

Grant Basics

VLCT SERIES





Today's Topics

- Picking the "Right" Project
- Understanding Roles
- Working as a Team
- Assessing Capacity
- Understanding Grant Readiness

The recorded training will be posted in the VLCT Resource Library at <https://www.vlct.org/resource-library>



Links:

- VLCT Resource Library for recorded webinars: <https://www.vlct.org/resource-library>.

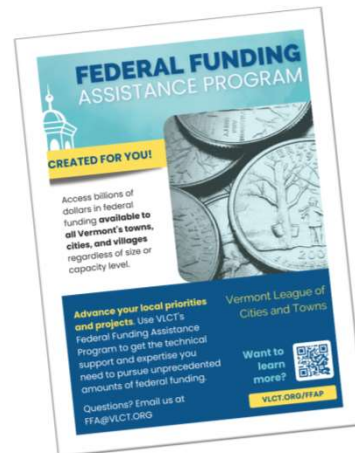
VLCT's Federal Funding Assistance Program

We do the work, so you don't have to.

Available at <https://www.vlct.org/federal-funding-assistance-program-ffaarpa>

- **Funding opportunities** right for municipalities
- **Consults on Call*** to self-book time with our team
- **Frequently Asked Questions** related to grants
- **Resources** to win and manage grants

Contact us for assistance at FFA@vlct.org



**Members only.* Must have an official role with a VLCT member organization (selectboard, city council, trustee, Town Manager or Administrator, town clerk, treasurer, planning commissioner, conservation commissioner, energy committee, etc.).

VLCT created the Federal Funding Assistance Program (FFA) to respond to an unprecedented level of federal funding available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. Launched in December 2022, it wrapped ARPA under its wing and includes both state and federal funding.

The team is small but has broad and deep knowledge about project development and state and federal funding opportunities

We work with all towns – no matter how big or small

Like we did with ARPA, we've become Vermont's high-level experts on the federal funding opportunities currently available so we can be a resource for municipalities and our partners to help Vermont make the most of this rare moment.

What does the FFA Program offer?

- We help our members set priorities and figure out how to advance them, which typically involves MONEY. VLCT culled the BIL and IRA programs down to the ones applicable to Vermont municipalities. We distill its information further and then present it as open funding opportunities and upcoming opportunities to

help you prepare.

- “Consults on Call” allow members to meet with us one-on-one. Because sometimes you just want to phone a friend and ask them questions. Typically, the conversation is about a local project and funding, but it can be about municipal operations, a problem that needs solving, or other questions. We ask A LOT OF questions; listen; ask more questions; and help members think through their issue. We draft a summary that we return to you. It might include suggested next action steps, resources or connections to people who can help the project, and often potential funding sources to consider in advancing the project. The Consult helps move you to your next decision point. Municipalities are welcome to return to Consults on Call as often as needed for the same project or for different projects.
- The website also has a list of Frequently Asked Questions related to grants and Resources that help you win and manage grants. We add information to the site regularly, so check back often.

Links:

- VLCT Federal Funding Assistance Program: <https://www.vlct.org/federal-funding-assistance-program-ffaarpa>



The webinar used three poll questions to help VLCT understand participant’s current level of experience with grants. Answers to the questions allows VLCT to tailor future webinars to participant experience.

Poll question #1: “Have you participated in a grant application in your municipal capacity?”

Response options: Yes or No.

Grant Basics Before the Grant



Grant basics is about what to do **before** you apply for a grant.

Grants are a great way to inject funding into your town and allow you to advance priorities and projects that otherwise would be funded by your taxpayers.

They enable you to bolster your planning efforts, increase programming, and build infrastructure like water and wastewater systems, transportation facilities, buildings, and energy generation facilities.

Grants also bring increased confidence and credibility to your efforts. Funders publicize their awards. Other funders, legislators, the Congressional Delegation, your residents, pay attention to those announcements.

Winning grants takes more than writing a good grant application. It is about building relationships, momentum and buy-in for your project. Teeing your municipality and your project up for success **before** you apply is critical.



Picking the “Right” Project What Funders Want

Funders look for more than a good idea. They want well-developed projects.

Funders want to know:

- How has the community identified its needs?
- How were priorities set?
- Who was (and wasn’t) engaged, and how?



Winning grants starts with picking the right project. Funders look for more than a good idea. They want good ideas that also are realistic, viable, and sustainable. They want well-developed projects.

Whether your project involves completing a study, drafting design plans, or construction, funders want to know how your community identified the need and chose it as a priority.

They also want to know who was, and wasn’t, engaged in making decisions, and how the engagement happened. For instance, did you explain your ideas or ask them for theirs? Who make decisions?

Picking the “Right” Project ID Needs & Set Priorities



Jeffersonville Visual Master Plan

Examples of how Vermont municipalities of different sizes and capacities identified needs and set their priorities...

Jeffersonville Hazard Mitigation

In Jeffersonville, population 750, Jean Jenkauskas experienced repeated flooding of her historic home. Worried about the increasing frequency and intensity of flooding, Jean joined the Village’s Hazard Mitigation Committee. As a champion of hazard mitigation, she used her first-hand knowledge of the actions she took to protect her own home, such as developing a flood response checklist. She advocated for a planning process that became a community-wide conversation to explore flood risk and resilience. Jean is a good example of how an individual with a vested interest helps municipalities focus on identifying needs.

At the Village’s request, the Lamoille County Planning Commission led the mitigation planning process. A consultant developed a river model to help the municipality project what actions would affect the volume of water coming into the village. The Village of Jeffersonville’s Visual Master Plan describes the projects that would help Jeffersonville increase its flood resilience. The Village used numerous criteria to set its priorities, including reduction in flood water levels. Working with partners like the Town of Cambridge, the Village won nearly \$1 million to implement multiple projects and reduced

the height of floodwaters in the village by more than one foot. The success of a bridge replacement and floodplain restoration has spurred the Town of Cambridge to make mitigation a higher priority too.

Links:

- Visual Master Plan: <https://floodtraining.vermont.gov/case-studies/Jeffersonville>
- Cambridge/Jeffersonville Flood Resiliency Projects:
https://www.lcpcvt.org/index.asp?SEC=252DE2F0-E3C8-45A6-81C8-12E8BFE7C017&Type=B_BASIC
- FEMA project brief:
<https://www.bing.com/search?q=village+of+jeffersonville+vt+flood+resilience&qsn&form=QBRE&sp=-1&ghc=1&lq=0&pq=village+of+jeffersonville+vt+flood+resilience&sc=10-45&sk=&cvid=DADA217E9DD745A9AE9AA839D02A2731&ghsh=0&ghacc=0&ghpl=>
- News article: <https://www.mychamplainvalley.com/news/local-news/recent-upgrades-likely-spared-jeffersonville-from-significant-flood-damage/>



Picking the “Right” Project ID Needs & Set Priorities



Montgomery Community Visit

The Town of Montgomery, population 1,184, invited the Vermont Council on Rural Development to facilitate a Community Visit in 2019. Over a three-month series of public meetings, the Community Visit process brought together a broad mix of community members with a Visiting Team - made up of state, federal, non-profit, and philanthropic experts - to create tailored work plans for long-term local success. VCRD provided the structure and neutral facilitation each step of the way. Ideas were championed by residents, priorities were set by residents, and residents led task forces that move ideas forward. The community used “dot voting” to set its priorities. Each participant had three dots to place among the championed ideas. The dots were used to vote for the ideas an individual thought should be the highest priority actions. Montgomery’s residents identified three priorities for future action: streetscape improvements, village wastewater, and broadband development.

Since the Visit, the Town completed extensive community engagement and secured \$5.5 million in grant funding to design a streetscape improvement plan and complete preliminary engineering for wastewater systems in its villages. It also joined the Northwest Fiberworx Communication Union District to further broadband development.

Links:

- VCRD Community Visit Report: <https://www.vtrural.org/montgomery/>
- Wastewater & Streetscape Bond Information (Q&A, news coverage, Preliminary Engineering Report): <https://montgomeryvt.us/g/selectboard/montgomery-thrives/public-info-project-plans>
- Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD): <https://www.vtrural.org/>

Picking the “Right” Project ID Needs & Set Priorities



new town center application
town of berlin, vermont

berlin town center plan
page HQ

[Berlin Town Center & Capital Improvement Program](#)

Berlin Town Center and Capital Improvement Program

Berlin, population 2,894, has never had one central gathering place. Twenty-five years ago, Berlin’s Town Plan mentioned the idea of creating a town center in the middle of its retail area. The Town began moving that effort forward 10 years ago. Its 2018 Town Plan positioned the town center as a municipal priority project.

Berlin began investing in water and wastewater infrastructure and planning for walkable transportation infrastructure. It updated its zoning to allow for more housing. It developed a conceptual mater plan and an official map for transportation infrastructure. Along the way, it engaged its residents, businesses, landowners, and visitors.

Berlin funded some of this work through grants, loans, and bonds, but one of its 2018 Town Plan actions was to develop a Town Center Capital Improvement Program. Berlin’s FY21-FY26 Town Center Capital Improvement Program outlines a 5-year, \$1.8 million investment in studies and improvements to transform the retail center into a town center. Berlin will pursue grants for some of this work. Investing in itself helps Berlin attract outside investment.

Links:

- 2022 Town Plan (see page 12):
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/617195a008b66134810b147b/t/62a771f0be07151a75379435/1655140865205/Berlin+Town+Plan+Revised+6.6.22.pdf>
- Town Center Master Plan: <https://placesense.com/portfolio/berlin-town-center/>
- Official Map:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/617195a008b66134810b147b/t/62a77c680d1dd30f2b323d89/1655143529698/official_map_2022_06_06.pdf
- FY21-FY26 Capital Improvement Program:
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/617195a008b66134810b147b/t/61df37a11cd9582ad76d5ea0/1642018721441/Capital-Improvement-Program+FY+21-26.pdf>



Picking the “Right” Project ID Needs & Set Priorities



Montpelier Strategic Plan

The City of Montpelier’s Strategic Planning process allows the City to prioritize new projects and initiatives that serve to further the City Council’s vision for the City. The Strategic Plan is updated annually through a collaborative process between the City Council and City staff,. The Strategic Plan incorporates the plans and projects City voters have approved as short and long-term efforts and prioritizes actions for the upcoming year. Essentially, the City Council prioritizes the priorities.

The City, population 8,074, uses its plan to guide its budget development so that priorities are funded, and to ensure it make progress on turning aspirational ideas into projects. The City’s online dashboard helps residents see progress on overall goals and specific activities.

Links:

- Strategic Plan webpage (includes past and present): <https://www.montpelier-vt.org/740/Council-Goals>
- Strategic Plan progress dashboard: <https://performance.envisio.com/dashboard/montpelier-vt1777>

Picking the “Right” Project What Success Looks Like

Common threads:

- The community generates ideas
- Someone (small group/outside person) helps focus and frame the ideas
- The community sets priorities
- Someone is assigned to transition the concept into a project

Funders don’t have a prescribed process for identifying community needs and setting priorities. Only your community can decide what the right approach is for it.

The municipal examples mentioned in this presentation have a few things in common that led to success.

- The community was engaged in generating ideas. Your residents are the biggest stakeholders in your project – inform and engage them. The more they know about the project, the smoother the path for it will be. Nobody likes surprises...especially your residents and taxpayers! If you are applying for grants for your projects, then you should know that funders LOVE to hear about the types and extent of community engagement that you have carried out.
- Someone – usually a small group or an outside person – conducts research or helps with studies to narrow broad ideas into more specific ones. This helps to focus and frame similar ideas.
- The community confirms the ideas are still appropriate and sets priorities for action. Priority setting happens in many ways, like “dot” voting or establishing criteria for what’s important.

- Individuals or a group help transition a concept into a project. Someone owns development of the idea. This could be a task force; a committee, commission, or board; or municipal staff.

Most ideas require additional planning to transition the concept into a project. VLCT will host a project development webinar on May 28, 2024, to talk more about transitioning concepts into projects.



Successful projects are built on the pillars of strong leadership, communication, organization, coordination, and partnership. All involved – project leaders, partners, stakeholders – are fully aware, engaged, and focused on the goal. They work together to not only plan and prepare for the project’s success, but also to strategize for challenges that may arise to compromise it.

Local projects are often initiated by interested citizens who have excellent ideas backed by the passion and enthusiasm for advancing them. This is especially true for the smaller communities that lack internal staff capacity in their local government. Skilled volunteers can step in to fill in gaps or even step up to take the lead in bringing an idea to fruition. When this happens, everyone benefits.

However, there can be times when the line of whether a local project is a municipal one or a community one can be blurred. Is the municipality a project stakeholder, partner, or the leader? Establishing, understanding, and respecting roles, responsibilities, accountability and setting expectations in the very beginning can bring necessary focus to achieve the project’s overall goals and ensure ongoing cooperation and success.

Sometimes these roles shift depending upon the project type. How the project is funded could play a part in this. If you are involved in a project in your community that potentially

involves a grant application for which your municipality is the eligible applicant, then working hand-in-glove with the leaders of your local government (legislative body – selectboard, aldermen, trustees, etc.) is critical.

Whether you are an official group of the municipality (planning commission, conservation commission, energy committee, library trustees, etc.), a community group (local non-profit, self-formed group of citizens, etc.) or a group with a larger geographic footprint (multi-town, regional or statewide organization), if the municipality is the eligible applicant for a grant you seek, making the legislative body your partner in the project early will help push you to success.

Understanding Roles

Accountability vs. Responsibility

(There is a difference)

Responsibility

- Responsible for completing a task in the larger activity
- “The Doer”
- Assigned to do the work
- Entrusted with the task
- Develops task and makes it happen
- Responsible to the person/entity that is accountable
- Facilitates, coordinates, and clarifies

Accountability

- Accountable for ensuring each task in the larger activity is completed to the required standard
- “Where the buck stops”
- Makes the final decision (sign-off) about the work
- Has the power/authority to say “yes” or “no”
- Has ultimate ownership of the activity
- Liable for any faults
- Directs, validates, approves



As you begin to plan your project, answer these important questions first:

1. Who is, or will be, accountable?

- Will the municipality “own” something at the end of the project, either a physical asset or under a long-term lease agreement.
- If there is physical property, then a document should exist to demonstrate ownership – like a deed or another document that should be recorded in the land records. If one doesn’t, then one should be created if the project progresses. Who is listed as the owner on these documents?
- If there is a failure in the project that involves legal implications, like a breach of contract, who is the name that would appear on the legal documents?

2. Who is, or will be, responsible?

- Will the municipality have an ongoing responsibility to the project (financial support; maintenance/repairs to structures, spaces or equipment; staffing support; etc.)?

- Will the municipality carry insurance on the project during development and after completion?
- Will the taxpayers of the community be obligated to maintain the project in the years after completion?
 - A written agreement outlining the project parties' responsibilities (memo of understanding or agreement, well-written detailed lease agreement, etc.) should exist to document the terms. If one doesn't exist, then one should be created if the project progresses. (Example: a town-owned building leased to a historical society.)

If the answer to the questions above is “yes,” then it is most likely a ***municipal project*** and the legislative body or local official with statutory authority are ultimately responsible for it.

If the answer is “no” then it is most likely a ***community project*** and an entity other than the municipality (non-government entity – non-profit, for-profit, citizen group, private, etc.) is responsible for it.

Understanding Roles
Broader Accountability

Be a good steward. Using public money involves accountability to:

- Beneficiaries - your residents and local partners
- Funders - State and federal entities that will award funds
- Taxpayers - Here, there and everywhere – most often grant funds are the public's money



When you use a grant, you are using somebody else's money for your project. For state and federal grants, you are using public taxpayer monies.

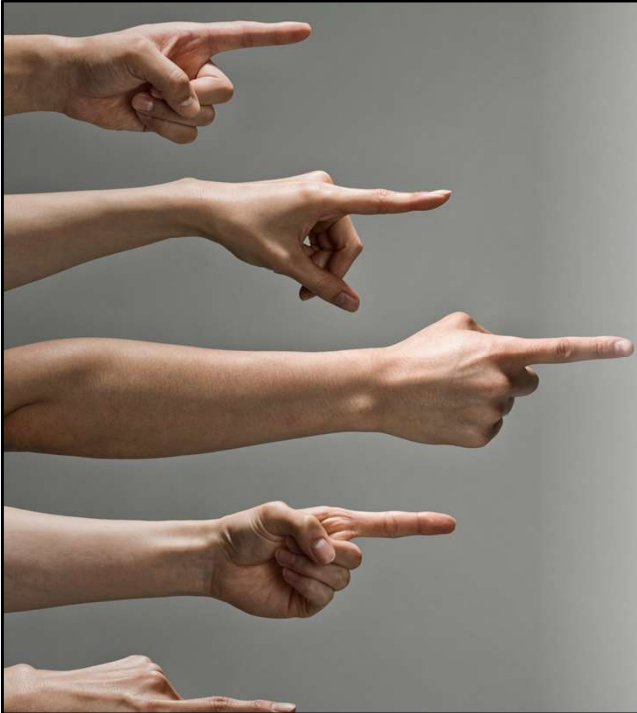
In return for using the public's money, the public requires accountability. People want to know that the money will be used for the awarded purpose and all conditions of the grant will be met. This means that when you receive a grant, you must have a system to ensure accountability.

Accountability starts with understanding roles and responsibilities. A first question to ask yourself:

Who is the point person for the grant?

- Project management by committee doesn't work well (or at all?). It can create confusion and a lot of extra work for all involved with a lot of opportunity for missed details and mistakes.
- Who will be the single (only) point of contact and project representative for the municipality?

- Put some thought into this important decision! The point person can be the idea generator, technical expert, or grant writer, but they don't have to be. This person could be a member of the legislative body, staff, or a resident with project management expertise. No matter who they are the skill that is most critical for them to have is they must be a strong communicator
- This will be the person who will keep track of all aspects of the project from early discussions with potential funders to on-going activities associated with the project. They will also be the project's face and voice, ensuring strong public relations so residents have clear information and reasonable expectations for the project.
- This person will have a lot of responsibility, but they will likely not have accountability.



Understanding Roles Accountability & Responsibility

- Who is responsible for grant identification?
- Who is authorized to apply for grants on the municipality's behalf?
- Who is authorized to commit municipal resources?
- Who holds/keeps the passwords?
- Who signs the grant application?
- Who tracks and ensures compliance with the terms and conditions of the grant (the regulations)?
- Who keeps grant-related records?
- If awarded, who is authorized to enter into a grant agreement?



Communication and coordination for grants is critical. As you think about the people involved in the process, there are questions that should be answered:

- Who will research grant opportunities for projects and identify which ones are appropriate to pursue?
- Who is authorized to apply for funds on the municipality's behalf? Grant agreements are contracts with a funding entity. The application is your proposal. It commits your municipality to fulfilling anything the proposal includes.
- Who can commit municipal resources, whether cash or in-kind resources? Municipal match, if cash or employee services, requires a budget commitment.
- Who holds the passwords to registrations sites and online grant portals? Passwords keep the municipality's account secure. They should be long, strong, and unique. And they should always be changed when people who know them leave the municipality. This includes staff and volunteers.
- Who needs to sign the application? A grant agency may require the legislative body or manager to sign the application. If not, best practice is that the

legislative body will decide in the realm of a duly wanted meeting who will be the signer of the grant application. Most often it is the Chair but the board may formally designate someone else for convenience.

- The Treasurer or Finance Department's role is to keep track of the money, but this does not extend to grant administration that involves compliance with the terms and conditions contained in the grant agreement, such as compliance with state or federal regulations and reporting. Also, when match is in-kind services, who will track this and incorporate it into the project budget and required reporting?
- Who will keep grant-related records, such as the grant agreement, project approvals, contracts, and progress, financial, and final reports? In addition to being subject to Vermont Public Records Law, grant records are subject to monitoring (audit) by the funding entity for several years after a state or federal agency issues its grant closure letter. People serving in a volunteer capacity at the municipality should be given copies of documents if they are managing the grant, never the originals.
- Who will manage the project(s) if the grant is awarded? Projects often succeed or fail based on the ability of a person or group to lead the project and make effective decisions. We'll talk more about the role of a project manager in our next webinar in this series.

Understanding Roles Accountability & Responsibility (continued)

Who decides:

- Is the grant opportunity strategically aligned with the municipality's goals and plans?
- If there are sufficient municipal resources (human and financial) to support the application?
- Funding analysis including grant match, audit costs, administrative costs?
- What policies and procedures are required for most grants?
- Is there a financial management system for tracking and managing the grant funds and match? Who is responsible for maintaining this system?



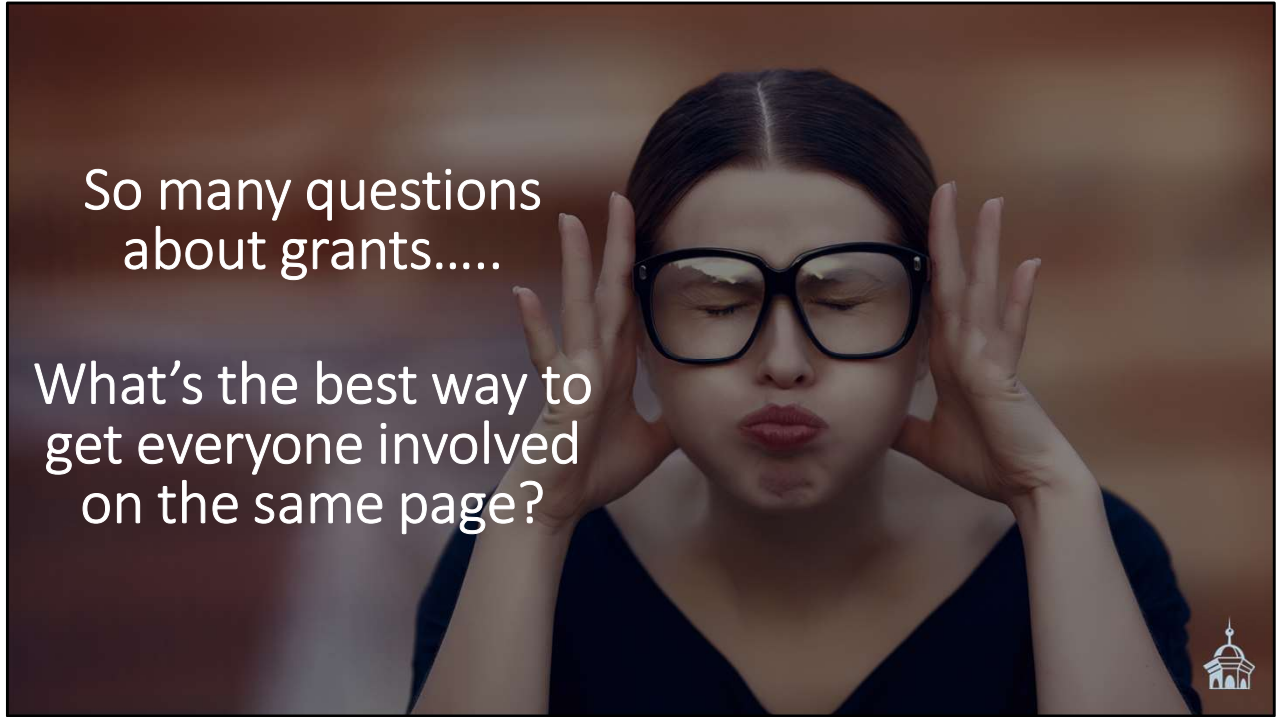
It isn't just about who does the work, but decisions that guide the work:

- Does the grant fit into the municipality's plans – Town Plan? Hazard Mitigation Plan? Any other plans, studies, etc. that the municipality has undertaken?
- There are times when the cost of applying for and managing a grant might not be worth it for the municipality. Do you have the human capital with the time and bandwidth to manage the grant? Volunteers are an incredible resource, but what is the backup plan if their priorities shift and they must step back from the project – who will carry it forward? What's the municipality's Plan B to ensure continuity and consistency in the effort?
- Do you have the financial resources – grant match and any contingency that might be required to cover the grant? Has there been an analysis to determine that the project budget is sound and contemplates all potential risk for the municipality?
- What policies and procedures does the grant require, and have you adopted them? Required federal policies include written internal controls, conflict of interest, procurement, method for conducting technical evaluations of proposals,

and travel; procedures for managing equipment; and employee fringe benefits. Uniform Guidance! If the municipality is subgranting funds to another entity, it must have a subgranting policy. Some state and federal agencies have other policy or procedure requirements. It is important to know what is required to be in place before applying for a grant.

- Who will manage the project(s) if the grant is awarded? Projects often succeed or fail based on the ability of a person or group to lead the project and make effective decisions. We'll talk more about the role of a project manager later in the webinar.

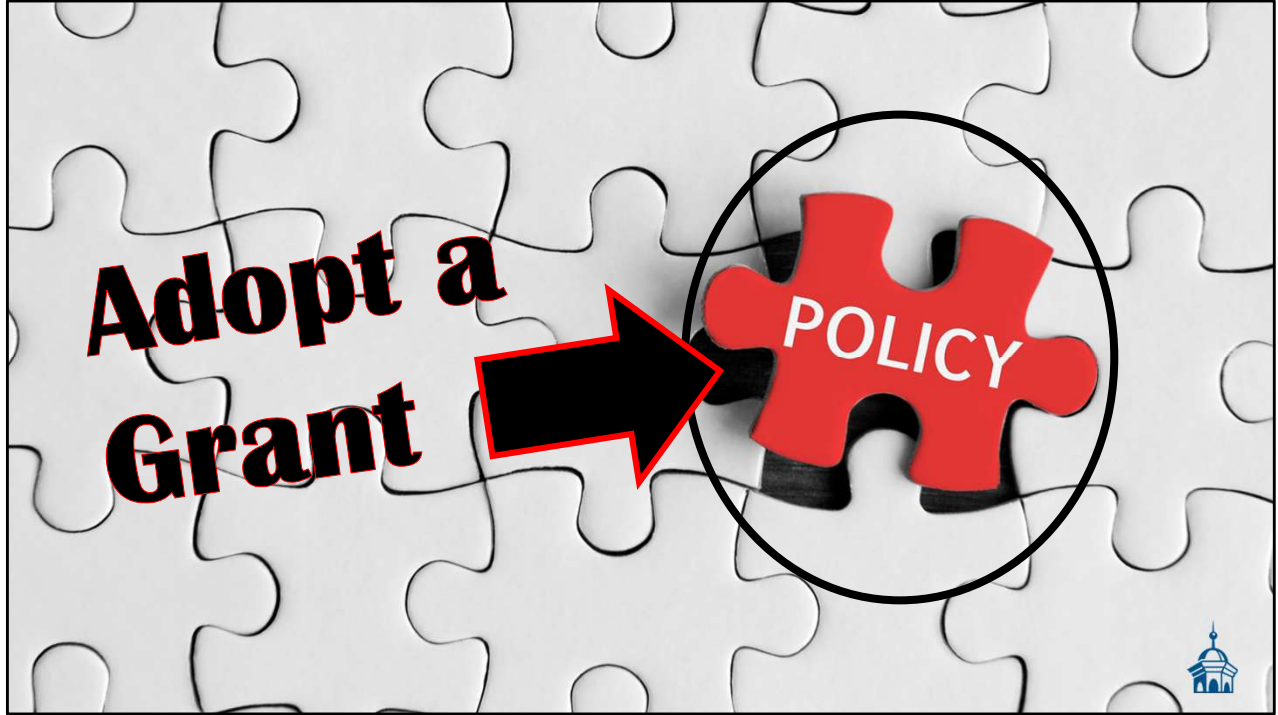
Accountability ultimately rests with whoever has legal authority. For municipal projects, the legislative body, or perhaps the Town Manager if it is a Town Manager form of government, is accountable for every aspect of it as the project owners. – the buck stops with them. Their role *also includes* overseeing all municipal expenditures and supervising personnel. They must be involved in any grant application that involves money or commitment of municipal resources – personnel, materials, or funds.



So many questions
about grants.....

What's the best way to
get everyone involved
on the same page?

So many questions about grants... What's the best way to get everyone involved on the same page?



Adopt a Grant Policy!

VLCT plans to have a model Grant Policy ready next month.

It will include language that will address all the questions in the previous two slides and many more.

It will help your municipality:

- Clarify roles and responsibilities,
- Provide consistency in your municipality's approach and process for grants,
- Set expectations so everyone involved knows what is required of them, and
- Check the box if a policy is required by a funder.

Understanding Roles Communication

**When it comes to municipal projects
an ounce of prevention is worth a pound
of cure.**



Municipal projects come in all shapes and sizes from putting a new roof on the town office to a multimillion-dollar infrastructure project. Regardless of the project type, ultimately the legislative body is responsible for every aspect of it as the project owners.

When it comes to municipal projects, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.



Understanding Roles Communication is Essential

Talk with your fellow local officials early and often about the project:

- **Treasurer or other finance staff** - Early in the planning stage when ideas about funding are being considered. The Treasurer's role and responsibilities (beyond their statutory requirements) should be discussed so it is clear what project support they would be willing/able to provide and, as importantly, what they won't. A plan should be devised for the latter.
- **Town Clerk** – Residents may ask the Town Clerk for information or have questions about the project. Consider creating a project page on your website. Post general information about the project and project updates for the public. Make sure the Town Clerk has the most update information for local chatter.
- **Listers** – Will the project involve a land or property transaction that could impact the Grand List? Talk to Listers about those impacts.
- **Highway or Public Works Supervisor** – Will the project require road closures, traffic control, or other resources (human, materials, equipment, etc.) of the Highway/Public Works Department? Engaging the Department early allows them to identify challenges for you and plan for actual events.
- **Zoning Administrator** – Does the proposed project comply with existing zoning regulations? Best practice dictates that municipalities comply with their own regulations.

Talk to your residents. Your residents are the biggest stakeholders in your project – inform and engage them. The more they know about the project, the smoother the path for its success will be.



Since the powers of local government are often lateral, the legislative body must determine how other officials might be involved in the project, especially the financial and regulatory aspects, and communicate with them about this:

Talk with your fellow local officials early and often about the project.

- Treasurer or other finance staff - The legislative body should talk with the Treasurer about the project in the early planning stage when ideas about funding are being considered. The Treasurer's role and responsibilities (beyond their statutory requirements) should be discussed so it is clear what project support they would be willing to provide and, as importantly, what they won't. A plan should be devised for the latter.
- Town Clerk – Residents may ask the Town Clerk for information or have questions about the project. Consider creating a project page on your website. Post general information about the project and project updates for the public. Make sure the Town Clerk has the most update information for local chatter.
- Listers – Will the project involve a land or property transaction that could impact the Grand List? Talk to Listers about those impacts.

- Highway or Public Works Supervisor – Will the project require road closures, traffic control, or other resources (human, materials, equipment, etc.) of the Highway/Public Works Department? Engaging the Department early allows them to identify challenges for you and plan for actual events.
- Zoning Administrator – Does the proposed project comply with existing zoning regulations? Best practice dictates that municipalities comply with their own regulations.

Talk to your residents. As noted previously, your residents are the biggest stakeholders in your project – inform and engage them. The more they know about the project, the smoother the path for it will be.



The second question is: “How many grant applications have you authored?”

Response options are Zero / 1-4 / 5-10 / So many that I’ve lost count!

Working as a Team

Grant Roles

Grants are a team activity. Identify key people before seeking grants.

Common grant roles:

- Authorized Agent
- Grant Writer
- Finance Manager
- Grant Administrator
- Project Implementer

One person might hold multiple roles, or one role might be fulfilled by multiple people.



We often think of the grant writer when we think about winning grants.

Grants are a team activity. The most successful writers know who to involve and when to involve them. Your municipality can identify a basic grants team before it begins seeking grants.

Common grant roles include:

- Authorized Agent - this is the entity that can enter into contracts for the municipality. In most instances, this is the legislative body, or if this power is granted to a Town Manager through a municipality's charter.
- Grant Writer - develops the application's narratives, identifies and collects data to support the narrative, and may submit the application.
- Finance Manager - helps develop the grant budget by providing pay rates and expense information. Develops and distributes grant finance reports.
- Grant Administrator - ensures that all reporting requirements and purchasing requirements are met. Monitors the budget and expenses. Reports may be

prepared by others, such as the Treasurer who will likely prepare financial reports.

- Project Implementer - coordinates stakeholders, manages communication, drafts memorandums of understanding, develops requests for consultant services, usually manages consultant, ensures project deliverables are met, and collects or documents in-kind match resources. Remember, project management by committee doesn't work.

Other people may be a part of the team when the municipality moves a project-specific application forward, such as stakeholders or municipal departments, committees, or commissions that will have a role in a specific project.

Since Vermont communities are small, one person might hold multiple roles, or one role might be fulfilled by multiple people.

Assessing Capacity Do You Have It?

Grants require capacity to:

- Research and identify potential grant opportunities
- Write applications
- Administer the award
- Manage the grant-funded project
- Maintain constructed facilities and equipment
- Replace facilities and equipment at lifecycle end



Grants require having the capacity to write and administer them.

They also require the capacity to manage grant-funded projects, to maintain constructed facilities and equipment, and to replace those resources at the end of their lifecycle.

Before pursuing a grant, take time to think about your municipality's capacity for each of these.



You can add capacity by:

- Using volunteers – Community volunteers bring fresh perspectives and enthusiasm. Your community has people skilled in many areas. Volunteers also could be from service programs like AmeriCorps VISTA, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, or a college grant writing class.
- Hiring more staff or sharing staff with another entity – If grant writing has become overwhelming for your community and you write a fair number of grants, hiring full or part-time staff to help with grants might make economic sense. Another option is to share staff with another entity, such as your school or nonprofit that pursues different types of grants.
- Using a service provider - Your Regional Planning Commission, Regional Development Corporation, or Natural Resources Conservation District may provide grant writing, grant administration and project management services. Get to know them and position your project early to use their services.
- Hire a consultant – Consultants also write grants and manage projects. Yes, you'll pay for their services. While grant writing rarely can be paid for by the project

grant, the investment in a professional grant writer should pay off as you move projects forward. Consultants work best for large grants or if your municipality doesn't pursue grants very often.

VLCT has published ideas for increasing your municipalities capacity for grants on its website at <https://www.vlct.org/resource/increasing-municipal-capacity-grants>.

Links:

- Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs): <https://www.vapda.org/regions.html>
- Regional Development Corporations (RDCs): <https://accd.vermont.gov/economic-development/resources/rdc>
- Natural Resource Conservation Districts (NRCs): <https://www.vacd.org/conservation-districts/>



The last question is: “How many awarded grants have you administered?”

Response options are the same as the previous question: Zero / 1-4 / 5-10 / So many that I’ve lost count!



Understanding Grant Readiness

Make life easier! What you can do before you apply.

- Renew your [Sam.gov](https://sam.gov) registration annually
- Register in application portals
- Talk to funders
- Learn about grant requirements and how grants work
- Set up your systems (financial, policies, tracking)
- Plan for match
- Get projects on [priority lists](#)

You can make applying for and managing grants easier by making sure you are ready before you apply.

- Keep your Sam.gov registration active. As many of you learned through the ARPA process, it must be renewed annually. Never create a second Sam.gov account. You may be locked out of the system, and it will foul up your grant awards.
- Register in application portals. Most grantors use online application portals that require registrations. To apply on time, you need to register in the grant portal before the grant is announced.
- Talk to funders. Tell them about your needs – cultivate relationships, learn about their programs, sign up for newsletters, attend webinars, verify municipal and project eligibility. Tell them your story **before** you need to ask them for funding.
- Learn about grant requirements and how grants work. Learn about administrative, reporting, closeout, finance (internal controls, audit, single audit, closeout), allowable and disallowed costs, etc. Read the previous year's grant information and look at awarded projects when available. Funders have put a lot of information online to help applicants learn about their grants, submit

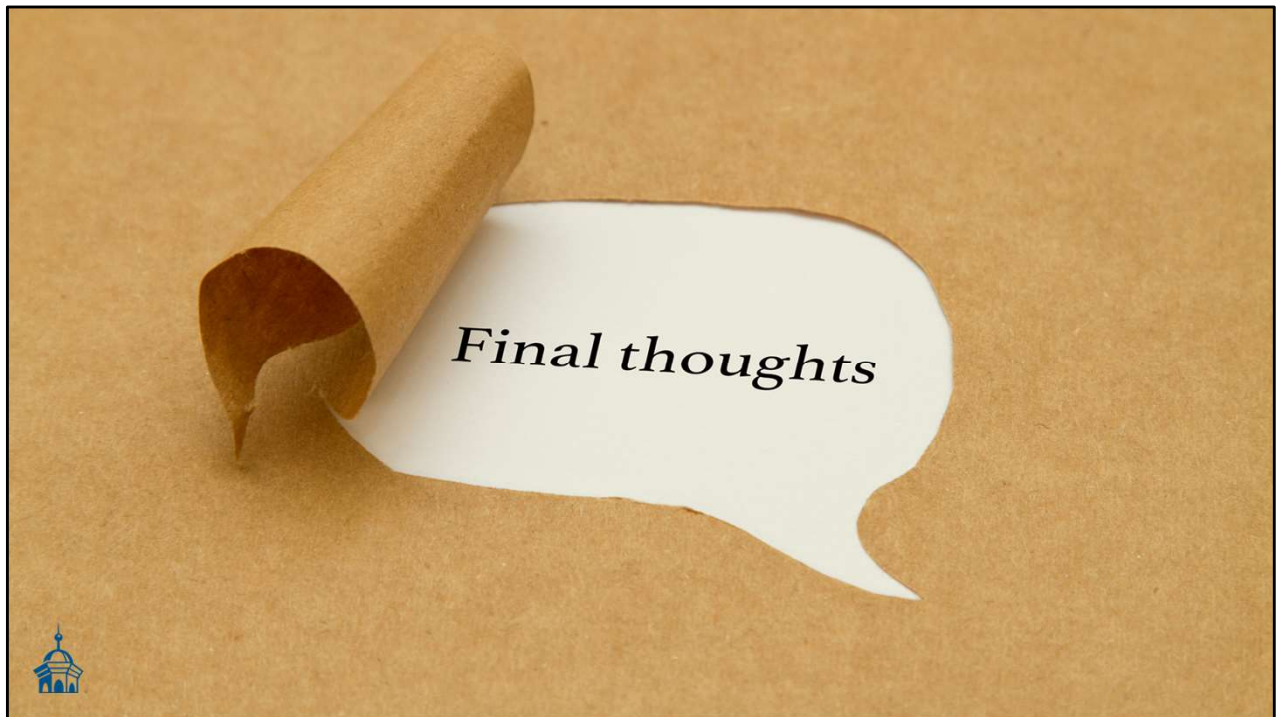
competitive applications, and administer an award. The Grants.gov Learning Center and the Department of Transportation's Navigator are great places to begin. Start slow and work at the pace you can. You don't have to learn it all at once.

- Set up your systems. Build robust internal controls. Plan how your financial system will accommodate grants and how your team will assign roles. Set up a tracking system to keep track of applications written, application status, etc. Write and adopt required policies. It is easier to create and align your systems before you apply for grants.
- Plan for match. Some towns set aside funds annually, so they have matching funds when they need them. Others pay as they go. Some prefer a cash match because it's simpler. Others prefer to leverage in-kind staff or equipment resources to reduce cash outlays.
- Apply to make your project a priority. Certain funding programs require that a project be included in databases, on priority projects lists, or in annual plans to qualify the project for funding. Other funding programs use published lists or plans to give extra points to projects during application review. Boost your project's competitiveness for grant funding by making sure it is on "the List" before applying. See our webpage for an article on relevant priority lists.

Grant readiness makes your life easier, and you can do it over time. This means you'll have less to do when you're busy applying for a grant.

Resources:

- Grants.gov Learning Center: <https://www.grants.gov/learn-grants>
- US Department of Transportation Navigator: <https://www.transportation.gov/dot-navigator>
- VLCT's Project Priority List article: <https://www.vlct.org/resource/seeking-funding-get-your-project-priority-list>



Picking the “Right” project is critical – Funders are looking for projects that meet local priorities, that are supported by residents, are well thought out, and make for exciting grant announcements.

Understand roles, responsibilities, and accountability - Advancing local projects and priorities using grant funding are team activities. Build a strong team and value each person on it.

Know your capacity - Sometimes your bench is full, and sometimes you need to deepen it. Recognizing when you need help and how to add it is critical for your project’s success.

Grant readiness = success. It boils down to having the right foundations in place:

- Adopting a grant policy and procedures will make a big difference for your municipality.
 - Once adopted, share it with other municipal officials for their situational awareness.
 - Share it with the chairs of all municipal commissions, committees, and

groups.

- Post it on your municipal website, and direct anyone who wants the municipality to be the applicant for their grant to it.
- Many federal programs now require having this policy.
- VLCT is working on a draft grant policy now. Once we have it ready, we will let you know through VLCT News – our biweekly email to members.
- Strong communication is the secret to success for almost anything whether it be a municipal grant application or a life partnership!
 - Keep nothing secret.
 - Work as a team and make your fellow municipal officials your partners.
 - Engage your residents. Answer their questions and allay their fears.
 - Be overly transparent. Make information available to the public through multiple methods – post to your website, make available for review in the Town Office, post on bulletin boards, etc.
 - Legislative bodies members - make decisions in public - put items on your agendas and include them in your meeting minutes – leave lots of breadcrumbs for residents to see.
- No two grants are the same.
 - You cannot assume that the requirements of one grant are the same for all grants – even within the same agency!
 - Your grant team might look very different for each grant your municipality pursues.
 - Having the right foundations – policies, procedures, processes, systems, communication - in place will help ensure that you can successfully manage any curveballs that come your way.

Thank You!



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