

## Successful Grants Writing

Grants from State and Local Governments are a really good way for your club to get additional funds. Governments at all levels often look to not-for-profit organisations to help them achieve social objectives such as keeping the community connected and healthy. Bridge can do that.

With a little practise and planning, you can develop a great additional income stream to support purchase of equipment and expansions that can really benefit your club and community.

### The Preparation

First things first. Think about what you need the money for. Governments will provide money for projects, not just to increase your surplus cash. They will give you money to purchase things so that they can see a tangible asset that the taxpayers' money has been spent on. They will also expect your club to contribute to the project – either with cash and/or in-kind labour or goods. Things that governments like to fund are:

- Disability access ramps
- Defibrillators
- Tables and chairs so you can grow your club
- Stoves and white goods so you can grow your club and offer more recreation options for residents
- Extensions to premises that will enable more community groups to share your clubrooms
- Computers
- Volunteer training and increasing community capacity (eg getting more people involved in directing, helping more people get skills necessary to be club office-bearers)

Governments are highly unlikely to give money to support congresses. The reason is twofold – why should the taxpayers subsidise our recreation and food and drink? – and if you need the money just increase your entry fees. The exception to this is that some regional/rural shires do try to attract people to come and stay and spend money in their area. Some local governments will sponsor a congress if you can show that most of your congress participants come from outside the region and stay overnight etc.

Governments will also only give money to established legal entities. So you will need to be incorporated and show that you are a good risk – ie stable club with good membership and/or potential to do something good for the community.

1. Start looking at your local government website. They will usually have community grants. Call the responsible officer at your shire/city and start the conversation. Be ready with some basic points about bridge:
  - It is a mind-sport that is played around the world
  - There are over 30,000 registered players in Australia
  - There are over 5,000 registered players in Victoria
  - There are many more social players
  - Bridge has been proven to increase memory, concentration, teamwork, logic and communication skills
2. Ask if your club would be eligible to apply for a grant.
3. Have a project idea in mind when you call. Tell them about it and why their contribution is crucial to its implementation/success.
4. Local Government grants will usually have a due date for applications. Ask when you should send in your application. Ask them to send you a form or download it from their website.
5. If seeking a local government grant, talk to your local ward Councillor. Invite them to the club one day to take a look at a session. Whilst they are not allowed to interfere with the Council Officers' process, it doesn't hurt to have a potential advocate on your side. Councillors love to launch things – get your local Mayor to open your congress.
6. You can also look for State Government grants the same way. They are a bit harder to get as they are very competitive but sometimes they will have a small funding round that fits the bill perfectly. Regional Development Victoria (country clubs only) and Dept of Health and Human Services are good ones to try.

### **The Application**

1. It might sound obvious, but follow their instructions exactly. There will be a reason why they want the application presented in a certain way. If they want you to use a particular form, use it.
2. Fill in all of the form. If you don't know the answer to any question, go back to the contact officer and get their help. They want good applications so they will help.
3. Use their language. Having already spoken to the contact person you will realise there is a certain jargon that they use. Things like 'place-based solutions' really mean locally-based projects that are specific to an area. The terms that they use usually relate to the objectives of the grants program and they will need to tick the boxes to ensure that your projects fits their objectives. If you use their language it helps them to make those connections.
4. Be realistic regarding your project's timelines. Most clubs will underestimate the time needed for projects and do not take possible delays into account. Having to do a variation on a grant is a real pain for the grants officer. They would rather that your project came in under time rather than extend the time of your project (the paperwork is hell).

### The Budget

1. Be realistic and don't pad it out. The grants officer will be able to smell a rat at 40 paces, and it is highly likely you will have to return unspent money.
2. Some grants programs will have certain % that you will need to contribute to your project. Do your sums carefully.
3. Some % of your contribution can be in kind. It is generally accepted that you can cost volunteer labour at \$20-25 per hour and skilled labour (ie a club member who is a qualified tradesperson or acting in their professional capacity) at \$45 per hour. Be sure to check what the limits are with the particular fund that you are applying for.
4. Allocate the sexy part of your project to the funds contributed by the government. So, if you want to fix up the entrance to your premises and make it more accessible, make the paint and painting your contribution and the disability access ramp the government contribution.
5. You will need to include your club's profit and loss for the past year. This has 2 purposes – to show that you are solvent and have the capacity to be an ongoing entity and complete the project. It also shows that you are able to afford your own contribution.

### Getting the Grant

1. Your club president will need to sign a contract, or funding agreement, to get the money. Check that the contract matches your idea of what you are going to do with the money. Be clear about all your obligations regarding reporting back to the funding body.
2. Be really, really, grateful. Ring the grants officer and thank him/her. Ring the local councillor and thank him/her.
3. Don't steal the government's thunder by announcing your grant before they do. Let them announce first – they need to get their day in the sun.
4. After the official announcement, write a letter to your local community newspaper, praising the government body that gave you the money. You will then be welcome to apply again next year!

### Not Getting the Grant

1. Don't be put off. There are always many more applications than grant funds available.
2. Ring the grants officer and politely ask for feedback. Take notes about the aspects of your application that need improvement.
3. Sometimes there is no real reason other than it is just not your turn to get the scarce funds. Accept it and try again next time.
4. Ring the Councillor and thank him/her for her support. Let her know that you didn't get the grant but will be happy to try again.

### Acquitting the Grant

1. You will need to report back to the government about how you have spent their money. Usually for a small grant it is just at the end of the project.
2. Make sure you send your report by or before the due date.
3. Keep copies of your receipts for purchases so you can prove that the goods/services have been obtained.
4. Take photos of the project.
5. Don't expect to apply for any more grants from that particular source before you have acquitted your current grant.

\*\*\*Many clubs are under the mistaken impression that if they come in under budget for a project they will be able to keep the money. That is not the case. If you save money by using in-kind donations instead of spending the money, you are not entitled to keep the money. This might sound harsh, but the it could be a way to defraud the government as someone could have pocketed the money. If you know that you are going to run under budget, contact the grants officer and discuss what you can do. It is likely that they will vary the contract to extend your project (ie buy more equipment related to the overall objectives of the project) rather than ask for the money back. But do early and don't spend first and ask later.

### Applying for the Next Grant

And so the process starts again the following year. Success breeds success. Once the council realises that you can meet their objectives and make life easier for them by doing the correct forms and reporting on time, you are like to go onto their (non-existent of course) preferred not-for-profits list.

### Further Information & Support

Prepared by Helen McAdam originally, with updates and modifications by Bridge Victoria. Enquiries and support with grant submissions may be directed to the [info@bridgevictoria.au](mailto:info@bridgevictoria.au)