

Funding Your Community's Future

Strategies and Solutions to Securing Lasting Investments

SEH®

Building a Better World for All of Us®

Engineers | Architects | Planners | Scientists

INTRODUCTION

Funding Your Community's Future

Strategies and Solutions to Securing Lasting Investments

Communities across the country face a common challenge: turning visionary projects into reality. Whether it's upgrading aging infrastructure, improving water quality, enhancing transportation networks, or investing in sustainable energy, securing the right funding is often the biggest hurdle.

At SEH, we work alongside communities to identify and secure funding that aligns with their needs. From federal grants and state programs to public-private partnerships and low-interest loans, navigating the funding landscape requires expertise, strategy, and persistence.

This eBook is designed to help you understand available funding sources, common challenges, and key strategies to maximize your chances of success. With real-world examples and expert insights, we'll help you take the next step in making your community's vision a reality.

Short Elliott Hendrickson Inc. (SEH®) is a 100% employee-owned company providing engineering, architectural, planning, and environmental services to public and private clients throughout the country. Our more than 900 employee-owners deliver valuable solutions in areas such as buildings, land development, energy, environmental services, infrastructure, transportation, water, and wastewater. Our collective purpose and body of work is focused on Building a Better World for All of Us®.

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About the Experts



ALEX SMITH

Alex helps communities turn vision into reality by securing the funding needed to move projects forward. He has guided initiatives that created more than 3,000 jobs and generated $1.5 billion in investment. With deep expertise in grant writing and administration, Alex builds strong relationships with agencies and stakeholders to open doors for clients. His experience in Washington, D.C., working with the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, gives him unique insight into navigating federal programs and advancing community priorities.

ALEX SMITH



THERESE HAFFNER

Therese partners with communities to design funding strategies that make essential infrastructure projects possible. Drawing on nearly 20 years in local government, she understands the challenges municipalities face and knows how to align them with the right resources. She has helped secure millions in federal, state, and local funding by pairing her grant-writing expertise with a collaborative approach. For clients, that means more than just applications, it means having a trusted partner who knows how to connect the right projects to the right opportunities.

THERESE HAFFNER



JANA WILLIAMS, AICP

Jana brings a planner's eye and a funder's mindset to every project. She helps clients identify where their priorities intersect with agency goals, ensuring proposals resonate and succeed. Her background spans city, regional, and state planning as well as private-sector development, giving her a wide perspective on how funding decisions are made. Jana has managed revolving loan funds, coordinated grant programs, and guided interagency partnerships – experience she uses to help communities unlock resources and deliver lasting improvements.

JANA WILLIAMS



RON CHAMBERLAIN

Ron draws on decades of public service to help communities move projects from planning to completion. As the former head of a county highway department, he oversaw budgets, capital plans, and construction programs – experience that gives him a practical understanding of what it takes to deliver results. Clients value Ron's ability to translate funding into action, using his insights from both military and public-sector leadership to anticipate challenges and keep projects on track.

RON CHAMBERLAIN



Funding 101: Understanding the Basics

Navigating funding opportunities for infrastructure projects can feel overwhelming, but understanding key concepts helps you plan effectively and maximize available resources.

Following is a clear breakdown of essential funding categories, key terms, and payout timelines – designed to make the process easier to understand and a bit less daunting.

FUNDING CATEGORIES YOU SHOULD KNOW



Navigating project funding starts with understanding how it's typically structured. Funding is generally divided into two key stages: pre-design and post-design.

Pre-design funding

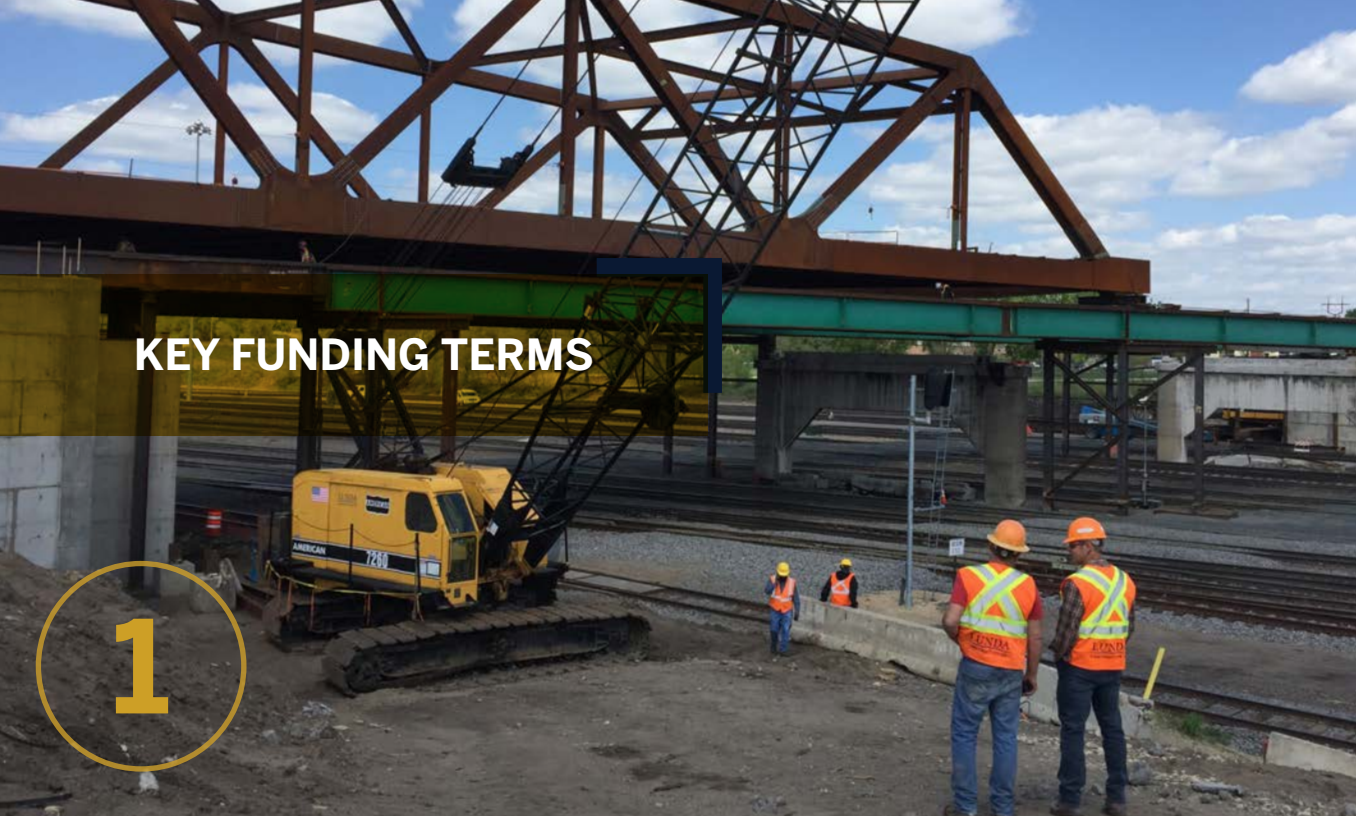
Supports early-stage efforts such as feasibility studies, planning, and environmental reviews. These funds help communities assess project viability before committing to full design and are often available through grants for research and assessment.

Post-design funding

Covers final engineering, construction, and implementation. This stage is typically supported by a mix of grants, loans, or public-private partnerships and may require local matching funds or proof of project readiness.



Understanding which funding is available at each stage allows for better financial planning and smoother project execution.



KEY FUNDING TERMS

1



2

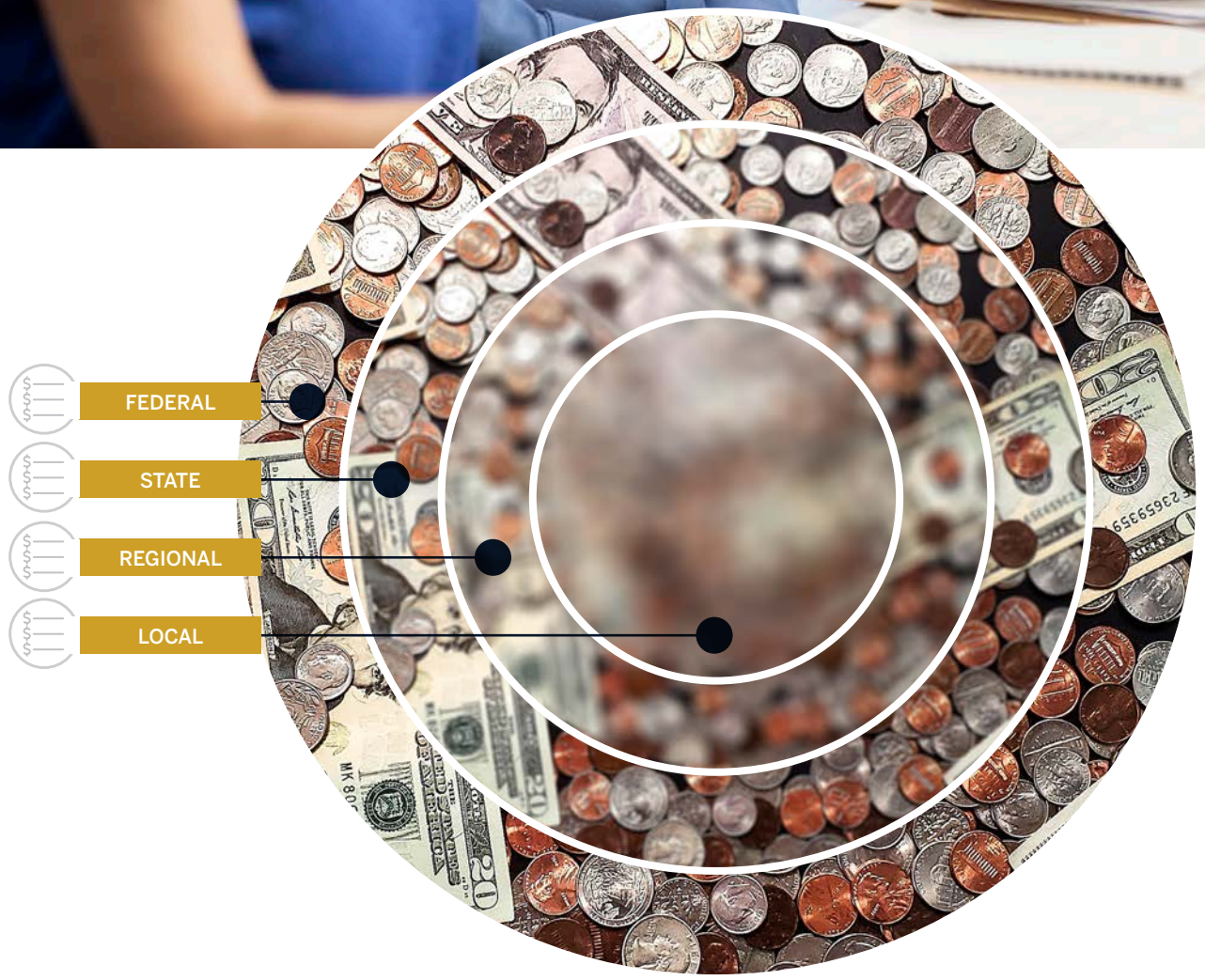
Along with the overarching categories, it's equally important to understand the terminology you'll encounter along the way. From development distinctions to loan and grant structures, these key terms can help you navigate funding conversations with clarity and confidence.

Community Development vs. Economic Development

1. **Community development** funding supports public amenities, infrastructure, utilities, and resources. These projects can access local, regional, state, federal, and philanthropic funding pools.

2. **Economic development** funding is geared toward infrastructure that supports private job creation in a region. It has its own dedicated funding sources, often tied to workforce growth and business investment.





Loans

Loan options are abundant, but many go unnoticed due to limited marketing. In particular, local and regional programs may not have the same visibility as larger state or federal loan options. To uncover these opportunities, reach out to:

- Local economic development organizations
- Community development groups
- Regional development councils
- Electric cooperatives
- Rural water associations
- State revolving loan funds

These organizations often provide flexible loan programs tailored to community needs.



Grants

Most grant funding operates on a reimbursement basis, meaning recipients must cover expenses upfront before receiving disbursement. Because grant programs tend to be risk-averse, it's important to:

- Align your project with current funding priorities (which can change frequently).
- Demonstrate that your project can be completed on time and within budget.
- Competitively procure your engineering firm before starting project work if you plan to use grant funds for design – otherwise, those costs may not qualify for reimbursement.

Tax Incentives

Tax incentives can be a valuable tool for funding development but require careful planning. If you're considering tax incentives as part of your funding strategy, consult a public financial advisor to ensure compliance and maximize benefits.



TYPICAL PAYOUT TIMEFRAME

Funding payout timeframes vary widely depending on the source and type of funding. Some programs provide funds upfront, while others require applicants to cover costs before reimbursement. Understanding expected timelines can help prevent cash flow issues and project delays.

Federal & State Grants–Often have long review and approval processes, taking anywhere from six months to two years from application to disbursement. More competitive grants may take longer due to multiple review cycles.



Loans–Typically available within a few months after approval, though timelines vary based on lender requirements such as feasibility studies or financial audits. Many loan programs, including state revolving loan programs for water and sewer, are reimbursement-based and pay out as project expenses are incurred. Local and regional programs may offer faster turnaround times than state or federal loan programs.



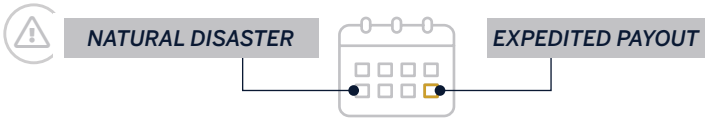
Reimbursement-Based Programs–Common for federal, state, and philanthropic grants. Processing times for reimbursements range from several weeks to multiple months, depending on agency efficiency and documentation requirements. Applicants should have a financial buffer to accommodate potential delays.



Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) & Tax Incentives–Highly variable payout structures. Some tax incentives are performance-based, meaning funds are received only after job creation or investment benchmarks are met. Others, such as tax increment financing (TIF), may distribute funds over multiple years.



Emergency & Fast-Track Funding–Certain funding sources, such as disaster relief funds or special appropriations, can be expedited for urgent infrastructure needs. However, these are typically reserved for crises such as natural disasters or economic downturns.



PUTTING YOUR FUNDING STRATEGY INTO ACTION

Understanding the basics of infrastructure funding helps you make informed decisions, avoid common pitfalls, and keep your project on track. Every project – and community – is different, which is why thoughtful planning and early coordination are so important.
If questions come up along the way, know that there are resources and people ready to help you navigate the process and find a path that fits your goals.



WANT TO
LEARN MORE?

Alex can help!

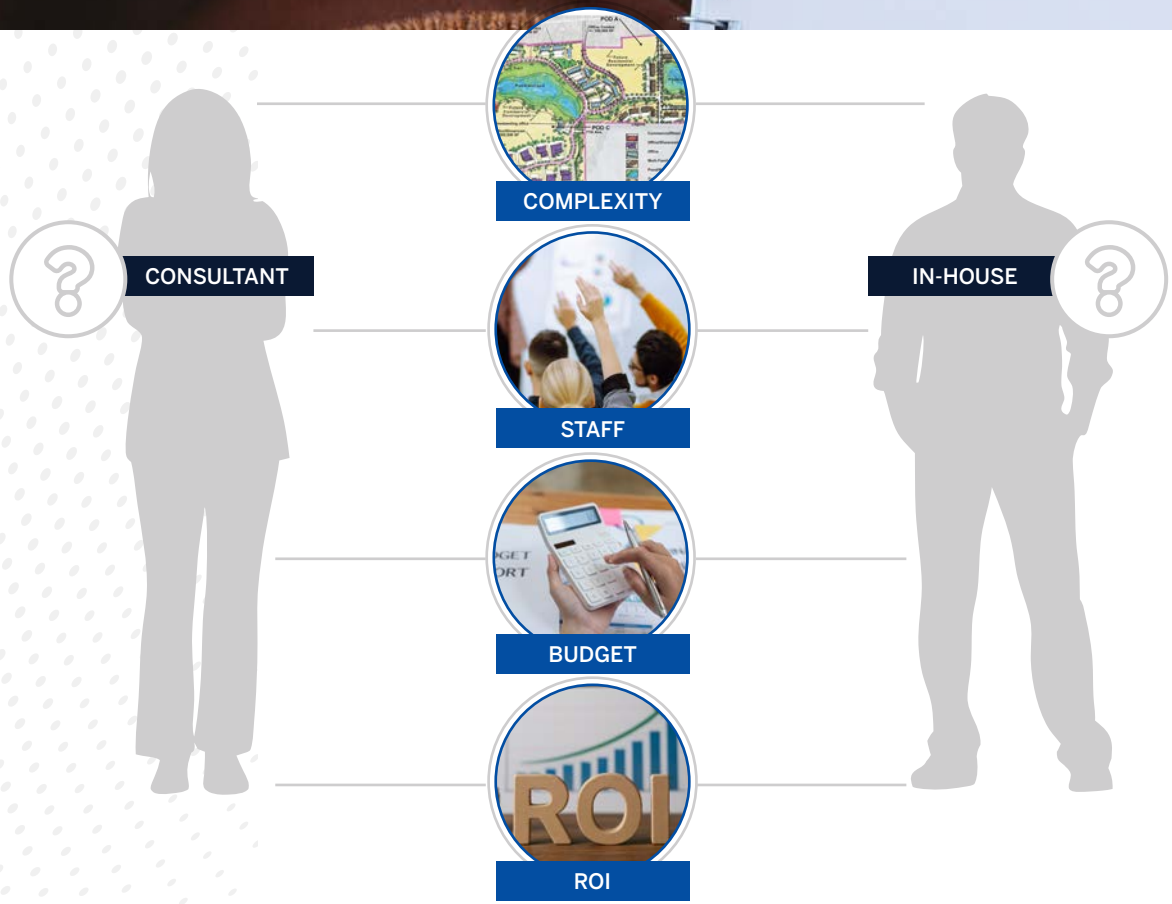
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Identifying When to Hire a Consultant for Funding: Key Criteria for Decision-Making

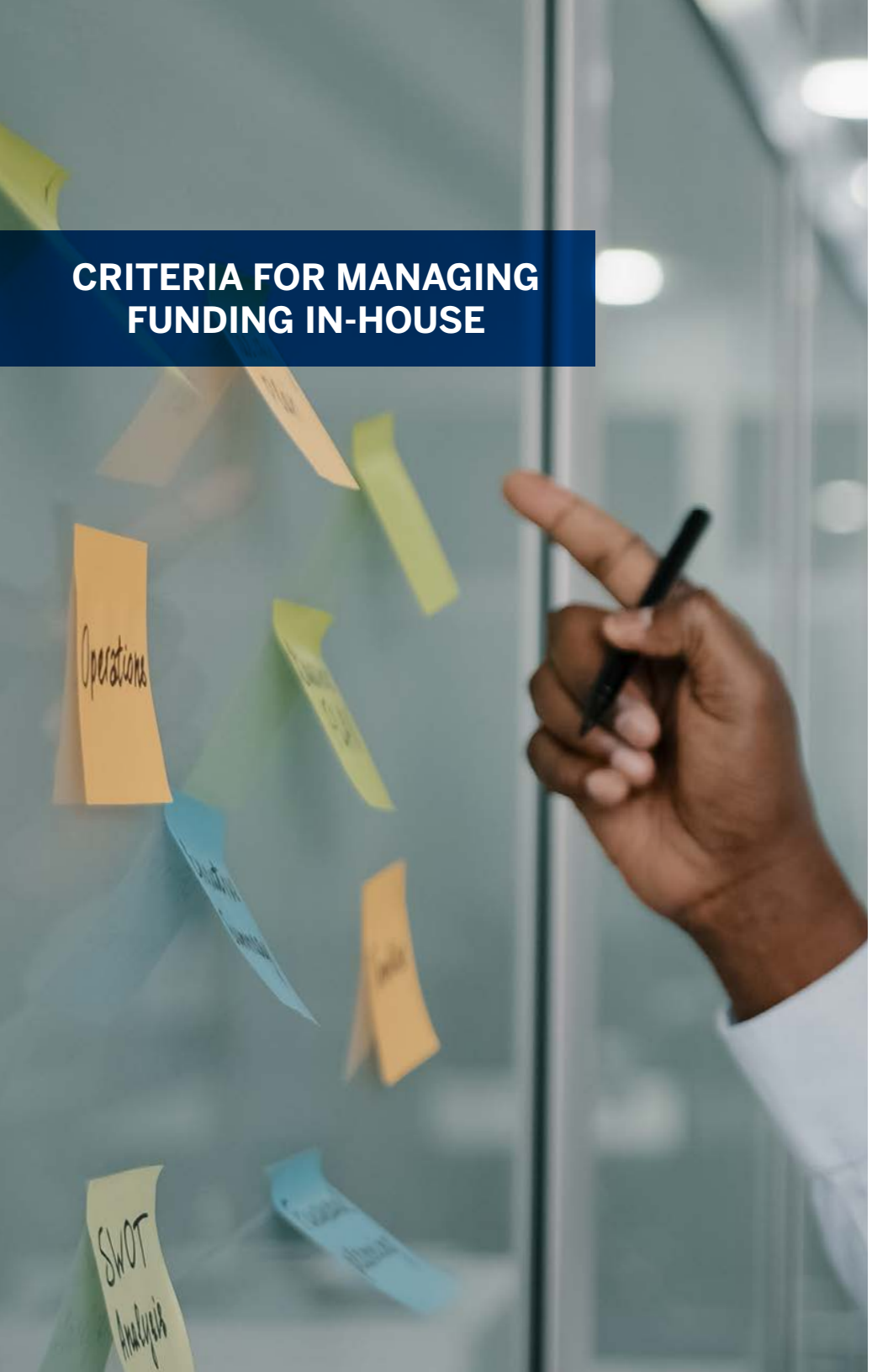
Securing funding for architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) projects is often a complex and time-sensitive process.





With billions of dollars available annually through federal, state, and private sources, municipalities and organizations must navigate intricate grant applications, compliance requirements, and reporting obligations. While some entities successfully manage funding in-house, others turn to consultants for their expertise in securing and maximizing funding.

The decision to hire a funding consultant, versus managing the process internally, depends on several factors, including project complexity, staff availability and expertise, budget considerations, and the potential return on investment. This article explores key criteria for determining when a consultant is the right choice and provides data-backed insights into their impact.



CRITERIA FOR MANAGING FUNDING IN-HOUSE

1 | Existing In-House Expertise

Organizations with staff experienced in grant writing and funding strategies may not require external consultants. Key indicators that an in-house approach is feasible include:

- A history of successfully securing federal, state, or private funding.
- Familiarity with agencies such as the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and U.S. Department of Energy (DOE).
- Staff members dedicated to grant writing, compliance, and fund management.

For example, larger cities with established finance or grant-writing departments may manage applications internally due to their institutional knowledge and established relationships with funding agencies.



2

Straightforward Funding Opportunities

Smaller projects with minimal application complexity, such as equipment upgrades or minor infrastructure repairs, may not require external assistance. Many Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grants and Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs) have clear guidelines that experienced municipal staff can handle without a consultant.



3

Cost Constraints

For municipalities with tight budgets, the cost of hiring a consultant must be weighed against potential funding gains. If consultant fees exceed expected funding awards, an internal approach may be more prudent. However, the risk of unsuccessful applications should also be considered – losing out on funding due to an incomplete or uncompetitive application could be costlier in the long run.



WHEN TO HIRE A FUNDING CONSULTANT

According to *Instrumentl*, the grant writing process can take 30-50 hours [for] a foundation grant, 60-80 hours for a state grant, and at least 120 hours [for] more complex federal grants.

1 | Complex, High-Value Projects

Projects requiring multi-agency coordination, environmental assessments, or extensive documentation often benefit from professional expertise. Examples include:

- **Large-scale bridge replacement or highway expansion projects** eligible for USDOT's INFRA grants, which require detailed benefit-cost analyses, environmental reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), stakeholder engagement strategies, and robust financial planning.
- **Water infrastructure upgrades** that must comply with America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (AWIA) requirements. These projects involve rigorous risk assessments, environmental impact studies, and demonstration of sustainable asset management.
- **Public-private partnership (P3) developments**, such as transit-oriented developments or broadband expansions, require innovative financial structuring, risk allocation strategies, and multi-stakeholder negotiations.

In all these cases, professional consultants offer deep experience with federal and state programs, up-to-date regulatory knowledge, and the ability to manage complex timelines – ultimately improving a project's competitiveness for funding and increasing the likelihood of successful execution.

GRANT TYPE	ESTIMATED TIME
Foundation Grant	30–50 hours
State Grant	60–80 hours
Federal Grant	120+ hours







2

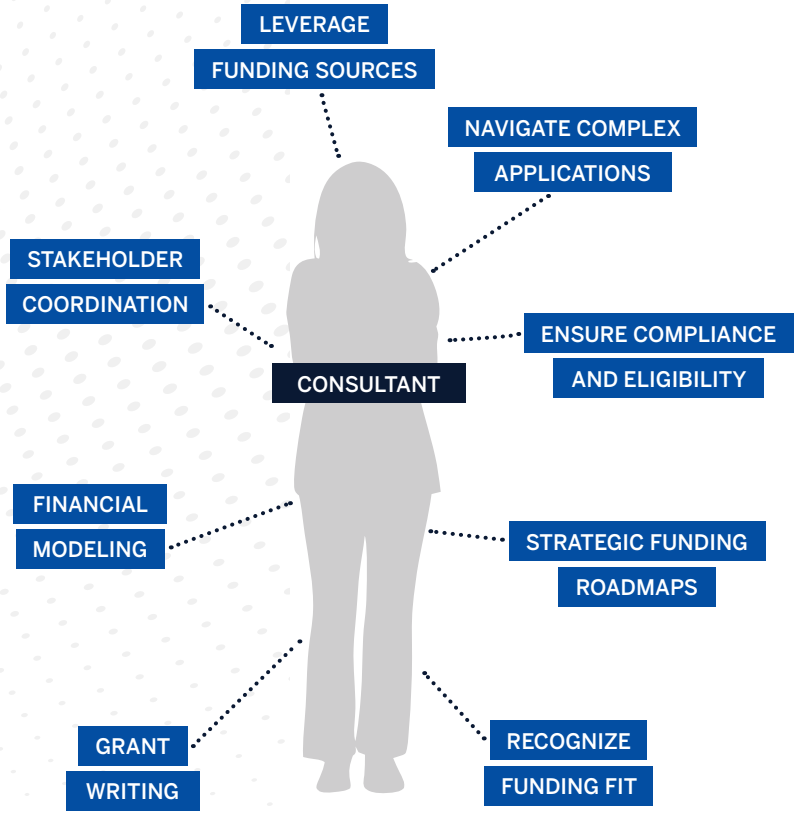
3

Limited Staff Capacity

Many small and mid-sized municipalities don't have dedicated grant writers or funding specialists, and limited staff capacity is often seen as a major barrier to securing external funding. Partnering with a consultant allows internal staff to stay focused on daily operations while funding experts lead the identification and pursuit of opportunities, building on the work staff has already invested in the project.

Tight Deadlines and Competitive Applications

Many federal funding programs have short application windows. For example, the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant receives hundreds of applications annually, with a strict deadline and extensive requirements. Consultants can expedite the process, ensuring timely submission and compliance. Their ability to tailor applications to align with funding priorities often gives them an edge.

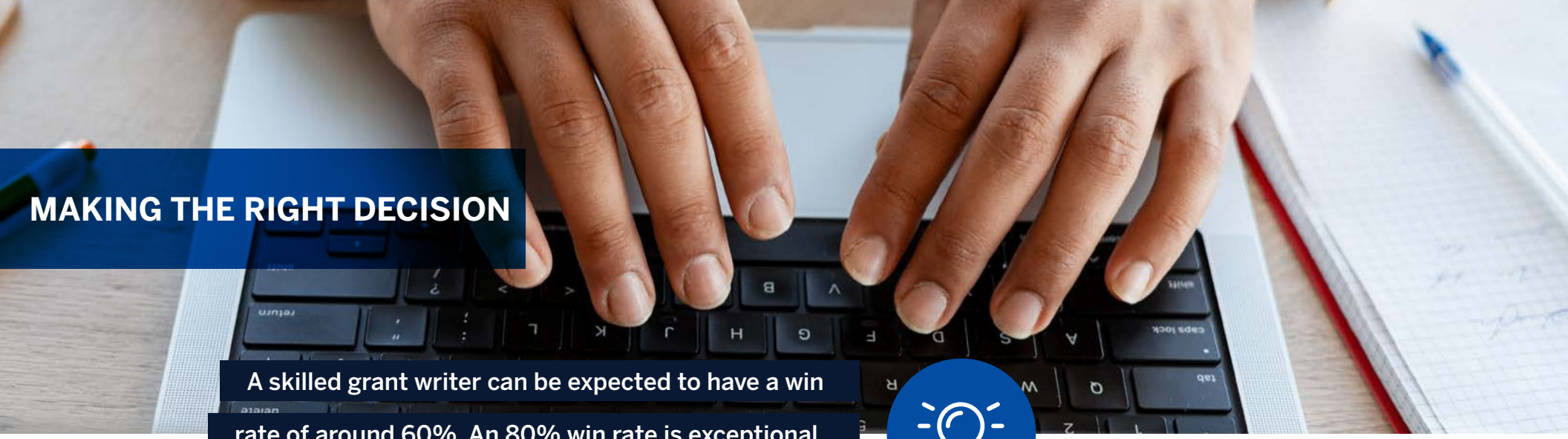


4 | Maximizing Funding Potential

Consultants can support staff by leveraging multiple funding sources or identifying additional funding sources not previously considered. A range of funding streams can be combined, such as federal grants, state loans, and private financing to optimize project funding. Beyond securing funds, consultants help municipalities navigate complex application processes, ensuring compliance with eligibility requirements and increasing the likelihood of approval. They also develop strategic funding roadmaps that align available resources with long-term infrastructure goals. Importantly, not all funding sources are the right fit for every project, even when eligibility criteria are met. Consultants with broad experience can recognize this fit early on – guiding clients toward opportunities that are not only available but also advantageous. By leveraging their expertise in grant writing, financial modeling, and stakeholder coordination, consultants help municipalities maximize funding potential while minimizing the financial burden on taxpayers.

5 | Ensuring Compliance and Long-Term Reporting

Many federal programs require extensive reporting and post-award compliance. The EPA Brownfields Program, for instance, mandates detailed environmental and financial reporting. Failure to comply can result in the loss of funding. Consultants can support municipal staff by managing these obligations, reducing the risk of costly penalties.

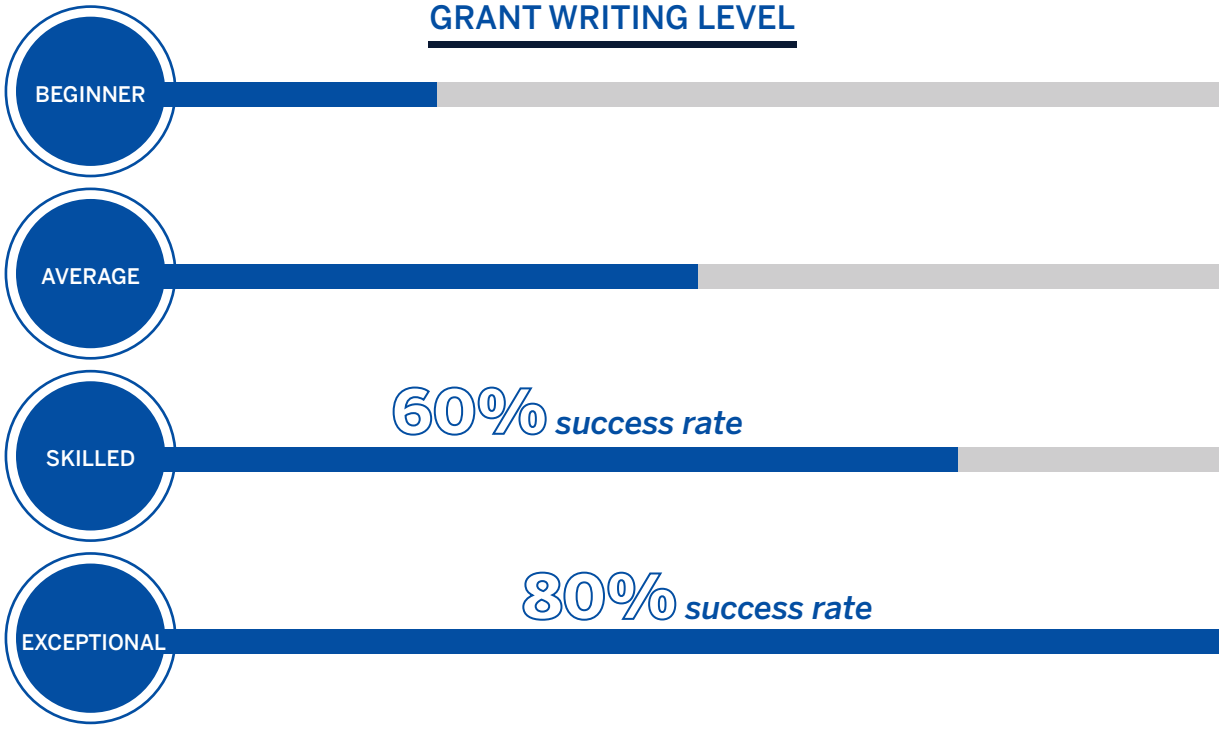


MAKING THE RIGHT DECISION

A skilled grant writer can be expected to have a win rate of around 60%. An 80% win rate is exceptional.

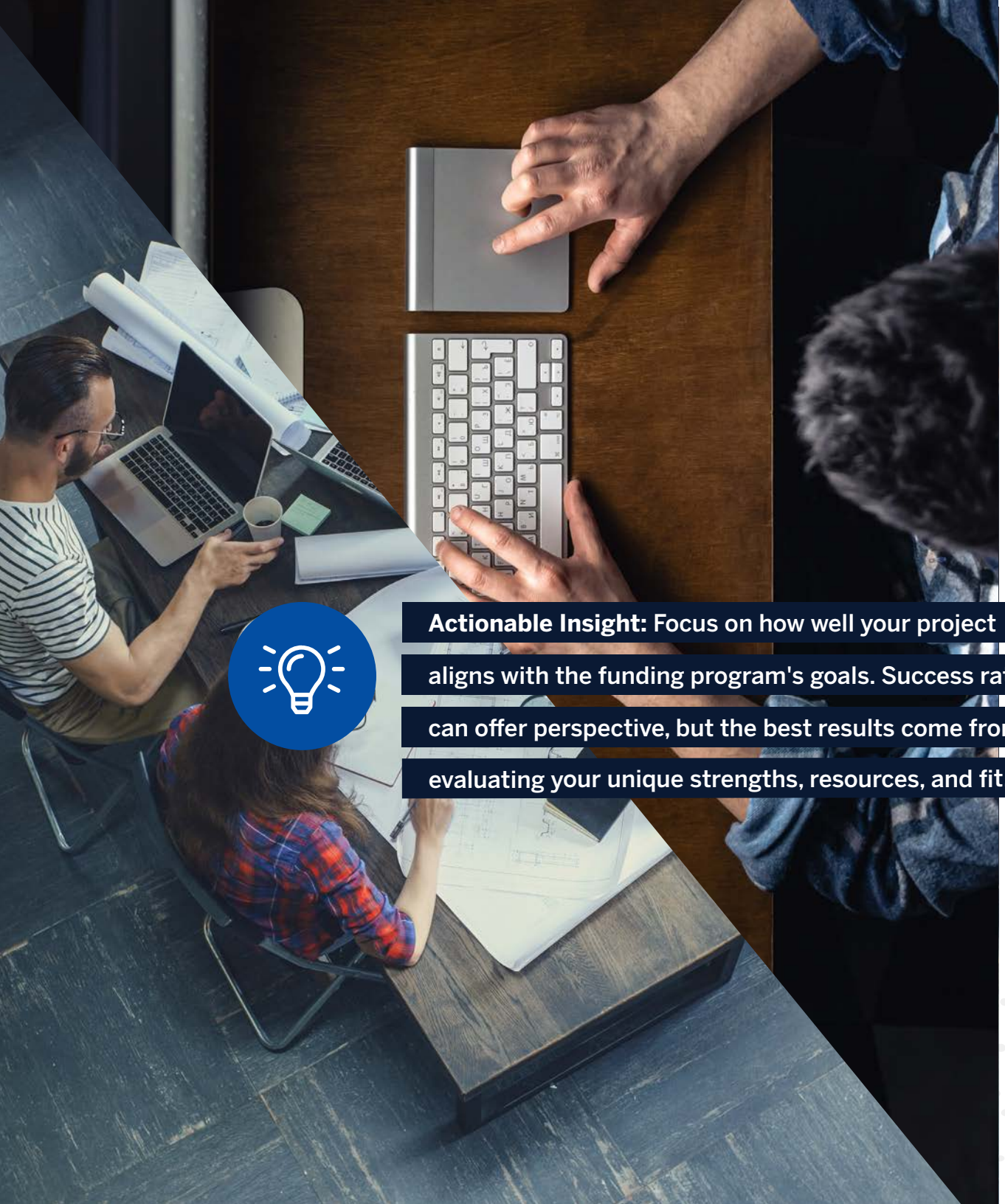
(Source: Forbes)

GRANT WRITING LEVEL



While managing funding applications internally can be cost-effective for smaller, straightforward projects, hiring a consultant is often the best choice for complex, high-value, or time-sensitive initiatives. To determine the best approach, municipalities should conduct a cost-benefit analysis, weighing factors such as:

- **Project size and funding potential:** Is the funding opportunity worth the investment in a consultant?
- **Internal expertise and capacity:** Does the team have the necessary skills and time to manage the process?
- **Application complexity and competition:** Is the funding highly competitive or does it require specialized knowledge?
- **Post-award obligations:** Are there extensive reporting and compliance requirements?



Actionable Insight: Focus on how well your project aligns with the funding program's goals. Success rates can offer perspective, but the best results come from evaluating your unique strengths, resources, and fit.

A hybrid approach – leveraging in-house expertise for smaller projects while engaging consultants for more complex funding pursuits – often provides the best balance between cost and success. Another hybrid approach is to use a consultant for those areas of the grant application that you need help with, while self-performing the remainder. This flexibility allows tailored support based on internal capacity and the specific demands of each funding opportunity.

By strategically evaluating these factors, municipalities can maximize their funding opportunities, ensuring long-term financial sustainability and successful project execution.



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Therese can help!

CONNECT



Writing Successful Grant Proposals

PART 1

Getting Ready for Funding: What to Gather and Do Before You Apply

Whether you're pursuing federal, state, or private funding, one thing holds true: preparation is everything. From setting up application portal logins to assembling your project materials, the groundwork you lay now will help you move faster, apply more confidently, and increase your chances of success.

In this first part of the grant guide, we'll walk you through the essential pre-application steps – how to find the right opportunities, what documents to gather, and how to get organized for a smooth submission process.



Step 1

START WITH THE SEARCH

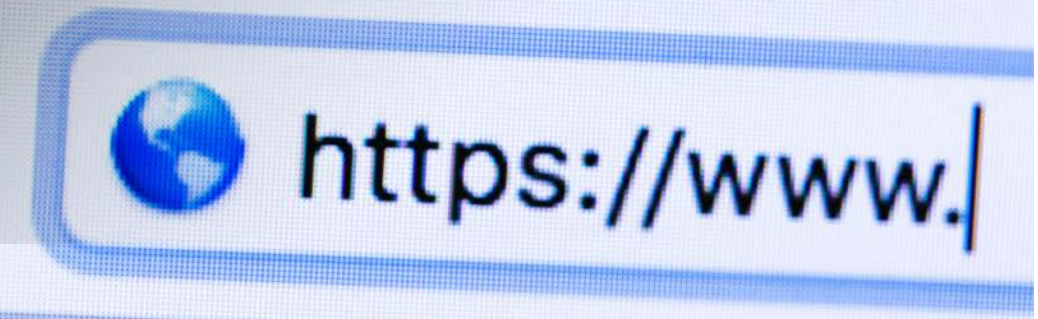
Before funding can flow, you need to know where to look. The search is often the most overlooked – but most critical – step in the process. Funding sources are diverse and often interconnected: a federal program might be administered by a state agency, while a nonprofit grant could be paired with a government loan. Taking time to explore the full landscape – public, private, and everything in between – will help you uncover the best-fit opportunities and build a stronger, more flexible funding strategy.

Use tools like search engines, funding databases, or AI-enabled platforms to cast a wide net. As you evaluate opportunities, ask:

- Who's eligible?
- Is this a grant or a loan?
- Is it competitive or formula-based?
- Are there deadlines, match requirements, or funding limits?
- Can I combine it with other sources?

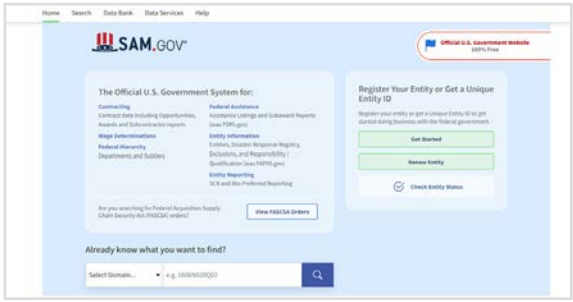
Step 2

KNOW THE SYSTEM BEFORE YOU NEED THE SYSTEM

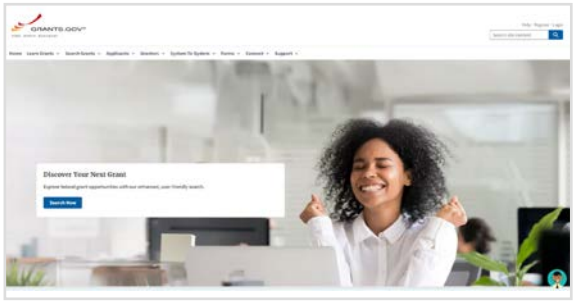


Most grants and loans require you to apply through online portals – and registering can take days or even weeks. These aren't optional steps; they're critical.

- SAM.gov account (for a Unique Entity ID)



- Grants.gov account (for federal opportunities)



- Any state or private foundation portals relevant to your project



Pro tip: Begin this process early. A common mistake is discovering you can't log in just hours before the deadline.

Step 3

READ THE NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY (NOFO)

The NOFO is your rulebook, roadmap, and referee all in one. It lays out everything: what the funder wants, who can apply, how much funding is available, and exactly how your proposal will be evaluated.

Take time to:

1. Highlight the funding program's mission and priorities
2. Bullet how your project aligns with each
3. Underline evaluation criteria
4. Bullet how your project addresses them



If your project doesn't meet one of the evaluation criteria, that's not a dealbreaker. Talk with your team early – there may be room for adjustment.

NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY (NOFO)

1 **Funder's Mission and Priorities:**

Project Alignment:

2

3 Evaluation Criteria:

Project Connection:

4



Step 4

GATHER KEY MATERIALS ONCE, USE OFTEN

Most funding applications ask for similar documents. By compiling them in advance, you're ready to apply across multiple programs without starting from scratch. Pull this information together now so you're ready:

About Your Organization

- Unique Entity ID (from SAM.gov) and EIN
- Contact info for leadership and financial roles
- Organizational chart, resolution process (if applicable)
- Partner organization information

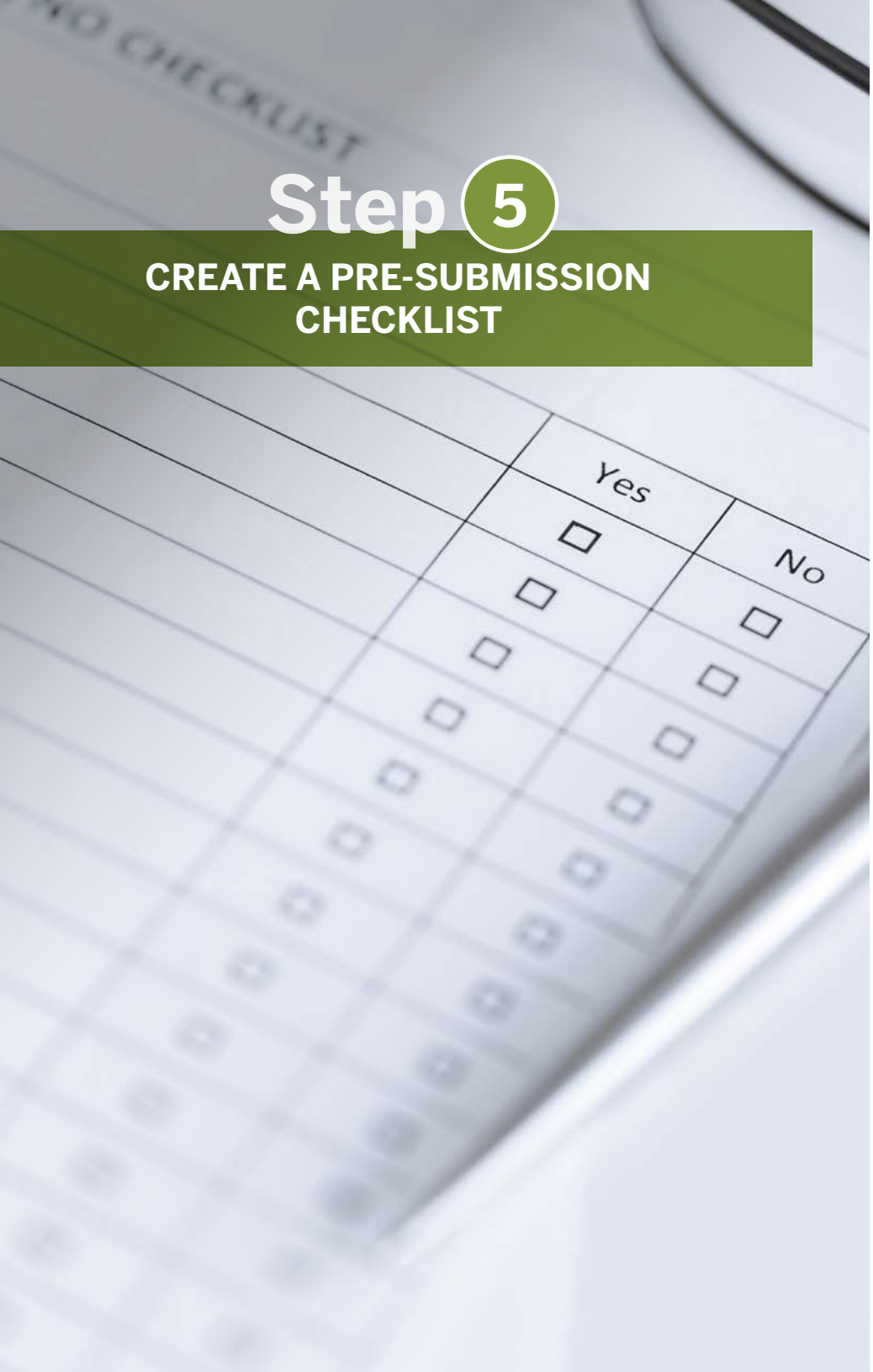
About Your Project

- Project description, urgency, and phases
- Budget (include contingencies and age of estimates)
- Maps and photos
- Matching funds or other sources
- Strategic plan references

Supporting Documentation

- Letters of support
- Demographic data (especially for disadvantaged communities)
- Capital improvement plan or 5-year financial forecast

To stay organized and save time on every application, store your materials in a shared location – such as a cloud drive or internal server – where your team can easily access them. Use clear, consistent file names so you're not hunting down documents or duplicating work each time a new funding opportunity arises.



Step 5

CREATE A PRE-SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

A detailed checklist helps avoid last-minute scrambles and should include:

- All accounts active and tested
- Application formatted correctly (margins, fonts, etc.)
- Budget forms complete
- Evaluation criteria addressed
- All documents uploaded and labeled properly
- Letters of support
- Resolution/approval from governing body

Step 6

COLLECT LETTERS OF SUPPORT EARLY

These letters show collaboration, community buy-in, and real-world impact. They take time to secure, so it's important to start early and streamline the process:

- Identify key supporters – stakeholders, beneficiaries, or respected partners
- Give them a clear ask: what to include, why it matters
- Provide a draft or template to make it easy
- Set a deadline and follow up with gratitude



From Logistics to Language

Once your logins are set, your checklist is complete, and your letters of support are rolling in, you're ready to tackle the next step: actually writing the proposal. And that's where the real magic happens – defining your problem, crafting your solution, and telling a story that compels funders to say "yes."

Let's dig into how to do that – effectively, persuasively, and maybe even a little creatively.





PART 2

In this second part of our grant guide, we'll walk you through defining the problem, designing a powerful solution, and using narrative, data, and even AI to bring your vision to life. This is your moment to show funders why your work matters and how their support will create real, measurable impact.



Step 1

IDENTIFY AND DEFINE THE PROBLEM

Every strong grant proposal begins with a clearly defined problem. This is your chance to show the funder not just what you're addressing, but why it matters.

Be Specific

Avoid vague language like “this is a growing concern” or “many people are affected.” Instead, detail how many, who, where, and why now.

Explain the Significance

Why should this problem be addressed today, and by you? Who is impacted – and what are the consequences of inaction?

Identify Root Causes

Don’t stop at the surface. Is your community facing a lack of clean water? Explore the infrastructure, economic, or policy issues contributing to it.



Use Data and Evidence

Support your statements with facts. Statistics, reports, and research help demonstrate you’re not working from assumptions – you’re responding to real-world needs.

Connect to the Funder

The best problem statements speak directly to the funder’s mission. Use their language. Mirror their priorities. Lay the groundwork for how your solution will align.



Step 2

DEFINE THE SOLUTION

Now that you've described the problem, here's your opportunity to show how you'll solve it – with precision, credibility, and a clear plan.

Be Clear and Direct

Don't just say, "We'll improve access." Spell out exactly how. Will you train staff? Install equipment? Launch a pilot program?

Link to the Problem Statement

There should be no mystery here – your solution should directly address the issues you just outlined.

Use Proven Practices

If your approach is based on research, pilot programs, or national best practices, say so. Funders want to know your methods work.

Set Measurable Goals

Good intentions are nice. Outcomes are better. How will you measure success? Think in numbers, timelines, and tangible benchmarks.

Detail the Plan

Give the funder a roadmap:

- What are your key steps?
- When will they happen?
- What resources are needed?
- Who's involved?

Plan for Sustainability

What happens after the funding ends? Address ongoing support, future funding strategies, or how community involvement keeps the work going.

Bonus

USE AI TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Artificial intelligence is a powerful ally in grant writing –and not just for grammar checks.

Why Use AI?

- **Save Time:** Draft sections faster with structured prompts.
- **Improve Quality:** AI can help sharpen your message and make your language more compelling.
- **Stay Competitive:** Tailor proposals to specific funders with precision and consistency.

Pro Tip

AI works best when paired with human insight. Use it to refine, not replace, your voice.

Try these prompts to get more from your AI assistant during the grant writing process:

FOR A PROBLEM STATEMENT:

> *SUMMARIZE THE FOLLOWING PROBLEM IN UNDER 200 WORDS USING CLEAR, PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE THAT REFLECTS URGENCY AND RELEVANCE TO [INSERT FUNDER OR SECTOR].*

generate

TO ALIGN WITH FUNDER PRIORITIES:

> *BASED ON THIS FUNDING NOTICE, REWRITE OUR PROJECT DESCRIPTION TO DIRECTLY REFLECT THEIR STATED GOALS, MISSION, AND EVALUATION CRITERIA.*

generate

TO CREATE MEASURABLE GOALS:

> *TURN THIS PARAGRAPH INTO A BULLETED LIST OF SMART OBJECTIVES.*

generate

TO DRAFT A LETTER OF SUPPORT TEMPLATE:

> *CREATE A PROFESSIONAL AND PERSUASIVE LETTER OF SUPPORT TEMPLATE FOR A LOCAL NONPROFIT ENDORSING A GRANT PROPOSAL FOCUSED ON [PROJECT GOAL].*

generate

FOR STORYTELLING IMPACT:

> *HELP REWRITE THIS ANECDOTE TO BE MORE EMOTIONALLY COMPELLING WHILE KEEPING IT CONCISE AND ALIGNED WITH OUR PROJECT'S TONE.*

generate

TO STRENGTHEN THE CLOSING STATEMENT:

> *WRITE A COMPELLING CLOSING PARAGRAPH THAT SUMMARIZES OUR PROJECT'S IMPACT AND ENCOURAGES THE FUNDER TO INVEST.*

generate



A great proposal does more than meet criteria – it inspires action. When you clearly articulate the need, outline a smart solution, and tell your story with confidence and authenticity, you invite funders to become true partners in your mission.

By combining strong preparation (from Part 1) with persuasive writing (in Part 2), you're not just submitting an application – you're building momentum. And with tools like AI in your back pocket, your proposal isn't just complete. It's competitive.

Insider Info: Some grant programs will provide a complimentary review of the draft application and provide feedback prior to the submission deadline. Additionally, some grant programs offer technical assistance and other guidance for grant applicants.

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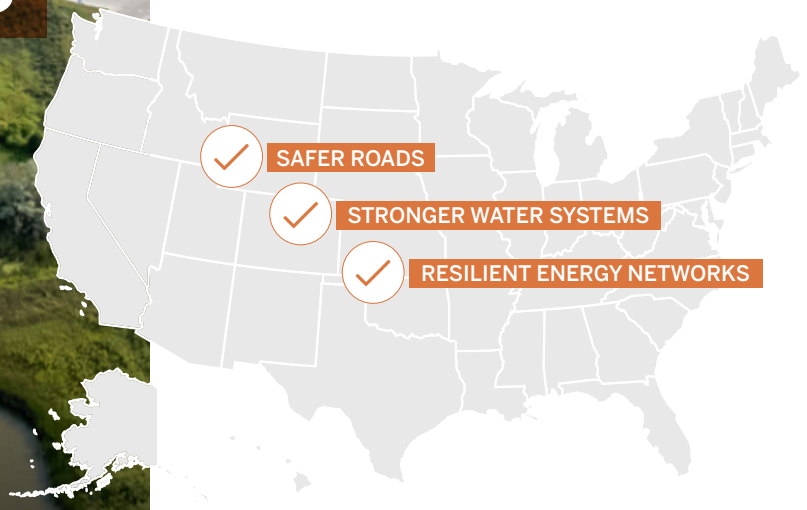
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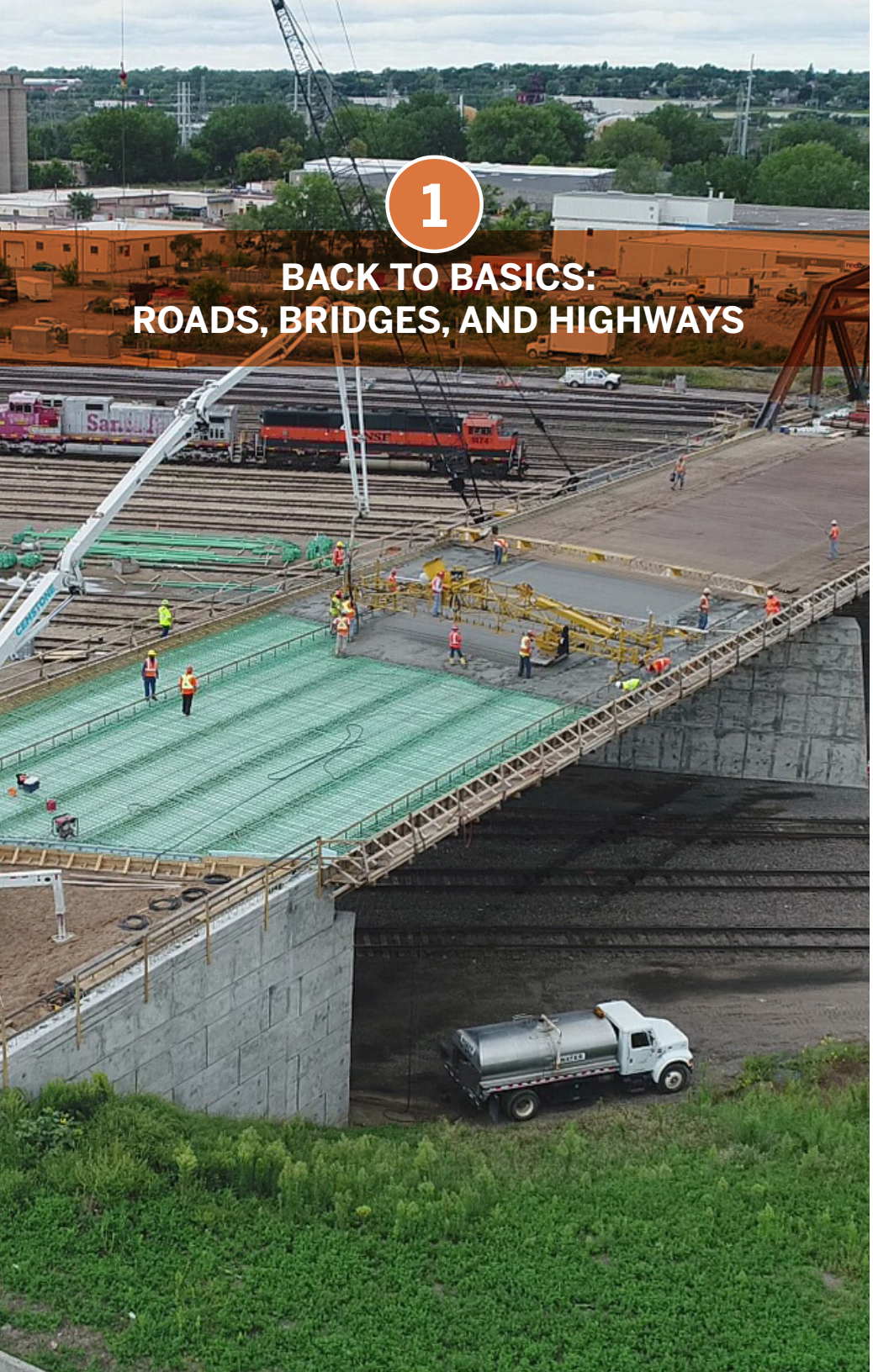


5 Key Trends in AEC Funding: What's Driving Investment in American Infrastructure

If you're planning to build, upgrade, or modernize infrastructure, now is a pivotal moment.

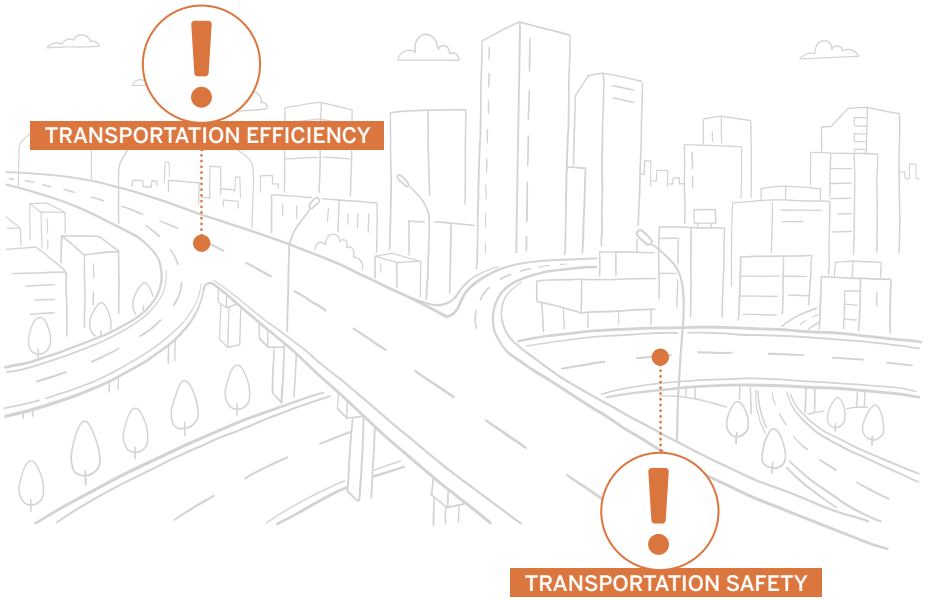
Billions in federal and state funding are targeting projects that align with national priorities – from safer roads to stronger water systems and more resilient energy networks. Understanding where the funding is flowing can help you position your project to receive support.





1 BACK TO BASICS: ROADS, BRIDGES, AND HIGHWAYS

The focus is shifting back to core infrastructure. From interstate highways to structurally deficient bridges, funding is flowing into projects that improve transportation efficiency and safety. Federal and state leaders are prioritizing shovel-ready projects – those that are fully designed, permitted, and ready to begin construction immediately – that demonstrate a strong return on investment and job creation.





2 ENERGY INDEPENDENCE & DOMESTIC PRODUCTION

Infrastructure tied to energy development – particularly oil, natural gas, and domestic refining capacity – is attracting significant investment. Whether through pipeline upgrades, energy corridors, or support for coal and nuclear facilities, funding is backing projects that reinforce U.S. energy dominance.





3 WATER INFRASTRUCTURE MODERNIZATION

Decades-old water and wastewater systems are finally getting long-overdue attention. Projects that upgrade failing systems, address lead service lines, and support agricultural water use in rural communities are seeing an uptick in funding, particularly from state revolving funds and targeted federal initiatives.



4 STRENGTHENING RURAL AND UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

Federal dollars are increasingly being directed toward rural broadband, water access, and utility infrastructure to support economic development in small-town America. The goal: close the urban-rural infrastructure gap and ensure all communities can compete economically.



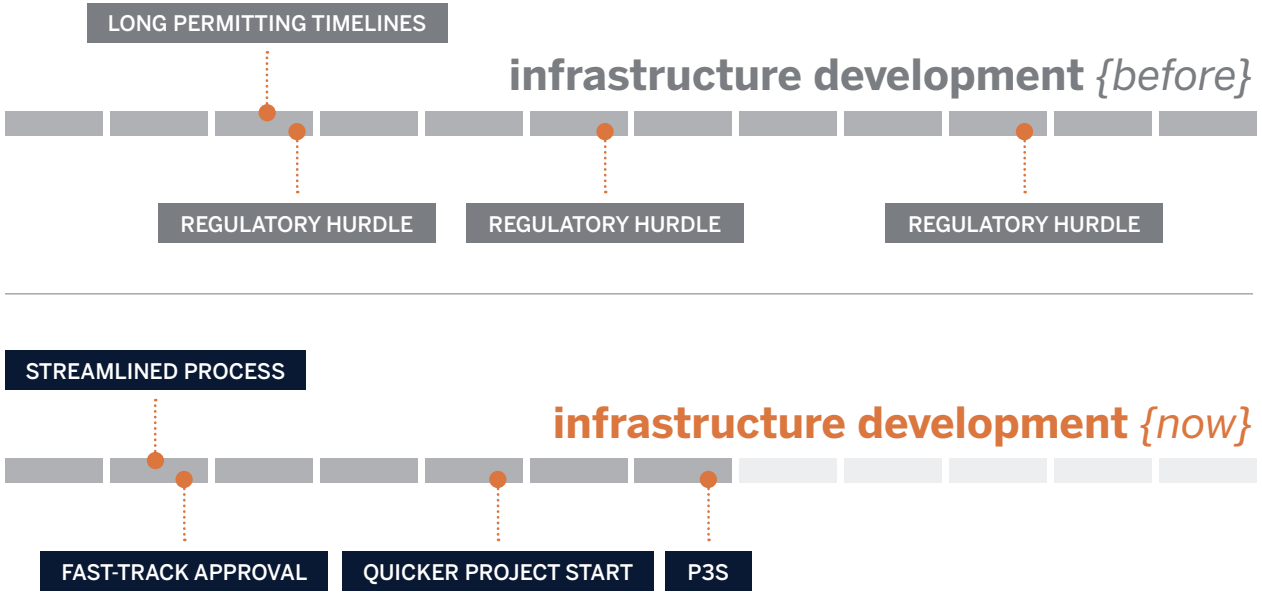




5

CUTTING RED TAPE: PERMITTING REFORM & PRIVATE INVESTMENT

Long permitting timelines and regulatory hurdles have historically slowed down infrastructure development, but there's a renewed push to streamline processes, fast-track approvals, and get projects off the ground quicker. At the same time, public-private partnerships (P3s) are gaining traction as a way to fund and deliver large-scale infrastructure efficiently. The projects that are "ready to build" and backed by strong financial strategies – especially those involving private capital – are best positioned to receive support and move forward fast.





BOTTOM LINE? KNOW THE PRIORITIES. WIN THE PROJECTS.

Priorities are shifting toward infrastructure that improves quality of life, boosts the economy, and protects long-term resilience. Whether you're a city, utility, Tribal Nation, or private owner, aligning your project with these goals – and tapping the right funding sources – can help you move from vision to reality.

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Navigating State-Specific Funding

Texas

In Texas, funding pathways are influenced by a strong emphasis on local control, a large rural-urban divide, and robust state-backed infrastructure programs. From water supply planning to transportation improvements, successful applicants need to align with both regional priorities and state-level criteria. In this Q&A, our SEH Texas funding specialist, Daniela Garnica, shares key insights on identifying opportunities, building local support, and positioning your project for success.



DANIELA GARNICA

TEXAS FUNDING SPECIALIST

HOW DO STATE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES DIFFER FROM FEDERAL FUNDING?

Texas state funding programs are supported by sources such as sales tax revenue, oil and gas income, and state-issued bonds. Like in many states, Texas' programs tend to offer more flexible structures, simpler application processes, and quicker turnaround times than their federal counterparts. In contrast, federal funding often comes with added layers of environmental, historical, or administrative review and typically follows a longer approval timeline. Understanding the balance of both funding types is key to building a strong, diversified funding strategy.

WHERE SHOULD ORGANIZATIONS START WHEN RESEARCHING AVAILABLE FUNDING OPTIONS IN TEXAS? ARE THERE ANY TEXAS-SPECIFIC DATABASES OR FUNDING PORTALS WORTH BOOKMARKING?

Texas offers several centralized resources for finding funding. Texas.gov eGrants serves as the state's main hub for grant opportunities, with regional directories available through groups like the Texas Association of Regional Councils. For flood mitigation, the Texas Flood Clearinghouse provides a one-stop shop for funding information and a way to check project or community eligibility. Water systems can also turn to the Texas Water Infrastructure Coordination Committee (TWICC), a multi-agency group that helps communities navigate funding and technical assistance options.

In addition, it's always good to monitor specific agencies such as the Texas Water Development Board, Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), and Texas General Land Office (GLO), which administer many of the state's infrastructure and resiliency programs.

WHAT SHOULD ORGANIZATIONS UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE TEXAS BUDGET PROCESS AND TIMING FOR FUNDING APPLICATIONS? HOW DOES TEXAS' BIENNIAL BUDGET PROCESS AFFECT THE TIMING AND AVAILABILITY OF FUNDING?

Since Texas operates on a two-year, biennial budget cycle, it's important that applicants keep up to speed on funding trends, engage with local state legislators, and build relationships with those lawmakers. Organizations should begin planning and building relationships with legislators early, especially in the year leading up to the legislative session. Once a program is funded, application windows can move quickly, so being prepared ahead of time and aligning your project with the state's published goals can make all the difference.



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WHAT ARE THE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TEXAS' APPROACH TO EARMARKS AND THE FEDERAL EARMARK PROCESS?

At the state level, earmarks are often called "riders," "special items," or "special appropriations." While these funding designations are public, they aren't always easy to track – transparency depends on how well the item is documented in the legislation. At the federal level, earmarks, also called "Community Project Funding" or "Congressionally Directed Spending," must include a public explanation and name the member of Congress who submitted the request. That said, it's uncommon for Texas communities to receive earmarks through the state's senators.

If your community is interested in federal funding, it's a good idea to connect with your U.S. Representative's office. Ask if they accept "Community Project Funding requests" and whether they do so on an annual basis. Doing this early can help you plan and prepare strong submissions.

HOW CAN ORGANIZATIONS EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE WITH LOBBYING NETWORKS TO ADVOCATE FOR THEIR FUNDING NEEDS?

Start by identifying professional associations and advocacy groups that align with your sector and priorities. I recommend groups like the Texas Water Association, ACEC Texas, and Texas Economic Development Council. These groups often advocate for funding programs on behalf of members and can be strong partners during budget cycles. It also helps to partner with experienced consultants such as SEH, who understand the legislative process and can help navigate key deadlines and messaging.

WHAT ROLE DO LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES AND LEGISLATORS PLAY IN FUNDING DECISIONS?

Local representatives and legislators play a key role in funding decisions by sponsoring project requests. They can help shape, secure, and direct potential funding in their districts. That's why it's so important for city and county officials – mayors, managers, and commissioners – to engage their local lawmakers early and often. A well-briefed legislator can be a valuable champion for your project.

WHAT TOOLS OR RESOURCES DO YOU RECOMMEND FOR STAYING UP TO DATE ON NEW FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES?

In addition to subscribing to agency websites like TXDOT, Texas Water Development Board, Texas Economic Development Office, Texas General Land Office, and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, it's smart to follow the Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office for broader updates. Email alerts, webinars, and newsletters from state associations and advocacy groups are also excellent ways to stay ahead of deadlines.



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WHAT STRATEGIES CAN ORGANIZATIONS USE TO UNCOVER LESSER-KNOWN FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES?

The Texas Regional Council of Governments is an often-overlooked resource. These organizations maintain close ties with state agencies and frequently know about grants or pilot programs before they're widely advertised. Local economic development offices and community foundations can also point you to smaller, sector-specific funding streams worth exploring.

IF AN ORGANIZATION IS NEW TO TEXAS FUNDING, WHAT'S THE BEST FIRST STEP THEY CAN TAKE TODAY?

Start by researching and joining advocacy organizations related to your field. These groups offer workshops, newsletters, and peer networks that can help you build knowledge quickly. From there, map out which state agencies fund the kinds of projects you're pursuing and begin building relationships with the appropriate contacts. A proactive, informed approach will help you navigate future funding opportunities with confidence. Additionally, connecting with SEH's Community and Economic Development team can provide personalized guidance and help navigate the process with confidence.

ARE THERE SPECIAL FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR COASTAL OR HURRICANE-PRONE COMMUNITIES IN TEXAS?

Yes, the Texas General Land Office (GLO) administers several programs such as the Texas Coastal Management Program, Coastal Erosion Planning and Response Act (CEPRA), Coastal Resources Program, and the Clean Coast Texas Program. These initiatives support shoreline stabilization, habitat restoration, and water quality protection. GLO also manages disaster recovery funds through the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program for communities affected by hurricanes and flooding events.

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CONCLUSION

Securing funding can unlock opportunities that transform projects, communities, and organizational goals.

Unsure where to start or which funding options are the best fit? Our team of funding specialists, planners, and engineers understands the complexities of identifying, applying for, and securing the right resources from start to finish. We're ready to guide you through the process and explore solutions tailored to your unique needs. Let's start the conversation.

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