



## County Initial Assessment Grant Program

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### **Purpose**

In recognition of the costs associated with local government efforts to conform to the Highlands Regional Master Plan, the Highlands Act provided for creation of 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 funds 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. The Highlands Council has allocated \$1.5 million for the Initial Assessment Grant Program.

### **Eligibility**

The County Initial Assessment Grant Program will accept applications from 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 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 pursuant to other programs that may be offered by the Highlands Council in the future.

### **Funding Levels & Grant Objectives**

In the Highlands Region, all seven Highlands counties have lands within the Preservation Area. To support regional planning initiatives in the Plan Conformance process, Initial Assessment Grants of \$15,000 are available for each county. These grants may also be used toward an assessment of voluntary Plan Conformance for lands within the Planning Area.

Applicants may apply using the Highlands Council preferred Scope of Work as provided in the Sample County Initial Assessment Grant Application. Initial Assessment Grant funding is available to perform the following tasks:

- 1) Identify any needed RMP Updates for areas under direct County jurisdiction, only;
- 2) Review County Planning Documents for general consistency with RMP using “Plan Conformance for Counties - Key Requirements” as a guide;
- 3) Estimate County cost to achieve Basic Plan Conformance; and,

- 4) Prepare a brief Initial Assessment (IA) Grant Report documenting findings.

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, and copies of any professional proposals or cost estimates provided in keeping with Task 3, above. A list of any identified RMP Updates should also be submitted at this time. (This submittal will not constitute a formal request to the Highlands Council for RMP Updates, but is intended to provide the basis for such requests. Please note also, that the county will not be precluded from submitting additional RMP Updates later in the Plan Conformance process, 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.

### **Application & Approval Process**

A sample 2009 County Initial Assessment Grant Application is available at the New Jersey Highlands Council website: [www.highlands.state.nj.us](http://www.highlands.state.nj.us), and includes a pre-approved Scope of Work setting forth a specific description of the tasks that the applicant will complete using the allocated grant funding. 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.

Completed applications for Initial Assessment Grants may be submitted to the Highlands Council immediately. These grants will remain available to each county with lands in the Highlands Region throughout the Plan Conformance process.

### **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 the Manager of Grants Administration at [grants@highlands.state.nj.us](mailto:grants@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 months to complete the tasks outlined in the Scope of Work. **A final report must be provided along with other deliverables as listed above to substantiate reimbursement.** To receive reimbursement, counties must provide detailed invoices for all grant-related expenditures, including billable hours and rates, 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 items. The county will be reimbursed for all grant-related invoices provided to the Highlands Council, up to the total grant amounts.