

Subject: Atkinson article

Date: Tue, 17 Jun 2003 14:09:27 -0500

From: william atkinson <wjaa@midamer.net>

To: hgordon@quinlan.com

Hi Heather,
Here's the Idaho wastewater grant article. I was able to interview the DEQ person right after you and I talked last month but, as luck would have it, the city engineer had just left for a three-week vacation earlier that day. I didn't get a chance to interview him until yesterday.
Thanks,
Bill Atkinson
PS: I'll fax the invoice in a few minutes.

Grants Work When Everyone Works Together
Grants for Cities and Towns
by William Atkinson

Given the fact that Idaho traditionally doesn't make it into the national news on a regular basis, it's unlikely that many people know about the teamwork and cooperation that exist in the state when it comes to grants for cities and towns, especially those related to wastewater treatment facility grants. In fact, the process is such a refined art that virtually everyone involved knows his and her role in announcing the grants, applying for the grants, and following up with grant money utilization.

In detail: The Water Quality Division of the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality State Office (Boise) offers 50% matching grants eligible to any entity in the state that is ready to engage in the preliminary planning engineering portion of a wastewater project. Those eligible include counties, cities, special service districts, non-profit corporations, or other governmental entities that have the authority to collect, treat, and/or dispose of sewage or industrial waste. The grant usually results in an engineering report, often called a facility plan.

Many of the communities, once they receive grants for their plans and complete the plans, then go ahead and begin work on the actual projects, using the state's revolving loan program, which is similar to programs in other states (funded by Federal money through EPA).

"Each February, we send out letters to all eligible entities for which we have addresses," explains Alan Stanford, senior water quality analyst. Entities can fill out a "letter of interest" form and return it to the DEQ State Office. The letter provides information on what the entity wants to accomplish.

"We turn over all responses that come in during the next month to our staff engineers," continues Stanford. The engineers rate each project based on a specific point system, which emphasizes public health and water quality issues, readiness to proceed (eg: the entity's ability to come up with the other 50% of the funding on its own), and several other criteria.

Once the list is approved by the DEQ State Office board, it is effective on the first day of July, which is the first day of the state's fiscal year. The list is then in effect for the following fiscal year.

"Once we have the final approved list, we begin contacting the entities on the list and encourage them to submit applications for the grants," explains Stanford. Entities that do submit applications are pretty much assured of receiving grants, according

1 of 2

6/19/03 11:16 AM

to Stanford. However, if an entity fails to submit an application within 30 days, the DEQ State Office bypasses it and moves on to another entity further down the list. As such, timing is important. Each year, the state awards grants to about 25 projects, with the average project being \$15,000 to \$20,000.

One community receiving a grant last year was Ashton, which received \$21,000. Dick Dyer, the city's engineer for almost 20 years and a veteran of grant writing, in addition to owning his own regional engineering firm (Rexburg, ID) that does work for other communities, delineates what it takes to initially get on the list through the initial "letter of interest" and then, subsequently, to submit a qualified, formal grant application within the allotted time. "The most important key to success is teamwork," he emphasizes. The team involves himself as the engineer, the municipality for which he is seeking the grant, and the Department of Environmental Quality. "It is very important to create and maintain a strong working relationship," he continues. The reason is that, when the team meets, it must be able to quickly identify and prioritize the problems that need to be addressed. "Everyone on the team must be informed and must play their part," he adds.

As an engineer, of course, Dyer has specific roles and responsibilities to fulfill in terms of gathering, compiling, and submitting information. However, he emphasizes, he is unable to do this alone. It requires assistance from the community and from the DEQ itself. He discusses their roles and potential for input.

Dyer has found over the years that some cities think they can sit back and expect the engineer to do everything for them. He emphasizes that members of the team representing the municipality must be actively involved. "The team members must understand what the DEQ's process is and what it expects," he states. "They should also understand what the DEQ can and can't do in terms of helping communities, so that they ask for only what is reasonable." This eliminates time spent chasing after things that would ultimately end up not being productive or successful.

The DEQ itself can also provide useful input into the team process. "The DEQ actually visited the Ashton wastewater facility, so it was able to help guide us in putting together an application that would speak to the problems we had and would bring these problems into the forefront for consideration," explains Stanford. "This helped tremendously, since we were competing with many other communities."

END

Alan Stanford
Senior Water Quality Analyst
Water Quality Division
Department of Environmental Quality State Office
1410 N. Hilton St.
Boise ID 83706
208-373-0502

Dick Dyer
City Engineer
City of Ashton
310 N. 2nd. E, Suite 153
Rexburg ID 83440
208-656-8800
□