

Funding for Municipal Wireless Projects

Sources and Strategies for Funding Your Municipal Wireless Applications

Grants information provided by



GRANTS OFFICE

About Municipal Wireless Funding

There are almost as many flavors of municipal wireless projects as there are municipalities. Some projects aim to enhance the response capability of public safety. Others start out with an aim at bridging the digital divide or making government more efficient. Grants support all these efforts, and many grant programs have been deployed successfully to enable wireless projects to achieve their objectives.

Because grants tend to fund a solution to a problem or identified issue, they usually fund the applications that travel over the wireless network, rather than the network infrastructure itself. Indeed, grant-funded applications provide an immediate use for the network and a compelling justification for its procurement. To the extent that a grant-funded technology will use the wireless infrastructure, grants will often fund elements of the infrastructure itself – keep in mind, though that it’s almost always in a context of a larger functionally-oriented project.

Major 2009 programs funding Municipal Wireless Applications

Below is a sampling of the grant programs that can fund elements of a municipal wireless network:

Program	Type
Public Housing Neighborhood Networks	Housing
Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program	Police
Public Health Emergency Preparedness	Health
Weed and Seed Program	Police
State Homeland Security Grant Program (SHSP)	Government
Public Works and Economic Development Facilities	Government
COPS Technology (earmark)	Police
Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)	Transportation
Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program (AFG)	Fire
Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program	Government
Public Telecommunications Facilities	Public Broadcasting
Hospital Preparedness Program (HPP)	Health
Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS)	Education
National Criminal History Improvement Program (NCHIP)	Police
Community Connect Broadband Grant Program	Government
Congressional Earmarks	Government

Finding Programs to Fit Your Project

Identifying programs in a list of appropriations is one thing, getting the dirt on how and where to send (or transmit) an application is sometimes quite different. Depending on the type of grant and its distribution method, you may be applying to a federal agency, state agency, or even a Congressman for the funds.

The Mechanisms of Funding

These funds are generally distributed either directly to state and local governments for them to use, or they are passed to the states to be administered. Obviously, the cleanest method is to send the funding directly to the recipient, but as grant programs reach close to \$1 billion in total funding, Congress tends to push the money out to the states to distribute, to allow the states to ensure that funded projects support statewide and regional priorities.

Decisions about how the funding should be distributed, on the state or federal level, follow one of three basic formats:

- Competitive
- Formula
- Earmark

Competitive grants require potential recipients to submit proposals that describe their communities' needs for the funding, how they will implement a project that complies with the requirements of the grant, and the benefits they expect to accrue as a result of implementing the project. These proposals are then scored, based on pre-established criteria, and funding decisions are made, based (mostly) on the scores the proposals receive. In competitive grants, if you don't apply, you won't get funded, and not everyone who applies for funding receives it.

Formula funding, as the name implies, is distributed based not on a community's ability to articulate its need, but rather the data available to the administering agency. Formulas for homeland security grants may include crime statistics, population, a minimum per-state amount, (measured or un-measured) vulnerability assessment, or (more likely) a combination of these and other factors. These funds may still require an application, but the form is intended more to document statistics and set a budget for how funds will be spent than to determine fundability of a project.

Earmark funds are among the more misunderstood methods of federal funding. Earmarks, discretionary legislative spending, or "pork," as it's sometimes described, is the least transparent and most personal method for distributing funding. It requires a Congressional Representative to ask his or her Appropriations committee member to encumber a funding program in the amount of the local project. Like a checkbook, Congress allocates funds for this museum in Syracuse or that Roadway in Virginia.

What concerns many about this process, an important way for legislators to create goodwill in their election districts, is that the uses of the various funds may not be the most appropriate outside the context of their use for a particular Congressman.

Nevertheless, earmarks are a \$28 billion reality, and as long as Congress is doing it, it may pay for the local community to try to get its share of the money.

Getting in the Loop

Except in the case of earmarks, you cannot generally apply for funding until a program has been officially announced as open. Using information from previous years may give you a general idea of when the grant will be administered, but the official word comes from the agency responsible for the grant. Federal grantmaking agencies are becoming increasingly adept at using the Federal Grants Gateway, www.grants.gov, to announce funding opportunities. Raw information on the program is available to browse and search. In the “Find” screen, the date and agency search features are quite helpful in zeroing in on the program you’re looking for. The grants.gov site is particularly useful if you already know which program you want to learn about. The site also allows you to apply online for many of the opportunities. The UPstream service at grantsoffice.com as well as other commercial databases provide additional classification and searchability, as well as a weekly e-mail notification service, and state and local funding opportunities, to round out your search.

In general, grant announcements contain:

- Title of the grant
- Application deadline(s)
- Formatting and transmittal requirements
- Required elements and forms
- Program contact information

Using the Guidelines Provided

Announcements may also contain such valuable information as reviewer’s guidelines and scoring criteria or allowable expenditures and requirements of awardees. All this information can be used to make your proposal stronger.

Knowing how your proposal will be reviewed is key to presenting the information in the most effective manner. Ultimately, the goal is to articulate your project so that it receives the highest possible score, given the scoring criteria for the program. The higher the score, the more likely the proposal is to win.

About Grants Office

Grants Office, LLC is a grants development and support company located in Rochester, New York. Though information and direct consulting support, Grants Office helps make municipalities, non-profit organizations, and industry partners more successful at obtaining funds from federal, state, and local sources.