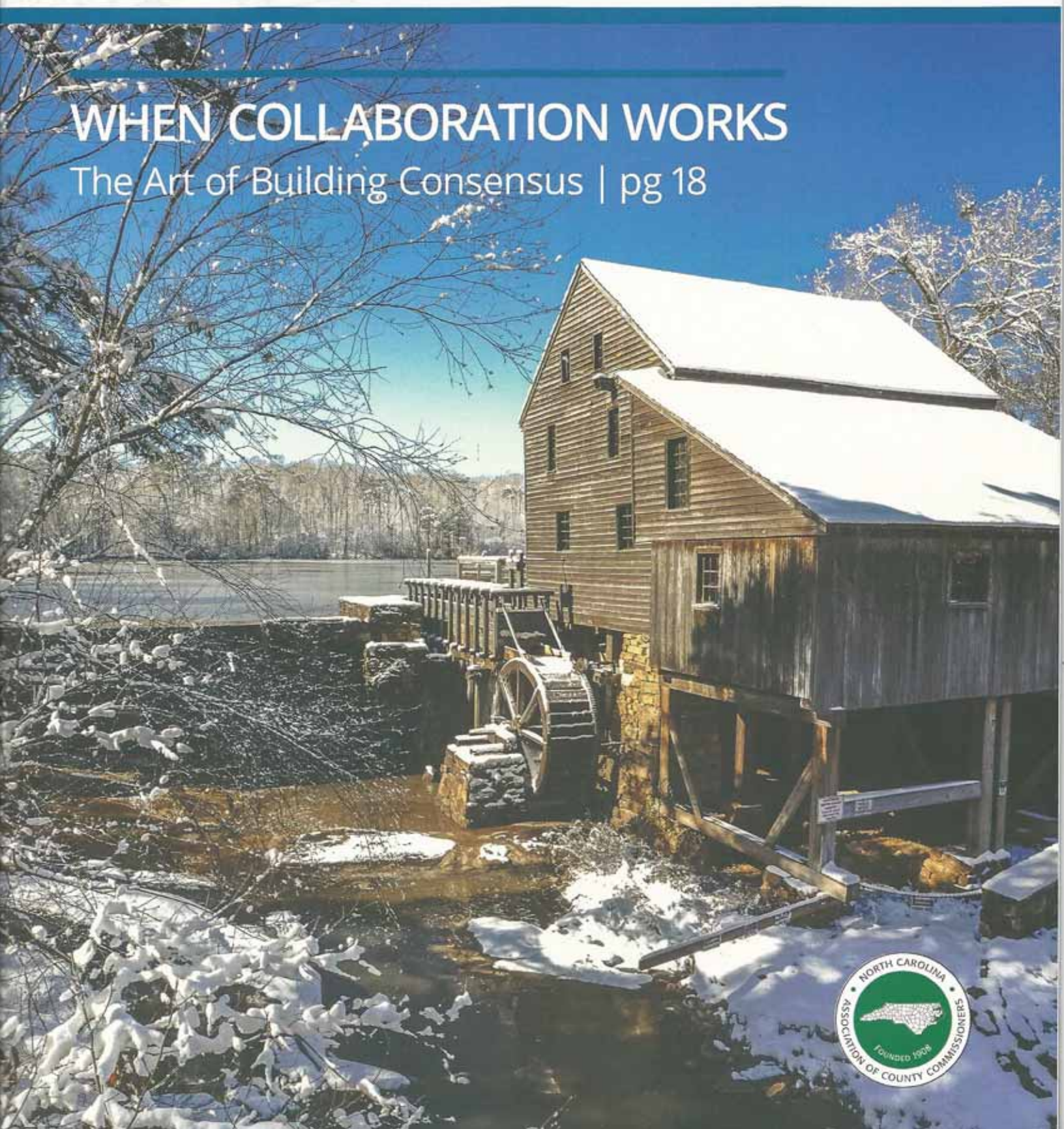


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WHEN COLLABORATION WORKS

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Collaboration Can Make Federal Grant Applications More Competitive

By Leslie Mozingo | *Strategics Consulting*

As the federal budget has continued to get tighter, federal agencies are looking to stretch limited federal dollars further and maximize project impact.

Therefore, counties should consider seeking opportunities for collaborative projects when developing grant proposals. Including other local partners in a grant proposal demonstrates that the applicant is striving to leverage community assets for greater impact. It also shows they have the organizational and leadership skills to bring together local or regional stakeholders. While there are many ways to make federal grant applications more competitive, there is no denying that collaboration gets the attention of the grant reviewers.

NEIGHBORS MAKE GOOD PARTNERS

When thinking about who to collaborate with on potential federal grant applications, counties should start within their boundaries by considering the local government entities that will also benefit from the grant. It would seem obvious that cities and counties would work together on common interests, but many would be surprised

how infrequently this occurs when entities approach the federal government for help. Therefore, working with local government(s) within your county is the quintessential low hanging fruit.

Counties should also look at neighboring counties. Reaching across jurisdictional lines to create a truly regional approach will garner even more leverage with grant reviewers. Although coordinating such an effort may seem daunting at first, consider working with your regional council of governments (COG) for help pulling a regional proposal together. Most COGs have already established networks between multiple counties, and the municipalities within those counties, and are expert at coordinating between multiple government interests and across government lines for the greater good. If you are a county on the state line, don't shy away from reaching across state lines, too, when thinking about collaborative partners. When it comes time to needing congressional support for your grant application, you will then have two congressional delegations from which to call upon and that can have a very powerful effect.



BE CREATIVE

Collaboration between local governments is not the only way to make your federal grant applications more competitive. Many notices of funding opportunity specifically instruct eligible entities to work with at least one or a combination of other entities. These groups often include institutions of higher education, community development organizations, faith-based groups and other non-profits. Therefore, think creatively about others in your county who would make good collaborative partners on the grant you are seeking. For example, the sheriff's office may work with the parks director, but the grant applicant should also consider reaching out to volunteer organizations such as citizen groups, the local YMCA, or youth sports organizations when considering applications for funding to help at-risk youth.

Don't forget to secure letters of support and financial commitments

from your fellow stakeholders if possible to help with the non-federal match requirements. Ideally, everyone needs to show they have some skin in the game. Regarding public infrastructure, one of the most frequently used terms today in Washington is "Public Private Partnerships," or P3. Typically, when large public infrastructure programs are discussed, applicants are encouraged to pursue private sector investments to offset the cost to the federal government and help address gaps in the public sector. If your county is able to find private sector partners who are willing to participate in grant applications, particularly from an investment position, it can be very appealing to federal agencies with limited funds and big goals.

Overall, it takes more thought, effort, and time to identify and engage partners for collaborative county grant projects. However, when you consider the benefits in terms of project impact and success in obtaining federal grant funding, it can be well worth it. ■