

New Mexico needs a strong match fund to unlock rural opportunities

Written by By Mayor Louis Bonaguidi
Friday, 09 February 2024 00:00



Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could unlock new job opportunities, investments in wind and solar energy projects, improving internet connectivity, better roads and bridges, and access to clean water in rural homes, communities, and businesses across New Mexico? As the Mayor of Gallup, this vision is a long time in the making.

And now, the New Mexico Match Fund or House Bill 177, backed by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, State Representative Meredith Dixon, and many others, could bring this vision to fruition and help us access major federal investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. This will help my community, as well as every corner of our state.

Smaller municipalities, counties, and tribal Governments stand to benefit the most from a strong New Mexico Match Fund.

And we're well on our way to making this a reality. On Feb. 5, the Fund passed the state House unanimously. In order to get the most bang for the buck, the state Senate should do what they can to increase the Match Fund to the \$100 million level originally proposed and get this once-in-a lifetime opportunity on the governor's desk, soon.

In doing so, we can help leverage federal investments to create good-paying jobs and help the state draw federal investments in energy, infrastructure, transportation, water infrastructure, and access to broadband internet.

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Typically, federal funds and programs, like those in the IRA and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, require a non federal match for a project to get off the ground, anywhere from 10 - 50%.

The bill will also allow using 5% of awarded funds to help hire grant writers, project managers, and other specialists. These experts will support rural communities, tribes, local governments, wastewater officials, and community organizations as they seek to qualify for federal grants, working hand in glove with them through project development and construction.

Studies show that often one of the biggest barriers in securing federal funding is matching fund requirements. These requirements are a special challenge for rural communities, disadvantaged communities, communities with predominantly low to moderate income earners, and communities in states with limited philanthropic investment.

Let's unlock opportunities for everyone. A state matching fund means small and rural communities can also thrive, breaking down financial hurdles and fostering equity in growth.

I hope other Mayors, City Administrators, and my fellow New Mexicans will join me in supporting the Match Fund as it now hits a critical juncture - where more funding can be infused by our esteemed State Senators.

By Mayor Louis Bonaguidi