
Supporting US Cities in Securing EPA Funding to Enhance Municipal Solid Waste Recycling and Improve Solid Waste Management

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In the United States, landfills are the third-largest source of anthropogenic methane emissions, **accounting for 14% of the total**. Due to methane's outsized warming potential, addressing these emissions is critical in the near term. Methane is generated when organic waste — such as food scraps and yard trimmings — buried in landfills decomposes without oxygen. Diverting this waste through organics recycling programs not only mitigates methane emissions but also delivers significant local benefits, including improved air quality, enhanced public health, and job creation. Investments in organics recycling infrastructure, such as composting and anaerobic digestion facilities, are supported by funding opportunities like the EPA's Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling (SWIFR) Grant for Communities.

Through engagement with cities, we observed a strong interest in utilizing the SWIFR grant to build and expand local recycling infrastructure. However, smaller cities and municipalities often faced challenges due to limited knowledge and capacity in project identification and design, quantifying benefits, and grant writing. To address these gaps, RMI served as subject matter experts in a bootcamp series organized by the **National League of Cities** (NLC) and **Local Infrastructure Hub** (LIH) to assist cities in preparing compelling applications for the SWIFR grant. Our expertise in organics recycling and emissions reduction, combined with support from experienced grant writers during this bootcamp, equipped participants with the knowledge and tools needed to identify suitable projects and build strong cases for funding support.



Background

The SWIFR grant program, authorized by the **Save Our Seas 2.0 Act**, is funded through the **Bipartisan Infrastructure Law** (BIL) also known as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The BIL, which invests in the health, equity, and resilience of American communities provides **\$275 million in SWIFR grants** for fiscal years 2022 to 2026 to implement the **National Recycling Strategy**, which aims to enhance the municipal solid waste recycling system and build a circular economy.

The SWIFR grant, which is administered by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), provides targeted funding opportunities for (i) States and Territories (ii) Communities and (iii) Tribes and Intertribal Consortia. In September 2024, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a **\$58 million SWIFR grant for communities and \$20 million for Tribes and Intertribal consortia**. The funding opportunity for States and Territories is expected to be announced in 2025.

Eligible applicants for the SWIFR grant for communities are political subdivisions of states and territories, such as counties, cities, towns, and parishes. Through the strategic goals of the SWIFR grant, communities can apply for funding for solid waste projects that are aligned with the **National Recycling Strategy** and achieve at least one of the following objectives:

- Establish, increase, expand, or optimize collection and improve materials management infrastructure
- Fund the creation and construction of tangible infrastructure, technology, or other improvements to reduce contamination in the recycled materials stream
- Establish, increase, expand, or optimize capacity for materials management
- Establish, improve, expand, or optimize end-markets for the use of recycled commodities
- Demonstrate a significant and measurable increase in the diversion, recycling rate, and quality of materials collected for municipal solid waste

Exhibit 1 SWIFR Grant Award Process and Timeline



In anticipation of this timeline, NLC and LIH organized a bootcamp series to help local governments be better equipped to prepare competitive application materials and improve their likelihood for grant selection. This bootcamp series was geared toward smaller cities and municipalities with fewer than 150,000 residents, aiming to boost their grant-writing capacity and effectiveness.

RMI supported the bootcamp through the **Waste Methane Assessment Platform** (WasteMAP) initiative funded by the Global Methane Hub.

SWIFR grant for communities bootcamp

The SWIFR grant for communities bootcamp comprised seven different modules that spanned several weeks from May 2024 to August 2024. The bootcamp was organized and facilitated by NLC and LIH and delivered by subject matter experts from various organizations including EPA, RMI, Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA), NLC, Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University, and Witt O'Brien's. Over 50 cities across 33 states attended the bootcamp; the list of attendees is attached in the Appendix. The objectives for each module are outlined below:

Exhibit 2 SWIFR Bootcamp Modules

Modules	Objectives	Subject Matter Experts
1. Setting the Table	Cities were introduced to the funding program and its criteria, and heard from federal administration speakers.	Swarupa Ganguli (EPA), Tom Frankiewicz (RMI), Kristyn Oldendorf (SWANA)
2. Federal Administration Priorities	Cities learned to incorporate climate, equity, and training and workforce development into grant applications.	Chris Carusiello (EPA), Ellie Garland (RMI)
3. Incorporating Data	Cities learned about the data requirements for the grant application; general data principles and uses; and how to apply data tools to assess local framework and support a transformational agenda.	Yuchen Wu (RMI), Ebum Ayandele (RMI), Justin Edwards (NLC)
4. Engaging the Community	Cities learned to draft community engagement and advocacy strategies and understand the audience for advocacy and project strategies.	Hadia Sheerazi (RMI), Joseph Cruz (Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University)
5. Demystifying Capital Stacks & Budgeting	Cities learned the basics of capital stacks and funding structures for projects; matching grant requirements and allowable uses; and developing a draft project budget.	Cynthia Taylor (Witt O'Brien's)
6. Writing and Packaging a Strong Grant Application	Cities learned best practices for crafting a competitive grant narrative that is consistent with funding requirements. Additionally, cities were taught how to package/submit a complete grant application along with developing a plan to advance the request with key officials.	Cynthia Taylor (Witt O'Brien's)
7. Post Submission - Long Term Capacity Building	Once the applications have been submitted, cities develop plans to successfully administer the grant including how best to (re)-organize local institutional processes.	Cynthia Taylor (Witt O'Brien's)

For each module, the bootcamp was structured as follows:

- A webinar-style peer learning session where experts delivered presentations on a specific module. Cities had an opportunity to ask a few questions.
- A webinar-style coaching session where experts recapped the highlights from the peer learning session, provided more detailed guidance on the subject matter (e.g., tool demonstrations and analysis of past winning applications), and addressed questions from the cities in attendance.
- One-on-one consultations where cities signed up for individual coaching sessions with the experts to answer questions specific to their situation.

Insights from the Bootcamp

Through the WasteMAP initiative, RMI subject matter experts brought their expertise in organics recycling and its potential to reduce methane, a powerful climate pollutant especially in the short term. Bootcamp participants generally came with an understanding of the type of projects eligible for the SWIFR grant (e.g., traditional recycling and organics recycling), and were eager to improve organics recycling and resource recovery in their respective cities. However, many of the participating cities were seeking support in the following areas:

- Further understanding the scope of the SWIFR grant and delineating the project to ensure that components outlined in their application are grant-eligible
- Incorporating organics recycling projects, including infrastructure buildout and stakeholder awareness/capacity building into the city or municipality's waste management value chain to maximize impact and demonstrate relevance to the National Recycling Strategy
- Guidance on available tools and resources to evaluate the environmental, economic, and health impact of proposed projects
- Guidance and examples on project implementation and ways to ensure or improve cost-effectiveness

These insights demonstrate a need to strengthen the capacity of local governments to support their project identification and grant writing processes and a need for technical assistance during project implementation.

Next Steps

As the 2024 SWIFR grant application process is currently underway, cities are finalizing the application packages for submission. With a grant award timeline in Winter 2025, RMI will explore opportunities to work with grant recipients to implement organic waste recycling and methane mitigation projects and document key learnings from select case studies.

Appendix

SWIFR Participating Cities

	City	State
1	Chevak	Alaska
2	Nome	Alaska
3	Center Point	Alabama
4	Prattville	Alabama
5	Fort Smith	Arkansas
6	Paso Robles	California
7	South San Francisco	California
8	Thornton	Colorado
9	New Haven	Connecticut
10	Miramar	Florida
11	East Point	Georgia
12	Marietta	Georgia
13	Caldwell	Idaho
14	Maywood	Illinois
15	Topeka	Kansas
16	Franklin	Kentucky
17	New Bedford	Massachusetts
18	Bedford	Massachusetts
19	Charlemont	Massachusetts
20	Lawrence	Massachusetts
21	Mattapoisett	Massachusetts
22	Methuen	Massachusetts
23	Manchester	Maryland
24	Perryville	Maryland
25	Auburn	Maine
26	Dearborn	Michigan
27	Lansing	Michigan
28	Brooklyn Center	Minnesota
29	Republic	Missouri

	City	State
30	Salisbury	North Carolina
31	South Sioux City	Nebraska
32	Alexandria	New Hampshire
33	Bethlehem	New Hampshire
34	Hampstead	New Hampshire
35	Northfield	New Hampshire
36	Pelham	New Hampshire
37	Stark	New Hampshire
38	Socorro	New Mexico
39	Freeport	New York
40	Sea Cliff	New York
41	Kettering	Ohio
42	Lawton	Oklahoma
43	Rufus	Oregon
44	Latrobe	Pennsylvania
45	Gaffney	South Carolina
46	Lake City	South Carolina
47	Rapid City	South Dakota
48	Beaumont	Texas
49	La Marque	Texas
50	Abingdon	Virginia
51	Northfield	Vermont
52	Orting	Washington

Additional Resources

1. [Bootcamp recordings and presentation slides](#)
2. [SWIFR grant for communities – funding opportunity](#)
3. [SWIFR grant awards recipients for 2023](#)
4. [Select winning applications from 2023](#)
5. [Model Recycling Program Toolkit](#)
6. [CPRG Tools and Technical Resources – Waste and Materials Management Sector](#)