

MAKING GRANTS WORK FOR YOUR MUNICIPALITY

Over one hundred eager municipal officials recently attended an informative VLCT Municipal Assistance Center workshop on grant writing and funding opportunities.

Fred Schmidt, Director of the Center for Rural Development at the University of Vermont, began the day with a discussion focused on essential skills for government grant writers. He likened the grant writing process to that of an airplane taking flight. There are many steps involved in the process, each one dependent on the other for success. Schmidt broke the process down into five steps: research, assembling an effective team, setting timelines and deadlines, devising a budget, and preparing the grant.

RESEARCH

This is the time to evaluate your organization, the funding organization, and search for any pertinent background information. Schmidt suggested looking through previously written grants. These can be an excellent source of general and demographic information about your organization. Along with finding this background information, remember to research and evaluate your expenses and determine what the grant can and cannot cover.

ASSEMBLE A TEAM

Behind every successful grant is a competent team. After conducting all necessary research, the next step is to assemble an effective work group. Schmidt recommended including a writer, a budget person, an administrator, and a “quartermaster,” to keep everyone in line and everything running on schedule. He also emphasized remembering all the people who will be affected by the grant, not just the immediate grant team. Outside assistance can be beneficial in gathering ideas and information, and the grant can affect many members of an organization in variety of ways.

TIMEFRAME AND SCHEDULE

Schmidt spoke next of devising a timeframe and schedule. He emphasized the importance of checking all deadlines, and then working backwards to decide a starting point. Schmidt’s rule of thumb is to anticipate how much time the process will take, and add an additional one-third. Declare a starting date and make your ideas a reality.

BUDGET

The budget is essential. Schmidt reminded participants to include all personnel costs along with administrative costs, including materials, supplies, equipment, and travel.

PREPARING THE GRANT

Schmidt calls the final process turning your “ideal” into the “real.” This means presenting your idea as a real and achievable project. The grant should be written in a compelling and unique manner. “Be honest and put your heart on your sleeve to the funders,” Schmidt told participants. He suggests thinking about the uniqueness of your proposal, the problem it solves, sustainability and timing, and making sure the proposal speaks to each of these essential matters.

CONCLUSION

The “ideal” and “real” merge, at long last, when your municipality receives the grant funding. The work is not over. Schmidt lists the following grant administration tasks as essential to the continuing success of the grant:

- Set realistic goals.
- Decide on annual and quarterly benchmarks.

- Write thank you notes to all that helped during the grant writing process.
- Develop programming to evaluate progress and success.
- Build in time for mid-course corrections.

- Tara Fischer, VLCT Research and Information Assistant

CHOOSING THE RIGHT GRANT FOR YOUR MUNICIPALITY

Before grant writing can begin, your municipality must first determine which grant is most applicable to your project. Pay careful attention to eligibility requirements for each individual grant and, before embarking on the grant writing process, take time to develop your project by choosing clear goals, objectives, partners, and expected outcomes. A successful grant proposal is one that is well prepared, thoughtfully planned, and concisely packaged. To get you started, here is a resource list of state grants presented at the VLCT MAC grants workshop:

Community Development Block Grants. Vermont Dept. of Housing and Community Affairs. Fund a variety of community development projects, such as affordable housing, economic development, community public facilities, public services, planning and feasibility studies, handicapped accessibility, and many others.

Municipal Planning Grants. Vermont Dept. of Housing and Community Affairs. Fund technical assistance for town planning, implementation of plans and ordinances, encouragement of citizen participation and education, and innovative demonstrations of planning projects. Planning grants have been awarded for projects such as rewriting town plans, updating zoning bylaws, and GIS updates.

Community Facility and Rural Business Enterprise Grants. USDA Rural Development. Facility Grants can be used to assist rural communities to develop or improve essential public community facilities. Rural Business Enterprise Grants are used for technical assistance and construction, expansion and equipment for small and emerging businesses. Also available from USDA: Water and Waste Loans and Grants for major improvements to tanks, sources, and treatment facilities; Pre-Development Planning Grants fund small scale improvement for water and sewer projects; Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants for repairs in small towns; and Solid Waste Management Grants fund technical assistance for reducing waste, promoting recycling, improving planning and management of waste sites or to reduce or eliminate water pollution.

Water and Waste Water Programs and Planning Advances. Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Funds available for small community wastewater evaluations with active community involvement.

Economic Development Administration Funds. Northern Vermont Economic Development Council. Provides credit financing for ventures that contribute to economic and community development. It seeks investments that increase employment, stabilize cyclical industries, improve wage scales and strengthen industrial sectors.

Downtown and Village Center Programs. Vermont Dept. of Housing and Community Affairs. Provides technical assistance and training to communities and helps them develop skills and strategies for downtown revitalization efforts.

Historic Preservation Grants for Local Communities. Vermont Dept. of Historic Preservation. Funds to help preserve and repair buildings that will promote the public's awareness and appreciation of Vermont's cultural heritage.

Enhancement Grants. Vermont Agency of Transportation. A freestanding enhancement program and environmental enhancements to traditional transportation projects.

Preservation Grants. Preservation Trust of Vermont. Grants available for the rehabilitation of historic buildings.

Vermont's Land & Water Conservation Fund. Vermont Dept. of Forests, Parks and Recreation. Funds acquisition of land for outdoor recreation and open space purposes and development or rehabilitation of outdoor recreation areas and facilities.

Vermont's Recreation Trails Grant Program. Vermont Dept. of Forests, Parks and Recreation. Funds construction, education and publications, and planning of trail projects in Vermont.

Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program. Vermont Dept. of Forests, Parks and Recreation. Funds planning, education, and planting and maintenance of trees.

Vermont Watershed Grants. Vermont Dept. of Fish and Wildlife. Grants are available for local and regional water-related projects in Vermont.

Homeland Security Grants. Vermont Dept. of Homeland Security. Funds projects dealing with planning, training, exercises, and equipment, law enforcement prevention, and citizen corps programs.

Additional opportunities:

Vermont Agency of Human Services. Child Care Services Division. Grants are available to communities, including mini-grants, community grants, tobacco grants, Vermont Children's Trust Fund, Success by Six, and Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities.

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets offers grants to help with the purchase price of a milk vending machine or a milk cooler.

Vermont Agency of Human Services, Social and Rehabilitative Services. Grants available for equipment and facility improvement along with training, accreditation, credentialing, and education, and providing a lead safe environment for children.

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Dept. of Environmental Conservation's Waste Management Division. Grants for food composting programs and Solid Waste Management Grants;

Farm and Residential Underground Heating Oil Tank Removal Grant. The Petroleum Cleanup Fund (PCF) offers grants to farm and residential tank owners towards the removal, replacement, or upgrade of underground heating oil tanks.

Here are some additional state, federal, and foundation grant resources:

STATE GRANTS

- <http://www.vpic.info/fundingsources/>. Vermont Planning Information Center (VPIC) is a good resource broken down by category coupled with a brief description of each individual grant.
- <http://www.acrpc.org/pages/activities/grants/state.htm>. The Addison County Regional Planning Commission's Web site comes complete with examples of activities previously funded, award amounts, matching funds necessary, and due dates.
- <http://crs.uvm.edu/municipal/#grants>. The Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont offers links to Vermont funds, federal funds, and general grant information.

FEDERAL GRANTS

- <http://www.cfda.gov>. The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance offers a comprehensive list of grants, organized by subject and agency. In addition, there are helpful tips on how to apply for assistance and information on writing grants.
- www.grants.gov. Grants.gov has updates and offers one-stop shopping for federal grants. The *Find Grant Opportunities* feature provides the ability to search for federal government-wide grant opportunities and to receive notification of future grant opportunities.
- www.fedgrants.gov. FedGrants includes a notification service for eligible applicants to receive electronic information on pertinent grants.

FOUNDATION GRANTS

- **www.fdncenter.com** . The Foundation Center is a good starting point. A list of the top 50 grant funders in Vermont (2000) can be found at **http://fdncenter.org/fc_stats/pdf/10_top50_tg/2000/vt_00.pdf**. This page provides the names of organizations with available funds. Specific research would need to be done to find out the types of projects funded, the amount of awards, eligibility requirements, and deadlines.
- **www.vermontcf.org** . The Vermont Community Foundation is a useful site to research existing foundations and their grant requirements.

The League publishes new grant-related information as it becomes available in the *VLCT News*. Limited grant information can also be obtained by calling the VLCT Municipal Assistance Center.

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