

RATIONALE

Strategic Context: This grant contributes towards our objective of enhancing the capacity of the lesbian and gay community to highlight its concerns.

1 Problem to be Addressed

The problem to be addressed is the ongoing struggle of Gay Community News (GCN) to produce a high quality free newspaper as a medium of communication for and between Ireland's lesbian and gay community.

GCN is the main project activity of the National Lesbian and Gay Federation (NLGF). The major barrier to the newspaper's development has been its traditional reliance on FAS temporary employment schemes, which forced it to operate in an "ad hoc" manner. Periods of service were short-term, affording few opportunities for mainstreaming positions and creating a highly skilled workforce. This in turn has resulted in problems in attracting strong profile contributors, which means that GCN has never been able to maximise either its circulation or advertising potential.

2 How proposed Grantee would address the Problem

In May 2001, an independent consultant (funded by Atlantic) drew up a business plan for implementation over a three year period and identified several recommendations to guarantee the development and expansion of the paper. Arising from the review, a number of objectives were set:

- the improvement of the quality of the editorial and journalistic output;
- the up-dating of format, design and production;
- the implementation of best practice staffing policies and procedures;
- the development of a regional reporting strategy;
- the setting of quality standards and the regular monitoring of these standards;

A central underpinning strategy was a major increase in advertising revenue from approximately € 14,000 to € 32,000 per month and an expansion in circulation.

NLGF propose to implement the business plan in three phases:

- Phase I will focus on creating the appropriate team to implement the business plan (Year 1);
- Phase II will concentrate on the redesign of GCN, its revenue and circulation potential (Year 1/2);

- Phase III will consolidate the growth and expansion achieved (Year 3/4).

It is proposed to increase the staffing in GCN from three full-time (Managing Editor, Financial Controller, Advertising Sales executive) and five part-time currently, to a permanent complement of eight full time staff. This includes the conversion of three postholders from the part-time FAS scheme to permanent full-time posts in research, journalism and administration. The funding for this expansion, as well as for the other elements of the plan, will come mainly from the increased advertising revenue, from state funding under a new Social Economy Programme as well as from grants and subscriptions. However GCN requires pump-priming support to achieve self sufficiency and requests Atlantic funding of €350,000 to support three staff appointments (a Business Development Manager, Assistant Editor and Advertising Manager), as well as finance for IT upgrading, test production of a new format for the newspaper, circulation surveys and periodic strategic reviews of progress.

3. Reasons for Recommending Support to Grantee

Targeted support at this critical stage in their development could make the difference between success and failure of the newspaper.

The production of a free newspaper is particularly important to the gay community whose members rely on it to communicate openly with each other, access information to their essential services and reduce the sense of marginalisation and isolation they continue to experience despite the decriminalisation of homosexuality (1993). The newspaper has been described as a lifeline by people particularly around the painful initial “coming out” to family and friends, in particular those in rural communities who would not have ready access to centres for support when necessary.

GCN is managed by the NLGF and has produced a significant and much respected publication since 1988 against all the odds. Ailbhe Smith, Director of WERRC in UCD and well known to Atlantic is the Chair of the Board and is championing this project. The Board was reconstituted two years ago and we are impressed with its strength and depth; between them, the new members have wide experience in the commercial and advertising sector, in universities and educational institutions and in community development.

3 Negative/Risks of Grant

The advertising revenue required may not be achieved and the project may not therefore be fully sustainable after the funding period.

The increase in staffing, although incremental upon current levels, will pose a challenge in terms of human resource management. There have been some difficulties around this area in the past.

4 Expected Outcomes

NLGF has set headline project outcomes to be achieved after one, three and five years.

The longer term planned strategic outcome is that GCN will be a stable successful community-based newspaper, which will be self-sustainable and a significant voice for the NLGF in the development of its advocacy and campaigning programmes for the rights of the lesbian and gay community of Ireland.

Shorter term operational outcomes include an increase in advertising revenue to €32,000 per month. Circulation will have doubled from the current levels of 10,000 per month to 20,000 per month. A volunteer network of editorial contributors will have been established nation-wide. GCN will be staffed by a professional progressive team with strong employment policies and procedures, who will combine journalistic, marketing and management excellence.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

The statement of project outcomes submitted by NLGF as part of their funding application will be used as a benchmark for monitoring progress. A readership and circulation survey will be conducted annually during the three-year plan. An annual external review of progress in implementing the plan will be conducted.

At the end of:

- **Year one:** Review of the implementation of the new format of the newspaper:
- **Year two:** Review against targets and progress and on implementation and strategic review of future direction and plans.
- **Year three:** Review of overall progress of three-year implementation plan with recommendations for going forward.

7 Previous Grants

None

8 Board Staff Affiliation

None