

Lessons Learned from Recycling Grant Recipients

On February 27, 2024, the Local Infrastructure Hub hosted a session to discuss the Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling (SWIFR) Grant, a new program created by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to improve community infrastructure for recycling and other post-consumer materials management, implement circular economy strategies, and improve local waste management systems. This session featured **Dan Halpert**, Program Lead of Recycling Market Development at the U.S. EPA; **Faith Leach**, Baltimore's Chief Administrator Officer; **Katie Kennedy**, Construction and Demolition Waste Diversion Lead, Seattle Public Utilities; **Jason McCombs**, Strategic Initiatives Division Manager, City of Austin, and; **Judy Sheahan**, U.S. Conference of Mayors Assistant Executive Director and Director of the Municipal Waste Management Association to discuss grant winners' projects and tips for creating a successful application.

Key Insights Shared

Ensure that your city's SWIFR application has an environmental justice component.

Dan Halpert discussed the wide range of city projects that have been awarded SWIFR Grants, including: the purchase of a new fleet of recycling collection vehicles to provide curbside pickup to communities that do not have access, construction of recycling drop-off stations in rural areas where curbside collection is not feasible, and construction to establish new composting facilities or increase capacity at existing facilities. However, the common thread in the winning applications is the focus on environmental justice, with 76% of SWIFR Grant funding focused on benefiting disadvantaged communities.

Use data as the basis of your application.

A compelling narrative backed by data is key to creating a competitive application. The [City of Baltimore received \\$4 million](#) to develop a solar-powered, scalable composting facility that is co-located at the East Side Transfer Station. Faith Leach credited Baltimore's data-driven approach with the success of their application. Baltimore had the data to paint a vivid picture to show the impact of the project. For example, Baltimore highlighted that 40% of the city's waste was compostable, and 20% of the city's emissions were waste-related. Through this compost facility, the city will be able to divert 12,000 tons of materials away from the landfills and incinerators that have been predominantly sited in BIPOC communities; therefore, reducing the waste and emissions impacting disadvantaged communities.

Demonstrate feasibility in your application.

The [City of Austin received a \\$4 million SWIFR Grant](#) to create a reuse warehouse that will accept and redistribute gently used furniture at no cost to nonprofits with a focus on furnishing the homes of those transitioning out of homelessness. Jason McCombs discussed how the city was already partnering with the University of Texas at Austin to do this on a smaller scale. McCombs believes Austin secured funding because of the simplicity of their application, showing that this grant would expand an already successful program. A city can increase the likelihood of receiving a grant by demonstrating that a project will be completed within the designated time frame.

Lessons Learned from Recycling Grant Recipients

Illustrate how a SWIFR Grant aligns with your city's broader goals.

The City of Seattle was awarded a SWIFR Grant to establish a “[Salvaged Wood Warehouse](#) to Support the Local Circular Economy.” The project aligns with [Seattle's Climate Action Plan](#), its [Zero Waste Plan](#), and the overall values of Seattle's residents. Diverting wood for reuse will make a significant difference in achieving the city's climate goals, as 17% of Seattle's construction waste comes from home demolitions. But the project also will enhance the city's workforce development, provide affordable building materials, and reduce asbestos and lead throughout neighborhoods. This grant progresses the city's climate goals, while bringing direct benefits to its residents.

An application comes down to points.

A city might be applying for a SWIFR Grant with an innovative project, but each application is rated under a points system. Katie Kennedy stated that while the EPA might have liked Seattle's approach, the key to the city's award was getting as many points as possible in each section of the application. She suggested that cities should act as though each section of the application stands on its own, and some redundancy in an application is actually a good thing.

Resources Shared During the Webinar and in Discussion

- [SWIFR Grant Winners](#)
- [Municipal Waste Management Association](#)
- [Austin's SWIFR Project](#)
- [Baltimore's SWIFR Project](#)
- [Seattle's SWIFR Project](#)
- [Creative Uses of SWIFR Grants](#)