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Fact Sheet: Fiscal Year 2027 Earmarks

What You Need to Know

What are earmarks? Earmarks are one-time federal funds for state, local, or tribal government entities and eligible nonprofits to carry out a specific project. U.S. Members of Congress (lawmakers) must request these funds on behalf of projects in their state or district.

What are earmarks called? In the Senate, earmarks are called Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS). In the House, they are called Community Project Funding (CPF). “Earmarks” is a colloquial term that can refer to CDS and/or CPF.

What can earmarks fund? Earmarks can fund a wide variety of one-time projects for state, local, and tribal governments and eligible nonprofits, covering a broad range of eligible activities which are specified every year by House and Senate Appropriations Committees. Historically, earmarks have been able to fund infrastructure, education, mental health services, and community development. [See example projects here.](#)

How much is earmark funding for? Earmark funding ranges depending on the scope of the project—anywhere from a few hundred thousand dollars to several million.

What is the process to obtain an earmark? The process from initial application to payout takes at least a year, but it is not unusual for it to take longer than that. A more detailed timeline is in the next section, but the condensed version is:

1. Have regular conversations with your lawmaker and their staff, educating them about the work your program does and the needs of your program.
2. Create a detailed outline of the project you want funded—be specific.
3. Submit an application with your lawmaker to request funding for your project.
4. If your lawmaker approves the request, it will need to be approved in the annual appropriations process by the Appropriations Committee and the rest of Congress.
5. If your request passes the appropriations process, you will work with the federal agency responsible for paying out your earmark to finalize the contract and implementation of your project.

When is the deadline to submit a request? Every lawmaker has different deadlines, but most are around March or April and contingent on the deadline set by the Appropriations Committee. Reach out directly to your lawmaker's office in January to inquire about deadlines and to put your project request on their radar.

Process of Applying for and Receiving an Earmark

1. Request earmark funding from your lawmaker.

- 1.1. **At least six months before the application deadline (the longer before the better):** Build relationships with your lawmaker and their staff.
- 1.2. **December:** Start emailing staff about your interest in applying for an earmark and ask them when their deadlines will be.
- 1.3. **January:** Weekly email reminding staff of your interest in an earmark, asking for more information about the process, when the deadline will be, etc. Be persistent!
- 1.4. **January-March:** Invite the lawmaker and their staff for virtual or in-person meetings to talk about your project.
- 1.5. **April:** Most applications are due (but make sure you check, because some offices have different deadlines).
- 1.6. If your lawmaker accepts your funding request, it will move on to the appropriations review process.

2. Funding request from your lawmaker is reviewed in the appropriations process.

- 2.1. **Spring-Summer:** The Senate or House Appropriations Committee will vet projects based on eligibility, whether it is too controversial, etc.
- 2.2. **Spring-Summer:** The Senate or House Appropriations Committee and the relevant subcommittees will review the appropriations bills, along with requested project funding, through their markup processes.
- 2.3. **Fall (and sometimes into Winter):** The Senate and House must negotiate each chamber's appropriations bills to make sure they are the same before sending them to the President to sign into law.
- 2.4. If your project is approved in the appropriations process, you'll be referred to the federal agency that will pay out your earmark.

3. Funding request is referred to the relevant federal agency.

- 3.1. You will work closely with the federal agency that is paying out your earmark to finalize the project and get paid.

Recommendations for Preparing Strong Earmark Requests

- **Build Relationships with Staff** - The importance of having good relationships with your lawmaker's staff cannot be overstated. While the lawmaker makes all the final calls, the staff make recommendations to the lawmaker. You should outreach to staff in both their district/state

and DC offices. Have them get to know you and your work and invite them and the lawmaker out to visit your program.

- **Demonstrate Community Support** - You must demonstrate that the project is something that the general community wants and needs.
 - **Letters of Support** - Letters of support from other organizations in your community for your project is crucial.
 - **Press Articles** - Publishing articles in local news outlets about your organization and the project you're applying for is another way to demonstrate strong community interest and support.
 - **Resolutions** - Have your mayor or city council issue a resolution in support of preventing and ending youth homelessness, or something similar that is related to your project.
 - **Community Plan** - If you can demonstrate that your requested project is in line with your community's plan to prevent and end youth homelessness, highlight that.
- **Avoid Controversial Issues** - Your project request ultimately has to be approved by every Member of Congress in the House and Senate. This means that projects deemed too controversial may not be funded. If you're worried that your project may be considered controversial, talk to your lawmaker's staff and make sure you have a lot of demonstrated community support and that they believe Congress more broadly would be supportive.
- **Demonstrate Capacity** - Detail how you intend to implement the project should you receive funding. Do you have enough staff? Are there other partners you'll work with? This is especially important for construction projects, which require a lot of organizational capacity to implement.
- **Request a Reasonable Amount** - Think carefully about your funding request amount. It needs to be reasonable and in line with your project. However, it's likely the amount approved may be smaller than the amount requested, so be sure not to lowball yourself.
- **Request Appropriate One-Time Funding** - Earmarks are one-time funding, so don't request funding meant to sustain a program. If you decide to request funding again, it must be for a different project.
- **No Subgranting** - You cannot use earmark funding to subgrant to others.

Criteria Used to Evaluate Earmark Requests

Each lawmaker may have their own additional criteria for evaluating the earmark requests they receive, but below is some of the criteria the Appropriations Committee considers when determining whether to approve a lawmaker's earmark requests.

1. **Requests are Transparent**
 - Lawmakers are required to post every request they submit to the Appropriations Committee online.
 - Lawmakers must certify that they, their spouse, and their immediate family have no financial interest in the projects they request.
2. **Ban on For-Profit Recipients**

- Lawmakers may only request funding for state or local governments and eligible nonprofits.
- 3. **Careful Vetting for Merit**
 - Members of Congress and Appropriations leaders reviewing earmark requests “are encouraged to reject any project that does not merit federal taxpayer funding.” This means they are expected to prioritize high-quality, credible projects and avoid approving those that may be viewed as inappropriate or controversial uses of federal funds.
- 4. **Demonstrated Community Support**
 - Lawmakers must provide evidence of community support as a compelling factor in their decision to select the requested projects.

Example Timelines

Applying for and receiving an earmark can be a long process—expect it to take at least a year, if not closer to two or three. Below are the timelines for two real projects that were funded through earmarks.

Example 1: HHS Earmark from a House Representative

**This program had a years-long, established relationship with the Representative and their staff.*

April 2021: Earmark requests due.

April 2021: Selected by the Representative.

July 2021: Project accepted by the House Appropriations Committee.

March 2022: Final Fiscal Year 2022 Federal Appropriations Omnibus approved.

July 2022: Notice of Award received.

January 2024: New equipment that the project was for was purchased by the program.

January 31, 2024: Full earmark payment received from HHS.

Example 2: HUD Earmark from a Senator

January 2020: Outreach and relationship-building began with the Senator and their staff.

April 2021: Earmark request due.

October 2021: Earmark granted by the Senate Appropriations Committee.

June 2022: Even though the earmark was granted, the program had to engage in ongoing advocacy and maintain close contact with HUD throughout the process to get paid out.

October 2024: Most of the earmark payment had been received from HUD.

December 2024: The rest of the earmark payment was received from HUD.

Resources

- [Earmarks Account Cheat Sheet](#)
- [Project Funding History](#)
- [Government Accountability Office's CDS + CPF Tracking Site](#) - Use this to find more information about previously funded projects.

- [House](#) and [Senate](#) Appropriations Websites - Keep an eye on these sites for upcoming earmark guidance.
 - All the [FY2026 House requests](#) (click “Consolidated Table” under the first bullet) (these have not been approved by the rest of Congress yet).
 - All the [FY2026 Senate requests](#) (these have not been approved by the rest of Congress yet).
- **Your Lawmaker’s Appropriations Staffer** - Find out which staffer(s) handles your lawmaker’s appropriations portfolio. They’ll be a good resource as you go through the earmarks process. If you need help finding direct contact information, email trinady.maddock@nn4youth.org.
- **Your Lawmaker’s Website** - This is where they will post earmark applications, guidelines, and deadlines.