



2025 Strategic Planning Program: Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) Executive Summary

The Delta Regional Authority (DRA) is publishing this Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) to provide guidelines and requirements for the 2025 Strategic Planning Program.

Proposals Due: Proposals are accepted semiannually on a winter and summer cycle. Estimated application due dates: Winter cycle: March 7, 2025; Summer cycle: August 1, 2025.

Funding for this program has been made available through the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) signed by President Biden. For questions about the program, please email strategy@dra.gov.

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A. DRA OVERVIEW

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 critical infrastructure projects in economically distressed communities. DRA's investment priorities include transportation infrastructure, other basic public infrastructure like water and sewer, small business development with an emphasis on entrepreneurship, and job training.

B. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Many communities in the DRA region do not have the capacity and resources for strategic planning. DRA's Strategic Planning Program provides funds for communities to develop strategic plans that address their gaps in public infrastructure, workforce development, and small business development/entrepreneurship. The goal of the program is to help economically distressed communities create plans to solve their challenges and increase economic growth.

Strategic planning is the process used to identify data informed goals as well as the activities, resources, and partners needed to reach those goals. Funds awarded through this program will enable communities to: access and benefit from expertise in strategic planning processes; convene relevant stakeholders to conduct robust strategic planning activities; facilitate engagement with the community to inform planning and priorities, etc.

The Strategic Planning Program grant is for planning, not implementation.

- **Planning** is the process of deciding what needs to be done. It involves setting goals, figuring out the best steps to reach those goals, and deciding how to use resources (like time, money, and people). Strategic planning is creating a roadmap for the future.
- **Implementation** is about taking action and putting the plan into practice. It is the process of carrying out the steps you have planned, making sure everything gets done, and solving problems that come up along the way.

In short, planning is about deciding **what** to do, and implementation is about **doing**.

1. Program Priorities

Applicants are strongly encouraged to include the following priorities in their proposals:

- Improving economic development in economically distressed, isolated areas of distress, or persistent poverty communities.
- Incorporating input from community members and underserved groups.
- Demonstrate local or regional collaboration.

Refer to the Strategic Planning Applicant Guide for examples.

2. Award Information

DRA will award approximately \$1.5 million through the Strategic Planning Program in Fiscal Year 2025. Funding was provided by the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#). Awards will range from \$25,000 - \$150,000.

Grantees must sign a participation agreement for a performance period of up to 24 months and can request advances or reimbursements. Further details will be provided in a post-award manual.

3. Cost-Sharing Information

There will be no match associated with this program.

C. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

1. Eligible Applicants

The following entities are eligible to apply for funds through the Strategic Planning Program. Private entities are not eligible applicants.

- Local units of government
- Federally recognized Tribes
- Public authorities and associations
- Nonprofit organizations
- Local Development Districts (required to apply alongside a member of government)
- Metropolitan planning organizations
- Institutions of higher education

To be eligible to apply, the applicant must provide services or be located within [DRA's service area](#).

2. Eligible Use Guidelines

Strategic Planning Program funds may be used to develop: comprehensive plans, master plans, capital improvement plans, workforce development plans, preliminary engineering reports, transportation plans, broadband deployment plans, feasibility studies, utility rate studies, or similar plans focused on improving economic growth.

Recipients will not be allowed to use grant funds toward any project activities not related directly to planning.

Hiring a contractor by a local unit of government or other entities is permitted, but the contractor will be required to work solely on the recipient’s planning priorities. See [2 CFR 200.400](#) for more information on allowable and unallowable costs, and the Strategic Planning Applicant Guide for examples.

D. APPLICATION INFORMATION

The Strategic Planning Program application is available on [DRA’s Program Application Portal](#). Any applicants who experience issues may email strategy@dra.gov for technical assistance. See the Strategic Planning Program Applicant Guide for more information. Please click [here](#) to access the Strategic Planning Program Applicant Guide.

Applicants are required to list their location on the application and they must provide services or be located within DRA’s service area to be eligible for funding.

Multiple applicants can also submit a joint application. Examples include cross-state or multi-jurisdictional strategic planning projects.

E. SCORING CRITERIA

After applications are submitted, they will undergo an eligibility and completeness review. Any application that is incomplete or deemed ineligible will be rejected. Once applications are validated, they will be reviewed using the criteria below.

Criteria	Points (maximum)
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

1. Project Information

Project Information	Section Total - 35
1. Project Description and Plan Rationale	35

In this section, applicants should describe the type of strategic plan that they are proposing to create using funds from this grant and explain why this strategic plan is needed. To guide you in writing this section, consider the following questions:

- **What is the plan?** Describe the specific type of strategic plan you are proposing to create using DRA funds.
- **What challenges does your community face in economic development?** Describe what problem(s) your newly developed strategic plan is hoping to address. For example, are there issues like high unemployment or aging infrastructure?
- **What are the goals and objectives that your strategic will aim to address?** Describe the end goals that will be reached by strategic plan developed under this grant. How will these goals help address your community’s challenges and support economic development?
- **Who will be affected by the plan?** Describe who will benefit from the strategic plan developed with DRA funds. For example, will this plan focus on creating or retain jobs, providing training, or benefiting families through improvements to public infrastructure?

Additionally, if you plan to pursue other federal or state funding after the project’s completion, you can mention it in this section. DRA also welcomes the use of demographic, economic, and other relevant data to support the rationale of your plan. DRA further encourages applicants to provide high quality research or evidence that supports how their new strategic plan will lead to the desired improvements in their region.

2. Program Priorities

Program Priorities	Section Total - 35
1. Description of the Desired Program Outcomes	35

DRA’s Strategic Planning NOFA outlines three main priorities for strategic plans:

1. Strategic plans that aim to improve economic development in economically distressed, isolated areas of distress, or persistent poverty communities.

Applicants are encouraged to focus on how the goals of the strategic plans that they propose to create under this grant align with [DRA’s economic development funding priorities](#). For example, public infrastructure is one of DRA’s priorities and it includes efforts to address water, sewer, drainage, and broadband issues.

2. Strategic plans that incorporate input from community members and underserved groups.

Applicants are encouraged to describe the community members and underserved groups that they will engage as part of their strategic planning activities. The

applicant should describe the community engagement activities that they will use to engage community members in the planning process.

Community meetings, focus groups, and surveys are examples of community engagement activities that can help to identify community assets, challenges, and opportunities.

Applicants should note how they will engage underserved groups in the planning activities. DRA uses the definition of underserved groups from the Biden-Harris Administration’s [Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government](#).

3. Strategic plans that demonstrate local or regional collaboration.

Applicants are encouraged to describe the local or regional implications of their strategic planning activities. Applicants should note if any local or regional partners will be a part of the strategic planning process.

For example, this could include partnerships with institutions of higher education, private sector organizations, counties or parishes, cities or towns, or non-profit organizations.

3. Work Plan and Budget

Work Plan and Budget	Section Total - 30
1. Description of the Project Deliverables and Timeline	15
2. Budget and Budget Narrative	15

Applicants are required to describe the tasks necessary to develop the strategic plan funded under this grant. This includes describing the key personnel, the time period for completion, and the major deliverables. See the work plan template for details. Please click [here](#) to access the work plan template.

Applicants are also required to list all expenses in their budget. Each budget item must be an allowable expense and align with the proposed project and work plan. See the budget template and sample for details. Please click [here](#) to access the budget sample.

Finally, applicants are required to complete a Budget Narrative. The Budget Narrative must provide a description of costs associated with each budget item. Each category should include the total estimated costs for the performance period. The Budget Narrative should also include each section as described below (as applicable to the applicant’s proposed project):

1. **Leveraged Resources:** The Budget Narrative should include a section describing any leveraged resources provided to support grant activities. Leveraged resources are all resources, both cash and in-kind, that will support this project beyond the funds provided by DRA under this grant.
2. **Personnel:** List all staff positions by title (both current and proposed), including roles and responsibilities for each person. For each position, give the annual salary, the percentage of time devoted to project, and the amount of each position’s salary funded by the grant.
3. **Fringe benefits:** Provide a breakdown of the amounts and percentages that comprise fringe benefit costs such as healthcare, FICA, retirement, etc.
4. **Travel:** For grantee staff only, specify the purpose, number of staff traveling, mileage, per diem, estimate number of in-state and out-of-state trips, and other estimated costs for each type of travel.
5. **Equipment:** See [2 CFR 200.1](#) for definition of “equipment.” List the item, quantity and the unit cost per item. Items under \$5,000 are supplies, not “equipment.” Equipment purchases are generally not allowed in the grant’s final year.
6. Identify the cost of supplies (e.g., general office supplies, desks/chairs, laptops/printers, and other specialty items) in the detailed budget per category. Except for general office supplies, list the item, quantity, and unit cost per item. Supplies include all tangible personal property other than “equipment.”
7. **Contractual:** See [2 CFR 200.1](#) for definitions of “contract” and “subaward.” Under the contractual line item, delineate contracts and subawards separately.
8. For each proposed contract and subaward, specify the purpose and activities to be provided and the estimate cost.
9. **Other:** Provide clear and specific details, including costs, for each item so that we can determine whether the costs are necessary, reasonable, and allocable. List items not covered elsewhere, such as stipends or incentives.

F. SELECTION TIMELINE

Applications Open	Winter cycle: January 8, 2025 Summer cycle: June 2, 2025
Applications Close	Winter cycle: March 7, 2025 Summer cycle: August 2, 2025
Review Timeline	The application review and funding decision process will take up to 60 days. Applications may be reviewed on a rolling basis throughout the application window.

G. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

DRA will offer technical assistance to applicants. Technical assistance will be in the form of workshops, webinars, and one-on-one virtual office hours. DRA will also provide technical assistance to unawarded applicants who would like feedback on their scores. For technical assistance, please email strategy@dra.gov.

H. REPORTING

Grant recipients will be required to report quarterly during the performance period.

I. APPENDIX

Please click [here](#) to access the Appendix.