Funding Opportunities:

Planning for Accessibility

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, up to 1 in 4 adults (24%) in Vermont have some type of disability. The most common disability types are related to mobility and cognition. Ensuring your community's residents and visitors can access your facilities, programs, and services begins with conducting a self-evaluation. A self-evaluation is a process by which a municipality identifies policies or practices that discriminate against people with disabilities. Below are funding opportunities we've identified to support your efforts to build a more inclusive community. You can learn more about accessibility and municipal obligations and opportunities in our Improve Accessibility Toolkit.

Consult program-specific guidance for additional information. Links to other sites offered in this document are provided to assist municipalities. The inclusion of a link does not imply endorsement or approval of the linked site or product.

Funding Opportunities

Completing a self-evaluation can be accomplished using a municipality's own resources or outside resources. Municipalities might use their own staff for the inventory, host an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer who completes a facilities inventory, or use consultants for the inventory. If using outside resources is desirable, here are some funding opportunities that can be pursued.

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 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

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through CCRPC's Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) process.

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 $50,000. A consortium (group) of municipalities may apply for a grant of any amount between $2,500 and $65,000. A cash match of 10% of total project cost is required for both. Project priorities vary each year. It is likely that equity-oriented projects, such as improving access for people with disabilities, would be competitive.

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.

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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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. Project awards are usually in the $65,000 range. A 10% cash match is required.

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.

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.

Congressional Appropriation - Congressional appropriations were formerly known as Earmarks and are currently known as Congressionally Directed Spending for the Senate and Community Project Funding for the House of Representatives. Projects are nominated by Members of Congress for funding through the appropriations bill.

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The Senate and House have different rules for these requests. Projects benefit from advanced discussion with Congressional staff. If selected, funds pass through a federal agency with that agency's associated grant terms and conditions. Funds may not be available for 1-4 years based on agency capacity. Information is available on websites of Senator Sanders, Senator Welch, and Representative Balint. Projects are usually submitted in late February through mid-March annually.

Where to Find Help

Municipalities are welcome to use VLCT's *Ask a Project Pro* service to discuss potential funding sources for a project or for project development advice. Through this service, VLCT narrows funding opportunities to those most pertinent to a project, saving municipalities time and resources. We also provide coaching for project development and grant management.

Many municipalities lack capacity for grant writing and administration. VLCT published a resource, *Increasing Municipal Capacity for Grants*, that offers ideas for assistance with grants.

Disclaimer: This resource was created by Municipal Operations Support (MOS) staff of non-legal professionals with expertise of the subject matter. It is only intended to provide information and does **NOT** constitute legal advice. Readers with legal questions are encouraged to contact an attorney. The use or downloading of this resource does **NOT** create an attorney-client relationship and will not be treated in a confidential manner. Non-legal questions about this resource can be directed to MOS staff at mos@vlct.org.

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