

HELPING HANDS

The USTA's Facilities Assistance Program can help you out with everything from funding, to resources, to advocacy, to technical advice.

BY ROBIN BATEMAN

We've all seen the emails or stories announcing available USTA funding: line grants for 10 and Under Tennis, matching funds for resurfacing, fencing, lighting; percentage grants for new courts, and facilities.

Money's great, of course. But the USTA has more than cash available for tennis facilities. The USTA has a plethora of resources, from facility concept designs through contract bid review—and many things in between.

Who benefits from USTA funding, resources and recommendations? Everyone, at all types of facilities, including public parks, and private clubs; elementary, middle and high schools; college campuses; and even private educational institutions. If you're in the business of promoting tennis, increasing traffic, or training your staff, check out what the USTA has available.

While applying for benefits is involved, the applicants aren't made to jump through hoops. However, you do have to have your ducks in a row—but generally, if you have a few stragglers, the USTA helps you get them in line. Visit www.usta.com/facilities for more info, and to apply.

Resources and Assistance

Advocacy: There's no question—standing before the city council or county commissioners asking for large sums of money will spark heated discussions. The USTA understands the importance of connecting with local governments in positive ways and provides tools to help you create effective, polished presentations for your money/project asking sessions. This allows you to not only score big in developing constructive working relationships, but also helps get policy makers to

buy into your facility's wants and dreams.

"The Big Serve," the USTA's advocacy initiative (www.usta.com/thebigserve), offers a "how-to" handbook for creating effective advocacy goals tailored to local needs so you can get your ideas and projects up and running while giving suggestions and tips for overcoming some common, and not so common, obstacles. Further, the USTA employs advocacy consultants to help jump-start your objectives. "Many of our clients have visions, but they don't know where or how to start," says David Lasota, USTA's National Technical Consultant. That's where USTA advocacy consultants come into play.

Technical: Technical consultants provide assistance in the development of facility concept plans, design and technical reviews, submissions, and development of specs for 10 and Under Tennis. They also make recommendations so that your facility is safe. Tech consultants can review construction documents and bid documents and make sure you are asking the right questions.

When Stratford Academy, a private school located in Macon, Ga. wanted to build a new tennis court complex, on its grounds, Jim Daws, president of Sierra Development and chairman of buildings and grounds at the Academy, discovered how beneficial the technical advice could be. "We were starting from scratch," says Daws. "We needed to remove six existing out-of-date courts." Questions buzzed: What orientation do the courts need to be? What about drainage?

The school's tennis coach, Jaime Kaplan, hooked Daws up with Robin Jones, USTA National facilities consultant. "Robin then put me in contact with David Lasota," Daws says. "The entire process was very involved. We'd submit a proposal and



they'd get back to us with, 'rethink your drainage.'"

For Stratford, the idea was hatched in May 2009 and construction began that fall. Despite some weather hiccups, the school played its first high-school season matches on brand new courts in April 2010. "We have eight new lighted courts, four with blended lines for 10 and Under Tennis, locker rooms, and a concession area," says Daws. "The (technical) reviews kept us from making so many mistakes. And the end result is that we will have a beautiful tennis complex for years to come."

Funding: USTA allots funding under three different categories. Category 1 includes basic improvements like fixed court amenities such as backboards, lighting, fencing, and 10 and Under lines. USTA will contribute up to \$4,000, but that money must be matched by the local community.

Category 2 provides 20 percent of the total cost for resurfacing courts (up to \$35,000). Courts must be located in public parks. Category 3 provides 20 percent with a \$50,000 max for new facility construction or existing facility reconstruction and expansion projects.

Ken Sumrow, director of tennis at High Point Tennis in Plano, Texas, applied for Category 1 funds. The facility wanted to resurface five courts and also wanted to install blended lines for short courts. High Point had a heavily used practice wall with courts laid end to end. Sumrow converted his backboard area into a 10 and Under Tennis training/practice spot. Not only can folks still hit on the wall, but now, kids can train, practice and play matches on short courts.

"Receiving the grant money made it easier to install the blended lines," says Sumrow. "Now, kids come out and practice on their own. There's more energy and excitement during

lessons. Kids are having fun and *playing* rather than [drilling], where their lessons were centered on instruction."

Kids aren't the only ones who love High Point's new shorter courts. At first some of the coaches were apprehensive, but now they fight over them. Sumrow applied for money during January 2010 and students stepped onto the shorter courts in June.

Rolling Deadlines

What about deadlines? There aren't any. All USTA Facilities Assistance and Resources have rolling applications. Simply complete and submit an online Facilities Assistance Form; correctly completed forms generate an automatic email notification.

Next, within 30 days a national consultant will contact your organization to assess and clarify your community's needs. After the assessment, the consultant evaluates your request. If granted, communications between advocacy and/or technical consultants will begin. Roll up your sleeves, the work starts here.

Then, if USTA believes your community qualifies, you'll receive an invitation to apply for money. Be careful not to jump the gun here. "There are some facilities who will apply before they should," says Jones. "Grant applications are invitation only."

Want windscreens, updated lighting or 10 and Under Tennis lines for your tennis center? Fill out your Facility Assistance form online today. "Our 2011 goal for 10 and Under courts is 3,000," says Lasota.

Money and resources are available for you to whip your courts into shape. Visit usta.com/facilities to see how your facility can benefit. ▶