



CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

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# Community Funding Guidebook

A Guide for Exploring  
Funding Opportunities

VERSION ONE: 07/2024



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## Acknowledgments

This booklet, created by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), is an informational compilation of existing concepts, examples, resources and considerations, gathered to provide a resource for communities and local power companies (LPCs) as they explore implementation of connected community solutions. This booklet is not meant to prescribe the details of how an individual community should implement a specific solution.

This Community Funding Guide supports all four of the Connected Communities focus areas by providing insights on securing funding for various community initiatives. Visit the [Connected Communities website](#) for more information.

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# Introduction

## The Need for Funding

Investing in the services and infrastructure required to become a “Connected Community” can be costly for many communities, and they often need funding from both public and private sources. Funding opportunities enable communities to secure the financial resources they need to make a resilient future possible. Federal funding opportunities available through legislation such as the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) provide a way for communities to invest in large-scale clean energy and resiliency projects. State and local government agencies provide funding opportunities to support and promote investment in areas especially relevant to their communities.

External funding sources are essential for many communities aiming to finance and implement projects, programs and technologies that achieve development goals and ensure equitable improvements to residents' quality of life.



Funding opportunities such as grants, loans and tax credits enable communities to secure the financial resources they need to make a resilient future possible.

## This Funding Guide

This guide aims to assist communities in navigating the landscape of external funding sources and provide insight on how to best use community resources to pursue funding. Communities can set themselves up to benefit from external funding by understanding how to assess available opportunities, evaluate eligibility for projects and entities, determine the responsibilities involved in pursuing different sources and structure proposals for success. The guide includes information communities need to identify and effectively pursue funding to support projects that advance progress in the Connected Communities focus areas: Broadband and Digital Literacy, Economic Empowerment, Energy and Environmental Justice and Enhanced Community Resiliency.

### Specifically, the guide provides an overview of:

- Types and sources of funding opportunities.
- Entities that administer funding opportunities and strategies for engaging with those organizations.
- Steps a community can take to better position its proposal for success.
- Resources required in the pursuit of funding.
- Additional funding resources to explore.



# Types of Funding Opportunities

A variety of funding sources offer targeted financial support designed to help communities accelerate infrastructure improvements, stimulate economic growth and expand public services. The funding opportunity landscape includes grants, loans, rebates, tax credits and other incentive mechanisms issued primarily through various federal, state and local government agencies.

## Federal Funding Opportunities

The federal funding landscape changed significantly after the passage of the BIL in late 2021 and the IRA in 2022, which provided approximately \$1.6 trillion of new investment and additional funding to existing programs. Federal funding programs introduced or revamped through the BIL and IRA are structured to address many of the barriers communities previously faced in benefiting from federal funding opportunities. Tax-exempt entities now have a streamlined process for accessing tax credits for clean energy investments, and most funding opportunities are part of the Justice40 Initiative, which requires that 40% of project benefits flow to disadvantaged communities.\* Projects seeking funding through the IRA and BIL must also include a Community Benefits Plan that sets equity-related metrics and outlines a plan for equitable stakeholder engagement and community-driven outcomes.

Several federal agencies and departments administer grants tailored to support a wide range of initiatives aligning with the needs of communities and municipalities. These grant programs typically focus on broad categories such as infrastructure development, education, healthcare, transportation, environmental conservation, energy and more. This guide focuses most heavily on funds from the BIL and IRA because they are among the largest spending programs in recent years, contain novel processes and requirements for distributing funds and are particularly relevant to the Connected Communities focus areas.

\*See the sidebar for more information.



### Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) created the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#)<sup>1</sup> (CEJST) to identify which census tracts qualify as disadvantaged communities. A community is highlighted as **disadvantaged** on the CEJST map if it is in a census tract that is at or above the threshold for both of the following:

1

AN ASSOCIATED  
**Socioeconomic Burden**

2

ONE OR MORE  
**Environmental, Climate or Other Burdens**



# Types of Funding Opportunities

## Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)

The passage of the BIL added approximately \$650 billion to existing programs and authorizations and \$550 billion in new program spending to the federal funding landscape. Priorities of the bill include transportation infrastructure, power infrastructure, broadband, water infrastructure, public transit and electric vehicles (EVs), cybersecurity, environment and restoration and climate resiliency. Funding from the BIL comes primarily in the form of grants, with a limited number of loan programs included as well. While some BIL programs will provide funding directly to community projects, most funding will flow to states and local governments that will then be tasked with dispersing the funds to individual projects or other entities.

### EXAMPLES OF BIL-RELATED FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

#### Clean School Bus Program

Department of Energy

The [Clean School Bus Program](#)<sup>2</sup> provides grants and rebates to governments, school systems and contractors for the replacement of existing diesel school buses with zero-emissions buses.

**\$5B**  
total funding

#### Energy Improvement in Rural and Remote Areas (ERA)

Department of Energy

The [ERA](#)<sup>3</sup> program provides funds to improve resilience, safety, reliability and availability of energy in rural or remote areas that provide environmental protection from adverse impacts of energy generation.

**\$1B**  
total funding

#### Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program

Department of Commerce

The [BEAD Program](#)<sup>4</sup> provides support for the expansion of broadband with priority to rural and underserved areas regarding broadband deployment.

**\$42.45B**  
total funding





# Types of Funding Opportunities

## Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

The IRA provides roughly \$370 billion toward energy manufacturing, greenhouse gas reduction, assistance for rural energy systems, EVs, home electrification and energy efficiency, renewable energy and energy storage. Most IRA funding comes in the form of tax credits worth roughly \$270 billion, with the remaining funding being used for rebate, grant and loan programs. Tax credits aim to benefit entities across the value chain, including those that historically had trouble accessing economic benefits from clean energy projects, like local governments and community nonprofits. One of the most significant changes the IRA brings is the direct pay provision, which allows non-tax-paying entities to capture value from tax credits.

### EXAMPLES OF IRA-RELATED FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

#### Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund

Environmental Protection Agency

The [Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund](#)<sup>6</sup> is a three-pronged program that funds a national clean investment fund, a clean communities investment accelerator and a residential and community solar program.

**\$27B**  
total funding

#### Climate Pollution Reduction Grants (CPRG)

Environmental Protection Agency

The [CPRG](#)<sup>6</sup> program provides funds for states, municipalities and air pollution control agencies to create and implement plans to reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

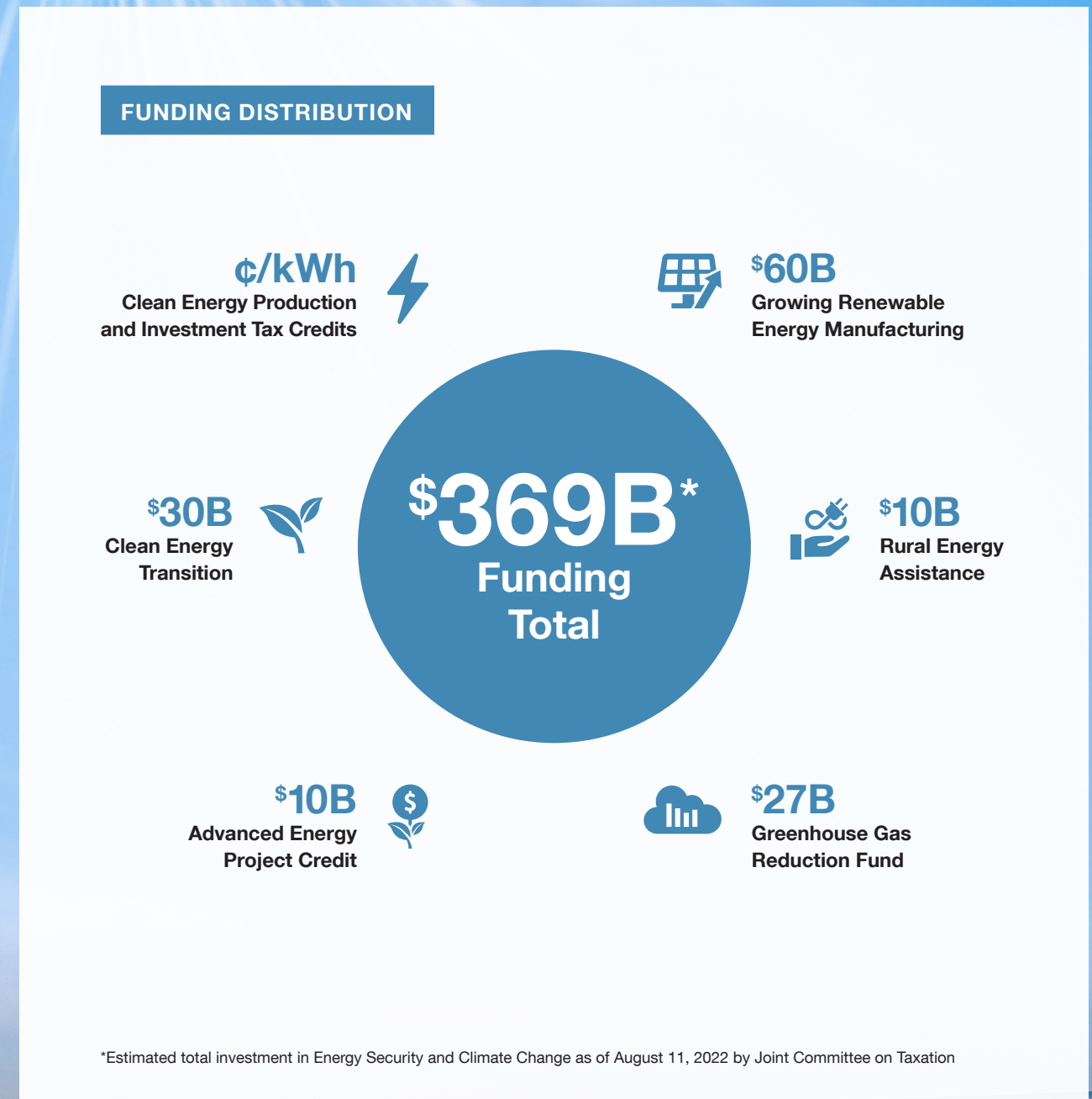
**\$5B**  
total funding

#### Empowering Rural America (New ERA)

US Department of Agriculture

The [New ERA](#)<sup>7</sup> program provides loans and other financial assistance that support the deployment of renewable energy systems, zero-emission systems, carbon capture and storage systems and energy efficiency improvements to generation and transmission assets.

**\$9.7B**  
total funding





# Types of Funding Opportunities

## Other Federal Programs

The federal funding landscape is vast, and not all modes and distributors of federal funding are discussed in detail in this guide. In addition to programs funded by the IRA and BIL, a variety of other public entities and programs can provide support to communities, a selection of which is provided below. This list below is not exhaustive but gives a glimpse at key opportunities that exist today.

### EXAMPLES OF OTHER FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

#### Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)

Regional Partnership

The [ARC](#)<sup>8</sup> is specifically dedicated to supporting economic development in the region that includes parts of 13 states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. ARC uses Congressionally appropriated funds to invest in the region's economic and community development through grants. In fiscal year 2021, Congress appropriated a record \$180 million for ARC.

#### Delta Regional Authority (DRA)

Regional Partnership

The [DRA](#)<sup>9</sup> is a federal-state partnership agency focused on improving the quality of life in the Mississippi Delta region, which includes parts of Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee. The DRA's focus areas are economic development, education and healthcare, workforce development, infrastructure improvement and natural resource management. One example of a funding program administered by the DRA is the [Community Infrastructure Fund](#).<sup>10</sup>

#### Community Facilities Program (CFP)

US Department of Agriculture\*

The [CFP](#)<sup>11</sup> provides loans, grants and loan guarantees to help develop essential community facilities in rural areas, including healthcare centers, schools, libraries, public safety facilities and more.

#### Rural Business Development Grants (RBDG)

US Department of Agriculture\*

The [RBDG](#)<sup>12</sup> are for projects that support the development of small and emerging rural businesses, as well as distance learning networks and employment-related adult education programs.

### Timelines vary across funding opportunities and by agency.

Therefore, by the time you read this, some of these programs may now appear closed. There may be future rounds of funding for closed opportunities in the following fiscal years, so it is important to monitor funding agency websites and sign up for newsletters and email notifications related to certain areas of interest. The [Connected Communities Funding Opportunities Database](#)<sup>13</sup> is a helpful place to start in searching for funding opportunities that meet your community's needs.

#### Broadband Infrastructure Program (BIP)

National Telecommunications and Information Administration

The [BIP](#)<sup>14</sup> funds the deployment of broadband infrastructure in underserved and unserved areas.

#### State and Local Implementation Grant Program (SLIGP)

National Telecommunications and Information Administration

The [SLIGP](#)<sup>15</sup> is a \$121.5 million formula-based, matching grant program designed to assist regional, state, local and tribal government entities as they plan for a nationwide public safety broadband network.

#### Digital Equity Act Programs

National Telecommunications and Information Administration

[Digital Equity Act Programs](#)<sup>16</sup> focus on advancing digital equity and inclusion, with a particular emphasis on underserved communities. They supports projects that promote digital literacy, skills training and access to technology resources.

#### Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program

Department of Transportation

The [Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program](#)<sup>17</sup> is intended to advance transportation infrastructure projects in rural and tribal communities by supporting the development of projects reasonably expected to be eligible for certain DOT credit and grant programs.

#### Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development Planning

Department of Transportation

The [Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development Planning](#)<sup>18</sup> provides funding to communities to integrate land use and transportation planning for a new transit project corridor.



# Types of Funding Opportunities

## State and Local Funding Opportunities

At the state and local level, various government offices provide a range of funding opportunities designed to address region-specific needs and promote local growth. State grants, tax credits and other financial resources can play a pivotal role in community development, revitalization efforts and the delivery of essential services.

### EXAMPLES OF STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

#### Broadband Make Ready Accelerator Program

North Carolina Department of Information Technology

The [Broadband Make Ready Accelerator Program](#),<sup>19</sup> also known as the Broadband Pole Replacement Program, provides grants that facilitate the deployment of broadband service to households, businesses, agricultural operations and community anchor institutions in areas unserved by broadband. This program creates a special fund to reimburse broadband providers (i.e., communications service providers) for eligible pole replacement costs in connection with qualified projects.

#### Capital Improvements Revolving (CAP) Loan Program

Central Mississippi Planning and Development District

The [CAP Loan Program](#)<sup>20</sup> provides loans to municipalities and counties to finance public infrastructure improvements in Mississippi. CAP Loan funds may be used by local governmental authorities in support of business location and expansion projects and other community-based projects. Eligible projects include but are not limited to, the construction or repair of water and sewer facilities, the renovation or repair of existing buildings for economic development purposes and the construction or repair of access roads for industrial development.



Local governments often provide funding opportunities that directly address the unique priorities of and challenges faced by their communities. Local grants, loans, tax incentives and rebates enable growth and improvement at the grassroots level.

#### State Opportunity Zones

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Local governments that undertake redevelopment and revitalization efforts in certain older commercial and industrial areas, also known as [State Opportunity Zones](#),<sup>21</sup> can now qualify those areas for the State's maximum job tax credit of \$3,500 per job. The incentive, which is available for new or existing businesses that create two or more jobs, is a Job Tax Credit which can be taken against the business's Georgia income tax liability and payroll withholding tax.

#### Energy Efficient Schools Initiative (EESI) Loan Program

Tennessee Department of Education

The [EESI Loan Program](#)<sup>22</sup> uses low-interest revolving loans to fund energy-efficient renovation and retrofit projects in Tennessee's public K-12 schools. New construction projects designed to exceed the current energy code may also apply and be considered for funding. Schools can use funding for energy conservation measures that have proven savings such as lighting system updates, the installation of energy management systems, load shifting projects and more.

#### Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF)

Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation

The [CWSRF](#)<sup>23</sup> provides technical assistance and low-interest loans to cities, counties, utility districts and water authorities across Tennessee for planning, design and construction of drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects.



# Types of Funding Opportunities

## Private Funding

Aside from government entities, communities can also seek funding from foundations, nonprofit organizations, universities and corporations. Private funding often has a less rigorous and faster application process, but awards are typically smaller and less likely to reoccur in the future. Examples are listed below.

### EXAMPLES OF EXTERNAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

#### Digital Inclusion Fund

Community Foundation of Greater Huntsville

The Community Foundation of Greater Huntsville launched the [Digital Inclusion Fund](#)<sup>24</sup> to support digital inclusion efforts in the city of Huntsville. With seed funding provided by Google Fiber, the fund grants high-impact programs that support making internet and digital education available to communities currently without access to those resources.

#### Global Impact Cash Grant program

Cisco Foundation

Cisco's [Global Impact Cash Grant program](#)<sup>25</sup> partners with nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that address a significant social problem. Cisco aims to fund programs that support its investment areas, serve the underserved and leverage technology to improve the reach and efficiency of services.

## Forms of Funding Support

Funding support is awarded through several mechanisms. Understanding the differences in terms of eligibility, application and reporting requirements will help you determine which type is right for your community. Most external funding opportunities come with specific compliance and reporting requirements, as funding agencies strive to distribute financial support responsibly and avoid misuse of funds. Understanding the expectations and requirements of a funding opportunity enables you to balance the value of available funds with the effort needed to apply.



**Grants**



**Rebates**



**Loans**



**Tax Credits**



To find funding opportunities that match your community's projects, explore the [Connected Communities Funding Opportunities Database](#).<sup>26</sup>

# Types of Funding Opportunities

## Grants

Grants are funds distributed to entities and projects that do not require repayment. Public agencies and private organizations offer a wide variety of grant programs, each with its own goals, eligibility requirements, reporting requirements and timelines. Grants are appealing options for communities because they do not require repayment with interest and often arrive in the form of upfront cash.

While grants may seem like the simplest form of available funding, meeting the application and ongoing reporting requirements of programs with larger award amounts can be a significant administrative burden on the recipient. For example, competitive grant programs may require a letter of interest and concept paper in addition to a full application. Applications may require multiple components, such as detailed budgets, Community Benefits Plans, teaming lists, detailed project descriptions, timelines and more. Federal grants have Buy America provisions requiring projects to source certain materials and parts from domestic producers. Grants may also require the receiving entity to share the cost, meaning that the applicant must pay for a certain percentage of the project rather than it being fully funded by the grant. This requirement may make pursuing some grants challenging for communities that do not have the resources up front to fund projects.

### GRANT EXAMPLE

# \$2B

## in available funding

from the [Community Change Grants Program](#).<sup>27</sup> These grants support community-driven projects that address climate challenges and reduce pollution while strengthening communities through thoughtful implementation.

# \$20M

## maximum amount

(no cost share required)

### TYPES OF GRANTS

There are many types of grants,<sup>28,29</sup> several of which are featured below in this guide. Grants may fall into multiple categories - for example, a grant may be a formula block grant.

#### Discretionary/Competitive Grants

Funding is awarded based on a competitive application process in which organizations complete applications to compete for the same funds.

#### Formula Grants

Funding is awarded based on set eligibility requirements instead of a competitive process. All eligible organizations can receive funding.

#### Pass-Through Grants

Funding is awarded to state government agencies, who then can use funds to create their own competitive or formula grant program for their state.

#### Block Grants

Federal funding provided to state and local government agencies for projects that serve a particular purpose, such as community development.

### Technical Assistance

Along with awarding funds, some federal grant opportunities include technical assistance. Technical assistance refers to activities that assist stakeholders with navigating the grant process and providing the capacity needed for applicants to pursue and manage grant funding. Direct technical assistance typically involves one-on-one support to address the specific needs of individual grant applicants or recipients. Indirect technical assistance includes tools such as webinars and guidebooks created to assist a wide range of stakeholders. For some funding opportunities, such as the EPA's [Community Change Grant](#),<sup>30</sup> qualifying applicants can apply for technical assistance to assist them in the grant application process. In other cases, technical assistance is part of the award itself. For example, winners of the DOE's [Clean Energy to Communities](#)<sup>31</sup> program are provided with consultations from industry experts, peer support and advanced modeling tools to help them realize their clean energy goals.



# Types of Funding Opportunities



## Rebates

Funding agencies also offer rebate programs to incentivize the adoption of certain types of technology or equipment. Rebates can come in the form of direct cash payment reimbursements for purchasing energy-efficient products or making energy-saving improvements. Rebate programs can be useful to end-use customers to lower the cost of high-efficiency appliances, electric or fuel-efficient vehicles, sustainable agricultural practices or to promote water conservation.

**TVA EnergyRight**,<sup>32</sup> available through many local power companies, offers incentives for a variety of energy efficiency-related investments, including electric forklifts, thermal ice storage, efficient HVAC and LED lighting for business and industrial customers.

As a result of the IRA, the federal government is providing \$8.8 billion to states across the country to offer rebates for a variety of efficiency-related home upgrades. Notable IRA-funded rebate programs include the **High-Efficiency Electric Home Rebate program** and the **Home Energy Performance Based, Whole House Rebate program**.<sup>33</sup>



**\$8.8B**  
in available  
funding

from IRA-funded rebate programs for efficiency-related home upgrades, including but not limited to:

- Electric heat pumps for water heating, space heating and cooling and clothes dryers
- Electric stoves, cooktops, ranges or ovens
- Electric load service center
- Insulation
- Air sealing and materials to improve ventilation
- Electric wiring
- Weatherization



# Types of Funding Opportunities

## Loans

Federal, state and local loan programs can be a low-cost financing solution depending on the project in question and your community's specific needs, goals and financial situation. One particularly relevant government agency offering loan programs is the [Department of Energy's Loan Programs Office](#)<sup>34</sup> (LPO). The LPO provides loans and loan guarantees\* for innovative clean energy, advanced transportation and tribal energy projects. If a community has the appetite and ability to take on debt, pursuing loans provides several benefits, listed on the next page.

### FEDERAL LOANS EXAMPLES

#### Powering Affordable Clean Energy (PACE) Loans

[PACE](#)<sup>35</sup> loans can be used by entities that generate electricity in rural areas to finance wind, solar, hydropower, geothermal or biomass renewable energy or energy storage projects.

#### Energy Efficiency Revolving Loan Fund

[This program](#)<sup>36</sup> provides states with capitalization grants to establish a revolving loan fund. States can then use this fund to offer loans and grants for energy efficiency audits, upgrades and retrofits.

#### USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Direct Loan Program

[This loan program](#)<sup>37</sup> provides funding to rural communities for essential facilities such as schools, healthcare facilities, public safety buildings and other community infrastructure projects.



For additional examples of federal loan programs, see the [appendix](#).

\*A loan guarantee is a type of loan in which a third party, or "guarantor", agrees to take on the debt if the borrower defaults. In the case of LPO loan guarantees, the [LPO works with US Treasury's Federal Financing Bank](#)<sup>38</sup> to guarantee loans, and as such, applicants do not need to secure third-party lender loans. Loan guarantees reduce credit risk, making credit more accessible when nonfederal financial sources would not otherwise offer it.

### LOAN BENEFITS

#### Large Funding Amounts

Government loans often provide access to larger funding amounts compared to grants. While grants are typically limited to specific project costs, loans can cover a broader range of expenses, allowing the community to undertake more significant and comprehensive pilot projects.

#### Long-Term Outlook

Loans can provide an opportunity for communities to build financial sustainability. Instead of relying solely on one-time grant funding, a loan allows the community to invest in the project and potentially generate revenue or savings over time. This revenue can then be used to repay the loan and enable the community to be less dependent on external funding in the future.

#### Flexibility

With a loan, the community has more flexibility in designing the project to meet its unique needs and objectives. Grants may come with more specific requirements or restrictions on how the funds are used, while loans typically offer greater freedom in project execution.

#### Quicker Access to Funds

Government grants often have a competitive application process, and the selection and approval may take a considerable amount of time. On the other hand, government loans may have a simpler application and approval process, allowing the community to access funds more quickly.

#### Building Credit and Relationships

Successfully repaying a government loan can help the community establish a positive credit history, making it easier to access funding in the future. Additionally, building a strong working relationship with the government agency through loan repayment can open doors to other opportunities or collaborations.



# Types of Funding Opportunities

## Tax Credits

Tax credits are incentives offered by governments to encourage investment and behaviors that align with certain policy goals. Tax credits are captured after filing a tax return and directly reduce the amount of tax that a person or entity owes. More versatile than other funding modes, tax credits can be designed to address a wide range of policy goals by targeting various sectors, behaviors and initiatives.

Tax credits are often considered more cost-effective for governments than direct spending programs or subsidies. Unlike grants or subsidies, tax credits leverage existing tax administration systems, requiring fewer administrative resources to implement and maintain. This accessibility also allows for a broader reach, with general availability to all eligible taxpayers who meet the criteria. Tax credits can offer better support for long-term planning because they often have multi-year durations, providing stability and predictability for businesses and individuals. This extended timeline can lead to more significant investments in projects or technologies and lasting changes in behavior.

Tax credits have advantages in terms of flexibility, breadth and duration, but they may be less beneficial to low-income individuals because they have a delayed impact. Tax credits often involve complex eligibility criteria, calculations and documentation requirements, which can make the process difficult for taxpayers. Other financial incentives mentioned in this guide may offer more immediate benefits and be better targeted to specific groups or behaviors.



### Targeted objectives of tax credits include:

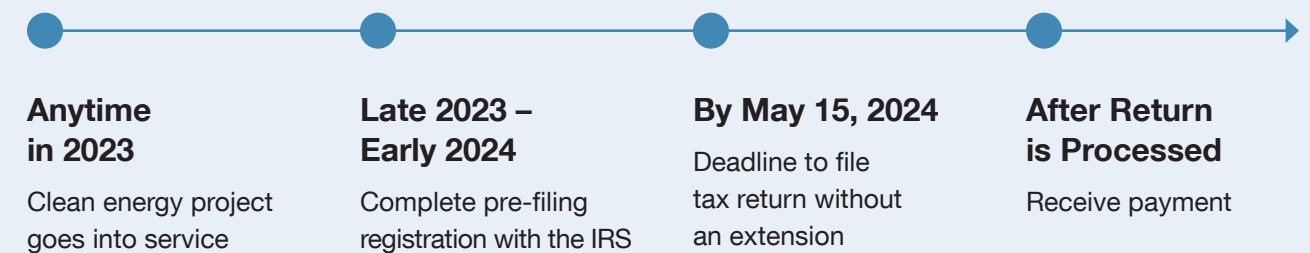
- Promoting renewable energy
- Supporting research and development
- Fostering affordable housing
- Encouraging education
- Incentivizing healthcare improvements

The IRA established an array of new tax credits and extended or expanded existing programs that incentivize renewable energy investment and production—including new and used EVs, clean buses, EV charging infrastructure, home efficiency improvements, construction of new energy-efficient homes and more. Many of these programs have bonuses and additional incentives if projects are located in disadvantaged or low-income communities, communities that have been affected by coal plant closures or those that rely on the fossil fuel industry for employment. These bonuses can be significant and can drastically change the economics of certain projects.

Additionally, the IRA includes two new provisions: Direct Pay (also known as Elective Pay) and Transferability. These new provisions enable entities to pursue energy projects and initiatives with more financial flexibility, independence and effectiveness. Direct Pay allows tax-exempt entities to benefit from tax credits in the form of cash payments. This allows municipalities, nonprofits and cooperatives to build energy projects without relying on complex financial agreements with third-party developers who have sufficient tax liability or access to tax equity capital. On the other hand, Transferability allows tax-paying entities to transfer all or a portion of their credits to a third-party buyer in exchange for cash. This is aimed at assisting entities that generate more credits than the amount they pay in taxes.

### EXAMPLE TIMELINE

Below is an example tax credit timeline for a local government that is placing a project in service in 2023.\*



\*Source: [The White House](#)<sup>39</sup>

# Types of Funding Opportunities

## Overview and Comparison



### Grants

Funds are distributed up front and without repayment after an application process, often requiring compliance and reporting post award.

#### PROS

- No repayment needed
- Supports various projects
- Encourages innovation

#### CONS

- Can be highly competitive
- Limited availability
- Stringent application process
- Administrative burden for larger awards
- Potential cost share requirement

#### BEST SUITED PROJECTS

- Projects that are difficult to value and finance, or that do not result in returns
- Research, development, pilots
- Smaller, local or community-scale projects



### Rebates

Partial refund for specific purchases or discounts at the point of sale to incentivize adoption of technology, equipment or certain practices.

#### PROS

- Direct cost reduction
- Incentives for energy-efficient products or practices
- Promotes adoption

#### CONS

- Limited to specific purchases/actions
- Not applicable to all situations
- Documentation and verification may be needed

#### BEST SUITED PROJECTS

- Purchases of equipment
- Incentivization of practices like water conservation, sustainable agriculture, etc.



### Loans

Borrowed funds that require repayment, but can cover larger expenses and help build financial sustainability over time.

#### PROS

- Larger funding amounts
- Long-term outlook for revenue generation
- Flexibility in project design

#### CONS

- Requires repayment with interest
- Potential debt burden
- Approval based on creditworthiness
- Application process may still be required

#### BEST SUITED PROJECTS

- Large-scale projects
- Longer term projects, which generate returns to service loan payments
- Projects that require more flexibility in execution



### Tax Credits

Deductions from tax liability; incentives for targeted behaviors or investments, which are versatile and stable.

#### PROS

- Direct reduction of tax liability
- Supports various policy goals
- Leverages existing tax systems

#### CONS

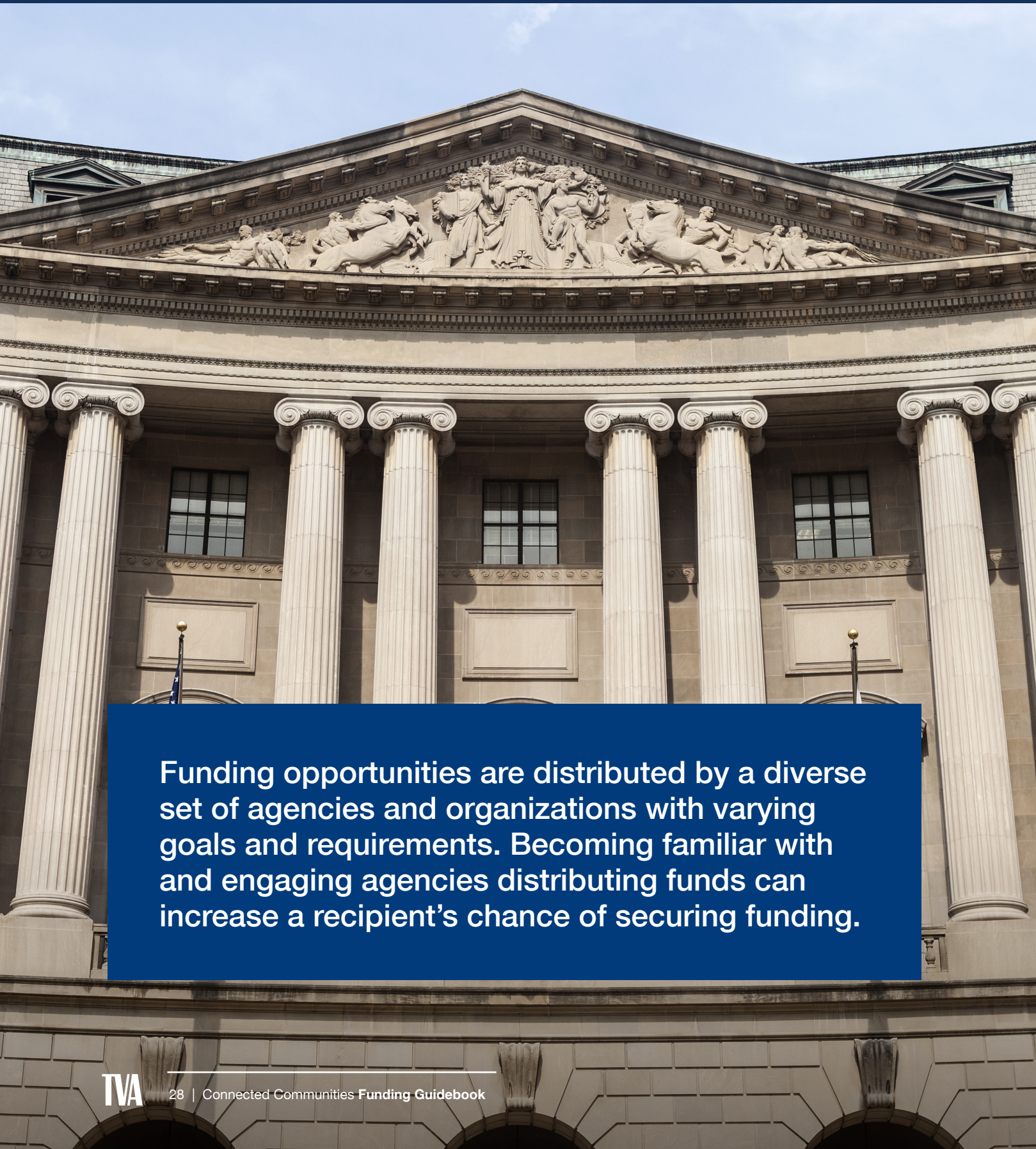
- Complex eligibility criteria
- Calculation and documentation requirements
- Less accessible to low-income individuals

#### BEST SUITED PROJECTS

- Long term projects
- Projects conducted by entities with high tax liability
- Large scale renewable projects
- Purchases of equipment and low-emission vehicles



# Understanding Funding Entities



Funding opportunities are distributed by a diverse set of agencies and organizations with varying goals and requirements. Becoming familiar with and engaging agencies distributing funds can increase a recipient's chance of securing funding.

## Federal Funding Agencies

Federal funds are appropriated to various government agencies through legislation passed by Congress. These agencies are then responsible for carrying out the goals laid out in the legislation and administering funds. It is important to be aware of the goals and mission of the agency distributing funds for programs you are pursuing. In some circumstances, engaging with these entities can increase your project's likelihood of receiving funding.

Prior to the release of a formal Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) or Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), potential applicants have the opportunity to engage with funding entities through Requests for Information (RFIs) and/or Notices for Public Comment, which are typically open for around 30 days. RFIs are used to solicit ideas and understand common needs from stakeholders and industry experts to inform the design of the funding opportunity. Notices for Public Comment notify the public of proposed rules and policies and seek feedback on such proposals before them being finalized in the formal funding opportunity. Potential applicants can engage with funding entities or federal agencies by emailing the point of contact listed in the RFI, Notice for Public Comment, formal FOA or NOFO.



**Each federal agency has specific missions and goals, and it's important to ensure your project aligns with these objectives before pursuing funding.**

Regularly check agency websites for updated information on current funding priorities and available grants to keep a pulse on opportunities that fit your community's needs.



# Understanding Funding Entities

## Department of Energy (DOE)

The [DOE](#)<sup>40</sup> administers energy-related programs, primarily grants and rebates. The DOE sometimes distributes funding to states, which is then funneled into programs for efficiency, weatherization and electrification. The DOE also facilitates large-scale grant programs, like hydrogen hubs, [Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnership](#)<sup>41</sup> (GRIP) grants, renewable technology research and development, hydropower grants and more. Large-scale grants may be a better fit for organizations such as large municipalities and intermediaries with strong administrative capabilities such as state energy offices or TVA; however, the DOE is prioritizing distributing funds to disadvantaged communities and energy communities, which are often under-resourced. Communities that fit the disadvantaged criteria may want to consider partnering with well-resourced entities or seeking technical support that sometimes accompanies funding opportunities to build capacity and take advantage of the DOE's current priorities.

## Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

The [EPA](#)<sup>42</sup> is focused on environmental and climate change-related grants and financing programs. The [Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund](#)<sup>43</sup> is a \$27 billion program run by the EPA, focused on solar and zero-emission technology deployment in disadvantaged communities. They also administer:

- [Climate Pollution Reduction Grants](#)<sup>44</sup>
- [Clean School Bus](#)<sup>45</sup> and [Heavy-Duty Vehicle Grants](#)<sup>46</sup>
- Grants for [brownfield remediation](#)<sup>47</sup>
- [Environmental and Climate Justice Block Grants](#)<sup>48</sup>

## US Department of Agriculture (USDA)

The [USDA](#)<sup>49</sup> administers many ecological health and restoration funding to states and federal land management agencies. Since passing the IRA, they also provide funding for [Powering Affordable Clean Energy](#)<sup>50</sup> (PACE) loans, biofuel incentives and assistance for underserved landowners and forest resilience. Through the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), the USDA provides funding for the [Rural Energy for America Program](#)<sup>51</sup> (REAP) and the [Empowering Rural America](#)<sup>52</sup> (New ERA) program. For these programs, communities should engage directly with the RUS.

## National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)

The [NTIA](#)<sup>53</sup> is focused on expanding broadband internet access and adoption, expanding the use of spectrum and ensuring that the internet remains an engine for continued innovation and growth. The NTIA is responsible for:

- [Broadband Equity Access and Deployment \(BEAD\) Program](#)<sup>54</sup>
- [Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program](#)<sup>55</sup>
- [Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program](#)<sup>56</sup>
- [Digital Equity Act Programs](#)<sup>57</sup>
- [Broadband Infrastructure Program \(BIP\)](#)<sup>58</sup>
- [Connecting Minority Communities \(CMC\) Program](#)<sup>59</sup>

## Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

The [FCC](#)<sup>60</sup> also administers funding programs for broadband deployment, including the [Emergency Connectivity Fund](#).<sup>61</sup>

## Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

The [IRS](#)<sup>62</sup> is responsible for carrying out tax credit programs, including those supporting clean energy production and investment, clean new and used vehicles, charging infrastructure, the production of hydrogen and biofuels and more. The IRS releases guidance on tax credits periodically on its website, and all guidance related to IRA credits is expected to have been released by fall 2023.





# Understanding Funding Entities

## State and Local Entities

Different state and local entities including state departments and local government offices often funnel state and federal dollars to qualified communities. State and local entities can offer funding opportunities more tailored to the specific needs of their communities.

### State offices

State departments are one of the most common sources of funding for grants and loan programs. Departments provide funding for initiatives and programs aligned with their purpose and goals. A department of environment and conservation, for example, often offers funding opportunities for programs related to improving access to clean drinking water or improving the state's sewer systems. Meanwhile, departments of economic and community affairs/development most commonly provide grants or loans to expand broadband access or improve public infrastructure to promote long-term economic growth.

State departments of economic and community development (or similar) also offer Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs). Each state receives an allocation of CDBG funds from the federal government and can administer them to projects aligning with one of three national objectives:

- Principally benefit low- and moderate-income persons
- Eliminate slums and blight
- Address imminent health and safety problems

### CDBG EXAMPLES

#### Tennessee

Tennessee receives around **\$25M in CDBG funds per year**.<sup>63</sup> Approximately 80 to 85% of funds are used for water and sewer projects, 10% is used for community livability projects and about 5% is used for housing rehabilitation.

#### North Carolina

**North Carolina's CDBG**<sup>64</sup> program administers federal dollars across several programs including a building reuse program, public infrastructure grants, demolition grants, disaster recovery funds and community housing grants.

### STATE DEPARTMENT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Organizations looking for funding are encouraged to check with relevant state departments based on the type of funding they are seeking. The examples listed below are not exhaustive but aim to give communities an idea of the types of projects state departments typically offer funding for.

#### Department of Education

- Quality education
- Energy efficiency in schools
- Electric buses

#### Department of Information Technology

- Digital equity
- Digital literacy

#### Department of Transportation

- Transportation systems
- Transit Infrastructure

#### Department of Housing & Community Development

- Affordable and decent housing

#### Finance & Administration Cabinet

- Energy efficiency
- Energy projects in state facilities

#### Department of Economic and Community Affairs / Development, Office of Planning & Development, Infrastructure Authority or the Department of Commerce

- Broadband
- Telecommunications infrastructure
- Coronavirus recovery funds
- Public infrastructure improvements
- Construction of buildings/facilities for economic development
- Business expansion
- Entrepreneurship
- Job training
- CDBGs

#### Department of Environment & Conservation / Environmental Management / Environmental Quality

- Clean drinking water
- Sewer
- Natural resource management

# Understanding Funding Entities

## Local Government Entities

City governments may offer funding opportunities related to local challenges such as housing or economic recovery. The city of Chattanooga, for example, launched [One Chattanooga Relief and Recovery](#)<sup>65</sup> to fund projects critical to the city's recovery from and prosperity after the COVID-19 pandemic. In April of 2022, the city announced plans to administer \$30 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to organizations in Chattanooga.



**Local entities can offer funding opportunities more tailored to the specific needs of their communities.**

## Regional Development Organizations

While less common, some regions have regional development organizations that provide funding for regional projects. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), for example, uses congressional funds to invest in economic and community development in the Appalachian region, which spans Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. The ARC's [High-Speed Broadband Deployment Initiative](#)<sup>66</sup> is a grant program aiming to increase broadband adoption across the Appalachian region.

## How Funding Entities Evaluate Applications

Funding agency reviewers use several criteria to prioritize applications for competitive funding opportunities. How funding applications are prioritized will vary widely across opportunities and types of funding and will depend on the goals and mission of the funding agency or organization, the competitiveness of the opportunity and the portfolio of projects that is presented to the application reviewers.

This section will focus on grant and loan programs that operate on a competitive application basis, as opposed to tax credits and rebates which are typically distributed through different processes. It is important to note that the stated goals and evaluation criteria within FOAs will offer the best guidance on what factors individual programs will most heavily consider.

### APPLICATION PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA



Broader Goals of the Administration and Administering Agency



Program Goals



Technical Feasibility, Innovation and Originality



Project Team, Collaboration and Partnerships



Geographic Diversity



Budget Justification



Overall Quality of Proposal



# Understanding Funding Entities



## Broader Goals of the Administration and Administering Agency

The goals and initiatives directing agencies at the federal level can shift with changes in administration. Therefore, the priorities of funding programs may reflect the goals of the administration that was in office when the program was established. On the federal level, this is exemplified by the Biden Administration's Justice40 Initiative, which requires that 40% of certain federal investments to flow to disadvantaged communities. Many of the grants established by the BIL and IRA are heavily focused on criteria surrounding the benefits that projects can bring to low-income census tracts, disadvantaged communities and communities affected by coal closures or that rely on the fossil fuel industry for employment. It is important to attend webinars, respond to RFIs and pose questions to the email addresses often provided by funding agencies to start a dialogue and better understand the goals of application reviewers.

### Justice40 Initiative

The [Justice40 Initiative](#)<sup>67</sup> is a policy established by the Biden-Harris Administration in 2021. It aims to address environmental and climate justice by ensuring that at least 40% of the benefits from certain federal investments are directed towards disadvantaged communities.

Disadvantaged census tracts in your community can be identified using the interactive and searchable [CEJST](#).<sup>68</sup>



## Program Goals

Goals will vary widely between programs and most will clearly state the goals of the program within a FOA. Two different programs administered by the same agency may have quite different goals. For example, the DOE's Hydroelectric Efficiency Improvement Incentives Program, which funds improvements to hydro facilities that increase efficiency by at least 3%, will be more focused on the technical merits of projects. While community benefits planning and Justice40 will still be crucial aspects of a proposal for this opportunity, applications are likely to be more heavily prioritized based on efficiency gains than other factors. In response, teams should focus on presenting projects that represent the largest efficiency gains possible. On the other hand, reviewers for the DOE's Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas will be more focused on applications that can demonstrate measurable benefits to rural communities; even the most technologically advanced clean energy projects that provide significant reliability benefits will generally be deprioritized if those benefits will not flow directly to rural and disadvantaged areas.

Most FOAs will have a program priorities and goals section that is crucial to review when considering pursuit and developing an application.



## Technical Feasibility, Innovation and Originality

Reviewers evaluate the applicant's capabilities, resources and plans to determine if the project is feasible and can be successfully executed. Ensure your application details a well-defined methodology, sound technical design and a realistic timeline. Creative and innovative projects that propose novel approaches to addressing challenges or gaps in the field often receive favorable consideration. Subject to exceptions based on specific program goals, reviewers generally assess the uniqueness of the proposed ideas and their potential to advance knowledge or practice.

# Understanding Funding Entities



## Project Team, Collaboration and Partnerships

Reviewers consider the expertise and qualification of project teams for application prioritization. The team must have the necessary skills, experience and capacity to successfully carry out the project, and their qualifications will be compared to others submitting applications under a given FOA.

Many programs also prioritize applications that highlight partnerships. Applications that demonstrate meaningful collaborations or partnerships with other organizations, stakeholders or experts may receive higher priority, as collaborations can enhance the potential for project success and impact. Reviewers typically also look for representation of disadvantaged groups in partnerships or industry partners, if the applicant is a municipality, lab or institution of higher education.



## Geographic Diversity

Federal programs will consider geographic and demographic factors when determining how they distribute funds. Larger, nationally scoped programs will often work to distribute projects regionally across the US. State governments and the federal government want to ensure that the benefits of funding programs touch various groups within their constituency and avoid the perception of playing favorites.



## Budget Justification

The budget requested should be reasonable, appropriate and justifiable to the proposed project's scope and objectives. Reviewers evaluate whether the budget aligns with the activities and outcomes described in the application.



## Overall Quality of Proposal

Reviewers assess the overall quality of the application, including the clarity of writing, organization of ideas and coherence of the proposal. A well-structured and persuasive application is more likely to be prioritized. Depending on specific program goals and criteria, many applications will benefit from emphasizing a narrative surrounding community benefits, environmental benefits and impact on disadvantaged communities, rather than simply listing technical criteria and benefits.



# Pursuing Funding Opportunities



**The strategic pursuit of funding opportunities allows communities to better plan and prepare strong applications that provide them the best chance of securing the funds they need to make an impact.**

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## General Strategy Considerations for Pursuing Funding

Communities and municipalities seeking funding must become familiar with available funding programs, channels of distribution, mechanisms, program objectives, eligibility requirements and application procedures.

While programs and processes for securing funding vary widely, key themes of successful funding pursuits should be considered regardless of the program. Taking the actions on the following pages will help a community become better prepared to respond across an array of opportunities.

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### Prepare Early and Ensure Alignment

Gathering stakeholders early and developing a cohesive community vision ensures clear alignment on community priorities, needs and goals. To better position the community for success, the funding application should reference a Community Plan that aligns with and supports the goals of the requested funding. Having a clear plan and priorities in place also drives efficiency by narrowing the funding search to only include opportunities aligned with a community's specific priorities.

Early alignment and preparation allow your organization to better assess funding opportunities and develop a well-planned approach. By starting early, applicants have ample time to understand the requirements, assemble effective teams, tailor their proposals to meet the criteria and engage relevant stakeholders for support and input.

This proactive approach ultimately ensures strategically aligned teams and stronger grant applications, maximizing the chances of success in securing funding and achieving project goals.

# Pursuing Funding Opportunities

## Identify Funding Opportunities

Understanding the full landscape of funding opportunities and what is available to various groups can be daunting. The Connected Communities initiative researched barriers to accessing funding and found that many communities face challenges in accessing clear information about funding opportunities and lack the expertise to navigate complex federal funding applications and documentation requirements. Information-related challenges make it difficult for communities to identify opportunities, plan necessary resources and pursue funding. To learn more, explore the [Connected Communities Funding Access Barriers](#)<sup>69</sup> report.

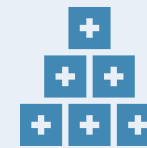
Resources that communities could use to search for and filter available funding opportunities include the [Connected Communities Funding Opportunities Database](#)<sup>70</sup> or [IRA](#)<sup>71</sup> and [BIL](#)<sup>72</sup> White House guidebooks. [Contact the Connected Communities](#) team for a tour of the database's contents and guidance on how to use the tool. The Connected Communities initiative also holds [monthly webinars](#)<sup>73</sup> that periodically provide updates on federal funding programs.



Communities can search and filter available funding opportunities using the [Connected Communities Funding Opportunities Database](#).<sup>74</sup>

## Convene Stakeholders

Defining a strategy requires input from and collaboration between community representatives and service providers. Consider what external stakeholder perspectives best represent community members' priorities to build trust and buy-in for the funding opportunity pursuit. Include stakeholders who represent the entities and service providers involved in the effort and can address their capabilities.



### Benefits

Engaging a variety of external organizations and stakeholders provides valuable insight into the community's needs and establishes an important framework for incorporating social justice and equity. Stakeholder engagement helps create community buy-in and support for associated decisions about resource allocation. Additionally, many funding opportunities require or prioritize projects that demonstrate engagement across a variety of stakeholders.



### Challenges

Common challenges in attempting to convene stakeholders include the lack of time, funding or resources available to organizations. Some organizations may have competing interests, making it necessary to find common ground that parties can agree on to gain support. Resistance to change is a normal part of stakeholder engagement, but reframing competing interests to be complementary can be an effective method of creating agreement. To overcome these challenges, it will be important to create a strong and relevant business case to convince stakeholders to get involved.



# Pursuing Funding Opportunities

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS

Each state in TVA's service region has a framework for development planning at a regional level. These agencies, which may be called Development Districts, Regional Commissions or Regional Councils, provide support to local governments, businesses and individuals. For example, the Area Development Districts (ADDs) in Kentucky serve as a hub of resources and often offer GIS services, conduct studies, generate plans and strategies, offer loans to businesses and support housing and food availability. Engaging these agencies can help applicants align funding pursuits with regional priorities and gain access to data that helps applicants tell their community's story. Regional development districts are overseen by a state-wide organization, as listed below.

### Tennessee

- [Tennessee Development District Association](#)<sup>75</sup>

### Kentucky

- [Kentucky Council of Area Development Districts](#)<sup>76</sup>

### Virginia

- [Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions](#)<sup>77</sup>

### North Carolina

- [North Carolina Association of Regional Councils of Government](#)<sup>78</sup>

### Georgia

- [Georgia Association of Regional Commissions](#)<sup>79</sup>

### Alabama

- [Alabama Association of Regional Councils](#)<sup>80</sup>

### Mississippi

- [Mississippi Association of Planning and Development Districts](#)<sup>81</sup>

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION (EDA) UNIVERSITY CENTERS

Get to know your local university! Many colleges and universities have centers that do research, offer technical support and have resources for economic and business development that may be beneficial in funding pursuits.

### Tennessee

- [The University of Tennessee's Center for Industrial Services](#)<sup>82</sup>

### Kentucky

- [University of Kentucky's Advanced Science and Technology Commercialization Center](#)<sup>83</sup>

### Virginia

- [Virginia Tech's Center for Economic and Community Engagement](#)<sup>84</sup>

### North Carolina

- [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's NC Growth](#)<sup>85</sup>
- [Western Carolina University's Rapid Center](#)<sup>86</sup>

### Georgia

- [Georgia Tech's Enterprise Innovation Institute](#)<sup>87</sup>

### Alabama

- [Auburn University's Government and Economic Development Institute](#)<sup>88</sup>

### Mississippi

- [Mississippi State University's Technology Resource Institute](#)<sup>89</sup>



# Pursuing Funding Opportunities

## EXAMPLES OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO ENGAGE AND ROLES THEY CAN PLAY

These stakeholders can support both the development and execution of a Connected Communities strategy and can play a variety of roles in funding pursuits.

### City/Town Governments

*(e.g., council representatives, IT, public safety, city planners, public works, parks and recreation, emergency services, sustainability)*

- Set priorities and a timeline for completing goals and objectives

### County Governments

- Determine strategies to meet goals and objectives

### Chambers of Commerce/Economic Development Agencies

- Identify issues and needs within the community

### K-12 Education Providers

- Offer workforce development
- Educate students and families on issues

### Healthcare Providers

- Inform community needs and challenges

### Local Transit Agencies

- Implement transportation projects
- Understand community movements and motivations
- Provide data on underrepresented communities reliant on public transportation

### Local Power and Water Companies

- Administer programs
- Identify communities that could benefit from support
- Build partnerships and engage with communities to plan and facilitate projects
- Provide access to data and information

### Local Colleges, Universities and Research Institutions

- Evaluate program success
- Provide subject matter expertise and research capabilities
- Serve as a potential source of interns to support projects

### Local Environmental Justice Groups

- Identify community issues and needs

### Community-Based Organizations

*(e.g., community development groups, non-profits serving disadvantaged populations, neighborhood associations, community action agencies)*

- Administer programs
- Partner in sharing information with constituents
- Set goals and identify action steps
- Foster partnerships with businesses
- Bring strategic partners to the table
- Share understanding of community needs

### Faith-Based Organizations

- Identify issues and needs within the community
- Incorporate information about Connected Communities solutions and opportunities into existing service offerings

### Cultural Affinity Groups, Such as those Representing Non-Native English Speakers

- Identify issues and needs within the community
- Share information about how community members can tap into resources and solutions
- Help ensure utilities and service providers are offering materials in the languages spoken by members of the community

### Major Employers

- Involved in decision-making process though public events to inform what projects will succeed
- Participate in programs
- Engage in their own planning efforts

### Small/Medium Local Businesses

- Involved in decision-making process though public events to inform what projects will succeed
- Participate in programs
- Engage in their own planning efforts

### Existing Information and Technology Providers

- Help implement program
- Bring information and ideas and success stories from other areas
- Serve as subject matter experts
- Provide technical assistance to communities

### Potential Technology Providers and Installers

*(e.g., telecom, intelligent transportation systems)*

- Help implement programs



# Pursuing Funding Opportunities

## Develop Clear Roles

The roles that stakeholders play in pursuing funding may differ, so consider what role different participants in the process are best positioned to play. For example, you may consult broadband providers and installers but ultimately not include them as decision-makers. In contrast, community-based organizations have historically been limited to consulting instead of collaborating roles, which risks not fully understanding or addressing community needs and priorities, so it may be beneficial to give them greater influence in decision-making.

## Assess Risks

Determine if your organization has the capacity to pursue a funding opportunity and understand the potential risks involved. Applications for grants and loans often create a significant administrative burden. Tasks to consider include:

- Ensuring eligibility for funding
- Gathering data from internal and external stakeholders
- Engaging stakeholders and community members
- Drafting letters of intent, concept papers and full applications
- Monitoring compliance and reporting

Potential applicants should seriously consider the risk of failing to secure funds after allocating substantial resources toward the pursuit of a competitive funding opportunity.



For more information on engaging stakeholders, developing roles and defining risks, access the [Connected Communities Guidebook](#).<sup>90</sup>

## RISK ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Regulatory**
- Are there current or anticipated regulatory barriers to pursuing this opportunity?
  - Is there political will for the pursuit?

- Financial**
- Are project economics well understood?
  - Can the community contribute the necessary cost-share for the project?

- Technical**
- Is the project technically feasible in the community given geography, project complexity, technological capabilities, etc.?

- Legal**
- Are there current or anticipated legal barriers to pursuing the opportunity?
  - Is the community eligible to receive funds?

- Schedule**
- Can the community develop an application or gather the materials necessary within the timeline of the opportunity?
  - Does the timeline for distribution of funds align with the project timeline?

- Operational**
- How will the pursuit fit into existing operations?
  - Does the community have the staff and resources necessary to apply for funding, execute the project and meet compliance and reporting requirements?
  - Is there strategic alignment between the community and the opportunity?
  - Is there leadership buy in within the organization to move the effort forward?

# Pursuing Funding Opportunities

## General Processes for Applying for Funding

While the process will vary widely depending on the funding agency or entity, the process of pursuing grants can be summarized in the following steps:





# Pursuing Funding Opportunities

## Funding Application Steps

### STEP 1

#### Identify Opportunities and Establish Strategic Alignment

Develop a vision and plan for the community and identify projects that will enhance the community's connectedness and progression within the four focus areas. The goals of the community and the activities that support these goals must guide which projects are prioritized and what funding opportunities to pursue. The time horizons of funding programs must also match a community's development timeline and ability to direct resources to funding pursuits. Once a project has strategic alignment and concrete goals, identify grant programs that match those goals. You can search for grants on official government websites, grant databases or through grants.gov, a central repository for federal grants. [The Connected Communities Funding Opportunities Database](#)<sup>91</sup> also offers information on a wide variety of grants and funding programs related to Connected Communities focus areas.

### STEP 2

#### Pre-Application Engagement and Analysis

Long before FOAs are released, project teams should begin to organize and strategize around the project or projects to include in the application. Community and partner engagement should also take place in advance of filling out an application. Consult with legal and financial teams to ensure eligibility and alignment with the financial strategy of your organization.

At this stage, the community should consider whether it has the expertise and capacity to write a grant application on its own, or if it will need to seek support from a specialized grant writer. Grant writers can contribute crucial insight into the grant writing process, craft a convincing narrative for the application, identify necessary information and structure the application most effectively. They can also contribute attention to detail and overall polish to the final submission materials above what a community may be able to achieve on its own.

### STEP 3

#### Review Eligibility Criteria

Carefully review the eligibility criteria for the grant you wish to pursue. Grants may have specific requirements regarding the type of applicant, project focus, geographic location and more. Ensure that your project and organization meet all the specified criteria. Generally, grant funding opportunity notices define eligibility by the type of entity that can receive funding, in addition to the types of projects that can be funded.

### STEP 4

#### Gather Information, Documentation and Team Members

Collect all the necessary information and documents required for the grant application. These may include project proposals, budgets, financial statements, organizational details, letters of support, resumes and any other supporting materials specified by the grant application guidelines. Gather a team with the right skill sets and ensure team members have the necessary resources and capacity to apply for the grant well in advance of application deadline.

### STEP 5

#### Develop a Project Proposal

Create a detailed project proposal that outlines the goals, objectives, methods and anticipated outcomes of your project. Clearly articulate how your project aligns with the grant program's priorities and objectives. Provide a budget that demonstrates how the grant funds will be used and managed. Federal grants, and DOE grants in particular, will require a robust [Community Benefits Plan](#)<sup>92</sup> in addition to a plan that demonstrates alignment with the Justice40 Initiative.



#### Continue to the next page for steps 6-10.

NOTE: You must complete steps 1-5 before applying.

# Pursuing Funding Opportunities

## Funding Application Steps (CONTINUED)



### STOP! You must complete steps 1-5 before applying.

Keep in mind that application due dates might be only weeks after a FOA. To respond within the grant timeline, the pre-application process must start months in advance. Without this preparation, your organization risks wasting time and resources building an application that has a low probability of securing funding.

#### STEP 6

### Complete the Application

Fill out the grant application form, which may be available online or in a downloadable format. Pay close attention to the instructions and provide all the requested information accurately. Some grant applications may require you to submit additional documents via mail or email, such as a Budget Justification Form. An example of a Budget Justification Form from the DOE's GRIP Program can be downloaded from the "Documentation" panel of the [FedConnect listing](#).<sup>93</sup>

#### STEP 7

### Review and Submission

Review your grant application thoroughly to ensure all the necessary information is included and all questions are answered. Seek feedback from colleagues or experts, if possible. Once you are confident in your application, submit it within the specified deadline. Late applications are typically not accepted.

#### STEP 8

### Evaluation and Selection

After the application deadline, the granting agency will review all submitted applications. The evaluation process may involve multiple stages, including an initial review for eligibility, a peer review by experts in the field and an assessment of the proposed project's merit and feasibility. The final selection is based on the evaluation results and the available funding.

#### STEP 9

### Award Notification

If your grant application is successful, you will receive a notification informing you of the award. The notification will include details such as the amount of funding, any conditions or reporting requirements and the duration of the grant. In the case your application is not selected, you may receive a rejection notice with feedback on why your proposal was not funded.

#### STEP 10

### Reporting and Compliance

Most grants will require the awardee to submit documentation throughout the project's lifecycle demonstrating compliance with the requirements outlined in the grant application. This may include a variety of data surrounding the impacts of the project, community engagement and benefits, labor data and other financial metrics. For additional information on the pursuit process for loans, tax credits and rebates, see the [appendix](#).





# Pursuing Funding Opportunities



## Build Your Team

As mentioned previously, larger-scale funding pursuits will require investment and a dedicated internal team. Your community will need to ensure the following elements are in place for a successful application:



**Strategic Leads,  
Advisors and  
Executive Buy-In**



**Project Manager /  
Pursuit Lead**



**Pursuit Team /  
Technical Team**



**Grant Writers**



# Pursuing Funding Opportunities



## Strategic Leads, Advisors and Executive Buy-In

Before organizing a funding pursuit, strategic motivation is often required to align resources. Prioritize engaging these stakeholders several months in advance to ensure as much time as possible for teams to respond to funding opportunities. Identify potential funding opportunities and communicate the benefits to leadership to obtain buy-in and strategic alignment as early as possible.



## Project Manager / Pursuit Lead

Funding pursuits can be complex. Many federal grants have extensive requirements to guide recipients in submitting an application and using funds. The complexity of the process proves to be a challenge for some communities, as data, insights and staff time must be pulled in from various groups in the organization. This complexity typically requires a dedicated project manager or pursuit lead who can ensure effective coordination.



## Pursuit Team / Technical Team

Assemble a team that can accomplish the following:

- Engage stakeholders and manage relationships
- Understand and answer questions about the technical aspects of the project
- Align financial information and create budgets
- Understand the nuances of the funding opportunity requirements

The staff within an organization charged with helping pursue funding often must continue their day-to-day job functions, as well; therefore, it can be difficult to organize the amount of staff time required for funding pursuits. A team should be assembled, briefed, engaged and incentivized to assist with funding pursuits long before a funding opportunity is announced.



## Grant Writers

In the [Connected Communities Funding Access Barriers](#)<sup>94</sup> report, communities note that they do not have enough staff with the right expertise to apply for grants. Communities that lack dedicated staff with the right knowledge and skill set to understand the various requirements of grants and funding are unable to pursue opportunities. To fill this gap, communities need to employ individuals with experience writing grants and completing applications with short timeframes and fast-approaching deadlines. To identify the right grant writer for your organization:

- Seek recommendations from peers in the region or TVA and utilize your network.
- Search online databases and directories such as LinkedIn or the [Grant Professionals Association website](#).<sup>95</sup>
- Identify grant writers who have experience in the field, industry or type of grant that you are pursuing and are knowledgeable about the process. A skilled grant writer should be familiar with federal, state or local entities that offer funding relevant to your communities' goals.
- Review the grant writer's portfolio and record of success and identify examples of applications that they have worked on that are similar in scope to your project.
- Consider ethical practices and verify that there are no conflicts of interest at play.
- Have a transparent discussion of fee structures, your community's budget and the goals of the project.
- Request a sample work or proposal of how they would approach your application.



# Conclusion

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## Connect With Us

We hope your community benefits from the guidance and resources provided in this funding guide. Going forward, our team would love to learn about your community's funding pursuits, what is working well and what challenges you are facing. TVA may be able to assist your community in pursuing grant writing and resources for applications.



For questions or assistance, contact the Connected Communities team at [connectedcommunities@tva.gov](mailto:connectedcommunities@tva.gov) or representatives from the Commercial Energy Solutions Business and Industry group at [rgsinghal@tva.gov](mailto:rgsinghal@tva.gov).





## Additional Federal Funding Programs

### Additional USDA Funding Programs

- [Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program](#)<sup>96</sup> provides funding for clean and reliable drinking water systems, sanitary sewage disposal, sanitary solid waste disposal and stormwater drainage to households and businesses in eligible rural areas.
- [Value-Added Producer Grants](#)<sup>97</sup> provide funding to agricultural producers in support of value-added agricultural products to generate new products, create and expand marketing opportunities and increase producer income.
- Rural housing programs such as [the Single Family Housing Direct Loans](#),<sup>98</sup> [Single Family Housing Guaranteed Loans program](#)<sup>99</sup> and [Multi-Family Housing Programs](#)<sup>100</sup> provide financial assistance for affordable housing projects.
- [Community Connect Grants](#)<sup>101</sup> provide funds for broadband access in unserved and underserved rural areas.
- [Local Food Promotion Program](#)<sup>102</sup> offers grants for local and regional food business enterprises, including food hubs, aggregation and processing facilities and direct-to-consumer markets.
- [Rural Energy for America Program \(REAP\)](#)<sup>103</sup> provides funding to complete energy audits, provide renewable energy development assistance, make energy efficiency improvements and install renewable energy systems.

### Additional Federal Loan Programs

- [Economic Development Administration \(EDA\) Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Program](#)<sup>104</sup> provides loans to support public works and economic development projects that aim to create jobs, attract private investment and foster long-term economic growth in distressed communities.
- [DOT Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act \(TIFIA\) Program](#)<sup>105</sup> offers credit assistance, including direct loans, to finance significant transportation infrastructure projects such as highways, bridges and public transit systems.
- [EPA Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act \(WIFIA\) Program](#)<sup>106</sup> provides low-cost loans and guarantees to support eligible water infrastructure projects, including drinking water and wastewater treatment facilities.
- [HUD CDBG Entitlement Program](#)<sup>107</sup> allows entitlement communities to use a portion of their CDBG funds for loans, grants or other forms of assistance to businesses for economic development purposes, job creation or retention activities.
- [Federal Transit Administration \(FTA\) Grants and Loans](#)<sup>108</sup> offer funding to local governments and transit agencies for public transportation projects, including the purchase of buses and the construction or improvement of transit facilities.
- [DOE State Energy Program \(SEP\)](#)<sup>109</sup> provides formula grants to states and territories, which may be used to support energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Some states may choose to offer loans using these funds.
- [NTIA BIP](#)<sup>110</sup> provides grants and loans to expand broadband infrastructure and improve digital connectivity in underserved and unserved areas.
- [US Small Business Administration \(SBA\) 504 Loan Program](#)<sup>111</sup> offers long-term, fixed-rate loans for the acquisition or modernization of major fixed assets—such as land, buildings or equipment—to promote small business growth and job creation.



## General Processes for Applying to Different Types of Funding Opportunities

### Applying for Loans

#### STEP 1

#### Research and Identify Eligible Programs

Start by researching state and federal loan programs that are relevant to your needs. Different programs may offer loans for various purposes, such as education, small business, housing, agriculture and more. The [Connected Communities Funding Opportunities Database](#)<sup>112</sup> also offers information on a wide variety of grants and funding programs related to Connected Communities focus areas. Identify programs that align with your financial goals and needs. Make sure you meet the eligibility criteria for the programs you are interested in.

#### STEP 2

#### Pre-Application Engagement and Analysis

Long before FOAs are released, project teams should begin to organize and strategize around the project or projects to include in the application. Community and partner engagement should also be initiated in advance. Consult with legal and financial teams to ensure eligibility and alignment with the financial strategy of your organization.

#### STEP 3

#### Gather Required Documentation

Each loan program will have specific documentation requirements. Common documents may include identification, financial statements, business plans (for business loans), tax returns, credit history and other relevant information.

#### STEP 4

#### Develop a Project Proposal

Create a detailed project proposal that outlines the goals, objectives, methods and anticipated outcomes of your project. Clearly articulate how your project aligns with the loan program's priorities and objectives. Provide a budget that demonstrates how the loan funds will be used and managed.

#### STEP 5

#### Review Loan Program Timelines, Complete Application

Ensure that the loan terms and loan application timelines match with your project, and confirm the ability of the project team to put forward an application before the deadline. Obtain the application forms for the specific loan program you are interested in. These forms can usually be found on the program's official website or by contacting the relevant agency. Carefully complete the application forms, providing accurate and complete information. Be thorough in your responses, ensure that you meet all requirements and craft a narrative around the benefits that your project provides.

#### STEP 6

#### Submit the Application

Follow the instructions provided in the application package for submitting your application. This will often involve submitting the forms online through a portal but could also entail mailing physical copies to the appropriate address. Be aware of application deadlines and submission requirements. Late or incomplete applications may not be considered.

#### STEP 7

#### Review and Evaluation

After submitting your application, it will be reviewed by the relevant agency. The agency's reviewers will assess your application based on the program's criteria and priorities. Depending on the program, there may be a review panel or committee that evaluates applications and makes funding decisions.

#### STEP 8

#### Notification of Decision

Once the review process is complete, you will be notified of the decision regarding your loan application. This notification may include information about loan approval, terms, interest rates and the amount of funding awarded.

#### STEP 9

#### Acceptance and Disbursement

If your loan application is approved, you will typically need to formally accept the loan offer and agree to the terms and conditions. After accepting the loan, the disbursement process will begin. Funds will be transferred to your designated bank account or used as intended (e.g., for education expenses, business development).

#### STEP 10

#### Repayment

Loans are generally expected to be repaid according to the terms specified in the loan agreement. Repayment terms, interest rates and schedules will vary based on the program and loan type. It is crucial to understand your repayment obligations and make timely payments to avoid penalties or negative impacts on your credit.

## Applying for Tax Credits & Rebates

### STEP 1

#### Identify Eligible Tax Credit Programs

Research and identify state or federal tax credit programs that are relevant to your circumstances or activities. Each program will have specific eligibility criteria and requirements. Tax credits can be complex, and the application process may vary based on the specific program. If you are unsure about any aspect of the process, consider consulting with tax professionals, accountants or legal experts who have experience with tax credit programs. It may also be crucial to engage with tax professionals to ensure that your organization is eligible for tax credits and that they are a good fit for your tax situation.

### STEP 2

#### Review Tax Credit Program Timelines and Bonus Requirements

Ensure that the credit term length and timelines match with your project's and that the project will be in service before applicable phase-out dates. Regarding federal tax credits, review various bonuses for low-income communities, energy communities, wages and apprenticeship and domestic content. Also, assess the applicability of any direct pay or transferability provisions to your project or tax situation.

Note: Municipalities and other tax-exempt entities can capture the value of tax credits through direct pay, however, they must meet domestic content requirements to receive any payments.

### STEP 3

#### Gather Required Documentation

Determine the documentation and information you need to provide to demonstrate your eligibility for the tax credit. This may include financial records, project plans, proof of expenditures and other supporting documentation.

### STEP 6

#### Notification of Approval

Once your application is reviewed and approved, you will receive notification of your eligibility for the tax credit. This notification will outline the terms and conditions of the credit.

### STEP 7

#### Utilize and Claim the Credit

Depending on the program, you may need to take specific actions to utilize the tax credit. For example, if you are claiming a tax credit for renewable energy investments, you might need to install the qualifying equipment and retain documentation of the expenditures. When it is time to file your tax return, you will need to claim the tax credit by filling out the appropriate tax forms or schedules. Follow the instructions provided by the tax authorities to accurately claim the credit.

### STEP 4

#### Develop Complete and Submit the Application

Some tax credits will require an application process similar to that of a grant. Obtain the application forms for the specific tax credit program you are interested in. These forms may be available on the program's official website or through the relevant government agency. Fill out the application forms accurately and provide all necessary information. Submit your completed application to the appropriate government agency or department. Depending on the program, you may need to submit the application online, by mail or in person.

### STEP 5

#### Application Review and Evaluation

If the credit requires an application, the government agency will review your application to ensure that you meet the eligibility criteria and have provided all required documentation. Some tax credit programs may involve a more detailed review process, which could include audits or site visits to verify the information provided.



#### Maintain Documentation

It is important to retain all relevant documentation and records related to your eligibility for the tax credit. These documents may be requested for verification purposes in the future.



## Resources

The following resources may be instrumental in community planning, resource allocation and funding pursuits:

### Connected Communities Resources

- [Connected Communities Funding Access Barriers](#)<sup>113</sup> report
- [Connected Communities Funding Opportunities Database](#)<sup>114</sup>
- [Contact Connected Communities](#) for a tour of the Funding Opportunities Database's contents and guidance on how to use the tool
- Connected Communities [monthly federal funding webinars](#)<sup>115</sup> focused on the BIL and IRA

### Key Resources, Guidance, Tools and Examples

- [White House guidance on Elective Pay](#)<sup>116</sup> (tax credits for non-tax paying entities)
- [IRA](#)<sup>117</sup> and [BIL](#)<sup>118</sup> White House guidebooks
- [CEJST](#)<sup>119</sup> for identifying Disadvantaged Communities
- Example of a [Budget Justification Form](#)<sup>120</sup> from DOE's GRIP Program (Navigate to 'Budget Justification Workbook' on the 'Documentation' panel)
- [Community Benefits Plan](#)<sup>121</sup> guidance from DOE

### Key Funding Opportunity Exchanges and Webpages

- DOE Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy [Exchange](#)<sup>122</sup>
- Sign up for DOE [email updates](#)<sup>123</sup> by office
- EPA [funding announcements](#)<sup>124</sup> from BIL and IRA
- USDA [FOAs](#)<sup>125</sup> (sign up for email updates at the bottom of the page)
- IRS [IRA landing page](#)<sup>126</sup> for tax credit guidance
- White House [IRA Guidebook](#)<sup>127</sup> (last updated August 2023)
- White House [BIL Guidebook](#)<sup>128</sup> (last updated July 2023)

## Acronyms

<b>ACP</b>	Affordable Connectivity Program	<b>GIS</b>	Geographic Information Systems
<b>ADD</b>	Area Development District	<b>GRIP</b>	Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnership
<b>ARC</b>	Appalachian Regional Commission	<b>HUD</b>	Department of Housing and Urban Development
<b>BEAD</b>	Broadband Equity Access and Deployment	<b>IRA</b>	Inflation Reduction Act
<b>BIL</b>	Bipartisan Infrastructure Law	<b>IRS</b>	Internal Revenue Service
<b>BIP</b>	Broadband Infrastructure Program	<b>NCDIT</b>	North Carolina Department of Information Technology
<b>CAP</b>	Capital Improvement Revolving	<b>NOFO</b>	Notice of Funding Opportunity
<b>CDBG</b>	Community Development Block Grant	<b>NTIA</b>	National Telecommunications and Information Administration
<b>CEJST</b>	Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool	<b>PACE</b>	Powering Affordable Clean Energy
<b>CEQ</b>	Council on Environmental Quality	<b>RBDG</b>	Rural Business Development Grants
<b>CFP</b>	Community Facilities Program	<b>REAP</b>	Rural Energy for American Program
<b>CMC</b>	Connecting Minority Communities	<b>RFI</b>	Request for Information
<b>CMPDD</b>	Central Mississippi Planning and Development District	<b>RUS</b>	Rural Utilities Service
<b>CWSRF</b>	Clean Water State Revolving Fund	<b>SBA</b>	Small Business Administration
<b>DOC</b>	Department of Commerce	<b>SEP</b>	State Energy Program
<b>DOE</b>	Department of Energy	<b>SLIGP</b>	State and Local Implementation Grant Program
<b>DOT</b>	Department of Transportation	<b>TDEC</b>	Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation
<b>DRA</b>	Delta Regional Authority	<b>TDOE</b>	Tennessee Department of Education
<b>EDA</b>	Economic Development Administration	<b>TIFIA</b>	Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act Program
<b>EESI</b>	Energy Efficient Schools Initiative	<b>USDA</b>	United States Department of Agriculture
<b>EPA</b>	Environmental Protection Agency	<b>WIFIA</b>	Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act
<b>EV</b>	Electric Vehicle		
<b>FCC</b>	Federal Communications Commission		
<b>FOA</b>	Funding Opportunity Announcement		
<b>FTA</b>	Federal Transit Administration		



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## Types of Funding Opportunities

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CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

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