

# Grant Resources & Responsibilities for Townships

**Is your township planning a new project, but coming up a little short on funding? A wide area of untapped funds is available to townships—in the form of grants from state and federal government, and from private corporations. Although the grant writing process may seem daunting, this article shows you where to look for grants, what to include in a grant proposal and how to prepare yourself for grant writing success.**

by Beverly A. Browning,  
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The first step to getting a grant is finding the right opportunities. Is your township connected to the Internet? The best way to find public and private sector funding opportunities is to let your fingers do the typing and your computer mouse do the clicking. Any township official can log on to any search engine, enter a search for “grants for Michigan townships,” and watch as pages of links and URLs appear. By clicking on the links, you’ll quickly go to the foundation, corporate, state and federal funding Web sites. Links to grant opportunity announcements can often be found on the Web sites’ homepages.

Some of the leads you will find doing these grant money searches include grants for projects related to:

- Community arts and cultural activities
- Housing development
- Revenue sharing
- EPA site assessment
- Arrest policies and enforcement of protection policies
- Rural health care (including equipment for local hospitals)
- Outdoor recreation

## *How to Obtain Federal Funding*

A great place to start when looking for federal grant announcements is a Web site hosted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture: <http://ocd.usda.gov/nofa.htm>. The site lists dozens of Notices of Funding Availability. Table 1 gives examples of federal grant opportunities townships can pursue.

### **Table 1—Federal Agencies Offering Grants**

**U.S. Department of Agriculture**—The Rural Utilities Service has grant funds to finance the acquisition, construction and installation of equipment, facilities and systems to provide local dial-up Internet access services in rural America. Grants may be made to legally organized entities providing, or proposing to provide, local dial-up Internet services in rural areas. Eligible entities include public bodies.

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**—Some \$12.5 million will be available for fiscal year 2002 grants, technical assistance, and program evaluation for the purchase, placement and training in the use of automated external defibrillators and related activities in eligible rural areas. Applicants must apply in the form of a community partnership. Interested eligible entities are encouraged to collaborate with a wide range of other providers in developing a broad-based consortium that will make up their community partnerships. These partnerships will include local first response entities (e.g., EMS, law enforcement and fire departments).

## *Sources of State Funding*

Michigan townships are also eligible for grants from State of Michigan departments. Look at the House Fiscal Agency Web site at [www.house.state.mi.us/hfa/](http://www.house.state.mi.us/hfa/). On the agency’s homepage, click on the “Reports, Other Reports” tab in the left column, then scroll down to the “Directory of State Administered Grants FY 2001-02” prepared by the House Fiscal Agency staff, March 2002. This

directory describes and categorizes grants-in-aid available through state departments.

Table 2 gives a glimpse at a few of the grants that townships may be eligible to apply for from a state agency.

### Table 2—State Agencies Offering Grants

**Office of Community Corrections**—To develop and implement community corrections plans and services.

**Michigan Strategic Fund**—Support for local community development and public infrastructure projects.

**Environmental Quality**—To seal abandoned water wells, replace individual water supplies or construct community water supply systems; reuse abandoned, vacant or underutilized properties known to be contaminated and promote clean-up; clean water fund; and household hazardous waste collection centers.

**Natural Resources**—To acquire firefighting equipment for local communities with populations of 10,000 or less, which have 1,000 acres of publicly owned forested land.

**Transportation**—To reimburse projects enhancing the inter-modal transportation network (includes landscaping, bicycle paths, historic preservation and stormwater run-off mitigation).

Remember, each government agency—federal or state—will have its own grant application guidelines and formats. Once you find a grant lead, contact the funding agency to connect with a program staff member to obtain grant application guidelines.

### Don't Overlook Foundation and Corporate Funding

Over the past decade or so, Michigan foundations and corporations have begun making grants to local units of government. Like any private or public funder, these grantmakers have preferences and limitations. They want to fund incentives that promote good township management. Some projects that appeal to private sector funders are:

- Establishing a repair or replacement fund for township equipment or technology.
- Establishing a public education program on recycling.
- Establishing a professional development fund to pay for conference fees and travel-related expenses for township staff.
- Replacing old or outdated computer equipment.
- Updating the furnishings at the library or senior citizens' center.
- Purchasing codebooks and other print materials.
- Installing video cameras in police vehicles.
- Purchasing firefighting vehicles, protective gear and equipment.

The following are three useful resources for townships to find private sector grant monies:

- **Michigan Foundation Directory.** Order online for \$25 or less at [www.cmif.org/directory2000.htm](http://www.cmif.org/directory2000.htm).

- **The Foundation Directory Online.** Access this vast database of foundation funders for as little as \$20 per month at <http://fdncenter.org>. Enter "Michigan" into the geographic focus search field to retrieve all U.S. foundations that make grants in Michigan.

- **Hoover's Online.** Look up information on Michigan corporations and other businesses operating in the state at [www.hooversonline.com](http://www.hooversonline.com). While this is a subscription-based Web site, you can look at "Corporate Capsules" free-of-charge.

Table 3 lists some major foundations that have made grants to Michigan townships, the amount and the purpose.

### Table 3—Examples of Foundation Grants Received by Townships

**Frey—Drummond Island Township** (Chippewa Co.), \$10,000 to increase hours of operation

**Gerstacker—Mills Township** (Ogemaw Co.), \$20,000 for amateur sports leagues

**Herrick—Moscow Township** (Hillsdale Co.), \$22,605 for SCBA equipment and fire truck

**Freemont Area—Brooks Township** (Newaygo Co.), \$30,000 for environmental conservation

**Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan—Van Buren Charter Township** (Wayne Co.) and **Clinton Charter Township** (Macomb Co.), \$38,000 and \$43,000, respectively, for trail and bike path

**Dow—Lee Township** (Midland Co.), \$40,000 for playground equipment

**Andrew—Homer Township** (Calhoun Co.), \$150,000 for fire prevention control

Table 4 depicts some of the projects supported by corporations headquartered or operating in Michigan that can be implemented by townships alone or in partnership with community agencies.

### Table 4—Some Michigan-based Corporations & Projects They Fund

**American Electric Power**—Economic development and donations of real estate, furniture and equipment in service areas

**Ameritech**—Economic development in service areas

**JCPenney**—Volunteer programs in, or near, store locations

**Land O' Lakes**—Soil and water stewardship projects

**DTE Energy**—Air and water quality, and brownfield development projects

**Nissan**—Environmental and safety programs

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## How Do You Approach a Foundation with a Funding Request?

First, visit the Council on Michigan Foundations' Web site ([www.cmif.org](http://www.cmif.org)) to see the preferred format for a grant proposal.

Second, make sure your grant proposal addresses the following questions that funders will likely have:

- What do you want?
- What concern will be addressed and why?
- Who will benefit and how?
- What specific objectives can be accomplished and how?
- How will the results be measured?
- How does this funding request relate to the funder's purpose, objectives and priorities?
- Who are we, and how do we qualify to meet this need?

You will need to include the standard attachments to support your request for grant monies, including the following information:

### Township Structure/Administration

1. Briefly describe how your township works: What are the responsibilities of board members, staff, and volunteers?
2. Who will be involved in carrying out the plans outlined in this request?

Include a brief paragraph summarizing the qualifications of key individuals involved.

3. Provide a list of your board members with related demographic information (address, term in office, occupation).

4. Include an organizational chart showing the decision-making structure.

### Township Finances

1. Most recently completed full-year organization financial statement (balance sheet), audited, if available.
2. Current annual operating budget.
3. Project budget for grant-funded activity.
4. Projected operating budget for upcoming year.
5. List of all funding sources for this request. Include amounts and whether

received, committed or projected/pending.

6. Plans for sustainability.

### Other Supporting Material

1. Letters of support/commitment (include up to three).
2. Recent grant project-related newsletter articles.
3. Copies of any signed Memoranda of Agreement or Understanding relevant to this grant request.

### Do Your Homework!

Before you start writing a grant application, grant proposal or a corporate letter request, research the organization you plan to approach for funding. Make sure that you're filling out the right form or using the right format to approach them with a funding request.

Find out what types of projects they previously funded and what amount you can request from them. Don't forget the deadline for submitting your proposal and how many copies you must provide.

Do your homework and you will WIN in the grantseeking game.

### Decoding Grant Lingo

When you're looking up information on funding sources, you'll come across the term "limitations." Limitations are conditions that can exclude your projects and may be worded like this:

1. *No grants for operating budgets.* In this case, you can submit proposals only for projects not covered by the annual operating budget. For example, you plan to upgrade the security system at the township hall, but you have no line item in your general operating budget for the upgrade. Because the upgrade project won't be an annual recurring cost, you can submit a funding request. Make it clear in the grant proposal that yours is a special one-time request.

2. *Applications not accepted.* Directory entries with that phrase may also include the phrase "grant to pre-selected organizations only." In this case, members of the funder's board of directors or trustees recommend which organizations should receive grant awards.

How can your township get recommended for grant award consideration?

By seeing if anyone in the township knows any of the board members or trustees personally. Sometimes all it takes to receive an invitation to apply for grant funds is a call from a township resident to the board member or trustee telling them about your township's critical need for grant funding.

3. *Formal proposal accepted by invitation only following letter of inquiry process.* Don't let this wording keep you from contacting the funder. A two page letter of inquiry is easy to write. In it:

- Briefly introduce your township.
  - State why you are writing to the funder. Talk about your project, why it is needed, project goals and objectives, and the cost.
  - Tell the funder why the township cannot pay for or finance the project's cost.
  - Share how your residents will benefit from having the project funded.
  - Tell the funder how to contact you (especially if your township office is not open five days per week or open all day).
  - Close the letter on a personal note, perhaps confiding how hard it is to envision this project completed because the financial obstacles are so great at this time, and so forth.
  - Sign the letter and attach any documentation you have on the project and its cost.
4. *Grant monies are not awarded to publicly supported organizations.* Well, that's you! Your township is funded with local and state public monies. But don't think the door to a possible grant award just slammed in your face.

Suppose you need \$50,000 to purchase and plant trees on Main Street. The township's money tree is no longer bearing fruit. You find out about a foundation that supports the environment and has even funded an Arbor Day program in a nearby county.

Just because your township doesn't qualify as a grant applicant doesn't mean it can't enjoy the fruits of a local or regional partnership with a qualified grant appli-

cant. Team up with a community foundation, local historical society, or even a local nonprofit environmental group to apply for the tree project. However, make sure your partner is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with an IRS letter in hand.

### *Working with a Community Partner*

Here are a few tips if you decide to pursue a grant with a community partner. After selecting a potential partner, sit down with the organization's board of directors and management staff to tell them about your project. Ask if the organization will act as the grant applicant and fiscal agent, and explain why the township cannot approach the funder directly. If the organization agrees to be a project partner, develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) immediately.

The MOU is a legal working document that defines each party's responsibilities. It spells out the community partner's role (i.e., to provide you with information on their organization, write the grant proposal, write and sign a cover letter under their signatory, and agree to work with the township to purchase the trees with 100 percent of the grant funding), as well as the township's role (i.e., to write the grant proposal, make copies for the partner agency [for pre-review before mailing] and for the funders selected for possible project support, to assume all responsibility for storing, planting and maintaining the trees, and assist with providing pictures and a written grant close-out report for the funders).

Both the community partner and the

township sign the MOU and receive a copy for their files. In our example, even if a township election occurs halfway through the MOU, the written document serves as a reference for incoming elected officials.

### *Grants Management Responsibilities*

What does a funding source expect after awarding a grant to your township?

1. If your township receives a grant award directly from a funder, you need to draft and approve a resolution to accept the funds (a similar resolution should have been written and approved to apply for the funds).
2. The township should have a separate, trackable account (clear audit trail) for depositing and disbursing grant funds.
3. Fiscal records and evaluation reporting records must be filed.
4. Before-and-after photographs of the township's project should be taken and provided to funders.
5. At a minimum, quarterly qualitative and quantitative reports for your partners (if applicable) and funding sources should be generated. When you provide reports at frequent intervals throughout the project's timeframe, it is called "formative" reporting.
6. File a final report when the project's

activities have been completed. This "summative" report will be both anecdotal (a recap of the goals and objectives that were achieved by the project) and financial (detailed report of monies in and monies out). Never return leftover monies to the funder. Either spend them on extras related to the project or carry them over into your next fiscal year for project-related expenses.

### *A Streamlined Process*

Many changes in grantmaking and grantseeking have occurred over the last few decades that impact township grantseeking.

Formats and forms have changed significantly over the years. Prior to the '90s, grant proposals were tedious and cumbersome. A grant-seeker was required to write 30 to 60 pages of narrative to justify a project. Today, thanks to the Michigan Common Grant Application Format, you

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## LANDPLAN

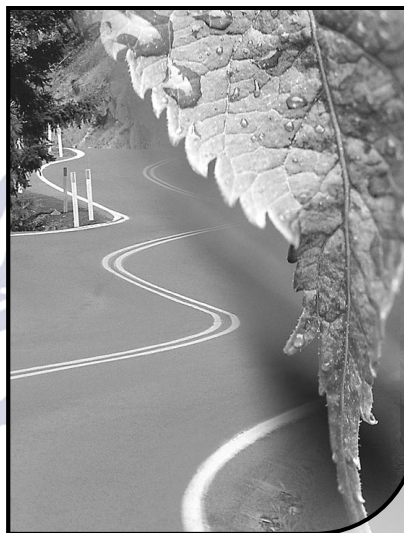
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can use an easy-to-follow template to quickly package your request. It keeps the narrative to under 10 pages (preferably to five pages with a cover form and attachments). You can download this template at the Council of Michigan Foundations' Web site: [www.cmif.org](http://www.cmif.org).

Many federal and state agencies formerly required upwards of 100 pages of grant application narrative and mandatory forms and attachments. Today, these same agencies have online electronic grant application Web sites and online grants management Web sites. Look at some of the following to see examples of these lean, clean grantseeking formats:

- IRS Grant Program:  
[www.egrants.irs.gov/index.htm](http://www.egrants.irs.gov/index.htm)
- U.S. Administration on Aging:  
[www.aoa.gov/egrants/](http://www.aoa.gov/egrants/)
- Federal Transit Administration:  
[www.fta.dot.gov/wtw/](http://www.fta.dot.gov/wtw/)
- Institute of Museum and Library Services: [www.imls.gov/grants/appl/](http://www.imls.gov/grants/appl/)

### Get in the Grants Game

How can you position your township in the grantsmanship game?

First, round up the troops! Form a volunteer grant writing team from among members in your community. Retired state employees, college faculty, librarians, youth in need of service learning credits, and other residents with research and writing skills are good candidates. Train your team at MTA or other grant writing workshops.

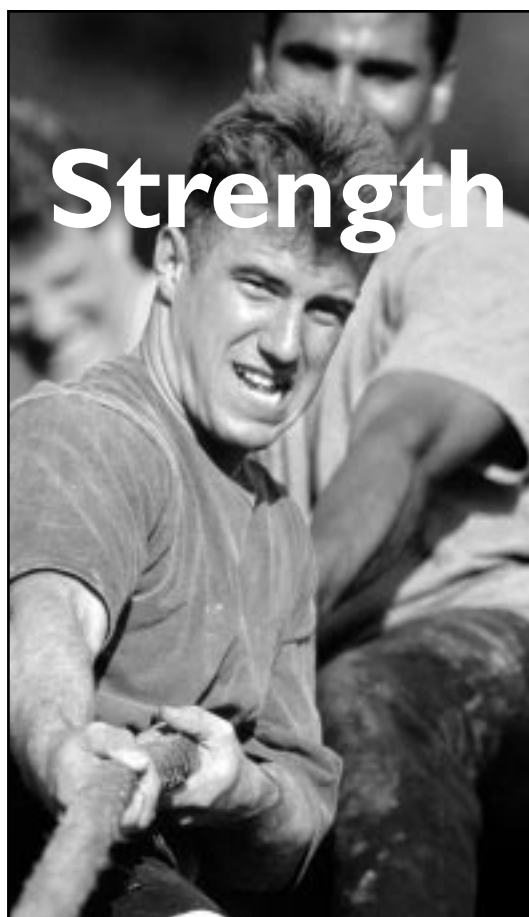
Give your team a list of township priorities that need funding, and convene the team monthly at a local library with Internet access or at your township offices to review funding opportunities online and identify possible grant monies for the township. Assign each member of your grant writing team an important task, from gathering, updating and collating the attachments for the grant proposal to making copies and packaging the final grant proposals for signing by township officials and getting the proposal in by the deadline.

Second, forge partnerships with local and regional nonprofit organizations. The day will surely arrive when you will need them to act as your grant applicant and fiscal agent, or to write a letter of support to use as an attachment in your grant proposal. Don't wait until you need something to reach out for a partnership. Start now and be prepared for aggressive and successful grantseeking.



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