EDA's Public Works & Economic Adjustment Assistance: Assistance to Coal Communities

An EDA & Grant Ready Kentucky Webinar | Tuesday, August 4,2026 | 1 p.m. ET

Hannah Conover, CPA

Chief Executive Director & Cofounder

Hannah is the founding Executive Director of Grant Ready Kentucky, a statewide nonprofit that helps communities compete for and manage public funding. She helped build the case for Kentucky's GRANT Match Program, which has scaled to $200M in state authorization and nearly $1B in approved awards across 350+ projects. She brings finance and operations leadership from philanthropy, startups, and audit. She holds a summa cum laude BBA in Finance from Eastern Kentucky University and is AICPA certified in nonprofit financial management and governance.

Dr. Melissa Vermillion, EdD, MBA, GPC

Chief Strategy Officer

Melissa serves as Chief Strategy Officer for Grant Ready Kentucky and is an Approved GPA Trainer. She spent 14 years at Hazard Community and Technical College as Director of Grants and Contracts and Dean of Institutional Effectiveness. She is one of only 14 Kentuckians to hold the Grant Professional Certification. She has secured nearly $50M in federal, state, and private grant funding, and holds a BBA, MBA, and Ed.D. in Adult and Higher Education from Morehead State University.

Emily Hathcock, PCED

Economic Development Representative, Kentucky Economic Development Authority

Emily is a community and economic development professional with a passion for helping regions turn shared vision into real progress. After years of leading planning and development initiatives across South-Central Kentucky at the Barren River Area Development District, she now serves as an Economic Development Representative with the U.S. Economic Development Administration, where she works alongside local partners to advance resilient infrastructure, strong economies, and vibrant communities.

ABOUT GRANT READY KENTUCKY

Grant Ready Kentucky's mission is to advance Kentucky by **empowering communities with the capacity, confidence, and connections to turn local visions into lasting impact.**

We provide **expert training, individual coaching, and hands on support** to help communities statewide become grant ready, develop competitive proposals, braid funding sources, and secure the investment needed to move from ideas to implementation.

Our work is unlocking transformative capital, fueling statewide collaboration, and helping communities turn long imagined projects into reality.

What We Will Cover Today

- The opportunity: two core EDA programs under one open application
- Why Kentucky is positioned to compete, and how to check your county
- Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance, program by program
- Spotlight: the Assistance to Coal Communities (ACC) pathway
- Award sizes, real Kentucky examples, and cost share
- How Kentucky's GRANT Program can help with your match
- How EDA reviews applications, and what makes a project fundable
- Barriers rural applicants face, workarounds, and how to get started

Poll #1

The Opportunity at a Glance

- **Funding Opportunity Number:** PWEAA2023 (Assistance Listings 11.300 and 11.307)

- **Two core programs, one application:** Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA). Applicants do not choose a program up front; EDA reviews each application and places it in the funding pool that best fits.

- **No application deadline:** EDA accepts and reviews applications on a rolling basis through the EDGE portal (sfgrants.eda.gov) until funds are exhausted or a new NOFO is issued.

- **Cost share required:** EDA covers up to 60 percent of project costs at baseline, rising to 80 percent for distressed regions, including coal communities.

Why Kentucky Is Positioned to Compete

4 of 6

Kentucky congressional districts (the 1st, 2nd, 5th, and 6th) rank among EDA's roughly 40 districts nationwide for Assistance to Coal Communities.

- That ties Kentucky with Pennsylvania for the most ACC districts of any state in the country
- Most Eastern and Western Kentucky coalfield counties qualify as coal employment-impacted communities

Program One: Public Works

Focused primarily on construction. Public Works provides catalytic investments to help distressed communities build, design, or engineer the physical infrastructure needed to attract industry, expand business, and create jobs that last over the long term.

Strong applications connect infrastructure to jobs. For example, a named employer that wants to locate in the region but needs upgraded sewer capacity to do so.

The historical average Public Works award is about $1.4 million.

Public Works: Example Projects

- Water and sewer system improvements
- Industrial parks, business incubator and accelerator facilities
- Port, harbor, and aviation facility revitalization
- Brownfield redevelopment
- Broadband and fiber optic infrastructure deployment
- Workforce development facilities
- Manufacturing space built for multiple tenants

Program Two: Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA)

EDA's most flexible program supports both construction activities and activities that do not involve construction, in regions facing adverse economic change, whether sudden (such as a plant closure) or gradual (such as an extended industry decline).

- **Strategy Grants:** develop, update, or refine a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

- **Implementation Grants:** carry out CEDS activities such as infrastructure improvements, workforce training, technical assistance, and capitalizing or recapitalizing Revolving Loan Funds (RLFs)

EDA's historical average EAA award is about $650,000.

Inside EAA: The Special Need Pathways

EAA includes three Special Need pathways for regions affected by the transition away from certain energy sources:

ACC	NCC	BCC
Assistance to Coal Communities	Nuclear Closure Communities	Biomass Closure Communities

ACC is the pathway most relevant to Kentucky. It runs on EAA's flexible authority (Section 209 of the Public Works and Economic Development Act), and Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations provided $80 million for the ACC initiative.

Poll #2

How Communities Qualify Through ACC

Instead of meeting standard distress thresholds, coal communities can qualify by documenting a Special Need:

Standard route

- 24 month unemployment rate above the national average, or
- Per capita income at 80 percent or less of the national average, per thresholds set in the NOFO

ACC Special Need route

- Closure of a coal mine, a coal fired power plant, or a coal economy supply chain business
- The event occurred within the 15 years before application
- EDA prioritizes demonstrated coal related job loss, business contraction, or long term distress in any part of the coal ecosystem

Every application must be consistent with the region's CEDS or an equivalent plan. Awards cannot go to individuals or commercial businesses.

What ACC Can Fund: The Full EAA Toolkit

Because ACC sits inside EAA, coal community applicants get the same flexible toolkit as any EAA applicant:

- Construction and infrastructure investments
- Workforce development and reemployment of displaced coal economy workers
- Planning, including developing or updating a CEDS
- Technical assistance to assess needs and define projects
- Capitalizing or recapitalizing Revolving Loan Funds
- Support for local and regional economies to create and retain jobs

How Big Are These Awards?

Program	Typical award range	Notes
Public Works	$600,000 to $5,000,000	Historical average about $1.4 million
Economic Adjustment Assistance	$150,000 to $2,500,000	Historical average about $650,000
ACC, NCC, and BCC implementation	$500,000 to $3,000,000	Special Need pathway projects
Planning projects	$100,000 to $350,000	A right sized first step for many communities

Ranges reflect EDA's recent practice under this NOFO; there is no fixed award floor or ceiling.

Kentucky ACC Awards in Action

Three real EDA awards to coal impacted Kentucky communities, small to large:

Amount	Awardee and year	Purpose
$62,507	Appalshop, Inc., 2022 (Letcher County)	Feasibility study to expand media production and education hubs into nearby coalfields
$610,000	City of Earlington, 2021 (Hopkins County)	Water and sewer infrastructure construction to diversify the local economy
$4,729,120	City of Richmond, 2024 (Madison County)	Renovation of a former school into a residential recovery and workforce training center

Source: EDA award announcements, Kentucky awards 2018 to 2026.

Cost Share: Understanding Your Match

EDA covers a percentage of your total project cost; your community provides the rest as match. The more economic distress you can document, the higher the share EDA is allowed to cover.

Distress level	Criteria	EDA share / Your match
Documented distress	24-month unemployment above the national average or per capita income at 80 percent or less of the national average	EDA up to 60 to 80% / Match 40 to 20%
Special Need, including ACC	Documented hardship such as a coal facility closure within the past 15 years; rate set case by case	EDA up to 80% / Match at least 20%
Full funding exception (rare)	Tribes, states, localities, or nonprofits that have exhausted taxing and borrowing capacity	EDA up to 100% / Match as low as 0%

Tiers shown for discussion; the final rate is set during EDA's review. See the NOFO for full criteria.

The Kentucky Advantage: GRANT Program Match

- **$100M state pool** for local governments and 501c3 nonprofits seeking federal grants that require local match
- Grant Ready Kentucky championed the model and delivers direct support and education, helping applicants compete now and build future skills
- Together, match funding and direct support address both the financial and capacity barriers Kentucky communities report most often
- **EDA grants qualify.** Learn more at newkentuckyhome.ky.gov/grant

Every Application Clears Two Gates

EDA screens for eligibility first, then scores merit. A project has to be strong on both.

Gate One: Competitiveness Review (pass or fail)

- The project responds to the NOFO and the budget matches EDA funding guidelines
- The project aligns with an EDA Investment Priority: **critical infrastructure, workforce, innovation and entrepreneurship, economic recovery resilience, or manufacturing**
- Matching funds are available and firmly committed
- The project aligns with the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Gate Two: Merit Scoring (8 Equally Weighted Factors)

- Feasibility and likelihood of hitting the proposed schedule
- Documented support and involvement from regional stakeholders
- Resiliency to future economic shocks, such as a major employer closing
- Alignment with other public or private investments in the region
- Degree of economic distress of the project region
- Job creation and retention
- Private investment leveraged
- Alignment with EDA's current Investment Priorities

Source: PWEAA NOFO, Section E.1

Six Indicators that Separate a Fundable EDA

- **Name the strategy document:** does the project tie to the region's CEDS or an equivalent plan
- **Lock in the match early:** signed commitment letters, cash, in-kind, or bonds that are available, committed, and unencumbered and available at award
- **Prove the distress:** current third-party data on unemployment, per capita income, or a Special Need
- **Build a visible coalition:** letters of support from local government, employers, workforce boards, and community organizations
- **Quantify the payoff:** realistic estimates of jobs created or retained, apprenticeships, and private investment leveraged
- **Show staying power:** the project connects to nearby public and private investments

Barriers Rural Communities Face, and Workarounds

Barrier	Workaround
No large employer to name as a partner	Build a sector partnership from several smaller employers, or lead with downtown revitalization or a small business ecosystem instead of one large anchor
Thin local match capacity	Document Special Need distress, persistent poverty, coal community status, or population loss to raise the allowable EDA share toward 80 percent, and pursue GRANT Program match assistance
Distress is hard to document	Use free federal data tools (Census ACS, BLS, StatsAmerica, NERDE) and start with a small Local Technical Assistance grant to build the documentation
Not ready for construction	Start with an EDA planning grant, Partnership Planning, Local Technical Assistance, or a strategy grant to define the project before a larger ask

What Could Your Community Build?

The National Association of Counties' BRECC Economic Diversification Toolkit highlights strategies proven in coal communities like ours:

- All of the above energy approach
- Downtown revitalization and small business support
- Expanded housing supply
- Outdoor recreation and tourism
- Remote worker attraction
- Repurposing former mine lands
- Strategic infrastructure investment
- Workforce development and training

Toolkit developed with EDA funding; linked in our program resource.

Poll #3

Getting Started: Your Checklist

- Confirm your SAM registration is active and current
- Register in EDA's EDGE portal at sfgrants.eda.gov
- Find your region's CEDS and note where your project fits (your Area Development District can help)
- Gather distress documentation, including any coal closure event within the past 15 years
- Line up match commitments early: letters, cash, in-kind, and GRANT Program assistance
- **Talk it through before you apply:** Kentucky's dedicated EDA representative, Emily Hathcock, EHathcock@eda.gov or 202-424-0424, and Grant Coaching | Grant Ready Kentucky

Resources You Will Receive

- Grant Ready Kentucky's PWEAA and ACC program resource article
- Our two-page program overview, ready to share with your board or council
- These session slides
- EDA's Assistance for Coal Communities Fact Sheet
- NACo's BRECC Economic Diversification Toolkit
- **Ongoing help:** Grant Coaching | Grant Ready Kentucky

Questions?

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