

Community & Regional Economic Support Program (CARES)



Program Guidelines

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Program Overview

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

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 associations, businesses and industries that enable diversification in a community or a region, and
- increasing industry and sector competitiveness to lay the foundation for investment and job creation, particularly tourism industry

Particular attention will be paid to projects with an innovation, investment attraction, or tourism focus.

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.

Municipalities and not-for-profit organizations must be able to match the funding requested at a minimum of 50 per cent of the total project cost. First Nations and Métis Settlements and Rural Alberta Business Centers must be able to match the funding requested at a minimum of 25 per cent of the total project cost.

All projects must not take more than two years to complete. Successful applicants will receive the grant up front so that their project can commence immediately.

Projects or initiatives that have private industry partnerships and have a positive impact beyond an individual community or organization may be given higher consideration during the evaluation process.

Eligible Entities

Entities eligible for funding under the CARES program include:

- incorporated federal or provincial (Alberta) non-profit organizations, associations or societies whose primary purpose is for economic development
 - federal organizations must partner with a provincially (Alberta) registered eligible entity and undertake an Alberta-based project
 - organizations must be in operation for a minimum of one year, 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)
- Métis settlements and First Nations
- formal and project-based partnerships between combinations of the above entities
- Rural Alberta Business Centers

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 association, businesses and industries that provide diversification in a community or a 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 are not currently prominent

4. Increased industry and sector competitiveness to lay the foundation for investment and job creation

Examples of initiatives include:

- coordination of marketing programs and initiatives amongst regions to more effectively promote business opportunities
- partnering with private business to support 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, gift cards, contests, prizes, awards, trophies, plaques
- contingency and miscellaneous costs
- in-kind contributions, in the form of donated goods and services, that exceed 20 per cent of the project's eligible costs, with a cap at \$10,000 (Calculation is based on the project's total eligible costs before the in-kind contribution)

- Example: Project's eligible costs include \$5,000 for training speakers/facilitators, \$5,000 for venue rental, and \$10,000 for marketing/publications. The total eligible in-kind contribution cannot exceed \$4,000
Calculation: $(\$5,000 + \$5,000 + \$10,000) \times 0.2$
- salary expenses for existing staff that exceed 20 per cent of the project's eligible costs (Calculation is based on the project's total eligible costs before existing salary expenses. Discretionary benefits and severance packages are not eligible)
 - Example: Project's eligible costs include \$5,000 for training speakers/facilitators, \$5,000 for venue rental, and \$10,000 for marketing/publications. The total eligible expense for existing staff salaries cannot exceed \$4,000
Calculation: $(\$5,000 + \$5,000 + \$10,000) \times 0.2$
- legal and accounting fees, goods and service taxes (GST), 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)
- minor infrastructure improvements (eg. renovations) that are not an integral part of the project and are not critical to the project's success
 - stand-alone minor infrastructure projects are not eligible
 - minor infrastructure deemed integral part of the project and critical to project's success will be considered on a case by case basis
- capital expenditures
- 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
- expenses occurred in the formation of a new community or regional economic development organization
- permits
- operating costs

The list of ineligible project costs is subject to change to respond to the Government of Alberta's and the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism'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 there is evidence the project will have a positive economic impact.
- The project has the potential to directly or indirectly support job creation.
- The project supports the priorities and needs of the community, region, and/or industry sector.
- The project has support from community leaders, businesses and/or organizations (written letters of support).
- The applicant has the capacity and experience to carry out the project.
- The project is collaborative and has regional impacts.
- The project is sustainable after program funding.
- 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 the online application portal through the CARES program webpage on Alberta.ca.

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.

Below is the list of required attachments that must be submitted with the grant application. Incomplete applications may not be processed.

- Letter/s confirming that the matching funding is secured and available at the time of submission. Application will be deemed ineligible without proof in writing that the matching funds are in place.
- Quotes to support the proposed budget. All listed budget items must be supported/substantiated with either quotes, estimates, historical information, or other relevant evidence demonstrating how the requested amount was derived.
- If in-kind contribution is included in the budget, confirmation in writing, including name of the donor organization, type of contribution, and value of the in-kind donation will be required.
- Letters of support (if any).
- If salaries for existing staff and/or new contract positions are included in the budget, job descriptions including responsibilities of the position, term, and salary/wage are required.

Application Deadlines

Dates for upcoming application intake periods for the CARES program are advertised on the program webpage when finalized.

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 a program staff 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 program staff within approximately 90 days of the application closing date. The program staff 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 and/or interim report within the specified time frame.

Funding Parameters

The funding parameters for the CARES program are as follows:

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

Matching funds: For municipalities and not-for-profit organizations, the program operates on a dollar-for-dollar matching basis (i.e. 1:1 matching ratio). In this context, the applicant must demonstrate in writing how it can provide the matching funds (minimum 50 per cent of the total project costs). CARES program staff reserve the right to collect financial statements for proof of matching funds.

First Nations and Métis Settlements are only required to provide a minimum of 25 per cent matching funding.

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 program staff 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 staff 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 program staff.

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.

Examples of matching funds

Jane from organization A (not-for-profit) would like to pursue a \$20,000 project. Jane can apply for a grant of \$10,000 (50 per cent of the project's value) to support her project. Jane 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)	\$2,500
Funding contribution from the local municipality	\$3,500
TOTAL PROJECT VALUE	\$20,000

John from First Nation X would like to pursue a \$100,000 project. John can apply for a grant of \$75,000 (75 per cent of the project's value) to support his project. John must demonstrate how First Nation X intends to come up with the remaining \$25,000 to match the funding.

CARES program grant request	\$75,000
Funding contribution from First Nation X	\$15,000
Funding contribution from the local municipality	\$5,000
Funding contribution from a project partner	\$5,000
TOTAL PROJECT VALUE	\$100,000

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/or 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.
 - Copies of invoices and receipts for all project expenses and proof for budgeted in-kind contributions must be submitted with the interim report.
- The final report must be submitted within 60 days after the project end/completion date
 - Copies of invoices and receipts for all project expenses and proof for budgeted in-kind contributions must be submitted with the interim and/or final report.

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/or the final report must be properly completed and signed by an authorized signing authority of all partners who signed the original application. Copies of invoices and receipts for all project expenses and proof for budgeted in-kind contributions must be submitted with the interim and/or final report.
- Program staff reserve 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 municipal and not-for-profit projects cannot equal more than 50 per cent of the project's value. Total provincial funding going towards First Nations and Métis Settlement projects cannot equal more than 75 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 program staff a minimum of 30 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, Trade and Tourism. 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.