

PRINCIPLE RICHMOND FEDERAL CLIMATE FUNDING REVIEW: *MAKING THE MOMENT*

RICHMOND, VA ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE STAKEHOLDER CONVENING TO DRAW DOWN INFLATION
REDUCTION ACT AND BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE LAW FUNDING



Prepared by the City of Richmond's Office of Sustainability

November 2023

A Note from the Director: The Story of Transformation

Since beginning my work with the City of Richmond just over a year ago, it has become clear that this City is poised for transformation. In just that short amount of time, the City Council has unanimously passed RVAgreen 2050, our Climate Equity Action plan, and our Mayor has achieved an ambitious clean energy goal of 50% renewable electricity for municipal operations. We have launched new programs like the Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy program and the Virginia Conservation Assistance Program. The Office of Sustainability has awarded nearly \$1 million dollars to local groups for neighborhood-level climate resilience projects, and we have applied for millions of dollars in federal grants to help advance environmental justice in our community. To date, the Office of Sustainability, along with internal and external partners, has already completed 12 percent of RVAgreen 2050.



It is clear that there is significant momentum behind this work in ways that we have not seen in the past- and now it is up to us to actualize this moment in historic federal funding.

Richmond's history is storied and complex, and the depth of historical injustices can be traced back to the first colonizers navigating up the James River to establish a trading post that we now call Richmond . This history includes being central in the enslavement and sale of Black and Brown individuals, followed by a discriminatory Jim Crow era. Richmond today is different from that past, and yet we still feel the impacts of those historical decisions. This is evident by the fact that nearly 70 percent of our community qualifies for some form of Justice40 alignment.

It is in spite of this history, coupled with the groundswell of progress surrounding our equity-centered and community-led climate action plan, that ***Richmond is now poised to become the story of how the IRA can transform a community.*** The Office of Sustainability is committed to ensuring that this vision becomes a reality and that we drive federal dollars into Black-and Brown, and lower income communities in Richmond. These are the individuals on the frontlines of climate change, and that are already experiencing its first and worst impacts.

This concept was the driving force in creating the Richmond Federal Climate Funding convening, and has led Richmond to be on the leading edge of this process nationally. The most exciting part about this whole undertaking has been the ability to lean into the strengths and passions of partners- from staff members in the Office of Sustainability and other City Departments to the endless support of community based organizations in Richmond. Without their work, Richmond would not be where it is today and would not be going where it is tomorrow.

Thank you to everyone who has participated in this convening to date, and I look forward to our continued transformation!

-Laura Thomas | Director of Sustainability | City of Richmond, VA

P.S. Visit rva.gov/sustainability to learn more about our work!

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BACKGROUND

On August 16, 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) was signed into law, and set the tone for a historic investment in equity, climate change and clean energy, never before seen in this country. This, coupled with additional funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), created a unique opportunity for local governments, non-profits, private developers, and many other professional industries with an unprecedented level of funding to significantly advance this work in every community and industry across the United States. It set the stage for a level of ingenuity, progress, and change that has never been experienced in the fight against the global climate crisis. In total, the IRA and BIL continues to direct hundreds of Billions of dollars to support this effort.

At the same time, communities across the country, specifically local government practitioners, who had newly become eligible for this historic funding, struggled to identify ways to expand their capacity, and the capacity of organizations in their communities, to successfully apply for these opportunities. Understandably so, as the process to apply for federal grants can be seen as arduous, complicated, and confusing. It is true that many cities, particularly those that are larger and more well funded, already have staff members that are familiar and comfortable with this process. But, many other cities, including smaller and less well-resourced cities, continue to struggle to identify a way to meaningfully engage in the process of seeking these funds.

An important aspect of these funding opportunities is that they must align with the Federal government's Justice40 initiative, which seeks to ensure that 40 percent of the overall benefits flow to 'disadvantaged communities' that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution¹. In order to meet this challenge, many of the communities who struggle with grant applications, are the same that the Justice40 initiative seeks to support.

With rapid-fire announcements of new grant opportunities on a weekly basis, cities and other organizations alike, felt the need to establish a process to identify the best ways to drive this funding into their communities. This includes ways to identify the right grant opportunities, assistance in navigating highly-technical processes, opportunities to better engage the community in equitable ways, and how to identify the right projects for their time and capacities.

It is in this national context that the City of Richmond, VA (the City) established a pilot program to work with community based organizations (CBOs) to identify projects and apply for these Federal grants in an equity-centered and community led manner. While the City also supported efforts to engage individual residents, private developers, and the broader community with these funding opportunities, this specific paper is a review of the "Richmond Federal Climate Convening Sessions", which were intended to drive these dollars into Black-and Brown, and lower income communities within Richmond.

Richmond is a city full of rich history, much of which is steeped in racist practices and policies, and it continues to confront that reality today. The City played a pivotal role in the slave trade² when it was first established, and then employed Jim Crow era laws, policies and zoning. While not enough to simply mention these items, there is far too great of detail and importance to describe the impact of these

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/>

² <https://virginiahistory.org/learn/story-of-virginia/chapter/slavery>

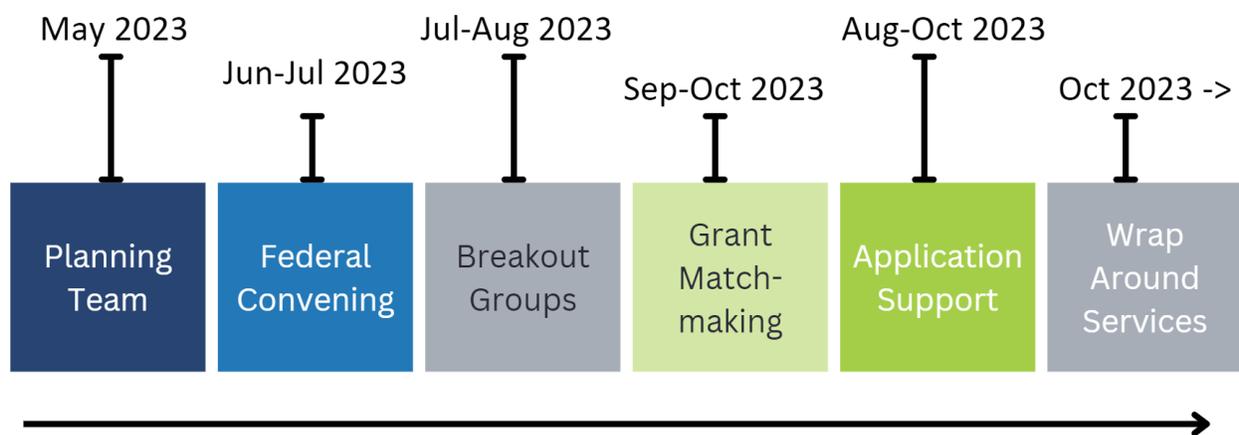
practices in these pages here. It is nonetheless within this historical framework in which the City finds itself today, and which situates the City to embody Justice40 and equitable climate action. It is within this context that Richmond's key planning elements, such as [Richmond 300](#) and [RVAgreen 2050](#) are situated and that allow for opportunities such as the IRA and BIL to make an outsized and far-reaching impact.

Building off of the momentum of recent equity-centered planning processes, which allowed the City the opportunity to work with CBOs on the frontlines of climate change, the transition into planning for Federal grants aimed at Justice40 elements was quite logical. The culmination of these planning processes, historical inequities, and momentum from historic Federal funding set the stage for the City of Richmond to be a national leader in embarking on a novel process for applying for and receiving Federal grant opportunities.

PROCESS SUMMARY

The Richmond Federal Climate Funding process was a natural extension of the planning process for RVAgreen 2050. The method used to create an equitable climate action and resilience plan was neither easy nor perfect. It required significantly more time than a conventional planning process, personal and professional learning among staff and participants, and thoughtful evaluation at each step to ensure equity was prioritized. However, the resulting plan advances equity, notes lessons learned for future planning processes, and represents a step in the right direction for the important work of building trust between government and community. The continued relationships and shared goals, actions, and vision of RVAgreen 2050 are the backbone of the Richmond Federal Climate Funding process.

The overall process the City of Richmond utilized to identify, apply for and receive grant funding through the IRA, centered around a small set of stakeholders serving as the planners and advisors to the process (the “kitchen table”). These individuals were a few of the key stakeholders in the development of RVAgreen 2050. After initially meeting to discuss shared goals around federal funding, this group then convened a larger set of CBOs focused on environmental justice work in the City. These stakeholders were asked to identify areas of interest, or themes, that they would like to see advanced through federal funding. The kitchen table then convened stakeholders in smaller breakout groups based on these specific topics of interest, and asked for participants to ideate potential projects for grant applications. Once a project idea was relatively solidified, the kitchen table used a ‘grant matchmaking’ process to identify the most appropriate upcoming grant award for the project. Finally, a mix of technical support was utilized to complete several applications. Additional and ongoing support was provided to ensure participants could continue to engage around the topic of grants in a long term manner.



The Kitchen Table

To leverage the power of organizations that were expressly interested in federal funding, a small group of initial stakeholders, “the kitchen table”, gathered to discuss the need to seize the moment. Representatives at the kitchen table were from CBOs (Southside ReLeaf and Groundwork RVA), the Southeast Sustainability Directors Network (SSDN), the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN), and the City of Richmond. Kitchen table representatives were determined based on continued conversations from the development of RVAgreen 2050 and the transition to plan implementation using federal funding.

The kitchen table initially met twice during the second half of February 2023 to discuss areas of concern around the topic, as well as shared goals and next steps. They also began creating a general framework to engage a broader set of CBO stakeholders in the discussion. The following is an overview of those meetings, which were a necessary first step in the development of the broader convening. It is also representative of a community-based planning process where the driving narrative is shaped largely by individuals on the frontlines of climate change or the organizations directly supporting those communities.

Areas of Concern-

The kitchen table identified several key concerns about each organization's individual constraints in being able to apply for, receive, and implement the vast amount of funding available. The primary concern across organizations was the lack of skills, capacity and/or experience in navigating this or similar processes.

CBO Comments:

CBOs often do not have specific grant-writing skills on their team, as they are focused on various other important aspects of running and operating their organizations.

Even with the proper skill sets, CBOs may also lack the capacity, i.e., staffing and time, to execute such vast amounts of funding in the allocated time frames.

Local Government Comments:

Census and other geographically-based funding allocation allows for communities to be prioritized that have historically been disadvantaged through land-based injustices. This includes redlining, waste and hazardous waste disposal, industrial zoning, and other urban planning processes. While effective in supporting funding for certain groups that have been disadvantaged, this method forcibly excludes other communities who experience discrimination from broader social harms. For example, LGBTQIA+ communities have not historically been excluded via land-based harms in a broad sense, and may live across various areas of a community. They nonetheless are disproportionately impacted by environmental injustices. This may also be true across other groups such as women, the elderly, individuals with physical disabilities, religious minorities, and many more. This impact may be exacerbated when considering intersectional identities within any given community.

Much of the funding in the IRA and BIL are geared towards municipal Office of Sustainability, State Environmental Organizations, and other teams, groups, or governmental Departments that have not traditionally been the highest funded or staffed. Without direct staff support, many communities feel that they are watching this unprecedented moment pass them by, and that this will further widen the gap between disparate community outcomes.

The speed of which IRA and BIL funding is being released is unprecedented, and is causing many in the field to feel rushed into applications that may not be as well-conceived as possible. It also leaves little time for collaborations, particularly with frontline community members. While some cities might be able to mobilize quickly in order to apply for funding, many others simply will not have the capability which may have unintended negative consequences, such as funding distribution that does not align with Justice40 intentions.

All Groups:

As in most communities, there are numerous organizations working to advance environmental justice efforts, from large corporations, to small CBOs or individual actors. However, these entities may often lack the ability or structure to know what others are doing in that shared space. Without a collaborative mechanism, it is likely that organizations within the same community may be competing for the same grant funds to do similar work in the same neighborhoods.

Goals:

The group identified two primary goals:

1. Convene a larger group (30-40) of environmental justice stakeholders in the community and build a consensus around priority shovel-ready projects, with a priority for immediate action.
2. Seize the momentum to establish this group as a long-term (5-10+ year) source to successfully draw down Federal and other funding opportunities, and as an incubator for building climate justice champions in the City of Richmond.

Additionally, participants acknowledged that the work should be done in a manner that helps to build and sustain a growing network of individuals and organizations focused on this work far into the future. To this end, the kitchen table aimed to ensure that all projects incorporated elements of workforce development and community engagement, as well as expanding grant application and implementation capacity, particularly for CBOs.

Next Steps:

- Funding was identified (\$20,000) to support a Facilitator for the first few months of convening the larger group;
- SSDN and USDN agreed to support grant writing to the extent most reasonable for their organizations;
- SSDN agreed to assist in the facilitation process in the form of aligning project ideas with upcoming Federal grant opportunities ('grant matchmaking');
- USDN agreed to support the effort through technical support as it may be needed;
- The stakeholder list for the Dining Hall was created by all kitchen table participants.

The Dining Hall & Breakout Groups

This larger group of 40+ participating organizations was convened a total of 5 times throughout the process, which formally lasted from May to October of 2023. The kitchen table helped to share insights about the upcoming opportunities and collaboratively ideate on potential projects they would like to see implemented in the community. Participants represented a mildly diverse set of sectors, including natural resources, community advocacy, energy, and several others. As the meetings continued, a more broad set of backgrounds was introduced in order to more fully meet the moment of holistic environmental justice, from housing and transportation to urban forestry and agriculture.

Individuals varied in their participation, and generally 20-30 participated in a rotating manner throughout the sessions, which were a mix of in-person and virtual.

Richmond Federal Climate Funding- Session Calendar				
Session #	Date/Time	Location	Focus	Notes
1	05/09 (4-7p)	Science Museum of Virginia	Background & Ideation	<i>Introduce the purpose of the sessions; Groups to meet and discuss ideas, opportunities and barriers</i>
2	06/13 (1-4p)	Virtual	Project Roles & Focus Areas	<i>Create resource lists in breakout groups; Further refine project list from Session 1 and discuss top selection</i>
3	07/18 (1-4p)	Virtual	Project Group Selections & Capacity Needs	<i>Determine groups based on Session 2; Identify areas of greatest strength and need per group; Select Federal opportunities</i>
4	09/28 and 09/29 - times varied	Virtual-Group Specific	Address Capacity Needs & Begin Applications	<i>Provide resources to support group-specific capacity gaps; Begin crafting grant applications</i>
5	10/17 (4-7p)	University of Richmond	Check-in & Define Next Steps	<i>Workshop applications; Create model for groups to move forward independently and as a collective</i>

In between meetings, the kitchen table would reflect on the success and outcomes of the session and begin planning for the next, including reviewing technical aspects of potential grant opportunities. The kitchen table met weekly throughout the process, with some exceptions, in order to keep momentum with the larger group of participants.

As the sessions continued, the smaller groups began moving at different paces due to a number of factors, including grant NOFO windows, participant schedules, project complexities or numerous other conditions. As such, the smaller groups needed different types of support from the kitchen table, simultaneously. For example, one group began writing their application after session 1, while others identified the need for a 1-year planning process prior to beginning their application. This required a high-level of adaptability and a deep level of planning from the kitchen table. In future iterations of this type of planning project, a more effective meeting structure may be to initially host a minimum of two in-person all-cohort capacity building meetings. As project teams solidify, transition them out of the larger cohort to project-specific meetings (virtual or in-person) where they can receive the full support of all individuals providing technical support (City-staff, grant experts, etc.). Additionally, the continuation of less frequent all-cohort meetings could be hosted to ensure that local government representatives have the opportunity to provide transparency to participants, as well as hold individuals accountable to their specific roles in the process.

Because of the unprecedented pace of this opportunity, session topics were continuously refined to better reflect where groups were at the end of each session. For example, the original intent of Session 1 was for participants to develop relatively specific and robust project topics and assign roles for each participant, such as grant writer, workforce development lead, etc. This is clearly far from where the group ended up, and some of this work occurred during Sessions 2, 3 and 4. Some groups also ended up

'leaving' the convening as they were ready to submit applications and no longer needed dedicated convening support to be successful. These groups continued to be invited to larger group meetings and encouraged to think of potential other opportunities throughout the process. These situations certainly created challenges for both the convener (OOS) and the facilitator (IEN), whose intent was to provide tailored support to each group, while also walking all participants through the process collectively.

While the end goals did not change throughout the process, some significant changes were made to the session topics, especially through the first three sessions. Reflection by the kitchen table between sessions was significantly important to informing what the larger group needed to be successful in their participation.

Ultimately, at least 6 project ideas were developed through this process, of which four have already turned into actual Federal Grant applications by November 2023. The first application submitted has already resulted in \$6 million being awarded to Richmond for urban greening projects. Multiple applications are still in progress and intend to result in additional funding. In total, Richmond's Federal Climate Convening Sessions boosted \$12,051,231.04 in Federal Grant applications to date.

Continuing the Conversation

An important aspect of this convening was to do more than submit applications to meet this moment of unprecedented investment. It was also to bridge connections between organizations and individuals who work in similar spaces but had not had the opportunity to previously collaborate and to build the overall environmental justice network broadly in the community. For example, one completed application resulted in a CBO being a more formalized partner in a process they had not previously had an opportunity to participate in. Another application resulted in not only a cross-departmental collaboration within the City of Richmond, but also the inclusion of several other local governments. These organizations had never previously worked together to submit an application to a federal grant. These enhanced connections should be supported through continued engagement and initiated by local government practitioners. To ensure a shared collaboration pathway was identified, Session 5 of the process focused on various methods to continue the work without the formal process of convening on a regular basis.

The group explored several options, including less frequent and less structured grant meetings, communications tools such as newsletters and social media, and other meeting types to ensure regular collaboration. Participants generally did not want to see changes to the process and noted the benefits of continuing all of the potential suggested mechanisms to move forward, including:

3. Open office hours
4. Contact list annotated with organizational interests
5. Listserv for federal grants
6. Bi-annual convenings (or higher frequency)
7. RVAgreen 2050 newsletter NOFO announcements
8. NOFO invitations- the City identifying a grant and inviting a select group of co-applicants based on their interest

Ultimately, not all of these are possible from a capability or a capacity perspective for the OOS, and a more limited selection of the above items will be utilized to keep the momentum moving forward. Most

notably, an annotated contact list, newsletter NOFO announcements, as well as personal invitations to grant opportunities are currently the most viable options.

FUNDING MECHANISMS

The sessions were supported by the use of consulting services in order to promote dialogue, receive expert facilitation, and ensure consistency in the approach to convening. All of the sessions were supported with the services of the University of Virginia's School of Architecture's [Institute for Engagement & Negotiation](#) (IEN). IEN is a nationally recognized leader in fostering collaborative change across a broad range of environmental, social and economic issues. Founded in 1980, IEN is a public service organization of the University of Virginia with a team of facilitators and mediators that assists organizations, agencies, industry, and communities in making bold, sustainable decisions. Their work spans four areas: sustainable environment; resilient communities; health, food and social equity; and building capacity through training and leadership. Their Vision is a world where people share in building resilient, just and healthy environments and communities.

In order to fund the use of these consultant services, the OOS initially leveraged the ongoing services currently being provided throughout the state of Virginia through the VA Department of Forestry (VADOF). This funding specifically supported the facilitation of Sessions 1-3 of the convening. To fund the extension of these services, the OOS applied for the [Urban Sustainability Directors Network's Emergent Learning Fund](#). This fund is a re-granting program built for local climate work to explore less prescriptive, more multilateral approaches within unique local, metro, and regional contexts. Awards range from \$5,000 - \$15,000 USD with short (3-6 month) timeframes and includes the ability to support both relationship building, planning or development work that supports local government or community collaboration, as well as regional or community collaborations to seek federal funding. USDN funding specifically supported IEN's facilitation of the final two sessions- Sessions 4 & 5.

The OOS also engaged with the [Southeast Sustainability Directors Network](#) to provide technical support in writing at least one grant opportunity (Department of Energy: Energy Future Grant) through their [Local Infrastructure Hub](#). The Southeast regional Local Infrastructure Hub (LIH) Cohorts Program seeks to advance climate and racial wealth equity by supporting local communities with technical assistance so they can successfully access federal funding. The LIH aims to advance racial wealth equity and climate equity through long-term local capacity building strategies, as well as to access the historic levels of federal funding available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

Further work to support deep investment in Federal grant dollars into the City of Richmond will be led by the OOS, in partnership with deeply invested CBOs and other partners in the community. It is not anticipated that additional funding will be sought to support the continuation of this process as future efforts will be scaled down, based on participant feedback. This future work may come in the form of less frequent and less structured convenings or other less formal methods that may not require such dedicated capacity and/or funding.

STAKEHOLDERS

In total, over 60 individuals were either directly engaged in the process or supported the work in some manner. These organizations varied in their background and ranged from Higher Education institutions to small, locally led volunteer groups.

Below is the initial list of participants in the process.

Name	Organization
Amy Wentz	Southside ReLeaf
Andrew Alli	City of Richmond - Parks & Recreation
Andrew Grigsby	Viridiant
Angela Conroy	VA DEQ
Ann Jurczyk	Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Ann Kildahl	VCU
Art Burton	Kinfolk Community
Bettina Bergoo	VA DOE
Bill Nickerson	RVAgreen
Brianne Fisher	Urban Sustainability Director
Bryan Epps	COR- OOS
Charity Howell	Fourth District of VA ; Jennifer McClellan
Charles Skelly	IBEW 666
Chris Mullens	VSU
Christina Bonini	East End Alliance
Dan Taylor	BlueGreen Alliance
Daniel Hart	UoR
Daniel Klien	Reforest Richmond
David Gordon	VUU
Dawn Oleksy	COR- OOS
Dr. Alia Carter	VUU
Dr. Cobb-Abdullah	VUU
Dr. Franklin Paterson	VUU
Dr. Janine Woods	VSU
Duron Chavis	Happily Natural Day

Emily Hastings	VCU
Faith Harris	Interfaith Power & Light
Faith Walker	RVA Rapid Transit
Glen Besa	Sierra Club Falls of the James
Gustavo Angeles	Sierra Club of VA
Janit Llewellyn	Park Planning Sustainability
Jenn Clarke	City of Richmond- Public Utilities
Jeremy Hoffman	Science Museum of Virginia
John Jones	VCU
John Zannino	Henrico Parks
Jonathan Morgenstein	NREL
Justin Doyle	James River Association
KC Bleile	Viridiant
Lara Johnson	VA Department of Forestry
Laura Thomas	COR- OOS
Michael Carter/Sarah Witiak	VSU
Michael Webb	COR- DPW
Mike Smart	COR- OOS
Molly Henry	American Forests
Monica Esparza	Renewal of Life Land Trust
Morris White	VA Tech- Extension Office
Nicole Keller	PlanRVA
Parker Agelasto	Capital Region Land Conservancy
Pastor Ralph Hodge	2nd Baptist Church
Portia Chan	Science Musuem Foundation
Rahul Young	Rewiring America
Rashmi Grace	COR- OBSP
Rob Andrejewski	University of Richmond - Office of Sustainability
Rob Jones	Groundwork RVA
Ruth Morrison	VDH

Ryan Rinn	City of Richmond - Parks & Recreation
Samantha Adhoot	Clinicians for Climate Action
Shelly Parsons	Capital Trees
Sheri Shannon	Southside Releaf
Tanya Gonzalez	Sacred Heart
Terrence Banks	City of Richmond
Virginia Slattum	VDH

SESSION DETAILS

SESSION 1: BACKGROUND & PROJECT IDEATION

Overview:

There were 24 participants who attended the first session, including members of the OOS, IEN, and SSDN. The session was held in-person at the Science Museum of Virginia (2500 W Broad St, Richmond, VA 23220) on Tuesday, May 09, 2023 from 4-7p. Dinner and refreshments were provided for attendees. The desired outcomes of this meeting were to:

- Introduce COR OOS as the convener to streamline Richmond Climate efforts
- Showcase Federal Funding opportunities
- Determine short term and long-term path(s) forward for upcoming funding opportunities to benefit Richmond Climate and Greening projects
- Identify projects, needs, organizations, and strategies for getting projects from ideation to evaluation
 - Goal: 5-10 projects outlined for funding needs with overlapping themes
 - Goal: 5 groups commit/express interest in being incorporated into funding application(s)

Strengths:

Participants were generally excited to be gathering with like-minded folks to potentially support important work for our community. The group overwhelmingly preferred in-person meetings and the ability to collaborate in a shared space. There were over 30 initial ideas that the group generated ranging from neighborhood-scale climate resilience forums to establishing areas of refuge from the impacts of climate change (extreme heat and flooding).

Lessons Learned:

Participants expressed a desire to expand the participant list, particularly in order to have representation from folks in un- or under-represented industries such as housing and public health. It was initially the understanding of the OOS that the intent of this first session was to stick closely to the “Environment” Pathway of RVAgreen 2050, rather than all five pathways (Environment, Buildings & Energy, Transportation & Mobility, Waste, and Community). A greater understanding of the intended scope from the kitchen table would have allowed a more effective and expanded participant list, though this was somewhat limited by facilitation capacity as well.

SESSION 2: ROLES, RESOURCES & RESEARCH

Overview:

Session 2 had a total of 27 participants which was held on Tuesday, June 13th from 1-4p via Zoom. This session had two goals, the first of which was to allow participants to spend time in breakout groups focused on further refining project ideas based on the themes created in session 1 (Energy, Transportation, Climate Resilience and Urban Forestry). The second purpose was to identify capacity and skills gaps of participants, and to begin identifying resources to address those gaps. The kitchen table had pre-identified four common areas that organizations struggle with in terms of federal grants: workforce development & project implementation, community engagement & advocacy, grant writing & administration, and data & research. These common areas were determined based on stated priorities within RVAgreen 2050, previous experiences from participating CBOs, and insights from technical experts (SSDN, USDN). Attendees were given the choice to participate in the breakout topic of their choice, first to explore the project themes, followed by a breakout group focus on the common areas of concern for federal funding. During this second breakout group, participants began developing [Resource Lists](#) to address these areas of concern, and were asked to continue adding resources outside of the meeting in preparation for Session 3. Future iterations of this process may find that these breakout sessions would be better completed in reverse order and potentially in separate meetings.

Strengths:

Participants felt the creation of the resource lists was a straightforward activity that made them feel like they could contribute directly to the conversation. The final [Resource List](#) can be distributed among CBOs both locally and nationally in order to help address these critical gaps in capacity.

Lessons Learned:

Individuals expressed difficulty in “thinking big” and developing projects that were broad, visionary, or transformative, as they may not have a clear understanding how they could actualize a concept. In the case of some CBOs, there was a disconnect between their current services and what their organizations might be capable of providing with additional funding. Simultaneously, they also struggled with being specific enough with their ideas in a manner that would lend itself to a specific grant project. When presented with multiple project options, some individuals expressed the difficulty in selecting one project over another, as they felt they all had merit. Alternatively, some individuals did not feel that selected projects aligned with their area of expertise, or would not want to participate in a selected project, effectively ‘removing them’ from the conversation.

For potential future iterations of this convening, local government practitioners might provide more concrete support for participating organizations. This could be in the form of directly reaching out to stakeholders to request they play a specific role in a given project, designing the outline of a project to allow organizations to better see their potential roles, or providing specific examples of potential projects from other communities.

Outcomes:

Participants continued to show enthusiasm for participating in this process and continued to provide structure to their proposed projects. After the meeting, the OOS, SSDN, and USDN reviewed notes of potential projects and provided suggestions on how to further refine them, in order to be more eligible for upcoming grant opportunities. SSDN helped develop a matrix to show which applications fit the designated projects, and provide updates to the timing and qualifications of each grant opportunity.

The Urban Forestry group, having successfully submitted a grant application and to better reflect the group's conversation, was further split into two groups, now including Parkland Interconnection. The group focused on the theme of Energy was matched with the Department of Energy's Energy Future Grant for their application. They were also ready to meet outside of the convening sessions to begin finalizing project structure, stakeholder inclusion and other necessary aspects of project creation.

Overall Project Matrix

Project Group	Energy	Transportation	Climate Resilience	Urban Forestry	Parkland Interconnection
Current Project Status	Energy Concierge: Support low-income housing and under-resourced communities energy retrofits	Improving health outcomes in Richmond's Southside by reducing air and climate pollution through pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.	Enhanced Community- and Climate-Based Community Development Planning and Implementation.	Broad Urban Forestry support including street and neighborhood trees, key indicators for the UFMP, Data collection, workforce development	Enhanced parkland interconnection within and between greenspaces in the City of Richmond and Chesterfield County.
Potential Partners	PlanRVA, Viridiant, OOS, other Energy-focused stakeholders, etc.	PlanRVA, COR OETM, RVA Rapid Transit, VDH, Physicians for Climate Change, etc.	PlanRVA, Southside ReLeaf, VDH, UoR, JRA, SMV, CBF, COR OOS, COR ED, etc.	COR OOS, COR DPW, VCU, Groundwork RVA, Southside ReLeaf, SMV, etc.	COR PRCF, COR OOS, VCU (Sust. + Urban Ag), Chesterfield Co., CBD, CRLC, PlanRVA, etc.
Potential Leads	PlanRVA?	PlanRVA?	PlanRVA?	COR?	COR?
Matched Grant!	DOE Energy Futures!	DOT Transit Oriented Development!	EPA Environmental and Climate Justice Community Grant!	EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Implementation Grant!	DOT SMART Grant!

SESSION 3: GROUP ASSIGNMENTS & CAPACITY GAPS

Overview:

Session 3 was held virtually on Tuesday, July 18th at 1p and had a total of 23 participants. To support all of the participating organizations, the OOS created a principal [Federal Convening Google Drive](#), which contains all of the materials for the Federal Convening sessions, as well as examples of other grants and detailed application support. This includes detailed Richmond-specific [Justice40 data](#), such as maps, project narrative examples, and census tract spreadsheets that can be directly pasted into other applications. In addition to sharing this information, this session focused on allowing groups to further refine their projects as they narrowed scopes and began preparing for grant applications, or to otherwise identify what the groups timeline for an application would be. The groups also discussed potential capacity gaps related to their project and using the [Resource Lists](#) they developed to address those gaps.

As of this session, each breakout group was situated as follows:

- Energy: The project to develop an “Energy Concierge” was selected and interested participants agreed they were ready to meet outside of the larger federal convening process to move forward with an DOE Energy Future grant. This concept had been developed independently by a CBO prior to this convening, which allowed the group to quickly rally around the topic and transition into writing an application;
- Transportation: Working with the regional transit organization ([GRTC](#)), the group would focus on studying the expansion of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in a North/South expansion. With GRTC being a well-resourced lead applicant, the group could complete their application independently of the federal convening process;
- Climate Resilience: The group discussed a focus on implementing actual climate resilience projects on private property, as well as other potential project ideas;
- Urban Forestry: The group had submitted for the USDA Urban and Community Forestry Grant to support Black-and Brown-Led Urban Greening;
- Parkland Interconnection: The group discussed ways to connect current greenspace through various expansion models, including the potential for urban agriculture, parkland acquisition, and more.

Strengths:

Federal grant technical experts (SSDN) were able to successfully match each project to a separate grant opportunity, eliminating potential competition between CBOS, local government, etc. This was also done in a way that avoided conflict with other potential grants that would be prime for other areas of the organization. For example, if the City had received funding for the Planning aspect of a specific grant, this convening would not be exploring the opportunity to apply for the Implementation aspect of that same grant.

Participants were polled to see how they were feeling about the overall process in the form of a ‘gut check.’ Though this was done towards the end of the session after several participants had to leave the meeting, general feedback was positive and affirming regarding the process.

Lessons Learned:

Some of the participants in Session 2 were not able to attend Session 3, which left a 'brain gap' between the project concepts. For example, most of the participants in the Climate Resilience group had not participated in the conceptual development of that project to date. When new individuals joined that topic in Session 3, there was a disconnect as to what the original intent was, and the group ended up asking to discuss a new topic. Ignoring the inputs from the Climate Resilience participants from Session 2 would not be appropriate, so additional follow up to communicate concerns about this were necessary by the OOS. A potential solution for this would be to identify a lead CBO to represent each topic early on in the process, or to alternatively allow the local government practitioners to serve in this capacity. While this does not innately speak to a community-led process, it does allow continuity of all stakeholder ideas, while continuing to build on them.

It was very difficult to disseminate the information from one Federal grant technical expert (SSDN) into all five groups. Facilitators would have been better informed if there were to be a technical expert in each breakout group to help more deeply describe barriers and opportunities with each assigned grant.

By the end of this session, it became apparent that the lead applicant for all five opportunities, as well as the USDA UCF grant, would likely either be PlanRVA, the City of Richmond, or other 'traditional' applicant. This does not necessarily align with the original intent of this process, as the kitchen table aimed to help expand capacity beyond traditional structures of power within the community. It also limits future participation by these traditional organizations in other applications, as they will quickly meet capacity to engage in additional projects. This could also be true of participating CBOs. This could be a threat to the second goal of the overall process "Seize the momentum to establish this group as a long-term (5-10+ year) source to successfully draw down Federal and other funding opportunities, and as an incubator for building climate justice champions in the City of Richmond." It is not, however, inherently negative, as this is perhaps the necessary next step in advancing CBOs abilities to engage in this process in the future.

This sentiment is also shared by the reflection that some participants were still unclear on the role that the City would play in various projects. While the OOS continues to support the concept that the City can play whatever role might best suit a particular project, it was a point of confusion for the group and more efforts could be taken to reinforce this concept.

Outcomes:

The Energy group officially began to brainstorm a second potential topic, while participants from the original project began to meet outside of the convening session. Their intent was to successfully complete an application for the September 30, 2023 deadline.

The Climate Resilience group, which elected to not move forward with the initial idea from Session 2, identified a potential topic of implementing a local [Resilience Hub](#). This is an explicit action item in RVAgreen 2050, and there are at least 2-3 community groups/CBOs working independently on similar projects. As it would require the OOS to advance this project in the interim, participants in this group would not be able to conduct any supporting work between Session 3 and 4. This left the OOS with internal discussions on how to best move forward with this concept given current capacity constraints.

SESSION 4: GRANT ASSIGNMENTS & CAPACITY GAPS

Overview:

Session 4 was designed with an alternative approach to the first three sessions, as many of the groups were at different stages of the grant application process. It was covered in three separate meetings across 2 days to allow for more hands-on support. For example, the Urban Forestry group had completed their application and been awarded funding and needed to meet to discuss next steps in the process. The Climate Resilience group was still slightly in their ideation process, and needed to meet to continue dialogue around grant specifics. Other groups, such as the Energy group, were solidly underway in their grant writing process and did not need additional convening in order to ensure their successful completion of their grant application. The overall intent and work for each group is summarized below.

- Energy: This group did not convene for Session 4 as they were already actively developing their application with technical assistance;
- Transportation: This group did not meet, as the participants in Session 3 identified a strong external grant writer and lead applicant in the regional transportation organization, GRTC, and the application was underway;
- Climate Resilience: Finalize grant alignment with the EPA Community Change grant and finalize project specifics and partner roles;
- Urban Forestry: Review grant award and discuss next steps in the grant negotiation process;
- Parkland Interconnection: Discuss grant alignment with the DOT SMART grant and finalize project specifics and partner roles.

Strengths:

Allowing certain groups to opt out of this session provided the facilitator the ability to focus on the specific needs of the groups that did still need support. It also made it easier to have all of the experts, including representatives from SSDN, participate in each conversation as they did not have to move from breakout room to breakout room. It became clear by this session that many CBOs wanted to play less of a leadership role in the process, and were more than happy to identify how they may be able to join a specific topic. For example, the Climate Resilience group continued to add ideas during Session 4, rather than narrow them down to a specific project scope. If the specifics had been developed by the OOS prior to this meeting utilizing the feedback from prior sessions, participants may have been able to more readily jump into an official project role.

Lessons Learned:

While the groups who did meet for session 3 did seem to have positive feedback and a continued interest in engaging in the process, the teams who were not yet 'application ready' did not seem to advance in their efforts based off of this session. Creating more progressive dialogue that narrowed down the project to a specific scope would have been advantageous to the broad open-dialogue space that had been created. This was the approach given the intermittent nature of participant availability in sequential meetings.

It also became apparent that groups were even more poised to let the City take the key role of project design and assigning organizations to participate formally in a specific project, rather than continued brainstorming.

Outcomes:

The Parkland Interconnection group was further split out to create an Urban Agriculture specific group. This was reflective of the dialogue regarding the potential use of the DOT SMART grant, which was determined to no longer align with the original intent of the group's work. This left a total of 6 different groups with the potential for at least 6 grant applications. All groups were committed to continuing their work outside of this process after this session. Participants were all also prepared for the final session, session 5, which would provide the groups with the ability to shape what the next iteration of the convening process would look like.

SESSION 5: CHECK-IN & CONTINUING THE MOMENTUM

Overview:

Session 5 was held in-person at the University of Richmond on October 17th from 4-7pm with approximately 25 participants. It was designed to provide a summary of where all the groups were and to identify potential ways to continue the work without the need for frequent dedicated convening sessions. The groups were encouraged to celebrate the work they had accomplished to this point and to continue to build momentum around how this unique opportunity can set Richmond up for great transformations.

Strengths:

By ensuring the participants had the ability to ask questions regarding the process from the beginning, no matter when they came into the convening, the group was able to receive additional transparency about the planning process itself. Also, since the CBOs provided direct feedback on what a longer-term process might look like, the OOS can help ensure that the voices of the frontline community are centered in future grant seeking opportunities.

The open-dialogue nature of discussing future opportunities and collecting feedback from the group, made facilitation especially effective.

Lessons Learned:

The participants continued to discuss the potential impacts of who was not in the room, from specific individuals to entire industries. While that continues to be true, it is also not feasible from a capacity/facilitation standpoint to ensure that unlimited stakeholders participate in any given meeting. The intent of the selected stakeholder list also changed overtime from the OOS's perspective, and future iterations of this process should take alternative approaches to stakeholder management.

Participants continued to express the desire to have full transparency and accountability regarding the City's participation in federal grants. It will continue to be the responsibility of individuals and groups within the process to proactively engage with OOS communications channels (newsletter, etc.) to ensure they are up to date with the current process. It will also be the responsibility of the City to effectively share information and proactively invite folks to become partners on particular grant opportunities.

Outcomes:

Groups discussed the following potential pathways to move the work forward:

1. Open office hours- participants liked this as an option to receive one-on-one direct technical assistance from the OOS should they be applying for a grant;
2. Contact list annotated with organizational interests- this was a very popular idea and would require the City to solicit responses from CBOs regarding primary contacts and interests in specific types of projects;
3. Listserv for federal grants- this idea came from the CBO group, however the City does not have the technological capability to support this request;
4. Bi-annual convenings- participants were highly interested in this and suggested it should be quarterly. Content was suggested to be focused on the City providing updates on current

applications, an overview of upcoming opportunities, and grant matchmaking for community ideas;

5. RVAgreen 2050 newsletter NOFO announcements- this popular idea would require the OOS to include a “grants” section in their monthly newsletter to help others be aware of what opportunities are available;
6. NOFO invitations- one of the most popular ideas was for the City to identify an upcoming grant, develop a project concept, review the contact list and invite a select group of co-applicants to go after the funding.

Ultimately, the City will choose which subset of these measures to move forward based on internal capacity and additional elements can be added to the process as needed. Collectively, all potential items would represent a greater time requirement rather than the intended scale-down following session 5, and the OOS was open in its ability to only move forward certain elements based on this.

The group was also surveyed for their feedback regarding the process in general. Participants were encouraged by the process, excited about funding opportunities, and were eager to ensure we continue this process in a manner that helps Richmond meet the moment of federal funding.

RESOURCES & KEY TAKEAWAYS

Resources:

Many resources were created throughout this process, both to help participants in this specific project, as well as ones that are applicable to groups across the country in their efforts to access grants, including Federal, state, and other opportunities. The following is a list of key resources that may be most beneficial to local governments and CBOs participating in similar processes, and can all be found in the [Shared Drive for the project](#):

- [Justice40 data](#)- This folder was specifically created for others to “copy and paste” Justice40 data which can be difficult and/or technical in nature to obtain
 - [Sample Justice40 Project Narrative copy](#)
 - [CDC SVI, CEJST, and EPA EJScreen \(combined\) Richmond qualifying census tracts](#)
 - [Richmond, VA Justice40 map with labels](#)
- [Capacity Gap Resource List](#)
- [Federal Convening Shared Drive](#)
- [Letter of Support/Commitment Template](#)
- [Notes and Files from Sessions 1-5](#)

Key Takeaways:

While there were several lessons learned and aspects of the process that worked well, below are the most impactful key takeaways, based on kitchen table conversations:

- **Effective stakeholder management is critical**, including managing lists of group-specific participants as well as the broader stakeholder list. It is suggested to ensure a personal invitation is given to the CBOs who most align with equity-centered work and then allow an open invitation based on in-person room capacity. As climate change is a wicked and broad topic, it is likely not possible to have all of the stakeholders in the same room
- Ensure that CBOs are invited to participate in the planning of the process
- Ensure initial alignment with plans, programs and projects already in place
- Quickly identify and address if specific groups might need additional support for one aspect of their grant process, such as connecting them with technical grant writing support
- Should a group need the assistance, allow CBOs to ideate themes, then the municipality can play a heavy hand in moving a concept towards a grant-ready idea
- With the significant number of federal grants available, it is helpful to ideate a project and find a relevant funding source, rather than identifying a grant and then fitting a project into those boundaries. This led to a successful ‘grant matchmaking’ process
- Utilize city-specific shared data where possible, such as draft Letters of Commitment and Justice40 maps and data to reduce duplicative work and barriers for CBOs
- This process was significantly boosted by the fact that Richmond had just completed its Climate Equity Action Plan, RVAgreen 2050 which was adopted by City Council in February of 2023
- The process as a whole provided a deeper level of awareness and ownership of the current landscape of federal funding. It also created new relationships within the community of CBOs and allowed them to have a better idea of what others were doing in this space

- It would be beneficial to further stress the importance of having the same stakeholders attend all 5 sessions, to help avoid 'brain drain' between sessions, or otherwise designating CBO leads for each potential project
- Facilitate sessions using a 'consensus-building' technique in order to move folks closer to application-ready concepts, rather than an open dialogue approach
- Provide more clarity regarding what a CBO can request in a grant application, from additional staff members to grant administrators

PROJECT APPLICATION STATUS- NOVEMBER 2023

Project Applications

As of November 2023, 3 groups have submitted applications, with additional groups continuing to meet and discuss the best potential grants for their project ideas. The OOS intends to support at least \$7 Million more in grant applications throughout 2024.

PROJECT MATRIX						
Project Group	Energy	Transportation	Climate Resilience	Urban Forestry/Greening	Parkland Interconnection	Urban Agriculture
Current Status	Application Submitted	Application Submitted	Application Writing Pending	\$6 Million Awarded	TBD	TBD
Description	Energy Concierge	North/South Rapid Transit Study	Neighborhood Engagement & Home-To-Home Climate Services	Black-and Brown-Led, Coalition Based Urban Greening	Connectivity between Parklands/ Parkland Acquisition	Implementation of Equity-Center Urban Agriculture
Partners	Viridiant, COR, Ashland Co, Chesterfield Co, Henrico Co, PlanRVA, Chickahominy Tribe	GRTC, COR, RVA Rapid Transit, PlanRVA	Groundwork RVA, COR, Others TBD!	COR, Southside ReLeaf, Groundwork RVA, VA Interfaith Power & Light, Happily Natural	COR, Others TBD	COR, VCU,
Lead Applicant	COR	GRTC	Groundwork RVA	COR	TBD	VCU/COR
Grant Match	DOE Energy Future	DOT Transit-Oriented Development	EPA Community Change Grants	USDA Urban & Community Forestry	TBD	TBD

CONVENING REFLECTIONS

Reflections for Improvement on Federal Funding Processes: The following commentary was gathered throughout the Richmond Federal Climate Convening process and is intended to help inform future Federal grant opportunities. These reflections are not the product of, or reflective of any one individual, organization, group or grant, and are rather generalized anecdotal feedback.

- Federal dollars should be structured in ways that not only eliminate issues of CBO and local government capacity and expertise, but to do so in a way that expands the ability for these organizations to draw down federal grants. This might be in the form of additional non-competitive grants, further supporting regional networks (e.g., SSDN) which local governments can connect with, or automatically including capacity expansion during the pre-application process
- The Justice40 approach to funding allocation prioritizes land-based injustices that may exclude certain groups from receiving Federal dollars aimed at improving life outcomes. Future funding opportunities should allow for funds to be spent using Justice40 priorities *and* easily allow organizations to spend funds to support communities that may not be physically located in the same area
- Such amounts of Federal funding must provide direct staffing to the organizations the funding is intended to support. Allocating a small percentage of the overall funding towards creating a grant training program, run by the Federal government, with the intent of deploying these individuals directly to each region of the country would significantly increase the overall impact of these types of opportunities
- Very few localities feel comfortable or informed regarding the vast number of federal grants becoming available. As it is true with this process, it is requiring a level of capacity that is in many cases not manageable for municipalities to proactively participate in the application process
- In order to maximize funding directly into Black-and Brown-led communities and organizations, no federal opportunities with pass-through dollars to these entities should be reimbursement-based
- Many municipalities and most CBOs do not have match or cost-share dollars available to them. It is often a lengthy, 1+ year process to secure this type of funding, if there is leadership support
- Additional flexibility is needed regarding allowable uses for funds, including payments directly to community members for their time and participation in projects
- Reduce the overall requirements for grant application packages, including the total number of pages. Also, application, submission, and administrative standardization would streamline the process, including what financial documents are needed for each application.

Questions regarding the Richmond Federal Climate Convening? Contact Laura Thomas, Director of Sustainability, City of Richmond, VA at laura.thomas@rva.gov.



Sign up for more news and information from the City of Richmond's Office of Sustainability to learn about future grant awards at rva.gov/sustainability.



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