

EXTENSITY AND INTENSITY OF GRANTS USAGE IN OBTAINING FUNDING FOR RECREATION SERVICES AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS AMONG PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES IN THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

Jerry L. Ricciardo

Associate Professor, Parks and Recreation Management,
Eastern Michigan University, Porter Building, Ypsilanti,
MI 48197

Abstract: The purpose of this research was to examine the use of grants among park and recreation agencies in the State of Michigan. A mail-out questionnaire was used to collect data. The sample was obtained from a listing of park and recreation directors. The data indicate that grant writing is regarded as a necessary activity among some leisure services providers to accomplish their aims of providing services and capital improvement projects that otherwise could not be provided. A number of statistics are provided that describes the grants received by the park and recreation agencies. The data also offers insight into grant activity in the state both among the agencies and the agency representatives.

Introduction

Directors of public park and recreation departments consistently cite the need for funding to provide quality leisure services for community residents. It is increasingly through grants that agencies, public and private, seek funding for a variety of social and recreational services and capital improvement projects to fulfill their missions. Overall, the state level grant application process, the source of many of the grants received at the community level in Michigan, has been simplified to the point that a minimum of forms are required that detail the project, the budget, and the time line for completion. Removing the cumbersome literature reviews has made grant seeking a desirable managerial activity. According to Bauer (1999) the primary motivator for grant seekers is not money; it is the interest and desire to accomplish a project, something that has high value to the individual or group. In addition, grant seekers strive for recognition from their agency and their colleagues. Successful grant seekers are persistent in their efforts to secure grants. The attitude required is that grant writing is a necessary management activity, not something to be done when time permits. Although the necessity for and the application for grants has long been recognized and is an on-going process among some park and recreation agencies, little is known about how extensive grant seeking is among public service agencies in recreation nor the amounts nor the kinds of services and capital improvement projects made possible by grant funds.

Objectives of the Research

The objectives of the research are to examine the extensity of use of grants by leisure service agencies in the State of

Michigan, that is, how widespread is the activity among park and recreation professionals. This research also examines the intensity or depth of involvement in grant usage relative to:

- a. The characteristics of the grants: status of grant usage over the previous fiscal year, current dollar amounts awarded, current sources of grant funds (federal, state, foundations, corporations, individuals, or other), current project/services that grants were used for, and the importance of the grant funds in accomplishing the projects.
- b. The characteristics of the agencies: the operational level of the leisure service agency (local, regional, or state), the size of the agency's annual budget, the number of full time employees, and the size (population) of the community or area served.
- c. The characteristics of the agency administrator: his/her job title, length of service with the agency, length of service in providing leisure services, his/her responsibility for obtaining grant funding, and the perceived importance of grant writing skills among park and recreation professionals.

The Sample

The sample for this research was obtained from a listing of leisure service agencies who are members of the Michigan Recreation and Park Association. The population consisted of 256 leisure service agencies. The sample size is 89 agencies.

The Data Collection Instrument

The data collection instrument was a mail-out questionnaire. The questionnaire was one page in length printed front and back. It contained a study title, Grant Usage Survey 2001, followed by a brief introduction to the survey. The data collection instrument was divided into three sections, the first section contained questions about the number, size, and source of grants, the kinds of projects grant monies were used for, and the importance of grant writing skills among park and recreation professionals. Section two asked questions about the agency, the kind of agency (public or private, local, regional, or state), the size of the agencies' annual budget, number of full and part time employees, and the population served. The third section asked the agency administrator to state his/her job title, the length of service with the present agency as well as his/her total length of service in the leisure services provision, his/her responsibility in obtaining grant funding, and the current most important problems facing his/her agency. The questionnaire ended by thanking the respondent for completing the survey.

There was one mail out. No attempts were made at reminders nor additional mail out questionnaires to non-respondents. Eighty-nine agencies returned completed questionnaires, a return rate of 34.7%.

Findings—Characteristics of the Grants

- 68 of the 89 agencies (76.4%) participating in this survey used grants to fund a variety of recreation services and capital improvement projects. The number of grants received in FY99-00 ranged from 1 to 13 among the 68 agencies awarded grants. The average number of grants received was 2.07 (s.d.=2.34).
- 48% of the agencies awarded grants in FY98-99 indicated that they increased the number of grants awarded to their agencies in FY99-00, 24% indicated no grant activity, and 17% of the agency respondents replied they had remained the same in FY99-00 as in FY98-99.
- Grants ranged in size from \$100 to \$260,000 at the low end range. At the high end grants awarded ranged from \$6,000 to \$2,800,000. The average size of grants received at the low end was \$43,900, and at the high end the average size of grants received was \$356,100.
- 49% of the agencies awarded grants in FY99-00 stated they had an increase in amount of grant monies received, 8% indicated a decrease in grant funds received, and 16% stated they remained the same as in FY98-99.
- The primary source of grant monies awarded came from state agencies (66.6%) followed by federal agencies (14.5%), foundations (10.1%), and corporations and community agencies, each at 1.5%.
- The primary use of grant funds awarded in FY99-00 supported facility development (36.9%), park development (20.0%), youth programs (13.8%), land acquisition (7.7%), waterfront development (6.1%), equipment for programs/areas (6.1%), recreation programming (4.2%), senior/adult programs/services (3.1%), and transportation (1.5%). Refer to Table 1 for a listing of specific projects funded by grant monies.
- Among those agencies awarded grant funds for projects, agency directors reported that the projects either were unlikely to be completed without the grant funds (60.0%) or grants speeded up the process (24.6%). Only 7.7% of the respondents stated that the projects supported by grants would have been completed without grant funds.
- Among those agencies receiving from 1 to 4 grants in FY99-00 (55 of 65 agencies or 84.6%), 21.8% of those agencies provided recreation services to communities less than 14,999 population, 29.1% serviced populations between 15,000 to 35,999, and 45.5% served community populations from 40,000 to 999,000. Only 3.6% of the 55 agencies that received from 1 to 4 grants in FY99-00 served populations of 100,000 or more.
- There is no relationship between the number of grants awarded and the number of agency full-time employees. The number of full-time employees among those agencies receiving from 1 to 4 grants ranged from none to 240. Approximately one-half of these agencies employed 6 or less full-time persons, 26% employed between 7 to 13 full-time persons, and 23% had more than 13 full-time employees.

Findings—Characteristics of the Agencies/Respondents

- 58 of the 89 respondents (65%) are male and 31 (35%) are female.
- 83% of the respondents are directors or superintendents of park and recreation agencies.
- 85.4% of the agencies are local or regional park and recreation departments, 9.0% are public school agencies followed by private nonprofit leisure service agencies (2.2%). The average annual budget of agencies receiving grants was \$2,283,900 in FY99-00. Annual budgets for these agencies in FY99-00 ranged from \$45,000 to \$56,700,000.
- 79.7% of the respondents claimed full responsibility for securing grants, 7.8% assisted in writing grants, and 6.3% had a grant writer.
- 68 of the 89 agencies (76.4%) used grant monies to fund a variety of recreation services, maintenance, and capital improvement projects.
- The average number of years employed in the present agency among those securing grants was 14.2 years (s.d. of 10.3 years). Among those not securing grants the average number of years employed in their present agency was 9.9 years (s.d. of 9.1 years).
- The average number of years employed in the field of leisure services among those securing grants was 18.8 years (s.d. of 8.9 years). Among those not securing grants was 17.5 years (s.d. of 9.8 years).
- All respondents stated that grant writing skills among park and recreation professionals were extremely important (41.8%), very important (39.5%), or important (13.9%), a total of 95.2%.
- The current first most important problem cited by respondents were funding (49.4%), the need for and condition of facilities (19.3%), staffing (13.3%), marketing services and/or image of the department (4.8%), meeting the needs of community residents (4.8%), meeting ADA requirements (2.4%), and providing quality services (2.4%).
- The second most important problem cited by respondents was staffing (28.2%), funding (24.3%), facilities and/or park development (16.6%), marketing/customer services (11.5%), planning and coordination with other agencies (5.1%), and creative programming (3.8%).

Conclusions

Many agency directors or superintendents in this sample population (76%) are active in the grant writing process. It is, however, not possible to generalize this finding among all park and recreation directors throughout the State of Michigan. The limitations of the sample do not permit such a generalization, as the sample is limited in size (a 35% return rate) and sample respondents were taken from a membership listing obtained from a state recreation association. Despite these limitations, there are some interesting conclusions. Throughout the state there are some very notable activities going on to provide recreation amenities as listed in Table 1. Most of the grant monies received are being funneled to the local and/or regional

levels through state agencies. The state agency in Michigan that administers grant applications for public monies for recreation (among other natural resource concerns) is the state Department of Natural Resources. The application process is a step by step procedure unencumbered by exhaustive literature reviews quite properly characteristic of private foundations. In its simplistic form the state requires a description of the project, a map if needed, a budget, and submission by a given date. To access more foundation monies, directors need to collaborate with recreation resource specialists, sociologists, psychologists, and political scientists among others to access specific expertise that is required for thorough literature reviews in, for example, such areas as at-risk youth. Most of the projects funded in this study (71%) were for capital improvement projects and the remainder (29%) was used for providing recreation services. A balance among both tangible and intangible projects can be achieved through interdisciplinary collaboration. Moreover, agency directors need to carefully examine park and recreation long range planning efforts to find needs to support social and environmental community vitality. With the focus on the health and sustainability of the community, park and recreation managers can find areas where their resources and grant monies can be applied. The extra effort required will position park and recreation departments in new market areas that will strengthen the organization through increased community participation, increased public

support, and an improved public image as a comprehensive social services agency.

Agency directors reported that only 8% of the projects funded with grant monies in this study would have been completed anyway, that is, without grant money. This fact is impressive in that it indicates the importance of an active grant writing program among recreation providers. Grant monies made possible an impressive array of areas, structures, facilities, equipment, and services reported earlier in this paper. Overwhelmingly, 95% of directors and superintendents cite the need for grant writing skills among recreation professionals. This fact is particularly true given that 80% of the directors and/or superintendents in this study claimed full responsibility for writing and applying for grant monies, and, secondly, funding was listed as the current first most important problem facing Michigan park and recreation agencies. Some university recreation departments have recognized the importance of grant writing skills among present and future park and recreation professionals by requiring a grant writing course as part of the park and recreation curriculum.

Reference

Bauer, D. G. (1999). The "how-to" grants manual: Successful grants seeking techniques for obtaining public and private grants (4th ed.). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Table 1. Projects Funded by Grant Money among Michigan Park and Recreation Agencies in FY99-00

Areas	Structures	Facilities	Equipment	Services
Landscaping	Tennis courts	Community Center	Computers	Youth programs
Playground	Waterfront boardwalk	Park improvements	Play equipment	Recreation programs
Land acquisition	Fishing dock	Restrooms		After school programs
River dredging	Picnic shelter	Nature interpretation building		At risk youth programs
Golf course construction	Seawall construction	Marina expansion		Intergenerational programs
Trails	ADA accessibility			Park/greenway planning
Rail trail	Picnic tables			Day care
Parking area				Youth scholarships
In-line skating area				Computer instructional classes
Bikeway				Professional development