GRANTS OFFICE
empowering communities

Collaborative Grantseeking for Economic Development

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Hosted by Ashley Schultz • Presented by Amanda Day, Joseph Phelan, and Siddhi Aubeeluck • Grants Office, LLC

Welcome and Introductions

Ashley Schultz:
Hello everyone. My name is Ashley Schultz. I am the Manager of Community Engagement here at Grants Office. Today we're going to be discussing the grant funding landscape for economic development, both across the United States and Canada. Our topics today are going to be relevant not only for both countries, but also for all sorts of organizations in our audience who are actively engaged in economic development. We've got content for folks in the public sector — local governments, utility providers, workforce training organizations, chambers of commerce — and we also have content relevant to those of you with us from the private sector. Whether you're a small business or a startup, or maybe you're part of a large firm looking to open a new location in a new city, we've got a wide range of audience members here with us today. We're just really excited to have all of you.

Since we have that broad range, we're going to talk about not only the funding landscape for economic development and what grants are supporting it, but also how you can collaborate on a grant proposal. As you can see in our title, we understand that it takes a village to be truly successful in economic development efforts. So we want to share our perspective on what that collaboration looks like, and how to work it into your grant-seeking practices.

Housekeeping

Before we get started today, I've got two housekeeping items for you. First, you can ask questions at any time during today's event. You can use the question and answer interface on the bottom right-hand corner of your screen. Feel free to submit as many questions as you'd like, and we'll get to as many as possible towards the end of our hour together. And then also, you should note the session is being recorded. The recording is going to be available for download at the Grants Office website starting tomorrow. The PowerPoint slides that we're going to share today are also going to be available at that same location.

Today's Presenters and Agenda

Today we're talking about the funding landscape for economic development. We're joined today by an international panel of grants experts here at Grants Office. We have Amanda Day and Joseph Phelan from our U.S. office, who both serve as Grants Development Consultants. We're also joined by Siddhi

Aubeeluck here from Ottawa, who is our lead funding consultant for Canadian opportunities. Across all three of these individuals, you've got a plethora of not only professional backgrounds, but also areas of grants expertise. I think you're going to learn a lot from them today. They've got some really great information to share with you.

Here's our quick run-through of our agenda over the next 50 to 60 minutes or so. Amanda's going to kick us off with a quick introduction to economic development itself. What is it? Who is involved? What are some key benchmarks for measuring success? And really, at the end of the day, why does it all matter? Then Joseph and Siddhi are going to bring us through four central themes that grant funders like to support in economic development projects. What are those key themes, and how do they end up turning into funded projects? From there, we'll share four example grants in the economic development landscape. These examples are going to be from both the U.S. and Canada, but I think you're going to find that there are more similarities than there are differences between those two countries and their individual funding landscapes. And then finally, Amanda's going to bring us home with tips on how to collaborate on a grant proposal. Again, we're going to end with a Q&A session from our audience, so feel free to drop any questions into the chat as they come up during our presentation today. With that, I'm going to kick things off and send it off to Amanda. Amanda —

What Is Economic Development and Why It Matters

Amanda Day:
Thanks, Ashley, and hello everyone. Thank you for joining us today. I think we put together a great presentation that not only highlights the wide range of available grant funding opportunities, but also provides practical guidance on how communities can come together to take advantage of those resources. Our goal is to show that grants are more than just financial support — they're tools that can help strengthen collaboration, spark innovation, and drive meaningful progress. By working collectively, communities can leverage these opportunities to advance economic development, create stronger local partnerships, and ultimately enhance overall quality of life for their citizens.

Defining Economic Development

Before discussing the grants landscape and how grants can help, we need to explain what we mean by economic development. By definition, economic development is the ongoing process of increasing an area's wealth and improving overall quality of life for its residents, measured by economic indicators like jobs and income, and social factors like education and infrastructure. It's a holistic approach that goes beyond simply attracting new businesses, and focuses on strengthening the entire community's well-being.

Why It Matters

We want to talk a little about why it matters — what is it accomplishing, and why do we need to invest in it? It matters because these types of initiatives play a vital role in shaping the health, resilience, and future opportunities of different communities. Investing in growth and innovation helps create environments where people want to live, where they want to work, and where they can thrive both personally and professionally. Key outcomes include a stronger, more resilient economy; reduced poverty and unemployment; access to better education, healthcare, and housing; and an increased focus on innovation and motivation to make their communities the best they can be.

Key Investment Areas

Some key investment areas we're going to talk about today are on the screen in front of you. They create the foundation for a strong, resilient, and thriving community. What areas are typically addressed? We are directing resources to areas such as workforce development and job creation, critical infrastructure, community development, and innovation. By making these investments, we can generate jobs, attract new businesses, improve quality of life, improve our schools, improve healthcare, and improve museums and libraries — all the infrastructure that's involved in creating a really great place to live. We'll dive deeper into these areas a little bit later in the presentation and explain how grant funds tie in with investments in these areas, and how we measure it.

Measuring Success

There are ways you can measure the success or ultimate failure of a project. Measurement isn't just about success rates — we're looking at developing answers to issues that might pop up if it doesn't work. It's about learning, improving, and making sure these efforts deliver real and lasting benefits to a community. It's tracked through key indicators that reflect the health and growth of the community. Common measures include job creation and employment rates, median income levels, poverty rates, infrastructure improvements, access to education, and overall economic output or GDP. Tracking these metrics helps communities understand progress, identify the challenges that come up when these initiatives aren't as successful as they'd like, and ensure accountability. Knowing what investments worked and what were not as successful also helps guide long-term planning efforts. We don't want to say that something failed — we just see it as an opportunity to do better in the future, to learn from issues that might have come up or failures within the project.

Collaboration Is Essential

Ultimately, in order to be successful, these types of projects need collaboration. You cannot do this on your own. There are several different stakeholders. Private and public partnerships are essential for this development. They combine strengths from both sectors. Governments can provide funding, regulatory support, and infrastructure, and then private partners are able to innovate, provide expertise, and

capital. Together, they make large-scale projects feasible. By taking on partners and working together, something that might be unachievable for a smaller community is now achievable. This stimulates job creation, drives innovation, and delivers outcomes that directly improve the well-being of that community.

Why is it essentially a collaborative effort? What makes it more successful when you have partners? Partnerships are essential to accomplish all the elements we've discussed so far. It works best when governments, businesses, and the community collaborate — pooling their resources, pooling expertise to drive growth that benefits everyone involved. Governments create those policies and provide infrastructure. Businesses generate jobs, innovate, and invest in local economies. Educational institutions develop a skilled workforce and provide training that fosters research, especially institutes of higher education. Nonprofit and community groups advocate for equity and inclusion. And finally, residents provide input, require accountability, and participate in shaping their community's future.

Where Grants Fit In

With all of those building blocks in place, communities may struggle to fully fund the initiatives they want to take on — they just don't have the funds in their budget. That's where grant funding comes in, and that's why we're talking about this today. How can grants help communities develop and implement these projects that may be beyond their reach financially? With a little bit of grant work and research, funding can be provided to improve the outcomes of these programs. Grants provide additional funding for communities to launch projects that might otherwise be delayed or scaled back due to limited funds. Next up, Joseph and Siddhi will explore how grants serve as a critical component for community growth and future success in the U.S. and Canada. Joseph and Siddhi —

Four Major Themes of Economic Development Funding

Siddhi Aubeeluck:
Thank you, Amanda. Now that we have a big-picture overview of what economic development is, let's take a closer look at funding — who's putting money in, where it's going, and the kinds of projects it's supporting in both the public and private sectors. Joseph and I work with both types of organizations, but during the presentation I'll focus primarily on the private sector and Joseph will cover public sector entities.

As Amanda outlined, funding in economic development falls under four major themes. First, we have workforce development. This is all about preparing people with the skills they need for the jobs of today, but also the jobs of tomorrow. This type of funding often supports training and reskilling programs. For example, digital literacy training for workers transitioning into new industries.

The second big theme is innovation. This focuses on fueling research, commercialization, and the adoption of new technologies. A good example here would be grants to help a university and a local business work together to bring a clean tech solution to market.

The third theme is critical infrastructure. This is all about building and modernizing the systems that keep the economy running. That might mean funding rural broadband expansion to connect more communities and businesses.

And then finally we have community development. This supports projects that improve quality of life and helps regions attract both talent and investment. For example, that could include funding for creating new green community spaces.

Workforce Development

Who Receives the Funding

Now that we have that background, let's take a closer look at each one of these themes. Federal and local governments, along with public and private foundations, create programs to help people build skills, find jobs, and support a strong and thriving economy. So who's actually receiving this funding, and what types of organizations are putting these programs into action?

Joseph Phelan:
On the public sector side, main actors are going to include workforce organizations such as labor unions, workforce agencies, and state- or provincial-run organizations. You have local governments — cities or towns, municipalities, counties, libraries, schools — any type of education from kindergarten through senior year, high school, community colleges, universities, technical or junior colleges. Then you have some nonprofit organizations, which come in all sizes — whether it's a community-specific foundation or a larger nonprofit organization that partners with governments or businesses to provide employment opportunities. And then there are housing agencies. Some public housing authorities, as well as local and provincial ministries of housing, are organizations that allow their residents to acquire the skills needed to have successful employment. You also have community development organizations — for instance, in the U.S., Habitat for Humanity, as well as some youth organizations such as the YMCA. These organizations provide opportunities for young people to have valuable job experience.

Siddhi Aubeeluck:
On the private sector side, the main actors seeking funding for workforce development include individual employers. They usually apply for support to train their current and future workers. We have industry associations and sector councils — they often take a broader view by coordinating sector-wide skills initiatives. We also have private training providers, who develop and deliver specialized programs tailored to employer needs. And then large employers in federally regulated sectors — for example,

transportation or banking — often look for funding to support mandatory training or those really big workforce programs.

Shared Public-Private Priorities

Joseph Phelan:
The private sector definitely works often with the public sector by sharing the cost of training, giving input on course design to make sure it matches real job needs, as well as teaming up on programs that benefit both businesses and the broader community. What kinds of projects are federal and local governments, as well as these public and private foundations, looking to fund? What initiatives do they support? Whether on the public or private side, funders often share similar priorities. You have job creation — any type of private company looking to expand into a new or existing market can help the workforce by creating new jobs. Close skill gaps through training, so apprenticeships in key sectors. Reskill the current workforce — with AI right now and other emerging technologies, reskilling is definitely a major funding opportunity. Address labor shortages — key industries that are going to be established by the government will be the focus of many competitive grant programs, whether it's construction, agriculture, healthcare, hospitality, manufacturing, or energy. Expanded access for opportunities — it could be as simple as offering childcare so a parent can work or train, public transportation, and general awareness that good-paying jobs are available in these key areas. And promote equity and inclusion — workforce development that promotes equity and inclusion allows everyone in the community to be involved in the process of workforce development.

Siddhi Aubeeluck:
And finally, our last point there: supporting sector transformation. This is often more of a private sector focus, where funding is going to help companies modernize operations, adopt new tech, or shift towards greener practices. These changes don't just influence one company — they can ripple out to the whole workforce, raise industry standards, and boost overall competitiveness. It's by working together on these shared priorities that public and private actors can strengthen the workforce, expand opportunities, and prepare industries for future challenges.

Innovation

By investing in workforce development, we're not just building skills — we're also laying the foundation for innovation, which is another key priority in economic development. Let's switch gears and explore how funding supports research, new ideas, and collaborative projects.

Who Receives the Funding

Joseph Phelan:
When you think innovation, you mainly think the private sector — organizations that are creating the technologies that are being established on a day-to-day basis. But from the public sector side of things, we see cities, towns, municipalities, and counties take advantage of these funds focused on helping utilities, transportation, sustainability, public safety, and general health of the community. Innovation definitely plays a role there. Universities focus more on the research and development of innovation. And then nonprofit organizations are often focused on more big-picture goals — it could be climate-related or energy-efficiency-related. Basically, how can the community build towards the future?

Siddhi Aubeeluck:
On the private side, we have startups, small and medium-sized businesses, big corporations, and tech firms. They're all creating new technologies and commercializing research, and they're often teaming up with academia and public sector partners to co-develop projects. Usually, private actors tend to drive market-ready solutions. So think of things like AI projects, clean energy innovations, or advanced manufacturing initiatives that benefit both industry and local communities.

How Funders Support Innovation

Joseph Phelan:
How do funders step in to support innovation? For public sector actors, there's some focus on advancing community sustainability goals. That could be renewable energy projects, reducing waste, improvements to smart grids — anything related to fostering a sustainable future. Smart city initiatives enablement is definitely a big one. You can have intelligent traffic management to reduce congestion, smart waste management or water systems to optimize efficiencies, sensors, smart buildings for energy efficiency, as well as using advanced analytics to enable more informed governance. Those are some examples of smart city initiatives. You have the research and development component — colleges and universities are going to work to solve problems established by federal, state, or provincial governments, often working with the private sector. And then the use of technology in general — the promotion of technology and digital transformation. General upgrades to a town or city's IT department, whether it's cybersecurity, emergency services, or just modernizing the systems for the 21st century.

Siddhi Aubeeluck:
When it comes to for-profit entities, innovation funding mostly targets projects centered around research and development, but also product prototyping. Another key piece in our digital age is helping businesses adopt new technologies and modernize their operations. Sustainability is obviously another big priority — supporting clean tech and environmentally friendly solutions. Across all these priorities, collaboration is really the common thread: bringing together businesses, academia, nonprofits, and

public sector partners to drive innovation and support economic growth. There are a ton of joint R&D grants and co-investment programs that require multiple partners and fund networks and innovation hubs. These are all aimed at fostering collaboration and turning innovative ideas into real-world solutions.

Critical Infrastructure

Who Receives the Funding

Joseph Phelan:
The next key theme is critical infrastructure. From the public sector side of things, it's going to really vary depending on where you're located and what is available at the federal, regional, state, or provincial level. But most funds are going to go towards cities and counties, municipalities, hospitals, public water agencies, public energy utility providers, and public broadband providers. That's usually going to be the focus of critical infrastructure projects for the public sector.

Siddhi Aubeeluck:
On the private side, critical infrastructure involves a really different mix of players. From utilities and energy companies to telecom providers, transportation operators, construction firms, and tech manufacturers, just to name a few. These organizations build, operate, and maintain the systems and networks we rely on every single day. In most cases, though, private actors need to partner with public sector entities to access critical infrastructure funding. A lot of federal and local government programs are set up to make sure infrastructure projects benefit the public. So it's common for grants to ask for collaboration with municipalities, local governments, or other public actors. That's really where public-private partnerships, or PPPs, come in — letting private and public partners join forces to make these infrastructure projects successful and beneficial to everyone.

Shared Priorities Across Public and Private Projects

Joseph Phelan:
As a result, the priorities funders support tend to strongly overlap across both public and private projects, since both focus on ensuring communities have reliable access to essential services like energy, water, transportation, and communication. Some grant-funded priorities are: building and modernizing roads, making work more accessible and efficient. Improving public transportation — similar idea to building or modernizing roads, accessibility goes a long way. Retail shops will have an increase in foot traffic if more people can visit their shops or establishments. Enhance grid resiliency technologies — utilities that work even through severe weather help ensure the economic development of the community continues to exist. Expand connectivity and access — everyone should have access to the internet, the only way to participate in today's economy, through digital literacy activities. Libraries

provide access for many groups of people to use the internet. Accelerate the clean energy transition, lower energy cost, improve public health through pollution reduction, and promote water conservation. Any type of water efficiency improvements is going to help to secure water. Ensure safe drinking water — a reliable water supply is essential for any functional economy. And then strengthening security, whether it's emergency services upgrades or cybersecurity. Cyber attacks may hurt a city's finances, so protection against those types of threats is going to go a long way. Pretty much anything to protect critical infrastructure will help sustain an economy. And finally, anything to do with upgrading equipment to make things more efficient and safer.

Siddhi Aubeeluck:
When it comes to our last point, strengthening supply chains, private sector actors are involved in specific ways. They're the ones that are going to invest in logistics, technology, and strategic partnerships to keep goods moving reliably. These efforts are closely tied to infrastructure projects — for example, roads, ports, railways, and digital networks. These are what enable commerce to flow efficiently. So it's by collaborating with public sector entities on these projects that both businesses and communities benefit from a more resilient and connected economy.

Community Development

Who Receives the Funding

Now we can move on to our last theme of economic development funding: community development. This is a pretty broad area of funding. It focuses on strengthening communities, improving local capacity, and supporting long-term social and economic well-being.

Joseph Phelan:
Grants for community development are mostly open to nonprofit organizations. A big driver for nonprofit organizations are foundations. Nonprofits rely on foundations to fund salaries, to implement projects, to serve as many people as possible within their communities. You're looking at social services, education, community events — those are going to be what you're looking for from the nonprofit side of things. You also have schools, colleges, and universities, which are going to play a role in the development of community projects. And then cities, towns, municipalities, and counties. Housing agencies are also going to play a role in community development projects.

Siddhi Aubeeluck:
Looking at the private side, some federal and local government programs are open to for-profit entities. We have developers and construction firms — they often receive support for projects that improve public spaces or housing. Small and medium-sized enterprises, or SMEs, can get funding for initiatives that boost local economic activity. Private owners and operators of public-use infrastructure can also

secure grants — that has to do with anything that enhances community facilities. Social enterprises and B Corps can also qualify, specific to projects that create social impact alongside economic growth. These grants all help these actors invest in stronger, more resilient communities.

Priorities and Examples of Collaboration

Joseph Phelan:
Collaboration happens both organically and inorganically with regards to community development. An organic collaboration example might be a developer using an old school building for affordable housing. An inorganic collaboration might be enhancing a sidewalk near a strip of retail shops, which may in turn help revitalize a neighborhood. Since community development is such a broad area, funders prioritize a pretty wide range of projects. It's really crucial to note that the type of funder often determines the kind of community development programs they support, as well as the scope and scale. National-level funders typically focus on large-scale economic development priorities like affordable housing or major community infrastructure projects, while regional and local funders support initiatives tailored to specific communities, helping revitalize neighborhoods and address local needs.

One of the main priorities right now: increase affordable housing as well as inclusive development. That could be upgrading a vacant building to improve the community, to remove the blight that exists, and also provide some affordable housing for those that are in need. Support sustainable and green building, which will allow for increased efficiencies. Enhance community infrastructure — that could be parks, green spaces, community gardens, trails, sidewalk improvements, community centers, senior centers — anything that enhances the overall infrastructure of a community, as well as promotes safety and security. Safe places tend to be more economically viable, so those are definitely a priority for a lot of the funders that exist. These are especially relevant for public sector initiatives, as a strong community allows for more economic activities.

Siddhi Aubeeluck:
When it comes to revitalizing local economies and promoting inclusive entrepreneurship, this is where the private sector comes in. Small and medium enterprises might receive grants to open co-working spaces, incubators, or local retail hubs. Social enterprises and B Corps can launch programs that provide training and mentorship to underrepresented entrepreneurs from minority groups. Together, these efforts help build lasting economic opportunities in various communities for various people.

Example Grant Programs in North America

Joseph Phelan:
We've covered the main funding themes — workforce development, innovation, critical infrastructure, and community development. But what do these grants actually look like on the ground? Let's check out

some real examples of North American economic development grants. The grants that Siddhi and I are going to explain will cover all four funding themes. However, there are a ton of federal, state, and provincial opportunities where maybe only one, two, or three of these themes are mentioned. That's definitely something to keep in mind as you brainstorm various economic development grant programs. Siddhi will kick us off with two examples found in Canada.

Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) — Canada

Siddhi Aubeeluck:
To start us off, we're going to explore the Strategic Innovation Fund, or SIF for short. This fund is run by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, one of the largest Canadian departments. The idea here is to boost Canada's global competitiveness by supporting really large innovation projects — anything from research and development, technology, commercialization, and industrial investment. This funding really isn't small pebbles. They are really significant grants. Projects usually start at around $10 million in repayable contributions. There is some non-repayable support available, but that is usually for nonprofits.

SIF has a couple of streams worth highlighting. The first is Business Innovation and Growth. This stream is exclusively for the private sector. It helps companies scale up, invest in research and development, and commercialize new tech. The second stream is quite interesting — the Collaborations and Networks stream. It's all about partnerships. It funds collaborative research and development, technology demonstrations, and basically any other initiatives that strengthen Canada's innovation ecosystem. The key here is bringing all of these different players — businesses, nonprofits, academic institutions, and different levels of government — so that everybody can share their expertise, resources, and benefits that support projects of national significance.

Let's look at how this single funding opportunity ties back to our four key funding themes. We'll start with workforce development — partnerships between industry and universities or colleges give students and researchers hands-on, real-world experience, and this contributes to building a skilled workforce. This naturally ties into innovation, which is really the main focus of this fund. Large-scale research and development and commercialization projects drive the creation and adoption of new technologies, helping Canada stay competitive on a global level. To make all of this possible, we also need critical infrastructure. Strategic investments in facilities and production capacity strengthen Canada's industrial base, and these provide the foundation for innovation and growth. And lastly, community development — this ensures that the benefits of all of these projects are shared broadly. Collaborative networks, research hubs, and regional innovation ecosystems all create inclusive economic opportunities supporting communities throughout the country.

Idea North — Canada

An example of an economic development funding opportunity that's more geographically limited, unlike the Strategic Innovation Fund, is the Idea North grant program. Idea North is a program offered by CanNor, the federal agency for northern economic development. The goal of this specific program is to support economic diversification, innovation, and greater Indigenous participation in both these things. The overarching goal is just to build a stronger, more sustainable, and resilient north.

Idea North has a bunch of different streams to address different regional priorities. Just to name a few: Sector and Capacity Development, Business Scale-Up and Productivity, and Small-Scale Economic Infrastructure. Each stream is designed to provide targeted support depending on the needs of the organization. In terms of how much funding is allocated, it can go up to $6 million per project, and a really wide range of organizations are eligible — both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, social enterprises, businesses, any level of government, basically any public or private entity. What ties them all together is that interest in northern economic development. In that way, partnerships are strongly encouraged, helping maximize the impact across these communities.

How does this specific program fit into our four themes? For workforce development, it supports training programs and capacity building so northerners can gain the skills needed for emerging jobs. On the innovation front, it's going to help businesses with things like product commercialization and clean tech adoption, boosting productivity and competitiveness. When it comes to critical infrastructure, it funds projects like incubator spaces and processing facilities. These give communities the assets they need for long-term growth. And lastly, when it comes to community development, the fund's going to support initiatives like visitor centers and shared facilities, which help build inclusive, resilient local economies. Just like the Strategic Innovation Fund, Idea North isn't just about funding individual projects — it's about making strategic investments that strengthen economic development across the north.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) — United States

Joseph Phelan:
Now we've looked at some Canadian grants. Let's dive into the U.S. landscape. Thanks, Siddhi, for that great information about those two grant programs. In the U.S., the first grant I'll speak about is the Community Development Block Grant, or CDBG. There are two different types of funds available: entitlement funds, and direct allocation to states who then award to those recipients that don't reach the entitlement threshold. The focus is really on revitalizing neighborhoods, providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and helping expand economic opportunities specifically to those low- and moderate-income persons. It's going to fund a wide variety of services to help improve community facilities or services, economic development, and neighborhood revitalization projects. Activities must

meet at least one of the national objectives: to benefit low- and moderate-income persons, to aid in the prevention or elimination of slums and blight, or to meet certain community development needs.

As I mentioned, there are two types of programs. The entitlement program is for cities or counties with at least 50,000 people for cities or 200,000 people for counties. These cities and counties directly receive funds each year from HUD. There's no deadline for that program when they receive these formula funds, and then they choose what to do with these funds — whether it's to help with public services, construct a water and sewer facility, and the like. Separately, there's also the competitive grant program. This is over a billion dollars that's going to be dispersed across all states and territories. Any city or county not eligible for the entitlement funds — any city under 50,000 people or any county under 200,000 — is going to be able to apply for this. Typically, it's in the spring. It depends on the state usually, but there's a competitive call for proposals. Some states have specific focus areas — whether it's public facility improvements, housing, or economic development. It really will depend on the local community.

When it comes to how CDBG fits into the four major themes: for workforce development, there could be assistance available to a for-profit organization to carry out economic development or job creation or retention activities within a community. There's also potential for childcare assistance to help someone who needs it to get a better job or to work full-time. For innovation, you have technology improvements to save money and modernize services. For critical infrastructure projects, you have the construction of water and sewer facilities, improving streets, broadband access, drainage upgrades, and increased accessibility to public buildings. And from the community development side of things, we've definitely seen neighborhood centers, converting old school buildings into public use — whether it's a library or a senior center — community gardens, trails, sidewalk enhancements, anything to beautify the community to help with community development and increase its viability through those enhancements.

Disaster Supplemental Grant Program — United States

The next grant program. Some grant programs exist in response to specific events. In late 2024, Congress passed the American Relief Act, which allocated billions to help communities with disaster relief, in addition to economic assistance for farmers. A grant program came into fruition with these funds, called the Disaster Supplemental Grant Program, which is going to award grants to regions experiencing severe economic distress from various national disasters that occurred in either 2023 and/or 2024.

There are three types of programs available for funding. The Readiness path is going to be focused on the community's readiness to apply for or implement a disaster recovery funding opportunity — the planning side of things. The Implementation path is focused on construction projects to help address

economic challenges faced by communities recovering from a national disaster, as well as to help improve the economic trajectory beyond pre-disaster economic conditions. And the Industry Transformation path is going to be the biggest grant program included under this program. It's really for regional stakeholders to create a transformative economic trajectory of a region through the development or acceleration of an industry. This comes from the Economic Development Administration, and they have five investment priorities: critical infrastructure; workforce; innovation and entrepreneurship; economic recovery and resiliency; and manufacturing. Most projects are going to need to build upon these investment priorities. There's $1.4 billion available in funds.

For every grant: the Readiness and Implementation paths can be submitted at any time, rolling deadlines. The Industry Transformation path has a March 3rd, 2026 deadline. With eligibility, anyone that is an EDA-designated economic development district can apply — tribes, states, counties, cities — as long as there was severe economic distress or harm because of a national disaster that occurred. They really encourage public-private partnerships for public infrastructure.

Now we're going to see exactly how this program fits across all four themes. For workforce development, there are funds to expand workforce training facilities or establish workforce training programs through different apprenticeships, depending on the focus of the community. On the innovation side, you can accelerate large-scale industry investment, business incubators, industrial parks, and expand the commercialization as well as proof-of-concept centers. Then you have critical infrastructure — to rebuild or expand facilities for water systems, bridges, railways, and broadband, those are all eligible. And the community development side: you can expand access to aviation, port, and harbor facilities. You have revolving loan funds for small businesses to help boost local economy. Those are some examples of the community development side of things.

These are just four examples of grants. I definitely encourage you to check any public resources that are available in the U.S., such as Grants.gov, or any of the 26 federal grant-making agencies, such as the Department of Commerce, Department of Housing and Urban Development, or Department of Labor. At the state level, there are various departments that will offer grants as well. In Canada, there is the Open Government Portal for various federal funding, and Canada has provincial agencies that administer funds for these economic development initiatives.

As Siddhi and I explained the funding themes in economic development: workforce development is really focused on adding jobs, strengthening the skills of current employees, and preparing them for future jobs. Innovation is focused on the research and adoption of new technologies to make life more efficient. Critical infrastructure focuses on the essentials of a community — roads, electricity, public transportation, broadband, public safety — which allow a community to function. And community development is going to make the community a wonderful place to live and work through various initiatives. Now Amanda is going to explain the role collaboration can play in grants.

The Role of Collaboration in Grant Seeking

Amanda Day:
Thanks, Joseph. So far we've talked about what economic development means for communities, looking at how it involves not just job creation and business growth, but investments in infrastructure, workforce development, and quality of life. We also talked about the role that grant funding can play in supporting these efforts, helping communities overcome financial barriers and take on larger and more innovative projects. Ultimately, we're trying to move closer to those long-term goals with this grant funding. Let's discuss how collaboration is essential to this process.

Why Partnerships Are Critical in Grant Seeking

We need to understand why partnerships are critical in grant seeking. Collaborating with other organizations can strengthen the proposal by showcasing collective efforts and demonstrating various strengths. In a collaborative approach, it signals that a project is supported both internally and externally. So we want to have internal partners and external partners whenever possible. By pooling resources, expertise, and networks, organizations can create better proposals and show funders that the project has widespread backing and buy-in, increasing the likelihood of winning that grant.

Projects with broad reach can impact more people and generate greater value for the community. Funders are often drawn to initiatives with far-reaching effects, particularly in areas like education, housing, and healthcare where services can extend to underserved populations. Partnerships also enhance credibility. A proposal backed by multiple stakeholders signals that the project is more than just an idea — it has buy-in, it's feasible, and has the potential for long-term success. Partners with relevant expertise further strengthen that credibility by demonstrating alignment with the funder's priorities, goals, and community's priorities. And finally, involving diverse partners brings a variety of knowledge, skills, and resources to a project. It's a holistic approach, as we keep saying, showing funders that the project is well-planned, flexible, and supported by the expertise needed to achieve its goals.

How to Develop Partnerships

How do we develop those partnerships? We want to be really focused on involving the right people in these grant applications. Before reaching out, make sure that we are pulling together our internal team. Talk with people across your agency to get a full picture of what's needed to make the project work. Take stock of what your team brings to the table, and think about where partnerships could help fill the gaps.

When we start engaging partners, bring them in early. Include them in discussions about your project's goals, and explore how they align with theirs. Make sure all the players have a voice in planning and they're heard. After initial conversations, we want to keep nurturing relationships throughout the

project and beyond. Successful collaboration can help ensure your project succeeds and open doors for future partnerships on future projects.

The final step is to formalize the partnership with a Memorandum of Understanding, often called an MOU. This document outlines the commitment between organizations and is often required as part of a grant proposal. The MOU is a non-legally-binding document explaining roles and goals, and cementing that partnership with the other entities involved.

Internal Partnerships

When we talk about partnerships, we talk about internal and external partnerships. First, internal partnerships. We need to identify internal stakeholders — this will be key in developing the project. Look for individuals or departments with the right expertise: executive leadership for strategic direction, finance for budget and viability, IT for technical support, and others who can contribute specialized knowledge you may not have. For example, internal partners for a Next Generation 911 project could include a grant writer to write the narrative, the finance team, the IT team, police officers, and dispatchers — so all of those voices are heard on how to best implement this program and what benefits it might have.

Once your internal team is set, bring them together to discuss the project, explain the grant, and brainstorm how it aligns with your organization's mission. Use the time to build a shared understanding of the project's goals, and agree on key milestones and deliverables. Next, we want to make sure we clearly define our roles and responsibilities and assign tasks. Typically, this includes a project lead to oversee coordination, a writer for the grant, a data specialist for evidence and statistics, IT support, and a financial manager to ensure the budget is realistic and that any cost shares can be met. Establish clear communication channels and regular check-ins to monitor progress, address any concerns, and keep everybody on the same page. And finally, foster an environment of open feedback and discussion. Encourage input from all team members, resolve potential conflicts early, and build consensus.

External Partnerships

When we're talking about external partnerships, a lot of overlap will be seen — some of the things from internal partnerships apply to external as well. This is just as important as building internal partnerships. External partnerships bring expertise, resources, networks, and sometimes finances, while showing broad support for your project.

Here's how you approach external partnerships. You need to identify the right partners — look at your project's needs and gaps, and identify which specialized knowledge and resources are missing internally. Potential partners can include nonprofits, government agencies, academic institutions, and local

community organizations. A great example might be including social service agencies and healthcare providers if the project is building a homeless shelter in your town.

Reach out strategically. Contact potential partners via email, a letter, or by phone. Emphasize the mutual benefits of that project — what can you do for us, what can we do for you — and create a win-win collaboration by clearly defining what you're trying to accomplish and how you can help each other. For instance, in a transportation project, if the DOT is taking on a big highway project, the city might connect with schools or fire stations to gather input on safety elements that could be included in the grant. They can address potential traffic disruptions during construction. They may also need to secure permits and conduct feasibility studies to make sure everything is by the book.

Define roles and responsibilities. Clarify each partner's role and how they'll contribute, from personnel and expertise to resources or technology, and establish communication. Again, check-ins are a really great way to keep everybody on track and resolve conflicts. Highlight your partners in your grant proposal — we want to make sure that everyone is being credited with the work they've put in. Describe each partner's role, their strengths, and unique contributions. Include letters of support, and reflect partner contributions in the budget. This strengthens credibility and demonstrates that collaborative commitment. Strong partnerships can be the difference between a good or great application. By working together internally and externally, communities can bring new expertise, share resources, and demonstrate broad support for their projects. These collaborations only strengthen the proposals in the eyes of funders. It ensures that the initiatives are sustainable and have a lasting community impact.

Today we've taken a closer look at what economic development really means, and how communities are affected by positive economic investments. We've examined the four major themes that drive it and explored how these themes translate into the grants landscape across the U.S. and Canada. We've also stressed that partnerships are key to converting these concepts into meaningful change. I hope you've enjoyed the webcast as much as we've enjoyed sharing this information with you. Now I'll hand it over to Ashley to introduce Grants Office Communities. This is a new website that makes finding and applying for grants easier and helps teams work together more seamlessly, making collaboration a central part of the process. Ashley —

Grants Office Communities

Ashley Schultz:
Thanks, Amanda, and thank you earlier to Siddhi and Joseph for all that really amazing information. I'm going to give our presenters just a few moments to grab a quick glass of water before we start our Q&A. Again, if you have any questions, please look to the bottom right-hand corner of your screen to drop them in the chat.

Overview of the Platform

While I do that, as Amanda said, I just want to quickly share information on Grants Office Communities. It's our brand new search and collaboration platform for grant seekers. We just launched it at the 1st of September. We are having such a great time seeing folks log in, make projects, find grants, and then work through their application process together. Grants Office Communities is a grant search and collaboration platform — basically your all-in-one stop where you can come up with ideas, whether they be for economic development or just for your own organization itself. You can come up with ideas, bring in your partners, and then find grants in our database and apply for them together. Unfortunately for those folks in our audience who are here from Canada, the platform is just for U.S. grant seekers at this time, but we do have plans to bring in Canadian grants and bring in our Canadian grant seekers into the Community here in the next year.

As I said, this platform is really built by grants professionals. The Grants Office team built this based upon the journey that we ourselves have experienced in grant seeking, and that we help folks with every day here. The platform is really built for you to go on this journey. First you have your Projects. You can create an unlimited number of project pages to help you start building your vision. This can be a page where you just jot down some ideas and what you think might be cool to do someday, or it can be a page where you really meticulously detail your work plan. You invite your accounting team, you put together a budget, you invite your boss to supervise your progress, and then you actively assign all of those different folks tasks inside the platform to keep that initiative moving together.

Then you have your Grants. I checked this morning — we have funding opportunities for more than 10,000 U.S. federal, state, and foundation funders, and that number grows every day. The humans here at Grants Office are constantly looking for more grants to add to that database. We've also got hours upon hours of recorded webinars just like this one that you can watch, along with a bunch of articles and downloadable PDFs, application guides, and step-by-step resources — all things that the Grants Office team here has collected over the years that we are now making available to everyone inside the platform. Through every step of the way, the Grants Office team is there with you. You'll see some familiar faces here — Joseph, Sydney, and Amanda, who you've already heard from extensively today. But the rest of the Grants Office team is also in there, actively updating the information and available to you behind the click of a button to say, “Hey, I need an extra set of eyes on this grant. Can you help me build out my project for this particular funding initiative?” We're all there to help you inside the platform as well.

Subscription Plans

We have three different subscription plans. The Pro membership is intended for single grant seekers or independent writers — these are our bold teams of one who are out there writing and winning grants all by themselves. We also have Team memberships for small grant-seeking groups within the same

organization. So if you are a K-12 district, for example, you can give access to three building principals, one person in finance, and one person in curriculum development. Together as a group of five people, you can see each other's project pages and work more closely together. You also get to pick a person to be your team leader, and they have a series of customized administrative dashboards to view progress. And then we have our Enterprise membership, designed for large-scale use by organizations in the public sector in the United States. So a local government, for example, may want to give access to public works, sanitation, community development, and parks because they know that grants are a vital part of each of their budgets.

I'll just quickly say we launched on September 1st. Our welcome discount is still active if you're here listening to us today live. If you use the code WELCOME50 as you're signing up for your free two-week trial, you can save 50% off an annual membership. It's WELCOME50, all caps. Here's the QR code if you want to hop over to Grants Office Communities and check it out. Sign up for a free two-week trial. If you want to see more, you can also click “Schedule a Demo,” and you'll get connected with me. I'll hang out with you, show you the platform on my screen, answer your questions, and we can work through it together.

Q&A Session

With that, I have four questions in four minutes, so we're going to do this pretty rapid-fire. If you have more questions, please feel free to send us an email at education@grantsoffice.com, and we will reply to you via email or give you a call.

Q1: What is an appropriate time to create and sign an MOU?

First I want to send this question to Amanda. It came in when you were chatting about MOUs in the conclusion there — what is an appropriate time to create and sign an MOU?

Amanda Day:

Really, the best time is early on in the proposal development phase. We want to make sure that we are filling out those MOUs because they really define the role of each entity. You can assign tasks — what role are they taking, what is the expectation — defining mutual objectives. It also gives you ample time to gather the information necessary. There's going to be sections of the MOU that need to be filled out: the organization name, the contacts, and all the information within. So, as early on in the development process as you can, once you establish that partnership.

Q2: Is there a way to access the allocation list of the CDBG entitlement program funds? Is it an annual program?

Ashley Schultz:
Joseph, this question came in when you were talking about U.S. funding opportunities, specifically CDBG, the community development block grant. Is there a way to access the allocation list of the entitlement program funds? And is it an annual program?

Joseph Phelan:
Yes, there is. So, hudexchange.info — there's a lot of information about several of the HUD grant programs, but specifically the CDBG community development block grant program. You can export that to an Excel file with the allocation for the states as well as for the entitlement communities. This is an annual fund. It depends solely on the federal budget, so that's something to be mindful of. Every indication is that this program is going nowhere. There might be some tweaks as far as what's eligible underneath the community development block grant program, but it is a program that has been around for several years now, and we anticipate that in the future as well.

Q3: What role do nonprofits play in the economic development funding landscape?

Ashley Schultz:
And Joseph, while I have you unmuted: what role do nonprofits play in the economic development funding landscape?

Joseph Phelan:
It's a great question. Nonprofits — you mentioned a little bit in the presentation — there's a lot of value that they offer. They're the ones who take up office space in downtown communities, a lot of front office space, as well as offering services to the community, which plays a major role. They also do partnerships and collaborations with local governments as well as the private sector to assist with reaching out to individuals in certain areas to let them know about workforce development opportunities or job training initiatives. Fostering social services, which nonprofit organizations are often focused on, as well as education-based programs such as digital literacy programs — you'll see nonprofit organizations are definitely going to have a role. It really will depend on the activity of the nonprofit organization, but there are several indirect and direct ways that nonprofit organizations can capitalize on these funds.

Q4: What does foundation funding support look like for these types of projects?

Ashley Schultz:
Our last question here: Siddhi, if you could please help us. What does foundation funding support look like for these types of projects? I know the examples that you and Joseph gave were all federal funding opportunities, but what does the foundation funding landscape look like?

Siddhi Aubeeluck:
Yes, foundations are also involved in economic development. They'll fund projects in workforce development, affordable housing, and community development as well. That's a big theme for foundations. What's cool about foundations is that a lot of them are privately funded, so they represent the private sector's contributions to economic development. But they'll usually only fund nonprofits, so that's a great example of partnership. They're also more flexible than federal, provincial, or state funders. Usually, they're more risk-tolerant, so you could try new pilot initiatives when it comes to economic development that, for example, federal funders might not want to invest in. They're really important to initiatives like this.

Closing

Ashley Schultz:
Wonderful. Great. Well, again, thank you everyone for attending our session today. We hope you found it to be a good use of your time. Please, if you have more questions, info@grantsoffice.com or education@grantsoffice.com — both are really great ways to reach out to us. We look forward to seeing you on another event. Thank you again, Siddhi, Amanda, and Joseph for all the great content. Talk to you soon.

— End of Transcript —

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