"Thinking outside the box" to resource a major project

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TENDER BRIDGE CASE OF SUCCESS: CASE 9
"Thinking outside the box" to resource a major project

Tannum Sands State High School is a school of over 980 students in the coastal town of Tannum Sands on the Central East Coast of Queensland, just over 400kms north of Brisbane. The school has been a Tender Bridge subscriber since March 2013. Community Liaison Officer Carol Shuttleworth spoke to Tender Bridge about the school’s path to securing some new sporting facilities.

Tannum Sands State High School had wanted to build some new sporting facilities at the school for some time. A new long jump pit and some cricket nets would provide an opportunity for the school to support the fitness of their students; it would also bring a community focus back to the school. “We want our school to be more of a community centre of activities, a kind of local hub,” says Carol Shuttleworth, the school’s Community Liaison Officer. This motivated the school to approach Little Athletics and cricket clubs in the local areas to get them interested and involved.

As well as being on the wish list of the Head of Sport, the proposed new facilities were also a long-held pipe dream of the school’s P&C, who decided they would dedicate some funds from their coffers. With an indicative costing for the project of $80,000, and with the P&C willing to commit around $50,000, the task of raising the remaining $30,000 fell to Carol.

Earthmoving works underway at the long jump/cricket nets site

Community joining forces to help realise a dream for long-awaited sports facilities

At left: Geoff Coleman from The Sands development, Member for Gladstone Hon Liz Cunningham MP, Mick Cross Shadforths and Head of PE Leon Sternberg. At right: School Captains with Principal Glen Donald.
Making a start
Carol's first move was to look around at some funds that might fit, deciding to try for $30,000 from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund (GCBF) for the long jump pit. "I knew that it should fit the bill, because I'd looked at their website to see what they'd funded in the past." According to the website, they'd provided funding for lawnmowers and sporting infrastructure for local soccer teams, and $30,000 was their maximum grant size, "so that was the first door to knock on."

Following their initial excitement when they got the news that their grant application was successful for the full $30,000, they began to realise that it was going to be a large project to manage, with contractors and subcontractors, and so they decided to go through QBuild*. They approached QBuild to say that they had a project they wanted built, and asked them to project manage it. "They charge a fee but they manage the whole project, including things like ensuring you have the right permits. They can take the whole project to market and put it out to tender for you."

The original prices were indicative costings only, supplied by manufacturers or builders of long jump nets and cricket nets. The funder can be satisfied with indicative costings for the purpose of providing the funding in the first instance, but the recipient of the funding is responsible for any additional cost. A part of what QBuild now had to do, because they had taken on the whole process, was to get some real costings. They then came back to Carol with the best quote. When the new quote came back it was $265,000 instead of the original indicative quote of $80,000. "A difficulty in some places in Queensland can be that because you can be located at a distance from whoever is quoting, a supplier will want to charge for the quote to cover their travel." Even so, Carol suggests that the lesson in this for others is to get real rather than indicative costings if you can.

Re-inventing the thinking around the project
With the $80,000 project the school had begun with suddenly now transformed into a $265,000 project, it became apparent that some new thinking was required around how the project could be resourced. A significant portion of the cost was for ground-clearing work, including getting rid of a number of large trees, originally projected to cost around $20,000. "But when we looked at the breakdown of the quote, we found that $111,000 was for earthworks!"

There are a number of heavy industries in the area, including the aluminium industry and liquid natural gas, and Carol is constantly on the lookout for any possibilities they might offer. This time she decided that instead of going ‘cap in hand’ requesting cash donations, it might be a good idea to go for in-kind support. She had seen heavy vehicles on-site at a number of local housing developments near the school, and so she decided to make an approach. The first was a government project, and unable to assist, but the second, a private developer, was happy to come and look at the site and hear about the project. "We could do that easily", he said. Carol says, "It was great to have the chance to actually be able to show him. He didn’t think it was too big a prospect at all. So it just all fitted."

Carol emphasizes the importance of such a contribution being recognised in the press and in school newsletters. They invited Shadforths (the contractor) to come along to the school for their awards night. The contractor also knew it was helping the local cricket club, and that the local Little Athletics club would also use the long jump pit. That meant that rather than 1,000 students, they are reaching a bigger

* QBuild was a Queensland government body that schools could call on to project manage building construction. It has now been absorbed into Building and Asset Services, and is part of the Queensland Government’s Department of Housing and Public Works.
social group, the wider community as well. “They knew we had not only backing of the school, but also of the broader community.”

Leveraging in-kind support

They now had $30,000 from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund, and $50,000 from the P&C. The in-kind support from the developer, in the form of the earthworks, was worth $110,000, but this still left them with a budget shortfall. That’s where the Smart Schools Subsidy Scheme came in. The SSS Scheme offers funding pro-rata to a school’s input. “We were able to leverage the $110,000 of in-kind support from the developer to cover the difference between what we already had and the quote amount.” The school is now very excited to know that the project will be completed in Term 4 of 2013. “Everything just fell into place.”

What would you say to other schools looking to resource a project like this one?

This project had been on the school’s wish list for a long time, but it had stayed there because they knew it would be a big budget item. It was kept on ice because it wasn’t immediately apparent how they might start it. “But we started chipping away at it, and we broke it down into specifics, into manageable bits, into projects within a larger project, such as the cricket pitch.”

Carol also suggests that it is important to think about how you are going to get people to buy into your project, to take ownership, to not just see your approach as asking for money. “It’s important to think about how you are going to convey the message that this is your school and your school community.”

Another helpful thing that Carol has discovered is that most businesses of a reasonable size have a community benevolent fund or a community giving fund. “Look into how much they give, what they give to, and when. Know who you’re approaching, and do your research.” It is important, she suggests, to find out if a business has a particular charitable focus or area that they want to be connected with. A business’s website will often list who they’ve given to in previous rounds, who they’ve helped before, and what they’ve purchased, “so use it as a guide.”

Carol has also found that you don’t have to approach people in a prescribed way. You just have to “know what you need is, and then, you have to really want it, that’s what sells it.”

Tannum Sands State High School has also sought funding together with other schools in the area, which gives their grant applications more weight. Where schools might look to their P&C for supplementary funding, Carol encourages them to look to the local community, to capitalise on the increased appeal of benefiting a cluster of schools with a single grant.

A final word

Carol acknowledges that the school is lucky in having heavy industry in the community, because that means there are lots of people they can tap on the shoulder. “Community support is important, but it’s important to target who you ask, to get to know whose shoulder to tap on.”

And finally, “It’s important to get not disheartened, it’s the nature of the beast. We’ve had lots of failures, and often when we don’t get anything, there’s no reply. But don’t give up, try to get feedback.”

**Some other grant-seeking successes**

- Commonwealth Bank Community Grant: $9594 for ‘Virtual Babies’ program run across 3 schools in conjunction with Queensland Health
- Local smelter employees fund: $2800 to supplement the Virtual Babies Program overhaul
- REAPing Rewards (Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal): $9,700 for professional development for teachers in literacy and numeracy (‘Teach the Teachers’ with literacy consultant Pat Hipwell)
- Queensland DETE: $1,000 for school tuckshop makeover

**Carol’s grant-seeking tips**

- Look at the funder’s website to see what they’ve funded in the past, and use that as a guide
- Get real costings rather than indicative costings for your project where possible
- It can be a good idea to look for in-kind support rather than cash donations
- Look in your local area and keep your eyes open
- A project can be more appealing to a funder when they know that it is benefiting not just your school, but the wider community too.
- Getting the opportunity to show your project to a potential funder or supporter can really help
- With a large project, break it down into specifics, into manageable bits
- Think about how you are going to sell your project to people, how they can be persuaded to take ownership of it
- Do your research on what funders give, what they give to, and when
- Find out who a business wants to be connected with
- You have to know what you need is, and then you have to really want it
- Find out if you can add weight to your application by applying as a cluster of schools rather than as a single school
- Target who you ask – know whose shoulder to tap on
- Don’t get disheartened, and when you’re not successful, try to get feedback

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