ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

About the Authors
This report was completed by seven Master of Public Administration students in the 2002 class of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. The research was conducted as part of the required MPA Capstone Project, which provides students the opportunity to work for a community agency while applying skills and experiences gained throughout the public administration coursework.

LILLIAN FOO
KATE GILPIN
CRAIG HOWARD
NORA KNELL
PAUL NEAVILLE
LEEANNE ROGERS
LISA WILSON

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communities in need of environmental infrastructure improvements can utilize a variety of funding opportunities. However, because the process of obtaining funding is so complex, communities often are unable to capitalize on these opportunities. Communities must be provided with the resources necessary to successfully obtain and use funding. Over the past four weeks, we examined the application process for rural utility services from a variety of perspectives. Through our personal interactions with the various stakeholders, we have developed steps that can be taken to improve the funding process.

The following report evaluates the current funding process and presents suggestions for improvement. First, the methods for collecting data are explained. Second, the results of the focus groups and interviews are reported along with an analysis of these results. Finally, the report elaborates on the recommendations and details the rationale behind them.

When compiled, the information from our focus groups, interviews, and program research on the rural environmental infrastructure programs leads us to the following recommendations that are intended to enrich the funding process so that communities can improve the quality of the environmental infrastructure projects:

- ✓ Streamline the application process;
- ✓ Improve and expand the technical assistance available to rural communities;
- ✓ Incorporate regional collaboration in the rural utility projects;
- ✓ Encourage strategic planning in rural communities;
- ✓ Use technology to improve the funding process; and
- ✓ Add evaluation to the funding process.

INTRODUCTION

In New York State, the physical and economic health of a rural community depends largely on the quality of its environmental infrastructure. Water and sewer systems play a particularly important role in such communities, especially since inadequate water and sewer systems can lead to a range of environmental health risks and can inhibit the direction and pace of economic growth. As the construction, expansion or rehabilitation of water and sewer systems can be one of the most significant capital projects that a small community will undertake, they often need planning and financial assistance to make such a venture feasible.

The United States Department of Agriculture-Rural Utility Service (USDA-RUS) assists such rural communities by funding rural utility expansion and improvements to existing infrastructure. In addition to the USDA, other agencies, both state and federal, have programs designed to assist these communities in their development. Largely due to the varied range of funding sources and application processes, as well as the myriad of rules and regulations that govern water and sewage treatment, many rural communities find the funding application process difficult or are unable to receive assistance. This occurs even though these communities may face regulatory pressure to update their water or sewer systems.

The Maxwell School Capstone Team has been asked to look at the funding processes of these programs and to recommend ways to streamline and improve these processes. To this end, the Team has met with community administrators, engineering firms, technical assistance providers, and funding program administrators to learn how the funding process may be improved. The following pages detail what we have learned through these interactions and present our recommendations for improvement.

Background

The USDA has a long history of providing utility service to rural America. Over time, this has been accomplished via a variety of methods, all involving a partnership of public, private, and non-profit groups working together towards the same goal. Today, the USDA-RUS continues to carry on the agency's mission of assisting rural communities to update and expand their utility services.

At the state level, the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC), manages the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (jointly administered with the New York Department of Health) and other programs that contribute to the improvement of rural infrastructure. In addition, the Appalachian Regional Commission also provides financial and technical assistance for infrastructure projects, and the New York State Department of Health provides funds for mandated water and sewer upgrades. Finally, the Governor's Office for Small Cities and the Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act's Financial Assistance to Business program provide funding for infrastructure projects related to economic development (see **Attachment A** for a overview of the various programs).

While these programs have proven to be very beneficial to those who have used them, there has been a perceived disconnect between the availability of funds and the ability of communities to access them. Each of these programs has a unique and individual application form, as well as varying requirements for eligibility. Many communities have found it difficult to access these funds due to an absence of technical assistance, knowledge of funding availability, or both. This is in large part due to a lack of manpower, time, and basic information about the available programs.

COLLECTING THE INFORMATION

Information about the challenges and success involved in the funding process was collected through a systematic research plan. The evaluation of the funding process was conducted within a four-week period using data collected through a combination of research techniques.

In order to obtain information from a variety of stakeholders, this study utilized two methods of data collection: focus groups and interviews. Three stakeholder groups (funding agencies, community leaders, and technical assistance providers) participated in both the focus groups and interviews. We interviewed eleven community representatives and one funding representative. Two focus groups were held: one with funding and technical assistance providers (funding agency representatives and public sector technical assistance providers) and another with funding applicants (including three town and village officials and one engineer).

Five of the town and village officials were interviewed in person. The other six were interviewed by phone, as conducting interviews by phone allowed for better geographic representation. We interviewed representatives from rural areas in north, southwest and western New York. One funding agency representative was also interviewed over the phone.

For more detailed information on the focus group and interview methodology, data collection, and sampling, refer to **Appendix B**.

WHAT WE FOUND

To collect data for this project, focus groups and interviews were conducted with the following stakeholders:

- Funding Agencies
- Technical Assistance Providers
- Community Representatives

Though viewing the funding process from different vantage points, all participants shared information that we grouped into several categories. Analysis of their input and comments reveal several trends, and these are discussed in the following sections.

Funding and TA Providers

A focus group of funding and TA providers was conducted. In addition, a phone interview was held with one participant who was unable to attend the focus group session. During both the focus group and the interview, participants were asked to:

- Describe their experiences with the funding process, specifically identifying the process through which communities connected with their services;
- Identify what is working well with the current funding process;
- Identify what is not working with the current funding process; and
- Offer suggestions for improving the funding process.

A copy of the focus group guide can be found in **Appendix C**. The results of the focus group and interview with funding and technical assistance providers are discussed in the summary below. A complete categorization of this information can be found in **Appendix E**.

> Technical Assistance
> In areas where technical assistance is available, it is very helpful in assisting communities throughout the funding process. Technical assistance is especially valuable when provided by individuals who have a solid understanding of the needs of a community and have established trust with the stakeholders. Participants highlighted Rural Communities Assistance Program (RCAP) and the Tug Hill Commission as examples of effective technical assistance.

Despite the proven success of technical assistance, there is simply not enough available across the state for all of the communities who need it. In-demand technical assistance providers are too busy to handle the current workload, and many communities across the state have no access to technical assistance.

Networking
Ongoing interaction and communication among funders and technical assistance providers is a strength of the current process. Though informal, this networking allows funders to consider co-funding projects and it allows technical assistance providers to share information and make referrals.

Regional Collaboration
When it has been possible, regional collaboration has proven to be a successful method for maximizing the available funding resources. In the past, these projects have allowed multiple communities to join together in planning and implementing infrastructure projects. Participants noted that the Black River Project is an excellent example of successful regional collaboration.

Although regional collaboration is widely believed to be "the wave of the future," it is difficult for many communities to effectively incorporate it. It is thought to require some amount of long-term planning and the guidance of a technical assistance provider. Though the benefits can be great, regional collaboration is rare because of the challenges and the amount of commitment required.

Application Process
Overall, funders and technical assistance providers felt the application process itself was confusing to communities. There is confusion about the eligibility requirements of the various funding sources. Additionally, different funding cycles among these programs compound the difficulty.

Available Funds
While communities often view grants as "entitlements" because regulatory pressures force them to change, there is not enough money to fund each project that meets the eligibility requirements. Additionally, communities prefer grants versus loans, but there is not enough grant money for everyone. It seems that most, but not all, of the available money in the state is used each year.

Strategic Planning

Funding and TA providers recognize the importance of communities engaging in long-term strategic planning. However, the funding process rarely provides money for strategic planning, and, overall, it offers more money to communities whose failure to plan has led to infrastructure emergencies and crises. There is also a need to start viewing utility service as a form of economic development and as part of a larger effort to create sustainable communities.

Evaluation

To date, there has not been adequate evaluation conducted on an ongoing basis to assess the effectiveness the funding process. No formal method for evaluating customer satisfaction exists, and no follow-up evaluation takes place after the completion of projects.

Technology

As communities, funding agencies, and technical assistance providers gain more access to technology, it is incorporated into the funding process. For example, email is currently used by EFC to alert others about new developments and opportunities, and this effort is appreciated. However, all agreed that using technology to communicate should happen even more frequently between stakeholders. The benefits of other technological advances were mentioned, including the Co-funding Initiative web page. There was also a suggestion to make completed applications available in an electronic form to enhance the ability of funders and technical assistance providers to share information. While there are a number of ways technology can be used to improve the process, there was some amount of agreement that technology alone cannot solve all of the coordination problems in the current funding systems.

Community Representatives

We asked community representatives in both the focus group and interviews to describe the water and sewer projects – completed, in progress and pending – in their communities, including sources of funding and size of project. They were then asked to discuss their experiences with the application and funding processes through the following questions:

- What prompted the community to undertake this project?
- What was the process of identifying funding sources and applying for funds? Who was involved?

- What unique characteristics of the community helped and/or hindered the application and funding process?
- What were the successes of the current process?
- What were the challenges?

In addition, interviewees were asked to describe their experience with technical assistance, applications, use of web technology, identifying qualified firms, and regional collaboration, based on the topics that emerged in the focus group with applicants.

Applicants were most concerned about technical assistance and access to information and training. These themes emerged without prompt in most interviews and the focus group. Other common topics include regional collaboration, the use of technology, and the application process.

A copy of the interview guide can be found in **Appendix D**. The product of the focus group and interviews with community representatives is discussed in the summary below. A complete categorization of this information can be found in **Appendix F**.

Technical Assistance
Most participants indicated a lack of resources for and access to technical assistance, particularly for low-income communities and certain parts of the state. Applicants in both the interviews and focus group referred to the Tug Hill Commission as a model of good regional technical assistance.

Applicants had common recommendations for improving the application process. Community leaders located outside of the Tug Hill region were aware of Tug Hill and expressed strong interest in the development of similar models of technical assistance for their parts of the state. Most applicants also indicated that the funders' use of regional offices or single points of contact would streamline the process by building stronger relationships between the funders and the communities.

Information and Training
Applicants agreed that access to information and training about funding and developing infrastructure projects should be improved. Community leaders would like help identifying qualified engineering firms, understanding what to expect in the funding process, and knowing what kinds of funds are available from what sources. Most expressed interest in having a clear understanding of the eligibility and scoring criteria used by funders to rank and select projects. Several ideas about how to improve information

and training emerged in the interviews and focus groups: using regional technical assistance providers for training, improved networking among community leaders, use of Public Management Finance Program (PMFP) as a clearinghouse, and the use of annual conferences sponsored by PMFP, the Association of Towns, or other professional associations to exchange information.

Networking
Not only is communication between the funders and applicants important, but communications with state and federal elected representatives is seen by many applicants as a way to keep the process going smoothly. Applicants shared many examples of successful networking, ranging from speeding up the application approval process to procuring line items in state budgets. Community leaders also pointed out the importance of communications with residents throughout the application and implementation process. "Residents need to feel a sense of ownership about these projects," explained one community leader.

Regional Collaboration
Most applicants recognize the cost-effectiveness of regional projects and also believe that funders prefer regional projects. Applicants indicated that inter-municipal agreements are effective methods to overcome the challenges of regional collaboration. Many recommended that funders formalize their preferences for regional programs by providing technical assistance and funding incentives to communities that propose regional projects.

Use of Technology
Technology emerged as an important topic in the focus group, and as a result the interviewees were prompted to discuss the use of technology such as on-line applications or a web-based database of funding information. Most community leaders agreed that while the use of technology is the direction of the future, it is less important than other issues like improving access to technical assistance. Smaller communities simply do not have widespread use of the Internet and other computer technologies.

The Application Process
Community representatives are interested in streamlining the application process where possible. Two recommendations include the use of single approval review processes for co-funded projects and common budget forms among applications for funding. Applicants would like to see funders working in partnership when projects are co-funded by more than one agency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the lessons we learned from the interviews, focus groups, and program review, we have identified a set of recommendations to improve the process of funding rural infrastructure development. These recommendations fall under six broad categories: Application Process, Technical Assistance, Regional Collaboration, Strategic Planning, Technology, and Evaluation.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Our recommendations for improving the application process center around two issues – the creation of a common pre-application form that can be used by most or all funding agencies to determine pre-eligibility, and the creation of a central clearinghouse for application data.

> **Success:** Informal stakeholder networks facilitate the application process.
>
> **Challenge:** Stakeholders find application process overwhelming and cumbersome.

- ***Creation of a common Pre-Application form for infrastructure projects*** – A common pre-application form would serve both local communities and funders by streamlining the initial requirements needed in order to receive or give funding. This should consist of a 2-page form that could be completed by community leaders. It would address basic issues such as the nature of a project, demographic information, and whether there is an existing system in place. This form could be given to a funding agency or technical assistance provider who would then have a snapshot of a community's eligibility for certain funds. With this document, funders could work together to identify funds and create co-funding packages that maximize available resources. A sample pre-application form is contained in **Appendix G**.

    - ♦ <u>A central clearinghouse should coordinate the Pre-Application process</u> – A central clearinghouse should be created to coordinate the Pre-Application process and to encourage technical assistance providers and government entities to work together. Ideally, the clearinghouse would also serve as a reference source for communities so that they will receive timely assistance. It would also be a resource to better coordinate the technical assistance that is available.

- ***Streamline federal and state processes where possible*** – Many communities felt that it would be beneficial to streamline federal and state processes when possible. For example, the different budget breakdowns that are required by the USDA-RUS and the EFC could potentially be coordinated so that each agency would use the same criteria. The preferred form in our interviews and focus groups was USDA Form E. We realize that many incongruencies are a result of legislative mandate. However, it is clear that many communities would find it extremely beneficial to streamline requirements and forms whenever possible.

- ***Funders should provide communities with a single point of contact*** – Funders should attempt to provide communities with a "point person" in their agency, so that communities will have the opportunity to develop a personal working relationship with the agency. Many communities have special needs and circumstances surrounding their projects, and part-time city officials often face time constraints. By providing a dedicated person at an agency, the funder will better serve the community.

- ***Increase the use of letters of commitment to ease problems stemming from funding cycles*** – Recognizing that different agencies have different funding deadlines, agencies should consider using a "letter of commitment" to communities that would ensure that the money would be provided in the future. Communities often wait in suspense to be informed of funding decisions, and providing them with a guarantee of future funds would allow them to take their next step or reassure citizens that a project is on schedule.

- ***Funding scoring systems need to become more transparent*** – Communities have requested a more transparent scoring system. There is a widespread perception that some communities "know" the application and are able to present themselves in ways that score well, while others cannot. If the criteria for how an application is scored were known at the outset, then communities would feel more comfortable and confident with the application process.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Throughout the focus groups and interviews, both community and funding agency representatives emphasized the importance of technical assistance. Technical assistance serves an important intermediary role between the communities and funding agencies because communities often do not have the resources or technical knowledge to complete the funding applications, and the funding agencies are unable to give in-depth help because they sponsor so many projects.

Not only can technical assistance providers answer questions about the funding process, but they can also encourage the communities to incorporate strategic planning and regional collaboration into projects. The following recommendations are aimed at increasing the availability of technical assistance in New York State, as well as augmenting the capacity of technical assistance providers.

> ***Success:*** Technical assistance helps guide communities through the complex funding process.
>
> ***Challenge:*** Technical assistance is not widely available across the state.

- *Expand availability of current technical assistance* – Currently, technical assistance providers are only available to assist a limited number of communities. Because technical assistance is so important in helping communities through the funding process, all communities need access to technical assistance. Two specific recommendations can improve the availability of technical assistance.

    - Create regional technical assistance organizations – Regional technical assistance organizations currently serve several areas in New York State. These organizations have achieved remarkable successes in these regions because they can combine their knowledge of the available funding resources, the funding processes, and the local communities. Existing technical assistance providers, such as Tug Hill, can serve as models for future regional organizations.

    - Make use of New York State Department of Health (DOH) set-aside funds targeted for technical assistance – The existing DOH set-aside funds can be used for technical assistance. Funding programs should work with DOH to ensure that these funds are used.

- **_Provide a list of "qualified" engineering firms_** – Engineering firms are a key component of a successful bid for funding. However, because many communities and technical assistance providers do not have the resources or prior knowledge to find a proficient engineering firm, providing a list of "qualified" engineering firms would be helpful. A system for compiling the list of firms should be developed to ensure its neutrality. For example, a clearinghouse or non-profit organization could compile a certification checklist that "qualifies" an engineering firm to be on the list.

- **_Formalize a technical assistance communication network_** – Currently, technical assistance providers have an informal communication network based on personal relationships within the technical assistance community. Providing a more formalized communication network would help to ensure an on-going exchange of ideas, especially for new technical assistance providers. Possible methods include development of an email listserv or an annual conference for technical assistance providers.

- **_Improve training and information sharing available for community representatives_**

    - <u>Use a central clearinghouse to connect communities with resources, such as funding information and technical assistance</u> – Currently, community leaders do not have one person or agency that can connect them with the necessary resources to navigate the funding process. A central clearinghouse can be the point agency that directs communities to funders and technical assistance providers.

    - <u>Provide information through local governing conferences and organizations</u> – Local governing conferences like the PMFP's Minnowbrook Conference can provide community leaders with information on the funding process. In addition, organizations such as the Association of Towns can be a useful way to disseminate information to leaders in rural communities.

    - <u>Marketing and publicity of the funding sources and success stories</u> – Often, community leaders simply need to know what funding is available and how other communities have successfully used the funding to complete environmental infrastructure projects. By more

thoroughly marketing both funding sources and success stories, community leaders will be informed of their opportunities.

♦ Community representatives email network – Connecting community representatives through an email listserv will ensure an exchange of ideas between community leaders.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Regional collaboration has proven to be increasingly important in recent years. Even with the current emphasis, however, communities still need to be encouraged to collaborate. Many communities and funders have told us how important regional collaboration is to them. The productive informal process that is currently in place should be formalized.

> **Success:** Allows communities to capitalize on economies of scale and support planned growth.
>
> **Challenge:** Numerous barriers exist that make regional collaboration difficult.

- *Include technical assistance providers in regional planning* – Technical assistance providers should be trained in creating effective inter-municipal projects. They should always look regionally first when asked for assistance in order to maximize economies of scale and spend taxpayer dollars most efficiently, as well as provide service to the maximum amount of people possible.

- *Restructure eligibility requirements to encourage regional projects* – Eligibility requirements for grants and loans should also be restructured, where applicable, in order to encourage regional projects. In some cases, many of the rules and regulations for current procedures actually serve as a deterrent to regional collaboration.

  ♦ Eliminate the $10 million EFC cap – The EFC's $10 million cap limits the size of a project, regardless of the number of communities and people served.

  ♦ Allow for flexibility in income requirements – Calculations used in funding eligibility determinations average the median household income (MHI) of multiple communities. This acts as a deterrent for poorer communities to collaborate with wealthier communities, as submitting a joint application will raise the overall MHI, which in some cases eliminates eligibility for a hardship consideration.

Therefore, funding programs should be prepared to allow for flexibility in income requirements to encourage regional projects.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The focus groups and interviews highlighted the importance of strategic planning in rural communities. The community leaders, funding agency representatives, and technical assistance providers agreed that incorporating environmental infrastructure projects into a community's strategic plan is beneficial. With the use of strategic planning, these projects can be planned in conjunction with other projects and may be better able to capitalize on available funding. The following recommendations focus on helping communities in their strategic planning processes.

> *Success:* Allows communities to maximize resources and pursue a long-term vision.
>
> *Challenge:* Funding process does not encourage or reward investments in strategic planning.

- ***Encourage communities to incorporate regional, economic, and community development in the strategic planning process*** – Regional, economic, and community development are increasingly important to local governments. Communities that use strategic planning can combine environmental infrastructure projects with regional, economic, and community development. Several benefits to comprehensive strategic planning exist. First, communities can leverage their planning resources through holistic strategic planning. Also, they can take advantage of economic development funding by incorporating economic development plans. For example, many utility projects can be funded through both environmental infrastructure and economic development funding. To capitalize on these resources, communities must use strategic planning.

  - ♦ <u>Offer strategic planning assistance (either direct or financial)</u> – Communities often do not have the resources to engage in strategic planning. Offering direct assistance, such as training, in the strategic planning process can help overcome the lack of resources. Also, funding agencies should offer grants for communities that engage in strategic planning. This will encourage these communities to incorporate regional, economic, and community development into their infrastructure plans.

♦ <u>Change eligibility requirements to reward communities who engage in strategic planning</u> – Communities without formalized planning are often in a crisis situation as a result of poor planning. This crisis situation easily qualifies them for funding. Thus, communities involved in strategic planning often are overlooked by the funding process because their careful planning keeps them out of the crisis situation.

- ***Include technical assistance providers in policy and planning processes of local communities*** – Technical assistance providers can work with local community leaders to shape the vision and goals of the community through involvement in policy-making and strategic planning.

- ***Funders should have more direct communication with the communities*** – Communication between funders and communities is essential in the strategic planning process. An open dialogue with the funding agencies will encourage communities and funding agencies to work together to plan future projects and investments.

TECHNOLOGY

Based on many of the comments and suggestions received from the focus groups and interviews, another category encompassing recommendations is technology. These recommendations revolve around how technology can be utilized to enhance the effectiveness of the funding programs, eliminate confusion and disconnect between funding sources, and improve program knowledge among communities. The specific recommendations are as follows:

> ***Success:***
> Allows for better information sharing among stakeholders.
>
> ***Challenge:***
> Limitations exist to the availability of technology and its ability to solve all coordination problems.

- ***Creation of eligibility database*** – The purpose of an eligibility database would be to allow communities, especially those in rural areas, to determine what programs they are potentially eligible for based on the type of project they intend to complete. The database should be a web-based or otherwise universally accessible.

  We have provided a basic database design with this recommendation, but did not attempt to physically create a sample database for two reasons. First, we did not receive a

great deal of feedback from communities that they would actually use a database and that it would be helpful to them. Second, the New York State Co-funding Initiative has already developed a smaller-scale database that is available on its website. Instead of creating something new, it may be a more effective strategy to expand the scope of the Co-funding Initiative database. If an eligibility database is constructed or if improvements are made to the existing Co-funding initiative database, however, we recommend that it follow the structure outlined in **Appendix H**.

- *Offer limited access read-only database of current applications that protects proprietary information* – A specific concern identified was that the different funding agencies often are working with different versions of a single project application or description. Creating an electronic version of current materials that the appropriate funding agencies could access would eliminate this problem. Access should be limited for private engineering firms to protect proprietary information.

- *Explore the use of Geographic Information System (GIS) applications related to project funding* – There are two specific areas where we learned GIS could be an effective tool for enhancing the success and usefulness of infrastructure funding programs.

  ♦ Assisting funders to see where money is going – A digital GIS layer can allow funders to visually determine where funding from all the programs is going and help funders target priority areas that need additional attention.

  ♦ Overlay infrastructure funding with certain geographic and environmental characteristics – Funders could use GIS as a tool to develop priority areas based on external factors combined with amount of water and sewer infrastructure development in certain areas. For example, areas with poor drinking water quality that have never received infrastructure program funding could be targeted.

EVALUATION

An evaluation process would be useful to both funders and the communities they serve. The evaluation process would focus on customer satisfaction and performance-based measures. In addition to providing continuous improvement to the funding process, evaluation would provide a mechanism for collecting success stories that could then be turned into marketing tools to promote the services of a particular agency or technical service provider. Success stories are also useful to communities as they can learn from each other in order to strengthen their process for developing infrastructure.

> *Success:*
> Allows continuous improvement in the funding process.
>
> *Challenge:*
> No formal mechanism exists to assess performance and receive feedback from communities.

- ***Create a customer satisfaction survey*** – The customer satisfaction survey would be implemented after the completion of projects as a mechanism to inform funders on a continuous basis of the strengths and weaknesses of their funding process. We feel that placing the funders, technical assistance providers, and communities in direct communication about the funding process on an ongoing basis can lead to great improvements in the provision of services for rural communities. A sample survey that could be used for this purpose is included in this report as **Appendix I**.

- ***Develop effective performance measures for evaluation*** – Performance measures would be useful for funders in evaluating the success of projects after they are completed. This will require funders to talk with communities and possibly visit them in order to assess whether their funds were maximized and effectively utilized. Along with the customer satisfaction survey, this form of evaluation will ultimately serve to improve the funding process by keeping funders informed of the outcome of projects and how future projects could bring continued success.

- ***Use success stories as "best practices" or benchmarking tools for evaluation*** – Success stories, which can be collected using the evaluation procedures described above, can be used as "best practice" tools for evaluating performance. Funding agencies can use success stories to identify elements of effective projects and publicize these stories to let other funding agencies, technical assistance providers, and communities know which funding application procedures work best.