

Green Municipal Fund improvements benefit Manitoba municipalities

By Andrew Cowan, Senior Manager of the Knowledge Management Unit at the FCM Centre for Sustainable Community Development.

Over the past year, FCM's Green Municipal Fund™ (GMF) has reaffirmed its commitment to a more client-centred service and adopted a continuous improvement approach. The Fund has made some important changes as a result.

GMF staff has been listening to what municipal governments across Canada have to say, and has heard them loud and clear. Municipalities want to be able to apply for grants and loans at any time of year, and to know well in advance what kinds of applications will be eligible. GMF has made the necessary changes to meet this need.

All deadlines to apply for grants and below-market loans for capital projects have been removed; municipal governments and their partners can now apply whenever it best fits into their project cycle. GMF has also locked in the eligibility requirements until at least March 31, 2010.

Municipalities have also made it clear that they want a streamlined applications process that is easier to navigate and takes less time. GMF is currently redesigning its processes to meet this need. As a first step, new applications are now reviewed on a monthly basis, and GMF is committed to providing a response as quickly as possible.

In addition to these process improvements, the FCM-ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program, supported by GMF, is working with the Province of Manitoba to assist a group of 12 municipalities through PCP's five-milestone process within three years. National tools developed by PCP will be adapted to the provincial context to support their work. Once complete, these municipalities, ranging in population from 500 to 40,000, will provide excellent case study examples for emissions reductions in rural communities.

The PCP program requires municipalities to commit to five milestones: creating a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory and forecast; setting an emissions reduction target; developing a local action plan; implementing the local action plan; and monitoring progress and reporting results.

On average, PCP members have spent \$110,000 to complete milestones One-to-Three for municipal operations and the community together as a package. These costs are often offset by energy savings once reduction measures are implemented. Funding support is available from GMF, which provides a 50% grant up to \$350,000 toward the completion of milestones Two and Three.

GMF recently announced a \$109,000 grant to the City of Portage la Prairie to evaluate strategies to treat its wastewater effluent and reduce the excessive amount of nutrients it currently contributes to Lake Winnipeg. The project team will assess several pre-treatment technologies, especially those related to the removal of phosphorous and management of biosolids, and develop a short list of preferred systems.

"The Green Municipal Fund will assist the City of Portage la Prairie significantly in reviewing various treatment options for

nutrient removal," said **Walter Keryluk**, chair of the City of Portage la Prairie Waterworks Committee. "The results of these studies will enable the city to proceed with the necessary upgrades for nutrient removal and enable the city do its share in reducing the impact on water courses."

The technological and financial analyses of these technologies will lead to an implementation strategy for the chosen system. The resulting capital project is anticipated to reduce nitrogen levels by 71% and phosphorous levels by 95%. This will reduce algae blooms and water pollution in Lake Winnipeg, which currently have a negative impact on fisheries, tourism and recreation.

GMF funds municipal initiatives like these that benefit the environment, local economies and quality of life across Canada. The Fund provides below-market loans and grants, as well as education and training services to support municipal initiatives that improve air, water and soil quality, and protect the climate.

Grants are available for sustainable community plans, feasibility studies and field tests, while a combination of grants and loans are available for capital projects. Funding is allocated in five sectors of municipal activity: brownfields, energy, transportation, waste and water. Details on funding opportunities in each sector are available on the FCM website at www.fcm.ca/gmf.

In 2008–2009, FCM approved over \$3.8 million in GMF funding for 38 sustainable community plans, feasibility studies and field tests. Almost \$52 million in below-market loans and over \$8 million in grants was approved to implement 34 leading capital projects. As municipal governments continue to raise the sustainability bar with innovative, leading-edge studies and projects, GMF continues to evolve to keep pace with municipal leadership, and remains a valuable asset to communities across Canada.

GMF is listening, and is working hard to meet the needs of municipal governments. The lines of communication are always open on ways to simplify and streamline GMF processes and to improve GMF products and services. Comments or suggestions are always welcome, and can be sent to gmf@fcm.ca.



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