

# Getting Started on the Exchange Network: Apply for an Exchange Network Grant

Exchange Network partners can apply for funding from the EPA Office of Environmental Information (OEI) to support the development and implementation of Exchange Network Nodes, exchanges, analytical tools, and other related projects. Partners have used grants to:

- › Build backend systems to enable participation on the Exchange Network,
- › Construct and install Exchange Network Nodes,
- › Build and join Exchange Network data exchanges,
- › Conduct innovative projects that benefit all Exchange Network partners, and
- › Standardize, exchange, and integrate geospatial information.

This guide provides general instructions and best practices for applying for an Exchange Network Grant. A more detailed introduction to the Exchange Network Grant Program can be found on EPA’s grant program website.

## HOW DO I GET STARTED?

### 1. Decide If an Exchange Network Grant Is Right for You

After developing a project idea and identifying partners as appropriate, find out if the Exchange Network Grant Program is the appropriate funding source. To determine this, you should read a copy of the most recent Environmental Information Exchange Network Grant Solicitation Notice, available on the EPA grant program website. This notice will outline the priorities and objectives of the current grant cycle (the cycle is aligned with the fiscal year) and delineate the types of grants available, partner eligibility, and expectations for grant outcomes or products. You may also want to review previous grants awarded.

#### Have an Impact on the Future of the Network

If you would like to have an impact on the focus of the next round of grant awards, you can provide input on draft Exchange Network Grant Solicitation Notices each year. These opportunities will be announced through the **Network Alerts**, so sign up for them today!

### 2. Apply for an Exchange Network Grant: The Preliminaries

Preparedness and timeliness are important factors in the quality of a grant application. Key dates and deadlines in the application process are located on the Exchange Network Grant Program website. The Exchange Network Grant Solicitation Notice is usually released in September, marking the beginning of the formal grant application process. The deadline for submitting grant applications is generally in late November.

Based on the experience of past applicants, clarifying and refining the scope of your project in advance of trying to describe it in an application is highly recommended. Communication among project partners can enable you to put together a stronger application package, and, if you are awarded a grant, help you to initiate the project promptly once you receive funding. The normal lifespan of a grant is two years after the grant becomes active.

When building your application package, it is important to remember that you are not allowed to discuss the substance of your grant proposal with EPA employees. For more information on this requirement, see the current Exchange Network Grant Solicitation Notice.

# Apply for an EN Grant

## 3. Apply for an Exchange Network Grant: The Application

Grant applications are a package of materials. The Exchange Network Grant Solicitation Notice provides detailed instructions for preparing an application. EPA's Exchange Network Grant Program website provides additional resources to help applicants, including checklists, "do's and don't's", and changes in the application process for FY 2008.

Successful applicants will have to prepare additional forms that can be obtained from the "Grants Application Materials" link on the Grants program website and the Grant Application section of the EPA Grants and Debarment website. The solicitation notices contain evaluation criteria for grant applications. You should be sure your application is consistent with these criteria. Another important consideration is the development of a complete and understandable work plan in the application. All materials must be finished and included when the final package is submitted to the Exchange Network Grant Program.

## 4. Implement Your Exchange Network Grant

Once you learn that a grant has been awarded and EPA releases the funds, you can proceed to implement your project. As part of the project implementation phase, you may choose to employ a contractor. The NPRG has created an **RFP Resource** that may be used to inform the substance and structure of related Requests for Proposal (RFPs). Partners without experience developing RFPs for IT projects are encouraged to take advantage of this resource.

## 5. Share Your Work with Others

A core principle of the Exchange Network philosophy is that collaboration and information sharing is the foundation of better environmental decision making. To help the Exchange Network community build a better Network, please be sure to share the details, status, and objectives of your project with others through the Exchange Network website.

## WHO CAN I TALK TO?

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### Other States, Tribes, and Territories

Look at the **progress pages** on the Exchange Network website. Click on the map/links for contacts & information.