



Community Resilience Funding Guidance Series: Setting Municipalities up for Success

May 2021

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 communities 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 municipal officials and synthesizes workshop feedback relevant to that audience. Fund managers and grant makers should refer to the companion document in this [Community Resilience Funding Guidance Series: Setting Funders up for Impact](#).

Summary of Guidance for Municipal Officials

- Establish a team and build capacity
- Focus on community outreach and build local support
- Self-reliant financing: Assess your needs with climate resilience in mind
- Find funding sources
- Share resources: Take a regional approach

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; Martha Sheils, martha.sheils@maine.edu; and Nathan Robbins nathan.p.robbins@maine.gov.



Guidance for Municipal Officials

Included here are a number of reported challenges, needs and identified actions for municipal officials to address community resilience - from developing plans and understanding a longer-term vision, to implementing specific projects. The information in this document is focused on how to build a team, how to engage with community members on plans and projects, how to become more self-reliant for financing, and how to access outside funding sources.

Establish a team and build capacity

Project teams with knowledge of the funding and fiscal landscape will be better prepared to develop and implement a resilience strategy.

- **Build knowledge longevity:** Tackle the challenges of staff turnover at the municipal level and the lack of continuity from year to year (changing project managers, changing leadership priorities).
- Capitalize on your **town staff and officials' in-house knowledge**. Bring information about grant opportunities to interdepartmental meetings.
- Leverage resources within your **town's staff and boards to provide project assistance** – e.g. engineer for design, conservation commission for input, intern to assist with application drafting, etc.
- Find out whether you have **hidden talents on staff**. Can the economic development and engineering departments in your city help write grant proposals?
- **Establish funding for professional development** programs to teach new staff and elected leaders about the basics of stormwater and climate resilience.
- Do not let negative feedback from municipal staff rattle you; stick with trying to educate councilors and selectboards about these topics.
- **Attend municipal association training(s)**. For example, through Casco Bay Coastal Academy and the Maine Municipal Association (MMA). Topics - comparison of town capital improvement plan projects to comprehensive plan.

Focus on community and build local support

An engaged community can provide the public incentive leaders need to justify the cost of building climate resilience into the town budget. Educate your fellow leaders, identify those with expertise, and tap into the existing knowledge base. Town leaders and staff need to be educated, too. If everyone begins to look at climate resilience as a component of everything they do, undiscovered expertise and previously unrecognized opportunities for cross-collaboration may be found.



- Start early to research opportunities, gain community buy-in, and **locate potential project partners**.
- **Meet with department of public works (DPW) staff** on climate issues and the importance of planning beyond 3-5 years.
- Build the commitment to climate resilience at a young age. **Work with your schools** to build these issues into the curriculum. Get schools involved with stormwater - they own a lot of land and over 50% of the municipal budget goes to schools.
- Build relationships with and leverage the work of **existing groups in the community** to help raise awareness.
- **Recruit volunteers** from local land trusts.
- Help **residents and business owners** think about resilience in every project they tackle.
- **Educate private landowners**. If they will be affected by a proposed project, do the upfront work to make sure they understand the project's goal. Address liability concerns they may have about private roadways (legal road associations can be a solution).
- **Invite outside experts** to share their knowledge with town leaders at their meetings.
- **Share the knowledge wherever leaders gather**--council of governments/regional planning agency meetings, municipal association meetings, conservation committee meetings, school board meetings. Encourage residents to attend and speak at these same local meetings (use public comment time).
- **Educate community leaders** (e.g. selectboard/council, committees, department heads, within key stakeholder organizations) involved in budget considerations and determinations on the full benefits of resilience projects so that they are more likely to retain the funding for them, when other projects are considered that compete for the same dollars.
- Town staff should **share information often with elected leaders** about the need to build commitment for town-wide climate resilience projects.
- **Recognize that terms of office are often short**. It's important for community leaders to know that their actions will have positive effects for years to come.
- Work with your selectboard, finance committee, city council and city managers so the projects are included in your **community's final budget approval process**.
- Every upgrade, every property improvement is an opportunity to get the community members thinking about resilience. **Promote project successes to the public so they see the results** of their investments.



Self-reliant financing: Assess your needs with climate resilience in mind

It's important to prioritize actions according to needs and budgets. Incorporate "no regrets" actions into routine municipal improvements such as road repair with stormwater upgrades, including green infrastructure and culvert replacements. Aim for holistic planning.

- Consider asking elected officials or town staff to **sign an agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU)** to continue a long-term commitment to discuss and work on stormwater and climate resilience issues.
- Include \$3-5,000 in **annual budgets for consulting support** to define projects and provide budget cost estimates.
- Conduct **preliminary planning**: Describe the project at the conceptual level, identify the barriers to moving it forward and define the costs and the public benefits.
- **Identify areas most at risk** for climate-related damage and move them to the top of the list for funding and implementation.
- **Evaluate open space areas** to leverage long-range planning. Manage your town's assets, such as open spaces and forest lands (**these assets are green infrastructure**), to help mitigate climate change and stormwater impacts.
- Include **climate resilience sections in your comprehensive plan**, either as a separate chapter or integrated in multiple chapters, and connect that with your capital improvement plan.
- Consider your town's funds. **Allocate dedicated funds** in your capital improvement plan for resilience projects.
- Develop **5-year capital improvement plans or master plans that phase projects over time** to optimize environmental outcomes (e.g. reduced flooding, improved habitat, culvert replacement).
- Build climate resilience into your **capital improvement plan**. One town recently completed a master plan for the downtown. The plan contains regular capital improvement work, but there is an element of climate resilience (i.e. raising the road, enhancing drains, considering sea levels) within the projects. Funding matches are coming from the town's normal sidewalk and road work reserves.
- Include **green infrastructure and natural solutions in your hazard mitigation plan** to build climate resilience into the work that already is scheduled to be done. [Note green/natural solutions may include permeable pavement, community forests, wetlands, or rain gardens.]
- Consider **voluntary buy-outs of flood-prone properties** like in Cranston, Rhode Island.



Find funding sources

It is important to pick the right one(s) and get the application in on time.

- **Develop boilerplate language** in advance for use in your town's grant applications.
- Identify potential projects that **fit existing grant programs**.
- Identify potential projects for which **grant sources need to be found**.
- Identify potential projects that have **more than one grant source**.
- **Meet with grant program managers** ahead of the grant proposal solicitation process to share ideas and conduct preliminary reviews of candidate projects (this may need to be an ongoing dialogue).
 - **MaineDEP** maintains a [Grants & Loans page](#) on their website and encourages municipalities to reach out for support with funding searches and applications.
 - **MaineDOT** has [Programs and Grants](#) that work to **accommodate smaller towns** that may not have the funding resources of a larger municipality (see [current MaineDOT grants](#)).
- Consider **broadening a given project** to expand the number of potential grant sources.
- Consider broadening a given project to incorporate non-governmental partners that could provide **matching funds**.
- Leverage partnerships with other organizations within the town—look for partners. **Local land trusts and other non-profits** may be willing to lend their grant application acumen and partner with your town toward a successful joint project. They may also be able to provide staff or volunteers for the project.
- Consider partnering with your local **soil & water conservation district**. They can serve as grantee, while the municipality does the technical work. Or the other way around where the soil & water conservation district provides technical work while the municipality is the grantee.

Share resources – take a regional approach

Look for towns that share your challenges and partner with them.

- Consider **appointing a facilitator to coordinate the regional network**-- to ensure it meets and connects regularly, and to provide a framework to work within.
- The “region” in a regional approach can be of different types—**from one watershed, to coastal towns with similar problems**—but regardless of the type, success requires coordination and buy-in from citizens and their leaders across the area, a coalition of the concerned.
- Getting buy-in within your own town is challenging; it can be more so with a group of towns. So **make sure your group's goals are specific and stay focused** on those clear objectives.

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- Towns and their leaders naturally want to maintain authority over what goes on within their boundaries. **Be aware and respectful** of that need as you work together.
- Towns and their leaders naturally don't want to pay to maintain equipment that other towns are going to use. Look for ways to **formalize the sharing process** and be fair in the give and take that comes with a joint project.
- Look for ways to **build in financial incentives**. If, at the end of the year, a project can help a town wind up with a surplus that can be shared, that will build buy-in for the next shared projects.
- Be aware that **funders want their money to go as far as possible**. By joining together for a given project, you can extend the reach of the funder's success and better compete with larger communities also seeking that funding.
- The **Southern Maine Planning & Development Commission (SMPDC)** is helping towns work together. Six towns have hired a sustainability coordinator that is employed by SMPDC. Though that only gives each town one-sixth of a full-time staffer, that's enough to make a positive difference.
- In **Hancock County**, a group has been meeting regularly to discuss public health, environmental issues, public services, fire prevention, and the need for broadband. If there's a mutual need, mutual solutions can happen. Clusters of five to 10 towns with a common interest work well (as opposed to an entire county organization).