



Community Connection

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Stake your claim for the Gold Rush of '09



By Scot Rourke, the Knight Center of Digital Excellence

If there is a 21st Century Gold Rush, it's now. And you really must rush if you want any chance at the nearly \$800 billion in federally approved economic stimulus money.

Be sure of this: The most sophisticated communities and organizations have teams of grant writers at work. If you don't, you need to get in the game quickly or lose your opportunity.

Here is a step-by-step process on what to do:

For simplicity's sake, let's focus on the roughly \$100 billion in stimulus money set aside for technology-related projects, much of which will be awarded by federal agencies in the form of competitive grants. Examples include \$7 billion for broadband. Nearly anyone can apply. Remember the goal is jobs - and jobs fast - and that means you need to have your plans and even your contractors lined up quickly.

Here's what to do to begin the application process:

1. Go to the federal government's Web site at www.Recovery.gov.
2. Don't be overwhelmed. The language is straightforward enough. As you scroll down, see if there are categories where your initiatives might qualify. Under technology, for example, you'll find categories such as "Construction of Research Facilities" and "Broadband Technology Opportunities." You might even dust off old plans.
3. Another way to find a project might be to check out your state's list of projects and see if you might want to collaborate on a project in progress in your community. Many states have already launched their recovery related sites for the posting of projects.
4. Think of others in your community who may benefit and can contribute "shovel-ready" projects. It's a good idea to begin talking up your initiatives with local and state agencies, and with federal agencies when possible.

5. Hurry. By around March 30, applications will be available online, and in addition to being a Gold Rush, it will be a Mad Rush. We'll see how it goes, but the legislation requires that 50 percent of the stimulus money be spent or committed by Sept. 30. The remaining money must be spent or committed by the same date in 2010. This is why there is so much emphasis on shovel-ready projects, and again it's about jobs.

This is an unprecedented opportunity to push projects in your community over the goal line. In Cleveland, for example, the United Way's Health Vision Council engaged the nonprofit OneCommunity to work with local Safety Net health care providers that serve primarily the uninsured. Working together over two years, these local organizations have developed plans for electronic medical records and data exchange between the health care providers and local hospitals. The stimulus is a great opportunity to get this project completed.

The clear challenge: To act in haste without waste requires smart spending along with plans for long-term sustainability to create new jobs and long-term economic growth.

So you may have a little more time than you think, but don't sit back, get your partners aligned, build some dedicated capacity to stay on top of the developing guidelines, get your projects ready and get your shovel tip sharpened. You don't want to miss this unprecedented Gold Rush.

Scot Rourke is President and CEO of the Cleveland-based technology nonprofit OneCommunity, which operates the Knight Center of Digital Excellence in partnership with The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. To learn more about the Knight Center, go to www.knightcenter.org or e-mail info@knightcenter.org.