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# The Grant Funding Landscape for Utilities and Energy

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*Presented by Ashley Schultz and Joseph Phelan • Grants Office, LLC*

## Welcome and Introductions

**Ashley Schultz:**
Hey, everyone. My name is Ashley Schultz, Manager of Community Engagement here at Grants Office. Today we're going to be discussing the U.S. grant funding landscape for utilities and energy. Our topics today are going to be relevant for folks out there who are generating power, running water utilities, and managing other critical infrastructure. It's also going to be relevant for the folks in local and regional government entities that oversee those entities and interact with them every day. If you were part of our last webinar where we mentioned that economic development takes a village to successfully deploy, this is really a lot of similar topics today — you're going to see a lot of overlap. Several entities need to come to the table and collaborate with one another to get this project off the ground.

## Housekeeping

**Ashley Schultz:**
Before we get started, just two quick housekeeping items for you. First, you can ask questions anytime during today's event. The question and answer interface is in 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 toward the end of today's presentation.

Also know that the session is being recorded. The recording's going to be available for download at the Grants Office website starting tomorrow, and the PowerPoint slides that we present here today are also going to be available in that same location.

## Today's Speaker and Agenda

**Ashley Schultz:**
So again today, we're talking about the funding landscape for energy and utilities. I'm joined today by Joseph Phelan, who is our in-house expert on all things transportation, broadband, manufacturing, smart cities, and also energy and utilities. Joseph works with folks every day who are just like you. They're searching for Department of Energy grants. They're trying to keep track of state broadband

funding. They're polishing up their proposals, et cetera. He's got a wealth of expertise in this area, and I think you guys are going to learn a lot from him today.

Here's a quick run-through of our agenda over the next 20 to 30 minutes. We'll talk about the current landscape of utility and energy funding in the United States — what things are being prioritized, where we're seeing shifts for this funding, particularly at the federal level with the new presidential administration. Then we have separate sections for each individual utility type. Joseph will talk about funding for power generation and for water utilities. Then he'll discuss funding for critical infrastructure, which is water and power, but also several other types of public services and amenities that the Department of Homeland Security has designated as critical infrastructure. And then with that foundation, Joseph will leave you with some tips on where to find those funding opportunities out in the wild, so you can take this information and find exactly where to get those specific grants in your state or region. We're going to end with the Q&A session from the audience, so feel free to drop those questions in that bottom right-hand corner. With that, I'm going to pass things over to Joseph to get us started.

## Understanding the Grant Funding Landscape

**Joseph Phelan:**
Thank you so much, Ashley, and thanks, everyone, for joining this afternoon — or late morning depending on where you're located. First, we're going to talk through just the understanding of what grants are: a very high-level overview. Grants are given by a public entity or a charitable foundation to another entity for a specific purpose linked to public benefit. That's just a very general definition of what a grant is.

### Top Sources of Grant Funding

**Joseph Phelan:**
Here are some of the top sources of grant funding. You have the federal grant agencies — that's going to be the bulk of where funds come from, the federal government. They have an annual budget that's passed each year that allows for funding to be shuffled to local organizations throughout the country, to states, to regional organizations. That's usually about $700 billion annually. There's also special funding, such as the Inflation Reduction Act and various bills that are passed by Congress throughout the year that also provide some potential for grant funding.

There are also some states that offer funding through various programs as well. That's a very popular targeted source for specific states. And then the last are private and corporate foundations. It's going to depend on who's eligible. Sometimes government agencies are eligible. A lot of times it's just for nonprofit organizations. But if you specialize in a specific topic that the foundation cares about, then you may be eligible for a grant from them.

### Recurrent Themes in Utilities and Energy Funding

**Joseph Phelan:**
When we're looking at utilities and energy funding, here are some recurrent themes that we see. Definitely build-out of infrastructure — any type of infrastructure is going to be a big talking point and spending point for the federal government and state governments to fund various infrastructure-related projects. Increasing the efficiency of an operating system, whether it's a water utility or energy utility — any type of funds that can increase the efficiency of the organization is going to be fundable. Strengthening resiliency — this really ties in with the grid resiliency aspect of funding. Providing training, whether it's workforce development or reskilling or upskilling of employees, that's going to be available as well. And then you have just overall innovation. Whether it's R&D or piloting technologies, innovation is definitely a key theme for utilities as well as energy funding.

### Federal Priorities Under the New Administration

**Joseph Phelan:**
With the new administration earlier this year, there have been some major priorities. These are additional federal funding priorities that the new administration is focused on: fossil fuel production, nuclear energy, critical minerals, the grid resiliency side of things, and then a pivot from clean energy. You might have seen in the news recently — there have been hundreds of grants from the previous administration that have been terminated, and they have to do with wind and solar and those types of clean energy technologies. So there is a pivot from clean tech, from clean energy.

## Funding for Power Generation

**Joseph Phelan:**
We're going to look at three different funding buckets, as Ashley mentioned. The first has to do with power generation.

### DOE Speed to Power RFI

**Joseph Phelan:**
The Department of Energy in September released a Request for Information, and the goal of this request is to accelerate the speed of large-scale grid infrastructure projects for transmission and generation. They're really asking state energy offices, public utility commissions, electric utilities, regional transmission organizations, and system operators, as well as large energy users, to submit questions that they have.

The questions that are going to be asked of these key stakeholders in the energy sector are things like: what kind of large-scale generation, transmission, and grid infrastructure projects are needed within the

U.S.? Where should the DOE prioritize investments? How should the DOE fund these projects? There are several funding streams that were associated with the Department of Energy in recent years through the IIJA — the Transmission Facilitation Program, the GRIP Program, which is all about grid resiliency, as well as various loans. So the DOE is asking for the key stakeholders' input on how they should utilize these dollars moving forward into 2026 and beyond.

They're also asking what types of new electric load are driving demand increases in service areas. Last December, a report from the Department of Energy estimated that the data center load growth has tripled over the past decade and is projected to double or triple again by 2028. That's going to be the key part of this RFI — to figure out where exactly these increases are throughout the country — and whether there are any grid infrastructure constraints that these organizations are facing.

This RFI is really going to dictate what type of grant program is going to exist as well as what the application is going to look like, what's going to be involved with the application, and how much money is going to be available. So not quite a grant program, however it does give us a good understanding of where the current administration is as far as their focus with grant funding into 2026 and beyond with this Speed to Power initiative.

## Grid Resilience State and Tribal Formula Grant Program

**Joseph Phelan:**
I mentioned the grid resiliency side of things — the GRIP Program. When the IIJA came through in 2021, there were two separate grid-related programs both from the Grid Deployment Office. The first one was the GRIP Program, which I mentioned in the previous slide. A grant program is going to come from that in some capacity, and we've already seen that program fund hundreds of awards in the last few years. However, states also received funds from the Grid Deployment Office with the Grid Resilience State and Tribal Formula Grant Program. For this program, it's quite simple. It's going to fund technologies and activities to help improve the resiliency of the electric grid against all types of extreme weather or natural disasters.

Funds have been allocated to states, territories, as well as tribal governments. There have been various sub-award deadlines for these electric grid operators, electricity generators, distribution providers, and distribution owners or operators throughout the country. Wherever they're located, they can apply to their state — whether it's their energy office, their office of commerce, or whoever is responsible for administering the funds. So it really will depend on where you're located. The amounts are going to range. Each fiscal year since 2021, there's been an allocation to these states, so some states have waited until they got all the allocation and then had one large application process. Others have made several rounds of funding each year since 2022 with those funds. Some states prioritize smaller utilities; other

states will allow large utilities to apply, but there may just be a larger cost share. It really will depend on the state itself.

We do have several deadlines that are open right now throughout the country. Tennessee and Pennsylvania have deadlines, as well as Colorado, in the next couple of weeks. Washington State has one on November 20, Connecticut's deadline is not until May of next year, and New York State has a rolling deadline, which means applicants can apply anytime.

### Upcoming DOE Critical Minerals Programs

**Joseph Phelan:**
Before we move on to the water side of things, the Department of Energy also in late summer released a couple of pieces of information about these upcoming grant programs. Some of these funds have come from the IIJA. They're really focused on the critical minerals side of things — things to do with domestic energy. The Rare Earth Elements Demonstration Program, also any type of demonstration or pilot technologies — those are going to be some of the focuses of these four grant programs. We don't know when they're going to open. They said that they're going to open sometime in October or November, late quarter of 2025, but they haven't opened up yet. Here is just an understanding of how much is available. Some of them are going to be R&D projects, some of them are going to be pilot projects, but there are some Department of Energy grants on the horizon.

## Funding for Water Utilities

**Joseph Phelan:**
Now we're going to switch to the water utility side of things, where we're going to talk about two specific grant programs.

### WaterSMART

**Joseph Phelan:**
There are several different programs under the WaterSMART umbrella, which is hosted by the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation. These funds are going to be available to conserve water, increase sustainability, and make more efficient use of water supplies. There could be some drought grants or there could be some large recycling grants — it really will depend on the actual program itself. But there are some water and energy efficiency grants, small-scale or larger ones. Projects are typically going to range between $100,000 and $500,000 depending on the actual water initiative that you're applying for. Some examples of projects we've seen funded in the past include canal lining, smart meters, irrigation flow measurements, and SCADA improvements — anything that helps conserve water, increase stability, and make more efficient use of water supplies.

For eligibility, this is actually only reserved for western states. So this has been around for several years now. Organizations in Texas and Oklahoma and throughout the West Coast are eligible to apply, as well as the territories that are located out west. States, tribes, irrigation districts, water districts, and any water or power delivery authorities located in one of these areas are eligible to apply for this program. These programs were expected to have deadlines this year for funding, but they were pulled during the review when the current administration took over. We still haven't seen when these programs are going to return. However, they've had so much success in the past that we do anticipate those funds being available into the future. We'll see exactly when they open.

## Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)

**Joseph Phelan:**
The next program is more applicable for organizations or governments throughout the country: the CDBG, or Community Development Block Grant Program. There are two types of funding for this — entitlement funding as well as competitive funding. Basically, these grants are going to help improve community facilities and services. That's one aspect. As well as revitalization of neighborhoods, and anything to help drive economic development. Projects must touch at least one of these objectives: benefit low- and moderate-income persons, aid in the prevention or elimination of slums, or meet certain community development needs.

There are two types of grants under this program. There's the entitlement program, which is going to be funds that are sent to entitlement cities — any cities that have at least 50,000 residents — and counties must have at least 200,000 residents. So this is a formula allocation. These funds are going to be directly allocated to these cities and counties. There may be a competitive process internally, because sometimes nonprofit organizations could apply for these funds. There might be some internal processes with how these cities and counties use the funds to sub-award eligible recipients within their county or city. However, there's not necessarily any public information about that. It's really an internal conversation you have with whoever is in charge of the funds from your city or county.

And then there is the competitive program, which is meant for any of those cities and counties that do not reach that population threshold. Over a billion is dispersed to those states and then put into a competitive call for proposals. The deadlines are going to vary, the priorities are going to vary — it really depends on where you're located, when the grant program will open, and what type of funding they're focused on. But they fund some of the same projects as the entitlement program does when it comes to public works facilities and upgrades to those community service facilities.

# Funding for Other Critical Infrastructure

**Joseph Phelan:**
Now we're going to move on to other critical infrastructure. Infrastructure is considered critical if it's essential for governments to have a working society and economy. So water and energy are definitely two types of critical infrastructure, but some examples also include emergency services, healthcare, IT, transportation, as well as general government facilities and several more. The federal government identifies 16 sectors of critical infrastructure for counties and cities throughout the country.

## Department of Homeland Security Programs

**Joseph Phelan:**
The DHS, the Department of Homeland Security — a lot of these grant programs stem from them. They could go to the water authority for cybersecurity upgrades, but they also could go to a city to improve their responses, to improve their capabilities to prevent or respond to incidents.

There's the UASI program, the Urban Areas Security Initiative program. Those funds are going to be directly allocated to the largest cities in the country to help with those types of security and resiliency plans. You have the State Homeland Security Grant Program — those funds are going to go toward soft target and crowded places protection. So physical security for local organizations throughout the country. States receive these funds each year and then award them to eligible recipients through a competitive application process. There's also an enhanced cybersecurity resiliency piece to the State Homeland Security Grant Program.

And then lastly, the EMPG, the Emergency Management Performance Grant — same type of situation where they're going to award funds to states. FEMA, or DHS, is going to award to states who then will sub-award to eligible applicants such as local emergency management agencies, anyone that has to deal with all-hazards emergency preparedness.

## State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program (SLCGP)

**Joseph Phelan:**
Last, I'll touch on the SLCGP, the State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program, just briefly because that's kind of separate from the DHS flagship programs. This is a program that came out during the IIJA. We've seen it funded each year since then. States have recently submitted their 2025 allocations. Yesterday we saw that Florida announced their deadline in December, so we've seen some states announce deadlines for the 2025 funds recently. It's really to improve the critical infrastructure for the security side of things, for the cybersecurity side of things. It could be equipment, it could be training, or it could be a combination of both. But the goal is to improve the overall resiliency of services that are provided by any type of government entity.

# Where to Find Funding Opportunities

**Joseph Phelan:**
Before I pass it back to Ashley, I will explain some of where to look for funding opportunities. From the federal side of things, there are 26 agencies that administer grants. So the Department of Energy — I mentioned that several times throughout. They have some sub-agencies like the Grid Deployment Office that is under the Department of Energy. There are also several other ones that are under the Department of Energy, but they're the ones who administer the bulk of the grant programs. The Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of the Interior — those are four of the examples I mentioned earlier, all stemming from these agencies.

## State-Level Sources

**Joseph Phelan:**
From the state side of things: the energy office. There could be a commission, an authority, a research and development entity — those are just some examples of what states have named their energy offices. It could be a governor's office of energy. It really would depend on the state, but those are just some key terms to look for. And then emergency management, and then environment. You'll see some examples of various environment departments throughout each state. Division of local government — that might be specific to certain states. Not every state has a division of local government, but there may be some funds there. And then you might see some funds through economic and community development or commerce — those types of state agencies may offer some of these grants as well.

## Regional Associations, Loans, and Foundations

**Joseph Phelan:**
Other methods of funding: sometimes there might not be federal or state grants that make sense for your organization. There are some regional organizations or associations, like the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Right now there's $20 million available for cybersecurity projects through September 2028, so they're really focused on rural co-ops with SCADA systems.

There are also always loans and financing. USDA offers various loans and opportunities for rural electric operators. There are also organizations like the American Public Power Association, which offer opportunities for members. And then foundations are never a bad idea to look at, because even if you're not necessarily a government entity — or maybe you are a government entity — you might think that you could be eligible based on what you're trying to do with these funds. The Energy Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the ClimateWorks Foundation — those are some examples of foundations that are focused on funding various clean energy initiatives. And that's just a couple of them. Depending on where you're located, there could be a foundation that will fund your project based on what you're

looking for funding-wise. Foundations are never a bad idea to look into because, as long as the project is going to benefit the public at large, they're definitely interested in funding those types of projects. With that, I will pass it back to Ashley, who has some things to share about Grants Office Communities.

## Grants Office Communities

**Ashley Schultz:**
Thank you, Joseph, for all that information. I'm just going to give you a few minutes to grab a glass of water before we start our Q&A session. Again, if you have any questions, feel free to drop them in that bottom right-hand corner of your screen.

While he does that, I just — as Joseph said — want to quickly share some information about Grants Office Communities. It's a new search and collaboration platform for grant seekers that Grants Office just launched. We have been live since September 1 and have had a great time seeing folks log in, make projects, find grants, and basically work through the application process together.

Grants Office Communities is a grant search and collaboration platform. It's basically a singular site where you can come up with ideas, bring in your partners, find grants, and then apply for them together — all in the same space. When you're in the platform, you can create an unlimited number of project pages. These are places where you can start building your vision. You could just jot down some ideas on what you'd like to do someday, or you can actually get very meticulous and detail your work plan, invite your accounting team to see your proposed budget, invite your boss to supervise progress, and then you can actively assign folks inside the platform tasks to keep your initiative moving forward.

You can also set up separate spaces to work on proposal pages together. Again, these are collaborative spaces where you can turn activities, tasks, documents, and conversations into completed grant applications together. And the best part is the collaborators that you bring in — your boss, your finance team, maybe an outside entity that's just helping you with drawings or specs for construction — they don't actually need to have a paid subscription to Grants Office Communities to see your page and to contribute to your work.

Standing behind all of those collaboration spaces is this database of grant funding opportunities. As of this morning when I was checking, we have more than 10,000 federal, state, and foundation funders from the United States inside that database, and that number grows every day. The humans here at Grants Office are constantly looking for more grants to add to the system, and we're always keeping watch of those existing program pages. Joseph mentioned CDBG for Florida earlier, for example — we're getting those updates into our system as soon as we can. As a user, you can search through that database, look through all these opportunities, and then link them to your project spaces. Say you're browsing the database and you see a funding opportunity — this is CDBG in California, for example —

and you think it would be perfect for your community facilities project. You can link that grant to your project page so that all of your collaborators can see it, and then you can decide as a group whether or not you want to apply to it together.

Last but certainly not least is the Grants Office team. We're here to help you with any other steps of the grant seeking process that you may need. We have research and consultation services — actually chatting and sitting down with folks like Joseph to talk about your project and understand all the grants that are specifically available to you given who you are and where you're located in the world. We also have folks who can help you build out your project, write the proposal, actually put pen to paper on your behalf, or just review documents that you yourself have written that you want an extra set of eyes on.

Feel free to engage with us. You can contact us at any point in time, at any point of the grant seeking process. We can jump in whether you're not sure what grant opportunities are available for you at all and just want a review of the landscape specifically for your organization, or whether you're ready to start working on an application and you want an extra set of hands in the whole process.

## Q&A Session

**Ashley Schultz:**
I'm going to jump over to our Q&A session here. I want to first call out someone in the crowd who I believe is a fan of grant seeking, because they had some pretty good advice here, and I want to particularly call out what they mentioned about CDBG, the Community Development Block Grant. They do have specific requirements on serving low- to moderate-income populations. Joseph mentioned that those funds are meant to target low- to moderate-income residents in your community. So keep that in mind when you're talking about a utilities project. For example, you could get a portion of a water main extension funded through CDBG if it happens to pass through a neighborhood that's 80% or more low- to moderate-income residents. So take a step back, be creative, and think critically about your project. And again, CDBG specifically has those requirements. Thanks to the person who dropped that into the chat.

### Q1: Are there any specific grants for water districts that are listed as a disadvantaged community?

**Joseph Phelan:**
There are several grants out there that will fund those types of projects. You see it a lot with USDA Rural Development. Their Community Facilities Program is designed for rural areas or those areas that have populations of under 20,000 people. So that's one example, but yes, there's definitely a focus on those types of projects and those types of areas.

### Q2: Do you have to apply through the city or county for CDBG, or do you go directly to the state?

**Joseph Phelan:**
If you're in an entitlement city or county, that process would be within the city or county. If you're under the population threshold — so under 50,000 for a city or under 200,000 for a county — then you apply with the state. The state has their own application process that you submit for those funds.

### Q3: When do you anticipate the DOE creating a grant opportunity from the Speed to Power initiative RFI?

**Joseph Phelan:**
That's a great question. We definitely think sometime in early 2026 — hopefully by March of 2026. We like to say that grants come out at the same time each year, but it hasn't necessarily been the case with some of these newer grant programs under the new administration, with shifting priorities and focuses and things like that. So we hope that once 2026 comes around and there's more of an established order of things, that'll be when the grant comes out, sometime in the late winter or early spring.

## Closing

**Ashley Schultz:**
I will also note, in response to someone asking about Grants Office Communities and where to go to the platform, you can go to grantsoffice.com — you can see that here on the bottom right-hand corner of your screen. There's a link to Grants Office Communities there. Or you can go to communities.grantsoffice.com, or just Google search “Grants Office Communities.” We made sure we were the first people to pop up when you put in that little chain of words. So you can go right there. We have free 14-day trials. So if you're not sure if you want to just hop in and poke around a little bit more, you can do that right through that website.

Thanks very much, Joseph, again, for all this excellent information and for the great answers to our Q&A session. And thanks to all of you for joining us here today. We hope you found this to be a good use of your time, and we hope to see you on a future GrantsCast webinar. Thanks much.

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