

Montana Public Facility Grants

IT'S TIME TO START PLANNING FOR THE NEXT GRANT CYCLE!

Depending on when the grant process begins, three to five years can pass from the time a project is identified to when it is constructed and operational. Having experience with the grant process, and knowing how its elements affect a successful project, are important to the timely completion of your public works objective. In nearly all cases, a successful grant-funded project is one in which a community begins its development early to allow adequate time to complete the planning, engineering and community involvement necessary to produce a quality application. Last minute submittals tend not to be competitive and rank low on the funding list.

Last minute submittals tend not to be funded

Time-Critical Funding Programs Demand Project Scheduling Decisions

Three important grant and loan funding programs for community facilities carry set application and approval cycles that affect project schedules. These programs are:

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP) Grant and Loan
- Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Renewable Resource Grant & Loan (RRGL)

Key grant programs are time-sensitive

Application for each of these funding programs is due in May. Funding from each of these programs may be sought independently, combined for a single project, and/or combined with other funding programs that are not time-dependent in their application.

Combining funding programs maximizes use of local \$

Additional funding sources commonly used in conjunction with the above programs include: Rural Utility Service/Rural Development Funds; Montana DEQ State Revolving Funds for Sewer and Water; federal appropriations such as EPA State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG) and Water Resources Development Act (WRDA); and Montana INTERCAP bridge funding. Each of these programs has a special role to play in overall project funding, but do not place a specific time constraint on the process. Knowledge of how these programs can combine to make the best use of available funds will maximize the use of local dollars.

TOTAL PROJECT SCHEDULE IS INFLUENCED BY MANY FACTORS

The total project delivery effort, from initial conception to final construction, consists of three separate activities each having an impact on the completion schedule and overall project success. Under a time-critical grant program, these activities impact the project delivery time as shown on the attached schedule.

1 Early Programming is Essential to a Quality Grant Application and Funding Success

Up-front efforts allow adequate time for selecting an engineer, preparing a preliminary engineering report, developing a capital improvement plan, and writing a grant. Early planning also strengthens the facility needs assessment and allows for an effective public participation and education process — essential elements of any successful grant application. Shortcutting these important efforts reduces their effectiveness and diminishes the quality and ranking of the grant application. The community controls this element of the project through its decision to start early and commit to a quality effort.

Adequate and early planning improves success

Water and sewer PER planning grants are available

Recognizing the importance of this step, the 2005 Legislative Session approved planning funds to be administered by the TSEP program. These funds are available to qualifying communities to assist them in preparing engineering studies for the next cycle of public works grants, but are given on a first-come-first-served basis, so apply early!

2 Grant Review and Approval Cycle is Time-Dependent

The TSEP and DNRC grant programs link project timelines to Montana's biennial legislative cycle. CDBG requires that the total project funds be committed within six months of the award of CDBG funds. This establishes a critical timeline under which grant applications for these funds must be prepared and submitted. It can take up to two years to go through the grant review and approval process to get TSEP and DNRC project funds committed with which to begin design and construction.

All project funds must be committed within six months after CDBG award

Communities can now submit all CDBG, TSEP and DNRC grant applications in the same year, since all money will be available in the Spring or early Summer of the following year.

It has become more common for a community to include a federal appropriation into their funding strategy. Two programs typically used are the EPA STAG program and the WRDA grants administered by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Funds from these programs are awarded by federal appropriation and are tied to the federal budgeting process, which can be very unpredictable. While formal applications are not required, requests must be submitted through Montana's Congressional delegation in January and become available sometime after the fiscal year budget has been approved.

Combining grants affects award times

3 Design and Construction Complete the Project Schedule

Final design must match project funded

This final element, and most important to long-term project success, is usually completed after the funding is in place. The project designed must be consistent with the project approved for funding. Minor modifications can be made but, in the end, the funding agencies must confirm that the final design represents the solution proposed and funded. It is, therefore, important that the preliminary engineering analysis completed in the application phase be thorough and identify the most appropriate solution.

In the final analysis, overall project success is determined by the quality of the project delivered to the rate-paying public and its performance through the life-cycle of operation. This is largely determined by the quality of the design and the quality of construction.

FUNDING TOOLS HELP REDUCE LOCAL COSTS

The many state and federal agencies that assist local governments in obtaining public works facilities have, over the past decade, put in place a system of funding programs to meet a wide range of community needs. These programs are designed to respond to

Start early, plan prudently, and commit to success

many special situations and provide communities with needed funding to make public works facilities affordable. Taking maximum advantage of the funding opportunities requires a thorough understanding of the programs and a concerted effort between community leaders, the public, contracted professionals, regulatory authorities and responsible funding agencies. Your project and your citizens deserve the

forethought, planning, expertise, and experience to deliver the best public works facility at the most affordable cost. Start early, plan prudently, and commit to success.

For additional information, contact your local Morrison-Maierle office or any of the following engineers:

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IMPROVING YOUR CHANCES:

- Begin planning early, especially on complex or large-dollar projects
- Understand grant requirements
- Prepare quality preliminary engineering reports
- Submit clear and concise grant applications
- Include a Capital Improvements Program with the application
- Involve the public to obtain acceptance through community participation and informed decisions
- Retain knowledgeable, experienced professional assistance