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AMERICAN PUBLIC WORKS ASSOCIATION / SEPTEMBER 2019 / www.apwa.net



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SEPTEMBER 8-11, 2019

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Over the past several years, Wausau city officials have worked with Stantec's brownfield team to obtain more than \$2.5 million in federal and state funding to remediate and redevelop 31 acres of vacant and contaminated riverfront parcels. (Photo credit: Stantec)

How can cities find funding for aging infrastructure?

Heidi Peper, Senior Funding Leader, Stantec, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Cities large and small have experienced some level of economic distress since the country's last recession, leading to the deferral of much needed maintenance for aging infrastructure. Recent infrastructure reports indicate that wastewater infrastructure needs exceed \$271 billion, bridge rehabilitation needs exceed \$123 billion, and one out of every five miles of highway pavement is in poor condition. Cities are stretching their budgets to accommodate basic needs, but many cities are struggling to keep up with demands on their infrastructure due to lack of funding.

New funding programs are popping up all the time, existing programs are being defunded, and the programs that remain are being changed constantly. It's not easy to keep up with the ever-changing world of funding.

For cities that are looking for funding for infrastructure improvements, there are three keys to funding success and developing a sound funding strategy: know your community, know your project, and know your funding agencies. Sounds pretty simple, right? But what does it mean to have this knowledge and how can you make it work for your city?

Know your community

Communities, no matter the size, need to make infrastructure improvements. For many, the cost of infrastructure

needs far surpasses the city's budget. In order to prioritize your community's needs and wants, it's critical to know your community intimately—it's more than population and median household income. What are other demographics that can help you paint the story of need? What is your per capita spending on infrastructure? What are your residents paying, on average, for sewer and water user rates compared to other area cities? What is your breakdown of homeowners versus renters? What is the commute pattern of your residents? What are your city's strengths and weaknesses? What is your position in the marketplace—are you a regional center or a "bedroom" community?

Additionally, what exactly are the community needs? What are the desires, goals and aspirations of the various segments of the community? It is important to point to specific, intentional, and inclusive community engagement exercises when applying for outside funding to demonstrate that the project and related funding ask is not an agenda borne by one or a few select people.

It can also help you identify potential partners for implementation, or at a minimum, organizations that can provide letters of support for your funding applications. When you understand the various organizations within your city (i.e., Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Kiwanis, workforce organi-



The Oregon International Port of Coos Bay acquired the 135-mile Coos Bay Rail Link in 2009, and successfully reestablished freight rail service in 2011 to strengthen local industry and move cargo valued at \$225 million annually. As bridge engineer of record, Stantec has worked with the Port to help ensure the system is in safe and operable shape, and helped the Port secure a \$20 million BUILD grant award which will be used on various bridge repair and replacement projects. (Photo credit: Port of Coos Bay)

zations, United Way, etc.) and their goals and missions, you can confidently put forth a project that moves your community forward.

Know your project

It's important to have a deep understanding of the project at hand and know all the angles that might attract outside funding. Is there an economic development component? Is there a hazard-mitigation piece that could also lend to project funding? Communities need to think outside the box when it comes to categorizing its project.

Also, think about how others will benefit from your project. As an example, what looks to be a traditional wastewater project could also be an economic development project, if it is preventing growth of industrial development. You need to know all drivers behind infrastructure projects beyond the obvious.

When you're looking at a specific infrastructure project, how long has it been an issue and what is in the way of resolving that issue? Is it strictly funding or are regulations getting in the way? Take stock of what has already been done to address this issue. This illustrates that you have proactively tried to address the need on your own but are now at a point where outside assistance is needed.

It's also important to think about getting creative with partnerships. Some regions have economic development, housing redevelopment, and/or port authorities; some areas have regional development commissions—these entities might have technical assistance or even funding programs to help advance your projects. Business associations and nonprofits are key, too, as their mission may align with the goals of your project(s). These entities might also inform the design of your project if they have needs that can be supported through the proposed improvements. Or they may provide support to your project by providing a letter of support.

Know who is playing in your space and get to know them. It often takes multiple players to bring a project to fruition.

Know your funding agencies

Knowing what project types are eligible for which funds is important, but just because a project is eligible for funding, doesn't mean it will compete well. Similar to municipalities' budget woes, demands on federal and state agency programs far outweigh the money they have available for funding awards.

It is critical to get to know staff at funding agencies prior to a notice of funding becoming available. Meet with state and federal agency staff in person, if possible. Many federal agencies have regional staff scattered across the country that are more than willing to meet with potential applicants. If travel is an issue, a phone call is the next best thing. The bottom line is you need to know what their priorities are for funding within the eligibility framework and what their hot button issues are. Multiple meetings or phone conversations may be needed for you to develop a comprehensive understanding of the funding sources, their priorities, and the timing of the programs. It also helps to know which sources can be leveraged with each other. The more you know them, and they know you, the easier it is to position yourself for success.

Funding success

When outside funding is needed, knowing your community, project, and funding agencies are key for any community to develop a sound funding strategy. Only then should you put "pen to paper" and start applying for grants and low-interest loans. It's also important to allow for enough time. Putting together a well-rounded, successful funding package often takes 18 to 24 months. Healthy doses of perseverance, passion, and patience are invaluable.

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