Increasing Municipal Capacity for Grants

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State and federal funding opportunities are unprecedentedly high right now, yet many municipalities lack the staff capacity or skill to pursue them. What options do they have for finding grants that are appropriate for their needs, for writing competitive applications, and for successfully administering their grant and managing their project?

1. **Use VLCT's Project Development and Funding Assistance services.** These services helps municipalities narrow the world of grant possibilities down to the ones that are most appropriate for their projects. Members can book appointments for one-on-one help with our Project and Funding Specialist to discuss ideas, a specific project, or other grant-related topics as often as they want. During the consultation, a member describes their project, and VLCT staff ask questions that provide insights about which grants are suitable. VLCT follows up in writing with applicable funding opportunities and other information.
2. **Use volunteers or existing municipal staff.** Are there community members that have research and writing skills? VLCT can coach them while they write the grant applications and can review draft applications. We have extensive experience with a variety of grants and have participated on many grant review committees. Regional Planning Commissions may review applications too.
3. **Hire staff or a consultant on a per-hour basis for one-time or on-retainer services**. Publish the job opportunity locally and through other outlets. Ask others what consultant they use or find grant writing services using the Vermont Community Development Program's list of community development consultants. The Selectboard or Municipal Manager directs projects to receive services.
4. **Share a grant researcher/writer with another municipality or organization.** Craft a Memorandum of Agreement to formalize how the process of hiring, project selection, and payment will be accomplished. A Grants Committee consisting of members from participating organizations usually chooses projects

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to receive services.

5. **Ask your Regional Planning Commission or Regional Development Corporation for assistance.** Both RPCs and RDCs provide grant-related services, with and without a fee. Find the RPC and RDC that serve your municipality at https://www.vapda.org/ and https://accd.vermont.gov/economic-development/resources/rdc respectively.
6. **Access the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board's Rural Economic Development Initiative.** This service works with municipalities that have populations of 5,000 or less. Projects must be community-based economic development, outdoor recreation, and working lands sector development. The program hires a consultant, who provides services for your project. Contact Mariah Noth at mariah@vhcb.org.
7. **Apply for assistance through the Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP).** This program funded by the Vermont legislature serves communities that ranked in or above the 50th percentile of the Vermont Community Index (opens in a new tab) or is in the 25-50th percentile and was "significantly" impacted by the flooding. Municipalities can use consultants that were pre-qualified by the Agency. The Program funds assistance with grant or permit applications, satisfying initial regulatory requirements, project management, grant administration, and other capacity-building activities.
8. **Ask your local Conservation District for assistance.** Natural Resource Conservation Districts (NRCDs) are non-regulatory entities that work with private landowners, farms, state and federal agencies, and other partner organizations, like municipalities, to promote and implement conservation programs. They can provide grant writing and administrative support for municipalities. Find the NRCD that serves your community at https://www.vacd.org/contact-nrcds/.
9. **Ask USDA Water and Wastewater Technical Assistance Providers for assistance.** The Vermont Rural Water Association (VRWA) and RCAP Solutions

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provide Vermont water and wastewater systems with technical assistance through their contracts with USDA Rural Development. VRWA assists with grant and loan applications. RCAP Solutions assists with grant and loan applications, grant and loan management, and hiring consultants. Contact VRWA by calling 802-660-4988 or via email at info@vtruralwater.org and RCAP Solutions by calling 802-377-5938 or via email at jkiernan@rcapsolutions.org. Learn about their other municipal services at https://vtruralwater.org/ and https://www.rcapsolutions.org/state/vermont/.

10. **Ask your local watershed organization for assistance**. Watershed organizations are community-based groups working with individuals and communities in their local watersheds to protect and improve water quality, habitat, and flood resilience and to build social and ecological connections with Vermont's waters. Some watershed organizations focus on a particular aspect of watershed protection, while others engage in a full suite of watershed protection activities. Your local organization may assist a municipality to apply for and manage grants if the project meets the organization's mission. Find the watershed organizations serving your watershed(s) at https://watershedsunitedvt.org/watershed-groups-and-partners/watershed-groups.
11. **Apply for Conservation or Outdoor Recreation Community Assistance.** The National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program provides 1 to 2 years of professional services to support locally-led projects that develop or restore parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as create outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage future generations in the outdoors. This program assists with planning, design, and technical expertise for projects. and can assist in finding and accessing funding for those projects. Applications are due annually in March.
12. **Access the Community Facilities Technical Assistance Disaster Relief Program.** Through a grant from USDA Rural Development, RCAP Solutions can

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assist eligible communities with loan and grant applications and to navigate the administrative and technical burdens of federal funding free of charge. Projects in the following counties are eligible for this assistance: Chittenden, Essex, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, Orange, Orleans, and Washington.

13. **Apply for Community Engagement Corps (CEC) assistance**. This program brings together professionals from the American Society of Civil Engineers, American Water Works Association, and Engineers Without Borders USA with students to serve communities. The volunteers provide pro-bono engineering services in the areas agriculture, civil works, energy, structures, and water and sanitation. Services provided include fieldwork (e.g. mapping, surveying, etc.), engineering/technical report, training, regulatory response, submitting grant or loan applications, and other services. Deliverable must be needed at least six months into the future. Communities must fit at least one of the CEC's criteria for underserved. The criteria use Median Household Income (MHI), poverty rate, and annual drinking water or wastewater rates.
14. **Apply for an Economic Recovery Corps fellow**. Paid fellows work alongside host organizations in under-resources communities to accelerate locally driven economic development and to drive more equitable economic outcomes. Fellowships are 2.5 years. 65% of fellows have 10+ years of work experience. This program is funded by the US Economic Development Administration and lead by the International Economic Development Council in partnership with organizations, such as the National League of Cities.
15. **Host an AmeriCorps service volunteer.** Municipalities can host a full-time volunteer for year-long service to address a variety of municipal needs. These programs are service learning based; the individual cannot replace an employee. The host sponsor must provide a supervisor for the volunteer who guides the volunteer's service and meets with the volunteer at least weekly. There usually is a charge to participate, but it is a nominal cost for having year-long capacity. Volunteers receive grant writing training as part of their service,

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and many secure grants for their host organization.

This resource is updated periodically as we find new sources of assistance, so check back each time you need capacity.

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