



Housing Choice Grant Program

FY27 Program Information and Guidelines

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Overview

The Housing Choice Initiative provides incentives, rewards, technical assistance, and targeted legislative reform to encourage and empower municipalities to plan and build the diverse housing stock that the Commonwealth needs to continue to thrive. The Housing Choice Grant Program (HC) is an exclusive grant program for municipalities currently designated as a Housing Choice Community (HCC) or Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community (RST-HCC) to further their current housing efforts to meet our statewide, regional, and local housing needs. Grant funds may be used for a variety of activities related to planning and zoning, site preparation for development, housing development, and infrastructure.

Program Information and these Guidelines have been developed for HC applicants. The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (HLC) may issue additional guidance, clarification, or revisions which shall be incorporated by reference into these Guidelines. This document is intended to clarify, interpret, and explain existing program requirements, and to provide guidance on HLC's applicant selection process. It is not intended to be exhaustive.

Maximum Award

The HC awards a maximum grant to single applicant entities of up to:

- \$500,000 in funding for projects within the "Site Preparation," "Buildings," and "Infrastructure" Community One Stop for Growth (COSG) Development Continuum categories.
- \$150,000 in funding for projects within the "Planning and Zoning" COSG Development Continuum category.

Applicants are encouraged to conduct due diligence to determine accurate estimates of project costs to better understand actual costs of the proposed project. Funding over these maxima will only be considered for joint or regional applications on a case-by-case basis, at HLC's discretion, based on project need, outcomes, impact, and scope of engagement plan and implementation.

While a local cash match is not required, a match may factor into HLC's applicant selection process. Projects that include at least a 10% cash match will receive bonus points in application review. Note that staff time is not considered a "cash match."

HLC reserves the right to reduce the amount of the award from the original request, and to deny an award to applicants with existing or past violations of HLC contractual obligations. Funding availability is subject to the final state budget and capital investment plan.

Project Examples

Examples of eligible projects by Development Continuum categories include but are not limited to:

Planning and Zoning

1. Update of a Comprehensive Plan.
2. Creation of an Urban Renewal Plan.
3. Review of current zoning to identify and remove language that excludes certain housing types.
4. Review of zoning ordinances, creation of a plan to update zoning rules to unlock potential housing production, and implementation of strategies defined in a Housing Production Plan or other municipal plan.

Site Preparation

1. Planning for housing at specific parcel(s), including feasibility analyses, site plans, market assessments, and other parcel(s) specific site preparation activities.
2. Permitting and preparing engineering plans to address changes to existing water, sewer, and stormwater in a development site.
3. Conducting pre-development site master planning on an underutilized commercial property with the intent to create mixed-use that includes affordable housing.

Buildings

1. Providing funding toward building construction of an affordable housing project to directly create affordable housing units or increase the number of affordable units in a new housing project.
2. Rehabilitation of housing to bring an underutilized property back onto the market.

Infrastructure

1. Permitting and construction of existing water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure.
2. Creation of engineering designs to replace an existing sewer pump station and increase water capacity to build additional housing.
3. Improvements to an intersection near newly built or permitted mixed-use project that will yield new affordable housing.
4. Physical infrastructure improvements to increase safety, mobility, accessibility, and quality of life between residential and commercial areas that increases and promotes alternative modes of transportation.

Eligible Applicants

Municipalities that are currently designated as an HCC or RST-HCC, as well as Regional Planning Agencies requesting funding for a regional project that will serve HCCs and/or RST-HCCs, are eligible for consideration of an FY27 HC grant. Applications may be submitted by one eligible municipal applicant, two or more eligible municipalities in a joint application with one lead municipality, or a Regional Planning Agency applying for a project located within HCCs and/or RST-HCCs only.

- Municipal applicant(s) must be a [currently designated Housing Choice Community or Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community \(RST-HCC\)](#).
 - Applicant(s) must have conducted an ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan or is willing to commit to conduct such planning by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with HLC and the Massachusetts Office on Disability.
- Regional Planning Agency applicant(s) must provide clear and evident support from the HCCs and/or RST-HCCs to be served by the project.

Other public entities and private firms, such as but not limited to Redevelopment Authorities, Economic Development Industrial Corporations, Water and Sewer Districts, other bodies created by legislative act to serve a municipality, and home builders, are ineligible to apply as the lead applicant. Ineligible entities must apply in partnership with an eligible entity.

Housing moratoria or restrictive bylaws

Applicants with adopted housing moratoria or other restrictive bylaws that do not allow for at least a 5% increase in housing production over a single year are ineligible. Email McKenzie Bell, Senior Community Grants Coordinator, at mckenzie.bell@mass.gov with questions about this eligibility factor.

MBTA Community Compliance

Applicants that are MBTA Communities that HLC determined to be noncompliant under Section 3A of the Zoning Act (MGL c.40A) and corresponding regulations for Multi-Family Zoning Districts (760 CMR 72.00) are ineligible for this grant program for all activities other than to fund efforts to become compliant with MGL c.40A, Section 3A.

Use of Funds

Funding is available through the “Planning and Zoning,” “Site Preparation,” “Buildings,” and “Infrastructure” categories of the Community One Stop for Growth development continuum. Grants will fund a variety of activities related to community planning, zoning revisions, and planning for housing (as defined in the FY27 Community Planning Grant Program Guidelines), feasibility, engineering, design, and construction of physical infrastructure and of existing and new buildings, rehabilitation, due diligence, plan designs, market studies, pre-permitting/permitting, engineering, acquisition, demolition, and site-related upgrades of future development sites. Construction projects should consider whether their budget should contain a contingency line item.

Grant funds shall not be used to support:

1. Any activities related to assertion of the General Land Area Minimum (GLAM) (1.5% of total land area) safe harbor under 760 CMR 56.03(b)(Chapter 40B); or
2. Routine administrative tasks of municipal staff including, but not limited to, grant application preparation, procurement, or grant administration;
3. Parking decks or garages; or
4. A development with primary municipal use.

Timeline of Use of Funds

FY27 grants are expected to be awarded in the fall of 2026. As a two-fiscal year grant, FY27 grant funded projects **must be completed by June 30, 2028**.

Community One Stop for Growth Application

The Housing Choice Grant Program is part of the [Community One Stop for Growth](#) (COSG), a single application portal and collaborative review process of community and economic development grant programs that make targeted investments based on a Development Continuum.

The Full Application is organized into the following sections:

- Form 1 – Applicant Information
- Form 2 – Project Information
- Form 3 – Certification of Application Submission Authority

To be considered for funding through the COSG, applicants must include complete responses to all required questions.

Additional COSG Information

- For information on the COSG, including key dates, frequently asked questions, and instructions on submitting an Expression of Interest and Full Application, please visit the [COSG webpage](#).
- The Expression of Interest is an optional, but highly recommended form that allows an applicant to seek guidance from the participating COSG agencies. Applicants are encouraged to submit an Expression of Interest prior to starting their Full Application(s). Visit the [COSG Expression of Interest webpage](#) for more information and access to the Expression of Interest form.
- Full Applications must be submitted electronically through the [online application portal IGX](#). An online webinar outlining the use of the system will be available on the site. The application form template and link to the platform will also be available on the [COSG webpage](#).
- Eligible applicants may submit funding requests for more than one Development Continuum Category project in the same round. However, a separate application is

required for each project. Each proposal will be evaluated independently against the criteria and will be competing directly with all other proposals.

- It is the responsibility of the applicant to be aware of all requirements and deadlines, and to ensure that their Full Application is complete and submitted on time. All Full Applications will be logged as to date and time received and kept on file as public record. Late submissions will not be considered.

Application Review

HLC reserves the right to request additional information from the applicant or external sources as may be necessary to complete the application review. HLC also reserves the right to recommend partial grant awards, as deemed appropriate.

Full Applications will be scored for the responsiveness to the following criteria. Full Evaluation Criteria and Scoring are available in [Appendix 1](#).

- **Project Need:** What community and housing needs are met by the project? Evaluation will consider factors such as impact on housing development, preservation, and/or rehabilitation; impact on other municipally identified needs; and advancing opportunities for target populations.
- **Project Readiness:** Is the project scope reasonable and achievable within proposed timeline? Evaluation will consider factors such as feasible timeline and scope; identified leadership with experience and ability to execute the project; implementation readiness; and inclusion of a comprehensive public engagement plan.
- **Project Financial Feasibility:** Is the project's budget reasonable? Evaluation will consider factors such as whether project is fully or partially funded; reasonableness of cost estimate; and inclusion of cash match(es). In-kind contributions are not match-eligible.
- **Progress & Commitment to Date:** Does the applicant show commitment to the project through past activity and investment? Evaluation will consider factors such as progress to date; and addressing a long-known need.
- **Project Outcomes & Impact:** What are the projected outcomes of this project and the impact this project may have on the community? Evaluation will consider factors such as impact of the project relative to the community and responsiveness to identified need; tangible housing outcomes; community engagement plan; zoning or local by-law changes related to the project; and implementation strategies.
- **Housing Choice Best Practices:** How many Housing Choice Best Practices are implemented by the Housing Choice Community? Evaluation will consider proof of how many Best Practices are implemented.

Evaluation will also consider the following factors:

- Past performance with all prior HLC capital grants and capital grant contracts;

- Regional/geographic diversity of awardees;
- Whether an applicant is a first-time HLC capital grants recipient;
- Prior HLC support or investment;
- Successful implementation of a prior HLC capital grant;
- Environmental resiliency; and
- Alignment with Secretariat priorities.

Grant Award Process

Contract with HLC and Award of Funds

Successful applicants must be ready to enter into a contract with HLC within 30 days after receiving contract documents. Funding is subject to approval of the HLC operating and capital budgets. Grant projects may begin as of the execution of the contract. If selected, an awardee will be required to submit the following forms to complete a contract:

- Commonwealth Standard Contract Form, filled out and e-signed by the Awardee.
- Commonwealth Scope and Budget Form (available from HLC).
- Completed Contractor Authorized Signature Listing Form (available from HLC).
- Completed Fiscal Exercise Form (available from HLC).

Grant Distribution and Invoicing:

Granted funds will be disbursed on a cost reimbursement basis. Only work completed during the period of the executed contract will be eligible for reimbursement. Upon receipt of all required deliverables, the grantee will be reimbursed for the balance of any outstanding grant funds.

APPENDIX 1: HC Evaluation Criteria and Scoring

HC will evaluate Full Applications through a panel review process per the following criteria for a **maximum of 100 points**.

Overall Project Need (maximum 31 points)

Overall Need (project will receive one of the following scores below)

- **18 points:** Project will advance 40A reforms (MBTA Communities or simple majority zoning votes) and/or housing development, preservation, and/or rehabilitation.
- **12 points:** Project will advance a more livable community, economic development, and/or local transportation options, and has documented evidence of this community need.
- **7 points:** Project either supports a different need or lacks community-based evidence of the need for project.

Priority Need (projects that meet the following criteria will receive points)

- **BONUS 4 points:** The community does not have a full-time planner or project-related full-time municipal staff assistance; project will help address municipal staffing capacity and unlock further housing or economic development potential.
- **BONUS 3 points:** Application is submitted by two or more eligible entities (joint or regional application).
- **BONUS 3 points:** Project is located within an Environmental Justice census block group.
- **BONUS 3 points:** Project will advance opportunities for community members who have been socially and economically disadvantaged, and/or historically underrepresented.

Project Implementation (maximum total 15 points)

Scope and Timeline (project will receive one of the following scores below)

- **5 points:** Project scope and timeline are feasible and within the grant timeline (6/30/28). Project has identified a consultant and/or has a sample cost estimate.
- **3 points:** Project scope and timeline may be feasible within the grant timeline (6/30/28), but there is no sample cost estimate or identified consultant. Project is ready to release an RFP within 3 months of award.
- **0 points:** Project may not be achievable within grant timeline (6/30/28) and/or project is not ready to bid upon within 3 months of award.

Ability to Execute (project will receive one of the following scores below)

- **5 points:** Project leadership is clearly identified and has requisite experience and ability to effectively manage and execute the project.
- **3 points:** Project leadership may have experience to manage and execute the project but may face some challenges with capacity and/or unclear leadership structure.

- **0 points:** Project leadership is not identified and/or has little to no experience leading a similar project.

Community Engagement (Projects within the Planning & Zoning category will receive one of the following scores below)

- **5 points:** Project outlines a comprehensive public engagement plan that includes all the following: inclusive participation process, engagement of new voices, empowerment of diverse stakeholders, and feasible implementation plan.
- **3 points:** Project outlines a public engagement plan that has at least one, but not all, of the following: inclusive participation process, engagement of new voices, empowerment of diverse stakeholders, and feasible implementation plan.
- **0 points:** Project includes a limited public engagement plan and/or does not have a feasible implementation plan.

Construction readiness (Projects within the Site Readiness, Buildings, or Infrastructure categories will receive one of the following scores per criteria below)

- **5 points:** Project is either A) ready to bid and execute contract within 3 months of award for feasibility, design and/or engineering, or construction services by an identified contractor or B) ready to start within 3 months of contracting or in the most immediate construction season for a construction project.
- **3 points:** Project can start within 3 months of award using established purchasing consortia, municipal material and equipment bid results or other immediately available sources for capital items, and the project has complete design and/or specifications and will proceed to bid upon grant award.
- **0 points:** Project is not ready to commence as steps outside of the scope of this project are needed to be completed prior to start.

Project Financial Feasibility (maximum 12 points)

Financial Feasibility (project will receive one of the following scores below)

- **6 points:** The funding request fully funds the project or fills the last funding gap in an otherwise fully funded project, and, as applicable, unlocks private/partner spending match.
- **4 points:** The funding request includes a draft warrant article or other recommended community funds request to pursue remaining funding with a funding award schedule that allows for project to be completed within the by grant timeline (6/30/28).
- **2 points:** The funding request is a portion of the necessary funding to complete the project, and application provides evidence of other grant applications and potential award schedule to be able to complete project within the grant timeline (6/30/28).
- **0 points:** The funding requests more funding than the applicant is eligible for or is more funding than is justified or available to the entire grant program.

Priority Financial Feasibility (projects that meet the following criteria will receive points)

- **BONUS 3 points:** Project includes at least a 10% local funding match (such as municipal appropriations, DLTA, ARPA, and other local cash sources). Staff time does not count as a match.

- **BONUS 3 points:** Project includes another 10% cash match funding source. Staff time does not count as a match.

Progress & Commitment to Date (maximum 12 points)

Progress & Commitment to Date (projects that meet the following criteria will receive points)

- **4 points:** Project is the result of another previously completed plan or community-based initiative/project that accomplished a community goal.
- **4 points:** Project has evidence of prior HLC investment/support and/or follows up on ongoing commitment from other state/federal agencies and/or grants.
- **4 points:** Project allows the community to either use a first-time tool or address a long known need that has not been tackled due to lack of resources.

Project Outcomes & Impact (maximum 30 points)

Outcomes & Impact (project will receive one of the following scores below)

- **18 points:** Project will create opportunities for tangible outcomes that advance housing development, preservation, and/or rehabilitation. Project clearly outlines how public engagement and/or implementation strategies will advance housing goals and clearly solves the identified project need.
- **12 points:** Project will result in recommendations or tactics/strategies/tools that may eventually advance housing development, preservation, and/or rehabilitation, but may face significant challenges due to mismatch of project scope, funding, and/or grant timeline (finish by 6/30/28). Project plans to solve the identified need may not be clearly defined.
- **7 points:** Project will advance another need to improve community wellbeing (such as more livable community, economic development, or local transportation options) and/or the project does not solve the identified need.

Priority Outcomes & Impact (projects that meet the following criteria will receive points)

- **BONUS 4 points:** Project includes focus and intent to produce affordable housing.
- **BONUS 5 points:** Project will develop materials for compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 3A or directly supports housing development in a compliant 3A district.
- **BONUS 3 points:** Project reasonably and realistically takes climate change and environmental sustainability into consideration.

APPENDIX 2: Accessing the COSG Full Application

All Full Applications must be submitted electronically through the Community One Stop for Growth application process. The Full Application will be available and accepted through [the IGX Platform](#). A user account is required. Below are the steps for getting into the platform.

An applicant should activate a primary account with the CEO and/or designee(s) as a “Grant Administrator.” This person(s) can then add other users, as necessary.

Current Admin Users – Municipal CEOs and/or designees who have used the IGX system in past rounds may use their existing usernames to access the system. Users who have forgotten their username and/or password must use the "Forgot Username/Password" function on the IGX login page.

New Organizations – If an applicant has not accessed the system in the past, a new registration for the organization is required. This should be done by the municipal CEO and/or designee. Click the “New Organization? Register Here” link to submit a registration request. When that account is approved by EOED, the system will send an email notification confirming designation as a Grant Administrator.

NOTE: All new requests for Grant Administrator must be approved by EOED. These will be reviewed as they are received. Applicants will get an email notification from the system confirming the approval. If confirmation not received after 48 hours, email onestop@mass.gov to request assistance.

New User in Existing Organizations – Once a Grant Administrator is established, that user(s) may then create and/or approve additional user accounts for municipal staff and/or consultants, such as grant writers, engineers, etc. Requests for user access should be made directly to the Grant Administrator.

Creating a new Full Application – Once accounts are registered and/or approved, a Grant Administrator can create a Full Application(s) from the “Start New Document” panel and follow the prompts in the portal. Any designated user may access, edit, and/or save an application on behalf of their organization, and are encouraged to save their work often, particularly after completing each section. Only a Grant Administrator will be able to create and submit the Full Application(s).

Submitting a Full Application – Full Applications may be edited in IGX at any time up until the deadline. Official submissions to the COSG will only be accepted during the posted dates. During these dates, Grant Administrators may submit the Full Application by selecting the “Submit Full Application” option at the bottom of the left side menu. Applicants will receive an email confirming receipt within 24 hours. If an email is not received after 24 hours, email onestop@mass.gov for assistance.

NOTE: If a Full Application is erroneously submitted, email onestop@mass.gov to reopen the Full Application for further editing and completion, as long as it is before the deadline. Staff will try to accommodate these requests as they are received but may not be able to respond to all requests immediately. Once reopened, it is the responsibility of the applicant to resubmit prior to the deadline.