

Securing a Good Grants Consultant Can Yield Big Dividends!

Triad Associates

Fiscal constraints at the municipal, county, state and federal levels are placing enormous pressure on municipalities who are challenged to maintain a high level of services for their constituents. Municipalities are struggling to maintain roads and infrastructure and provide critical services such as police, fire and EMS while simultaneously offering quality programs for residents. In many instances the rateable base is shrinking with a resultant decline in revenues. This is compounded by unfunded state and federal mandates.

In consideration of the above, many municipalities are seeking professional help in assessing their needs and identifying technical and financial solutions beyond the scope and capabilities of their municipal budget. Hiring the right professional can pose some challenges, but securing a good grants consultant can yield big dividends for local government.

The following is a listing of criteria that can serve as an outline for a Request for Proposals to assist in selecting a firm/individual with qualifications and experience in identifying federal, state and regional resources and preparing competitive applications. This service will enable municipalities to address local needs and place less of a burden on taxpayers. The following is a summary of some of the important qualifications that should be considered in selecting a grant writer.

Specifications/Qualifications for a Grant Writer/Grants Consultant:

1. Individual/Firm is able to document significant and documentable experience in the field of grant writing and the pursuit of regional, state and federal resources.
2. Individual/Firm is required to provide examples of successful efforts in securing supplemental public resources. This should include a listing of projects approved by the following general categories but not limited to economic development, community development, housing, infrastructure, public facilities, recreation, planning and marketing.
3. Individual/Firm must provide a description of its approach to pursuing regional, state, federal and other funding sources.
4. Individual/Firm must demonstrate experience in implementing approved programs. This is an important consideration, so that in the course of identifying potential resources, the municipality is aware of the technical implications and additional requirements of the grant. An analysis of requirements will assist the municipality in deciding whether or not to pursue

a certain grant. The requirements associated with the grant, whether it be labor standards, limitations on use of facilities, matching fund requirements, permitting issues and etcetera should be on a par with the value of the grant.

5. Individual/Firm must provide client references that represent a diverse cross section, commensurate with the public resources secured.

Specific areas to consider in discussions with client references and/or reviewing information provided by the individual or firm should include:

- Timeliness in meeting deadlines.
 - Documents clearly written – applications that present as thorough, well written and well documented. Applications should include supporting letters, reports evidencing need and appropriateness of funding.
 - The ability of the individual/firm to work with other technicians including architects/engineers, municipal/county department heads, state agencies and etcetera.
 - Identification/validation of partners who leverage and/or support the project for which funding is sought.
6. Resumes of those persons to be assigned to work with the municipality must include evidence of direct experience working with state, federal and regional housing, community development and economic development programs and success in securing funding to implement those programs.
 7. Individual/Firm must provide a clear description of the methods of compensation for services. This should include examples of fixed fees where applicable and a listing of hourly rates that will be inclusive of all expenses or identify additional costs associated with grant writing services.

Selecting a grants consultant can be as significant to a project as selecting the engineer or architect. When municipalities make an informed choice they can be rewarded with a person/firm who is creative and looks at resources from a holistic view. The consultant with a comprehensive approach will consider not only grants but will also look at ways to move funding from areas that are difficult to fund into areas where resources are available.

Municipalities and their leadership need to do their due diligence. Do not simply select the first entity that comes to the office. Be informed of the work plan an organization is presenting for projects and don't be afraid to ask the tough questions. The future financial viability of your municipality may be riding on the quality of the grants consultant hired to assist with that next big project!