



# **STRATEGIC PLANNING PROGRAM MANUAL**



# Table of Contents

Introduction	3
What is Strategic Planning?	3
Types of Plans	3
Program Information	5
Eligibility	5
Priorities	5
Frequently Asked Questions	6



# 01

## INTRODUCTION

DRA was established by Congress in 2000 as a formal framework for joint Federal-State collaboration to serve the eight-state Mississippi River Delta and Alabama Black Belt regions. DRA promotes economic growth and opportunity by investing in human and critical infrastructure in economically distressed communities. Through funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, PL 117-58) signed by President Biden, DRA has designed a planning program that gives public entities across the region the autonomy to develop plans that address common and unique challenges and needs. Many communities across DRA's deeply rural region lack the resources to employ grant writers, planners, or to hire consultants. This program will provide grantees with the resources necessary to develop a roadmap for economic development.



### A. What is Strategic Planning?

DRA uses “strategic planning” as a broad term to define a wide variety of planning activities. Strategic planning is simply the process of examining or analyzing current economic conditions and developing strategies that maximize community assets, identify opportunity, and mitigate challenges.



### B. Types of Plans

Grantees will be allowed to conduct several planning activities with DRA funds. Funds can be used for, but not limited to, the following plans:

#### 1. Comprehensive Economic Development Plan or Master Plan

Economic development plans or master plans are broad strategic plans that encompass several areas such as infrastructure, land use, and residential development. These plans provide a review of current socio-economic conditions and long-term strategies and implementation steps that will prepare entities for future growth and opportunities.

#### 2. Capital Improvement Plan

Capital improvement plans provide a strategic outline for physical development such as the construction or restoration of assets owned and maintained by local governments. These plans allow local governments to develop an outlook for funding and the completion of capital projects.





### 3. Utility Rate Study

Utility rate studies are financial studies that provide an analysis of revenue and operating costs for water systems. Rate studies offer a review of the revenue needed for maintenance and upgrades while ensuring equitable rates for consumers.

### 4. Preliminary Engineering Report

Preliminary engineering reports are often required to secure funding from state or federal agencies. These reports provide an assessment of specific needs, such as water and sewer, proposed projects, and costs.

### 5. Workforce Development Plan

Workforce development plans address challenges unique to different communities by analyzing the current workforce landscape and setting goals that address issues such as a knowledge or skill gap, placement, retention, and training for entrepreneurs. These plans can also include economic development components like housing development for workers.

### 7. Transportation Plan

Transportation plans are developed and implemented to address local or regional transportation systems. Transportation plans can also include strategies and goals for economic development, environmental mitigation, climate resilience, and workforce.

### 8. Feasibility Study

Feasibility studies are designed to help communities analyze and assess the viability or potential success of a project. Feasibility studies can be powerful tools that help public entities project the impact of economic development projects.

### 9. Broadband Deployment Plan

Broadband deployment plans focus on developing strategies and programs that will remove connectivity barriers especially in rural and underserved communities. These plans help communities map out broadband delivery and infrastructure.

- DRA is offering a wide array of planning activities to meet the various planning needs across the eight-state region. Communities adjacent to flood zones could benefit from climate resilience plans and coal communities with displaced workers could benefit from workforce development plans. This program is designed with your needs in mind.





# 02



## PROGRAM INFORMATION



### A. Eligibility

Eligible applicants for this program include:

- Local Units of Government
- Public Authorities and Associations
- Non-profit Organizations (such as business incubators)
- Local Development Districts and Metropolitan Planning Organizations
- Institutions of Higher Education
- Federally Recognized Tribes

Local development districts should apply alongside a local unit of government to help them conduct strategic plans. Non-profit entities such as business incubators and Institutions of Higher Education can also apply alongside a local unit of government but can also apply as the sole applicant for plans such as workforce development.



### B. Priorities

DRA's priorities for this program are consistent with statutory requirements of investing and improving the quality of life in economically distressed counties and parishes and isolated areas of distressed in non-distressed counties and parishes. Priorities for the program include:

- Proposals that demonstrate goals that will improve economic development in economically distressed, isolated areas of distress, or persistent poverty communities such as plans that address job training, improving infrastructure like water and sewer, and other catalysts for growth.
- Proposals that incorporate input from underserved groups. For example, focus groups or community meetings that measure community challenges and needs.
- Proposals that demonstrate local or regional collaboration. For example, a local government applying with an institution of higher education, or a multi-county/parish proposal that addresses regional economic development.
- Proposals that demonstrate alignment with DRA's Regional Development Plan IV.

Applicants are encouraged to submit applications that match these priorities.





# 03

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. **What is the grant range amount?** \$25,000-\$150,000
2. **If I hire a consultant, does that consultant have to reside in DRA's service area?** No, but the applicant will have to reside in DRA's service area.
3. **Do I have to hire a traditional consulting firm or can I work with a non-profit?** Grantees can hire a traditional consulting firm or a non-profit organization that specializes in community development.
4. **Are there other plans that can be completed other than the ones listed?** Applicants will be allowed to submit proposals for plans other than the one listed. For example, a market demand study is an eligible plan. DRA will determine whether proposed plans fit within the scope of the program during the review process.
5. **How can I determine if my area is economically distressed?** Information about economically distressed counties and parishes, isolated areas of distress in non-distressed counties and parishes, and persistent poverty counties and parishes can be found here.
6. **How often will I have to report on the progress of my plan?** Grantees will be required to report annually. Reports will be due exactly one year after the date of the award. DRA will provide grantees with a questionnaire to report their performance.
7. **Will DRA offer technical assistance for this program?** Yes, DRA will offer technical assistance for applicants and grantees. Technical assistance will be in the form of webinars, workshops, and virtual office hours. DRA will offer technical assistance to unsuccessful applicants that would like guidance on strengthening future applications.
8. **How will grantees receive payments?** Grantees will receive advanced payments for the first 12 months of the project. Any remaining funds will be advanced every 6 months until the project is complete.
9. **What is the period of performance?** The period of performance for this program is up to 24 months. The period of performance covers planning activities and implementation.
10. **If I have already started a strategic plan but lack resources to complete it, can I apply for this program?** Yes, this program can be used to help recipients complete planning activities that are currently underway.
11. **Who do I contact if I have questions?** If you have any questions, please email [strategy@dra.gov](mailto:strategy@dra.gov). To access the application, please visit <https://dra.gov/programs/capacity-building/strategic-planning-program/>

