

Municipal Resources

A Roadmap to Grant Funding Success

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Municipal government staff working on funding projects.
Photo: Wasan Tita



Objective

To provide municipalities with a strategic framework for improving grant funding success by identifying and prioritizing community-focused projects, leveraging partnerships and interconnected investments, and effectively communicating project benefits. Through proactive planning, collaboration, and alignment with funding priorities, communities can develop competitive grant applications that secure funding and deliver lasting economic, environmental, and quality-of-life benefits for residents.

A Roadmap to Grant Funding Success

Communities that consistently secure grant funding are rarely successful by chance. Their success is often the result of thoughtful planning, strategic project development, budgeting necessary matching funds, strong partnerships, and effective communication. The following roadmap outlines a practical approach municipalities can use to build competitive projects and maximize funding opportunities.

1. Plan, Identify, Define, and Prioritize Projects

Successful projects begin with a clear understanding of community needs and long-term goals.

Establish a Community Vision

- Complete comprehensive planning efforts such as comprehensive plans, strategic plans, transportation studies, parks and recreation plans, utility master plans, and economic development studies.
- Use these planning efforts to identify major community themes, priorities, challenges, and opportunities.
- Engage residents, elected officials, businesses, and community organizations to ensure plans reflect the community's vision.

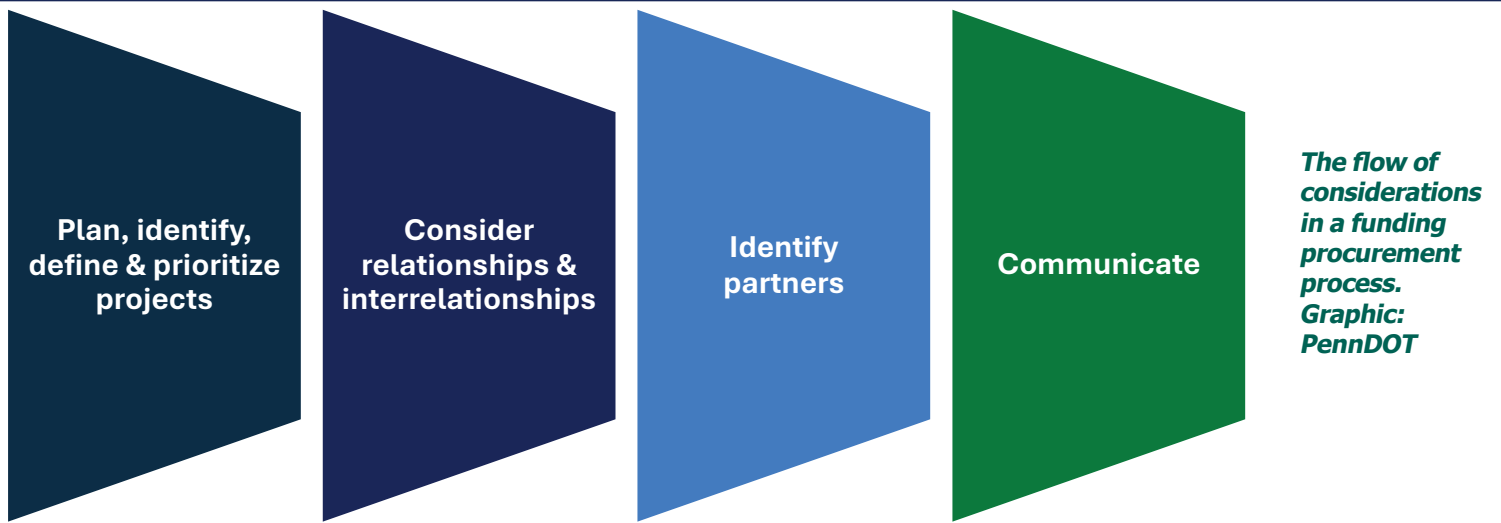
Translate Plans into Projects

- Identify specific projects that directly support the major goals and themes identified through planning.
- Focus on projects that solve known problems, advance community priorities, and create measurable outcomes.
- Look for projects that can address multiple community objectives simultaneously.

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Education Information board at the Stream Restoration project overlooking the restored stream and riparian buffer area in Camp Hill Borough. Photo: HRG



Clearly Define and Prioritize Projects

- Develop a clear project scope, anticipated outcomes, and implementation strategy.
- Prepare planning-level cost estimates and update periodically to understand funding needs and project feasibility.
- Prioritize projects based on community need, readiness, funding eligibility, and potential impact.
- Review priority lists to identify projects that align well with available grant funding programs. For example, PennDOT and Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Multimodal Transportation Fund grant opportunities open on an annual basis and fund a variety of transportation project types.
- Maintain a well-defined project pipeline so opportunities can be pursued when funding becomes available.

2. Consider Relationships and Interrelationships

The most competitive projects are often those that support multiple community goals and coordinate investments across programs and departments.

Look Beyond Individual Projects

- Consider how proposed projects relate to existing infrastructure, community initiatives, and future investments.
- Ask whether completing one project can reduce costs or improve the effectiveness of another.

Coordinate Infrastructure Investments

- Evaluate how roadway improvements may create opportunities to replace utilities, improve stormwater management facilities, or address pedestrian and bicycle needs.
- Explore opportunities to combine multiple capital improvements into a single, comprehensive project to maximize funding potential, coordinate work, and minimize future disruption.
- Discuss projects with the local [Metropolitan or Rural Planning Organization](#) and [PennDOT District Office](#), if the project impacts a state route.

Understand Community-Wide Impacts

- Recognize how land use decisions influence transportation infrastructure needs, utilities, community facilities, housing, and economic development.
- Consider how public investments can support broader community outcomes such as safety, mobility, environmental stewardship, recreation, and economic vitality.

Design for Multiple Benefits

- Whenever possible, develop projects that address several community priorities at once.
- Projects that improve transportation, water quality, recreation, economic development, and public safety simultaneously are often more attractive to funding agencies than projects with a single purpose.

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3. Identify and Engage Partners

Strong partnerships help demonstrate project importance, expand project benefits, and strengthen funding applications.

Identify Potential Partners

- Determine who may benefit directly or indirectly from the project.
- Consider neighboring municipalities, county agencies, school districts, transportation organizations, state agencies, utilities, community organizations, environmental groups, and local businesses.

Understand Partner Interests

- Identify how the project aligns with the goals, responsibilities, or priorities of potential partners.
- Look for opportunities where multiple organizations can achieve shared objectives through a single investment.

Explore Opportunities to Expand Impact

- Consider whether modifications to the project could provide broader community benefits or serve additional stakeholders.
- Ask whether a slight change in scope could connect neighborhoods, support recreation, improve environmental outcomes, enhance economic development, or improve regional mobility.

Leverage Partner Support

- Seek letters of support, financial contributions, technical assistance, or implementation partnerships.
- Demonstrate how the project serves a broader audience whenever possible.

4. Communicate Your Story

Even the best projects can struggle to gain support if their benefits are not clearly communicated.

Tell a Compelling Story

- Explain the problem the project addresses, why it matters, and how the project will improve the community.



***Ribbon cutting at the Franklin County bridge opening on Hickory Run Road over the Conodoguinet Creek between Southampton and Lurgan Townships following successful project implementation.
Photo: HRG***

- Use data, local examples, and community experiences to illustrate project need.
- Focus on outcomes and benefits rather than simply describing construction activities.
- Demonstrate that there is a well-defined plan for project delivery that clearly lays out project readiness and feasibility.
- Demonstrate that the project, when complete, will align with the goals of the grant program (e.g. sustainability, innovation, job creation, etc.)

Build Community Support

- Engage residents, businesses, elected officials, and community organizations early and often.
- Create opportunities for meaningful public involvement and feedback.
- Demonstrate broad support for the project before funding applications are submitted.

Use Multiple Communication Channels

- Share information through municipal websites, social media, newsletters, public meetings, stakeholder presentations, and local media.
- Tailor messaging to different audiences while maintaining a consistent project narrative.

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Ribbon cutting at the Siebert Park trailhead in Camp Hill Borough. The borough focused on demonstrating how a group of investments coincided to achieve multiple community objectives by improving transportation connections, recreational opportunities, environmental stewardship, addressing infrastructure needs, and strengthening community quality of life. Photo: HRG

Align Your Message with Funding Priorities

- When discussing the project, emphasize benefits that align with the goals of the funding program.
- Highlight outcomes such as improved safety, increased mobility, economic development, environmental protection, recreation opportunities, community revitalization, or regulatory compliance, depending on the funding source.
- Show how the project advances both local priorities and broader regional or state agency objectives.

Bringing It All Together

At its core, grant funding success is about more than finding money—it is about developing meaningful projects that advance a community's vision. Communities that plan strategically, understand relationships among projects, cultivate strong partnerships, and communicate a compelling story are better positioned to secure funding and successfully deliver projects that create lasting community value.

Additional Resources

Several resources are available to guide prospective applicants through the grant funding process.

Federal Funding

- [*Pursuing Federal Grant Funding: A Guide for Regional and Local Applicants*](#) is a guidebook published by PennDOT that provides a detailed breakdown of how to pursue and apply for federal grants. Many of the practices can be applied for applicants interested in pursuing state funding.

Commonwealth Funding (Program-Specific)

- [*Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Multimodal Transportation Fund \(MTF\) Success Manual*](#) is intended to help potential applicants understand the MTF program requirements, navigate the application process, and assist sponsors selected for funding in achieving compliance.
- [*Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Alternatives Set Aside Program*](#) Guidance and Resources provides general information and resources for potential applicants.
- [*Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development Multimodal Transportation Fund Program Guidelines*](#) is updated annually and provides guidance on the Commonwealth Financing Authority's MTF program. The document is one of several programmatic resources offered by DCED that pertain to CFA or DCED grant programs.