation of health risks that can arise from poor sanitation.

USDA's Rural Development Agencies, comprising the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RB-CS) and Rural Housing Service (RHS), are leading the way in helping rural America improve the quality of life and increase the economic opportunities for rural people. RUS provides financing for much-needed infrastructure improvements to rural communities, which includes Water and Environmental Programs (WEP). WEP provides the technical assistance and financing necessary to develop, improve, and operate drinking water and waste disposal systems. Safe drinking water and sanitary waste disposal systems are vital to public health, and to the economic vitality of rural America. WEP is proud to be the only federal program exclusively focused on the water and waste infrastructure needs of rural communities with populations of 10,000 or less. Additionally, WEP provides funding to organizations that provide technical assistance and training to rural communities to support water and waste activities and is administered through National Office staff in Washington, DC, and a network of field staff in each state.

On December 20, 2019, Congress passed the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, which established a pilot program, the Technical Assistance and Training for Innovative Regional Wastewater Treatment Solutions (TAT/RWTS) Grant Pilot Program, to assist communities with wastewater systems. Specifically, Congress was concerned about raw sewage discharge in some rural communities, particularly historically impoverished communities that have had difficulty utilizing Rural Development programs. Rural Development was directed to develop a program to solve untreated raw sewage issues with innovative technologies and strategic management and regulatory models. The program is to address rural wastewater management including county needs assessments, testing wastewater options, defining funding mechanisms for remediation and developing regulatory guidance. Congress appropriated \$5 million in grant funding for the TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program in the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020.

In this guide, you will find information to help you:

- Assess your eligibility for RUS grant assistance
- Understand how and when to apply
- Create a successful application

1.2 Authorization

The Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (CONACT) authorizes the TAT program. Under the CONACT, Section 306(a)(14)(A) authorizes the TAT Grant Program (see 7 U.S.C. 1926(a), as amended). The TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program is authorized under Division B, Title VII General Provisions, Section 783 of the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (Public Law 116-94).

The regulation implementing the TAT program is found at 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1775, Technical Assistance and Training Grants. Should any differences result in the interpretation of these guidelines and 7 CFR 1775, the regulation will take precedence over information contained in this guide. This guide is to be used in conjunction with 7 CFR 1775.

1.3 Available funding

Up to \$5,000,000 until expended.

1.4 TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program Contacts

The Water and Environmental Programs (WEP) staff will administer the TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program. We encourage you to contact the WEP staff early in the application process with any questions or ideas concerning your proposal. The staff will answer your questions about the application process and program requirements.

Telephone: 660.492.4268

Email: lois.east@usda.gov

1.5 TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program Resources online

Program information is available on the internet at:

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/water-waste-disposal-technical-assistance-training-grants>

Section 2: General Considerations for the TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program

2.1 Eligible Organizations

Regional consortia located in the United States and its territories may apply for this program. Eligible entities would include a consortium of regional institutions of higher education, academic health and research institutes, or economic development entities located in the region identified to be served that have experience in addressing these issues in the region. The consortium must include a regional university, or the proposed scope of work must include coordinating with a regional university, to solve untreated raw sewage issues with innovative technologies and strategic management and regulatory models.

Applicants must include all proposed activity under a single application. Application requirements and other important information is available at grants.gov and on the

TAT/RWTS Webpage <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/water-waste-disposal-technical-assistance-training-grants>.

An applicant is eligible to apply for the TAT/RWTS grant if it:

- a. Is a consortium of regional institutions of higher education, academic health and research institutes, or economic development entities, or combination thereof, located in the region identified to be served that have experience in addressing these issues in the region;
- b. Is legally established and located within one of the following:
 - a state within the United States
 - the District of Columbia
 - the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico
 - a United States territory
- c. Has the legal capacity and authority to carry out the grant purpose;
- d. Has no delinquent debt to the federal government or no outstanding judgments to repay a federal debt;
- e. Demonstrates that it possesses the financial, technical, and managerial capability to comply with federal and state laws and requirements; and
- f. Is not a corporation that has been convicted of a felony (or had an officer or agent acting on behalf of the corporation convicted of a felony) within the past 24 months. Any corporation that has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an agreement with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability is not eligible.

2.2 Eligible Grant Purposes

The goal of TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program is to find regional solutions to longstanding wastewater treatment problems where soil conditions make traditional wastewater treatment ineffective and economically unfeasible.

Grant funds must be used to identify and evaluate economically feasible innovative regional solutions to wastewater treatment concerns for historically impoverished rural communities in areas which have had difficulty installing traditional wastewater treatment systems due to soil conditions.

Grants are for wastewater related technical assistance, including such services as feasibility studies, preliminary design assistance and supervision, oversight, or training for the development of an application for financial assistance. Grantees will be expected to provide the Agency a detailed report to include the area to be served, the issues with the present method of wastewater discharge, the alternatives and innovative solutions to the wastewater issue, the long term cost and effect of the solution, affordability

including possible funding sources, potential treatment staff training needs, and lifecycle cost analysis.

The area to be served must be historically impoverished and rural. For purposes of this grant, historically impoverished is defined as meeting persistent poverty guidelines, which, according to Section 740 of the General Provisions of the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, Public Law 116-94, dated December 20, 2019, is any county that has had 20 percent or more of its population living in poverty over the past 30 years, as measured by the 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses, and 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-year average.

Rural is defined as being cities, towns or unincorporated areas that individually have populations of no more than 10,000 inhabitants as adjusted by exclusion of individuals incarcerated on a long-term or regional basis and the exclusion of the first 1,500 individuals who reside in housing located on a military base, according to the most recent decennial Census of the United States. The area to be served may be made up of combinations of these eligible areas. If the applicable population figure cannot be obtained from the most recent decennial Census, RD will determine the applicable population figure based on available population data.

Eligible project costs are only those costs incurred during the grant period that are directly related to the use and purposes of the TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program.

The work product must be related to a proposed project that meets the following requirements:

- a. MUST be regional in scope; and be for one of the following:
- b. To construct, enlarge, extend or otherwise improve rural wastewater facilities.
- c. To construct or relocate public buildings, roads, bridges, fences or utilities, and to make other public improvements necessary for the successful operation or protection of the facilities authorized in paragraph b. of this section.
- d. To relocate private buildings, roads, bridges, fences, or utilities, and to make other private improvements necessary for the successful operation or protection of facilities authorized in paragraph b. of this section.

2.3 Ineligible Grant Purposes

Grant funds may not be used to pay any of the following:

- a. Fund political or lobbying activities.
- b. Pay for work already completed.
- c. Purchase real estate or vehicles, improve or renovate office space, or repair and maintain privately owned property.
- d. Construct or furnish a building.
- e. Intervene in the federal regulatory or adjudicatory proceedings.

- f. Sue the federal government or any other government entities.
- g. Pay for any other costs that are not allowable under 2 CFR 200, as adopted by USDA through 2 CFR part 400.
- h. Make contributions or donations to others.
- i. Fund projects that duplicate technical assistance given to implement action plans funded by the Forest Service (FS) under the National Forest Dependent Rural Communities Economic Diversification Act of 1990 (7 U.S.C. 6613). Applicants cannot receive both grants made under this part and grants that the Forest Service makes to implement the action plans for five continuous years from the date of grant approval by the FS.
- j. To pay an outstanding judgment obtained by the United States in a Federal Court (other than in the United States Tax Court), which has been recorded. An applicant will be ineligible to receive a grant until the judgment is paid in full or otherwise satisfied.
- k. Any project that creates a conflict of interest or an appearance of a conflict of interest.

2.4 Security Requirements

A grant agreement will be executed between the consortium (formally known as Grantee) and the Agency.

Section 3: Application Submission Process

3.1 Electronic Filing of Applications

Applications must be submitted electronically through <https://www.grants.gov>, the official federal government grants website. No other form of application will be accepted. Application and supporting materials are available at www.grants.gov. All electronic documents must be in .pdf format.

You must be registered with Grants.gov before you can submit a grant application. If you have not used Grants.gov before, you will need to register with the System for Award Management (SAM). You will need a DUNS number to access or register at any of the services. The registration processes may take several business days to complete. Follow the instructions at Grants.gov for registering and submitting an electronic application. RUS may request original signatures on electronically submitted documents later.

SAM registers your organization and stores your organizational information, which allows Grants.gov to use it to verify your identity. You may register online at <https://www.sam.gov>.

3.2 DUNS Number Requirement

Applicants will need a Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and must be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM).

You must provide your DUNS number on the SF-424, “Application for Federal Assistance.”

To verify that your organization has a DUNS number or to receive one at no cost, call the dedicated toll-free request line at 1.866.705.5711 or go to <http://www.dnb.com>. You will need the following pieces of information when requesting a DUNS number:

- Legal name
- Headquarters name and address of the organization
- Doing business as (dba) or other name by which the organization is commonly recognized
- Physical address
- Mailing address (if separate from headquarters and/or physical address)
- Telephone number
- Contact name and title
- Number of employees at the physical location

3.3 Deadlines for Grant Applications

Applications for the TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. (Eastern Daylight Time) on **November 4, 2020**. Applications received after 11:59 p.m. (Eastern Daylight Time) on **November 4, 2020**, will not be considered.

Section 4: Requirements for a Completed Grant

4.1 Preparing the Application

To be considered for support, you must be an eligible entity and must submit a complete application by the deadline date. You should consult the cost principles and general administrative requirements for grants pertaining to their organizational type in order to prepare the budget and complete other parts of the application. You also must demonstrate compliance (or intent to comply), through certification or other means, with a number of public policy requirements.

4.2 Required Forms

Applicants must complete and submit the following forms to apply for the TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program. Note: Some forms may be available via www.sam.gov, however, all forms are required regardless of the method of submittal:

- Standard Form 424, “Application for Federal Assistance – Non-construction”
- Standard Form 424A, “Budget Information—Non-Construction Programs”
- Form RD 400-1, “Equal Opportunity Agreement”

- Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (if applicable, applicant must include approved cost agreement rate schedule)
- Certification regarding Forest Service grant.
- Other required supporting forms/information as listed in 7 CFR 1775.10 (c) and (d), including the following:
 - A short statement of applicant's experience in providing services similar to those proposed;
 - A brief description of successfully completed projects including the need that was identified and objectives accomplished;
 - The latest financial information to show the applicant's financial capacity to carry out the proposed work;
 - A list of proposed services to be provided;
 - An estimated breakdown of costs (direct and indirect) including those to be funded by grantee as well as other sources. Sufficient detail should be provided to permit the approving official to determine reasonableness, applicability, and eligibility;
 - Evidence that a financial management system is in place or proposed;
 - A description of the type of technical assistance to be provided and the tasks to be contracted;
 - A description of how the effectiveness and results of the proposed TAT/RWTS project will be measured;
 - Number of personnel on staff or to be contracted to provide the service and their experience with similar projects;
 - A statement indicating the maximum number of months it would take to complete the project; and
 - Explanation of the cost effectiveness of the project.

4.3 Project Proposal

The project proposal must outline the project in sufficient detail to provide a reader with a clear understanding of how the proposed TAT/RWTS project will address the technical assistance needs of RUS-eligible sewer utilities in historically impoverished communities in areas which have had difficulty installing traditional wastewater treatment systems due to soil conditions.

Explain what your project will accomplish by utilizing the grant funds. Demonstrate the feasibility of the proposed project in meeting the objectives of this grant program. Proposals should be no more than 20 pages single sided using a font size of 12 points (Times New Roman font style preferred). The proposal should cover the following elements:

1. Proposed Services

Present a brief project overview. Explain the purpose of the project, how it relates to RUS' purposes, how you will carry out the project, what the project will produce, and who will direct it.

2. Area(s) to be Served

Describe the areas to be served, including population, non-metropolitan median household income information, and the name of association(s) or type of association(s) that will be served as defined by 7 CFR 1775, §1775.2. Address the specific needs of the proposed service area. Also describe the method used to select the association(s) that will receive the service.

3. Project Goals and Objectives

Clearly state your project goals. Your objectives should clearly describe the goals and be concrete and specific enough to be quantitative or observable. They should also be feasible and relate to the purpose of the project.

4. Project Narrative

The narrative should cover in more detail the items briefly described in the Project Summary. It should establish the basis for any claims that you have substantial expertise in providing effective Technical Assistance and Trainings. In describing what the project will achieve, you should tell the reader if it also will have broader influence. The narrative should address the following points:

Document your ability to administer the TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program in accordance with the provisions of 7 CFR 1775.

Document that, to establish the TAT/RWTS, you can commit financial resources your organization controls. This documentation should describe the sources of funds other than the TAT/RWTS grant that will be used to pay your operational costs and provide financial assistance for projects.

Demonstrate that you have secured commitments of significant financial support from other funding sources, if appropriate.

5. Work Plan

The work plan must describe the tasks and activities that will be accomplished with available resources during the grant period. It must show the work you plan to do to achieve the anticipated outcomes, goals, and objectives set out for the TAT/RWTS Grant Pilot Program. The plan must include:

- The benefits of the technical assistance and/or training.
- Brief description of how the service will be provided and whether currently employed personnel or contracted personnel will be used, and their experience with similar projects.

6. Budget and Budget Justification

The written justification for projected costs should explain how budget figures were determined for each category. It should indicate which costs are to be covered by grant funds and which costs will be met by your organization or other organizations. The justification should account for all expenditures discussed in the narrative. The budget justification should explain the budget and accounting system proposed or in place. The administrative costs for operating the budget should be expressed as a percentage of the overall budget. The budget justification should provide specific budget figures, rounding off figures to the nearest dollar. Applicants should consult 2 CFR 200, Subpart E “Cost Principles,” for information about appropriate costs for each budget category. Sufficient detail should be provided to permit the approval official to determine reasonableness, applicability, and eligibility.

4.4 Required Information Not Found on Standard Application Forms

In addition to completing the standard application forms, you must submit supplementary materials:

1. Evidence of Legal Existence

Demonstrate that your organization is legally recognized under state and federal law. Satisfactory documentation includes but is not limited to, certificates from the Secretary of State, or copies of state statutes or laws establishing your organization. Letters from the IRS awarding tax-exempt status are not considered adequate evidence.

2. IRS Tax exempt Status

Submit evidence of tax-exempt status from the IRS.

3. Debarment and Suspension Rules

You must disclose debarment and suspension information required in accordance with 2 CFR 417 “Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension,” if it applies.

4. Drug-free Workplace Requirements

You must identify all of your organization’s known workplaces by including the actual address of buildings (or parts of buildings) or other sites where work under the award takes place. Workplace identification is required under the drug-free workplace requirements in accordance with 2 CFR PART 421 “Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace” (Financial Assistance).

5. Audit

Submit the most recent audit of your organization.

6. Financial statements

Submit the following financial statements:

Balance sheets, income statements, and cash flow statements for the last three years. If the applicant organization has been formed less than three years, the financial statements should be submitted for the periods from inception to the present including pro forma balance sheet at start-up and for at least three additional years.

7. List of Directors and Officers

Submit a certified list of directors and officers with their respective terms.

8. Other Organizational Documents

If contracting with an affiliated organization, provide the contract and/or legal documents that illustrate the affiliation between the contractor and your organization. For further information, contact the WEP staff at 202.720.9635.

4.5 Additional Information Not Found on Standard Application Forms

You may present additional information to support and describe your plan for achieving the grant objectives. The information may be regarded as essential for understanding and evaluating the project such as letters of support, resolutions, policies, etc. The supplements may be presented in appendices to the proposal.

Section 5: Application Review Process

5.1 Receipt Acknowledgment

RUS will acknowledge the application's receipt by letter within 30 days of receiving your application. Your application will be reviewed for completeness to determine if you included all of the items required. If your application is incomplete or ineligible, RUS will return it to you with an explanation.

5.2 Evaluating the Application

A review team will independently evaluate all applications and proposals. They will make overall recommendations based on factors such as eligibility, clarity, detailed information, application completeness, and conformity to application requirements. They will score the applications based on criteria in the next section.

5.3 Scoring Criteria

All applications that are complete and eligible will be ranked competitively based on the following scoring criteria, in accordance with the information contained in this Application Guide:

Criteria No.	Criteria	Points
1	Scope of Assistance Proposed services to be provided.	Up to 15 points
2	Degree of Expertise Applicant's experience in providing services similar to those proposed and/or description of successfully completed projects including the need that was identified and objectives accomplished	Up to 15 points
3	Applicant resources (Staff vs. contract personnel)	Up to 10 points
4	Goals/Objectives: Goals/objectives are clearly defined and tied to need, results and measurable outcomes.	Up to 10 points
5	Extent to which the work plan clearly articulates a well thought-out approach to accomplishing objectives; and clearly defines how the applicant would respond to historically impoverished communities in areas which have had difficulty installing traditional wastewater treatment systems due to soil conditions	Up to 10 points
6	Financial Controls	Up to 5 points
7	Project Duration Maximum number of months it would take to complete the project	Up to 5 points
8	Innovative approach to identifying and targeting wastewater treatment	Up to 10 points
9	Direct efforts towards identified communities in historically impoverished counties	Up to 10 points
10	Direct efforts towards identified communities in the Mid-South Region	Up to 10 points

* 7 CFR 1775. 35(e)(3) Eligibility - Applicants may contract with a nonaffiliated organization for not more than 49 percent of the grant to provide the proposed assistance. The Water and Environmental Program's definition of an affiliated organization is as follows:

- 1) In corporate law and taxes, an affiliate is a company that is related to another company, usually by being in the position of a member or a subordinate role (must be verified by organizational documentation). Two companies may be affiliated if one company has control over the other or if both are controlled by a third company, and
- 2) One corporation can be affiliated with another corporation by shareholdings, by holding a minority interest, or one corporation might be a subsidiary of another.

5.4 Application Selection

RUS will rank all qualifying applications by their final score. Applications will be selected for funding, based on the highest scores. Due to the short application window and the pilot nature of the program, the Agency expects to award a small number of grants. The Agency reserves the right to make no grant awards if all applications are incomplete and/or score below 65 points. **Each applicant will be notified via email of whether or not the application has been selected for funding.**

Note: Applicants selected for funding must have an active registration with current information in the System for Award Management (SAM). The recipient must maintain the currency of your information in SAM until you submit the final financial report required under this award and all grant funds under this award have been disbursed or de-obligated, whichever is later. This requires that you review and update the information at least annually after the initial registration, and more frequently if required by changes in your information or another award term. Recipients can register online at www.sam.gov. You as the recipient may not make a sub-award to an entity unless the entity has provided its DUNS number to you. Sub-recipients with sub-awards of \$25,000 or more must also have and maintain a current SAM registration. You as the recipient must report each first tier sub-award of \$25,000 or more in non-Recovery Act funds to www.frs.gov no later than the end of the month following the month the obligation was made.

5.5 Possible RUS Actions on the Application

In making its decision about your application, RUS may determine that your application is:

- Eligible and selected for funding,
- Eligible but offered fewer funds than requested,
- Eligible but not selected for funding, or
- Ineligible for the grant.

5.6 Appeals Process

In accordance with 7 CFR Part 1900, subpart B, you generally have the right to appeal adverse decisions. Some adverse decisions cannot be appealed. For example, if you are denied RUS funding due to a lack of funds available for the grant program, this decision cannot be appealed.

However, you may make a request to the National Appeals Division (NAD) to review the accuracy of our finding that the decision cannot be appealed. The appeal must be submitted within the proper timeframe, in writing and filed at the appropriate regional office, which can be found at <https://www.nad.usda.gov/content/file-appeal> or 703.305.1151.

Appendix—Rules and Regulations

These rules and regulations have been mentioned throughout the text of the guidelines, but are listed in one place for easy reference. The Code of Federal Regulation is located at www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/ECFR?page=browse.

- 7 CFR 1775, subpart C, “Technical Assistance and Training Grant Program”
- 2 CFR 417 “Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension”
- 2 CFR 421 “Requirements for Drug-free Workplace” (Financial Assistance)
- 7 CFR 1900, subpart B, “Adverse Decisions and Administrative Appeals”
- 2 CFR 400 “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards”
- 2 CFR 200 “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards”