Funding Opportunities for Municipal Vaults and Records Preservation

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The sheer volume of paperwork being filed and stored in municipal offices has filled municipal vaults to capacity. Municipalities can digitize records to enhance public access, but original documents still need to be retained and stored. Below are funding opportunities we've identified to support your efforts to expand vault space.

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

Municipal Restoration and Preservation Reserve Fund - Vermont Statute (32 V.S.A. § 1671) discusses the fees a Town Clerk can collect for recording documents. In 2019, the Legislature made it mandatory for legislative bodies to create a Restoration and Preservation Reserve Fund for restoration, preservation, digitization, storage, and conservation of municipal records (32 V.S.A. § 1671(8)(c)(1)). The law requires that no less than $4.00 per page from the per page recording fees established under Vermont law are required to be deposited into the fund unless the Town Clerk certifies annually to the House Committee on Government Operations that the municipality has sufficient dedicated reserve funds to address the requirements of the Restoration and Preservation Reserve. The fee is higher for certain types of documents. Unspent funds carry over to subsequent fiscal years and must be used for records restoration and preservation.

If your municipality has not established a fund, we advise you to calculate the fees owed to the Fund and either set aside the cash to build the Fund or create a plan to fund it. Document storage, including a new vault, is an eligible activity for Fund use.

USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program – Provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas,

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which is defined as a community of 20,000 or less population. Examples of essential community facilities include health care facilities; public facilities; community support services; public safety services; educational services such as museums, libraries; private schools; utility services such as telemedicine or distance learning equipment; and local food systems. Check your community's grant eligibility, which can range from 0% to 75%. We recommend discussing the project with USDA staff prior to initiating an application.

National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions - Municipal records offices are eligible. The grant improves the applicant's ability to preserve and care for their significant humanities collections. Applicants must draw on the knowledge of consultants whose preservation skills and experience are related to the types of collection and the nature of the activities on which their project focuses. This grant could be used for professional services to assess preservation needs and to purchase preservation supplies, storage furniture or environmental monitoring equipment. A recorded webinar about this grant is available on NEH's website. [Note: As of 02/17/26, information about this grant has been removed from the NEH's webpage. The grant may have been terminated.]

National Historical Publications & Records Commission Access to Historical Records - This grant supports projects that ensure online public discovery and use of historical records collections. All types of historical records are eligible, including documents, photographs, born-digital records, and analog audio and moving images. Grants have gone to local government archives, colleges and universities, and other nonprofit institutions. It may be helpful to discuss this grant with the State Archivist prior to pursuing an application as the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration has received several awards.

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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. 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.

Other Grant Opportunities

Portions of projects may be eligible for other grants based on standalone components of the project. For example:

- Sites with stormwater challenges or along streams may be eligible for grants from the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation.
- Structures that need accessibility modifications to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act may be eligible for grants from the Vermont Community Development Program.
- Sites that have experienced flooding may qualify for hazard mitigation grants through Vermont Emergency Management or FEMA.

Capital Planning

Municipal budgets often include capital costs – constructing a new fire station or garage, repairing or replacing the town office, purchasing a new vehicle, water or

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wastewater system replacement, repairing or replacing recreation facilities, etc. A capital plan looks at annual costs for capital projects for the next five to ten years and then proposes a means of paying for them. Municipalities use capital planning to prepare for the cost of capital projects, which helps stabilize tax rates. VLCT recommends that municipalities adopt a capital plan or, at minimum, establish a capital planning schedule.

The Two Rivers-Ottauquechee Regional Commission has a presentation and resources on its website that are useful for capital budgeting. Municipal Planning Grants can be used to develop a capital plan. The Vermont Bond Bank has a capital planning resource page with videos and sample templates, policies, and plans. The Bond Bank assists municipalities with determining their debt capacity. Contact Ken Linge at ken@vtbondagency.org for assistance. Marguerite Ladd, VLCT's Government Finance Specialist, is a wealth of knowledge. She provides best practice advice for getting started and building your capital plan. Contact her at mladd@vlct.org.

Where to Find Help

The Vermont State Archives and Records Administration has a link to national standards for vault specifications. There are different costs associated with each records storage environment and the tolerance scale can be used to determine what best meets a public agency's needs and budget.

Municipalities are welcome to use VLCT's Ask a Project Pro 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.

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Many municipalities lack capacity for grant writing and administration. VLCT published a resource, *Increasing Municipal Writing 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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