

DATE: April 5, 2022
TO: Honorable Jane Kitchel, Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
FROM: Karen Horn, Director, Public Policy & Advocacy
Gwynn Zakov, Municipal Policy Advocate
RE: \$250,000 Request to Provide Municipalities Resources to Access Infrastructure Funding

VLCT is seeking \$250,000 to replicate the success of our American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Assistance and Coordination Program by creating a Federal Funding Assistance Program. The program will help municipalities access the \$1.2 trillion in infrastructure funding contained in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, or IIJA) and the hundreds of millions of dollars in ARPA funds being administered by state and federal agencies. Approximately half of the BIL/IIJA funding will be distributed through competitive programs, including dozens of new programs of which Vermont municipal leaders have never even heard. The influx of federal dollars requires new resources to help educate our municipalities about these programs, help municipalities write grant requests, manage grants, and build financial capacity.

VLCT will use the funding to build a centralized resource where selectboards, town managers, public works directors, and others can access information, ask questions, get insights, and receive one-on-one help on how to apply for and administer federal funding. We anticipate using the funding to hire an experienced federal grant writer and administrator to lead the program at VLCT, hire contracted grant writers to provide a surge in grant-writing capacity during this influx of money, and build a central repository of opportunities and FAQs to explain them to municipalities.

Vermont cities and towns stand far ahead of those in other states in terms of their understanding and implementation of the more than \$200 million of State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funding they received. This is a direct result of the Vermont Legislature funding the ARPA Assistance and Coordination Program at VLCT. No other state has dedicated funding for this purpose, and nationally we are recognized as leaders because of your commitment to ensuring municipal success in Vermont. Through this program, Vermont's 277 ARPA recipients receive on-demand assistance with every aspect of their funding – from how to accept it, eligible ways to spend it, track it, report on it, leverage it, and even creative problem-solving to get to “yes” in ways that achieve local goals while following federal regulations.

Our work in the ARPA Assistance and Coordination Program has cast a bright light on local governments' need to understand the massive funding universe at the federal level. An August 2021 VLCT survey of our members revealed grant research, writing, and management was one of the top three services they hoped VLCT would offer. That was before a new \$1.2 trillion of federal funding appeared last winter.

VLCT's Federal Funding Assistance Program will be a single statewide conduit for coordination, collaboration, and communication to:

- maintain a comprehensive list of federal resources available to municipalities;

- support the eleven independent regional planning commissions (RPCs) by gathering and disseminating program details, and drafting consistent, unified messaging, templates, and response documents that can be passed along to the regional commissions' member municipalities;
- provide simple to navigate, comprehensible summaries and analysis of newly enacted infrastructure legislation to ensure municipalities can access new resources and funding opportunities;
- provide one-on-one support and technical assistance to municipalities as they learn about, apply for, administer and track federal funding;
- act as a liaison between state and federal agencies and municipalities;
- assist municipalities in project development regarding financing options and provide coordination among multiple funding programs;
- coach municipalities on efficient and effective use of resources;
- connect municipalities to relevant funding opportunities and grant writers;
- participate with state agencies in drafting program language to ensure programs are accessible, navigable, and appropriately designed for Vermont cities and towns of all sizes and locations;
- assist state agencies to find efficiencies in the delivery of their programs to municipalities;
- coordinate with state agencies and other stakeholders on timing, messaging, promotion, training, and execution of state programs to better support municipalities; and
- work with other state and federal organizations to find creative financing models and tools for municipal projects.

We are happy to discuss this proposal in more depth at your convenience. We look forward to working together to ensure all local governments have equitable access to this once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a more economically vibrant, resilient, and sustainable Vermont. Thank you for your time, attention, and consideration.