



PREDEVELOPMENT GUIDE

TO ADVANCE
YOUR COMMUNITY
INFRASTRUCTURE
PROJECT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of topics and activities related to community project development. The Milken Institute and the Rural Community Assistance Partnership developed this report. A corresponding technology platform, the [Community Infrastructure Center](#), provides further guidance to project advancement and resources to navigate critical predevelopment activities.

Many communities begin the project development phase following an intensive period of economic or community development. During this phase, communities may evaluate their needs from equity to job growth to underlying infrastructure needs. Coming out of this phase, communities may have a project idea, but may struggle to navigate the funding, technical assistance, and technology landscape to identify next steps and opportunities to advance a project. This document and accompanying data, tools, and resources on the Community Infrastructure Center, is designed to equip a community with grant matches, a project readiness assessment, data, templates, and resources corresponding to major predevelopment activities, and a community platform to find and connect with other communities deploying their projects.

PROJECT READINESS

The objective of this program and following sections is to supply communities with the knowledge, expertise, and information about funding opportunities required to advance their project to a state of “readiness” to apply for implementation grants for their priority projects. To determine whether a project, community, or organization is “ready”, here is a brief guide to defining what a project is and how to distinguish between project readiness and eligibility depending on your goals as a project sponsor.

Tip: There are several types of organizations that may be a project sponsor including a state or local government agency, community development organization, civic organization, university, or academic institution, or non-profit. It is the organization with the authority to advance a project.

Project Definition

A project may be either a capital (infrastructure) project, or a programmatic (non-capital) project with a discrete start and finish development timeline, followed by the implementation and maintenance of the project. The Economic Development Administration partnered with the Urban Institute to categorize their funding priorities into the following categories:

- Facilities include business incubators and manufacturing facilities.
- Transportation including port and harbor facilities.
- Utilities include fiber optics, water, and sewer systems improvement.
- Workforce programs (non-construction) including regional commercialization, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

While this is not an exhaustive list of all project types, it serves as an example of the scale and type of projects aligned with a federal agency, which will be important when evaluating project eligibility.

Project Readiness Criteria

When developing a project, organizations designated as the project sponsor should start with the end in mind. Whether a community is seeking federal grant funding for the entire project, or private investment, or some combination – most projects must be mature enough to be competitive and qualify for funding and financing opportunities. Project readiness may vary depending on the specific type of project. One helpful tool is HR&A’s Infrastructure Funding Navigator program, which was integrated into the Community Infrastructure Center for ease of use. This tool gauges the project maturity across a range of metrics and estimates project alignment with federal funding priorities.

Once a project sponsor can visualize where the project currently stands relative to its readiness, they can prioritize their predevelopment workload accordingly and design a project plan to get to a state of “readiness”.

Technical Approach

Land-Use

- Is there an identified project site? *The project site is the geographic location where the project will be implemented. Identifying the site means this site is finalized and is not likely to change in the future.*
- Is there a plan or a similar guiding document prepared specifically for the project? *A plan is a guiding document containing information on the specifics of the project and how the project will be executed, even if it is on a high level.*

Costing

- Is there a preliminary yet logical cost estimate for the project? *Cost estimate refers to a rough budget estimate for the project. This may estimate approximate implementation costs for different workstreams of the project. The budget may not be final or detailed, but a high-level estimate shall suffice.*

Scoping

- Is there a scope for the project (and its outcomes) discussed and agreed among the implementation authority? *Scope provides different project workstreams that will be implemented in the project and what purpose they are meant to achieve. The scope may be a part of the plan. Scoping a project ensures that the project meets its desired objectives and is planned or designed accordingly. It also facilitates communication between different stakeholders.*

Technical Feasibility

- Were any alternative approaches considered to achieve the purpose of this project? If yes, were there any technical studies to validate the current approach? *Alternative approaches are different means to the same end. They are different methodologies, designs or strategies which help achieve the project scope.*

Construction & Operations Period

- Is there a set timeline for the project, including specified construction and operation periods? *The timeline may not be detailed, but a rough estimate for different project workstreams and expected deadlines shall suffice.*

Commercial Structure

Delivery

- Which primary methodology are you using to make the financial case for the project? (VFM, CBA, LCC, etc.) *These methodologies provide monetary term estimates of costs and/or benefits from executing the project. VFM = Value for Money, CBA = Cost-Benefit Analysis, LCC = Life Cycle Costings.*
- Is your project secured by a contract with set roles and responsibilities for participating players? *A legal contract is a binding agreement that serves as a security for each participating players' commitments towards the project.*

Materials

- What percentage of the cost of project components comes from domestically manufactured goods? *The Buy American Act and the Federal Acquisition Regulation require the use of American Made Good, Products, and materials for infrastructure projects in varying capacities. Using domestic materials and goods also invites financial and pricing benefits from the government.*

Funding

- Is there a set funding source for the project? *Funding may cover a fraction or the whole of the project cost. Sometimes, there might be a matching grant requirement where the funder's amount is required to be matched by funding from participating players or other stakeholders in the project.*
- Is there a long-term affordability plan/strategy/contract in place? *Long term affordability means that the project's operating cost and service use costs are affordable for all parties in the long run.*
- Is your project insured against climate risks? *This can be a special insurance program or part of a comprehensive insurance plan.*

Financing

- What primary financing techniques are you using to finance the project/generate revenue from the project? (PPPs, bonds, TIF, others) *Financing allows for revenue generation over the project's lifetime to cover project costs. PPP = Public Private Partnership, Bonds = loans, TIF = Tax Increment Financing.*

Governance

Country/State/County Governance

- Is there clarity on governance level owning, implementing, and overseeing the project?

Project Governance

- Is there a governance or organizational setup for the project?
- Is the governance structure established for all the phases of the project (planning, delivery, long-term operations)?
- Are stakeholders' roles well communicated and agreed upon?

Regulatory Environment

National/State

- Is the project checked to satisfy existing legislation and regulation? *This includes legislation at the national, state, and local levels.*

Regulator

- Is there an identified regulatory body for the project? *A regulatory body is the primary stakeholder overseeing the project's implementation and management.*

Dispute Resolution

- Is there a dispute resolution process in place? *The dispute resolution process must be strong and easy to enforce while being independent from involved stakeholders.*

Impacts and Outcomes

Social & Environmental

- Are there any impacts on the investor from the project apart from investment risks? *The investor impacts may affect an investor's involvement in the project other than investment returns. For example, if the investor has personal reasons, benefits, or costs to pay from implementing the project, the investor should be aware of these.*

- Will the project cause any displacement, including potential gentrification? *Gentrification is the process of increasing the rent burden on existing renters, which makes it unaffordable for them to live there. Displacement is any project-induced activities (such as land procurement, excavation, construction, etc.) that cause people to leave their homes and move elsewhere.*
- Is the public aware and overall supportive of the project?
- Has an environmental impact assessment been completed for this project? *An EIA is a scientific/technical examination of predicted impacts on the environment from implementing the project.*

Climate Change

- Is the project planned and designed for future climate projections? *Various organizations estimate climate trends and projections. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) releases climate projections that can be viewed here.*
- Is the project building local community resilience towards future climate impacts? *Community resilience refers to a community's capability to withstand and overcome effects of climate change.*
- Is the project designed for net zero or negative carbon emissions? *Net zero emissions mean that the amount of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide and methane being the most prominent) emitted during the project lifetime are the same as the amount of greenhouse gases absorbed from the atmosphere by the project throughout its lifetime. In case of negative emissions, the greenhouse gases absorbed are more than those emitted throughout the lifetime of the project.*

Equity and Service Delivery

Service Recipients

- Are there identified service recipients that will benefit from this project? *Service recipients are the intended users/recipients of the project. These can be Historically Disadvantaged Communities, or Opportunity Zones. Here is the Department of Commerce's National Economic Resilience Data Explorer.*

Employment

- Will this project create local employment opportunities?

Impact Bearers

- Are there identified groups that will be adversely impacted by this project? *Impacted groups are the ones who experience or bear the negative outcomes from the project which affects their livelihoods (or capability to enjoy their normal lives) in any manner. These can be Historically Disadvantaged Communities, or Opportunity*

Zones. Here is the [Department of Commerce's National Economic Resilience Data Explorer](#).

Risk

Risk Identification

- Are there any identified general risks specific to this project (including social, environmental, international currency exchange risks, etc.)? *Social risks are consequences on society from the project. Environmental risks are consequences on the environment from the project. International currency exchange risks are any challenges emerging from converting currencies such as international transfers, exchange rates, etc.*
- Are there any identified construction and implementation risks (including political and legal risks)? *Construction risks are challenges emerging during the construction phase. Implementation risks are challenges emerging during the implementation phase.*
- Are there any identified operational and demand risks? *Operational risks are challenges emerging during the operational phase, including demand projections being under or over-estimated.*

Risk Allocation

- Are all identified risks communicated and allocated to the participating players in the project? *Risk allocation safeguards against unforeseen circumstances by preparing the participating players to manage them if they get realized.*

PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

While a project may be “ready” for implementation funding and financing based on its maturity, depending on the source and agency, a project sponsor must also consider whether their organization, project, community profile, and expected project outcomes are eligible for funding under that specific agency and program. This is a helpful framework to consider at the outset of the project, so the development team can consider early on which funding avenues will be available to them downstream. Below are major “eligibility” categories to consider when evaluating federal programs.

Organization Eligibility

Organization Type: Each federal agency has categories of eligible and ineligible organizations. A few examples of organization types include:

- Economic Development Districts
- Federally recognized Indian Tribes
- States and political subdivisions of states (e.g., municipalities, counties), which may include special purpose entities such as regional water and sewer districts, airport commissions, and regional economic development commissions
- Institutions of higher education
- Public or private nonprofit organizations or associations working in cooperation with a political subdivision of a state

Organization Registration

- UEI Number and Grants.gov account
- Sam.gov registration

Project Eligibility

Beneficiaries: Project beneficiaries may need to meet the listed criteria. Examples of demographic details are listed below:

- High unemployment
- Low per capita income
- Economic injury from the coronavirus pandemic for notice of funding opportunities associated with the American Rescue Plan

Impacts: Estimated impacts from the project may need to meet the listed criteria. Examples of project impacts are listed below:

- Facilitate job creation
- Increase capacity for economic development
- Foster business expansion
- Attract private investment
- Facilitate resilience to future economic disasters

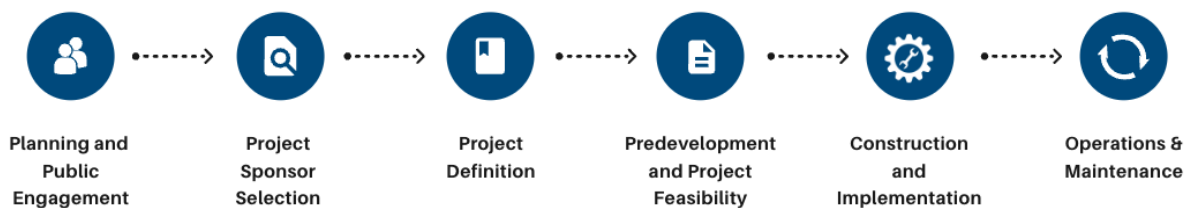
Project Alignment: Depending on the program and agency, the project may need to align with the agency/program's priorities. Examples of alignment are listed below:

- Equity, Recovery, and Resilience
- Workforce Development
- Manufacturing
- Technology-Based Economic Development
- Environmentally Sustainable Development
- Exports and Foreign Direct Investment

Project Components: Although a project may be “ready”, there may be additional documentation required to receive funding from specific programs. Examples are listed below:

- Alignment with a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) or Equivalent
- Demonstration of Community Engagement and Participation
- Local Match must be:
 - Be committed to the project for the period of performance
 - Be available as needed
- Demonstration of project sustainability

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT STAGES



Planning and Public Engagement

Project planning and predevelopment activities can begin only when a project has been identified, often as a part of the economic development planning stage. For communities specifically seeking access to grants and programs, a first step may include planning to link your project to a plan to meet program requirements. Phase activities may include:

- Identify Areas of Distress
- Economic Cluster Analysis
- Current Asset Analysis
- Demographic Analysis
- Workforce Analysis
- Regional/Local SWOT Analysis
- Develop a Vision Statement
- Resilience Plan
- Develop an Evaluation Criteria
- Comprehensive Planning Document Creation
- Develop Economic Goals and Objectives
- Develop Portfolio of Strategic Project, Programs, and Activities
- Economic Development Conditions Summary

Project Sponsor Selection

Once a project has been identified as a means of economic or community development in the community planning stage, an appropriate project sponsor should be identified and engaged to lead the project development efforts. There are several types of organizations that may be a project sponsor including a state or local government agency, community development organization, civic organization, university, or academic institution, or non-profit. Phase activities include:

- Develop a Project Sponsor Criteria
- Stakeholder Mapping
- Stakeholder Analysis
- Community Engagement
- Sponsor Selection
- Develop a Project Sponsor Criteria
- Develop a Project Sponsor Criteria

Project Definition

Once the project sponsor has been selected, the sponsor will lead this phase to create a detailed project definition. The project definition may include the scope and estimated size of the project, outline the economic and community objectives the project will seek to achieve, and outline the project development plan. Phase activities include:

- Define Objectives of Project
- Define Scope of Project
- Develop Preliminary Project Plan

Project Predevelopment and Feasibility

Once a project has been defined, the project development cycle can begin. This phase can cost up to 10% of the total project cost, require extensive technical project development expertise, and requires dedicated staff time. Phase activities include:

- Assemble the Project Team
- External Partnership Development
- Develop a Statement of Purpose
- Conduct a Needs Assessment
- Create a Project Concept Note

- Pre-Feasibility Study
- Hire an Engineer
- Design a Business Plan
- Feasibility Study
- Environmental Assessment
- Land Acquisition
- Site Plan
- Preliminary Engineering Report
- Permitting & Approvals
- Management Plan
- Procurement & RFP

Construction and Implementation

Following the predevelopment/project feasibility phase, the engineer/contractor will begin the building phase of a construction project, or the selected programmatic partner will begin the implementation of a non-construction project. Phase activities include:

- Resource Management
- Progress and Performance Reporting
- Monitoring and Control

Operations and Maintenance

Finally, once a project has been constructed or implemented, the responsible entity identified in previous phases as the owner of the operations and maintenance phase will assume their responsibility at this phase. Phase activities include:

- Occupancy and Operations
- Asset Management
- Maintenance
- Cyclical Testing
- Program Evaluation

PREDEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY DEEP DIVE

The predevelopment and planning phase of a construction or non-construction can require up to 10% of a project cost. These activities are critical to the project development cycle since they inform whether a project is viable and inform the community of potential economic, environmental and community benefits. However, these activities require technical experience, funding, and internal staff capacity. The

following sections lay out the specific activities required as part of this phase, activity outputs, roles required, and activity examples and models from similar projects.

Once a community has identified a problem related to economic shortcomings, gaps or quality and the primary stakeholders have agreed to address and investigate the problem, the community may embark on the below predevelopment or planning activities. This is to have them understand the scope of the project opportunity, identify an action plan, conduct a feasibility study, and move forward with permitting, procurement and studies. From here, they can create investment-worthy and implementation-ready projects for developers, investors, community partners and funders.

VIDEO RESOURCE

Predevelopment 101

In this Predevelopment 101 session, the Milken Institute's Public Finance Program Director, Dan Carol, kicks off the General Track with a brief overview of what the predevelopment phase of a project entails, why it matters, and some key considerations as you navigate the journey of preparing your project for implementation or construction. During this lesson, we explore the major activities within the predevelopment phase, risk management considerations, and some early ideas around the role the federal funding opportunity may play in your project development.

[Resource Link](#)

Assemble the Project Team and Project Lead

Once the problem has been identified, the community or governing entity should appoint an individual project leader and assemble a project team. The lead will be responsible for coordinating with the relevant agencies, organizations, and communities impacted during the project lifecycle. The project team will support in driving, coordinating, and analyzing the outputs of the predevelopment or planning activities and support in decision-making related to the project.

Roles Required:

- Members from the governing body of your community or organization
- A representative from the relevant agency (e.g., DOT, DOE, Utility Company)
- Engaged technical or volunteer stakeholders

- Representatives of residents in the community impacted by this project or regional representatives (E.g., Economic Development Districts).

Sample Activity Artifact: Section One: Building a Project Team, “Getting Your Project To Flow Smoothly” Guide, RCAP

Activity Outputs: While the project team may add or remove members throughout the lifecycle of the project, the output of this activity should be a clear written statement of project leadership and membership with individuals listed and expected tasks and ownership over the course of the subsequent development activities.

VIDEO RESOURCE

Structuring your Governance Model

Whether you are creating a new utility for the first time or combining efforts with other communities/systems on a new or existing shared utility, governance is a vital part of the process. You need to understand what types of entities exist in your state that can purvey drinking water, treat, or transport wastewater or manage stormwater, you need to know what powers and responsibilities each type of entity has and make an informed decision for your unique infrastructure solution. Does this entity need its own board? What will be the board’s composition/how will they be put into place? Will the board adequately represent your customers? What are the requirements, roles, and responsibilities of this governing body? What resources are out there to ensure they get the training they need to be successful?

Session Speakers: Rural Community Assistance Partnership

[Resource Link](#)

Conduct a Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is a systematic process for determining and addressing needs, or “gaps” between current conditions (supply) and desired conditions or “wants” (demand). The discrepancy between the current condition and the desired condition must be measured to appropriately identify the need and it is then used for the development of a business case that builds the foundation for determining the project objectives and serves as input to a project concept note or action plan.

Roles Required:

- Consultant
- Planning or Community Development Department

Sample Activity Artifact: Loudon County Wastewater Needs Assessment

Activity Outputs: The assessment includes an analysis of demographic characteristics, infrastructure supply, and affordability indicators in the community as compared with trends in the region, state, and country. If there is a demonstrable need for a project (e.g., supply does not sufficiently match demand either in terms of quantity, quality, or affordability), this may be a viable project.

Create a Project Concept Note or Action Plan

Once a project team has identified a needs gap, the team will pull together a concept note or action plan to outline --short- and long-term goals, identify the areas of focus for a new project, anticipated challenges they will address, and local opportunities and resources to address these problems along with a timeline.

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Community Liaison

Sample Activity Artifact: Cambridge Resilience Hub Business Plan

Activity Outputs: This project summary should include the findings from the needs assessment, a description of the problem that will be solved in this project undertaking, project expectations, and success criteria.

Site Selection

During this activity, the team will identify an adequate project site. The team should establish a list of site criteria to select a good site for the project (e.g., access to utilities, proximity to residential and retail areas, proximity to transportation, or size. If the site is not under project sponsor ownership, the project team will need to create an acquisition and funding plan for site procurement.

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Site Owner/Management
- Permitting and Zoning Office

Sample Activity Artifact: Housing Toolbox: Site and Building Assessment Checklist

Activity Outputs: The site assessment should include location and land use information, on-site structures, site access, utility locations, public permitting information, environmental context, and existing ownership data.

Pre-Feasibility Study

This study assesses the basic conceptual, economic, and financial viability of the proposed project chiefly to identify the costs and benefits of each opportunity and to eliminate those opportunities that are unsuitable. This appraisal is generally based on secondary data that can be easily collected. Examples of secondary data that may be widely available include national agency data (e.g., DOE, EPA, NTIA, FCC, BEA), industry-standard data (e.g., ASCE, IEDC), state-level data or local-government data (e.g., open data portals).

Roles Required:

- Project Team

Sample Activity Artifact: Pre-feasibility analysis for recreation-related development

Activity Outputs: A high-level market research and analysis and investment appraisal based on financial modeling for the client-internal “go/no-go” decision on whether to further pursue the proposed development project.

VIDEO RESOURCE

Planning your Resilient Infrastructure Project

Session Overview: In this Community of Practice session, experts discuss their experience regarding the upfront planning and assessments required to develop resilient infrastructure projects and the importance of connecting with and serving communities with different resources and needs.

Session Speakers: Replica, BoxPower, Willis Towers Watson

Additional Resources:

- WTW Climate and Resilience Hub
- Presentation Materials

[Resource Link](#)

Hire an Engineer

Once the pre-feasibility study deems a project worthy or fundamentally viable, the project team will shift to greater technical analysis and will likely require a dedicated

consultant or engineer to undertake the feasibility study and environmental studies. During this activity, the project team will often follow a qualification-based selection process to hire engineers and consultants, assemble a team to interview and rank engineers and consultants and structure a report review cadence.

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Selection Committee
- Procurement Office
- Engineering Firm
- Consulting Firm

Sample Activity Artifact: Tips to Hiring an Engineer, Great Lakes RCAP

Activity Outputs: This activity should culminate in a binding contract that clearly states the project requirements, timeline, and costs.

Design a Business Plan

Using the inputs from the pre-feasibility study, the project team may develop a business plan to use as an overall project roadmap to clearly communicate the vision, strategy, and how the project fulfills an unmet need. A business plan can be used internally or circulated to potential funders and other key constituents. A consultant may prepare the business plan with the project team's input.

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Consultant

Sample Activity Artifacts: Community Microgrid Business Proposal and Broadband Utility Business Plan

Activity Outputs: The business plan for the project will describe the problem that the project addresses, how the project would address that problem, the benefits of the project, the anticipated costs, and how the project will recover those costs through either a subsidy or revenue. The business plan may also include potential funding streams and financing options.

Feasibility Study

This activity undertakes a study that shows the technical details of the project and demonstrates whether the project can be implemented from an engineering/technical and economic standpoint. At this stage, the EDA can provide dedicated funding for Feasibility Studies under the Local Technical Assistance Program.

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Consultant

Sample Activity Artifact: [Microgrid Project Feasibility Assessment Criteria](#)

Activity Outputs: A feasibility report will include an executive summary, description of the project, technology considerations, marketplace, marketing strategy, organization and staffing requirements for delivery and support, schedule, financial projections, and recommendations.

VIDEO RESOURCE

Technical Considerations and Strategies to Advance a Microgrid Project

Session Overview: In this session, experts from Siemens PTI discuss the Blue Lake Rancheria Microgrid project, the preliminary technical scoping and requirements, and the economic and sustainable benefits of microgrids.

Session Speakers: Siemens

[Resource Link](#)

Environmental Assessment

An Environmental Assessment is the assessment of the environmental consequences of a plan, policy, program, or actual project prior to the decision to move forward with the proposed action. Consider that while non-construction projects may not require this, all construction project applications submitted to EDA require an environmental assessment per the National Environmental Policy Act.

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Consultant

Sample Activity Artifact: [EDA Environmental Narrative Template](#)

Activity Outputs: A high-level market research and analysis and investment appraisal based on financial modeling for the client-internal “go/no-go” decision on whether to further pursue the proposed development project.

Create a Technical Plan and Design

For construction projects, during this phase, the technical consultant will develop detailed technical plans and designs with a deliberate focus on civil, mechanical, and architectural plans. This activity will refine the expected costs and provide the basis for the construction schedule required for permitting and procurement. Following the design process, the project team should allot adequate time to submit site plans and technical designs to the public for community input.

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Consultant

Sample Activity Artifact: San Bernardino Countywide ZEB Rollout Plan

Activity Outputs: The outputs of this activity will include architectural and engineering drawings and designs, detailed construction costs, projected operational costs, and schedules of construction. There are also engineering specifications for materials, machinery, and equipment for each step. The reports will record the evolution of the design process and all criteria and assumptions used.

Preliminary Permitting and Regulatory Approvals

Once the technical design has been approved, the consultant and project team will submit the site plan and technical plans to the regulatory agency for review.

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Consultant
- Relevant Government Agency

Sample Activity Artifact: Missoula University District Permitting Modifications

Activity Outputs: This phase may result in receiving a permit approval or an amendment to the existing zoning standards for the site, depending on the project’s needs.

Designing the Capital Stack

This activity includes the design of the contract and tendering process to solidify the financial contributions to the project. The project structure will define the

responsibilities of the parties and the mechanisms for financing and risk. The contract is an enforceable document that codifies the project structure. The tendering process may be used to help the project team find a suitable developer, funder, or investor for the project. Something to consider during this phase is the EDA preference or requirements for a Match fund if the project team is relying on federal EDA funds for implementation or technical assistance. This is a critical step to outline a source of match funds.

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Consultant
- Relevant Government Agency

Sample Activity Artifact: Guidance for Municipal Stormwater Funding

Activity Outputs: The output of this activity includes either a capital stack for a construction project or a budget and funding sources for a non-construction project as well as a written contract between parties.

VIDEO RESOURCE

Structuring your Capital Stack

Session Overview: There's so much work (physically and emotionally) that goes into preparing your organization and community for a complicated infrastructure project; navigating just the financing can be a full-time job. Let's demystify the jargon that gets used when trying to start a complex project and delve into the intricacies of financing and completing a project. In this session we will explore approaches for assembling funding programs, reviewing project estimates, managing grant/loan applications and administration, and maintaining stakeholder involvement. Combined, these methods can help pave the way for community longevity.

Session Speakers: Rural Community Assistance Partnership

[Resource Link](#)

VIDEO RESOURCE

Rural Considerations when Designing your Project

Session Overview: In this Community of Practice session, experts discuss the unique circumstances surrounding economic development and project development in rural areas and how to navigate federal programs when it comes to applying for funding and designing your project structure.

Session Speakers: Rural Community Assistance Partnership, U.S. Economic Development Administration Economic Development Integration Team, U.S. Department of Agriculture, The Center on Rural Innovation.

Additional Resources:

- Stacking programs for strategic planning and broadband buildout
- Economic Development Integration Team
- Community Networks
- Regional Economic Development Summit
- FIRES & Economic Recovery Workshops
- Economic Recovery Corps
- Strategic Economic and Community Development
- Stronger Together: Federal Funding and planning strategies design to promote sustainable economic development

[Resource Link](#)

Secure Construction and Land Acquisition Financing

During this activity, the project team will engage with funding and financing partners to secure construction funding and site acquisition funding (if necessary).

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Consultant
- Fund Manager

Sample Activity Artifact: [Loan Term Sheet Example](#)

Activity Outputs: Once the capital for the fund is put together, the project team needs to manage the fund to finance affordable housing development. [The fund manager \(e.g.,](#)

a local CDFI) conduct financial underwriting of the borrower and project, and service the loan once it has been made.

VIDEO RESOURCE

Considering your Funding and Financing Options

Exploring funding and financing options for planning and implementation to advance your projects.

Session Speakers: Rural Local Initiatives Support Corporation, U.S. Economic Development Administration Economic Development Integration Team, Quantified Ventures, Center for Creative Land Recycling

[Resource Link](#)

Easements and Land Acquisition

Once financing is secured, the project team may need to submit for site easements using the relevant agency easement forms. Once the easement is procured (if necessary), the project team may formally acquire the land/additional land for the project or procure land use rights from the landowner.

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Consultant

Sample Activity Artifact: [Example Right of Way Policy, Jackson County](#)

Procurement

During this phase, the project sponsor will design a competitive procurement process to obtain technical services, goods, or works from a bidder. Once the bid is designed, the project team must advertise the bid to contractors, review the bids, select the competitive offer, and negotiate final terms.

Roles Required:

- Project Team
- Consultant
- Relevant Government Agency

Sample Activity Artifact: [HKS Strategic Procurement Systems Templates](#)

RESOURCES TO ADVANCE YOUR PROJECT

Whether a project sponsor is advancing an infrastructure or programmatic project, it can take years to develop an equitable, sustainable, and high-impact project before an organization has even received funding for implementation. However, while the list of required activities is long, fortunately, there is a vast network of supportive providers who can assist communities at every stage by way of in-kind technical assistance, capacity-building programs, and direct funding opportunities. The below sections outline the kinds of organizations critical to supporting your project advancement, types of support project sponsors can seek out, strategies to engage with providers, and additional recommendations.

Types of Support

Capital

Given the upfront costs of developing a project with the intent to scope out the feasibility and viability of a project, the predevelopment costs are often considered “high-risk” capital and may not be attractive to traditional investors. Therefore, communities navigating the pre-development activities may look for capital from funders that provide “early risk capital” in the form of grants or low-cost, forgivable loans.

- Grants may be flexible or conditional depending on the source, with varying reporting requirements and reimbursement cycles. For project sponsors, consider the size of the grant, the activities it applies to, and the timeline to apply, hear back and receive the funds to ensure it aligns with your project priorities. Ensure the project meets the “eligibility” criteria mentioned earlier in this report before embarking on the application process.
- Forgivable loans are loans that may be partially or totally forgiven if they meet certain criteria. An example of a forgivable loan may be found in the [State Drinking Water Revolving Loan Fund](#) which requires the loan be granted to “disadvantaged communities” and meets the rate impact review criteria. Always remember to revisit the eligibility criteria for each program of interest.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is a service designed to educate project sponsors on specific or broad categories of project development activities, with the goal to equip existing staff with both knowledge and, in some cases, direct expertise to conduct the activity for a community. Types of technical assistance may include:

- Live Staff/Group Educational Events
- Web-based Information and Guidance

- One on One Consultations
- Customized Resource Development
- Workshop Facilitation

Capacity Building

In contrast to technical assistance, which is often focused on addressing specific, pre-identified challenges and activities, capacity building is often a broader skills development approach to coach and train current staff on developing their own in-depth technical expertise on the subject or embedding new staff with expertise in the organization to support overall operations. Types of capacity-building programs may include:

- No-cost Program Staff
- Leadership Training Institutes
- Program Training Institutes

Resources

Given the technical requirements and nature of project development, we advise always consulting with professionals and established organizations and agencies to seek support and capital. However, in addition to specific programs and funds, we encourage project sponsors to seek supporting documentation independently, to avoid re-creating work for themselves, and to have a reference point for navigating the development activities in partnership with experts. Here are specific resource types we encourage project sponsors to leverage:

- Templates
- Data
- Case Studies
- Guidebooks and Playbooks
- Articles
- Webinars and Trainings

Provider Segments

Capital Providers

Organizations that fund or finance projects from project ideation through predevelopment activities, implementation, and operations. Examples include:

- Federal Agencies
- Community Development Financing Institutions
- National Philanthropy
- Community Foundations

- Impact Investors

Technical Assistance & Capacity Building Providers

Organizations providing advisory services, education, or training directly to project sponsors at varying project stages. Examples include:

- National Non-Profits
- For-profit Advisory Firms
- Regional Organizations
- National Associations of Engineering Firms
- National Associations of Governing Entities

Technology Providers

Organizations providing hardware, software, or goods/materials for project activities ranging from planning to implementation. Examples include:

- Data Analytics Firms
- Manufacturing Firms

Project Developers

Organizations that lead the design, build, and management of projects. Examples include:

- Program Management Firms
- Engineering Firms
- Consulting Firms

Engaging Providers

Federal Agencies

Every agency differs by size, composition, organizational structure, and program design. There are several pathways for communities and community-based organizations to access technical assistance, capacity-building, and grant funding programs. Depending on the organization, project type, stage, and region, communities may access programs and services directly or through the assistance of intermediary organizations. Examples of channels to engage with an agency include:

- Direct outreach to a regional division of the agency (e.g., EDA's Regional Offices, EPA's Regional Offices, USDA States).
- Regional intermediary partners like university centers, economic development districts, or contracted technical assistance partners.
- Directly applying through federal Notice of Funding Opportunities.
- Participating directly in webinars, information sessions, and calls for comment.

To navigate early-stage technical assistance and funding opportunities specific to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we developed a database using programmatic information shared by the administration, to identify specific federal programs for project advancement by type.

WEB RESOURCE

Planning and Predevelopment TA and Grant Programs

This dataset includes program name, corresponding project category, type of TA, application requirements, description, agency, program budget, deadline, eligibility, and direct information on contacting the program.

Program Name	Category	Type of TA	Applica...	Description	Agency
Build America Bureau Reg...	General Tran...	Access and project del...	Yes	The Build America Bureau Reg...	Department o...
Thriving Communities Init...	General Tran...	Access and delivery as...	Yes	The newly created Thriving C...	Department o...
Build America Center	General Tran...	Delivery support (inten...	No	The Build America Center (BA...	Department o...
Center for Accelerating In...	General Tran...	Delivery support (inten...	Depends	The Center for Accelerating In...	Department o...
Center for Transportation...	Small Busine...	Delivery support (inten...	Yes	From early education through ...	Department o...
Small Business Transport...	Small Busine...	Access support, applic...	Yes	Utilizing partnerships and ind...	Department o...
Local Technical Assistanc...	Place-based ...	Delivery support (inten...	No	The Department of Transport...	Department o...
Rural Opportunities to Us...	Place-based ...	Delivery support (self-...	No	ROUTES provides technical as...	Department o...
Tribal Technical Assistanc...	Place-based ...	Delivery support (inten...	No	The Department of Transport...	Department o...
National Highway Institute	Highway, roa...	Delivery support (self-...	No	The National Highway Institut...	Department o...
FHWA Resource Center	Highway, roa...	Delivery support (inten...	No	Organized by functional and t...	Department o...
Joint Office of Energy an...	EV Charging ...	Delivery Assistance – ...	No	The Joint Office of Energy an...	Department o...
National Transit Institute	Public Transi...	Delivery support (self-...	No	The National Transit Institute ...	Department o...
Accessible and Innovative...	Public Transi...	Delivery support (inten...	No	The Federal Transit Administr...	Department o...
State Digital Equity Planni...	Technical As...	Access, application, a...	Yes	The State Digital Equity Planni...	Department o...

Resource Link

State Agencies

State agencies, like Federal Agencies, have several programs from technical assistance to capacity building and funding opportunities. They have eligibility requirements and program criteria. Some states operate directly with municipalities, while other programs may be facilitated through intermediary regional organizations. State agencies can be incredibly valuable partners for your project advancement and engaging with them early and often is encouraged. Examples of State programs are below:

PREDEVELOPMENT GUIDEBOOK

- California Strategic Growth Council TA and Grant Programs for Climate Infrastructure
- Colorado Federal Grant Navigators program
- Michigan MIO Program
- North Carolina Covid Recovery Program

National Organizations

From technical assistance to capacity building, national organizations are major supporters of project sponsors and have deep networks both with federal agencies and technical expertise to help sponsors navigate not only project readiness but often specific eligibility for federal programs. Every organization may differ slightly, but often there is an intake process to go through an initial evaluation with a national organization. Examples of specific capacity-building programs include:

- Americorps
- Partnership for Equitable and Resilient Communities
- Fuse Corps
- IEDC Economic Recovery Corps
- Quantified Ventures SRF Academy

Examples of specific national technical assistance providers include:

- Rural Community Assistance Partnership
- Environmental Protection Network
- Local Infrastructure Hub

During the development of the program, we sourced a preliminary set of major national technical assistance and capacity builders, which you can find below.

WEB RESOURCE

National Technical Assistance Providers

This dataset includes the program name, description, author and lead, relevant federal program it may address in the program, resource type, and contact information.

<p>Organizing Stimulus Command ...</p> <p>DESCRIPTION</p> <p>Accelerator for America is working with our Stimulus Command Center cities to compile a narrative-style "Halftime Report" on how cities are doing in ...</p> <p>AUTHOR</p> <p>Accelerator for America Nowak Metro F</p> <p>TAGS</p> <p>ARPA</p> <p>HYPERLINK</p> <p>https://drexel.edu/~media/Files/nowak...</p> <p>RESOURCE TYPE</p> <p>Program</p>	<p>Infrastructure Investment & Jo...</p> <p>DESCRIPTION</p> <p>The distribution of the American Rescue Plan required local governments to organize and prepare for federal recovery dollars. Implementing the IJA ...</p> <p>AUTHOR</p> <p>Accelerator for America US Conference</p> <p>TAGS</p> <p>BIL</p> <p>HYPERLINK</p> <p>https://drexel.edu/nowak-lab/publicatio...</p> <p>RESOURCE TYPE</p> <p>Public Guide</p>	<p>Community Safety & The Ameri...</p> <p>DESCRIPTION</p> <p>This guide highlights strategies for utilizing fiscal recovery grants to advance holistic safety centered on health and opportunity...</p> <p>AUTHOR</p> <p>Civil Rights Corps</p> <p>TAGS</p> <p>ARPA</p> <p>HYPERLINK</p> <p>https://civilrightscorps.org/wp-content/...</p> <p>RESOURCE TYPE</p> <p>Public Guide</p>
<p>Harnessing Infrastructure Gran...</p> <p>DESCRIPTION</p> <p>A resource for advocates and policymakers on how to access Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding to support green spaces, streetlights, ...</p> <p>AUTHOR</p> <p>Civil Rights Corps</p> <p>TAGS</p> <p>BIL</p> <p>HYPERLINK</p> <p>https://civilrightscorps.org/wp-content/...</p>	<p>State Small Business Credit Init...</p> <p>DESCRIPTION</p> <p>View the latest webinars, analyses, policy guidance, and program updates for the \$10 billion State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI).</p> <p>AUTHOR</p> <p>Council of Development Finance Agencie</p> <p>TAGS</p> <p>ARPA</p> <p>HYPERLINK</p> <p>https://www.cdfa.net/rc/SSBCI.html</p>	<p>Capitalization Strategies & Fun...</p> <p>DESCRIPTION</p> <p>During this installment of the CDFA // BNY Mellon Development Finance Webcast Series, we will discuss capitalization strategies that ...</p> <p>AUTHOR</p> <p>Council of Development Finance Agencie</p> <p>TAGS</p> <p>ARPA</p> <p>HYPERLINK</p> <p>https://www.cdfa.net/e/7785763332?o...</p>

[Resource Link](#)

Philanthropy

National and community philanthropy each has its own preference for engaging with communities based on their investment priorities and regional networks. Many philanthropies post their grant programs online by program area, deadline, and size – like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Kresge Foundation. If philanthropy is unable to make a direct grant to the project, there may also be opportunities to engage with their grantees directly who may serve as intermediary TA providers or grant-makers – so

project sponsors should also review “current grantees” under philanthropic webpages to learn more.

VIDEO RESOURCE

Considerations and Strategies to advance your Water Project

During this community of practice call, experts provide their perspectives on financing with SRF funds, funding with philanthropy, and sourcing technical assistance to advance water projects.

Session Speakers: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Moonshot Mission, Bowman Environmental Consulting.

[Resource Link](#)

Putting it all together

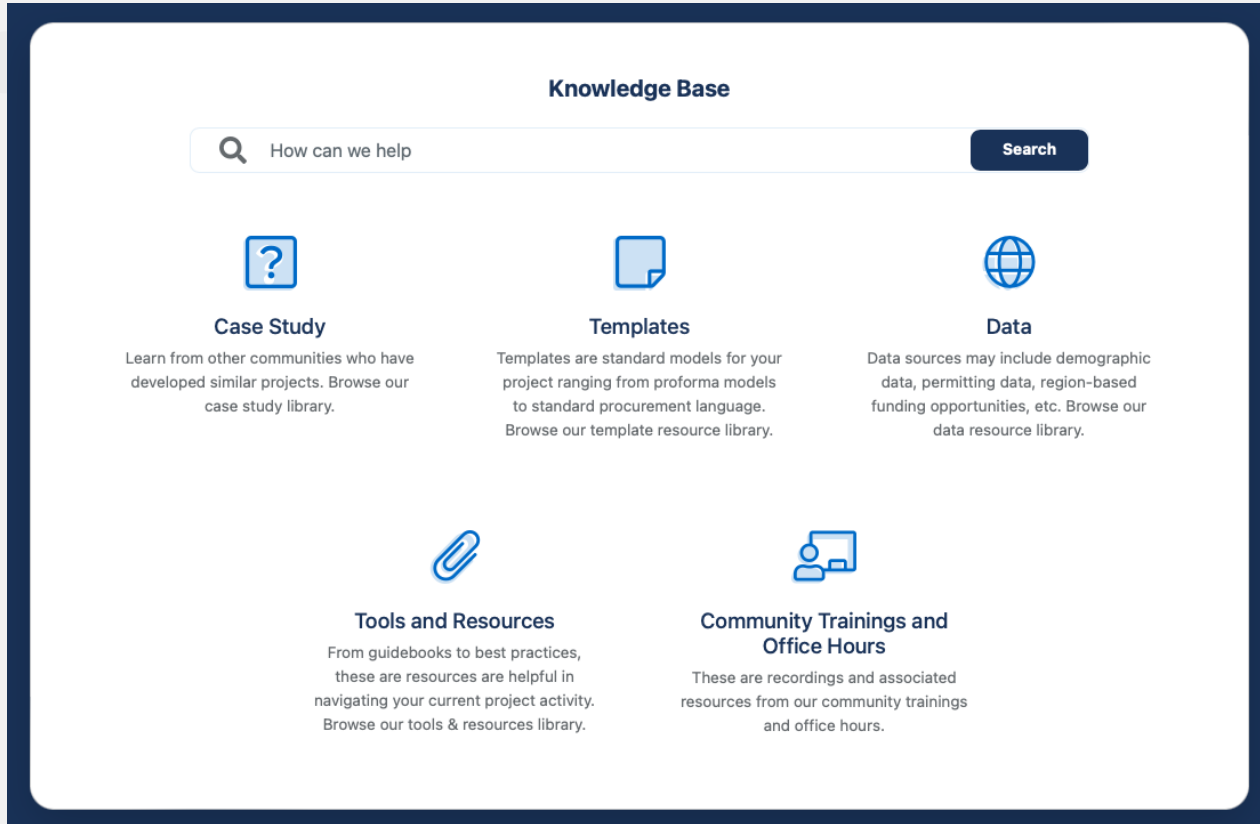
Finding Resources that Work for You

There is an overwhelming amount of content available for project sponsors to sift through as they are designing their project plan and seeking to fill knowledge gaps. One way we recommend engaging with tools and resources is to identify corresponding resource types based on **project activity** so the project sponsor is not overwhelmed with information that may be further downstream and less critical to the current activity at hand. On the Community Infrastructure Center, we have created a knowledge base segmented by project type, project readiness component (e.g., land use, costing), project activity (e.g., feasibility study, governance structure), geography, and type of resource.

WEB RESOURCE

Knowledge Base Repository

This dataset includes resource type, project component, project activity, geography, project type, author, link, and summary of the resource.



[Resource Link](#)

Join the Community Infrastructure Center

This program led to the development of [the Community Infrastructure Center](#), a platform designed to directly connect project sponsors with:

- A set of funding opportunities aligned to the project.
- A readiness assessment to establish your project “readiness”.
- A checklist to check your project’s eligibility for specific programs.
- Direct connections to a provider network.
- Open access to available data, templates, case studies, and tools to advance a project.