

Partners for Places Application and Award Guidance

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Introduction to Partners for Places

[Partners for Places](#) is an established matching grant program hosted by [The Funders Network](#) (TFN). This fund creates opportunities for cities and counties in the United States and Canada to improve communities by building partnerships between local government practitioners and place-based funders in partnership with the [Urban Sustainability Directors Network](#) (USDN). Partners for Places administers three grant programs: Sustainable Climate Action grants, Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) grants, and a Mini Grants program. This document provides guidance for those drafting an application in response to a Partners for Places Invitation to Apply, and/or Partners for Places award recipients.

This document is designed to clarify how to apply and plan for an award, and to answer questions about what happens after an award.¹

Partners for Places offers a twice a year cyclical Invitation to Apply. Invitation to Apply deadlines are firm once published; no extensions are given for any reason, to keep the funding opportunity fair and clear for all applicants.

Please note that the local match may not be provided by a national funder that currently invests in Partners for Places.

Proposal Team Guidance

Partners for Places **defines a sustainability director** as any person who leads a multi-department and community wide urban sustainability initiative from within local government. This person usually, but not always, has a title that includes the word “sustainability” or “resiliency”. They are in charge of advancing local government initiatives in a way that balances economic development, environmental quality, and equity. This person may have other responsibilities too, and sometimes is not specifically called “sustainability director”. If the local government does not have a sustainability director or someone who performs those duties as described above, they are ineligible to apply. The local government applicant must be a filling a non-elected staff position within that local government.

A sustainability director may include any of the following:

¹ If, after reviewing this document, questions remain concerning specifics of unique circumstance or place, please contact [Ashley Quintana](#).

- A USDN core member²
- A member of a USDN-affiliated [partner network](#) member, such as a regional sustainability directors network
- Any person who leads a multi-department and community-wide urban sustainability initiative(s) from within a city/municipality or a county government in the United States or Canada.
 - The application must show that the local government is a “city” or “county.”
 - Depending on the form of state or provincial government, towns and Native American tribes could be eligible.

A sustainability director is not:

- A director from a transit, local housing, or community development authority or corporation
- A director of a sustainability initiative, whose consortium members include local government, even if the director is technically with a non-profit
- A director or a regional council of governments
- A director of a community group, non-profit, or a quasi-governmental entity

For Green Stormwater Infrastructure projects, the water department/water utility director(s) develop proposals with the local place-based foundation(s). **Partners for Places defines a stormwater department or water utility director** as a decision-maker working for a local government or a local water utility. They must be from within a city or county in the United States or Canada.

The local **frontline community-led group partner(s)** are made up of and/or serve people who are impacted by systems of oppression and injustice, economic disadvantage, and environmental harm. A frontline community-led group can be a nonprofit organization or group of nonprofit organizations, but a nonprofit status is not required.

The local matching partner must be **an entity who regularly grant-makes within a community** from annual philanthropic revenue. A local, place-based foundation may include:

- A community foundation, even if they have previously supported local sustainability initiatives
 - Partners for Places **defines a community foundation** as a grant making charity composed primarily of permanent funds established by many separate donors for the long-term benefit of the residents of a defined geographic area - which is usually a city or county, and rarely larger than a state. Many funders who are committed to investing in a community also have a larger geographic focus beyond just one particular city/county. These funders qualify as local foundations
- A private or corporate foundation, such as a bank community trust, within a greater metropolitan area
- In some cases, a corporate utility, though Partners for Places prefers that these applications include a local community foundation in addition to a corporate utility

Partners for Places does not allow organizations who receive supporting grants to provide a match from a grant or non-philanthropic funding stream. The local match may not be provided by:

- A national investor in the Partners for Places program

² The USDN member needs to be involved in the application, although they do not have to be a project lead if they want to encourage cross-sectoral involvement in the project.

- A municipally-owned utility
- A local, state, or federal government
- A non-profit who is offering up funds from a received grant as the match

If a local foundation makes a renewal grant to support continuing the work, Partners for Places considers this a legitimate match for a new Partners for Places application outlining follow-on work phases.

Budget Guidance

Partners for Places grants can be used for planning or implementation of projects or programs. **Reference the Invitation to Apply, and budget template provided with the Invitation to Apply.** Eligible expenses include new staff, consultants, community stipends, equipment, supplies, and administrative costs. Funding can be used for existing staff at a partner nonprofit organization to help implement a new project that advances the local government’s sustainability plan.

Funding can also be used for small capital or equipment costs related to projects such as gardens, electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, and bike stations, for example, if these are key priorities that advance a goal(s) in a community-focused sustainability, climate action, or comprehensive plan that specifically addresses sustainable climate action.

Partners for Places will not support salaries for existing local government staff, major capital projects, or endowments. Use the budget form posted with the Invitation to Apply to outline the specifics of how the requested funds will be spent. When completing the project budget, be sure to:

- **Be specific.** The budget should clearly show the “to whom”, “for what”, “how much”, and “from what source” for each line item
- **Check the totals.** Confirm that all funds requested are fully allocated by funding source, and that they sum correctly
- **Cross reference the request with Invitation to Apply restrictions.** Make sure that all fund requests are allowable by Partners for Places

Benefits and Overhead Limits. Partners for Places allows grantees to allocate a portion of the budget to fringe benefits and overhead costs. Fringe benefits include financial reimbursements to employees, such as funding an insurance policy, medical plan, or pension plan. Overhead or indirect costs are fixed non-labor expenses not directly related to the delivery of a service, such as rent, or administrative/marketing costs. Partners for Places caps benefits at 30% and overhead/indirect costs at 15%.

Other Funding Sources. Do not base the scope of work on external and non-matching funds that are not in hand at the time the application is submitted. Partners for Places will not incur the project investment risk should that funding not materialize. Unless additional funds for the work is already on hand and allocated for the proposed project, the scope of proposed work should only encompass work that a Partners for Places award and one-to-one match can support.

Two-Year Projects. An application requesting two years of project support requires an up-front two-year matching commitment from local funder(s). The applicant must delineate milestones over 24 months, so the Selection Committee can see cash flow requirements over the life of the project. An explanation of the importance of two years versus one for project lifespan, investment, and impacts is also needed. The Selection Committee also considers applications that advance projects funded in earlier rounds. Two-year and

renewal applications must demonstrate how an additional award/funds will bring appreciable and quantifiable impacts beyond the first year or initial award.

Unspent Funds: Any changes in the purposes for which grant funds are spent must be requested and approved in writing by TFN before grant funds are expended. Should TFN determine that grant funds have been expended for any other purpose, TFN has the right to withhold any remaining grant payments and receive repayment of funds used for any other purpose.

Prohibited Uses of Grant Funds: The grantee cannot re-grant any portion of the funds awarded without the express written permission of TFN. In addition, the grant funds must be used in compliance with all applicable anti-terrorist financing, sanctions, and asset control laws and regulations. No portion of the funds can be used to attempt to influence legislation or the outcome of any specific election for candidates to public office.

Grant Award Issue and Payment Timing

Partners for Places grants are intended to fund activities that can be completed within 12 to 24 months, depending on application timeline. Awards are made by TFN on behalf of the Partners for Places grant program. Grants range between \$25,000 and \$75,000 for one-year projects, or \$75,000 and \$150,000 for two-year projects. A one-to-one match is required by one or more place-based funder(s).

A letter(s) of commitment or intent to commit is required from that funder(s) with the grant application. The local match does not have to be formally approved or the funds received before submitting an application, but it needs to be evident that a funder partner(s) is working together on the application and that the funder is intending to support this project financially, subject to board review/approval.

It is understood that there will be challenges with the timing of funder approval processes and board of director's meetings. As part of the application, the Selection Committee must see a letter from the local funder(s) that expresses a strong intention to provide the matching funds.

If awarded, TFN must receive a signed grant letter or grant agreement from the local partnering funder(s) showing proof of the match within three months of the award date. Receipt of this letter after an award is made will trigger Partners for Places to release the matching grant funding in full for that year. If the award is a two-year grant,³ Partners for Places funding for the second year will be released upon review of an interim grant report showing expected progress in year one towards overall award project goals.

Reporting Requirements

Narrative reports that provide a summary of project activities and accomplishments are required of all grantees. One-year grants submit a final narrative report at the end of the grant period, and two-year grants submit an interim report at end of year one and a final report at the end of the grant period. These reports give an explanation of outcomes achieved, adjustments made, and lessons learned. Grantees are also required to fiscally account on total project income and expenses using the budget template provided with each Invitation to Apply.

It is the signee of an award letter that is ultimately the responsible party to deliver and report according to the agreed upon scope and schedule. The expectation is that all partners (“awardees”) will support the award

³ Two-year grants are less common, because these applications must show a strong rationale for a two-year timeline and also have two-years of support committed from a matching funder. **Carefully consider if a two-year request is truly needed or not, as a one-year application budget may be more competitive in a limited funding pool.**

letter signee (“grant recipient”) in delivering the terms of the grant, but there is no legally recognized shared liability by anyone not signing the award letter. Reach out to [Ashley Quintana](#) for the reporting template.

Acknowledgements and Copyrights

The grantee is encouraged to document the project by facilitating and/or producing publications, audio or video programming, film or other media regarding the project and make those available to TFN. When acknowledging the grant in the media and otherwise, grantees are required to refer to the fund as “Partners for Places – a project of The Funders Network.” All references to the grant’s funding source should be credited to “The Funders Network.” Media activities must be cleared through TFN’s Director of Communications, [Tere Figueras Negrete](#). Participants, including Partners for Places and TFN, should be credited on project materials so that readers understand funding origin. The Partners for Places and TFN logos are [here](#).

Partners for Places shares the outcomes and lessons learned from funded projects with colleagues and communities across the U.S. and Canada. The goal of this outreach is to further the field of urban sustainability. Because of this field-building mission, TFN is granted a non-exclusive, royalty-free, worldwide, perpetual license by all grantees in the grant agreements.

Grant Extension Process

Partners for Places grants have a life span of anywhere from 1 to 2 years. Grants that are not delivered within the prescribed timeline come with a price tag for the fund, in the form of: (1) increased Fund Management time investment, and (2) the potential for reduced funder trust that Partners for Places grantees can deliver strong, impactful projects in reasonable timeframes.

To mitigate these costs, Partners for Places has created the following guidelines by situational category (Table 1.) to help grantees understand the established process and subsequent corrective action steps.

Table 1. Partners for Places Extension Request Guidelines.

Reason	Description	Impacts of Delay	Corrective Measures
Project lead leaves position	Staff turnover is expected and will be experienced during some grant lifespans	When a project lead departs, the team can experience significant delay and the product can be jeopardized	Departing project lead must contact Partners for Places fund management as soon as possible; a transition plan will be developed on a case-by-case basis depending on factors like funds spent to date and by whom, strength of other team members, and percent complete
Project partner leaves position	Sometimes a critical team member departs the project, leaving the team to replace them	When a key project partner leaves, a replacement must be found to carry out the roles stated in the application	Project lead must contact Partners for Places fund management immediately; fund management will work with the grant team to find swift and suitable replacement(s)
Project partner is unresponsive, or responsive in a negative manner	In some cases, project partners have unexpected capacity issues that prevent them from executing the project as the application promised. Additionally, some partners that look	This type of issue can jeopardize the quality of the deliverables and the effectiveness of the project as a whole	Project lead must notify fund management early of any negative interactions with the partner and team; fund management will speak to the partner separately to understand how the situation can be corrected or resolved; in extreme cases, Partners for Places may request a return of unexpended grant funding if the project partner is the funds recipient

	good on paper do not meet expectations during implementation		
Local government lead is unresponsive	In some cases, local government leads have capacity issues that prevent them from executing the project as the application promised	This will directly impact that city's ability to obtain more funding	Fund management will note unresponsiveness, and this will be a point of decision: in extreme cases, Partners for Places may request a return of unexpended grant funding
Deliverables are incomplete	At times, project outcomes are unsatisfactory or do not match the signed scope of work	This may directly impact the ability of the project team to obtain funding in the future, depending on the justification as to why they are incomplete	The project team must submit to Partners for Places fund management in writing why the outcomes do not meet expectations; based on those explanations, a corrective course of action may be developed by fund management and the lead grantee
Repeated extension requests	Some grantees request repeated extensions	Any grant extension requests must be submitted in writing, and decisions will be made by fund management on a case-by-case basis	The project lead must submit to Partners for Places fund management in writing why the extension is being requested; they must also submit any deliverables created to that point for evaluation of progress and merit. Based on the explanation and product, a corrective course of action may be developed by fund management and the project lead, or a return of unexpended grant funding may be requested by Partners for Places to the grantee

Partners for Places strives to work with each member to ensure success, so these guidelines ultimately stress proactive communication and responsiveness. It is understood that situations change and encourage contact early and often to work with Partners for Places to avert situations that cannot be corrected in a manner that still obtains strong deliverables and usefulness to the field of urban sustainability. Please contact [Ashley Quintana](#) with any questions. If a grant extension must be requested, please explain the following in writing:

1. List all Project Team members, including partners
2. Describe progress to date (attach any deliverables in their current state)
3. Describe reason for extension request
4. Describe any corrective action taken to ensure the new requested deadline can be met
5. Suggest new deadline

This write up will be evaluated by Partners for Places fund management. A follow-up phone call may be requested to clarify portions of the request. Extensions will be provided in writing from fund management to the project lead.