



## **Local Efficiency Achievement Program (LEAP)**

### **Challenge Grant Guidelines**

**Fiscal Year 2024**

**State of New Jersey  
Philip D. Murphy, Governor**

**Department of Community Affairs  
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## **PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) is dedicated to helping local governments improve the quality of life in every one of the state's 564 municipalities. Through a variety of programs, DCA's Division of Local Government Services (DLGS) works with counties and municipalities to streamline government operations and reduce costs and property taxes.

In 2018, Governor Phil Murphy launched the Shared Services Program with the appointment of two "Czars," former mayors Nicolas Platt and Jordan Glatt, to promote shared services throughout the State.

In 2019, DLGS established the Local Assistance Bureau (LAB) to provide direct support to local government entities in a variety of ways. This includes a key collaboration with the Czars and local governments to identify and implement shared services opportunities across the state.

The Local Efficiency Achievement Program (LEAP) is a natural extension of this mission.

Sharing services offers numerous benefits for participating communities. It reduces costs, delivers municipal services in a more efficient manner and increased value for each dollar spent while ensuring local units remain responsible stewards of the public trust.

The LEAP affords an unprecedented opportunity to incentivize shared services implementation across New Jersey's local government entities, advancing the mission of the Shared Services Program. The LEAP facilitates exploring and establishing shared services. The LEAP provides counties, municipalities, school districts, authorities, and fire districts assistance for the study or implementation of promising shared services projects undertaken pursuant to the Uniform Shared Service and Consolidation Act. The program is available to all New Jersey local government entities.

The LEAP is comprised of three primary components: Challenge Grants, Implementation Grants, and County Coordinator Fellowship Grants.

DLGS is responsible for administering the LEAP. Eligible entities are invited to apply for grant funds under each of the LEAP Grants. All information needed to apply is contained in these guidelines and the application package.

The LEAP Challenge Grant allocates funds to the most compelling projects in potentially each of New Jersey's twenty-one counties, affording municipalities, authorities, and counties the opportunity to compete for grant funding to support efficiency-generating shared services. This grant program is designed to promote innovation among peer communities and counties across New Jersey, and challenge municipalities and counties to collaborate on more extensive partnerships that produce shared services of greater significance than is customary. LEAP Challenge Grants provide reimbursement for qualifying expenses incurred in the study or development of approved programs and services authorized under the Uniform Shared Services and Consolidation Act (N.J.S.A. 40A:65-1 et seq.). Shared service programs and activities authorized by other statutes are not eligible for LEAP assistance.

The guidelines and funding levels will be reviewed annually and are subject to change with each funding cycle. Additionally, DCA reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to adjust the amount awarded under the LEAP Challenge Grant by the amount of unexpended funds available in other LEAP Grants or transfer unexpended Challenge Grant funds to other LEAP Grants.

## **ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS**

New Jersey counties, municipalities, school districts, authorities, and fire districts are eligible to receive LEAP Challenge Grant funding.

Funding for the LEAP Challenge Grant originates from \$7.5 million appropriated through the state budget at A. L. 2023, c.74 for Shared Services and School District Consolidation Study and Implementation Grants from the Property Tax Relief Fund.

Local government entities are invited to compete for a share of \$150,000 in available funds per county, a statewide total of \$3.15 million.

## **ELIGIBLE PROJECT CRITERIA**

Each project must meet the following criteria:

1. Advance efficiency in the provision of services.
2. Improve operational effectiveness.
3. Involve at least two (2) local government entities.
4. Strive to develop or be the first to use or apply a new method, area of knowledge or activity.
5. Present a proposal that has the potential to scale or to be replicated if the concept bears out upon study and implementation.
6. Reflect a documented commitment in the form of a certified governing body resolution (see resolution samples in application) from all participating local government entities to pursue the identified project or activity.
7. Involve a shared service agreement that will include a **minimum five (5) year term**, with a requirement to remain in place for the **full term of the agreement**. Should a shared service agreement be terminated prior to the five (5) year term expiration, the DLGS reserves the right to **recall** the grant in whole or in part at their discretion.

**Please note:** Applicants must be current, in good standing and compliant with all DCA DLGS and other State of New Jersey funded projects and grant agreement terms.

### **Ineligible Projects:**

Programs or projects authorized under any statute other than the Uniform Shared Services and Consolidation Act, including joint insurance programs and cooperative purchasing programs, are ineligible.

### **FUNDING AVAILABLE**

Funding in the amount of \$150,000 is available within each New Jersey County. Up to three (3) grants per county may be awarded.

### **ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES**

LEAP Challenge Grant funds can be used to support a variety of costs related to investigating, developing, and pioneering a new shared service project initiative. Eligible activities may include but are not limited to:

- Enhancing existing regionalization of services.
- Identifying and eliminating duplication and other redundancy of services through greater technical and capital alignment.
- Facilitating integration of resource deployment.
- Building community engagement and consensus around the joint provision of services.
- Sharing best practices and innovations with other communities.
- Investigative study of the potential benefits for a local government shared services or a consolidation.
- Information technology plan development for shared services initiative.
- Cybersecurity plan development for shared services initiative.

### **Ineligible Activities:**

- Salaries, wages, and ongoing operating costs are not generally eligible. This includes fringe benefits, rent, utilities, telephone maintenance or general administrative costs.
- Early Retirement Incentive (ERI) programs.

- Any expenses not fully justified that DLGS may deem ineligible.
- Expenses related to alcohol, out-of-state or out-of-country travel, prizes and awards, honoraria, lobbying expenses, fundraising events/expenses, grant-writing costs, fines and penalties, taxes, deficit funding, and refreshments for meetings.

### **Consultant Services:**

Local government entities intending to use a consultant to conduct a LEAP assisted feasibility study or to facilitate an implementation effort must adhere to the following conditions to qualify for reimbursement of part or all of the associated expense:

1. All consultant contracts must be awarded based on a formal Fair and Open Request for Proposal (RFP) process or the Non-Fair and Open RFP process permitted under the Local Public Contracts Law for certain licensed professionals. The Non-Fair and Open RFP process is specific to the following professional services: architecture, engineering and legal. Copies of the RFP submitted and selected proposal(s), and the applicant's analysis or other documentation that supports the selection are required for Non-Fair and Open RFPs. Consultant contracts awarded through the Fair and Open RFP process shall include copies of the RFP, proof of public notice of advertisement either in a newspaper or listed on applicant website, the submitted and selected proposal(s), and the applicant's analysis or other documentation that supports the selection.
2. All consultant proposals are to be on a time and materials basis, not a single all-inclusive fee, and must show the following:
  - A project timeline broken down into major component tasks and activities.
  - The anticipated time (hours or days) required to accomplish each component.
  - Personnel staff level assigned to each component, the number of hours/days estimated for that assignment and the rate to be charged.
  - Charges for support staff time must also identify the activity, the staff's hourly rate and estimate of hours required for task completion.
  - Out-of-pocket reimbursement (mailing, delivery charges or other related third- party expenses).
  - The total estimated cost of the proposal.
  - Feasibility study work plans must include crucial decision points that will halt the project should it appear that the project is not feasible on a joint or shared basis. The grantee must consult with the LEAP before authorizing any further activity.
3. Travel expenses are not eligible for LEAP reimbursement. This includes all mileage, tolls, parking, meals, or other travel related charges.
4. Staff "down time" while traveling between the work site and consultant's home or primary office location is not reimbursable by the LEAP.
5. If a grant is awarded to the local government entity, the selected consultant must prepare a detailed work plan of the tasks and activities for each project component, including the personnel assignments and the estimated time anticipated for completion of each task. This

work plan must be submitted to the LEAP. The LEAP reserves the right to request additional documentation, information, or other materials necessary to its evaluation of the proposed work plan.

6. There are specific requirements related to submitted reimbursement requests for consultant services. See Below.

### **Consultant Related Reporting:**

LEAP Grant reimbursement of payments for contracts with third party consultants must adhere to the following requirements:

1. Reimbursement of consultant service contracts shall be on a time and materials basis that details the grant related activity performed and time required for the activity or allowable expenses related to grant purposes. Grant awards shall be considered the maximum amount of LEAP assistance; the value of any time or other costs above the maximum grant amount approved by the LEAP shall not be reimbursable through the LEAP.
2. Invoices from the consultant must include the name and hourly rate of each individual whose time is billed, the date and number of hours worked, the project activity or task associated with the chargeable hours, and the amount due for the services rendered.
3. A separate line item or charge is required for each project activity or task being billed.
4. Copies of executed purchase orders, final invoices, and proof of payment checks (front and back) must accompany the LEAP Financial Status Report (FSR). The FSR must bear the signature of the local government entity's Chief Financial Officer and Certification number.
5. A copy of the consultant's feasibility study final report and recommendation must be submitted as part of the documentation for a final reimbursement payment, as applicable.

### **APPLICATION PROCESS**

Each application submitted to DLGS shall: include a description of the intended use of grant funding for the approved shared services project; demonstrate the applicant's capacity to complete the proposed project and provide project management and oversight for all activities and fiscal operations; and list key personnel and/or outside consultants that will be managing the grant funds and/or proposed project.

Applications must be submitted jointly by all participating local government entities. Each partner to a proposal must submit a conforming resolution that memorializes the local government entity's commitment to completion of the proposed project. The resolutions and application must designate one entity the project lead.

The following forms must be submitted to complete a LEAP Challenge Grant application:

- a. Grant application.

- b. Certified governing body resolutions (see resolution samples in application) from all participating local government entities.
- c. Shared service project narrative, including statement of need.
- d. Detailed explanation of use for funds, including efficiency estimate and cost savings summary.
- e. Detailed work plan for the project, including staffing commitments and timelines.

Applicants are to submit their application and supporting documentation in one (1) PDF document file format via electronic mail to: [dlgs.leapgrant@dca.nj.gov](mailto:dlgs.leapgrant@dca.nj.gov). Should application document be too large to send in one email, send additional emails with application documentation including naming conventions with the following suffixes: File 1\_of\_3, File 2\_of\_3, File 3\_of\_3, etc., as an example.

## **SUBMISSION DEADLINE**

**DLGS must be in receipt of one electronic copy of the completed application and required supporting documentation by 5:00 p.m. EST on April 15, 2024, in order for the applicant(s) to be eligible for grant funding. The date of email submission shall constitute the date filed.**

Incomplete applications will not be considered for funding. Applications not submitted on or before **5:00 p.m. EST on April 15, 2024**, will be rejected.

## **GRANT REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS**

DLGS will evaluate all applications. Grant applications will be ranked by scope of impact, breadth of collaboration, and efficiencies generated. DLGS will review grant applications and notify applicants of grant awards on or about June 15, 2024.

Grant application decisions are final and not subject to appeal.

## **APPLICATION SCORING CRITERIA**

Applications will be scored based on the following criteria, on a scale of 100 points:

1. Degree of Innovation (25).
  - a. Incremental.
  - b. Breakthrough.
  - c. Transformational.
2. Scale/Replication Potential (15).
  - a. Applicable between different local unit types.
  - b. Applicable across regions.
  - c. Can expand to other participants.

3. Direct Financial and Administrative Advantages (20).
  - a. Need for project.
  - b. Taxpayer impact.
  - c. Performance measurement.
  - d. Efficiencies to be generated.
  - e. Sustainability and source of proposed funding mechanism.
  - f.
4. Quality and Feasibility of Work Plan (20).
  - a. Quality.
  - b. Feasibility.
  - c. Expense Eligibility.
5. Full Participation and Support of Participants (20).
  - a. Documented commitment by all participants.
  - b. In-kind staff resources.
  - c. Matching local government entity funding.
  - d. Community engagement strategy.
  - e. Participant readiness.

Applications for LEAP funding must be consistent with the policies and priorities of any relevant State agency which has jurisdiction or supervisory responsibility over the service or function (e.g., Administrative Office of the Courts, 911 Commission, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Education). Applications for LEAP Grants may be reviewed in part by, and are subject to the comments of, such agencies.

## **GRANT FUNDING PROCESS**

All awards are subject to the availability of funds.

Upon completion of grant review and selection, DLGS will enter into an agreement with applicants approved for funding. Following execution of the agreement, the grantee can seek reimbursement costs, as appropriate within the category of grant awarded, provided that all award conditions have been satisfied.

Grantees shall maintain and retain accounting and other grant-related records and information for the duration of the project funded by the grant, as required by applicable state and local laws and regulations, for no less than two (2) calendar years.

Such records shall be subject to examination, audit, and inspection by DLGS and/or any other federal, state, or local agency that has jurisdictional authority.

DLGS reserves the right to rescind or reclaim funds, withhold future grant funding and/or disqualify a grantee from participating in future grant awards if any condition of the grant program is unmet,



including if grant funds received by the grantee are not properly accounted for, or if the grantee fails to meet reporting or certification requirements.

Following execution of the agreement, the grantee is permitted to move funds between authorized categories within these guidelines for eligible items without requesting prior approval from the Division.

## **SEMI-ANNUAL REPORTING**

Grantees shall provide the DLGS with Project Progress Reports (semi-annual), reporting on the activities and progress of the new shared service project initiative. Project Progress Reports are due on the following dates:

Grant Agreement Period ending December 31st - Report due January 15th

Grant Agreement Period ending June 30th - Report due July 15th

## **REIMBURSEMENT PROCESS**

LEAP Challenge Grants are reimbursement-based. There will be no advance payment or drawdown of grant funds. Eligible costs are reimbursed to the grantee upon submission of evidence of payment by the grantee and for expenses incurred on and/or after July 1, 2023, and through the grant award period.

Requests for payment must be made by submitting a Financial Status Report (FSR) along with copies of fully executed purchase orders, final invoices, and cancelled checks (front and back) documenting the expenditure of funds for which reimbursement is sought.

Reimbursement Payment Request format includes: executed FSR form, followed by individual scope of work deliverable(s) and task(s), each with a detailed list of associated expenses, each immediately followed by proof of payment, in order as was listed: resolution award and contract (where applicable), and for each expense, in order as follows: copy of executed purchase order, final invoice and canceled check (front and back), in one (1) PDF document file. Should FSR documentation be too large to submit in one (1) PDF document file, separate into multiple documents, each beginning with a scope of work deliverable, where able, and submit FSR documents with naming conventions that include the following suffixes: File 1\_of\_3, File 2\_of\_3, File 3\_of\_3, etc., as an example.

For additional third-party consultant reimbursement documentation requirements, please refer to the Consultant Related Reporting instructions.

Requests for reimbursement can be submitted semiannually (every 6 months) along with progress reports except for final grant closeout when the project has been completed.

Funding for reimbursement requests received more than two (2) months after the close of the fiscal year during which the costs were incurred cannot be guaranteed.

Payment will be made via electronic transfer of funds to the account and financial institution identified by the grantee.

## **GRANT CLOSEOUT PROCESS**

At the conclusion of the approved project period, which may coincide with the date upon which the grantee requests final payment but shall not be before the execution of the shared service agreement for which Challenge funds were provided, except as otherwise provided in writing by DLGS. Recipients must submit a final report documenting that all administrative responsibilities and required activities under the approved shared services project have been satisfactorily completed and provide a copy of the final executed shared services agreement. The report must also describe the benefits derived from the grant. A copy of the consultant's feasibility study report and recommendations must be submitted as part of the documentation for final payment if the grant supported a shared services or a consolidation study.

At the conclusion of the grant agreement period deadline, any grant program disbursements without submission of an executed shared service agreement or feasibility study final report and recommendations may be subject to recoupment along with non-payment of remaining funds.

## **ASSISTANCE**

Applicants may contact DLGS staff at (609) 913-4398 to discuss program and project needs up to submission of the application. Questions can also be submitted via e-mail to [dlgs.leapgrant@dca.nj.gov](mailto:dlgs.leapgrant@dca.nj.gov).