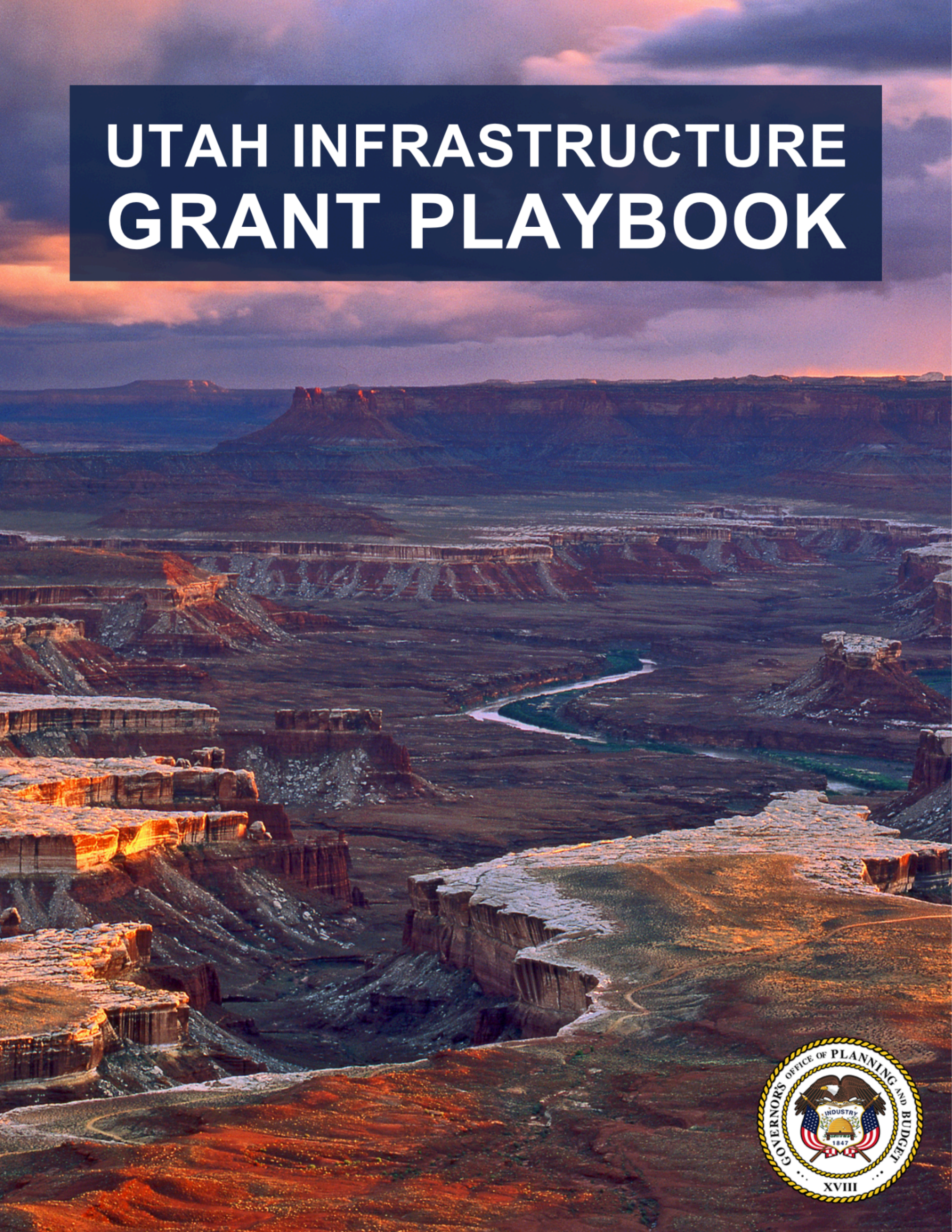
UTAH INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT PLAYBOOK



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Utah Infrastructure Grant Playbook. Whether you are a state agency, local government, institution of higher education, or other stakeholder, we hope that this guide will be a valuable resource for all involved to collectively elevate Utah's infrastructure.

The current federal funds landscape is defined by three landmark pieces of legislation: the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA), the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA) and the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 (CHIPS). Together, these laws appropriate over $1.3 trillion for infrastructure, manufacturing, and energy projects, a significant portion of which is available through competitive discretionary grants. For more information on these laws, click here.

These laws and the grant programs that they fund offer a generational opportunity to modernize, improve, and expand Utah's infrastructure. Because of the breadth of these programs, many entities that were not previously involved in pursuing federal funds now have the opportunity to do so. We understand that navigating the federal funds landscape, including researching appropriate funding opportunities, assembling technical support and know-how, and completing reports can be challenging. This Playbook responds to Governor Spencer Cox's direction that the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (GOPB) serve as the central coordinating entity for federal infrastructure funds.

The Playbook is intended to connect grant applicants to necessary resources to learn about grant programs, find appropriate grants to apply to, understand what resources are necessary to apply, find resources for applications, understand what steps are necessary after submitting an application, receiving an award, and receiving and using grant funds, as well as finding resources necessary for these post-application steps. The Playbook is divided into three main sections: Preparing to Apply, Grant Application, and Post-Application.

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SECTION 1: PREPARING TO APPLY

This section includes several parts, each of which are important to ensuring a competitive application. Please read the entirety of this section carefully before beginning an application. Many of the resources and documents referenced in this section are not maintained by GOPB or the State of Utah. Neither GOPB nor the State of Utah endorse the content of non-Utah resources and documents.

PART A: FAMILIARITY WITH FEDERAL REGULATIONS

Federal grant opportunities are governed by the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 2 CFR 200. This guidance is subject to change and we will not detail its specific recommendations and instructions here. To ensure compliance with this guidance and the rules that federal agencies develop from this guidance, your organization's counsel should be familiar with 2 CFR 200 and should be consulted as you prepare your application.

2 CFR 200 is intended to "streamline guidance, reduce administrative burden on award recipients, and guard against waste, fraud, and abuse of Federal funds." It serves as the baseline upon which federal agencies develop program-specific rules. Understanding 2 CFR 200 will provide your organization with a foundation that is applicable to grant programs administered by all federal agencies.

PART B: ENSURING ROBUST DOCUMENTATION PRACTICES

Information organization is an essential component of grant applications and helps you to be audit-ready. Documentation can also be beneficial in evaluating grant application practices and in retracing your steps in previous applications when preparing for future grants. However, documentation practices go beyond simply keeping internal documents in a filing drawer or online.

Proper documentation begins before any grant application takes place. A culture of documentation within your organization is important to ensuring that all information relevant to any application, whether completed or not, is easily accessible. Strive to create a culture where all members of your organization understand and follow documentation practices in their filing, information transfer, and communication. Here are some suggested practices to follow:

- Encourage members of your organization to use a common drive to store all documents
- Create a folder and file labeling system that eliminates ambiguity about proper file location and clearly identifies the purpose of folders and documents

- Download and appropriately file local copies of important email attachments
- Standardize organization vocabulary regarding different projects to simplify locating information

When considering applying for a grant we recommend implementing the following practices:

- Create a folder in which to file all grant-related documents
    - Within the folder, create a folder or document for considered and identified needs and projects for which to pursue grant funding
    - Create a new folder for each grant application. Each grant application folder should contain the following documents:
        - An introductory/overview document that states the reason why a grant was considered for this project, a description of the project that needs to be funded, and an assessment of the time, cost, and labor associated with the project. This document should also contain a list and description of all other documents in the folder for quick reference and a list of all meetings related to the grant in question, with a link to the meeting notes or the meeting notes directly included in the document itself
        - A PDF of the final grant application and supporting materials
        - Any evaluations that were performed as part of the application process
        - Any working, research, and draft documents
        - Quotes, invoices, or other documentation from project partners

Documentation is more than simply compiling documents. Communications related to grant applications can also be relevant to an audit or valuable in future grant applications. For these reasons:

- To the extent possible, simplify communications around the grant application to a small number of continuous email chains or chat groups
- Use consistent keywords or consider developing a keyword labeling system for different grant applications (such as Grant Application 001). Use this system to tag/title all relevant communications so that they can easily be located in the future. Take care to include this keyword in communications with external partners.

As digital or physical storage space allows, consider keeping records of drafted or otherwise incomplete grant applications. These records may be useful in informing future applications, including providing insight to the decision making process or other actions that ultimately contributed to the application not being completed or submitted.

PART C: IDENTIFYING INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

Grants are most often made available for specific project areas, such as bridge building, railroad infrastructure, local transit, or water, among others. As such, identifying the type of infrastructure that you need to fund is beneficial to narrowing down what type of grants to search for. For local governments, state agencies, and certain other stakeholders, your organization regularly identifies anticipated infrastructure needs as part of regular long-range capital planning. For private sector stakeholders, these anticipated needs should be identified through your capital expenditure planning or equivalent process.

It is important to identify infrastructure needs before searching for corresponding grant opportunities. Your capital plan should drive your grant search, not the other way around.

To view key infrastructure areas for which federal funding opportunities are available, see the Atlas Infrastructure Handbook. This resource lists example projects in each category, which can help you identify similar projects within your organization.

Find below certain guidelines for identifying projects that will be appropriate for federal funding. These guidelines should not limit your search for potential grant opportunities, but projects that fit into this scope will naturally be stronger competitors for funding:

- **Medium to low priority (for state agencies)**
  - The legislature is less likely to fully fund projects that your agency, GOPB, or the legislature itself determines not to be high priority. Grants can fill the gap between legislature-funded priorities and unfunded, but still priority, items.
- **Beginning or improving service to rural and other underserved communities**
  - Current federal guidelines as of June 2024 focus heavily in funding projects that serve rural, minority, and other underserved populations. Many grant programs require that the application show how the funded project would benefit such communities.
- **Potential to jointly apply with a locality, state agency, or private sector partner**
  - Previous experience has shown that projects featured in a joint or multiple submission are stronger than single-applicant submissions. For assistance finding a joint applicant, contact GOPB.

PART D: FINDING APPLICABLE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Once you have identified an appropriate project, begin searching for funding opportunities. You should try to select funding opportunities that have recently opened (with at least 75 percent of the funding opportunity application timeframe remaining) or will open soon (several of the resources listed below indicate anticipated funding opportunity openings). This will ensure that your organization has enough time to evaluate the funding opportunity and assemble your application.

When reviewing available opportunities, pay attention to the indicated “award floor” and “award ceiling”, which will indicate how many funds are available to individual applicants. If this is a recurring grant program, you may want to consider reviewing previous award announcements for the program to evaluate the actual award range for previous applicants.

There are multiple resources available to assist you. The platforms listed below are not comprehensive and you will find additional listings on other websites:

- **GOPB’s funding programs dashboard**
    - GOPB’s funding programs dashboard lists all current federal funding programs. It is intended as a general resource to these programs, but when the program is open for applications the dashboard indicates the program status and provides a link to the associated funding opportunity along with relevant resources for applying to the program. To prepare in advance for funding opportunities, use the “program status” filter to identify opportunities that are anticipated in the current quarter.
- **The Local Infrastructure Hub**
    - The Local Infrastructure Hub provides a centralized funding opportunity dashboard and also provides a list of key upcoming funding opportunities. This resource can be particularly useful for anticipating funding opportunities across multiple federal agencies.
- **GOPB’s monthly newsletter**
    - GOPB’s monthly newsletter’s “Current Opportunities and More Resources” section lists notable federal funding opportunities that have opened within the last month and will close within the next two or three months, depending on the duration of the open submission period. This is not a comprehensive list of opportunities and is curated based on how relevant the funding opportunities are to the interests of Utah infrastructure stakeholders.
- **Grants.gov**
    - Grants.gov is the federal government’s primary central grants repository. Most funding opportunities are listed here, though the platform has two

main drawbacks. The first drawback is that not all grants are listed. Though intended to be a single repository for all federal funding opportunities, some federal agencies continue to host funding opportunity notices on their own platforms. The second drawback is that, though multiple filter options are available to search on grants.gov, the filters for IIJA are inconsistently used by posting agencies to tag corresponding funding opportunities and there are no filters for IRA or CHIPS. Because of this, searches should be made with multiple different keywords, including “IIJA” and “BIL” in order to find all funding opportunities associated with the corresponding legislation.

- **The Federal Register**
    - The Federal Register is the daily journal of the United States government. Though grants.gov has since supplanted the Register’s function as a grants notice publication, some federal agencies still post funding opportunities here. One benefit is that agencies using the Federal Register tend to post pending documents, allowing you to find and view detailed funding opportunities before the opportunity opens and is posted on grants.gov. Use a verbatim search with terms such as “NOFO”, “opportunity”, or “NOI” to identify recently issued or upcoming opportunities.
- **US Department of Transportation (DOT)**
    - As a significant portion of funding opportunities currently available are for transportation infrastructure, DOT is responsible for some of the largest funding programs and provides plentiful resources for identifying funding opportunities. DOT’s Navigator tool allows users to search specific grant programs, and also provides an overview of some of the most significant programs with their typical open date. This allows you to identify detailed transportation-related funding opportunities and also view anticipated funding opportunities and prepare to apply before the opportunity goes live.
- **US Department of Energy (DOE)**
    - Instead of a single common repository, DOE maintains five separate lists of funding opportunities for the following offices. These separate lists do not use a uniform ordering style.
        - Energy Efficiency and Renewables (EERE)
        - Office of Science
        - Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E)
        - Nuclear Energy
        - Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs Funding Operations

Outside of these regularly maintained, online resources, personal connections can also be beneficial sources of information. Establish relationships with your relevant congressional offices and federal agencies that you may already work with. These relationships can often provide valuable insight into upcoming funding opportunities and provide support in the application process.

Once you have identified an appropriate funding opportunity, read the funding opportunity notice summary and eligibility details with your team. Evaluate whether your organization possesses the technical expertise to complete the application within the notice timeframe and to perform necessary follow-ups and audits as necessary. If your organization does not directly have access to these technical resources, see part e for assistance identifying available resources.

You should also consider whether your organization (or partner organization(s)) can satisfy the non-federal match requirement on the funding opportunity. If you cannot satisfy the match requirement, you should not apply. The State of Utah will not provide matching funds. If your ability to provide matching funds is a point of concern, consider joining with another organization on the application to share the match obligation or limiting your funding opportunity search to funding programs that offer non-federal match waivers or do not have a matching requirement.

Decide based on your evaluation of the available technical capabilities and match funding capacity whether or not to pursue the funding opportunity.

PART E: SECURING TECHNICAL RESOURCES

In this part we provide a list of available technical resources to assist in your application. Before securing resources independently, it’s important to understand the types of resources that will be necessary to assemble a competitive application.

If your organization does not regularly submit grant applications, or if you are applying for a new category of funding you should first evaluate whether the funding opportunity would be appropriate for a joint application. This is because different funding programs often have different peculiarities in their application process. Jointly applying with another organization that has more experience in the relevant area of the grant will allow you to leverage that organization’s prior experience to craft a more competitive application.

Explore the following technical resources to find the assistance best suited for your application. GOPB does not endorse the content of external websites:

- **TRANSPORTATION**

- **General Transportation**
    - From the Local Infrastructure Hub
    - From the Department of Transportation
    - From Utah State University
    - From Wasatch Choice
    - From the Utah Department of Transportation
- **National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI)**
    - From the Joint Office of Energy and Transportation
- **Rural Transportation**
    - From the National Rural Transit Assistance Program

- **WATER**
    - **General Water**
        - From the Local Infrastructure Hub
        - From the Utah Department of Environmental Quality
        - From the Environmental Protection Agency
            - Note: The EPA's WaterTA program is an extensive, free, technical assistance program for water projects.
    - **Rural Water**
        - From the United States Department of Agriculture
        - From the Environmental Finance Center Network
- **BROADBAND**
    - Note: The Federal Government's BroadbandUSA program is unique among current federal grant programs and many funding and technical opportunities are already closed. Contact the Utah Broadband Center for Utah-specific information.
    - **General Broadband**
        - From the Local Infrastructure Hub
        - From BroadbandUSA
    - **Rural Broadband**
        - From the United States Department of Agriculture
- **RESILIENCY**
    - **General Resiliency**
        - From the Local Infrastructure Hub
        - From the Federal Emergency Management Agency
        - From the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
        - From the Environmental Protection Agency
        - From the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
            - Note: This resource only available to AASHTO members.
        - From the Clean Energy Group

        - From the US Climate Resilience Toolkit
- **ENERGY**
    - **General Energy**
        - From the Local Infrastructure Hub
        - From the Department of Energy
        - From the White House
            - Note: This resource is an extensive compilation of other technical resources for energy
    - **Renewables**
        - From the National Renewable Energy Laboratory
        -
- **ENVIRONMENT**
    - **General Environment**
        - From the Environmental Protection Network
        - From the National League of Cities
- **TRIBAL**
    - **Tribal Energy**
        - From the Department of Energy
    - **Tribal Environment**
        - From the National Indian Health Board

PART F: ESTABLISHING AND LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS

We've already mentioned the importance of partnerships with other Utah infrastructure stakeholders. Here we will detail what kind of partnerships you should develop to assist in crafting a competitive application and how you can leverage those partnerships in the application process.

- **Relevant members of state government**
    - Letters of support from the Governor's Office, other cabinet-level officials, and state senator(s) and representative(s) can be beneficial to your application. Establishing and maintaining relationships with these individuals and offices prior to asking for their support on your application is important.

      If you do not already have a relationship with the Governor's Office or other cabinet-level officials, work through your state senator(s) and representative(s). If you do not know your state senator(s) and representative(s) or do not yet have a strong relationship with them, find their contact information here.

You can also reach out directly to GOPB to submit letter of support requests through this page.

- **Relevant members of Utah's Congressional delegation**
    - Members of Utah's Congressional delegation can also provide support to your application. GOPB coordinates outreach and support efforts with Congressional offices in relation to grant support requests. Contact GOPB here for assistance.
- **Nonprofit organizations**
    - Nonprofit organizations that would be impacted by the project for which the grant seeks funding and/or that do work that is directly relevant to the area of the grant can also provide support. This can include letters of support and/or technical assistance in your application. Several nonprofit organizations that offer technical assistance are listed in Part E above.
- **Institutions of Higher Education**
    - Higher education institutions often have prior experience in grant writing and many (such as the University of Utah) conduct research that may support your application. Partnering with institutions of higher education that are located in or near your area and/or which have issued publications that could be used in support of your application can be beneficial. These institutions can also be a source of technical assistance and knowledge about the grant process if your organization is less familiar with federal grants.
- **Relevant state agencies**
    - Partnering with state agencies can give you access to technical resources, institutional knowledge, and expert information relevant to your project. Several Utah state agencies are experienced grant applicants, such as the Utah Department of Transportation and the Department of Environmental Quality. Partnering with state agencies has strengthened local grant applications in the past: we strongly recommend that you consider what Utah agencies you might approach about jointly compiling and submitting your application.
- **Localities**
    - Like state agencies, localities can be a powerful partner in grant applications, though for different reasons. Localities are often intimately familiar with the project in question and can provide detailed information about the current situation that will help strengthen your application.

      Partnering with rural Utah localities has the added benefit of highlighting the potential impact of the grant on rural and underserved communities, a key focus of many current federal grant programs. We strongly recommend that you consider which localities you might approach about jointly constructing and submitting your application.

- **Community organizations**
    - Like local governments, community organizations can be strong partners in telling the story of the communities impacted by the problem that your project seeks to address. Community details can strengthen your application and engaging community partners is often a requirement on federal grant applications.
- **Grassroots engagement**
    - In addition to formal community organizations, hosting listening sessions and conducting community outreach activities can be a powerful way to show broad community support for your project and include diverse community perspectives in your grant application. Individual or group testimonies can provide macro level details about the potential impact of a grant that strengthen your submission.

You should approach existing or potential partners about their involvement in your grant application before beginning the application process.

SECTION 2: GRANT APPLICATION

This section will build on section 1 to describe best practices and recommendations for how to navigate the grant application process. You should have read section 1 before this section. Once you've identified an appropriate grant to pursue, ensured that you have the necessary technical resources and partnerships to support the application process, and have established appropriate documentation practices, you're ready to begin the application process.

This resource from the Local Infrastructure Hub may also be beneficial in certain applications. The resource provides examples of successful applications for several notable grant programs and other general application resources.

PART A: BREAKING DOWN THE NOFO

Having identified the funding opportunity/opportunities that you want to pursue, you should assemble your grant team and read the entire Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), sometimes referred to as the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA).

When reading the NOFO, note the following:

- The funding opportunity purpose
- Key dates
- Preferential match requirement (which will rank your application higher if you meet a certain increased match threshold)
- Community outreach requirements
- Direct responsibilities of the primary applicant
- Agency contacts

You might also consider separating/coding the NOFO into the following categories:

- **Description and objectives**
    - This includes the specific language about the issues that the NOFO seeks to address. It will be helpful in telling a story with your application that responds to the expectations of the issuing agency, which we will discuss in part D.
- **Requirements**
    - The NOFO will list the documents and materials that are required for the application. Highlighting or listing all of these requirements will be helpful in creating an application timeline, which we will discuss in part B.

To simplify future reference and task delegation, and as you have staff to do so, assign staff to summarize each section of the NOFO and create a list of requirements found in that section.

PART B: ESTABLISHING TIMELINE AND EXPECTATIONS

Once you've identified and listed key application dates and requirements, work to create a timeline for project completion with your organization's team. Consider creating a regular check-in meeting to report on application progress and assigning leadership roles in the team to ensure accountability. The timeline should include due dates for each section, with consideration given to how long each section of the NOFO might take to complete. The timeline should also include a review period before final submission to evaluate the application and make any revisions as necessary.

Your internal team may already be familiar with your expectations for the grant application based on their experience with your organization's work culture, but don't assume that outside partners will share the same perspectives. Include these partners from the beginning and establish clear expectations for communication, keeping track of records and filing documents, and task completion. Even seemingly minor details, such as formatting and vocabulary, can help save crucial time in assembling your application.

You should also be sensitive to the expectations of these partners. Be particularly aware of the capacity of your partners and ensure that they are given opportunities to contribute to the application as they expect to, without overburdening them. Crafting an overall grant goal statement can help to unify differing perspectives and priorities.

PART C: DELEGATING TASKS EARLY

Moving quickly on your application is key to success. Meeting to review the NOFO is important, and as soon as you identify a requirement of the application you should consider who will accomplish the task. Ask yourself privately and to the group in meetings "who will be responsible for this?" and discuss which staff member or outside partner is best equipped to handle that task.

If you require letters of support or resources from outside organizations to strengthen your application, reach out to the appropriate contacts as soon as possible. Never assume that organizations will be able to provide these resources on short notice. When contacting organizations for supporting materials, clearly explain the purpose of the supporting material, any information that the NOFO requires the supporting material to contain, and a due date for the organization to send the materials to you.

Time is limited to complete your application. The faster you are able to assign tasks, the greater your potential to submit a competitive application.

PART D: MIMIC NOFO LANGUAGE IN THE APPLICATION

In section 1 we briefly mentioned that benefiting rural and underserved communities is often a focus of current federal funding opportunities. Being aware of the issuing agency's priorities in awarding grants can help you structure your application to be more competitive. While reading the NOFO, pay attention to language that indicates the problems that the grant is addressing or specific communities and populations that the grant is intended to serve. Then, in writing your application, use that exact language (or excerpts) to demonstrate how your proposal will satisfy the program's purpose.

For example, if a NOFO mentions that the goal of the grant program is to "improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of the movement of people and freight over bridges" your application should state that "this project will improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of the movement of people and freight over the _______ bridge in _______ locality." You should then provide supporting details, including how the current state of the bridge(s) in question hamper efficiency because the bridge condition requires drivers to slow down and/or that the current state of the bridge hampers safety and reliability because it cannot be used in certain weather conditions (among other potential reasons). Provide additional information, including supporting documents from partner organizations, to demonstrate the truth of these statements.

Utilizing the same language in your application that is used in the NOFO communicates your commitment to the issuing agency's priorities and frames your project using vocabulary that is familiar to the agency, thus making it easier for them to understand and evaluate the potential impact of your proposal. Conversely, failing to demonstrate how your proposal will respond to the goals of the grant program will negatively impact your application's evaluation.

PART E: CONVINCING THE READER

A successful grant application tells a compelling story. Assume that the agency to which you submit your proposal knows little if anything about your organization and the needs that are driving your application. As such, your proposal is above all an exercise in effective storytelling.

In this sense, your proposal should do the following:

- **Highlight the problem or need you are trying to address**

  - Use personal details, anecdotes, images, maps, and data to clearly establish need. Pay particular attention to highlighting the consequences of failing to complete the project within a certain time frame. Your explanation and justification of need should convey urgency. Community outreach can provide powerful supporting materials detailing how the need currently impacts the community, community sentiment and fears about the issue, and the community's vision and personal anecdotes about the impact of a solution.
- **Justify the scope of your proposed solution**
  - Using the same range of supporting materials, lay out your case for why the solution that you are proposing to be funded by the grant is the right solution. Why not smaller? Why not larger? Why not later? Use data and analysis from your own and external sources to demonstrate why your proposal is the best solution and, by extension, why the federal agency should award the amount of money you're requesting.
- **Demonstrate impact**
  - Emphasize how your proposal will impact the community, paying particular attention to the stories of individuals or communities which the NOFO focuses on. Leverage testimonies from individuals and focus groups from these populations of interest to make clear the anticipated impact of the project. You may also want to cite examples of how your organization has used similar projects have addressed similar problems or how an organization comparable to yours has done the same.

Remember that the issuing agency will know only the information that you include in your application. Your application should paint a complete picture, leaving no doubt about the urgency, scope, funding, and other details of your project.

PART F: REVIEWING THE APPLICATION

Once you have completed the application it's important to take time to review. A review period to allow for thorough internal review of the completed application should have been included in your application timeline.

A thorough review process should include at least the following steps, though you may choose to include additional reviews depending on the nature of the application:

- **Criteria review**
  - Assemble a staff and technical team composed of staff who are not familiar with the application and staff members who worked across various sections of the application. Working section by section, review the stated criteria and requirements and verify that all are met.

- **Narrative review**
    - Ask a staff member or several staff members who are not familiar with the grant or the project in question to review your application to verify that the application paints a complete picture for a reader who has no prior knowledge of the situation. You might also consider leveraging technical staff from partner organizations in this narrative review. This review should consider flow, use of supporting visuals, integration of data, formatting, and background, including personal and community testimonies in telling a compelling story.
- **Post-submission capacity review**
    - With your application partners, review the stated requirements in the NOFO for secondary applications, reporting, or other follow-up and clearly identify the staff and other resources that will manage those responsibilities.

SECTION 3: POST-APPLICATION

Your team's continued engagement after submitting your application is critical to preserving and improving your competitiveness for future grants and ensuring that you remain audit-ready. Audits can be time-consuming and difficult if you do not file proper and timely reports, keep proper and well-organized documentation, and do not have strong relationships with all parties involved in the application process. Much of the detail provided in this section is geared toward ensuring that your organization takes steps to avoid being flagged for an audit or that, in the case of an audit, your organization can quickly identify and produce the documentation requested. The secondary goal of this section is to assist your organization in building momentum for future grant applications. To this secondary goal, this section can be beneficial to your organization even if you were not successful in winning the grant. In this case, part C and part D of this section will be most beneficial to your organization.

PART A: SUBMITTING ON-TIME REPORTS

If you are awarded the grant your organization will be expected to submit several different reports. Information about the different reports can be found on grants.gov or you can view all post-award forms here.

Meeting reporting deadlines is key to building and maintaining trust with the federal agency issuing the grant. Most frequently these reports will detail expenditures and reimbursements of grant funds. Submitting timely reports is an organizational and individual responsibility. Make submitting your required reports on time a priority by:

- **Ensuring accountability**
    - Continue to meet regularly with your internal and external team as you did during the application process. During these meetings, review the timeline of reports that must be submitted and request updates from meeting participants about the status of reports or parts of reports for which they are responsible.
- **Communicating clearly with the issuing agency**
    - A standard of zero-ambiguity communication between you and your agency contact will be beneficial in multiple ways. It will allow you to use the agency contact as a resource to guide your organization through parts of the reporting process that may be unfamiliar to you and, importantly, help you avoid audits that could result from poor communication. If for any reason your organization is unable to submit a report on time, communicate the delay clearly to the issuing agency as soon as you become aware that you will not be able to meet the reporting deadline. Not communicating and failing to meet the reporting deadline is an immediate

    flag to the issuing agency that something is wrong. Communicating late with good news is never better than communicating early with bad news; delaying communication is not the answer. Delaying or limiting the information that you transmit to the issuing agency increases the likelihood that your grant award will be audited.

- **Establishing expectations for sub-awardees, vendors, and contractors**
    - Your organization is designated by the federal government as the prime awardee. You will likely involve other organizations as you disburse grant funds. It's important that these organizations understand what type of documentation you will require from them in filing reports with the issuing federal agency. You may want to designate a staff member from your organization as a liaison between you and these entities to ensure that invoices, receipts, and other documents are provided on time.

PART B: CONTINUING DOCUMENTATION

We've already highlighted the importance of a robust documentation scheme in section 1. Post-award documentation is even more critical, as audits will be most focused on this period of the grant process.

Be sure to continue following these organizational best practices outlined in part 1 during this stage of the grant process:

- Encourage members of your organization to use a common drive to store all documents
- Create a folder and file labeling system that eliminates ambiguity about proper file location and clearly identifies the purpose of folders and documents
- Download and appropriately file local copies of important email attachments
- Standardize organization vocabulary regarding different projects to simplify locating information

In addition to these best practices, you may consider making a separate folder to store all documents related to post-award reports, including the reports themselves, any RFPs your organization may issue in relation to the grant, invoices from partners and contracted entities, communications with the issuing federal agency, and more. Do not rely on the issuing federal agency to keep records of your interactions with them or documents that they may send you. Be sure to document these exchanges, particularly any documentation or justification relating to exemptions or exceptions that your organization may seek or obtain in the grant process.

Agencies perform audits to ensure that the grant process is free of mismanagement and/or fraud. See [this resource]() from grants.gov for more information on grant fraud.

PART C: MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Continuing to value and strengthen relationships that you have used or established during the grant application process is important even after the submission. Regardless of whether you received the grant or not, maintaining these relationships can benefit your organization.

In this section we've already highlighted the importance of your communication and relationship with the federal agency overseeing your grant award. Throughout the grant application process you should have leveraged multiple partnerships to strengthen your application, worked with close partners as joint grant applicants, and established new relationships with stakeholders and the community at large through your outreach efforts. If your application was successful you will likely need to continue to leverage these partnerships in administering the grant, including compiling reports, moving forward on your project, and communicating successes to the community. If your application was not successful you should ensure that your application partners feel valued in the contributions they made to the application and that they remain viable partners for future projects.

Consider our recommendations for how to maintain relationships with your partners moving forward:

- **Send letters thanking partners for their involvement**
    - Recognize the specific contributions of individual partners in the application process, commenting on how their involvement strengthened the application and which NOFO requirements their work satisfied. In this communication, make it clear that you remain open to working with the partner in future applications or projects.
- **Request a review meeting with each partner to collect their feedback**
    - Prepare a standardized list of questions to collect feedback from all partners. Use this meeting as an opportunity to ask their opinion about the organization of the application process, communication to and among partners, how clearly expectations were set and reinforced, how they and their contributions were valued, and any general feedback. Aggregate the feedback from these meetings to improve internal processes and refine your organization's best practices for future applications.
- **Create a working group to facilitate future joint projects**
    - Particularly among key partners, you may want to create a regular (perhaps quarterly) meeting to review ongoing projects and upcoming grant opportunities that you and/or your partners may want to pursue or work on jointly. This type of organization can help ensure that your

organization and a team of close partners have an established working relationship and are ready to respond quickly to future opportunities.

PART D: EVALUATING RESULTS

An important final step in the grant process is assessing your organization's efforts. Outside perspectives, like the feedback meetings that you conduct with partner organizations or even feedback solicited from contacts at the federal agency overseeing the grant in question, can be beneficial, but your organization should seek internal consensus in evaluating lessons learned.

Similar to your process for soliciting feedback from external partners, you may want to consider meeting with (or simply send surveys to) each staff member who participated in the grant application. This individual feedback should be geared towards topics such as how the staff member felt they were able to contribute to the project, how clearly expectations and deadlines were communicated, and how readily available supporting resources were. You might additionally consider asking about how these individuals felt that external partners contributed to the effort, how they would approach similar responsibilities in the future, and what they wish they had known before beginning their work on the application.

In addition to these individual interviews or surveys, consider holding team meetings to collectively discuss the application. The purpose of these meetings is different from the individual feedback efforts: individual feedback solicits opinions, whereas these discussion groups should seek to address big-picture questions by combining multiple perspectives. This type of meeting is best suited to discuss and address why or not your grant application was successful and how your team would approach another grant application in the future.