

Community Climate Action Grant Program

Background and Instructions FY 2025-26

Thank you for your interest in Orange County's Community Climate Action Grant Program!

Climate Action Fund Background:

In 2019, the Board of Orange County Commissioners created the Orange County Climate Action Fund dedicated to accelerating climate change mitigation actions in Orange County. This decision was motivated in part to help the County meet the climate change mitigation goals set by the Commissioners in recent years.

The process for soliciting and selecting projects to receive funding is conducted through a formal grant program. For the 2025-26 funding cycle, an estimated \$267,750 in funding will be provided to support an expansion of climate change mitigation and resilience projects that build on Orange County's long history of sustainable actions.

Following the direction of the Board of Orange County Commissioners, Orange County is seeking applications for the FY 2025-26 funding cycle.

Orange County Climate Change Mitigation Goals:

- On November 2, 2023, the Orange County Board of County Commissioners adopted the County's first Climate Action Plan.
- The County's climate goals are to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 50% by 2030 and 100% by 2050 (from 2005 levels).
- [Here](#) is a link to the Climate Action Plan with its 70 strategies and associated 188 actions.

Grant Program Key Dates FY25-26:

DATE	ACTIVITY
Monday, June 16, 2025	Grant Application Opens
June-August 2025	Applications are Prepared*
Friday, August 8, 2025, 5pm	Deadline for questions and technical assistance requests
Friday, August 15, 2025, 5pm	Application Deadline
September-November 2025	Application Review by Orange County Commission for the Environment and Human Relations Commission
December 2025-January 2026	Complete scoring is sent to Board of Orange County Commissioners for their review and final approval
Early 2026	Contracts Executed & Projects Begin

*Please be sure to check the [Grant Project website](#) regularly for any updates.

Eligibility:

All public and non-profit entities are eligible to apply as well as small businesses whose gross revenues do not exceed \$3 million annually. All proposed projects must demonstrate a positive impact on Orange County's residents and environment as described in the **Scoring Criteria**. All funds awarded through this grant program should be spent in Orange County. Before funds can be distributed, successful applicants must have the legal standing to enter into a contractual funding agreement with Orange County. Such legal standing is not required at the time of application.

The Board of Orange County Commissioners (BOCC) intends to use the Climate Action Fund to support projects that would not be completed without funding assistance. Existing projects and programs may be

eligible if the applicant can demonstrate that Climate Action Funding would significantly accelerate the pace or amplify the scope of the project or program. Projects that contain repairs and replacement of necessary technology or infrastructure must show both energy efficiency improvements and demonstrate that the project is unlikely to be funded through another funding mechanism within the next 5 years.

GARE Model:

Orange County follows the models and methods of the [Government Alliance on Race and Equity \(GARE\)](#) to ensure racial equity in projects and other initiatives. The application questions were informed by the GARE model, and applicants are encouraged to refer to this model as well when designing their projects.

Scoring Process and Technical Assistance:

For the FY 25-26 funding round, there will be a single open application period during the Summer of 2025 with the aim of announcing project awards by January 2026.

In addition to the guidance and [online impact estimation tools provided](#), supporting staff will respond to applicants' requests for clarification or technical assistance if submitted before the posted deadline for questions.

Requests for technical assistance or disability accommodation in completing any portion of the application are welcome! Applicants are encouraged to ask for clarification and technical assistance as early as possible. Questions and requests should be directed to Orange County Sustainability at sustainability@orangecountync.gov.

Once the FY 25-26 application period closes, the Orange County Commission for the Environment (CFE) and the Human Relations Commission (HRC) will review and score all eligible projects using a formula that prioritizes social justice and racial equity. The CFE and HRC will consult with other experts or advisory boards on any or all submitted applications for the purposes of ensuring diversity and inclusion and to reinforce their scoring decisions. Upon request, comments from the reviewers on an application will be made available to the Board of Orange County Commissioners and/or to the party who submitted the application.

The CFE will deliver a rank-ordered list of their recommended projects and scores to the Board of Orange County Commissioners who will make the final funding decisions. In this process, the CFE and HRC may recommend full or partial funding for their recommended projects.

Project Types:

Below you can find the different types of projects (with examples). These examples are just for illustrative purposes. We encourage a wide range of projects.

- Clean Energy Infrastructure – New
 - Example: Rooftop Solar Installation, Electric Vehicle Charging Station
- Clean Energy Infrastructure – Repair
 - Example: HVAC System Repair, Weatherization
- Clean Energy Infrastructure – Replacement
 - Example: LED lighting to replace fluorescent bulbs
- Communication/Education
 - Example: Extreme Heat Education Materials & Outreach
- Nature Based Solutions
 - Examples: Soil Regeneration, Reforestation
- Waste Reduction/Circular Economy
 - Example: Composting Program
- Analysis/Plan
 - Example: Energy Efficiency Analysis
- Other (Please describe)
 - Example: Neighborhood Tree Planting

Scoring Criteria:

Projects will be assessed by the CFE and the HRC based on the scoring criteria as listed below. Example metrics that can be used to assign scores under the criteria are listed below each one. Not all example metrics will apply to each project.

Application reviewers will pay close attention to any objective and authoritative evidence supporting a proposed project. As you complete your application, please describe how your proposed program aligns with evidence-based approaches to addressing climate change.

Note: The CFE and HRC may recommend a shift in the weight of the scoring on the following criteria. Final decisions on any change to these weights will be made by the Board of County Commissioners and will be posted on the grant program webpage and communicated to any known applicants.

The current scoring criteria for all projects are below:

1. Social Justice and Racial Equity (0 to 6pts):

Low-income households have fewer resources to cope with climate change, and communities of color are often hit hardest by its effects. Both socioeconomic status and racial identity will be important factors in measuring the positive impacts of these programs. Socioeconomic status and race should be tracked separately because not everyone below the poverty line is a person of color.

Example Metrics:

- Low-income or marginalized communities/households were engaged in the creation of this project.
- Low-income or marginalized communities/households benefit most directly.
- Racial minorities will be hired and/or are essential to the completion of the project.
- Any negative side effects of the project do not impact any low-income or marginalized communities/households.

2. Emissions Reduced (0 to 4 pts):

This criterion rewards projects that reduce the most emissions, especially those reducing emissions within Orange County (e.g., transportation, carbon farming), instead of at power plants outside the County.

Example Metrics:

- A significant amount of Greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced within Orange County because of this project.
- Greenhouse gas emissions reductions are directly attributable to the project.

3. Efficient Use of Funds (0 to 4 pts):

The impact of each project will be measured based on how much it reduces emissions per dollar of investment from the Climate Action Fund.

Example Metrics:

- Impact per grant dollar.
- Generated cost savings over a reasonable payback period.
- Acceleration or expansion of existing programs that already show positive impact.
- Leveraging other funding sources.
- The proposed project positions the applicant for future funding from other sources.

4. Capacity of Applicant (0 to 3 pts):**Example Metrics:**

- Applicant has the expertise to complete the project and shows understanding of what is needed to accomplish the project goals.

- Applicant has done similar projects or has collaborators with direct experience in the project field.

5. Local Economic Development (0 to 3 pts):

Reducing the impacts of climate change can also help boost local economic growth and create new job opportunities. The County wants to support projects that focus on local investments in renewable energy and clean technologies.

Example Metrics:

- Number of Orange County residents employed by the applicant organization.
- % of project materials that are sourced within Orange County/The Triangle/North Carolina.

6. Amount and Duration of Engagement (0 to 3 pts):

This criterion looks at how well projects educate the community on climate change impacts, solutions, and resilience, as well as how they increase awareness and engagement.

Example Metrics:

- Number of people reached.
- Retention of new knowledge or attitude after project completion.
- Likelihood of impacted audience continuing engagement with climate change efforts.

7. Time to complete (0 to 3 pts):

Example Metric:

- Project can be completed or show clear positive impacts within two years or less.

Reporting and Monitoring:

Applicants that receive funding are required to submit quarterly written progress reports. Funded projects will be monitored for progress and performance, financial and administrative management, and compliance with the terms of Performance Agreement(s). Monitoring may involve site and/or office visit(s).