



2025 Strategic Planning Program: Applicant Guide

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A. Program Information

1. Background

In 2023, the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) developed the [Strategic Planning Program](#) as a competitive grant program to help economically distressed communities address their economic development planning needs relating to public infrastructure, workforce development, entrepreneurship, and small business development. Communities with access to strategic planning resources are better suited to address critical issues and pursue funding that will help with the implementation of local solutions. Through this program, communities receive funding to help them create goals, ensure those goals are feasible, and align partners that will assist with the execution of these goals. Applicants can request **\$25,000-\$150,000** to complete their planning activities. There is no matching requirement for this program.

Note: Although this Applicant Guide contains valuable information about the program, DRA highly recommends that each applicant review the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Strategic Planning Program Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) before applying. Please click [here](#) to access the FY 2025 Strategic Planning NOFA.

2. Eligible and Ineligible Applicants

The following public entities are eligible to apply to DRA's Strategic Planning Program. The examples included in this list are not exhaustive. If you have questions about your eligibility, please email strategy@dra.gov.

- Local units of government
 - Examples include cities, towns, villages, counties, parishes, and special purpose districts
- Federally recognized tribes
- Public authorities and associations
 - Examples include airports, city or county economic development organizations, and water associations
- Local development districts (LDDs) and metropolitan planning organizations
- Nonprofit organizations
 - Examples include nonprofit organizations whose work is relevant and related to the type of plan proposed, such as organizations with 501(c)(3) status engaged in workforce development or small business development and community foundations.
- Institutions of higher education

DRA will only accept applications from eligible applicants who reside in the [252 counties and parishes across the agency's eight-state region](#). Applicants such as nonprofit organizations or institutions of higher education that are not located in DRA's region but serve communities within DRA's region are eligible to apply.

DRA does **NOT** accept applications from private entities.

Note: LDDS and metropolitan planning organizations that apply for this program must apply on behalf of another public entity, such as a local unit of government. DRA will not accept applications from LDDs and metropolitan planning organizations seeking to conduct strategic planning for their organization.

3. Eligible Plans

The examples of strategic plans listed below are eligible through this program. Applicants can also be creative in proposing other strategic plans that reflect their project goals. These proposals must still demonstrate alignment with DRA's core funding priorities. To learn more about DRA's core funding priorities, please visit the "Application Sections" page in this Applicant Guide.

- **Comprehensive Plan:** Comprehensive plans allow communities to develop a document that will serve as a long-term guide to economic growth. Typically, comprehensive plans encompass a wide range of issues, such as infrastructure, transportation, land use, and housing.
- **Master Plan:** Master plans can also help communities identify long-term goals that lead to economic growth. Master plans generally allow communities to specifically target an issue like business development or a particular area like a historic neighborhood.
- **Capital Improvement Plan:** This plan helps communities prioritize capital improvement projects and conduct a financial analysis to identify funding streams. Capital improvement projects generally involve the construction, renovation, or acquisition of public assets such as infrastructure, facilities, and land.
- **Preliminary Engineering Report:** Preliminary engineering reports involve the assessment of existing critical infrastructure, such as a community's water or sewer system. The assessment includes recommendations on infrastructure upgrades, cost analysis, and information on the system's regulatory compliance. Preliminary engineering reports are usually leveraged to secure infrastructure funding from state and federal agencies.
- **Utility Rate Study:** Utility rate studies allow communities to financially analyze and project revenue and expenses. Rate studies help communities ensure rates are equitable and that they have the necessary operating resources to maintain a system or increase its capacity. Outdated studies can impact revenue flow and a community's ability to access funding for repairs or upgrades.
- **Broadband Deployment Plan:** This plan helps position communities to effectively develop goals and objectives to expand coverage in rural and underserved communities. This plan can also be an effective tool to cover digital inequities, broadband workforce development, and other projects that could accelerate the delivery and expansion of broadband.

Other example plans include feasibility studies, workforce development plans, and transportation plans.

B. Application Process

1. Accessing the Application

To access the Strategic Planning Program application, please click [here](#). DRA also offers a [New Grant System Application Guide](#). This guide provides important information on starting a new application. Other information applicants should know before starting an application can be found below.

- Applicants should ensure that their Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) is up to date. Previously known as the DUNS number, applicants will need to provide an accurate UEI. To check the status of your UEI, please visit [SAM.gov](#).
- Nonprofit organizations must provide proof of their articles of incorporation or their most recent Form 990.

2. Application Sections

Project Description and Plan Rationale

In this section, applicants must describe (1) the plan they are proposing and (2) explain why the plan is necessary. Applicants should consider the questions below when writing this section:

- How would you describe the plan you are proposing?
- What are your community's current or prolonged challenges to economic development (e.g., high unemployment or aging infrastructure)?
- What are the goals and objectives for this planning project? Will those goals and objectives help alleviate your challenges and advance economic development?
- Who will be impacted by this planning project (e.g., is this a planning project that will help create jobs, retain jobs, train individuals, or affect families through public infrastructure)?

Additionally, language aimed at the applicant pursuing other federal or state funding opportunities at the completion of their plan is acceptable. DRA also welcomes the use of demographic, economic, and other relevant data in this section to help explain why your plan is necessary.

Program Priorities

DRA has outlined three priorities (listed below) in the Strategic Planning Program NOFA.

- a. Proposals that demonstrate goals to improve economic development in economically distressed, isolated areas of distress, or persistent poverty communities.
 - Applicants are encouraged to focus on how their goals align with DRA’s economic development funding priorities around public infrastructure, workforce development, entrepreneurship, or small business development. Public infrastructure includes plans that address issues such as water, sewer, drainage, and broadband.
- b. Proposals that incorporate input from community members and underserved groups.
 - Applicants are encouraged to describe the community members and underserved groups that the applicant will engage to advance planning activities. The applicant should detail the community engagement activities that will be utilized to inform and incorporate community members in the planning process. Examples of community engagement activities include community meetings, focus groups, and surveys that help the applicant identify community assets, challenges, and opportunities. This section also emphasizes involving underserved groups in planning activities. [Underserved groups](#) include groups such as people of color or people who live in rural areas.
- c. Proposals that demonstrate local or regional collaboration.
 - Applicants are encouraged to describe their proposed plan’s local or regional implications and if any local or regional partners will be a part of the planning process. Examples of this include partnerships with institutions of higher education, private sector partnerships, multi-county/parish partnerships, partnerships with cities or towns, and partnerships with nonprofit organizations.

Note: DRA recognizes that community engagement activities vary based on the community and project. For example, an applicant proposing a preliminary engineering report might not deploy the same level of community engagement activities as an applicant proposing a comprehensive plan or master plan. However, DRA still expects all applicants to engage their community members during the planning process.

Work Plan

Applicants are required to describe their project deliverables and project timeline. As stated in the NOFA, this program’s performance period is 24 months. However, applicants have the autonomy to determine their own timeline for project activities within the 24-month period. For example, some applicants can complete their planning activities in 12

months or less. DRA will provide a work plan template as an application attachment. Please click [here](#) to access the work plan template. Please complete and submit this work plan template as your completed work plan.

Budget and Budget Narrative

Applicants are required to provide both a budget and budget narrative or justification. Please reference the “Allowable and Unallowable Costs” section in this Applicant Guide to ensure your budget and budget narrative align with eligible costs. Please click [here](#) to access the budget sample.

3. Example Projects

The example projects below represent projects successfully funded through DRA’s Strategic Planning Program in FY 2023 and FY 2024.

Craig Field Airport (Selma, Alabama)

The Craig Field Airport received funding to conduct a strategic plan focused on hangar revitalization to spur industry growth and job creation, infrastructure upgrades to the water and road systems, and broadband access. Community engagement practices will include holding community meetings for feedback on planning priorities and engaging Selma and Dallas County officials and other federal and state agencies to help transform the airport. Used to train pilots during World War II, the airport was once a hub of economic activity and has played a critical role in fostering economic growth in the Alabama Black Belt. This strategic plan will help the airport reignite the airport’s ability to create economic development.

City of Minden (Minden, Louisiana)

The City of Minden received funding to conduct a comprehensive plan focused on workforce development and small business development. The city will partner with community colleges, K-12 school boards, and local businesses to create a plan that fosters the development of a strong workforce development ecosystem and a thriving community of small businesses. The city recognized that a strategic plan was vital to the community’s future growth. The plan will also focus on developing foundational pieces of development, such as public infrastructure.

Princeton Water and Wastewater (Princeton, Kentucky)

The Princeton Water and Wastewater Commission provides water and wastewater services to over 6,000 residents. The commission’s water and wastewater system exceeded its useful life and needed major upgrades. As part of its plan to upgrade the system, the commission received funding to conduct a preliminary engineering report, including geotechnical investigations, environmental, and preliminary design. The report will help

the city be more prepared to pursue federal infrastructure funding programs and position the city to be construction-ready once those funds are requested. Community engagement practices will include public meetings, surveys, and community advisory committees.

4. Scoring Criteria

Criteria	Points <i>(maximum)</i>
Project Information	Section Total - 35
1. Project Description and Plan Rationale	35
Program Priorities	Section Total - 35
1. Description of the Desired Program Outcomes	35
Work Plan and Budget	Section Total - 30
1. Description of the Project Deliverables and Timeline	15
2. Budget and Budget Narrative	15

5. Allowable and Unallowable Costs

Applicants should be aware of the allowable and unallowable costs below before preparing the application’s budget and budget narrative section.

- **Allowable Costs**
 - **Contractual Services:** This includes hiring a consultant or firm to conduct planning activities. Although not a requirement, DRA welcomes applicants to provide quotes from consultants or planning firms to justify the requested amount for this line item.
 - **Personnel:** DRA will only approve funding for administrative personnel working on the grant. In the work plan and budget narrative, the applicant should list the names, titles, and responsibilities of the personnel who will work on the grant. For each position, the applicant should provide the individual’s annual salary, the percentage of time devoted to the grant, and the amount of each individual’s salary that the grant will fund. The amount requested by the applicant for administrative functions **should not exceed 5%** of the total grant amount requested.
 - **Fringe Benefits:** DRA will only approve funding for fringe benefits for administrative personnel working on the grant. In the budget and budget narrative, the applicant should provide a breakdown of the fringe benefit costs, such as health care, FICA, or retirement.
 - **Travel:** The requested amount for travel **should not exceed 5%** of

the total grant amount requested. DRA reserves the right to disallow travel not directly associated with planning activities. For example, travel to events that are not directly linked to the completion of strategic planning will not be allowed. In the budget and budget narrative, the applicant should provide a breakdown of the personnel who will travel throughout the planning activities, an estimate of mileage and per diem, and the estimated number of trips.

- **Supplies:** DRA will fund the purchase of supplies related to the direct execution of strategic planning activities. Examples include general office supplies needed for community engagement activities such as printing surveys and advertising community members.
- **Unallowable Costs**
 - **Food:** DRA will not fund the purchase of food.
 - **Gifts and Stipends:** DRA will not fund the purchase of gifts such as gift cards or stipends.
 - **Equipment:** DRA will not fund the purchase of equipment through this program, such as office furniture or technology devices, that are considered unreasonable for the completion of strategic planning activities. DRA will also not fund equipment purchases related to construction or renovation through this program.
 - **Indirect Costs:** DRA will not fund indirect costs related to facilities. For applicants with indirect costs related to personnel, please include those costs in the personnel line item.
 - **Other:** DRA will not fund any other activities not directly related to the completion of strategic planning. For example, DRA will not provide funding for contractual services that are beyond the scope of work of your strategic planning activities.

C. Pre-Award Technical Assistance

DRA will provide pre-award technical assistance to any applicant who has questions about the program or the application. Applicants can request a virtual meeting with DRA by emailing strategy@dra.gov. DRA will also host webinars and other public-facing events about the Strategic Planning Program. Please enter your information [here](#) to receive updates. Applicants can also email strategy@dra.gov with general questions about the program.

D. Frequently Asked Questions

1. Does this program cover implementation?

No. DRA encourages applicants to proactively think about how they will implement the goals outlined in their strategic plan, but this program will not fund the implementation of those goals.

2. Will this program cover workforce training or marketing for a project?

No. The Strategic Planning Program is designed solely for strategic planning purposes.

3. Will DRA reimburse me if I have already started a strategic plan before I apply for the Strategic Planning Program?

No. DRA will only reimburse awardees after signing a Strategic Planning Agreement and receiving their notice to proceed. However, applicants who have already started a strategic plan can still apply for this program if they have insufficient funds to continue their planning activities.

4. When can I apply, and when will I hear back about a decision on my application?

DRA will have two application cycles for this program. The first cycle will open January 8, 2025, and close March 7, 2025. The second cycle will open on June 2, 2025, and close on August 1, 2025. The application review and funding decision process will take up to 60 days.