

Prince George's County
Planning Department

Municipal Grant Writing Workshop Series

*Workshop #3 Writing
and Responding*

March 18, 2026



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Municipal Grant Writing Workshop

This workshop is brought to you by the Prince George's County Planning Department's Planning Assistance to Municipalities and Communities (PAMC) Program, which provides free technical assistance funding for municipalities and communities who are interested in revitalizing and enhancing the appearance and function of their communities.

PAMC



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Review of Session Two

- Reviewed grant- and finance-related vocabulary
- A grant award is not an award until there is a signed agreement!
- Reviewed sample grant criteria



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Welcome & Framing

What makes a proposal stand out in a competitive funding cycle?



Key Framing Message

- **Grant writing is not creative writing – it is strategic alignment storytelling**
- **High-scoring proposals:**
 - Answer exactly what is asked
 - Provide evidence, not emotion
 - Demonstrate readiness and impact
 - Connect narrative to implementation



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Grant Writing



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Creating a clear and compelling narrative

- Draft persuasive responses for key proposal sections
- Writing responses that are concise, relevant and strong in evidence
- Understanding how language, structure and flow will convey impact
- Community voice & storytelling

Responding effectively to grant questions and prompts

- Purpose & need
- Expected outcomes
- Project delivery
- Grant requirements and evaluation

Avoiding common grant mistakes

- Pitfalls that lead to lower scoring proposals
- Relationship between grant application and grant agreement

POLL

Multiple Choice



What is the grant activity that you have the most trouble with?

1. Translating technical plans into compelling grant language
2. Writing outcomes that balance community impact + funder metrics
3. Aligning projects with funder priorities (equity, access, climate, etc.)
4. Responding clearly to narrative questions with limited word counts
5. Budget narratives for capital or infrastructure projects
6. Addressing reviewer comments or resubmitting after rejection



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Creating Clear and Compelling Narrative



Draft Persuasive Responses for Key Proposal Sections

Common Sections in Local & State Grants:

- Statement of Need
- Project Description
- Community Engagement
- Equity & Access
- Outcomes & Evaluation
- Budget Justification



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Common Sections: Statement of Need

What the statement of need must prove:

- The problem exists
- The problem is significant
- The problem is documented
- The problem affects specific people
- The project directly addresses the problem



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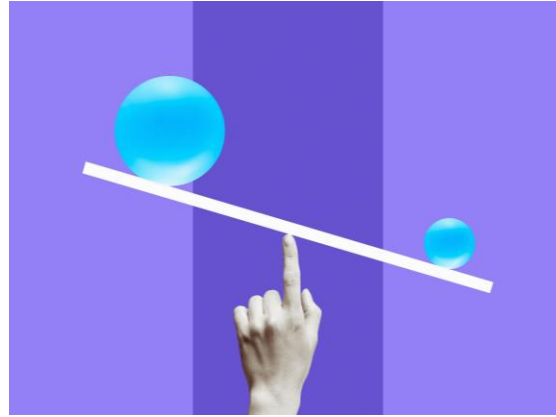
Framework



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Data

- Crash data
- Health disparities
- Park access metrics
- Environmental risk indicators
- Demographic trends



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Disparity

Show inequity or gap:

“Residents in District 4 have 40% less green space per capita than the county average.”



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Consequence

Explain impact of doing nothing:

- Public health risks
- Safety risks
- Economic stagnation
- Environmental vulnerability



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Opportunity

Transition to solution:

“The proposed multi-use trail directly addresses pedestrian crash corridors identified in the 2023 safety audit.”

Common Sections: Project Description

This section should answer:

- What exactly are you building, improving, or implementing?
- Where is it located?
- Who benefits?
- What is the scope?
- What are the phases?
- What is the timeline?



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Common Mistake: Being Vague

Specificity builds the confidence of the reviewer.

Weak: “We will improve the park and enhance safety.”

Strong: “The project will install 1.4 miles of ADA-compliant trail, upgrade lighting along the western corridor, add two pedestrian crossings at identified crash locations, and construct a shaded community gathering space.”



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Draft Persuasive Responses for Key Proposal Sections

The “CLEAR” Formula

- C – Context (What is happening?)**
- L – Local data (Why here? Why now?)**
- E – Evidence-based solution**
- A – Alignment with funder priorities**
- R – Results (measurable impact)**



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Writing Concise, Relevant, Evidence-Based Responses

Rule of thumb: If it doesn't add value, it doesn't belong

- Remove adjectives without evidence
- Replace generalizations with data
- Avoid repetition
- Keep paragraphs focused

Replace:

- “Very important”
- “Extremely needed”
- “Will greatly improve”

With or add:

- Numbers
- Comparisons
- Benchmarks
- Outcomes

Practical Editing Tip

After drafting, ask:
“Does this sentence directly support the scoring criteria?”

If not — remove or revise it.



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Common Mistake: Fluff Without Substance

Weak: Our community park is very important to local residents, and provides a wonderful space for families, children, and visitors to gather and enjoy outdoor recreation. Unfortunately, the park has become outdated and does not meet the growing needs of the community.

By improving the park, we will enhance quality of life and create a safer and more enjoyable environment for everyone.”

Why This Is Weak

- No specific data
- No clear problem
- Uses generic language reviewers see repeatedly
- No evidence of community need



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Common Mistake: Fluff Without Substance

Strong: “Riverside Park serves more than 8,500 residents within a one-mile radius, yet the park’s playground equipment is over 22 years old and no longer meets current safety and accessibility standards.

According to the County Parks Condition Assessment (2024), the playground structure is rated ‘Poor’, with deteriorating surfacing and no ADA-accessible play features. Additionally, the surrounding census tract has 28% of households with children under age 12 and no other playground within a 15-minute walking distance.

Community engagement conducted during the 2025 Parks Master Plan update identified playground replacement and accessible recreational space as the #1 priority among residents.

Investing in Riverside Park will address a documented recreation gap and ensure safe, inclusive play opportunities for families in this underserved neighborhood.”

Why This Works

- Uses specific numbers
- References existing plans and assessments
- Shows clear community impact
- Demonstrates alignment with planning data

Funders don’t fund good intentions; they fund well-documented solutions

Language, Structure & Flow Convey Impact

Strong grant narratives follow a logical flow:

- Define the problem clearly
- Prove it with data
- Show who is affected
- Present the solution
- Demonstrate readiness
- Outline measurable results

Use Headings Strategically

Instead of dense paragraphs, organize clearly:

- Existing Conditions
- Identified Safety Risks
- Project Scope
- Equity Considerations
- Anticipated Outcomes

Remember: Structured writing improves readability and scoring efficiency. Follow the outline.



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Community Voice & Engagement

What Reviewers Want to See:

- Who was engaged
- How they were engaged
- When they were engaged
- What they said
- How feedback influenced project design

Move Beyond “We held a meeting” Instead show:

- Attendance demographics
- Survey results
- Language accessibility
- Partnerships with trusted organizations
- Changes made based on input



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Common Mistake: Generic

Weak: “Our department values community input and worked closely with residents to ensure the park improvements reflect community needs. The community is excited about the project, and many residents expressed interest in seeing upgrades to the park. We will continue engaging with the community as the project moves forward.”

Why This Is Weak

- No explanation of how engagement occurred
- No number of participants
- No documentation or evidence
- No indication that community feedback influenced the project design
- Sounds like a placeholder paragraph used in many applications



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Common Mistake: Generic

Strong: The proposed improvements at Riverside Park were shaped through a multi-step community engagement process conducted between March and July 2025. Engagement activities included:

- Two in-person community meetings attended by 64 residents
- A bilingual online survey completed by 312 community members
- Three youth listening sessions conducted with students from Riverside Elementary School

Survey results indicated that the top three community priorities were:

- Safe playground equipment for younger children (78%)
- Shaded seating areas for caregivers and seniors (65%)
- Accessible walking paths for individuals with mobility challenges (59%)

Community feedback directly informed the project design. As a result, the proposed project includes an ADA accessible playground, shaded seating areas, and a new accessible pathway connecting the playground to the parking area and restrooms.

To ensure continued community involvement, the Parks Department will provide project updates through neighborhood association meetings and the county website during the construction phase.

Why This Version Is Strong

- Clear engagement methods
- Number of participants
- Multiple outreach approaches
- Specific feedback received
- How feedback shaped the project

This shows reviewers that the project is community-driven, not agency-driven.

Remember: Funders and reviewers are not looking for statements that the community supports the project — they are looking for evidence that the community helped shape the project.

When Writing, Remember This:

When using words such as

- “important to the community”
- “enhance quality of life”
- “vibrant community space”
- “benefit residents”

Be sure to include:

- Data
- Community demographics
- Infrastructure condition
- Specific project scope
- Measurable outcomes



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Respond Effectively to Grant Questions and Prompts



The Number #1 Scoring Mistake

**Answering
the question
you *wish*
were asked**



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Respond effectively to grant questions and prompts

How to Interpret Prompts Correctly

Break the Prompt into 3 Parts:

- Topic (What section is this?)
- Required evidence (What must be included?)
- Evaluation lens (How will this be scored?)

Statement of Need: “Describe the safety challenges in the project area and provide current data to demonstrate need.”

What It Really Requires:

- Geographic specificity
- Current (not outdated) data
- Quantified safety issues
- Clear relationship to proposed project



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Respond effectively to grant questions and prompts

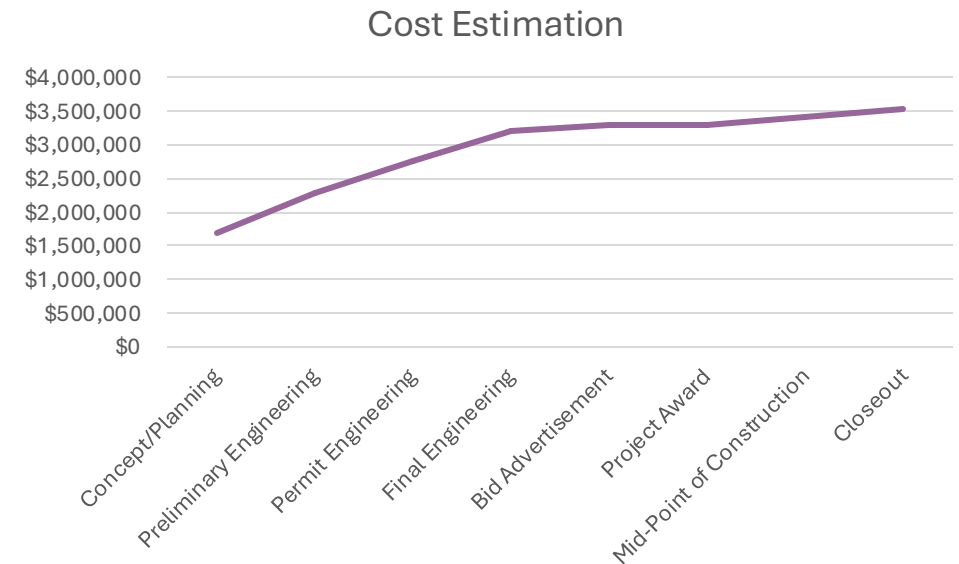
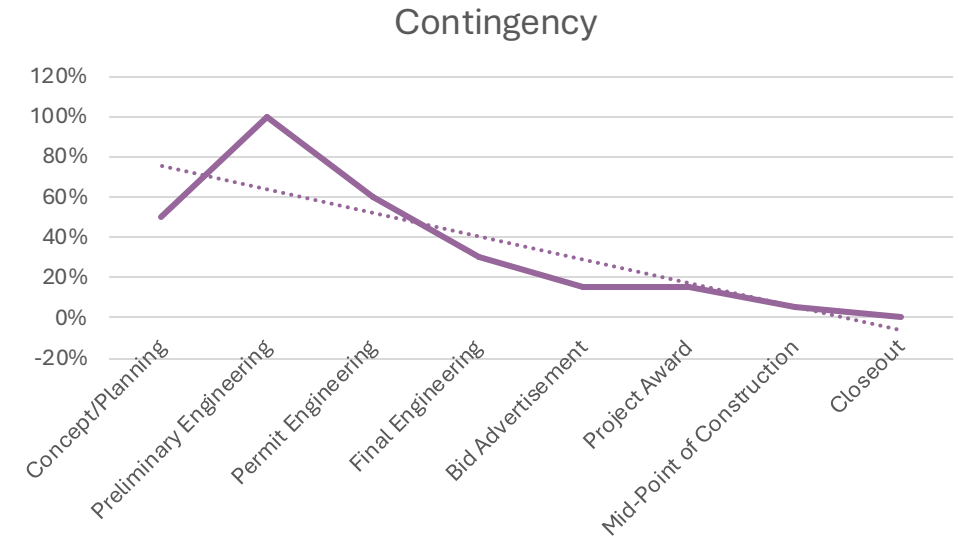
Practical Tool: Prompt Alignment Grid

Prompt Requirement	Did you address it?	Evidence Included
Current data	✓	2023 crash report
Geographic focus	✓	Census tract map
Safety challenge defined	✓	17% pedestrian crash increase

Every paragraph should answer: “How does this directly respond to what the funder asked?”

Developing a Project Budget

- Document your assumptions
- Take note of ineligible/non-reimbursable costs.
- Prepare the full cost of the project
 - Administrative/Indirect
 - Planning
 - Engineering
 - Construction
 - Right of Way, Permitting, Environmental Mitigation
 - Construction Management and Inspection
 - Contingency
- Consider inflation (year of expenditure)



Avoiding Common Grant Mistakes



Pitfalls that lead to lower scoring proposals

- Copy-paste narratives from prior grants
- Generic language
- No clear measurable outcomes
- Overpromising without capacity
- Budget that does not match scope
- Lack of community engagement documentation
- Missing attachments or formatting errors



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Copy-Paste Narratives from Prior Grants

Why This Happens:

- Time pressure
- Staff bandwidth limitations
- “It worked before”

Why It Hurts Your Score:

- Funder priorities shift
- Data becomes outdated
- Language may not align with this NOFO



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Overpromising Without Capacity

Ambitious language can unintentionally create risk

Red Flags:

- Aggressive construction timelines
- Staffing assumptions without funding
- Complex infrastructure without engineering readiness
- Multi-phase expansion without secured matching funds

Reviewers assess:

- Organizational capacity
- Past performance
- Internal controls
- Procurement readiness

If awarded tomorrow, could we truly deliver what we wrote?



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Budget That Does Not Match Scope

Common Issues

- Line items not mentioned in narrative
- Narrative elements not reflected in budget
- Administrative costs unexplained
- Contingency gaps
- Inconsistent totals
- Numbers that don't add up
- Including ineligible or non-reimbursable costs



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Relationship between grant application & grant agreement

What you promise in the application becomes legally binding in the grant agreement

Your narrative becomes part of:

- Scope of work
- Reporting requirements
- Performance metrics
- Audit review

Misalignment Risks

If application and implementation do not align, risks include:

1. Scope Reductions: You may be forced to scale back or renegotiate
2. Funding Return: Funds may be withheld or recaptured
3. Compliance Findings: Audits may cite discrepancies between proposal and execution



Source: PowerPoint Stock

POLL

Multiple Choice



What typically drives how you structure your narrative?

- A. The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
- B. A past proposal we copy and edit
- C. Internal brainstorming
- D. We write as we go



Source: PowerPoint Stock

What makes a narrative most compelling to reviewers?

1. Strong statistics
2. Emotional storytelling
3. Clear measurable outcomes
4. Alignment with funding priorities



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When a prompt asks for “Statement of Need,” you:

- A. Describe the problem
- B. Include current localized data
- C. Connect the need to your proposed solution
- D. All of the above



Source: PowerPoint Stock

If your narrative overpromises outcomes, what can happen?

1. Nothing, we adjust later
2. Scope reductions
3. Compliance findings
4. Funding recovery



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Wrap Up



Key Takeaways

1. Clarity Wins Over Creativity

- Grant reviewers score alignment, structure, and evidence – not passion alone
- If it is unclear, it will not score

2. Answer the Question That Is Asked

- Do not respond to what you *wish* the funder asked
- Dissect prompts
- Align responses precisely
- Use the funder's language



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Key Takeaways

3. Data Is Not Optional — It Is Foundational

Data builds credibility.

- Localized statistics
- Disparity analysis
- Measurable outcomes
- Current evidence

4 . Alignment Between Narrative, Budget, and Timeline Is Critical

- If your narrative promises more than your budget funds – reviewers notice
- Consistency equals credibility



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Key Takeaways

5. What You Write Becomes Legally Binding

- Your application becomes part of your grant agreement
- Before submitting, ask: Can we confidently execute everything we are promising?

6. Capacity Matters as Much as Vision

Big ideas must be matched by operational reality.

High-scoring proposals demonstrate:

- Organizational readiness
- Implementation experience
- Clear internal roles
- Risk awareness



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Thank you



Next Session – April 1st

Implementation & Compliance

- Budget
- Risk
- Schedule
- Post-award responsibilities
- Compliance and legal requirements

Post-Workshop Session

Maryland State Arts Council



Source: PowerPoint Stock

Chat with Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Dana Reiss

Director, Center for Restoration Finance

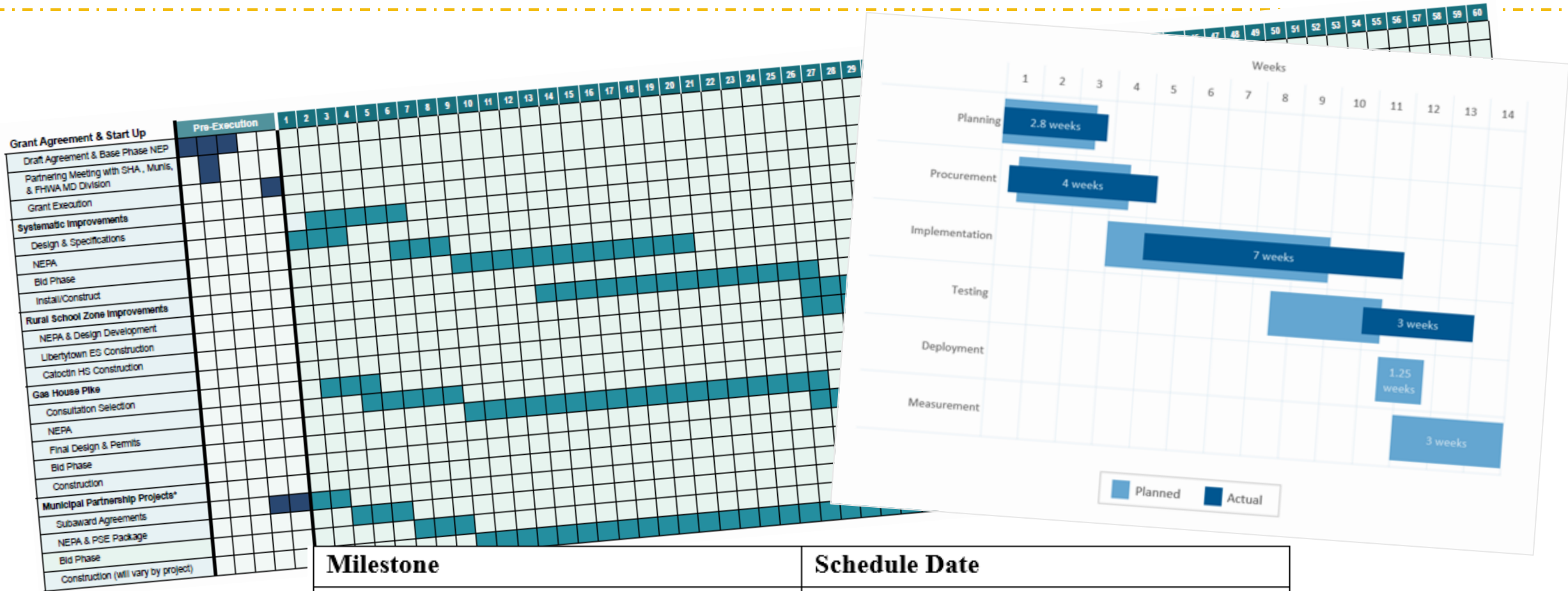


Grant Preparation

Budget, Schedule, and Readiness/Risk



Sharing Your Project Schedule



Developing a Project Schedule

- If possible, use Grant Award + 1 month, 1 quarter, etc. rather than specific dates.
- If dates are required, remember that it will take time from grant award announcement to grant award.
- Stay within the maximum time allowed.
- Show a reasonable amount of detail.
- Document assumptions.
- Consider the time required for external reviews and approvals, procurement, etc.
- Be realistic.



Source: Prince George County Council

Explaining Project Risks/Solutions

- Unless otherwise stated, grantors want to fund projects that are ready and likely to succeed.
- Risk is neither good nor bad; it just needs to be addressed and mitigated.
- Risk has budget, scope, and schedule implications.
- Do not be afraid to share the potential problems. Doing so shows maturity of the grant applicant and supports your readiness arguments.
- Risk relates to internal and external factors and shifts as the project progresses.

Readiness	Status
State and Local Planning Approvals	The National Capital Transportation Planning Board (MPO) has indicated that the SS4A projects do not need to be added to the TIP.
Roadway Design Standards	SS4A projects will follow the MDOT design standards and local roads.
Right of Way	All spot and systemic improvements will occur within the operational right of way. Any sidewalk improvements implemented by the municipalities will be prioritized so that right of way is not needed, but if right of way is needed it will be acquired in conformance with the URA.
NEPA	Not yet started, but will qualify as a Categorical Exclusion's under § 771.117(c) 3, 8, 22, and/or 27.
Section 106, Section 4(f)	No protected properties are likely to be affected; coordination will occur with the SHPO.

Readiness	Status
Utility Relocation	None on high injury network systemic improvements. If sidewalk construction occurs in the municipalities, then storm drains may be affected; but project selection would encourage that no other utilities could be impacted due to cost and delay impacts.
Partnership and Implementation Agreements	MDOT has indicated its support for the projects (see letter from Secretary Wiedefeld.) SHA has indicated that it will take responsibility for construction management of spot and systemic improvements along state-owned roadways. Municipalities will be permitted to use eligible county contracts that comply with federal requirements and allow municipalities to draw down from that contract. We will also designate a project manager to work with the municipalities to advance their selected project(s).
Public Engagement	Community meetings will be held and property owners potentially affected by construction will be coordinated with.