

Strategic Grants Management

Triad Associates

Okay, so you didn't get the grant application funded - no big deal. It happens to everyone once and a while, right?

What many municipalities do not appreciate however, is that grants management really needs to be comprehensive and strategic. That means in order to maximize your success in applying for and obtaining grants, there should be a management plan in place. Federal, state and other grant programs are becoming too competitive given recent cutbacks and funding shortfalls to rely solely on a "shot in the dark" approach to grant funding.

There are several things that municipalities should consider in developing a comprehensive and strategic approach to grants management.

- Get Professional Assistance. If you have someone in-house who is well versed in grants management and who is a good grant writer, that's fine. If not – and this is most true for complex grant applications and for those with big funding possibilities – get some outside advice and assistance. More and more grant applications are being submitted electronically, which requires an understanding of venues such as the *NJ Sage System* or *Grants.gov*, and often these programs are not easy to manage for the first-time user.
- Assess your Grant Needs. Project and program needs change quickly and often from year to year. Your community should update its grant needs and priorities annually to stay on top of emerging funding opportunities.
- Develop a Comprehensive Inventory of Possible Grant Funding. This involves matching your grant needs with program opportunities. You should know what grant opportunities exist and how they might be used to address your funding priorities. Communities often spend money from their general funds without realizing that grant funding could be used for these possibilities.
- Understand the Grant Calendar. Grants that are offered annually by state or federal governments typically follow a calendar. While the precise date of a grant announcement may change, one can often expect that certain grant announcements are likely to come in late spring, early summer and so forth. Many times there have to be specific advance work done in order to prepare an effective application. Cost estimates need to be generated, some initial planning work is often required, local political support is necessary and other considerations need to be made. Having a calendar enables the municipal administrator or grants coordinator to anticipate these needs and prepare for a given round of grant funding.

- Know How Grant Programs Can be Linked Comprehensively. Funding agencies want to know that their grant programs fulfill a particular project need. But they also want to know how their funding can help meet a broader, more comprehensive community purpose. So it always helps to be able to say that “this bike trail will be the last link in the greater County system of trails”, or “this streetscape funding will complement the ongoing facade redevelopment effort that is taking place on Main Street.”

Everyone wants grant money these days to offset budget problems, challenges and the growing list of municipal and community needs that local officials face. It is important to be aggressive in meeting these needs, but it is also important to have a good multi-year plan of action in place that helps to maximize your chances for success.

Triad Associates is currently the League’s Grant Consulting Firm. Their firm, which is known for its expertise in community and economic development, including strategic planning, redevelopment, acquisition, relocation and funding, has brought diverse plans and projects to life by generating more than \$580,000,000 for over 120 public, private and nonprofit clients throughout the Northeast region since 1978. Every member of the Triad team is personally committed and dedicated to the success of its clients and the projects that benefit communities.