



Initial Assessment Grant Program

Purpose

In recognition of the costs associated with local government efforts to conform to the Highlands Regional Master Plan, the Highlands Act provides a funding mechanism known as the Highlands Protection Fund. A significant amount of grant funding is available through this fund for municipalities and counties seeking to conform or considering voluntary conformance with the Regional Master Plan (RMP).

The Initial Assessment Grant Program will fund preliminary municipal and county Plan Conformance activities for lands within the Preservation Area where conformance is mandatory, as well as in the Planning Area where Plan Conformance is voluntary. These grants will allow local jurisdictions to engage their professionals to assess the requirements and benefits of Plan Conformance. For 2008, the Highlands Council has allocated \$1.5 million for the Initial Assessment Grant Program.

Eligibility

The Initial Assessment grant program will only accept applications from municipalities and counties in the Highlands Region, as defined by the Highlands Act. Initial Assessment Grants will be awarded at the discretion of the Highlands Council.

Receipt of an Initial Assessment Grant does not obligate municipalities or counties to conform to the RMP with respect to lands in the Planning Area. Furthermore, receipt of an Initial Assessment Grant will not prejudice an applicant from applying for additional grants after the adoption of the RMP by the Highlands Council, or pursuant to other grant programs that may be offered by the Highlands Council in the future.

Funding Levels & Grant Objectives

Counties

Each of the counties in the Highlands Region has land in both the Planning Area and the Preservation Area. To support the counties in the Plan Conformance process, Initial Assessment Grants of \$15,000 are available to each county. These grants may be used toward any Plan Conformance activities relating to the Preservation Area, and/or toward an assessment of voluntary Plan Conformance for lands within the Planning Area.

The particular circumstances of each county will determine the extent to which all or just a preliminary portion of each of the tasks listed below may be completed within the limits of the available funding. Applicants must provide clear proposals indicating the intended scope of work

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and the projected cost to complete each item. The county may use the Initial Assessment Grant to perform the following tasks:

- 1) Assess its existing planning program for consistency with the Highlands RMP (i.e., by review and comparison between the RMP and county Master Plan, Development Review Regulations, ERI, and various Management Plans);
- 2) Determine whether RMP Updates (factual updates or corrections) are needed to make the RMP accurate and up-to-date (including maps, tables, and technical data);
- 3) Evaluate the extent of the county planning program changes necessary to achieve “Basic” and/or full Plan Conformance (see below);
- 4) Prepare any of the actual documents, inventories, maps, master plan and/or regulatory updates required to achieve Basic and/or full Plan Conformance; and
- 5) Determine the estimated cost to achieve Basic and/or full Plan Conformance.

Basic Plan Conformance. Additional information on the requirements applicable to Basic Plan Conformance and full Plan Conformance appear in the documents that accompany this application. Basic Plan Conformance is intended primarily to assist counties in achieving mandatory elements of conformance for Preservation Areas within the 9-15 month deadline required after adoption of the RMP. Its major aim is to ensure immediate protection of Highlands resources during review of land development applications. Basic Plan Conformance entitles the county (or municipality) to conditional conformance but does not relieve a county from the obligation to achieve full Plan Conformance, it minimizes pertinent upfront requirements and commits the county to fulfillment of the remainder in accordance with a Council approved Action Plan and Implementation Schedule. The process of Basic Plan Conformance also applies to the Planning Area, but has no statutory deadline and is not mandatory.

Grant Period & Deliverables. Initial Assessment Grants will provide funding to counties for three (3) months after the grant is executed by the Highlands Council. Before the end of the three month period, the county will be expected to submit a report outlining the tasks that have been completed, a summary of findings to date, copies of any maps or documents developed to address Plan Conformance requirements (if any), and copies of any professional proposals or cost estimates provided in keeping with Task 5, above. Identified RMP Updates must also be submitted at this time. (The county will not be precluded from submitting additional updates at later times, if necessary.)

Additional Funding. Counties may submit a petition for additional funding under the Initial Assessment Grant program if they cannot cover reasonable expenses for the allocated \$15,000. The decision to increase grant funding will be at the discretion of the Highlands Council. The Highlands Council anticipates providing significant additional grant funding for implementation efforts leading to Basic and full Plan Conformance, following completion of the Initial Assessment process.

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Application & Approval Process

The 2008 Planning Assistance Grant Application is available at the New Jersey Highlands Council website: www.highlands.state.nj.us. Applicants should complete this application electronically and submit **both an electronic and printed copy**. The printed application should be mailed to the Highlands Council with an original signature. The Manager of Grants Administration will confirm the receipt of this application with the applicant. When all of the required information is received, the Highlands Council staff will review the materials and present the application to the Highlands Council for consideration.

Applications shall include a Scope of Work setting forth a specific description of the tasks that the applicant intends to complete using the allocated grant funding. This Scope of Work should indicate how the applicant intends to begin to assess the implications of RMP conformance.

Completed applications for Initial Assessment Grants may be submitted to the Highlands Council immediately. These grants will be allocated throughout Plan Conformance and will be available to each municipality and county in the Highlands Region.

Timeframe & Reimbursement

Upon approval, the Highlands Council Executive Director will issue a Commitment Letter with a Grant Agreement. The applicant must execute and return this agreement within thirty (30) days to:

**New Jersey Highlands Council
Attention: Manager of Grants Administration
100 North Road
Chester, NJ 07930**

An electronic version of the grant agreement must be e-mailed to Lindsey Interlante, Manager of Grants Administration at lindsey.interlante@highlands.state.nj.us **in addition to** mailing the executed original. Failure to execute and return the Grant Agreement to the Highlands Council within 30 days will result in rescission of the grant approval. The Executive Director may, at her discretion, extend the 30-day expiration date for the recipient of the executed Grant Agreement upon written request from the applicant.

Once approved, grantees will have three (3) months to complete the tasks outlined in the Scope of Work. **A final report must be provided, along with RMP Updates, and deliverables, as listed above to substantiate reimbursement.** To receive reimbursement, grantees must provide invoices for all grant-related expenditures, as well as a voucher and certification (provided by Highlands Council staff). After submission of these items, Council staff will determine satisfactory completion of approved scope of work. The grantee will be reimbursed for all grant-related invoices provided to the Highlands Council, up to the total grant amounts authorized.