

Grants Writing

By STEPHEN J. GINDES, DIRECTOR, FINANCE AND PERSONNEL SERVICES

Conway Gregory, of the Maryland Environmental Service, provided insight at the recent MML convention on how cities and towns should apply for grants and what funding agencies are looking for before they approve any requests for funds.

The following subjects must be considered when preparing a grant request:

Types of Grants

Program grants help provide services to the community (such as literacy training for adults). **Research grants** study a particular issue (such as effects of a drug treatment on a disease). Operating grants usually refer to those funding needs in the day-to-day budget items. **Technical assistance** grants cover hiring a consultant, usually to educate staff or to provide specialized help on an as-needed basis (such as an architect or an urban planner). **Planning/ coordinating grants** provide assistance where one area of service is affected by several different agencies, requiring additional coordination. An example is a hotline for refugees referring people to areas of housing, education, and job training. **Capital improvement grants** cover the cost of physical improvements to land and buildings, such as new buildings, roofs, and other improvements.

Developing Your Idea and Grant Request

The process of prewriting your proposal begins with identifying and defining the problem so that support is built, not only within the organization, but with the business and community at large. This is done by establishing clear and attainable outcomes to lay

the groundwork for the actual grant proposal. There should be a grant development "team," when possible, to develop a response to a Request for Proposal (RFP) or to properly complete a grant application. Among other tasks, the team should be visionary (how does this grant fit in with the big picture), realistic (only ask for what is needed and do not overstate the problem or solution), accurate (proofread) and accountable (with a budget and timeline for completion). The proposal/grant request should also include resumes of key personnel, letters of commitment for outside assistance and pertinent research about the problem and solution to the grant request. Further, the proposal should be written by one person, so that the language is in "one voice." All directions should be followed to the letter.

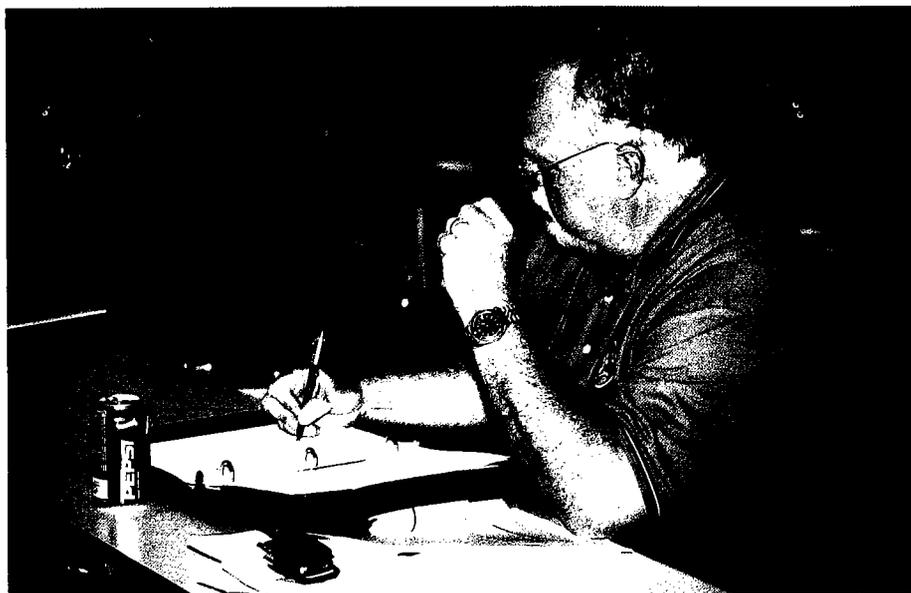
The Grant Request

There are many parts of a successful grant request, including:

The **Cover Sheet**, which should be concise and explicit and focus on your outcome, not the method. Common sense ideas include the use of subtitles, if needed for clarity, and avoiding acronyms



and technical terms. The **Abstract** identifies the specific problem, target population, location of the problem and timeframe of the project. The abstract also summarizes the goals of the project and discusses such items as the town's qualifications and the expected benefits of the project. As with the cover sheet, the abstract should be concise. The **Table of Contents** must conform to the text and be numbered properly. The **Needs Assessment** will state the problem, who will benefit from the project, the time frame and where the project will take place. Proper research should be included, as needed, from national and state data, and current and past projects. Also, the downside of not dealing with the problem should be noted. The **outcomes** section directly addresses a problem noted in the needs assessment, is clearly measured and has a deadline/timeline. Also, a result that is both realistic and ambitious is preferred. The goals (what is hoped to be achieved) and objectives (short-term outcomes) must be clear-



ly stated, as well. The **implementation plan** includes strategies, which are general approaches to solving the problem and activities, which are specifics to the strategy. Accountability is always

an important factor when dealing with outside funding sources, and the **evaluation plan** provides this. The plan should include ongoing and final results with proper data collection and analysis that is tied to the goals and outcomes. A related requirement is the **budget**, which includes a narrative (reflecting the budget numbers), a detailed line item description and a summary sheet for easy review.

Sources of Grant Money

Privately funded grants are provided by: **community based groups**, which are formed for the benefit of a specific area; **national or general purpose foundations**, which are large, nationwide foundations looking for innovative projects; **special purpose foundations**, which are local, national or international groups dedicated to one purpose; **family foundations**, which are usually formed for the benefit of a specific area; and **corporate foundations**, which are usually formed for the local community and to achieve the goals of the corporation. Private sector grants tend to accept applications all year long, are likely to request that you submit a proposal without a specific form, and often do not have staff to discuss their programs.

Government grants can come from a city, county, state or federal agency. The city, county or state may add restrictions to a federal program, but they can't remove any federal restrictions. Government grant programs are more likely to have a funding cycle and a specific application form, as well as staff to discuss programs.

What Funding Sources Look For

Private and government agencies look for: **severity of need** (your community needs the program more than other communities competing for the funding); **shared mission** (your grant must help the funding agency further its goals); **consistency** (your application must be logical and provide solutions to all problems listed in the proposal); **understanding of the problem and solution** (the solutions must use currently accepted methods in the field – avoid outdated solutions); **competence** (show that you are capable and effective with an overview of experience of your town); **cost effectiveness** (efficient use of grant dollars should be explained); **accountability** (a timetable with milestones should be clearly stated); and **realistic goals and budget** (promise only what you can deliver, and consider that the amount requested be in line with what the agency typically awards).

Additional government agency requirements include: **project readiness** (all approvals, permits, matching funds are in place) and **leveraging ratio** (a measure of funding from other sources. The more funding from other sources, the better. Also, the source of the other funding may need to be addressed by the proposal).

Follow-up

If the grant is denied, find out why and look elsewhere if you were considered ineligible. Otherwise, ask how to improve your proposal and whether the funding agency will keep you informed about future funding proposals. If the grant is approved for less money than requested, you will need to either achieve less, use a different method to address the problem, use funding from somewhere else in your agency, take more time to find more money, or decline the grant altogether. If the grant is approved, share the credit with supporters and keep the funding agency informed about your progress, even if is not required. Also, keep accurate financial records.

Other sources of information include the internet and such sites as the Federal Register, the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, the Foundation Center and specific federal and state agencies, such as the Maryland Department of Planning, as clearinghouses for information. ■

Dr. Conway Gregory may be reached at the Maryland Environmental Service at 410/974-7281, e-mail cgreg@menv.com.