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Connecting Constituents with Federal Assistance for Community Centers

Introduction

Federal grant, loan, and technical assistance programs can support the creation of *community centers* run by nonprofit organizations or local, state, territorial, and tribal governments. These buildings often host social, recreational, educational, and other activities.

This In Focus product is intended to help congressional offices connect constituents with federal programs that provide financial and other assistance to build or renovate community centers. It contains information about selected federal programs that may allow for resources to be used for community center construction projects. It does not discuss potential sources of funding for community center operations, activities, or programming.

This list is not comprehensive. Additional federal program criteria may affect the eligibility of any given project. Not all programs are open to all applicant types (e.g., some programs may accept applications from local governments but not nonprofit organizations). Funding levels and availability may vary.

Federal Assistance Programs

This section provides brief descriptions accompanied by URLs for websites that can provide additional information about programs, including potential points of contact.

Constituents can also look up program information using the Assistance Listings on SAM.gov, the Grants.gov website, and the Office of Management and Budget's Federal Program Inventory (<https://fpi.omb.gov>).

Loans and Grants for Rural Facilities

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) administers the Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program to support “essential community facilities” in rural communities. Loans and grants provided through the program can be used to buy, build, or renovate facilities in places with 20,000 or fewer residents. Loan guarantees are available through the related Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program.

USDA state rural development offices can provide information and guidance to potential applicants: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/about-rd/offices/state-offices>.

- Community Facilities Programs:
<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities>.

Community Development Block Grants

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) administers the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to “develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for low- and moderate-income persons.”

CDBG funds are awarded at the state and local level, which means state and local governments have considerable flexibility in directing CDBG funding to projects and programs in their communities. Eligible activities include the “acquisition, construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation or installation of public facilities and improvements,” though not “buildings … used for the general conduct of government” (24 C.F.R. §570).

Some larger “entitlement” cities and counties receive CDBG funding directly from HUD. State governments receiving CDBG funds “pass through” CDBG funding to smaller communities.

- Community Development Block Grant Program:
<https://www.hud.gov/hud-partners/community-cdbg>.

Defense Community Infrastructure

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) administers various programs to support communities that host military bases. These include the Defense Community Infrastructure Program, which provides grants to “address deficiencies in community infrastructure supportive of a military installation,” such as a “community support facility” (10 U.S.C. §2391).

Grants are awarded to state and local governments through DOD’s Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation: <https://oldcc.gov>.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The U.S. Department of the Interior’s Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) awards grants for outdoor recreation areas, which could include exterior elements of community centers such as an outdoor public pool or skating rink. (See also CRS In Focus IF12687, *Connecting Constituents with Federal Programs for Public Parks*, by Eric P. Nardi.)

Certain state government agencies are allowed to apply for LWCF funds and can then award subgrants to other entities

such as local and tribal governments: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/contact-list.htm>.

- Land and Water Conservation Fund: <https://www.doi.gov/lwcf>.

National Register of Historic Places

Depending on its age, historical significance, architectural features, and other factors, a community center building may be eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Park Service describes listing as the “first step towards eligibility” for Historic Preservation Tax Incentives and Historic Preservation Fund grants. (See also CRS Report R45800, *The Federal Role in Historic Preservation: An Overview*, by Mark K. DeSantis.)

State Historic Preservation Offices can provide assistance: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/state-historic-preservation-offices.htm>.

- National Register of Historic Places: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister>.

Department of Energy Programs

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) provides grants and technical assistance for energy-efficiency improvements and building retrofits. These programs include Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants, which provide funding that local, state, and tribal governments can award for community center building renovations and improvements.

The DOE’s Office of State and Community Energy Programs administers many of these programs: <https://www.energy.gov/scep/office-state-and-community-energy-programs>.

See also the Database of State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency (DSIRE): <https://www.dsireusa.org>.

Accessibility Improvements

Several federal programs support community center accessibility improvements and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), typically in the form of training or technical assistance.

- ADA Information Line: <https://www.ada.gov/infoline>.
- ADA National Network: <https://acl.gov/programs/aging-and-disability-networks/americans-disabilities-act-national-network>.
- U.S. Access Board: <https://www.access-board.gov/ta>.

Federal Surplus Property Donations

State and local government agencies and nonprofit organizations may be able to obtain surplus federal property for community centers, such as equipment and furniture, through the U.S. General Services Administration’s Federal Surplus Personal Property Donation Program.

Government agencies and eligible nonprofits can access the program through their State Agency for Surplus Property (SASP): <https://www.gsa.gov/buy-through-us/government-property-for-sale-or-lease/personal-property-for-reuse-and-sale/for-state-agencies-and-public-organizations/state-agencies-for-surplus-property-contacts>.

- How to Acquire Surplus Federal Personal Property: <https://www.gsa.gov/node/80898>

Other Community Facilities

Construction projects involving other community facilities (e.g., fire stations, town halls, courthouses) and infrastructure may benefit from programs discussed in this product and other CRS publications, such as

- CRS In Focus IF12806, *Connecting Constituents with Federal Programs for Firefighters and Fire Departments*, by Carol Canada;
- CRS In Focus IF12802, *Connecting Grantseekers with Federal Assistance for Storm Shelters and Safe Rooms*, by Kathleen E. Marchsteiner and Maria Kreiser;
- CRS In Focus IF12687, *Connecting Constituents with Federal Programs for Public Parks*, by Eric P. Nardi;
- CRS In Focus IF11911, *Connecting Constituents with Federal Programs for Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Projects*, by Claire M. Jordan; and
- CRS Report R48124, *Connecting Charitable Food Assistance Organizations to Federal Funding Information and Resources*, by Sarah K. Braun and Alyse N. Minter.

Additional Guidance for Grantseekers

General information about finding grants is available in CRS In Focus IF12910, *Searching for Federal Grants: An Overview of Resources*, by Maria Kreiser and Kathleen E. Marchsteiner, and CRS Report RL34012, *Resources for Grantseekers*, by Maria Kreiser.

Constituents may also wish to contact private grant makers, since government funding for community center construction projects is often limited or unavailable.

- Candid provides information on private foundations, proposal writing, and other topics: <https://candid.org>.
- The Council on Foundations has a Community Foundation Locator: <https://cof.org/page/community-foundation-locator>.
- The Grantsmanship Center provides listings of grant makers and other resources in each state: <https://www.tgci.com/funding-sources>.

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