

Community and Regional Economic Support program

(CARES)

■ PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Community and Regional Economic Support (CARES) program is a two-year initiative under the Alberta Jobs Plan that runs from 2016 to 2018.

The CARES program funds initiatives of Alberta municipalities, communities and regions that enhance local economic conditions, leverage regional economic development resources, and build local and regional capacity for sustainable economic development delivery.

For a project to be eligible, it must create a measurable impact and align with one or more of the following program outcomes:

- improving local business environment and/or regional economic collaboration;
- increasing support for entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to grow and succeed;
- enhancing support for businesses and industries that provide diversification to a community or a region; and
- increasing investment that drives high-value job creation.

The CARES program funding for economic development initiatives begins at \$10,000. Eligible applicants can apply for projects that build economic development capacity, strengthen approaches to improve economic conditions, and achieve prosperity in a defined geographical area based on a shared economic vision for the future.

Applicants must be able to match the funding requested (1:1 matching ratio) and projects must not take more than two years to execute. Successful applicants will receive the grant up front so that their project can commence immediately.

Projects or initiatives that are completed by two or more project partners and have a positive impact beyond an individual community or organization may be given higher consideration during the evaluation process.

The program funding is limited, and not every eligible application will receive funding. The amount approved for each project may be less than the amount requested and is based on how closely the project meets grant criteria, eligible expenses, the number of requests received and consideration for providing support across the province.

■ ELIGIBLE ENTITIES

Entities eligible for funding under the CARES program include:

- Incorporated non-profit organizations, associations or societies whose primary purpose is for economic development. Organizations must be incorporated as of March 31, 2016, and be in good standing with required filings and their status.
- Municipalities (cities, towns, villages, summer villages, municipal districts, specialized municipalities, improvement districts, special areas).
- Metis settlements and First Nations.
- Formal and project-based partnerships between combinations of the above entities.

■ EXAMPLES OF ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

For a project to be eligible under the CARES program, it must create a measurable impact or positive outcome in one or more of the following areas:

1. Improved local business environment and/or regional economic collaboration

Examples of initiatives include:

- Implementation of priority economic development initiatives, either new or ones identified in existing strategic plans, that demonstrate strong benefit to local and regional entrepreneurs and businesses.
- Workforce attraction and retention strategies.
- Strategic action planning to enhance business conditions.

2. Increased support for entrepreneurs and SMEs to grow and succeed

Examples of initiatives include:

- Business coaching and training for communities with a lack of support resources.
- Providing information, tools and support services.
- Network and market development.
- Research for market opportunity identification.

3. Enhanced support for businesses and industries that provide diversification to a community or region

Examples of initiatives include:

- Activities that increase the capacity of businesses working in collaboration with their communities to expand their products and markets.
- Sector and business analysis to identify emerging opportunities suitable to a community's or region's strengths.
- Attracting and developing innovative and sustainable industries in areas where they aren't currently prominent.

4. Increased investment that drives high-value job creation

Examples of initiatives include:

- Coordination of marketing programs and initiatives amongst regions to more effectively promote business opportunities.
- Identification/scoping of potential investment opportunities.

The examples listed above are not an exhaustive list of initiatives that an applicant can undertake. Other activities related to economic development that further an economic goal in Alberta may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, undertaking one of the above examples does not guarantee the applicant funding.

■ INELIGIBLE PROJECT COSTS

The CARES program does not support project costs related to:

- core education, health and wellness, and advancement of specific faith or political based activities;
- travel and accommodation expenses of any kind;
- hospitality and entertainment costs (food, alcohol);
- gifts, contests, prizes, awards, trophies, plaques;
- contingency and miscellaneous costs;
- salary expenses for existing staff that exceed 20 per cent of the project's total cost;
- legal fees, taxes, insurance;
- membership fees;
- sponsorship;
- re-granting;
- municipal signage;
- land acquisition;
- major infrastructure (such as roads, public transit, sewers, broadband, waste water systems, museums and recreational facilities);
- projects that may duplicate existing provincial or federal economic development initiatives in the community or region applying for funding;
- non-arm's length transactions (payments to an affiliated organization, payments to Directors/Board Members or their families);
- debt reduction;
- lobbying or advocacy activities;
- expenses related to preparation of funding applications, committee planning meetings;
- fundraising and similar activities not related directly to the project;
- retroactive funding for costs that have already been incurred prior to application submission; and
- expenses occurred in the formation of a new community or regional economic development organization.

The list of ineligible project costs is subject to change to respond to the Government of Alberta's and the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade's priorities.

■ PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications will be evaluated through a competitive process. Each application will be reviewed against the following criteria:

- The project opportunity aligns with the program outcomes (listed on page 1) and shows clear evidence of job creation, investment, diversification and sustainable economic growth.
- The project supports the priorities and needs of the community and/or region.
- The project aligns with the applicant's mission and mandate.
- Community and/or regional support is shown (letters of support from community leaders, businesses and organizations, etc.).
- The project complements other community or regional initiatives.
- The project is collaborative and has regional impacts.
- The project outlines the short and long-term benefits to the community and/or region.
- The applicant has identified project risks and methods to mitigate them.

■ APPLICATION PROCESS

To apply to the CARES program, applicants must complete the following steps:

Create a User Profile and Log In to the Online Application Portal: Starting the first day of every intake period, applicants will be able to access an online application portal through the CARES program website.

Applicants will be prompted to create a user account with a secure login name and password. Once the account has been created, applicants will gain access to the online application portal, which will host live application forms and templates for submission during each of the intake windows.

Apply for Funding: Once the user profile has been created, applicants must complete and submit an online application. The CARES program is based on a competitive process and eligible applications will be evaluated by CARES program staff and scored against the evaluation criteria indicated above.

■ APPLICATION DEADLINES

There are two remaining application intake periods for the CARES program:

- April 1, 2017, to May 31, 2017, inclusive.
- October 1, to November 30, 2017, inclusive

The program aims to provide applicants with notification of funding decisions within 90 days of the application intake closing date.

■ REVIEW PROCESS

Funding recommendations are based on a competitive, merit-based process in accordance with the project criteria outlined above.

Once all applications are reviewed to confirm basic eligibility requirements are met and the application is complete, applications will be assessed by program staff.

Applicants may be contacted by the Program Administrator to provide clarification or further detail on their budget or proposed project.

Notification and payment:

- **Unsuccessful applicants** will be notified of the decision within approximately 90 days of the application closing date.
- **Successful applicants** will be contacted by the Program Administrator within approximately 90 days of the application closing date. The Program Administrator will email a copy of the approved eligible budget and funding agreement to the organization. The organization must agree to the funding agreement, spend the grant funding according to the approved eligible budget and submit the final report within the specified time frame.

- A grant recipient must request approval for a change of project in writing to the Program Administrator if the nature of the project approved in the original application changes. The scope of the project may only be adjusted with written approval from the Program Administrator.

■ FUNDING PARAMETERS

The funding parameters for the CARES program are as follows:

Minimum Funding: Minimum of \$10,000 request per application. Applicants may be listed as the lead once per intake. Applicants may be listed as project partners on any other applications.

Matching funds: The program operates on a dollar-for-dollar matching basis (i.e. 1:1 matching ratio). In this context, the applicant must demonstrate how it can provide the matching funds (minimum 50 per cent of the total project costs).

Priority will be given to projects that have financial resources in place to support the initiative. In-kind matching contribution in the form of donated goods and services will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and cannot exceed 20 per cent of the project's value, with a cap at \$10,000.

Important notes:

- Monies must be deposited into a separate account where the funding and accrued interest can be tracked.
- Grant funding not used or accounted for in accordance with the approved eligible budget is repayable by the recipient to the Government of Alberta.
- The grant recipient is required to notify the Program Administrator if the project cannot be completed or the applicant organization or partner organization has ceased operations. If this happens, the applicant may be required to repay to the Government of Alberta a portion or all of the grant amount. The amount of funding to be repaid will be at the discretion of the Program Administrator according to defined approval authority.
- If the actual project costs are less than the approved budget, the applicant has two options:
 - Submit a written request to expand the scope of the project, and if approved, apply the unexpended funds to this purpose; OR
 - Send in a cheque made payable to the Government of Alberta for the remaining unexpended funds once the final amount has been confirmed by the Program Administrator.

Examples of matching funds

Jane Doe from organization A would like to pursue a \$20,000 project. Jane Doe can apply for a grant of \$10,000 (50 per cent of the project's value) to support her project. Jane Doe must demonstrate how organization A intends to come up with the remaining \$10,000 to match the funding.

CARES program grant request	\$10,000
Funding contribution from organization A	\$4,000
In-kind contribution from organization A (one staff working approximately 167 hours on the project at \$15 per hour)	\$2,000
Funding contribution from the local municipality	\$4,000
TOTAL PROJECT VALUE	\$20,000

Important notes:

- The approved funding amount may be lower than the amount requested.
- Projects must not take longer than two years to execute.

REPORTING

Grant recipients are required to submit an interim and final report for each funded project.

- The interim report must be submitted 12 months after the start of the project or at the half way project milestone.
- The final report must be submitted within 90 days after the project end date.
- Final and interim reporting templates will be available through the online application portal.

Important notes:

- If the applicant has overdue reporting from any Government of Alberta program, the final report must be provided before a new grant is considered.
- Any applicant that does not comply with the reporting requirements may be subject to legal action and may be ineligible to receive additional funding through any Government of Alberta funding program.
- The grant recipient must permit the Minister or the Minister's representative to examine, during regular business hours, the books or records relating to the expenditure of the grant to determine if the grant has been properly spent.
- Records should be kept for seven years following completion of the project.
- The interim and the final report must be properly completed and signed by an authorized signing authority of all partners who signed the original application.
- The Program Administrator reserves the right to request additional interim reports.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Fund stacking

The maximum level of funding to a recipient from all sources combined (including federal, provincial/territorial and/or municipal) for any initiative or project is 100 per cent of eligible costs. Total provincial funding going towards the project cannot equal more than 50 per cent of the project's value. All funding sources must be disclosed, including those from non-government entities and the private sector. The Program Administrator reserves the right to contact other government entities to ensure the fund stacking is acceptable.

Extensions

Extensions on project completion and/or reporting date may be requested by submitting a written request to the Grant Administrator a minimum of 60 days prior to the originally-stated project completion date. The request should include an explanation of why the extension is necessary. The Program Administrator will inform the organization of the decision.

Appeals

All decisions made are final and appeals will not be accepted. However, applicants are able to seek feedback on their proposal and re-apply in the next intake period.

Recognition

Projects funded through the program are required to acknowledge Government of Alberta support for the initiative. The Government of Alberta also reserves the right to make a joint public announcement on any project funded by the program. For coordination of announcements and to receive appropriate communications materials, please contact the Program Administrator at CARES.program@gov.ab.ca.

Freedom of Information and Privacy (FOIP)

The FOIP Act applies to any information that is provided to the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. This information may be disclosed in response to an access request under the FOIP Act, subject to any applicable exceptions to disclosure under the Act. The personal information that is provided on the grant application form will be used for the purpose of administering the CARES program. It is collected under the authority of section 33(c) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and is protected by the privacy provisions of the Act. Questions regarding FOIP can be directed to the Program Administrator.