

Expand NYS Climate Smart Communities Grant Program to include Community Farms & Garden Initiatives

Central Issue

In 2016, the New York Department of Environmental Conservation established the New York State Climate Smart Communities Grant Program which provides matching grants to towns, villages, counties and boroughs of New York City to implement projects related to climate change adaptation or mitigation, and specifically allocates these funds to (eligible) planning actions that work towards 'Climate Smart Communities Certification'. Certified Climate Smart Communities are further supported by receiving additional points in the application process for funding to incentivize participation in the program; although non-certified communities are also eligible to apply. During the 2018 grant cycle over \$8 million in funding was available and awards granted have ranged from \$10,000 to \$2,000,000.

Background

Climate adaptation initiatives that were funding eligible were outlined as projects that: decreased the vulnerability of future floods risks and increase the overall 'natural resiliency'; assisted with the removal or renovation of infrastructure that is at risk of flooding; implemented 'flow barriers' to assist with the facilitating of emergency response, and protected people, natural resources and infrastructure; implemented projects that addressed future anticipated increase in dangerous heat conditions; and improved emergency 'preparedness' and response systems for anticipated future extreme climate conditions.

In the past, these grants have been awarded to projects such as a new firehouse, a regional security center, property restoration that enhanced flood protection and more. In addition, the Climate Smart Communities Program awarded grants to cities and counties throughout New York State that implemented the Climate Adaptation various initiatives however, none of the funding was granted to communities that effectively implement these initiatives by way of community gardening and/or community farm projects.

In the program description, all 'municipalities' in the State of New York were eligible to apply for funding. A 'municipality' was defined as any county, city, town, village, or borough of the City of New York. Ineligible applicants included but were not limited to Political subdivisions such as municipal corporations, school districts, district corporations, boards of cooperative educational services, fire districts, public benefit corporations, industrial development authorities, and similar organizations. Additionally, eligible project types included various Adaptation and Mitigation Implementation Projects. The CSC Pledge requires projects to commit to some or all of the following:

- **Build a climate-smart community.**
- **Inventory emissions, set goals, and plan for climate action.**
- **Decrease energy use.**
- **Shift to clean, renewable energy.**
- **Use climate-smart materials management.**
- **Implement climate-smart land use.**
- **Enhance community resilience to climate change.**
- **Support a green innovation economy.**
- **Inform and inspire the public.**
- **Engage in an evolving process of climate action.**

Urban agriculture (which currently includes but is not limited to community gardens and farms currently regulated by the NYRP (New York State Restoration Project) and NYC Parks GreenThumb project) already implement(s) at least 8 of the above initiatives; and should be included as a recognizable strategy to help reduce climate change impact and reduce disaster risk as part of the 'Climate Smart' community efforts.

Stakeholders

- NYSDEC(New York State Department of Environmental Conservation) which oversees the [Climate Smart Communities](#) Program
- Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA);
- Department of Public Service
- Department of State

- Department of Transportation
- Department of Health and the Power Authority (NYPA)
- New York City Department of Environmental Protection
- New York City Department of Parks & Recreation
- Green Thumb: the largest community gardening project in the Nation (Funded by federal Community Development Block Grants, GreenThumb has been a program of the NYC Parks since 1995.)
- New York Restoration Project (NYRP): a non-profit organization driven by the conviction that all New Yorkers deserve beautiful, high-quality public space within ready walking distance of their homes. Since our founding in 1995 by Bette Midler, NYRP has planted trees, renovated gardens, restored parks, and transformed open space for communities throughout New York City's five boroughs. As New York's only citywide conservancy, we bring private resources to spaces that lack adequate municipal support, fortifying the City's aging infrastructure and creating a healthier environment for those who live in the most densely populated and least green neighborhood

Challenges and Strategies

This grant program provides funding solely to municipalities which can exclude or overlook local initiatives and projects that work towards the same Climate Smart Community goals. Urban agriculture which includes community gardens and farms have been proven to not only provide food security, but have also indirectly assisted with the CSC Adaptation and Mitigation Implementation projects. Urban agriculture has already been proven to increase or preserve natural resilience by implementing additional nature-based landscape features that decrease the vulnerability and effects of climate change; reduce flood risk, as gardens have a sponge-like effect (soil and plants intercept water) and the increase of plants and vegetation assist with the management of stormwater; provide additional shade and natural cooling solutions as a preparedness measure for anticipated extreme heat; reduce vehicle mileage by providing communities with locally sourced produce as opposed to importing and sourcing non-local reserves, and inadvertently implements a 'City Regional Food Systems' approach; and where applicable, assists with the reduction of organic waste by implementing composting sites and programs at the garden or farm site; and more.

Conclusion

By including an exception to or expanding the current grant program, (to provide exclusive funding for existing programs such as NYRP, Project Green Thumb, education centers, programs and schools and/or school districts that have implemented garden or farm practices, and other organizations including non and for profit, that provide education, tools, and small grants direct to community gardeners and farmers) the initiatives currently being implemented would increase as well as provide an additional incentive for communities to continue in the practice of the upkeep of existing urban agriculture efforts; as well as implement new ones across NYC and throughout New York State. Urban agricultural efforts especially at a micro level, rely heavily on organizations such as NYRP and Project Green Thumb for tools, funding, education and other resources to continue running, and these programs often do not have enough existing funds to meet the demands or allow for additional growth in communities that are most vulnerable and susceptible to the effects of climate change and food insecurity.

<https://climatesmart.ny.gov/actions-certification/>

https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration_pdf/cscrfa19.pdf

[https://climatesmart.ny.gov/about/#:~:text=The%20CSC%20program%20is%20jointly,the%20Power%20Authority%20\(NYPA\),](https://climatesmart.ny.gov/about/#:~:text=The%20CSC%20program%20is%20jointly,the%20Power%20Authority%20(NYPA),)

<https://www.nyrp.org/about>

[Urban food gardens: the potential for climate change mitigation and adaptation.](#)

<https://theconversation.com/how-your-garden-could-help-stop-your-city-flooding-42473>

<https://journals.openedition.org/factsreports/5650>