



# Community Resilience Funding Guidance Series: Setting Funders up for Impact

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The New England Environmental Finance Center (New England EFC) and Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP), with support from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MaineDEP) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 1, held two pilot virtual workshops in 2020 focused on helping towns and cities craft successful proposals toward sustainable financing of climate resilience and stormwater-related projects. The first workshop, “Navigating Grant Programs,” was held on August 19, 2020, and the second workshop, “Funding Community Resilience: Setting Your Community Up for Success,” followed on October 16, 2020. Workshop materials can be found on both the [New England EFC](#) and [CBEP](#) websites. This document also incorporates insights from a similar workshop in Rhode Island held by the Southeast New England Program Network, a project of the New England EFC, where CBEP and MaineDEP participated.

Many observations and ideas surfaced during these workshops. The aim of this guidance series is to assemble the wisdom and expertise of local municipal officials on the challenges and opportunities to funding community resilience initiatives. Guidance is provided in the form of various best practices that represent where funders might pursue actions in response to identified gaps. Minimal editing has been done to the following content generated by workshop participants and does not necessarily constitute the opinions of the organizing partners. Any bold or underline formatting has been added to highlight key concepts.

**This document is intended for fund managers and grant makers and synthesizes workshop feedback relevant to that audience.** Municipal officials should refer to the companion document in this [Community Resilience Funding Guidance Series: Setting Municipalities up for Success](#).

## Summary of Guidance for Fund Managers and Grant Makers

- Community challenges with capacity
- Clear and transparent application process
- State agency funding programs and other grant maker coordination
- Feedback from registrants on specific resources

The authors envision this guidance series as a living document and will continue to revise and update with additional content as available and feasible. **Your contributions are encouraged!**

This document is for further co-development. Please send edits and comments to Victoria Boundy, [victoria.boundy@maine.edu](mailto:victoria.boundy@maine.edu); Martha Sheils, [martha.sheils@maine.edu](mailto:martha.sheils@maine.edu); and Nathan Robbins [nathan.p.robbins@maine.gov](mailto:nathan.p.robbins@maine.gov).



## Guidance for Fund Managers and Grant Makers

Included here are a number of reported challenges and needs of municipal officials to address community resilience, and some recommendations of actions that funders can take to tailor their programs - from lack of capacity to develop plans and understand a longer-term vision, to specific projects to implement. These challenges are important for funders to be aware of, and to formulate responses for municipalities in these areas. The information contained is focused on the application process, providing greater communication with applicants and awardees, encouraging collaboration, supporting community dialogue and resilience projects, and beginning greater cross-funding program coordination to meet community needs for resilience funding.

### Community challenges with capacity

Communities face a number of challenges when it comes to their capacity and their support to pursue community resilience projects.

- There will be municipal staff and volunteer turnover. **Develop and maintain your relationships** and build strong communication channels with municipalities.
- Consider your submission schedule. Will it **be in sync with the municipal budget process**? Will the required match for a successful application have to be approved in the following fiscal year's budget?
  - Grants that require a match are hard to plan for with tight budgets. **There isn't a "set aside" in a municipal budget for match.** The effort to develop a grant proposal, without a guarantee of award, is a big risk without having a predetermined match by the municipality.
  - Point out opportunities to include outside **partners on a project to help with match requirements.**
- Look for opportunities to remove obstacles, for example:
  - A coastal town has voted to develop a climate action plan, but hasn't voted on funds to pay for someone who can actually draft the plan. **Does your organization or partner organizations have someone on staff who could help draft the plan, or could your organization fund that position for the town?**
  - Perhaps your organization has **GIS and grant-writing know-how** to offer towns that lack that expertise.
- **Be a resource/referral of intern programs** to help towns with capacity challenges.
- Provide **"third party" assistance to prepare grant applications**. Create "vetted" list of:
  - Consultants who can help municipalities and/or organizations with preparing grant applications & with permitting restoration projects;



- Attorneys who can help with legal issues encountered in implementing restoration projects (land ownership and permitting issues cited).
- Expand on **capacity-building videos** (e.g. [Providing Resilience Education for Planning in Rhode Island](#) PREP-RI videos) and get a dialogue around people watching them.
- Municipal planning horizons are often limited to the **two-year political cycle**, so work to educate city councils and selectboards on big-picture thinking and broader regional or watershed needs.
- **Educate town officials (elected, appointed, and department heads)** to establish cross-departmental communication regarding stormwater, ecological restoration, and climate resilience objectives and to build recognition and understanding of sustainable revenue opportunities.
- Share information often with **elected leaders** on the need to build a sustained commitment to community resilience.
- Recognize the **tension between short- and long-term needs**. Climate resilience may seem like a long-term need, and town attention is often on the short term. Help municipalities find a balance.
- Encourage **establishment of long-term goals and watershed/regional goals**, objectives and plans to build support and span across political cycles;
- Help municipalities incorporate those into **multi-year implementation plans**, such five-year rolling capital improvement plans.

## Clear and transparent application process

- **Make sure your potential applicants know** about the funding opportunities you offer. Use multiple outreach and distribution channels: social media, listserv announcements, etc.
  - **Use outreach methods that will reach small and large municipalities**, and include direct in-person outreach as much as possible.
  - Offer to **give a brief evaluation of a project's viability** via a phone call or other informal exchange in advance of the application period.
- **Offer workshops** for municipalities to provide clear guidance about what types of projects you want to fund. Help your potential grantees determine their likelihood of securing funding from you. (A ready model is the [Municipal Stream Crossing Upgrade Grant Program](#) workshops run by MaineDEP. Towns are provided with minute detail of what the program is looking for in the application, as well as practical and useful advice of what to put into proposals.)
- **Point out that if project goals were expanded**, it might be possible to bring in other partners and secure funding from other sources.



- **Assist in deciphering grant RFPs** – who is eligible? What types of projects are eligible? Can grant funds be used to achieve compliance with regulatory requirements (e.g. MS4 permits)? Etc.
- Assist in framing proposals to **help applicants better understand the process** from planning & conceptual design to final design & permitting to construction/implementation, and to align proposals with grants that are available for that type of project (and phase of project).
- **Keep your program application requirements consistent** from year to year.
- Consider your program's reach. Is it so targeted that it unduly limits the good you can do? If your grant program's requirements are broadly written, towns will be able to use your funds to take care of the projects that truly should be done first, rather than the projects for which they can find funding. Consider **writing requirements that would encourage more successful high-priority projects.**
- Provide **clear and straightforward instructions**, including:
  - Deadlines
  - Match requirements
  - Legal notice requirements
  - Your definition of a successful project
  - Scoring criteria (percentage/points per category)
  - Requirements checklist
  - Eligibility requirements! (Both what is eligible and examples of what is not, particularly for common issues with proposals containing parts of projects that cannot be funded – e.g. land acquisition and moreover where parcels are owned or not owned by the applicant).
- **Make your application easy to complete** and offer it in different formats:
  - use fillable documents or software;
  - consider software compatibility issues;
  - provide alternative submittal methods for different audiences (online vs. paper).
- **Indicate how much time your application will take and the kind of information that's required**, so that potential grantees can assess whether it's something they can handle. They have to weigh that effort and the probability of getting the grant against other funding opportunities.
- Point out where **state assessments or content generated by partners could be used** to fulfill application requirements.
- **Provide case studies of successful projects:** what do innovative projects look like?
- **Offer ongoing opportunities for funders and grantees to hear from one another** to open lines of communication on grant substance and process; important to get feedback on unsuccessful grant applications.



- **Give unsuccessful applicants feedback** so that their next proposal is more likely to be funded (and so that they don't give up!).
- **Maintain communication** with successful applicants. Let them know that project extensions are available and that it's better to do the project right even if one must ask for extra time.

## State agency funding program and other grant maker coordination

- **Consider working with other agencies to develop and use one application form that can be submitted to one entity to** evaluate the need against existing funding opportunities from multiple sources.
- **Partner with other major funders to offer a common application form**, pre-populated with general information that can be used for multiple applications, and where specific individual program requirements and project proposals for those programs can be attached.
- Culverts and causeways, shoreline development, flooding mitigation, habitat protection, and wildlife protection—a given project might touch on all of these issues or more. It would be highly beneficial for the **private funding and public regulatory entities that govern climate resilience projects to communicate and coordinate with each other**; they certainly shouldn't contradict one another.
- Consider **providing a circuit rider for a given group of communities**; someone who can evaluate multiple communities' needs with available grant programs and then help the towns prepare their applications.
- Consider **providing a technical expert using the circuit-rider concept** to help towns establish best practices for common problems, such as the size of culverts or height/drainage of roads.
- **Encourage collaboration** between partners in the grant application process, foster relationships to work together to optimize outcomes, recognize mutual responsibility for success.
- Encourage municipalities to **welcome the help of land trusts and other NGOs**; let them take the lead in projects that ultimately will benefit the municipality.
- **Act as convener to encourage partnerships between municipalities** to address common problems (apply for grants jointly as opposed to competing for grants); convene group meetings as often as possible.
- Consider **using criteria that encourages shared effort**. Reward multi-community applications, or make multi-community applications a requirement.
- Consider **writing ethics, equity, and fairness factors into your program criteria**.
- Private property owners, particularly in small towns, may resist the cost of developing their properties in a sustainable fashion. Is there an opportunity to **provide funding so that development occurs in the least harmful way?**



- Assist municipalities in **tying stormwater and ecological restoration projects with hazard mitigation** and other relevant plans;
- Emphasize water quality on **equal footing** with water quantity.
- Recognize that some projects will take **sustained effort over several years**, and **build an invitation** for that into your process.
- **Assist in coordinating with state agencies** having significant role in stormwater and/or other restoration initiatives (e.g. speak with transportation departments).

## Feedback on specific resources

- A tool that we used was developed by the Maine Department of Conservation, Agriculture and Forestry – the [Maine Flood Resilience Checklist](#). Many of the questions didn't apply to us but we used that in our task force in order to prioritize activities and priorities for funding in the community. Good way of pulling all the issues together. The homework that we had to do to gather the background information was useful for planning. Tailor it more toward small and inland communities.
  - In some communities the tool hasn't worked well because of a **lack of facilitation and a good understanding of the process** – question of capacity and expertise in the community willing to put in that effort.
  - **Regional planners have been trained to facilitate** workshops; tap into them for that.
  - Other states like **MA and RI all have their own versions** of that checklist – capacity is always an issue. [EPA has one for VT.](#)
- **Often, communities turn to state agencies for grants:** Maine Coastal Program at the Department of Marine Resources, Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) and MaineDEP. Water bond process was very straight forward.
- **MaineDOT** attempts to provide a simple process and does a phone call or site visit up front.
- **MaineDOT works to accommodate smaller towns** that may not have the funding resources of a larger municipality.
  - There are often issues with cost overruns
  - Looking for shovel-ready projects, but sometimes bids come in at 200%
  - It sometimes helps to combine funding sources
  - Try to be aggressive with getting projects out and getting things built
- **MaineDOT and Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife are typically willing to look at grants early** to provide initial feedback. Also willing to provide feedback on grants that weren't awarded.
- Some **projects may be in a long queue** for 2-3 years.