

State Grants from Reviewer Perspective

Bill Hinkley

Massachusetts Environmental Trust



About State Grants

- Grants are issued to advance a state policy or goal.
- A government grant is not a gift and it is not charity. There is no philanthropic intent.
- The purpose of a grant is to achieve a better result at better price and timeline than doing it ourselves.

Example

- Grant to Ipswich River Watershed Association for Stream Continuity Surveys- \$25,850



Photo: Ipswich River Watershed Association

Agency Goals for Project:

- Evaluate road-stream crossings for passage by fish and other aquatic life
- Record and upload standardized evaluations to UMass database for watershed scale analysis

Benefits of Grant:

- Reduced cost through trained volunteer and intern labor
- Many crossings evaluated in one summer
- Strong local expertise and project management from IRWA

Great Project!

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- Grant managers are tasked with stewarding taxpayer funds.
 - Our guidelines are set by the Legislature and the Code of Massachusetts Regulations.
 - Our job is to advance administration priorities within these boundaries and according to legislative intent.

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- We think of grants as procurements. You should too.
 - Think about your proposal not as asking for money but selling your services to the state.
 - Think of a creating your proposal the way you would like to see a proposal from a contractor.
 - It should be professional, exact, and measurable.
 - Don't try to pitch a project on emotions.

Example

Marine Animal Entanglement
Response Team

Center for Coastal Studies

- Policy Need
- Team
- Qualifications
- Experience
- Budget
- Location
- Savings over a full-time state team



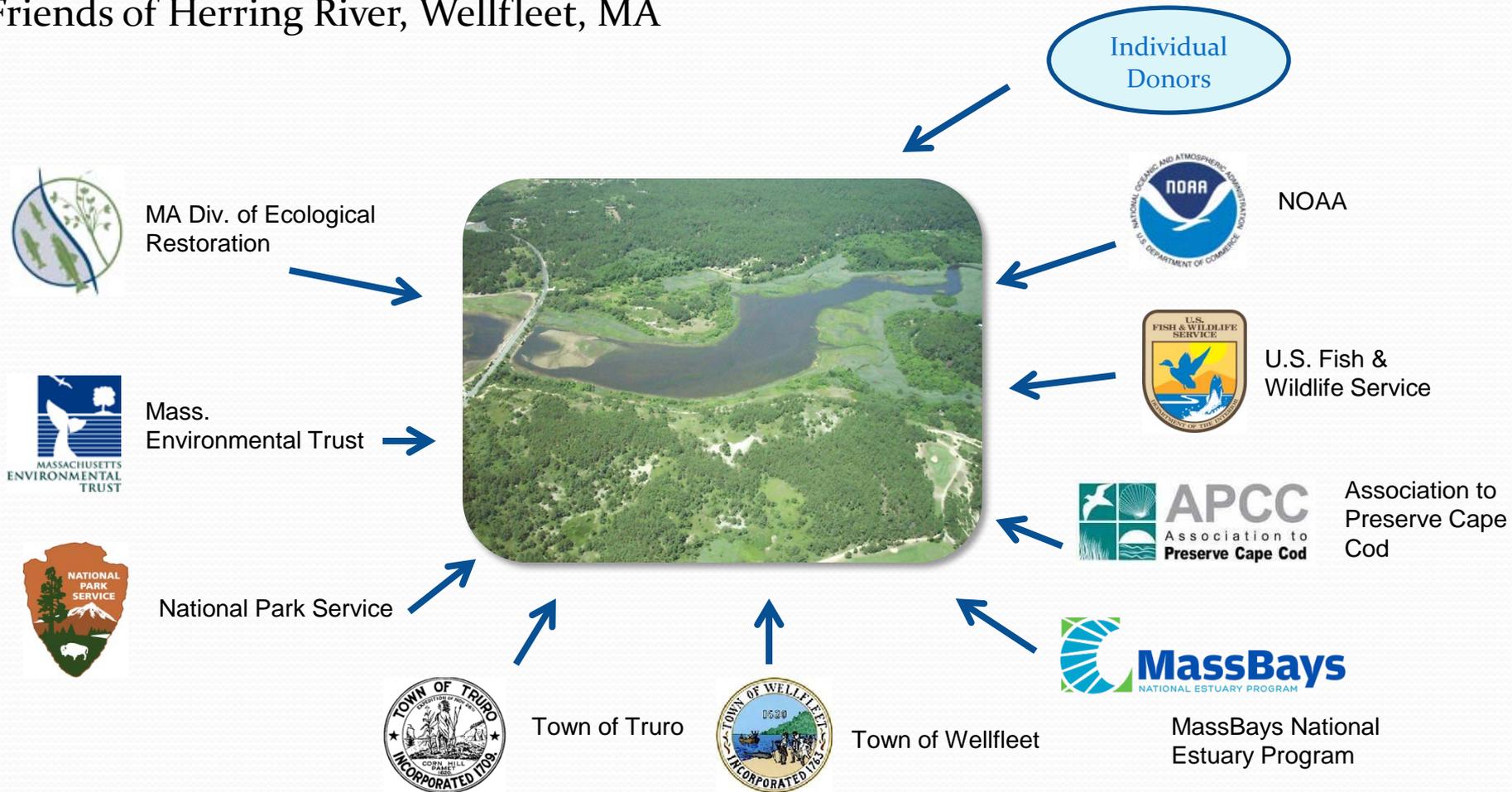
Matching Funds

Why do RFRs always want matching funds?

- This is your commitment to accept risk.
- We also try to leverage state funds to accomplish more with these taxpayer resources
- Use to attract federal and private funds
- Grant partners can aggregate multiple funding sources to accomplish project

Aggregating Resources

Friends of Herring River, Wellfleet, MA



The RFR

For the 3rd time today:

- Read the RFR closely. Understand that it is written to satisfy procurement laws and regulations. We know it is dense.
- Follow the instructions. Most RFRs have language that allows for disqualification of proposal if it is not correctly prepared.
- The RFR will have information about how proposals will be scored.
- Be sure to understand any matching funds requirements.

How are funding decisions made?

- Usually a team of internal and external reviewers.
- Reviewers read each proposal and score it on points. A set of evaluation criteria and scoring rubric is usually in the RFR.
- The team leader compiles scores and team members discuss how they arrived at their score. Adjustments to scores are made based on discussion.
- Scores are averaged and the team makes funding recommendations from the highest score down until funds are fully committed.

The Budget

- From a reviewer perspective, the budget is the most important part of the proposal.
- Do not let the budget be an afterthought.
- Start your proposal by building the budget and use the narrative to describe the activities in the budget.
- The budget and narrative should be seamless, with each task in the narrative clearly linked to a budget line.
- Poor alignment of narrative and budget is one of the most common causes of poor scores.

Tips

- Just because you can ask for the maximum doesn't mean you should.
- It is hard to justify a maximum request in the budget.
- Grant programs have budgets too. Grant managers want to fund as many good projects as they can. Most program managers would rather fund many smaller projects than one large one.

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- Optics matter
 - Get your proposal in a little early.
 - Don't be panicking at the last minute. What does that say about your ability to manage public funds? We notice.
 - Procurements are strictly managed for transparency and fairness. There are no extensions.

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- Future funding and business planning
 - How will this be sustained in the future?
 - Are you in it for the long haul? How will you find people and money?
 - Reviewers are very wary of “orphaned” programs.

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- Past performance matters.
 - Remember that we get evaluated too.
 - When grants are unsuccessful or grantee is unresponsive, it reflects on the program manager's decision process.
 - Almost all scoring systems in RFRs have some category for reviewer discretion.

Contact

William Hinkley

Massachusetts Environmental Trust

100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900, Boston, MA 02114

617.626.1177

www.mass.gov/eea/met

