Improve Accessibility: Funding and Assistance for Planning

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Completing a self-evaluation and transition plan can be accomplished using a municipality's own resources or outside resources.

Staffing Assistance for Self-Evaluations

1. *Use municipal staff* for the inventory - When larger municipalities self-inventory facilities, programs, and services, it is customary for department heads to be responsible for conducting an inventory of their facilities, programs, and services. One department, usually administration or planning, is given the responsibility for organizing and compiling the overall effort and for writing the final Transition Plan.
2. *Use VISTA members* for the inventory – VISTA member services could be used to support physical access self-evaluation work. Staff resources are required to train, monitor, and support the volunteer.
3. *Use consultants* for the inventory - Below are three municipalities that recently completed, or are completing, an ADA transition plan. The entities they worked with are included because those entities may be able to assist with gauging the cost of an inventory and/or transition plan. Inclusion of the entity's name is not endorsement of their services by VLCT.

Bethel is working with Direct Access in 2022-23.

Bennington worked with Vermont Center for Independent Living in 2022.

Montpelier worked with Institute for Human Centered Design in 2018.

Funding Sources for Self-Evaluations and Transition Plans

1. *Regional Planning Commissions* – Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) receive funding from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) to provide planning capacity to VTrans. Through this program, RPCs can assist their member municipalities with local planning and transportation issues. Many RPCs

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conduct sidewalk inventories and may consider adapting the inventories to include ADA accessibility. Contact the Regional Planning Commission serving your municipality to ask about services. In Chittenden County, municipalities can request assistance through CCRPC's Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) process.

2. *Municipal Planning Grant* – This annual State program supports planning and revitalization for municipalities. The program usually is announced in July with applications due in October/November/December. Single municipalities can apply for an amount between $2,500 and $26,400. A cash match of 10% of total project cost is required. Project priorities vary each year. It is likely that equity-oriented projects, such as improving access for people with disabilities, would be competitive.
3. *Community Development Block Grant Planning Grant* – This State program provides funding for community development planning activities and/or pre-development activities related to housing, economic development, public facilities, or public services. The grant range is $3,000 to $60,000. A 10% match is required. The program also provides larger Implementation Grants and Accessibility Modification Grants to make improvements. Both the Selectboard and Planning Commission must sign a resolution for the application. It's helpful to discuss a project with CDBG staff prior to applying.
4. *AARP Community Challenge Flagship Grant* – AARP supports projects that create vibrant public places, deliver a range of transportation and mobility options, support housing options, focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, increase digital connection, support community resilience, increase civic engagement, and improve community health and economic empowerment. This grant could be used to establish an ADA Advisory Committee and engage Committee members and the public in the Transition Plan's development. Development of the Transition Plan itself is not an eligible activity.

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5. *Better Connections Program* – The Better Connections Program is a partnership between the Vermont Agency of Transportation, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Department of Health. The program funds planning efforts to increase multi-modal transportation options and to improve land use, water quality, public health, and economic vitality in communities. A standalone accessibility inventory would need to be proposed in tandem with a land use planning effort, such as implementing a downtown or village center connectivity masterplan. See example from Bethel For All in the Resources section. Project awards are usually in the $65,000 range. A 10% cash match is required.
6. *Hospitals* are focusing on well care, and many support community efforts through their Accountable Communities for Health (ACH) initiatives. ACHs link social service agencies, the business community, and governmental entities into a working group focused on shared goals to improve community health. Many health networks and some ACH organizations offer grants focused on healthy communities and/or health equity. Check with your local hospital administration or ACH organization to explore this idea.
7. *Safe Streets for All* – This US Department of Transportation program supports prevention of roadway deaths and serious injuries. Planning and Demonstration grants support development, completion, or supplementing a comprehensive safety action plan. Self-evaluations and transition plans are eligible activities. For a competitive application, municipalities would need to partner or work with their Regional Planning Commission.
8. *Congressionally Directed Spending Requests (a.k.a. CDS or Earmark)* – CDS' are spending provisions in federal appropriations legislation included primarily at the request of a Member of Congress for a specific purpose. Project sponsors should have an advance discussion with Congressional staff prior to submitting a request. If a project receives CDS funding, funds pass through a federal agency and have the same requirements as other grants that pass through that agency.

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Requests are accepted annually in ~March by each Senator and Representative. Information is available on their websites.

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