



**Dig
Deep**[®]
RESEARCH

From Funding Novice to Funding Leader

Fort Lupton's Four-Year Funding Transformation

A partnership that delivered 800% Return on Investment and positioned Fort Lupton among Colorado's model communities for funding success.

The Challenge

A small rural town on the edges of Denver captures the moment to grow as the metro region expands.

Fort Lupton was formed in 1836 as a fur trading post on the banks of the South Platte River. For more than 150 years, the community remained a small town with a population of 6000 or less. Then Denver's growth reached Fort Lupton. Between 2020 and 2025, population spiked 30% to reach 10,000. Today, Fort Lupton maintains 5% annual growth while preserving affordability and expanding amenities—filling over 150 housing units annually.

The Specific Challenges

- Expanding trails and park spaces to meet the needs of a growing population
- Modernizing 50+ year old public utility systems for 21st century demands
- Ensuring water reliability keeps pace with rapid development at the city's edges
- Expanding City administration facilities to support a rapidly growing team

The Partnership

Building Fort Lupton's Competitive Edge

When Fort Lupton engaged Dig Deep Research in 2021, the city was positioned for growth but largely unknown to state and federal funding agencies. Dig Deep began by evaluating the funding potential of Fort Lupton's planned capital projects and identifying opportunities to elevate the City's profile among funders. Strategically prioritized grant and loan applications delivered notable results, but the value of the partnership stretches beyond dollars. The grant pursuit skills and relationships the Fort Lupton staff developed have built their reputation as a top-performing municipal team in Colorado and created a dynamic and impactful staff culture at the City.

What Made this Partnership Different

- Long-term strategic planning vs. project-by-project funding
- Relationship building that earned tangible investment for Fort Lupton
- Mentorship and professional guidance that empowered staff across several City departments

The Breakthrough

Pushing Bigger Results

Fort Lupton's initial approach to the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE) Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) for an \$11M loan was approved. However, the City initially did not meet department criteria to be considered a Disadvantaged Community (DAC)—a critical determination that could save the City millions over the loan's term. Dig Deep recognized that state data sources didn't reflect Fort Lupton's actual economic conditions.

The team collected timely local data to confirm trends apparent in the community: Fort Lupton did qualify for DAC status based on the most recent data. After presenting this evidence through the agency's appeal process, the agency agreed. As a result of Dig Deep's tenacity, the City secured \$3M in principal forgiveness, and an interest rate reduction from 3% to 1.75%, saving an additional \$2.49M over 30 years.

How Dig Deep Made it Happen



Identified the appeal opportunity when the City was initially deemed ineligible for Disadvantaged Community status

Crafted strategic communications to CDPHE managers requesting an appeal

Built the business case with data analysis and supporting documents for the agency's Board

Secured DAC approval unlocking \$3M in principal forgiveness and \$2.49M in reduced interest payments over 30 years.

4 Years of Results

Unprecedented ROI and Community Impact

The success of the fundraising efforts is clearly demonstrated by several key indicators:

800%

Return on Investment over 4 years

\$644

Annual savings per water utility customer connection

\$48M

In low-interest loans secured

\$8.5M

In grants & principal forgiveness funding

\$62K

In technical assistance

20

Funding pursuits secured

Beyond the Numbers

The Non-Financial Value

While the financial ROI is impressive, the partnership's non-financial benefits are priceless:

Relationship Capital: Dig Deep's approach provided extra capacity to build relationships between City staff, program officers, legislators, and state and federal funding agencies.

Community Trust & Culture: Fort Lupton's funding successes have created ripple effects. A sense of shared community identity is growing with the voices of engaged citizens. Youth leaders are emerging and involved, bringing ideas to fruition. Active engagement and transparency are increasing trust between government and citizens.

Knowledge Transfer: City staff gained new insights and strategies to re-ignite their dedication to competing among larger communities seeking the same funding. Since 2021, Fort Lupton's team has expanded skills and experience that is now accelerating the successful implementation of grant pursuits, awards, and project delivery.

Confidence Among Funding Agencies: Fort Lupton has developed the capability and credibility to pursue increasingly ambitious projects. Today, some funding agencies are proactively sharing grant funding opportunities with Fort Lupton, as a trusted and competitive partner.

Strategic Achievements

- Obtained Disadvantaged Community status for state loan program
- Gained credibility among public and private agencies as a high-performing and trusted community that delivers
- Grew community engagement in parks and recreation planning by 400%

Capacity-Building Results

- 3 Key departments (Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Planning & Building) advancing skills and confidence to accelerate funding pursuits and wins
- Leading the region in public engagement outcomes, and sharing best practices with neighboring communities
- Game changing regional water partnerships implemented

The Partnership Philosophy

Trust and Flexibility

What makes this partnership work is the mutual trust and operational flexibility both parties bring to the collaboration.

Key Partnership Elements



Long-term commitment rather than project-based contracting

Collaborative approach elevating the expertise of both parties

Flexible scope that adapts to changing priorities and opportunities

Engaged staff that share responsibilities in a supportive environment

“Having staff work alongside Dig Deep—learning and growing together—that’s what builds the whole team. It’s how we get more efficient at pursuing grants, and the return on value just keeps getting better.”

Chris Cross

City Administrator, Fort Lupton, Colorado

Lessons for Other Communities

Fort Lupton's successes offer valuable insights for other communities facing similar infrastructure and funding challenges:

1

Think Strategically, Not Just Tactically

Don't just chase individual grants—develop a comprehensive funding strategy that leverages multiple sources and opportunities.

2

Invest in Relationships

Building relationships with funding agencies, legislators, and philanthropists pays dividends far beyond any single grant application.

3

Build Internal Capacity

Use external expertise to help train City staff, not just complete projects. The knowledge transfer creates lasting value.

4

Embrace Creative Solutions

The most successful funding strategies often involve innovative approaches that maximize benefits

5

Plan Strategically for the Long Term

Major infrastructure challenges require multi-year solutions. Partner with advisors who think in terms of years, not quarters or one fiscal year.

Looking Ahead

Building on Success

With a strong foundation of funder relationships, proven project delivery, and enhanced staff capacity, Fort Lupton is positioned to tackle even more ambitious infrastructure challenges. Current priorities include expanding regional water partnerships, continuing utility system modernization, and developing additional parks and recreation amenities for a community that continues to accelerate.

The transformation from a small rural town to a thriving, strategically-funded community didn't happen overnight—it required vision, partnership, and persistence. Fort Lupton's story demonstrates what's possible when communities invest in long-term strategic planning rather than chasing short-term wins.

