

COMMUNITY-FOCUSED GRANT PROGRAM

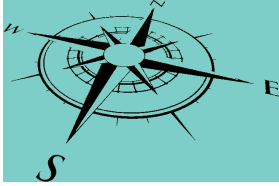
The Community-Focused Grant Program (CFGP) is a competitive grant program intended to allow Congress to harness its unique constitutional authority to appropriate federal dollars through a congressional competitive award process, with an emphasis on supporting projects that have the broad support of local communities across the United States. Public entities, including certain non-profits and including the public entity collaborating with a Member of Congress to identify a local priority, may apply for grants, and they must do so by submitting an application to at least one Member of Congress. It is up to each member to determine which projects they will support via a uniform request process to the appropriate congressional committee. For-profit entities are prohibited from participating in the program, as are relatives of members of Congress.

A hallmark of CFGP is end-to-end accountability and transparency, with public access to every member request and supporting documentation, and routine independent audits. For discretionary programs, the grant program is limited to 1 percent of discretionary spending. The grant program will give special consideration to projects that have broad support at the local level, thorough supporting documentation, bipartisan support and multi-member support. Congress will aim to distribute grants equitably across states and geographic regions, between rural, suburban and urban areas, and throughout economic sectors. From time-to-time, major projects of national or regional importance may merit a larger-than-normal grant share.

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DEMONSTRATION ONLY



Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress (SCMC)

Stakeholder(s):

Communities :

The CFGP recommended by the Committee outlines detailed requirements to ensure that congressionally-directed spending are communities' priorities; and is transparent from beginning to end, a good use of taxpayer dollars, and fair. This framework, passed by the Committee on September 24, 2020 holds great potential for Congress. From a constitutional perspective, the CFGP is an important step to reclaiming Congress' Article One responsibility and power of the purse. In addition, the CFGP will provide a much-needed refresh to the stagnant and inefficient authorization and appropriations process.

Americans :

Perhaps more importantly, this program is an important step for the American people. The money allocated to support local communities belongs to them—and they should have full access to the application and selection process, from beginning to end. In addition to the transparency of the CFGP, this program allows constituents to hold their Representative accountable in the way the Founders intended.

Executive Branch Bureaucrats :

Executive branch bureaucrats shouldn't be alone in making decisions regarding spending in congressional districts. That responsibility belongs to the community leaders and Members that represent them. This program puts the decision-making into the hands of those who know districts best: the communities themselves and the Members elected to represent their interests in Congress.

Members of Congress :

Committee Members shared the broad goal of restoring Congress to its rightful place as a co-equal branch of government and focused on recommendations to help Congress uphold the responsibilities given by the Founding Fathers. By encouraging more thoughtful discourse and enabling a more productive committee process, these recommendations will help restore public trust in Congress and its Members.

Vision

Public trust in Congress and its Members is restored

Mission

To restore Congress to its rightful place as a co-equal branch

Values

Accountability

Transparency

1. Transparency

Ensure transparency from the start of the application process to the final selection of grant funding

Enhance House Rules and Implement End-to-End Transparency — A top priority of this program is to ensure transparency from the start of the application process to the final selection of grant funding.

1.1. Directed Spending

Combine all rules governing congressionally directed spending into the Rules of the House

The Committee recommends combining all rules governing congressionally directed spending into the Rules of the House. Currently, House rules contain numerous transparency requirements, but several prior reforms were placed in the House Code of Official Conduct, rules governing the Democratic Caucus and Republican Conference, or were adopted as individual committee rules. While the Committee understands it could be difficult to incorporate these rules in the Rules of the House, it was important to make clear these should become House rules applicable to all Members and all committees. This also includes reinstating transparency requirements prior to 2011: Specifically, no request for projects may benefit a Member or their spouse; no request may be made to private entities; and all projects that received funding must be made public, among other requirements.²⁸¹ The Committee also recommends a ban on providing funds to for-profit entities, and an expansion on the certification of Member or Member spouse limitations to include the extensive House nepotism rules.

Stakeholder(s):

Congress

1.2. Website

Establish a website with every detail of the grant-allocation process

The Committee also recommends establishing a singular, public website with every detail of the grant-allocation process, including information on Member requests, accompanying documentation, and selected projects. The website will be a “.gov” website, and easily accessible and sortable. Each Member that participates in the grant program should have a prominent link to this website on their own congressional website. The goal of this singular website is to avoid the fractured process of 435 different websites posting results... The Committee recognizes transparency is key to accountability in the process. Through this recommendation the public will be able to see those that apply and grant requests that are awarded, and ultimately hold their Members accountable should they feel programs or projects are not an effective use of taxpayer dollars.

Stakeholder(s):

Office of the Clerk of the House :

The Office of the Clerk of the House will manage this website.

2. Grants

Create a New Competitive Grant Program

2.1. Collaboration & Application

Local communities collaborate with Members and apply through a universal, official form

A. A Process that Starts in Local Communities

Stakeholder(s):

Communities :

Unlike prior endeavors that put the nomination and decision-making process in the sole hands of Members, this program will start outside of Washington and in the communities Members represent.

Public Entities :

Grant requests must originate with a public entity (including not-for-profit entities that serve a public interest) or state, local, or tribal governments (including subdivisions of state or local governments and including a local community or public entity collaborating with a Member of Congress to identify a local priority) via formal application submitted to at least one congressional office. Recognizing issues related to community capacity, the committee also acknowledges that this may also include a local community collaborating with a Member of Congress to identify a local priority.

State Governments

Local Governments

Tribal Governments

Nonprofits :

The Committee felt it was important to allow not-for-profit entities to apply for a Community-Focused grant, given the valuable services many provide to communities across the nation. From schools and hospitals, to conservation programs and historical preservation efforts, the range of services provided by not-for-profit entities vary greatly across the country.

Members of Congress :

One of the top priorities of the CFGP was to allow communities and Members to have the freedom to identify projects in most need of funding. Ruling out not-for-profits could hamstring that goal. The Committee took important steps to ensure the process was easy for all communities across the nation to navigate—whether a large city with grant coordinators on staff or smaller, rural towns without resources on hand to help them navigate the grant process. As noted, public entities can collaborate with Members to ensure they are properly identifying projects and submitting necessary information. The form used to make grant requests should also be simple and allow communities and public entities to easily navigate the

grant application process. Only after a project is submitted by the appropriate entity will Members select which CFGP projects to support. Members will then submit those projects as individual requests to the applicable committee for review. Members are strongly encouraged to establish a process which facilitates nonpartisan engagement of local elected officials and stakeholders.

Local Economic Development Entities :

A process could involve input from local economic development entities and state and local elected officials before the Member moves forward with the request. Prior to the 2011 ban, there were multiple examples of such processes being utilized by members.

Local Public Leaders :

For public entities requesting funding for non-profit programs, Members should encourage consensus from local public leaders. One option the Committee considered as a model for Members was an approach similar to “the Dayton Model”—a non-partisan, independent review board that reviews requests for federal funding.

Grant Applicants :

Applicants and Members will use a standardized grant application. The form should include but shouldn't be limited to:

- *Identification of whether the grant requestor is a public entity, or a state, local, or tribal government*
- *Detailed description of the project including data or evidence of project merits*
- *Explanation of how the project is a good use of taxpayer dollars*
- *Total cost of the project including a breakdown of expenses*
- *Forecast of necessary future federal funding*
- *Timeline for the project*
- *Previous federal funding used to advance the project, if applicable*
- *Non-federal share of dollars for the project if it is a public-private partnership*

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Stakeholders (continued)

- Citation of authorizing language for the program under which the project falls (to be completed by the Member office)
- Letters of support from other state or local officials and entities
- A list of support from other Members (to be completed by the Member office)
- Indication if the request is bipartisan (to be completed by the Member office)

Grant Collaborators :

If a project would impact another state, district, or region, Members are strongly encouraged to work together with other Members on a robust, bipartisan (if applicable) request. To further encourage bipartisanship and transparency, committees should also strive to balance the prioritization of bipartisan, multi-Member, and multi-district projects with the requests of at-large and rural-representing Members.

Congressional Committees :

Committees are expected to ultimately fund projects that benefit rural and urban districts alike. Standing

committees should apply this framework to appropriate legislation under their jurisdiction. For example, the CFGP should be utilized to allow for community input when the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure is crafting the highway bill or when the annual National Defense Authorization Act is being developed by the Committee on Armed Services. It is important to note, the Committee took care to balance the importance of larger projects that could receive a great deal of Member support with equally important projects that could receive support from just one Member (a project in New York City versus a project in Helena, MT for example). The Committee incorporated language to make the intent clear that each project should be considered in an equitable manner. Lastly, Members should submit this documentation and ultimate requests through the same website (CFGP.gov for example) so that the process from request, to public review, to approval or denial is seamless from start to finish across committees.

2.2. Evaluation & Prioritization

Members, staff, and community leaders evaluate and prioritize the applications and programs

B. New Caps and Tighter Guardrails — The Committee considered several options to prevent abuse by any individual Member, and to ensure equitable distribution of grant awards.

2.2.1. Equitability

Prevent the inequitable distribution of funds

The Committee recommends a cap to prevent the possibility of inequitable distribution of funds, where, for example, some Members are successful in directing vastly more funding to their district than other Members. The Committee debated caps on the number of successful project awards and also on size of awards, but both proved to be very difficult to implement. Rather than be overly prescriptive, the Committee recommends that any adoption of this program be guided by the principle of equitable distribution of funds and take great care to avoid any situation where the program would allow a small number of Members to direct far more investments than the rest of the body.

2.2.2. Cap

Cap all requests at a combined total of 1 percent of discretionary spending

All requests will be capped to a combined total of 1 percent of discretionary spending, not including project-based accounts. Such a cap should encourage the applicable committee to ensure funds are “distributed equitably across geographic areas, between rural and urban areas” and among project modes, similar to TIGER grants.

2.2.3. Information

Provide the relevant information

If a CFGP request is funded in legislation, the committee should provide the following information to the Clerk of the House to be included on the Community-Focused Grants website:

- Updated tables that detail Member justifications
- Relevant grant application information
- A summary of statistics and demographics impacted by grant awardees (urban versus rural, average grant award, geographic disbursement, etc.).

Stakeholder(s):

Congressional Committees

Clerk of the House

2.2.4. Capacity

Evaluate the capacity for the Clerk of the House and any committee that has plans to fund CFGP awards to accommodate the new process

Lastly, capacity for the Clerk of the House and any committee that has plans to fund CFGP awards should be evaluated to accommodate the new process, review of project requests, oversight of spending, and development of websites.

Stakeholder(s):

Clerk of the House

Congressional Committees

2.3. Recommendations

Members and their staff recommend programs for grant funding to the appropriate committee

C. Heal the Legislative Process — In addition to reclaiming Article One responsibility and ensuring a more transparent and representative discretionary grant program, the CFGP provides individual Members with an opportunity to represent their community in the authorization and appropriations processes. The Committee deliberated requiring congressional authorization of programs before funds could be awarded. However, a delay in a congressional authorization or reauthorization could have prevented projects from receiving needed funds and concerns were raised such a requirement could be overly prescriptive. Ideally, the CFGP would only be provided to projects under authorized accounts. Understanding this may not always be possible, any relevant committee shall include, on its website, the scope and criteria for unauthorized accounts that contain Community-Focused Grants.

2.3.1. Documentation

Document CFGPs in bills passed out of committees

The Committee recommends that a CFGP appear in a bill that has passed out of a committee. At a minimum, though, it should be required to appear on the CFGP.gov website as a Member request.

2.3.2. CRs

Exclude grant projects from a Continuing Resolutions

The Committee also recommends that grant projects should be prohibited from being inserted into a Continuing Resolution.

2.3.3. Floor Amendments

Disallow amendments on the floor for new projects

To prevent unvetted, politically motivated projects replacing or taking funding from projects that went through the full process and were deemed to have merit, amendments on the floor for new projects should not be permitted.

2.4. Reviews & Placements

The appropriate committee reviews each submission and considers its placement in legislation

D. Training for Member Offices

2.4.1. Staff Training

Train staff and Members on how to apply for grants

To ensure all offices and community members participate in the CFGP with equal footing, the Committee recommends that training be provided for staff and Members on how to apply. This training should be provided on a routine basis.

Stakeholder(s):

Members of Congress

Congressional Staff

2.4.2. Constituent Training

Develop training for constituents and grant applicants

Furthermore, the Committee recommends that offices develop training for constituents and grant applicants, perhaps through district staff and online resources. This will ensure that all programs—regardless of applicant resources and experience—have an opportunity to apply for the CFGP.

Stakeholder(s):

Congressional Constituents

Grant Applicants

2.5. Audits

Independent Audit by the respective agencies' Inspector General

E. Independent Audits and Clawbacks — Lastly, to further ensure that the process is transparent, fair, and implemented as intended, the Committee recommends independent oversight from the respective agencies' Inspectors General.

Stakeholder(s):

Inspectors General

2.5.1. Waste, Fraud & Abuse

Identify waste, fraud, and abuse

The agencies' IGs should identify waste, fraud, and abuse and offer recommendations where funds should be reduced.

2.5.2. Funding Reductions

Offer recommendations where funds should be reduced

2.5.3. Pilot

Implement a pilot program

Stakeholder(s):

Susan Brooks :

Rep. Susan Brooks also suggested that the CFGP could be implemented as a pilot program for review after a couple of years, or as in specific committees that would likely utilize the CFGP, such as the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

2.5.4. Analysis

Analyze how the grant program is functioning

Stakeholder(s):

GAO :

The review of the pilot program could be performed by GAO, and should analyze how the grant program

is functioning, highlighting areas of success or areas in need of improvement.

2.5.5. Engagement & Accountability

Support public engagement and ensure Member accountability throughout the process

The Committee also considered a formal process for public comment. However, the Committee did not want to give the appearance that there was a beginning and end to public comment. End-to-end transparency of a process starting in communities allows for public engagement and Member accountability throughout.

Administrative Information

Start Date:

End Date:

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