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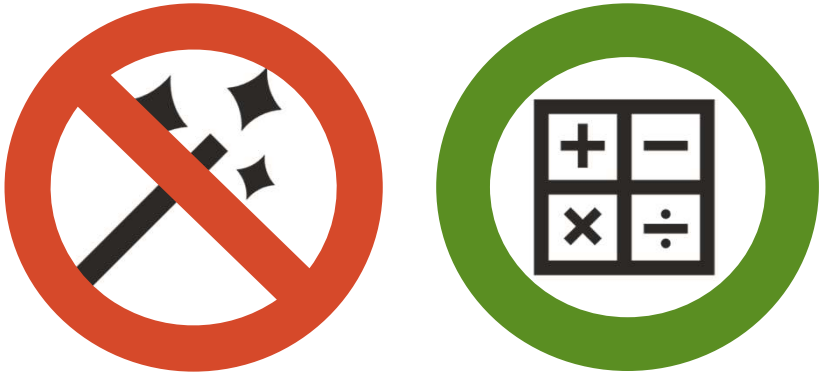
Put a bridge on it (or not?): the finer points of infrastructure funding

Sarah Sieloff
Planner & Funding Strategist

Frequent stumbling blocks: magic math

- Two key budgetary buckets
  - Match
  - Administrative costs
- Key questions
  - Will the grant reimburse for management? How much?
  - Does your budget include staff time for management?
  - Do you have the staff capacity to manage this grant and do it well?



Frequent stumbling blocks: time, community engagement

Lack of time

- If the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is out, you're too late
- Look ahead 1-2 years
  - Their timeline, your timeline, and flexibilities and dependencies
- Consider end of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding in FY25

Community engagement, environmental justice (EJ), resilience

- Expectations, best practices, requirements evolving rapidly
- Can your project meet the program's requirements?
- Do you have the partners in place? If not, how can you find them?

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Setting up for success

It’s a marathon. And a sprint.

juice > squeeze?

And do we even like this kind of juice?

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Socialize the project, and start early

- **Key agency staff**
- Local and state elected officials
- Members of Congress
- Governor's office
- Community partners

> "It's an even playing field, if you make it one."
>
> *DC lobbyist*

Get creative with match, start talking early

- Match vs. leverage
- Cash match
  - Your money
  - Other federal funds (caveat emptor, but possible)
  - If using state funds, are these federal pass-through?
- Third-party in-kind match
  - "Soft" matching
  - Could be services, supplies, real property, equipment from you or a partner (public, nonprofit, private)
  - Value limited to fair market value at time of donation
- Department of Transportation's (DOT) guide to nonfederal match

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Scan the landscape, give yourself the gift of time

1. Grant requirements

2. Identify and inform your partners

3. Bootstraps vs. hired guns

4. The longer view

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1. Grant requirements

- Implementation timeline
- Benefit-cost analysis
- Market study
- Business plan
- Public participation plan
- Attachments
- Maps, GIS files
- Page limits

2. Identify and inform your partners

- Increasingly highly encouraged or even mandated
- Think cross-sector
- More than a letter: should be substantial, specific, and meaningful
  - Clear contributions
  - Clear benefits
- **Should you even be the lead applicant?**

A note about partnerships

- Start early
- Build beyond the transaction
- Don’t confuse community-based and nonprofit groups
- Make friends with philanthropy
  - More than an ATM
  - Relationship broker
  - Grease and glue
- How can partnership development support other organizational priorities and goals?

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3. **Bootstraps vs. hired guns:** in-house or hired out?

- Consider staff capacity, timing
- Your familiarity with the grant program
- Grant requirements
- Cost of application prep (time = $)
- Success rate
- What do you most **need?**
  - Strategy? Writing? Assembly? Review?
- Remember grant applications are a form of gambling

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4. The longer view … because they're going to ask

- What can be leveraged?
- What's next, and why?
- Who else have you talked to?

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The fine art of reading (and responding to) a NOFO

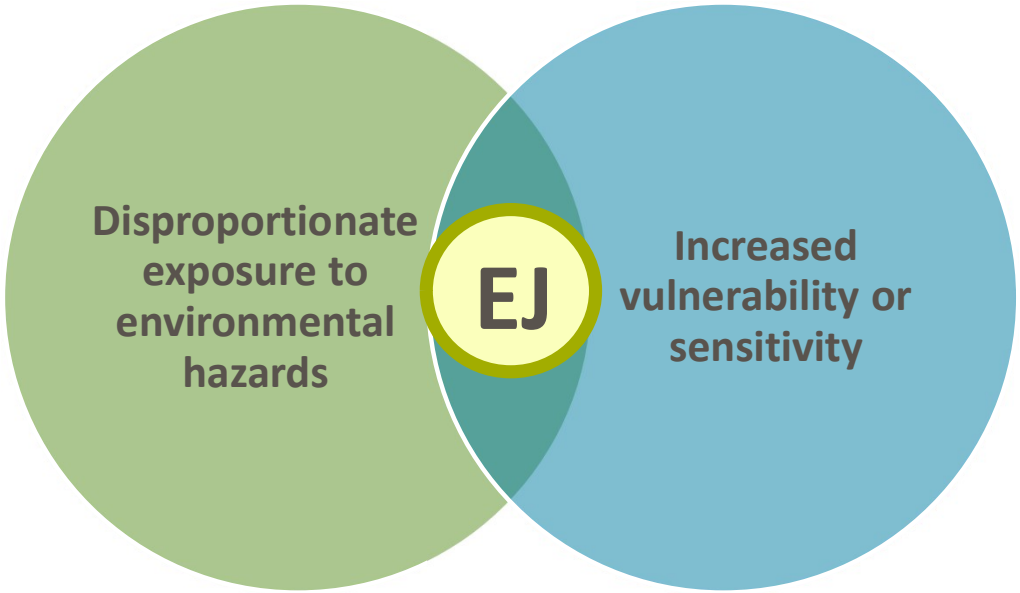
Finding the right lens

Be aware of agency priorities and how they've changed

- EJ and equity
- Climate change and resilience

Example: Environmental justice

> **Environmental justice (EJ)** is the **fair treatment** and **meaningful involvement** of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies."
>
> *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA*



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How EJ shows up in grant guidelines

Example 1: Resilience and climate mitigation in grant guidelines

MARAD encourages applicants to (1) consider climate change, sustainability, and environmental justice in project planning efforts and (2) incorporate project elements dedicated to mitigating or reducing the impacts of climate change, improving sustainability, and addressing environmental justice. In particular, applicants should address the extent to which the project

Source: MARAD PIDP FY23 Guidelines, Section V(2), Selection Criteria E: Climate Change and Sustainability

Example 2: Community engagement, EJ in DOT RAISE

c. Quality of Life

DOT will consider whether and how the project will improve quality of life, such as by increasing affordable transportation choices and expanding active transportation usage or significantly reducing vehicle dependence; reduce transportation and housing cost burdens by integrating mixed use development and a diversity of housing types (including affordable housing) with multimodal transportation infrastructure; coordinate and integrate land use, affordable housing, and transportation planning in order to create more livable communities and expand travel choices; reduce vehicle dependence and improve access to daily destinations such as jobs, healthcare, grocery store, schools, places of worship, recreation, or parks such as by adding new facilities that promote walking, biking; implement transit-oriented development that benefits existing residents and businesses; mitigate urban heat islands to protect the health of at-risk residents, outdoor workers, and others; or proactively address racial equity.[27]

Fair treatment:
- Economic
- Health

Fair treatment:
- Mobility

Fair treatment:
- Climate

Source: FY23 DOT RAISE Notice of Funding Opportunity, section on application review information

What's next?

Step 1
Identify the tools

Step 2
Gather the data

Step 3
Tell the story

Step 1: Identify the tools

- Which tool(s) are the right fit?
  - Grant requirements
- Recognize tool limitations
  - Data granularity
  - Ground truthing
  - The **data** aren't the **story**

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Step 2: Gather the data

EJScreen

- U.S. EPA's publicly available EJ mapping and screening tool
- Nationally consistent data sets
- Combines environmental and demographic indicators
- Does not identify cumulative impacts or EJ and disadvantaged communities

CEJST

- Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)
- Used for programs covered under Justice40 Initiative
- Identifies disadvantaged communities
- Does not use race as an indicator

EHD

- Washington State Department of Health's Environmental Health Disparities Map
- Provides a single, cumulative impact score by census tract
- Focused on "health equity"
- Used to analyze factors driving cumulative impacts to inform policy and decision making

ETC Explorer

- U.S. DOT's Equitable Transportation Community Explorer
- Assesses cumulative burdens based on five components informed by 40 indicators
- Complements CEJST by taking a deeper dive into transportation disadvantages
- Combines maps with data dashboards

Step 3: Tell the story

- **Who or which** communities are disadvantaged?
- **Where** are they?
- **What** is impacting them?
- **How** does this impact your project, or how will your project impact these groups?

Final thoughts

- Look before you leap (set up for success)
- Know what's required and how to respond (read the NOFO, then read it again)
- Get it done (deep breath and go for it)
  - Roles
  - Internal deadlines
- Sometimes you win, and sometimes you learn
  - Always request a debrief
- Good luck!

Thank you!

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Scan the landscape, give yourself the gift of time

- Grant requirements
  (hint: they don't tend to change much year to year)
- Identify and inform your partners
- Bootstraps vs. hired guns
- The longer view

Get creative with match, start talking early

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