GHA
Infrastructure + Intelligence

Grants!

Learning the Grant Mindset

Turning Community Needs into Funded Projects

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- Experience
  - GHA, Inc., Market Lead Capital Improvement Programs, 2023 - present
  - Village of Buffalo Grove, Village Engineer, 2013-2023
  - Village of Barrington, Asst. Dir. Engineering & Building, 2007-2013
  - Lakewood Homes, Project Manager, 2003-2007
  - Lake Zurich, Civil Engineer, 2001-2003
  - Civil/Environmental Engineering companies 1996-2000
  - Dec. 1995 Graduate University of Illinois

Outline

- Successful Village Funding Model
- Learn the Grant Mindset
- This is not a list of grants to apply for

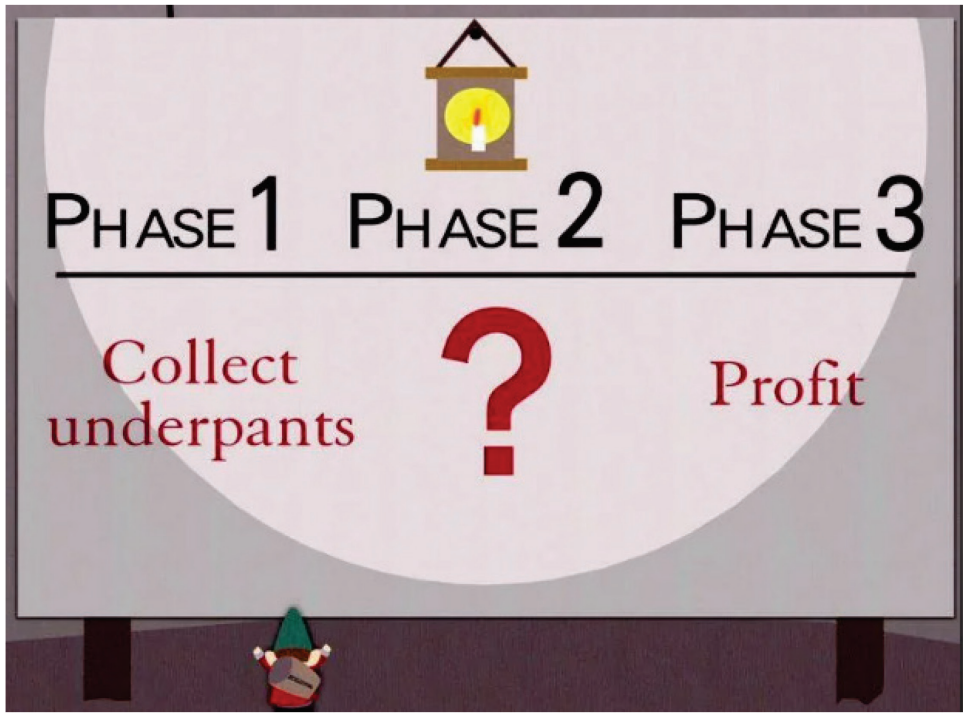


Become the Miracle Worker!

- When you can successfully bring grants to your town, your Village Board will think you are a miracle worker.
- The positive press it brings to the Village Management, the Board, and your department is immense.
- If you are a consultant, your client will love you, and their boss or board will shower them with praise.

The 3 Step Grant Process – The Grant Mindset

- Plan
- Distribute
- Apply



Step 1 – The Plan



- Have a 20-year plan
- Have a 5-year plan
- Have a wish list?
- Have something…

- Cannot say you do not have the time to apply for grants

The Plan

- The plan should include:
  - Regular projects like maintenance
    - Everything from road work to hydrant flushing, sanitary cleaning to sidewalk replacement
    - Economic Development ideas like a road or utilities to help businesses/developments
    - Locations for Village owned parks or public gathering places
  - It should also include as much as you can
    - Projects that can be done now, in the next 2 to 5 years, and staged projects
    - Wish list projects - won't do unless you have funding
  - Everything should be included
    - Make sure it has staff, board, and public support

The Plan



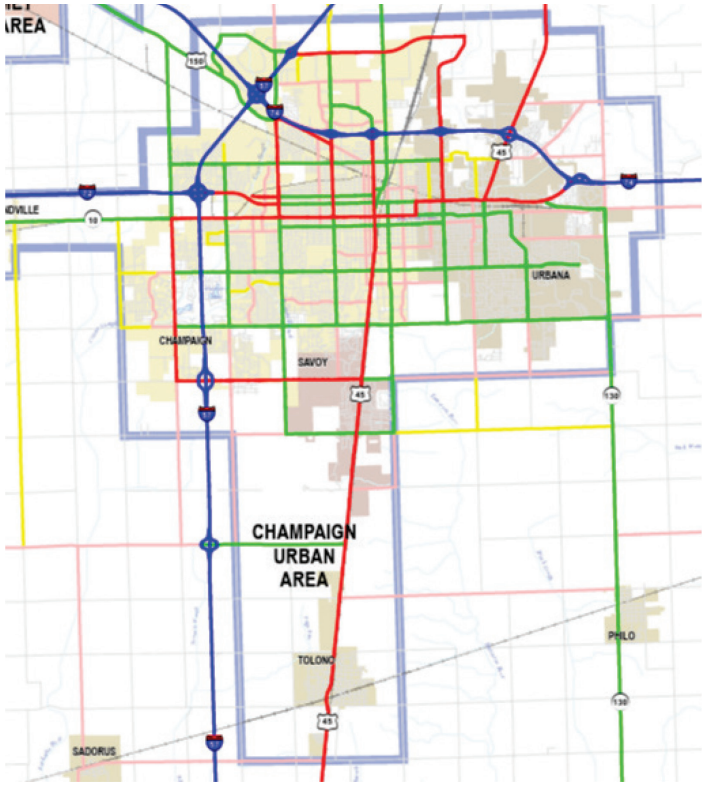
- Who helps create these plans?
  - Everyone!
  - At least public works or engineering, which ever division it is in
  - Village Manager, Director of PW, Mayor, Village Board, etc.

The Plan

- Help on identifying projects for a town or agency
  - Review the Agency's Comprehensive Plan
  - Review their budget for goals and objectives
  - Match their goals and objectives to the grants
    - For example, bike friendly community – look for these types of grants



The Plan – Federal Aid Urban Routes



- FAU Routes - Federal Aid Urban Routes
  - Do you know where these are in your town?
    - IDOT 5 Year Functional Classification
  - There is a process for creating more of them
    - Review your town, see what makes sense
    - Begin and end on another FAU Route, can't be too close to others
  - Example from Village
    - 5 road applications, 3 successful, 14 million in grants from STP

Community Development Assistance



- Economic Development is very important to a village.
  - Helps meet the agencies' goals, mission, and objectives.
  - Helps agencies maintain our systems.
- Think about more than just public works & maintenance - is there a parcel or lot in your community that just cannot get built? – Ask why?
- Is the problem utilities or access? Both, or something else?
- Is the community looking for a public gathering place?
- Search for grants specifically for this problem
  - Extend utilities to it, find a grant for road or traffic signal work
  - IDOT grants for road access or Economic Development Program

Eligibility & Community Need

- Many programs use income, census, environmental, safety, or other need-based criteria
- Eligibility and scoring definitions vary by program—verify the current NOFO
- Some programs provide reduced match, principal forgiveness, or scoring advantages - Know your community data before the grant opens
- Lately we've seen the Federal government go away from this, but the State has increased it

Keep Your Politics Out of Grant Applications

- Need to be agnostic
- Some people do not agree with large amounts of government spending
- Your job is to get as much funding as possible for your community or agency

(Side note – it's just good to keep your politics out of your work in general)



Think Big - Partnerships

- Don’t just plan for your community, work with your neighbors on bigger projects. Some grants are high dollars and need more than one agency
- Regional bike plan, regional industrial or commercial area
- Don’t stop a road, bike path, park area at the community border, talk to your neighboring towns about continuing into their town or at a destination

Think Bigger – get your work done with a grant

- Think outside the box – what else can you include in the grant application?
  - Road work, sidewalk or path connection, road signs – anything
  - Detention for future development
  - Utilities for commercial area

- Think what else you can add into the grant to benefit the community?

- This cannot be stressed enough, find ways to stretch your budget with projects that help the agency while completing important items

Think Bigger

- Project Example – Roadway with STP and ITEP funding
  - ITEP for bike path – included a large storm culvert and curb work.





Think Bigger

- Project Example – Moving stormwater







Step 2 – Distribute the Plan

- Meet with elected officials and give them the list
  - Senators and Representatives, national and local
  - County Commissioners or Board members
    - Cook County Commissioners have a separate fund for them to allocate
  - They can be advocates for you and your projects
  - Meet their staffers who will send letters of support
  - Get on their email lists for grant announcements
  - You never know when a certain elected official needs a certain project in a certain area for a certain dollar amount
    - Barrington example - 2009

Step 2 – Be Aware of Grants and Deadlines

- This is sometimes difficult – lots of grants out there
- Plan ahead, know when grants typically come out and be prepared
- Get on grant or agency email lists for grant alerts
- Keep SAM.gov/UEI and Illinois GATA registrations current
- Track recurring grant cycles and likely opening dates
- AI Chatbot does this for me now

Step 2 – Redirect Your Energy

- Instead of waiting for grants, focus on future projects and find grants to match the projects
- Advance projects before the NOFO: scope, cost estimate, concept plans, public support, permits/ROW, and match strategy. “Shovel ready” is still a major advantage.
- Work with your elected officials and Village staff to discuss projects in relations to certain grants

Step 3 – Application

- Getting grants is very important for an agency to move forward
- Not just trying to stay afloat, but advancing important village initiatives
- This is where you look like a miracle worker

Step 3 – Application

- Letters of Support – everyone has them
  - Need to explain the how and why. For example, how it makes the road safer, don't just write that it makes the road safer
- Build the application around the scoring criteria and use the NOFO's language
  - Similar to the how and why, not just cookie cutter answers
- Respond to the individual needs/info for the grant
  - Some may want public involvement, or deeper explanations of the how
- Do not do it last minute! – One hour example

Step 3 – Award and Projects

- This is where you complete the projects and enjoy the fruits of your labor and hard work
- Communication – show the wins on social media!
- Then manage the grant: agreements, procurement, federal/state requirements, reimbursement, reporting, and scheduling
- Keep an eye on the next round of opportunities

Grants

- There are many types and sizes of funding opportunities for roads • bike/ped • safety • trees • water/wastewater • stormwater • resilience • economic development
- Lead service line replacement is a huge cost – hopeful for future opportunities
  - CPF grants or State low interest loans – lots of funding available
- Federal discretionary grants can be powerful—but often require more readiness, partnerships, compliance, and staff capacity
- Illinois has a program to pay for half of the local share for federal projects, need to apply to that first. Often overlooked

What Has Changed? The 2027 Grant Landscape

- Funding is still available—but the best opportunities increasingly reward projects that are already defined, supported, and ready to move.
- ITEP Cycle 17: $157 million available; up to $5 million per project, closed October but need to prepare for future cycles with shovel ready projects.
- Illinois EPA continues major water infrastructure funding through SRF programs, including dedicated lead service line replacement financing.
- Federal programs can change quickly: always verify the current NOFO, eligibility, deadlines, and federal requirements before committing resources.

Grant Readiness: Do the Work Before the Grant Opens

- Define the problem—not just the project.
- Have a defensible scope, planning-level cost estimate, schedule, and funding/match strategy.
- Know ownership, right-of-way, environmental, utility, permitting, and public-engagement issues.
- Maintain required registrations and internal authority to apply and accept funding.
- Collect the data now: crashes, flooding history, water loss, condition ratings, LMI data, jobs, users served, benefit area, and other measurable need.
- Create a one-page project sheet so the project can be quickly matched to a new opportunity.

Write to the Score — Not Just the Story

- Start with the scoring criteria and build the application outline around it.
- Answer the question being asked; do not recycle a generic project narrative.
- Quantify the problem and the benefit whenever possible.
- Explain the HOW and WHY: how the project improves safety, resilience, access, reliability, economic development, or quality of life.
- Use maps, photos, cost estimates, schedules, and letters of support as evidence—not decoration.
- Have someone who did not write the application review it against the scoring sheet.

Winning the Grant Is the Beginning

- Confirm the award scope, local match, eligible costs, and reimbursement rules before spending.
- Understand procurement, prevailing wage, Build America Buy America, DBE/Section 3, reporting, and other requirements that may apply.
- Assign responsibility for documentation and reimbursement from Day 1.
- Communicate the win to elected officials and residents—but also communicate the obligations.
- After award, capture lessons learned and immediately feed the next projects back into the grant pipeline.

Summary - Develop the Grant Mindset

- PLAN – Build and maintain a pipeline of real community needs and future projects
  - This is not a separate process, you are not looking for grants, you are including grants in your annual CIP and programs
- DISTRIBUTE – Build support, partnerships, and awareness before funding is announced
- APPLY – Write to the scoring criteria, quantify the benefit, and explain the how and why
  - Match– Find the right funding source for the right project.
  - Do not force a project into a grant
- DELIVER – Manage compliance, communicate the win, and start preparing for the next opportunity

Action Steps

Be ready for the Community Project Funding Grants for March/April

- Have only 7 to 10 days to get these projects submitted
  - Review your elected official's website for guidance and examples – mailing list
  - Talk to elected officials before hand. Typically have a staffer in charge of this.
    - Bike path example

- Senator Duckworth has a Webinar on Nov. 9th on this
  - (Community Directed Spending for Senators = Community Project Funding Representatives)

- See how grants and low interest loans can work into your long-term plans

Grant Audit and Assistance

- Grant Assistance
- Grant Audit
- Email list

Thank You!

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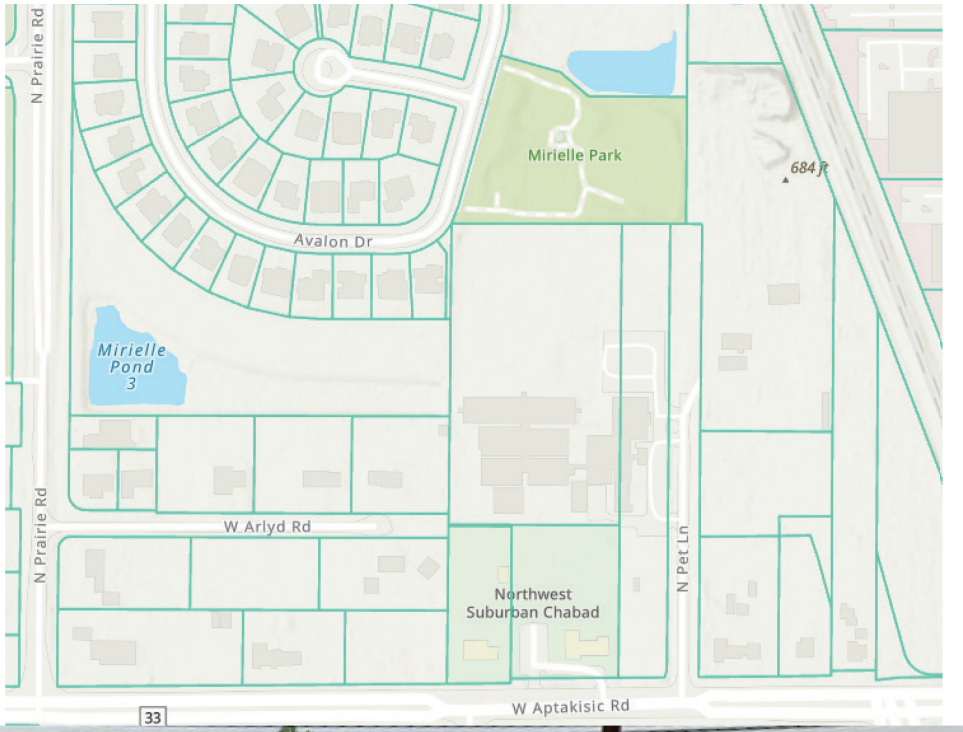
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Grant Examples or Projects

- Butterfly Garden – Buffalo Grove
- $25,000 for creating a prairie

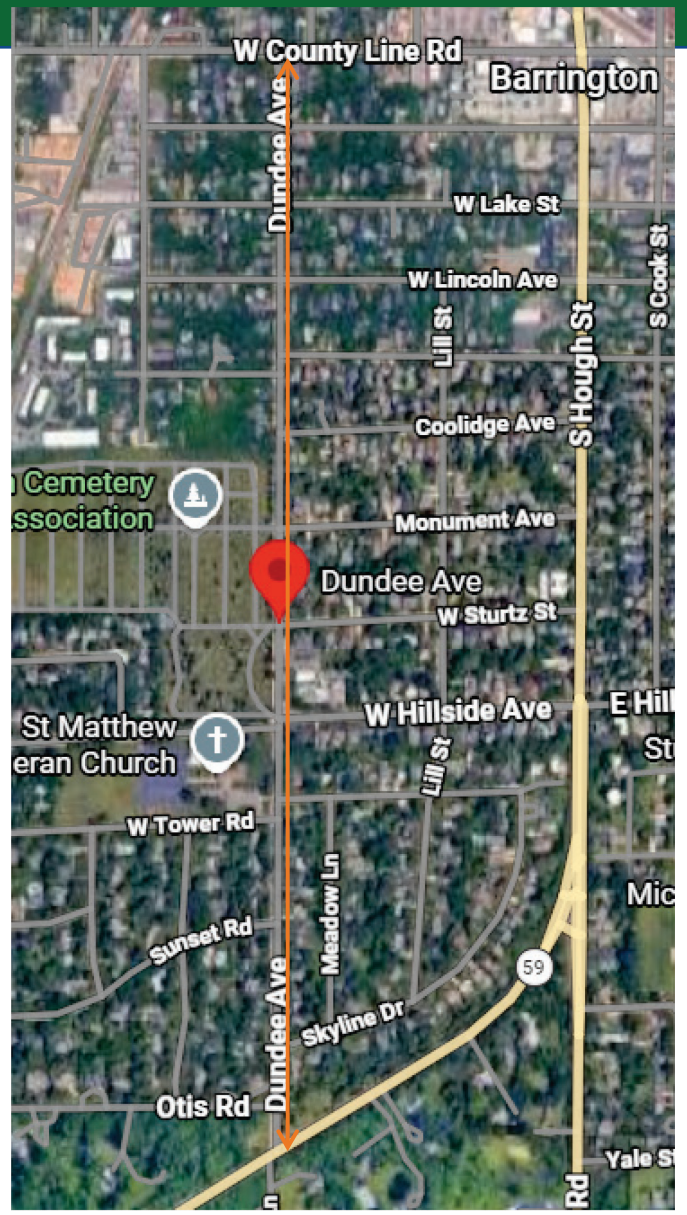




Grant Examples or Projects

- Dundee Ave – Barrington
  - Getting to know your elected officials
    - $225k for resurfacing





Grant Examples or Projects

- Buffalo Grove - $1.6 million from 2019
  - Getting to know your elected officials
  - Village distributed a project list/fact sheet to officials
    - 6 grants through DCEO
    - $150k Stormwater Improvements
    - $400k Metra repaving and streambank stabilization
    - $300k Water main cleaning – facts straight/staff on same page
    - $250k Wetland restoration
    - $300k Bike path/boardwalk through wetland
    - $300k Sidewalk replacement, specific location plus annual program

