

## **Federal Earmarks: How do you get from here to there?**

*Lyle Dennis, Cavarocchi-Ruscio-Dennis Associates*

The notion of achieving an earmarked appropriation to your municipality seems like a daunting task at first blush. After all, what we are ultimately talking about is the United States Congress passing legislation - and the President signing it into law - to award funds directly to your town, bypassing many of the standard processes needed to obtain federal funds.

But, in reality, such an endeavor is not only possible, it happens hundreds or thousands of times every year for municipalities large and small throughout the country. While it is true there is currently some pressure on Congress to tighten up the process to address some flagrant abuses, most observers find it unlikely that earmarking will ever disappear.

Every year, Congress has to pass and the President has to sign legislation to fund every Executive Branch agency of the federal government. Within those bills are provisions that direct those agencies to provide funds directly to municipalities, counties, states, universities, nonprofit organizations, hospitals and more. Those provisions are put there by Members of Congress who are interested in “bringing home the bacon.”

Members of Congress have varying levels of ability to supply their constituents with earmarks. If a representative is the chairman of the appropriations subcommittee with jurisdiction, he or she can almost operate at will. On the other hand, a freshman member of the minority who is not on the Appropriations Committee has almost no ability to deliver. Most representatives, of course, fall somewhere in between.

As a municipal official, your work begins with having a good idea – a project that will benefit your municipality, fits within a federal program, and does not have opponents that will work against it. The process has become largely form-driven with both individual members and the subcommittees requiring that forms be completed and supplied to them by deadlines that vary widely.

We always recommend that mayors and managers schedule a visit with their representatives either in Washington or when they are back in the State. Nothing replaces that personal touch, particularly when the elected officials of the municipality and the congressional representatives enjoy a good relationship. On the other hand, if you publicly and actively campaigned against your congressman or senator in the last election, urging voters to support his opponent, you might want to think twice about going down this path.

Acting early in the process, supplying timely and succinct information and being available and accessible are all keys to success. Whether your project is

for a roadway, wastewater treatment, or an after school program, the federal appropriations process needs to be considered as a possible means of generating additional revenue and meeting local goals.

---

*Lyle Dennis is a partner in the Washington DC based lobbying firm of Cavarocchi-Ruscio-Dennis Associates, which represents state and local governments, municipalities, universities, colleges, corporations and nonprofit organizations.*

If you have any questions regarding grant writing, please feel free to contact Bohse & Associates, Inc. at 732-291-8038, or email Pat Bohse, president of Bohse & Associates, Inc at [pbohse@bohse.com](mailto:pbohse@bohse.com).