
Small Community Opportunity Program

2023-24 Application Guidelines



Superseded

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Small Community Opportunity Program: 2023-24 Application Guidelines | Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation

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Small Community Opportunity Program

2023-24 Application Guidelines

Indigenous and small communities are vital to rural Alberta and our province's long-term economic prosperity. The Small Community Opportunity Program recognizes the challenges and unique opportunities these communities face. Through grant funding, it enables Indigenous and small communities, and the non-profit organizations that support them to complete local projects that have a measurable impact driving innovation and growth in rural areas.

Background

Alberta is taking a whole-government approach to economic development in the province, especially in rural areas. Actions are related to business supports, job creation, healthcare, broadband and infrastructure investment with the goal of a thriving rural Alberta. In 2021 and 2022, the Alberta government held conversations with rural Albertans and Indigenous communities on rural economic development. These insights informed the [Economic Development in Rural Alberta Plan](#) (the Plan) as well as key strategies to address the unique challenges these communities face.

The Plan is founded on guiding principles that promote innovation, diversification and sustainable economic growth and development in rural and Indigenous communities. Through five strategic directions and measurable actions, the Plan is helping ensure these communities have economic opportunities where they live. The five strategic directions include:

1. Economic development-enabling infrastructure: Identify and improve economic development enabling infrastructure to support investment and growth in rural Alberta.
2. Rural business supports and entrepreneurship: Advance entrepreneurship capacity and a culture of innovation across rural Alberta.
3. Support for labour force and skills development: Enable skills development in rural communities to enhance workforce capacity today and for the future.
4. Marketing and promoting rural tourism: Enhance rural Alberta's reputation and capacity as a diverse tourism destination.
5. Rural economic development capacity building: Enhance rural economic development through regional and targeted capacity building.

By establishing the Small Community Opportunity Program, the Alberta government is taking action to address strategic directions 2, 3, 4 and 5. Alberta's [Northern and Regional Economic Development Program](#) supports strategic directions 1 and 5. It provides funding for projects that are regionally-focused or support non-capital investments to assess the feasibility of, or maintain economic development enabling infrastructure.

Overview

The Small Community Opportunity Program (the Program) provides grants between \$20,000 and \$100,000 for Indigenous and small communities, and non-profits they work with, to build capacity in agriculture, local economic development and small business supports. The program is designed to bridge funding gaps and support capacity building projects from planning to implementation. Communities that meet the rural characteristics described in the Plan may work independently or together, and non-profit organizations may collaborate with them. Through local projects, these communities will tackle challenges and tap into opportunities to achieve sustainable growth and diversification in rural Alberta.

Applicants are encouraged to review these Guidelines and refer to the Glossary for the terms and definitions that are used. (Appendix 1)

Timelines

Dates	Activity
November 10, 2023	Application intake opens
January 10, 2024	Application intake closes
March 2024	Funding decisions

Eligibility

Eligible Applicants

Indigenous communities, Metis Settlements and small municipalities may apply for the Program if they meet the characteristics of rural communities described in the Plan, which indicates they:

- have a population less than 20,000,
- have a limited geographic proximity (approximately 100 km or further) to population centres with more than 25,000 people that could provide employment and services,
- may be remote or have in them, or around them, a significant amount of nature, natural resources, agricultural land and wilderness areas, and
- have a workforce largely focused on primary economic activity, including oil and gas, agriculture and forestry.

Eligible rural communities may work together or independently on local projects, or they may collaborate with non-profit organizations that are:

- a Non-Profit Entity incorporated under Part 9 of the Companies Act (Alberta) or the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act with an economic development mandate. (A federally incorporated non-profit must partner with a provincially registered non-profit.)
- a legal non-profit entity located in Alberta that is owned and controlled by an Indigenous community that has at least 51 per cent ownership.

Eligible Projects

For a project to be eligible it must align with one or more of these strategic directions in the Plan:

- Rural business supports and entrepreneurship
- Support for labour force and skills development
- Marketing and promoting rural tourism
- Rural economic development capacity building.

In addition, the project must address one or more of these priority areas:

- Entrepreneurship and mentorship
- Skills development
- Small business supports
- Partnerships, interconnectivity and collaboration.

Projects must be completed within two years from the date the grant agreement between the Government of Alberta and the recipient is signed. Grant recipients must ensure their project will be sustainable beyond the two-year funding and have a measurable impact supporting, improving or enhancing one or more of the following:

- Rural and Indigenous communities
- Local economic development
- The agriculture sector.

Ineligible Projects

Projects will not be eligible for grants through the Program if they:

- focus on regional economic development
- support economic development enabling infrastructure.

Funding may be available for these types of projects through Alberta's [Northern and Regional Economic Development Program](#).

Examples of Eligible Projects

The following examples illustrate projects that would be eligible for the Program. The list is not exhaustive and should not limit other potential projects that applicants may be considering. For guidance on a project idea, contact agi.ruraleconomicdevelopment@gov.ab.ca.

Entrepreneurship and Mentorship: Projects that advance entrepreneurship capacity and a culture of innovation across rural Alberta.

Project Type	Description	Example Projects
Capacity Building	Projects that build entrepreneurship capacity to support economic development in rural and Indigenous communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Entrepreneurship training modules, sessions ○ Mentorship programs ○ Collaborative partnerships to support entrepreneurship training and leadership development ○ Projects supporting innovation. For example: housing initiatives supporting rural immigrants, youth retention, etc. ○ Projects supporting agriculture. For example: agri literacy, youth attraction to the sector, mental health initiatives to support the sector, mentoring and coaching, agritourism, etc.

Skills Development: Projects that enable skills development in rural communities to increase workforce capacity today and for the future.

Project Type	Description	Example Projects
Skills Development Training	Projects that increase workforce capacity through leadership and skills development to enable rural, Indigenous and/or agricultural businesses to grow existing markets or access new markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Skills training ○ Training/workshops in innovation ○ Employment partnerships ○ Economic Development Officer training ○ Mentorship training programs ○ Collaborative partnerships to support training and leadership development ○ Occupational and safety training ○ Sector based training ○ Employee training ○ Youth training
Initiatives	Activities that build awareness of in-demand skills within the agriculture sector, rural and Indigenous communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Partnerships between rural businesses and organizations to host career fairs that create awareness of in-demand skills ○ Collaborations to create online awareness campaigns that create awareness of in-demand skills

- Partnerships and collaborations that increase awareness and information about in-demand skills in agriculture

Small Business Supports: Local projects for communities to support rural small businesses in building capacity to alleviate challenges and access economic opportunities.

Project Type	Description	Example Projects
Small Business Training	Projects that provide information and training to help small rural, Indigenous and/or agriculture businesses start up and grow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seminars or workshops for business management ○ Leadership development ○ Human resource development ○ Business tax law training
Networking	Projects that increase networking relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Events to bring multiple business owners, suppliers and financial institutions together ○ Webinars for continued networking
Economic Development Supports	Projects that hire and support economic development officers in building small business capacity and managing projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Training sessions/workshops for economic development officers ○ Projects led by economic development officers to train and promote activities to small businesses ○ Projects led by economic development officers to increase networks among small business owners

Partnerships, Interconnectivity and Collaborations: Local projects that build capacity and enhance rural economic development through targeted partnerships and collaborations.

Project Type	Description	Example Projects
Strategic Planning	Local projects that develop a strategy to grow the local visitor economy or local agricultural activity and sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Partnership to access community attraction ○ Impact studies for Trade Corridor development ○ Community planning
Capacity Building	Local projects that foster a collaborative rural ecosystem by demonstrating partnerships and collaboration between businesses, communities and/or municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cultural awareness activities ○ Promotional activities to create awareness of community resources ○ Projects that promote resource-sharing
Enhancing Communication Capabilities	Local projects to enhance communication among rural communities, Indigenous communities and organizations, and non-profit organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community/multi-community activities to connect and collaborate ○ Information sharing venues online and/or in-person ○ Community job exchange placements ○ Initiatives to promote membership in rural economic development organizations
Marketing and Promoting Rural Tourism	Local projects that enhance rural Alberta's reputation and capacity as a diverse tourism destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agritourism

Funding

Applicants may apply for grants between \$20,000 and \$100,000 for each project. The grant may fund up to 90 per cent of eligible project costs and the applicant must fund at least 10 per cent.

Eligible Project Costs

Project costs that are eligible for the grant include:

- Skills development training
- Training equipment and supplies
- Salary expenses for new contract staff to deliver a project
- Equipment and supplies to deliver the project (computers, software, office supplies, etc.)
- Eligible travel costs for hotel, meals and mileage based on Government of Alberta [Travel, meal and hospitality expenses policy](#)
- Promotion and marketing activities related to the project
- Project administration up to 10 per cent of the total eligible project costs
- Any other expense the Government of Alberta deems eligible under the Program.

Ineligible Project Costs

Project costs that are not eligible for the grant include:

- Capital infrastructure including capital assets such as a new building, machinery and technological equipment
- High school or post-secondary education to receive a diploma or degree
- Health and wellness programs
- Faith-based or political activities
- Alcohol and entertainment
- Gifts, gift cards, contests, prizes, awards, trophies and plaques
- Contingency and miscellaneous costs
- Salary expenses for existing staff
- Legal and accounting fees, federal goods and services tax (GST) and insurance
- Membership fees
- Sponsorships
- Land acquisition
- Projects that may duplicate existing economic development initiatives in the community or region that is applying for funding
- Non-arm's length transactions (e.g. payments to an affiliated organization, payments to directors/board members or their families)
- Debt reduction or interest expenses
- Lobbying or advocacy activities
- Expenses to prepare funding applications or hold committee planning meetings
- Fundraising and similar activities not related directly to the project
- Retroactive funding for costs incurred prior to submitting the Grant application
- Expenses incurred to form a new community or regional economic development organization
- Permits
- Any other cost the Government of Alberta deems ineligible under the Program.

The project must commence when the grant is distributed and be completed within two years. Large projects may receive funding installments, with the majority of the grant provided at the onset.

Matching Funds

Applicants may cover their portion of eligible project costs by matching funds from their organization with monetary payments or grants from one or more of the following:

- Municipal government
- Federal government
- For-profit enterprises, non-profit organizations and post-secondary institutions
- Private sector programs, such as corporate social responsibility initiatives.

When the application is submitted, applicants must provide evidence that all matching funds (including their own) have been received, approved, or confirmed. Applicants must include a letter from each organization that:

- Is on the appropriate letterhead
- Confirms the funding has already been secured and received, or that it is committed and approved
- Is signed by a leader with the authority to commit funds for the organization (i.e. finance officer, director or equivalent).

Please note: The Program will not accept in-kind contributions.

Matching Fund Examples

Example 1

First Nation applicant pursuing a \$100,000 project:

- Application submitted for a \$90,000 grant
- Applicant must have received or been approved for \$10,000 in matching funds

Program request	\$90,000
Cash contribution from applicant	\$5,000
Cash contribution from municipal partner	\$5,000
Total	\$100,000

Example 2

Municipality applicant pursuing a \$50,000 project:

- Application submitted for a \$45,000 grant (90 per cent of the project's value)
- Applicant must have received or been approved for \$5,000 in matching funds (10 per cent of the project's value).Program request

Cash contribution from applicant	\$2,500
Cash contribution from Federal government	\$2,500
Total Project Value	\$50,000

Funding Limitations

Small Community Opportunity Program grant recipients cannot receive any other funding for their project or related activities from the Government of Alberta or its agencies. Appendix 2 provides examples of these funding programs. This means recipients cannot 'stack' or receive multiple funding sources from the Government of Alberta or its agencies for a single project.

In addition, recipients cannot use Program funding for projects or activities that are contrary to applicable legislation or regulations. However, once the Program-funded work is complete, new activities may be supported by other funding sources from Government of Alberta or its agencies. For example, if the grant was used to develop a strategy, the activities to implement the strategy may be eligible for funding from another funding program offered by the Government of Alberta or its agencies. As well, the Program will not accept in-kind contributions.

How to Apply

Applicants can apply online until **11:59 p.m. (MST), January 10, 2024**. Before starting the application process, applicants are encouraged to review this entire guide and have supporting documents on hand. Depending on the project and applicants, some or all of the required documents listed below may be needed to complete the online questionnaire. Applicants may be asked to send the required documents to the Program to finalize their application.

Required Documents

- A complete budget signed by a board treasurer, financial officer or similar representative and substantiated by one or more of the following:
 - quotes
 - estimates
 - historical information
 - other relevant evidence demonstrating how the requested amount was calculated.
- The most recent audited or unaudited financial statements.
- A Municipal Council Resolution signed by authorized representatives.
- A Metis Settlement Council Resolution signed by authorized representatives of the organization.
- A Band Council Resolution with signatures from a quorum of council that authorize the project, when the applicant is a First Nation.
- Letters or documents confirming matching funds have been received or approved.
- A letter or documents from a provincial or federal regulator confirming regulatory approval has been provided, if the project requires regulatory approval.
- A list of the board of directors, executive committee and/or decision-making body for each organization partnering in the application, including the individual's names, position/title, daytime phone numbers and email address.
- A letter of support signed by the local municipality for a non-profit organization and the project it will deliver with grant funding.
- Letters of partnership or a partnership agreement signed by all partners that are collaborating on the project, indicating their specific financial contributions, if applicable.

Applying Online

When beginning the online application process, applicants will create an account to access a questionnaire. Having an account allows applicants to log in and complete the questionnaire whenever it is convenient. Applicants can apply online until **11:59 p.m. (MST), January 10, 2024** at alberta.ca/small-community-opportunity-program.

Protecting Privacy

When completing the Program Application, the Government of Alberta will collect personal information in accordance with section 33(c) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (the FOIP Act) (RSA 2000,C.F-25) and it will be protected under Part 2 of the Act. Any personal information that is provided in the Program Application Form and associated attachments will be used for the purpose of assessing applications made to the Program. The information collected in the Program Application Form and associated attachments will also be used to report on the success of each applicant's project, and information from all applicants will be used in aggregate to report on the success of the Grant. Should you require further information about collection, use and disclosure of personal information, please direct your questions or inquiries to the Manager, Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation by telephone at 310-FARM, by email at agi.ruraleconomicdevelopment@gov.ab.ca.

After You Apply

Review Process

All application submissions go through a multi-stage review process, starting with an administrative screening to check for completeness and eligibility based on the guidelines in this document. Applicants are responsible for ensuring their application is complete and submitted prior to 11:59 (MST), January 10, 2024.

All eligible applications will be evaluated by a Program selection committee. It will be comprised of representatives from the Government of Alberta and its agencies who are not administrating the Program. Committee members bring multidisciplinary expertise to the review process and are chosen based on their:

- Area of expertise
- Sector knowledge
- Economic development knowledge
- Investment and capital attraction knowledge
- Senior leadership experience.

The selection committee will evaluate all application submissions using the Project Assessment Matrix below. As the Program has limited funding, not all eligible applicants will be awarded a grant. All applicants will be notified about the status of their submission by email.

Project Assessment Matrix

Category	Criteria	Weight
Project Description / Opportunity	<p>Anticipated Outcomes</p> <p>There is evidence the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ addresses and supports the priorities and needs of the community and/or the industry sector, including the agriculture sector ○ has support from one or more communities ○ includes ways to grow and/or diversify the economy ○ creates or retains jobs during the project and/or after completion ○ develops and sustains partnerships and collaborations with industry, communities, First Nations and Métis communities and organizations and rural areas 	20
Alignment with Capacity Building Priorities and the Plan Strategic Directions	<p>Strategic Fit</p> <p>There is evidence the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ identifies tangible and measurable economic benefits ○ demonstrates alignment with a least one of the following priority areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - entrepreneurship and mentorship - skills development 	20

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - small business supports - partnerships, interconnectivity and collaboration 	
Economic Impact	<p>Project Reach</p> <p>There is evidence the project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o has a measurable outcome to increase the economic capacity of one or more rural or Indigenous communities (based on the 'rural' definition in the Plan) o identifies ways to create economic impact in the community or communities 	20
Budget	<p>Costs and Funding Sources</p> <p>The application submission provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o a completed budget with descriptions and justifications for eligible costs that will be incurred throughout the project o line-item costing o evidence the applicant's funding and any matching funds are received or approved o evidence there are no matching funds for the project or related activities from any other funding programs offered by the Government of Alberta or its agencies (Appendix 2) 	20
Management	<p>Management and Implementation Strategy</p> <p>The application submission provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o sound project management methodology, including milestones and critical success factors o risk identification and mitigation strategies o an implementation approach and timeline 	10
Agriculture Related	<p>Agriculture Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The application supports the development of the agriculture sector in a meaningful and measurable way. 	10

After Recipients Are Selected

Successful applicants will be emailed a Grant Agreement that outlines the funding terms and conditions. It must be completed and signed by the recipient organization's authorized representative, then returned to the Government of Alberta by the deadline indicated in the email. Once received, a government representative will sign the agreement and a grant cheque will be sent to the recipient.

Grant recipients are encouraged to acknowledge the Government of Alberta as a project funder in announcement and promotional communications, such as news releases, social media posts, websites, newsletters, presentations, etc. Before making public announcements or promoting the funded project, contact the Program for guidance on recognizing the Government of Alberta and opportunities to collaborate and build public awareness.

Reporting

The Grant Agreement outlines the reporting requirements and schedule. Recipients must regularly report on the project's financial status and outcomes achieved. If the project scope or deliverables change after the Grant Agreement is in place, the recipient must contact the Program. Both parties must agree to amend the Grant Agreement to accommodate the changes.

Contact Information

Grant applicants and recipients can connect with the Alberta Small Community Opportunity Program by emailing agi.ruraleconomicdevelopment@gov.ab.ca.

Appendix 1 – Glossary

Term	Definition
90/10 Rule	A funding guideline for the Program, whereby where the applicant provides 10 per cent of the Eligible Project Costs, and the grant provides 90 per cent.
Eligible Project Cost	A cost for a project that is eligible for Program funding, as listed in the Guidelines.
Grant	Funding from the Program that is granted to a successful applicant.
Grant Agreement	<p>The legal agreement that commits a successful Rural Economic Development Capacity Building Grant applicant to the terms and conditions of the Program, including the terms under which the Grant will be paid.</p> <p>Successful applicants will receive a standardized agreement that they must sign and return within the timelines specified. Once the Government of Alberta representative has approved and signed an applicant's agreement, funding will be paid to the applicant.</p>
Local	Local refers to an area that is a neighborhood, business district, small town, or other similar area. There is normally a generally recognized name or description for this area.
Metis Settlement	A "settlement" as defined in the <i>Metis Settlements Act</i> .
Moderate Metropolitan Influence Zones	This category includes Census Subdivisions (CSD) in provinces where at least 5 per cent but less than 30 per cent of the CSDs resident employed labour force commute to work in any census metropolitan area or census agglomeration. It excludes CSDs with fewer than 40 persons in their resident employed labour force (Statistics Canada).
Municipality	<p>As listed on Municipal Affairs Municipal Profiles, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Alberta incorporated municipalities recognized under the <i>Municipal Government Act</i> and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cities - Towns - Villages - Municipal Districts - Counties - Summer Villages - Specialized Municipalities o Alberta Improvement Districts recognized under the <i>Municipal Government Act</i> o Alberta Special Areas as defined in the <i>Special Areas Act</i> <p>And Alberta Regional Services Commissions as defined in the <i>Municipal Government Act</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Controlled Corporations, as defined in the <i>Municipal Government Act</i>, with an economic development mandate.
Non-Profit Entities	Federally or provincially incorporated non-profit organizations that have been actively operating for a minimum of one year and are in good standing with required regulatory filings.
Outcome	The impacts or consequences from the products or services produced, which address the question: What has been achieved by the project?
Outcome Indicators	Specific data that tracks project success and describes observable, measurable characteristics or changes that represent the achievement. Measurement activities could include administering a follow-up procedure or knowledge test with a learner or client to determine improvement resulting from direct instruction, conducting a survey or focus group to get feedback from a targeted group. A good example of an outcome indicator: The number and percentage of learners who complete the program and increase their score by 10 or more points on pre- and post-questionnaire. A poor example: The number of learners attending the program. This is an 'output' (total number of clients) rather than an outcome indicator as it does not describe the impact the program had on the learners.

Partner	Is a collaborating organization that will have an integral role in the completion of the project. This may include in-kind contributions such as expertise, staff time or use of facilities.
Program	The Small Community Opportunity Program
Regional	Regional refers to a larger area that encompasses more than one local area that comprises a larger area that is generally recognized as a region.
Rural	<p>During engagement sessions that informed the Economic Development in Rural Alberta Plan, participants suggested the most common characteristics of rural communities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a population of less than 20,000 people ○ limited geographic proximity to population centres over 25,000 that could provide employment and services ○ communities may be remote or have in them, or around them, a significant amount of nature, natural resources, agricultural land, and wilderness areas, and ○ a workforce largely focused on primary economic activity, including oil and gas, agriculture and forestry.

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Appendix 2 – Other Government of Alberta Funding Sources

The Government of Alberta and its agencies administer a number of funding programs that support economic development projects. When applying for the Program, applicants cannot use the following programs as matching funds. This list is not exhaustive and there may be other sources not identified below. Applicants are reminded to disclose all the funding sources that have been received or approved when the application is submitted.

Program Name	Administered By
Aboriginal Business Investment Fund	Alberta Indigenous Relations
Alberta Broadband Fund in Partnership with the Universal	Alberta Technology and Innovation in partnership with the Government of Canada
Alberta Community Partnership	Alberta Municipal Affairs
Capacity Grant Program	Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation
First Nations Development Fund	Alberta Indigenous Relations
Indigenous Reconciliation Initiative – Economic Stream	Alberta Indigenous Relations
Indigenous Tourism Alberta Micro Fund	Indigenous Tourism Alberta
Municipal Sustainability Initiative	Alberta Municipal Affairs
Northern and Regional Economic Development Program (NRED)	Alberta Jobs, Economy and Trade
Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (STIP)	Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors
Travel Alberta - Product Development Fund	Travel Alberta