

Communities in Transition Strategic Initiatives Report

Communities in Transition Capital Grant Program

Strategic Initiatives

In the event that Communities in Transition (CIT) Capital Grant Program funding remains unspent at the end of a fiscal year, the Minister of Government Relations may approve Strategic Initiatives, consistent with *The Municipal Grants Regulations*.

Since 2009-10, the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) has received \$5.9 million for the following initiatives, which benefit several or all rural municipalities (RMs) throughout the province. SARM is responsible for the administration of these funds.

Current Initiatives

1. Asset Management

Funding will be used to help develop guidelines, tools and templates to assist RMs with the long-term management of their infrastructure assets. Pilot projects may also be considered.

2. Bylaw Enforcement Research, Program Development & Implementation

Funding will be used to research RMs' increasing requirements for by-law enforcement, develop viable options (including SARM providing enforcement officers) and assist with implementation.

3. Community Planning

Funding will be used to help RMs address their community planning needs. This may include the net cost of hiring SARM professional planners and sending elected and appointed officials to related workshops. This may also include the costs related to groups of RMs hiring professional planners.

4. Elected Officials Training and Development

Funding will provide informal training and skill development of RM elected officials. Initial initiatives will focus on the development and delivery of a Newly Elected Officials handbook as well as cover the unrecompensed costs to SARM for delivering the Municipal Leaders Roles and Responsibilities module through the Municipal Leadership Development Program to RMs.

5. Infrastructure Committee

A new internal committee called the "Infrastructure Committee" was recently formed. The committee has been tasked with identifying infrastructure challenges facing the RMs today and in the future and finding ways to address them efficiently and effectively. A survey of RMs is currently being conducted. Some of the known infrastructure challenges include the increasing cost of gravel and dwindling supply and the increasing cost of road maintenance and construction. Projects may include the development of best practices, the development of new road/bridge maintenance and construction technologies as well as educational materials and workshops for RM officials.

6. Management Essentials Training

Funding will assist RM councils and administrators in capacity building through a formal certified program delivered by Southeast College. The Administrative Management Essentials program consists of 8 modules. The funding will provide a 50 per cent subsidy partnering with Saskatchewan Municipal Hail to encourage participation in the development of strong leaders.

7. Outside Worker Education

There are few outside worker education opportunities other than at Saskatchewan Polytechnic, which in many cases requires students to enroll for a semester a great distance away from home. As a local, cost-effective alternative, funding will be provided for workshops and printed materials such as guidebooks, best practice documents, etc. Examples of topics covered in the materials include risk management, occupational health and safety, gravel specifications and road maintenance and construction. Related modules have also been offered at SARM Annual Conventions.

8. RM Administrator Recruitment & Training

Rural Municipal Administrator Association (RMAA) Train the Trainers Program - Funding will cover the cost of RM administrators who wish to train new administrators as well as cover costs of rooms and meals of trainees and the instructor's costs.

Rural Municipal Administrator Internship Program (MAIP) - There is a great need to attract new people to the profession of RM administrator; however, there is a certificate requirement for an RM administrator which includes hours of on-the-job training. The provision of funding to a municipality that takes in a trainee will increase the interest of both RMs and RM administrator trainees.

Rural Municipal Administrator Recruitment - Research has shown that in the coming years, there will be a high number of RM administrators retiring. RMs will be competing with other sectors for good qualified people to fill these positions. The MAIP is one good tool to assist in this challenge, but further work is required. Funding will be used to promote the profession through career fairs at high schools, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina as well as producing printed materials and the strategic use of electronic media.

Rural Municipal Administrator Scholarships – Ten scholarships have been awarded over the last three years to worthy recipients enrolled in the Local Government Authority Program at the University of Regina.

9. Strategic Priority Initiatives

Over the past two years the SARM Board of Directors has developed the SARM Governance Policy to assist in board governance and priority focus for the organization. Within the policy there are four strategic priorities - communication, government policies, programs and capacity building. This project will assist with completing the priorities set out by the board and implemented by SARM staff.

Completed Initiatives

1. Alternative Bridge Design, Management, and Long-Term Financial Planning

Funding will be used to continue the work initiated by the North East Quadrant group of RMs to: design cost-effective alternatives for a permanent rural road bridge and a portable temporary rural road bridge; develop pilot projects for bridge asset management and related long-term financial plans; and assist RMs and groups of RMs with developing their own plans.

2. Community Planner Program

Funding will assist RMs in covering the costs of hiring a community planner and/or sending elected and appointed officials to related workshops. Preference will be given to applications that involve more than one municipality.

3. Comprehensive Insurance Department Review/Enhancement

SARM delivers several benefit programs to RMs including the SARM Benefits Plan, the Extended Health and Dental Plan, the Long Term Disability Plan, the Group Life Insurance Plan and the Optional Life Insurance Plan. SARM would like to undertake a comprehensive review of these plans to ensure they are meeting the current needs of RMs. In addition, there is a need to enhance current processes to assist both the RMs and SARM in the administration of these plans. Enhancing current administrative processes will involve upgrades to existing software or the replacement of existing software.

4. Municipal Capacity Development Program (MCDP)

In partnership with the Ministry of Government Relations, interim funding was committed to continue the program from January 1, 2016 to March 31, 2016. The commitment provided time and space for discussions and decisions to occur to either attract funding through the current Gas Tax Program, through other funding options, or wind the program down.

5. Public-Industry Partnership Program

SARM and the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure have recently partnered on the development of the Public-Industry Partnership Program (PIPP). Currently in its initial stages of development, the PIPP is based on a four-way funding model which is meant to better utilize scarce tax dollars to fund essential rural infrastructure projects. Funding will be used to hire a consultant to work with SARM, the province, industry stakeholders and RMs to identify a resource road system that will take pressure off at-risk municipal and provincial infrastructure.

6. Real-Time Elections Reporting

Funding will be used for the development of a website that would provide information on RM elections to voters, media and the general public, including nominated candidates and results. Election information would be posted by individual RMs prior to the election and results information would be posted the night of the election providing convenient, timely access to this information.

7. Resource and Economic Development Committee (R&EDC)

Funding will be used for research, education, training and resource development activities associated with the R&EDC.

8. SARM Office Relocation

Funding for the second phase of the project will fund costs resulting from the move to a new building in the fall of 2017. Without this source of funding, additional one-time costs would be generated through increased membership fees to RMs.

9. SARM Office Transition

SARM staff have outgrown their current office space as well as their leased space. Due to their need for additional office space, SARM has leased space large enough to accommodate all staff. The extra space will accommodate the human resources needed to work on projects, such as those included under Strategic Initiatives. Funding will cover tenant improvements, IT and telephone equipment and installation, furniture and equipment, moving costs and preparation of current office building for lease and/or sale.

10. Sign Manual for RMs

Funding will cover the cost of printing and distributing new signing manuals. Each RM will receive a complete office manual as well as ten pocket copies.