

Municipal Infrastructure Funding Experience (Part 2): WELCOME TO THE 2026 FUNDER GAMES

A New Vision for the Town of Calamity Falls (50 minutes)

Narrative Introduction (1 minute)

Welcome to the fictional Town of Calamity Falls, a community of approximately **10,000 residents** with an estimated median household income of **\$68,000**.

Like many communities across New York State, Calamity Falls is juggling multiple infrastructure challenges. The town has aging drinking water infrastructure, and resident concerns have been growing about the presence of lead service lines in older parts of the system. These lines connect homes to the water main and present ongoing public health risks if not addressed. At the same time, excess stormwater has been seeping into the town's deteriorated sanitary sewer system through outdated manholes and collection pipes (known as Inflow and Infiltration, or I&I), causing the system to experience treatment failures and increased need for maintenance and repairs.

Faced with these infrastructure challenges, town officials are eager to take action. However, navigating the complexities of planning, funding, and implementing these projects is no easy task.

Question 1

The Town has already completed and submitted its lead service line inventory to the NYS Department of Health (DOH) in October 2024 following the EPA's 2021 Lead and Copper Rule revisions. Now the town needs to turn that inventory into an actionable replacement plan and begin lining up funding.

What is the first step the town should take?

- A. Define the project scope and begin establishing a relationship with the NYS Department of Health by listing the project on the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) Intended Use Plan Multi-Year List.
- B. Explore eligibility and apply for the Green Innovation Grant Program (GIGP) administered by the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC)

Question 2

Great News! The Calamity Falls project team has agreed that planning for the replacement of the town's Lead Service Lines (LSLs) is an essential next step in order to meet EPA's deadline, which requires the replacement of all LSLs by December 1, 2037. They have also initiated conversations with NYS DOH to begin listing their project on the Drinking Water SRF Intended Use Plan (IUP) Multi-Year list. They realize that they need a Preliminary Engineering Report - or PER - in order to move forward with the replacement plan, but do not have the funds to pay for its preparation. **What should the town do next?**

- A. Assess eligibility and apply for a Non-Agricultural Nonpoint Source Planning and MS4 Mapping Grant (NPG) through the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.
- B. Assess eligibility and apply for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to fund preliminary engineering activities for LSLR

Question 2.A

As town officials begin preparing their CDBG application, they realize that the town's public water system service area does not align with U.S. Census boundaries. Not only that, but the Town of Calamity Falls' Census tract also includes income data from seasonal residents with second homes on private wells, and does not accurately reflect households served by the public water system. **With this in mind, what should the town do before moving forward with their CDBG application?**

- A. Submit the application and trust that income eligibility will be confirmed later
- B. Conduct a self-funded income survey to develop a more accurate income estimate

BONUS QUESTION

True or False? The income survey requirements for CDBG funding and NYSEFC funding are exactly the same.

Question 2.B

Time has passed and the income survey was completed by a locally-based third-party group familiar with the community. As town officials expected, the results confirm Calamity Falls' eligibility for CDBG funding, allowing the town to move forward with completing and submitting its application.

Congratulations! After the review process, the town receives notice that it has successfully secured planning funds. With planning funds now secured, the town moves quickly to hire an engineering firm to complete the PER. Wanting to keep things moving, the town awards the contract to a trusted firm it has worked with before without public advertisement or competitive procurement. **What (if anything) went wrong here?**

- A. Nothing. CDBG-funded preliminary engineering work does not require adherence to procurement guidelines.
 - B. Procurement requirements apply to CDBG-funded preliminary engineering services
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Question 3

Time has passed. After correcting the procurement misstep, Calamity Falls follows all required standards for procuring preliminary engineering services. The town hires a qualified engineering firm through a competitive, compliant process and successfully completes a Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) that meets NYSDOH and NYSEFC requirements.

With a compliant PER finalized, Calamity Falls now has a shovel-ready lead service line replacement project. Town officials are eager to move the project forward and begin securing implementation funding. **To secure funding for this project, what should be the town's immediate next step?**

- A. Begin the process of listing the project on the Drinking Water SRF Intended Use Plan (IUP) Annual List.
 - B. Apply for a USDA RD Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants (ECWAG)
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Question 4

As Calamity Falls prepares its project listing for the DWSRF IUP Annual List, officials review the results of the income survey that was carefully and intentionally designed to meet both CDBG and SRF requirements. The survey confirms that median household income in the project area is lower than the Census estimate and could potentially qualify the town for SRF "Hardship" status and more favorable financing terms. **What should the town do next?**

- A. Submit the income survey results with the project listing to support evaluation for DWSRF hardship eligibility

- B. Assume hardship status will be automatically applied based on prior CDBG eligibility and proceed without submitting additional income documentation
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Question 5

Following the rank and scoring process, the draft IUP was published. The town's project is officially listed on the DWSRF IUP Annual List. Additionally, not only did the completion of an income survey successfully verify the town's "hardship" status, but the project is also listed on the IIJA-LSLR Eligible Project List and will be considered for awards consisting of additional subsidy in the form of grants and/or interest free financing. Town officials are now ready to proceed with the application process for Drinking Water SRF financing. **What is the next step they should take?**

- A. Move forward with submitting the financing application as quickly as possible in order to maximize funding.
 - B. Carefully review and prepare all required documents and comply with all Terms & Conditions before proceeding with the DWSRF financing application.
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Question 6

Months have passed since the Town of Calamity Falls submitted their Drinking Water SRF (DWSRF) financing application through the NYS EFC's Online Portal. Great news! Town officials have received word that their financing application has been processed and accepted. After finalizing the remaining closing documentation, including other funding award letters and current capital and operating budgets, the town will receive zero-interest financing, with additional grant funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) LSLR funding. Following plan approval from the Department of Health (DOH), the town will soon be able to move forward with construction on its lead service line replacement program, marking a major milestone in the town's efforts to modernize its drinking water system and reduce long-term health risks for residents.

Meanwhile... town officials shift their focus to another pressing issue. Aging sewer lines and manholes are contributing to inflow and infiltration in the collection system, driving up wastewater treatment costs and the need for maintenance and repair. To move forward with sewer upgrades, the town knows it will first need a Preliminary Engineering Report (PER). **What is the first step the town should take?**

- A. Assess eligibility and apply for a Local Government Efficiency Grant (LGE) from NYSDOS
- B. Assess eligibility and apply for a Wastewater Infrastructure Engineering Planning Grant from NYSEFC

Question 7

Great news! The town was awarded the Engineering Planning Grant from the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation. Learning from their prior procurement setbacks with the LSLR project, they carefully follow all state and federal requirements for competitive, qualifications-based firm selection, including following the NYSEFC's Architectural & Engineering (A/E) Services Procurement guidance. Now, with a compliant PER in hand and a well-defined project, the town is ready to move from planning to financing and construction. **What should the town do next to pursue funding for the sewer upgrade?**

- A. Assess eligibility and apply for the USDA RD Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant program via RD Apply
 - B. Assess eligibility and apply for the NYS DEC Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) program
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Question 8

Time has passed, and Calamity Falls receives an award notice from USDA Rural Development. While the town did not receive the level of grant funding it had hoped for, it has been offered a low-interest Water & Waste Disposal Loan with a 40-year repayment period.

Town officials pause to consider their options. The sewer upgrades are urgently needed to reduce inflow and infiltration, protect public health, and avoid rising maintenance and compliance costs. Waiting for a future grant cycle could delay construction and increase overall project costs.

Though the town had hoped for grant funding for this project, why would they make the decision to accept the loan award instead?

- A. Accept the loan due to the anticipated costs of no-action and extensive damage to assets
 - B. Accept the loan to take advantage of the low interest rate and 40-year repayment period, allowing the town to spread costs over time and move the project forward without creating sharp rate impacts
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Prompt 9

After finalizing the remaining closing documentation, Calamity Falls secures long-term, low-interest financing with a 40-year repayment period. With financing in place, the town is now positioned to move forward with construction on critical sewer collection system upgrades, including replacing aging sewer lines and manholes to reduce inflow and infiltration, improve system performance, and protect downstream water quality. This milestone marks another major step in the town's efforts to modernize its wastewater infrastructure and address long-standing system deficiencies.

Concluding Narrative

With diligent efforts and strategic planning, the Town of Calamity Falls has successfully addressed critical infrastructure needs. By leveraging the Drinking Water SRF program and accessing Lead Service Line Replacement grant funding through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the town is moving forward with implementing its lead service line replacement project, reducing long-term public health risks and modernizing its drinking water system. At the same time, Calamity Falls addressed long-standing challenges in its wastewater collection system. Through the use of planning grants, careful procurement, and long-term financing, the town secured funding to make essential sewer system upgrades.

Thanks to funding administered by New York State, the Town of Calamity Falls has been able to meet these infrastructure challenges head-on. The story of Calamity Falls shows how communities can effectively navigate state funding programs to maximize available funding opportunities and address key infrastructure needs. By better understanding these programs and starting conversation with state and federal infrastructure funders early on, communities can secure the financing needed for critical community investments, leading to a better and more sustainable future for the Town of Calamity Falls.