

**Capital Grants Workshop
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Mannville Alberta**

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Reality of Grant Work Room

Imagine: Three people in a basement going through hundreds of grant applications – over-worked, tired, and trying not to respond emotionally to the applications before them. They will sort applications ruthlessly. This is part of your challenge as a grant writer.

Writing a Proposal

- Applicants need to make their applications “snappy, sexy, grippy:” the opening statement needs to grab the attention to make your application get to the “let’s look at it again” pile.
- Proposals are submitted to the province, to municipal affairs, the minister of other portfolios, etc. – you can’t be sure who is reading it.
- The key is to locate the appropriate federal and/or provincial ministry b/c there are as many as 20 even 30 grant programs in some Ministries. Check the Ministry websites.
- Identify either capital or operating grant programs.
- Build a database that tells your municipality what kinds of funding programs are available from the provincial and federal programs. Key more on provincial.
- Perhaps the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association or HUB could put together a database of provincial and federal grant programs. Update your list annually.
- Write with integrity and it will be treated with respect. People making the decisions will try to get the proposal funded.
- Keep the prose simple. Adjectives and adverbs are your enemy: don’t rely on emotional pleading or torquing the argument – it makes assessors uneasy. Make the reader care about the project by getting to the heart of the matter, not adding verbiage.
- You are trying to build credibility via clarity and a simple direct style.
- Don’t be afraid of the form. Yes it is constricting. It is a bureaucratic tool to make comparing applications easier. **USE THE FORM.**

- Usually there is an opportunity to attach extra information: take it! Attach an appendix: eg. council minutes, a sustainability plan, the critical path of a building project, links to your websites with relevant info.
- Assume you will never have a face-to-face interview with the assessor or decision makers; your paper trail has to do all the work.
- Assume the assessors have no familiarity with your town, region or province.
- Don't ever assume that because you filled in all the boxes, you have written an effective application.
- Ambiguity is death to a grant proposal. **REDUCE AMBIGUITY.**
- More eyes on the proposal at the beginning are crucial to weeding out ambiguity.
- Proposals must be focused and fit all the stated criteria.
- Be careful of wording; eg. ambiguity about the capital partnering or the environmental siting will slow assessment if not stall or kill a proposal.
- There is never enough space to argue your proposal, you can only assert it. The decision makers will certify it. So list the supporting items and indicate that supporting documentation is available upon request.

Life Cycle of a Proposal

The Need

- Identify a need.
- Identify an authority for that need (e.g. council directive, a regional Master Plan).
- Make the need fit with other initiatives and plans embedded in the community's governance structures so that your proposal gains credibility from association.

The Objective

- Make it have a clear objective, just like a resume, "We want to do X."
- Explain how it is a fit to making a community a better place: "we need to integrate our growing community", the problem: we have two new growing suburbs across the river."
- The solution: we need to renovate and upgrade the existing bridge.
- Then some details: we aim to broaden the driving lanes, add pedestrian walkways and rebuild the approach ramps, sight-lines and street signage.
- Speak very clearly about the money: "We have municipal funds, a guaranteed loan, community fund raising with X dollars, a grant application from the province, now we're looking for federal funding."
- Include letters indicating the status of the financial partnering arrangements the proposal requires.
- The federal government will be, typically, the last of the three orders of government to partner in any funding structure. Get the private, municipal and provincial moneys (or at least the applications) done first.

Manage Your Own Project

- Call on the grant case manager every six weeks or so. You are engaged in client relations with government assessment staff. Ask if they need clarifications or documentation. Tell them about the project; enrol their interest if you can.

- Don't be passive about your own interests. Be proactive on your own behalf but not nasty or demanding.
- You should tap as many programs simultaneously as you legitimately can.

An Analytical Approach

- Build authoritative linkages
- Remove ambiguity
- Statement of problem and solution
- Responsible stewardship of resources: talk about the community as the key driver; is the land use appropriate; etc.
- Clarity around the money that you have and of that which you will receive.
- Build credibility

The proposal isn't about the bridge; it's about enhancing the community (in fact, a grant proposal should ALWAYS be about this in some fashion or another) and it is this that can motivate public officials who are assessing your proposal. Position your "ask" in the right kind of framework. Nobody cares about your bridge until you make them care. Get to the heart of the matter.

What is the question to which this is the answer?

Q: How do we build connectivity in our growing community?

A: a better bridge.

Task: write a grant for the money for that bridge.

Q: Mannville wants \$250,000 to upgrade the facilities.

No...

Q: Mannville wants to (think of how the facility will benefit Mannville, the County, the Region), and make sure you explain how this proposal is fully aligned with the Community Sustainability Plan. For example, "this proposal supports goal 6 of the Village of Mannville's Community Sustainability Plan (approved 2008)" Think through before you apply. It's important to lace the proposal to the officially sanctioned ambitions of the district, not just your town but the neighbouring village or hamlet and the County.

You can attach an appendix to a grant application to support your statements.

Maintain clarity around the money that you have and that which you will receive. Phase grants. If the total grant is \$2.5 million, propose receipt of smaller amounts on a certain schedule. It's the grant writer's job to make the person who says yes to the proposal feel prudent about his/her yes. The money has been lent responsibility.

Anything that helps the grant decision makers see the scale of the project in terms of job generation is beneficial.

An analog can be found for capital projects

- Architects and engineers identify the functional needs of capital projects and translate that into square footage.
- The project manager also identifies tasks, timelines on a graph and builds the project on time and budget.
- These kinds of documents should be attached in the appendix because they build confidence in a reader.

Similar analogs should be constructed for operational projects.

- Consistent with this detail, there should be a discussion of labour.
- How many people will be employed over how much time?
- Where will you source the work? The district, the region? Identify the economic impact for that area.

Include a sentence or two of sourcing commodities because it makes your thought process more complete.

The Score Card

Decision makers treat applications in an equitable fashion; they typically do this by using a standardized checklist or scoring card to determine whether or not the project has integrity and, often more importantly, to rank its strength compared to other proposals.

There may be weighted categories of scoring for a set of factors. For example:

- Economic impacts
- Number of persons or operations that will benefit from this project
- Safety issues
- From the community perspective, how will this project benefit...
- # of identified integrated functional programming that will occur due to the project.
- Discuss disability access in any capital building proposal You MUST include this component in your proposal.
- Innovative design – environmental, sustainable measures?
- Existing conditions of road, bridge, building, etc.
- Engineering documentation?
- Budget?
- Bonus Points (eg. Fit to community planning documents)

There is always a report card that measures your comparative strength. Why? because there always are more applications than money. So projects are compared.

Political Aspects of a Grant

- Keep your MLAs and MP informed of what it is that you're doing because they have a stake in building the infrastructure and economic capacity of the region.
- It is perfectly legitimate for the MLAs and MPs to be kept informed about the status of your application. Talk to them.

- Case management is a nightmare, so the more people aware of your project, the better.
- This is not about lobbying the assessors; rather, it's about getting the MLAs and MPs enrolled early in the virtues of the project: they may be able to help you build a better proposal or have staff resources that you can talk with.

Question Period – key points

- Administrators have a duty to make judgements with reasons; therefore, you have every right to ask for clarification and some explanation of a decision to defer a decision or a decision to reject your proposal
 - “Describe the project” is the most dangerous box in the form; don't be sloppy here.
 - Once a proposal gets through the first cut, you will probably have a case manager who often can assist you on the phone how to complete the grant or supplement the proposal documentation for a successful result.
 - Additional documents you allude to will add credibility to the proposal.
 - All projects are scalable. “We are only applying for one strand b/c this is the strand that fits with your funding program.” The entire plan will reveal which funding programs are building which sections.
 - The status and scale federal grant programs won't be clear until late April 2010 (that is a month or so after the March 4 federal Budget).
 - The programs haven't disappeared. The amount of money in some of them will probably shrink. So this puts a premium on writing strong proposals.
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