

Communicating the Success of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

Two years ago today, President Biden signed the historic Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), a once-in-a-generation investment in America's infrastructure. Since then, mayors and city leaders have been working with the Biden-Harris Administration on projects to rebuild our roads and bridges, clean up legacy pollution, deliver clean water, expand broadband access, and advance clean energy—all while creating good-paying jobs.

This landmark legislation not only allows local governments to address long-standing infrastructure challenges, but it empowers city leaders to launch innovative projects that can transform their cities for generations to come.

On November 14, 2023, the Local Infrastructure Hub hosted a session on communicating the impact of cities' infrastructure investments to commemorate the second anniversary of the signing of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The session featured **Tom Perez**, Senior Advisor and Assistant to the President and Director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs; **Mayor Sylvester Turner** of Houston, Texas; **Mayor Justin Bibb** of Cleveland, Ohio; **Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson** of Riverside, California; **Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird** of Lincoln, Nebraska; and **Mayor James Hovland** of Edina, Minnesota. The mayors shared how they have been successful in messaging the impact of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law projects in their communities.

Key Insights Shared During the Webinar

- **Understanding the source of these investments.** Tom Perez reiterated that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law represents an opportunity to restore faith in the government's ability to **get the job done**. Mayors are trusted leaders, and messaging the success of the BIL helps residents understand that projects are a direct result of the federal government's investment. Mayors should also partner with community organizations, schools, and other trusted messengers to convey how the project will benefit residents.
- **Communicating with residents repeatedly creates transparency and trust.** When Houston was awarded \$36.9 million in a railroad crossing elimination grant, the [announcement](#) was well attended by federal and state leaders as well as community activists. However, communicating a project is not a one-time effort—it requires repetition with the same messaging. The mayor requires his PIOs to include "but for this federal funding, this project would not be possible" when announcing a new project on social media. The City of Houston has both [Engage Houston](#) and [Federal Update](#) to provide real-time, transparent information to the public.
- **Prioritize the right projects.** Cleveland received [\\$19 million](#) to replace lead water lines and [\\$130 million](#) from the Rail Vehicle Replacement Program. These projects were chosen through collaboration with the community and state to ensure Cleveland prioritized the right projects when competing for funding. Cities should not apply for every infrastructure program, but instead compete for the right grants based on capacity to implement.
- **Address residents' fears and concerns.** Mayor James Hovland cited equity as a critical component when communicating the regional benefits of the BIL-funded projects. When engaging residents about an infrastructure project, a city and region must not only address its benefits, but listen to residents' concerns about gentrification and other impacts. For example, the [Rondo Project](#) is working to create a landbridge to reconnect a historically black neighborhood that was destroyed to make way for the construction of an interstate. The project will not only re-link the neighborhood but will also develop an African American cultural enterprise district. The district will create economic activity that benefits those displaced by the construction of the interstate, their descendants, and current residents.

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- **Make the community feel a part of the process.** Mayors should also invite the community to participate in the infrastructure project ideation, application, and later celebration of the project's success. When Riverside, California [received](#) \$38.5 million for improvements to its Third Street Rail Crossing and Civil Rights Walk, Mayor Lock Dawson invited the community members who worked on the application to participate in the announcement. In engaging residents, it is important to bring the conversation to residents by using plain language, hosting accessible events, and amplifying them on platforms that resonate with the community.
- **Use data to tell a story.** David Medina, the COO and Co-Founder of Results for America, highlighted the importance of using strong data points to tell the story of how your proposed infrastructure project will help make your communities more effective and efficient—especially when [informing your BIL applications](#). Some examples of cities using data to inform their applications include [Toledo's Connecting Toledo Neighborhoods to Opportunity: From Redlining to Green Streets Project](#) and [Waterloo's Municipal Fiber Deployment Project](#). Additionally, David urged cities to use data to engage their communities through unique communications strategies that are easy to understand and showcase your project's story in multiple formats and more than just once—keep your residents informed throughout the whole project.
- **Have good working relationships with federal partners—and be persistent.** Lincoln, Nebraska secured a \$23.7 million RAISE grant for a Lincoln Multimodal Transit Center—after applying seven times—and held events on how the city's youth could benefit from the project. The City invited former Secretary Walsh to the ribbon-cutting ceremony, demonstrating how federal partners can help [showcase](#) the impact of a project to local residents. The mayor indicated that every stage of a project's development and construction offers a chance to “shout from the rooftops” how the project was made possible by federal funding. The City also uses virtual open houses to communicate progress on its infrastructure projects.
- **Always “make it feel real” to residents.** Mayor Lock Dawson recommended that city leaders engage the community early, but on a schedule that works for them. Provide child care for community meetings to encourage broader participation. Mayor Gaylor Baird held a press conference on [street safety](#) on the steps of a school where parents talked about how the project improved safety for their children. And Mayor Bibb held a town hall meeting in his grandmother's church to connect to the everyday, lived experience of residents in that particular neighborhood.

Resources Shared During the Webinar and in Discussion

- [Information on LIH grant application boot camps](#)
- [Toolkit on Messaging the BIL](#)
- [Albuquerque, New Mexico Rail Trail](#)

Local Infrastructure Hub Bootcamp Materials

The Local Infrastructure Hub is here to support cities in communicating the success of BIL-funded projects through a mix of webinars, practical tools, and templates. Our Grant Application Bootcamp materials can guide you through different application processes and actionable steps to submit a strong application.

These materials were prepared as part of the Local Infrastructure Hub's Fall 2022 Grant Application bootcamps. They include information on how to apply for federal funds and relevant tools and templates that can be applied to your grant application. The materials focus on how to build a community engagement plan, how to leverage community assets, how to effectively incorporate data into the grant application process, and how to construct a budget and a strong grant narrative. [Upcoming Bootcamps and registration information can be found here.](#)