

Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) Program: Fact Sheet



What Is a Technical Assistance Grant?

Often, there are many technical issues at Superfund sites that are hard for people to understand. The EPA's Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) program provides money to community groups so they can pay for technical advisors to interpret and explain technical reports, site conditions, and EPA's proposed cleanup proposals and decisions.

EPA's cleanup decisions depend on several different things, including what studies say about site conditions, the kinds of wastes found, and the cleanup methods that would work at a particular site. A technical advisor can help community members participate in decision making by helping them to better understand what is going on at the site.

Who May Apply for a TAG?

Your group may apply for a TAG if your members' health, economic well being, or enjoyment of the environment is, or may be, hurt by a Superfund site. Your group does not need to be incorporated to apply for a TAG; however, to receive a TAG, your group must incorporate for the purpose of participating in decision-making at the site. Groups that are already incorporated for other purposes may also be eligible under certain circumstances.

EPA encourages applications from groups that are interested in becoming more involved in the decision-making process for a nearby Superfund site, but need help understanding the technical issues and want to share



information with the whole community. Here are a few types of community groups that can apply for a TAG:

- A community group or citizens' association which was formed because of issues and concerns it had about the site.
- A group that has been actively involved at the site and that includes all the affected individuals and groups who joined in applying for the TAG.
- A group made up of several groups (like those described above) that came together to deal with community concerns about the site and its effects on the surrounding area.

Groups That Are Not Eligible for a TAG Are:

- Potentially responsible parties (PRPs), who are the individuals, cities/townships, or companies that may be responsible for, or may have contributed to, pollution problems at the Superfund site. PRPs can include facility owners, operators, transporters, or generators of hazardous waste.
- Groups representing or receiving money or services from a PRP.
- Academic institutions like colleges or universities.
- Groups affiliated with a national organization.
- Political subdivisions like states, counties, cities, townships or tribes.
- Groups created by, representing, or receiving money or services from any of the groups described above that are not eligible.

How Does My Group Apply for a TAG?

EPA may award only one TAG per Superfund site. To make sure that all eligible groups have an equal opportunity to apply for a single TAG, the application process follows these steps:

Step 1: Your group writes EPA a letter telling of its interest in a TAG. This "letter of intent" should include the name of the Superfund site or sites the TAG is for. It also should include the name, daytime telephone number, and address of your group's contact person. EPA will send you the TAG Application Package.

Step 2: EPA informs the rest of the community that your group is interested in a TAG. EPA usually notifies the community by publishing an ad in a local newspaper. The notice also explains that other groups interested in a TAG may contact your group and join with you or may submit their own Letter of Intent.

Step 3: Other interested groups in your community then have 30 days to get in touch with your group to talk about working together to submit one application to EPA. If your group and other interested groups decide they don't want to form a coalition, other groups that intend to apply for the TAG must write EPA a letter of intent within this 30-day period.



Step 4: After the initial 30-day period, interested groups will have another 30 days to submit applications. If EPA receives more than one application, it will rank each applicant based on whether the group represents the affected community, the group's plans for using a technical advisor, and the group's ability and plans to inform other community members about site-related information provided by the technical advisor. EPA is available to provide help to all groups preparing TAG applications.

How Much Money Can My Group Receive?

Initially, EPA will award a TAG for up to \$50,000. Additional funds may be available. There can be only one TAG for each Superfund site.

To get a TAG, your group must contribute a matching share to the project. Your match must equal at least 20 percent of the total project costs. This match usually is not difficult to provide: most groups make their match by donating volunteer hours and other "in-kind" services. Sometimes, EPA can waive the matching-share requirement or require your group to contribute a smaller match. EPA will help your group determine what "in-kind" and donated services can be counted as match.

How Does My Group Get Its TAG Money?

EPA reimburses your group for its eligible costs. Reimbursement means that your group must first incur a cost and then ask EPA to pay for it. For the most part, your group may not get money up front. However, new recipients of TAGs may ask for a one-time advance payment of up to \$5,000. To get an advance payment, you must explain in your TAG application how your group plans to spend the advance payment. Your group can use the advance payment to pay some of the costs for starting up your group. Start-up costs might include opening a bank account, buying or leasing office supplies and equipment, or advertising for a technical advisor. You cannot use an advance payment to pay for incorporating your group or to pay a technical advisor or for other contractor services. (Although your group cannot use the advance payment to pay incorporation costs, your group can be reimbursed for incorporation costs later.)

What Can My Group Do with a TAG?

Your group must use most of its TAG money to pay for one or more technical advisors to help you understand information about the site. For example, you may want someone to explain how the site affects the air or water in the site area and someone else to evaluate any health issues related to the site. The technical advisor reviews and explains existing information about the site developed as part of the Superfund cleanup process. Technical advisors



should produce reports that are easily understood by the community. Technical advisors cannot, however, conduct additional studies or generate any new data or information.

Here are some examples of what your group might pay a technical advisor to do:

- Review site-related documents from EPA or others.
- Meet with your group and other community members to explain site information.
- Make site visits, when appropriate and necessary, to learn more about site activities.
- Travel to meetings and hearings about the site.
- Evaluate plans for reusing the site after it is cleaned up.
- Interpret and explain health-related information.

Your group may use a small amount of its TAG funds to pay for supplies, office equipment, and rent. Your group also may pay someone to manage your TAG. If your group incorporates as a non-profit organization just so it can receive a TAG, the expenses for incorporation can also be charged to your TAG if your group is chosen to receive one. If EPA does not award a TAG to your group, however, you will not be reimbursed for the incorporation costs.

What Can't We Do with TAG Money?

There are several activities you cannot pay for with TAG money. Here are some examples:

- Travel expenses of group members (only technical advisor travel expenses can be paid).
- Lawsuits or other legal actions, including preparing testimony or hiring expert witnesses.
- Lobbying.
- Social activities, fund raising, or amusement.
- Tuition or training expenses for group members or technical advisors (except for one-time health and safety training for the advisor to gain access to the site).
- Collection of new health or primary data through, for example, medical testing or well drilling and testing.
- Reopening or challenging final EPA decisions.

How Does EPA Decide If Our Group Can Get a TAG?

The TAG application asks for information that will help EPA decide whether your group can manage a TAG. The application also asks your group to describe its history, goals, plans for using TAG funds, and how your group plans to share information learned from the technical advisor with the rest of your community. Your group must



include in the application to EPA a work plan and a budget that shows the time and resources the group will commit to TAG activities.

How Do We Find and Hire a Qualified Technical Advisor?

After EPA awards your TAG, your group needs to choose a qualified technical advisor. EPA has a list of sources where your group might find qualified advisors. You should choose a technical advisor who has the skills to address the specific issues and concerns at your site. A technical advisor must have these qualifications:

- Demonstrated knowledge of hazardous or toxic waste issues or relocation, redevelopment, or public health issues at your group's site.
- College or university training, and preferably a degree, in the relevant fields.
- The ability to explain technical information to your community in ways you understand.

Like all grants awarded by EPA, TAGs have certain regulatory requirements. Besides finding an advisor with the right background for your community's needs, you must also find and hire your technical advisor in accordance with EPA's grant regulations. The grant regulations require that you go through certain steps that make sure you find your advisor through a fair and competitive process.

How Does My Group Manage Its TAG?

Your group must keep track of how it spends TAG funds. This means your group must:

- Create a bookkeeping system and keep complete financial records of how TAG funds and your required matching funds or in-kind services are used.
- Ask EPA for reimbursement so you can pay your technical advisor on time and in full.
- Prepare and give quarterly progress reports and other reports to EPA.

Your group can use a small amount of TAG funds to pay a grant administrator to manage the TAG. But remember: Most TAG money must go toward your technical advisor, so the cost for a grant administrator should be both reasonable and necessary, and you must follow federal procurement regulations when hiring a grant administrator.

What If My Group Needs More Information?

Visit the TAG program web site at: <http://www.epa.gov/superfund/community/tag/contacts.htm> to contact the TAG coordinator for your region. The TAG coordinator will be available to further assist your group.