

The Principles Quick Guide to Creating a Competitive RFP Process for Opioid Settlement Funds



[The Principles for the Use of Funds From the Opioid Litigation](#) are nationally recognized guidance for states, counties, and cities receiving money from the lawsuits against entities that contributed to the opioid epidemic. These planning Principles, coordinated by faculty at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, can help jurisdictions create a foundation for effective spending of the monies to save lives from overdose. This guide was adapted from numerous templates, tools, and guidance documents developed by the [Michigan Association of Counties](#).

The Principles for the Use of Funds From the Opioid Litigation encourage governments to create a fair and transparent process for the use of opioid settlement funds ([Principle 5](#)). This quick guide provides local governments with a streamlined process for allocating opioid settlement funds using a fair, competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) or comparable grantmaking process.

What is an RFP process?

A competitive RFP is a formal process used by local governments to invite qualified organizations, such as nonprofits, service providers, or community-based agencies, to apply for funding to carry out specific programs or projects. The RFP outlines key details, including the purpose of the funding, eligibility requirements, funding priorities, evaluation criteria, reporting expectations, and submission timelines.

Why is an RFP process important to use?

RFP processes promote transparency and fairness by allowing for a variety of applicants from across the substance use continuum of care (prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery) and encouraging innovation and rigor through its competitive nature. Competitive bid processes encourage applications to include data-driven solutions to address specific local needs. They also allow local governments to outline clear and specific expectations associated with priorities, expected outcomes and impacts, and reporting requirements. Creating a formalized structure through an RFP can support long-term planning and assist in building public trust.



To view all links in this Quick Guide, scan the QR code to access a digital version of this resource

Who executes an RFP process?

Responsibility for managing the RFP process should be clearly defined to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment with community priorities.

Local government staff often oversee the logistics of the process, including issuing the RFP, receiving submissions, coordinating committee meetings, and facilitating contract execution. For local governments with capacity limitations, ensuring a competitive process for community-based organizations and county departments is still important. When these limitations arise, the RFP responsibilities may be outsourced to an external grantmaking entity, such as a community foundation.

A [settlement council](#) of local stakeholders and people with lived and living experience often determines the strategic priorities for the RFP. If participants on the settlement council are submitting proposals themselves, a neutral group from the settlement council — free from conflicts of interest — reviews and scores the proposals. If that is not possible, members of the settlement council may fill out a conflict-of-interest form.

Having a clearly defined structure and delegation of responsibilities enhances trust and ensures that the RFP process abides by legal requirements and can incorporate the voices of those most impacted by the opioid epidemic.

Steps for Effective RFP Fund Management and Oversight

1. [Form a Settlement Council](#)

- Convene a multi-stakeholder advisory body (public health officials, community representatives, people with lived and living experience, etc.) -- this group guides priorities but does not make final funding decisions

2. Establish a Neutral Group to Review Proposals

- Create a neutral expert panel, free from [conflicts of interest](#), to score and recommend proposals. Include voices of those with lived and living experience for a grounded perspective

3. Design a Transparent and Competitive RFP

- Clearly state funding goals (ideally sourced from a recent [needs assessment](#))
- Outline eligibility criteria for consideration (e.g., organization status, location, financial and legal requirements, etc.)
- Specify reporting requirements and desired [outcome metrics](#) to be reported by grantees (ideally aligned with state and national reports to minimize administrative burden)

View the templates linked below to get started:

- [Conflict of Interest Form](#) for settlement council members
- [RFP](#) and [RFP budget](#) for release to the public
- [RFP Scoring Rubric](#) for settlement council use
- [Recipient/Grantee/Vendor Agreement](#) after final grantees have been selected

- Preview scoring rubric and criteria
- Provide templates for budgeting and contracts
- Offer support through pre-application webinars and technical assistance

4. Review Proposals and Determine Awards

- Use standardized scoring tools
- Require conflict-of-interest disclosures and reviewer guidelines
- Rank proposals, review recommendations in committee, and submit recommendations for final approval to the governing body – often the local board of elected county officials

5. Execute Contracts and Set Expectations

- Formalize agreements with awardees, detailing funding amounts, performance periods, reporting schedules, outcomes, and flexibility for mid-course corrections

6. Public Launch

- Announce grantees, host onboarding sessions, and distribute tools (e.g., reporting forms) to align processes and support implementation

7. Ensure Ongoing [Monitoring and Transparency](#)

- Standardize reporting requirements to align with state-level and National Settlement Administrator requirements. Provide flexibility and support to grantees around reporting to minimize administrative burden
- Maintain public-facing information on where funds are being used and the impact of those funds
- Solicit community feedback (e.g., through town halls or public hearings)
- Continually adapt funding priorities for future RFPs in response to emerging trends and community needs

County Examples

Ogemaw County, Michigan

In 2023, Ogemaw County developed an opioid settlement advisory committee comprised of county commissioners and representatives from local provider organizations, including the local health department, emergency medical services, sheriff's office, community corrections, medical and behavioral health treatment providers, a recovery housing provider, a recovery support provider, and individuals with lived experience, among others. The group conducted a county-wide needs assessment, during which the committee oversaw a funding and service landscape analysis to better understand local needs from individual and organizational perspectives. With priorities

outlined from the data collected, an RFP was developed and disseminated widely within the county and among service providers. The Ogemaw County RFP can be found [here](#).

Brunswick, Halifax, and Mecklenburg Counties, Virginia

In 2024, counties in Virginia's Southside Planning District Commission – Brunswick, Halifax, and Mecklenburg – worked with a local university to engage the community for input on strategies to prioritize funding with opioid settlement dollars. The following year, the counties released a joint competitive RFP, accompanied by a pre-proposal webinar, budget and timeline templates, scoring rubric preview, and desired performance measures. To minimize administrative burden on applicants and potential grantees, performance measures and budget templates requested from applicants were aligned to information required by the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority. Applicants were also encouraged to review [strategies prioritized by the community engagement process](#) and were awarded extra points for addressing one or more of those. The Southside Planning District Commission's RFP can be found [here](#), performance measures workbook [here](#) and scoresheet [here](#).

Forsyth County, North Carolina

Forsyth County accepts proposals through a competitive RFP process once a year. Proposals are then reviewed by a cross-sectional team including behavioral health county staff, county management, a representative from the local managed care organization, representation from the Health & Human Services Board, and a member of the finance/grants management team. To support applicants, county staff hold an information session prior to the application and offer to meet individually with each organization not awarded funding to help them prepare for future applications or connect with others in the community. Ongoing collaboration among all funded providers is encouraged through quarterly gatherings to address barriers and emerging community supports. The 2027 Forsyth County RFP can be found [here](#).

Doña Ana County, New Mexico

From the start, Doña Ana County committed to a process guided by the Johns Hopkins [Principles for the Use of Funds from the Opioid Litigation](#), including input from a settlement council, use of a needs assessment, and continuous monitoring and evaluation to fund strategies likely to have the highest local impact. The needs assessment identified four priorities and issued its 2025 RFP for three of those – (1) Medicated Assisted Treatment (MAT), (2) enrich prevention strategies, and (3) expansion of warm handoff programs and recovery services. To add further specificity to the RFP, the county's Opioid Advisory Council, which meets monthly, used the [Opioid Settlement Principles Resource and Indicators](#) (OSPRI) tool to select specific metrics they hoped to achieve with investments from opioid settlement dollars and target investments to communities particularly impacted by the opioid crisis. Doña Ana County's 2025 RFP can be found [here](#).