Make Your Project a Priority for USDA Funding

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Will your municipality be seeking USDA Rural Development funding in the upcoming year? **If your project implements a multi-jurisdictional, multi-sectoral plan, you can boost its competitiveness by pre-qualifying the project through USDA's Strategic Economic and Community Development Program (SECD).** SECD-earned points are added to the score your application earns through a regular USDA program's evaluation process, boosting your application's total score and increasing its competitiveness.

What Is the SECD Program?

This program does not provide funding. The SECD program reserves a percentage of funds from certain USDA programs for projects with regional benefits to economic and community development. Designation of your project by SECD prioritizes it for those set-aside funds. A separate application to an eligible USDA funding program must be submitted. The program application does not need to be submitted at the same time as the SECD application.

Projects that will apply for funding through the following USDA Rural Development programs are eligible for SECD priority designation:

- Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program,
- Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program,
- Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program,
- Water and Waste Disposal Loan Guarantees, and
- Rural Business Development Grants.

What Is a Multi-Jurisdictional, Multi-Sectoral Plan?

USDA requires that a multi-jurisdictional, multi-sectoral plan:

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- cover more than one jurisdiction,
- have participation from more than one sector (ex. business, education, nonprofit and health care),
- be developed with participation from multiple stakeholders,
- demonstrate an understanding of, and leverages, the region's assets,
- include investments (monetary and nonmonetary) from strategic partners such as private and philanthropic organizations, cooperatives, government entities, and tribes,
- propose a variety of activities designed to promote a future rural community vision, including considerations for improving and expanding broadband services, and
- contain clear objectives, including performance measures, actions steps for implementation, and methods to track progress toward achieving the objectives.

In Vermont, examples of investment plans that might qualify include a cooperative plan focused on multiple communities (ex. MRV Moves Active Transportation Plan, etc.), regional-level plans (ex. RPC, CEDS, CUD, Community Action Needs Assessment, housing plans, etc.), state-level plans (ex. CEDS, HUD Consolidated Plan, Climate Action, Forest Future Roadmap, Long-Range Transportation Plan, Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan, Hazard Mitigation Plan, etc.), or a multi-state plan. Projects do not need to be listed by name in the applicable plan.

How Does My Community Apply?

USDA issues a Notice of Solicitation of Applications (NOSA) in the Federal Register when it is ready to accept applications. An example is the FY 2024 Notice of Solicitation of Applications. The SECD application is a single form with supporting documentation. The location for submitting your SECD application varies by USDA program and is included in the NOSA. In February 2024, the application submission

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methods were:

- Community Facilities Program: Submit SECD applications via email to CFapplications@usda.gov.
- Business Programs: Submit SECD applications via email to Kenneth.Yearman@usda.gov with a copy too Cindi.Gelinas@usda.gov.
- Waste and Waste Disposal Program: Submit SECD applications electronically at https://rdapply.sc.egov.usda.gov/.
- Loan Guarantees: For lenders assigned an OneRD Loan Guarantee Initiative Customer Relationship Manager (CRM), SECD applications must be submitted to their assigned CRM.

The application is easy - submit Form RD 1980-88 with supporting documentation and the 2-page SECD Applicant Checklist.

What Will Make Our Application Competitive?

How well the project supports a multi-jurisdictional and multi-sectoral plan is a key consideration. In addition to providing sections of the plan and support your project, a letter from the entity that developed the plan your project will reference is required. The letter must state that your project is consistent with the plan and that the plan has been adopted. Your project receives points for each of the Plan's objectives it directly supports.

Whether the investment plan contains evidence of collaboration among multiple stakeholders; leverages applicable regional resources, monetary and non-monetary investments from strategic partners, including private and philanthropic organizations and government entities; and includes clear objectives with measurable performance metrics and actions steps for implementation. Encourage the entity to seek a plan

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review from USDA's Vermont/New Hampshire Office if it hasn't already done so. The plan must meet certain requirements to qualify your project. It is helpful, but not required, for the plan review to be completed before you submit your SECD application.

How Can My Community Learn More?

To learn more, please visit the SECD Program webpage. You also can reach out with questions to USDA's Vermont program staff:

- Community Facilities and Business Programs
- Water and Waste Disposal Program

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