

Nonprofit fights to get \$1M in stimulus funds

Rebuilding Together lobbying Capitol Hill

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With donations to nonprofits dwindling, a saving grace for many charitable organizations has been federal stimulus dollars. But the stimulus funds can provide headaches too. Just ask Amy Radachi, president and chief executive officer of Rebuilding Together Dayton, who is pushing Capitol Hill to allow stimulus money to increase her budget by \$1 million.

Earlier this year, Radachi was told by Dayton officials to budget for a \$1 million increase. The funding would have been paid for with stimulus dollars through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program that gave the city of Dayton \$5.5 million.

But when city officials looked closer at the stimulus money, the rules dictated it be spent on certain types of projects involving vacant houses. That meant Rebuilding Together, which provides home repairs for residents already in homes, could not receive the money.

The \$1 million would have gone toward providing 20 new roofs, 60 new gas and water systems, 60 new electrical and plumbing systems, 20 new handicap ramps and provide 10 houses with new siding, windows and doors.

The work would employ local contrac-

tors and volunteers who would provide the services and products to homeowners free of charge.

But before those projects can be completed now, Radachi needs funding.

Outside of the stimulus dollars, many of the small grants available to Rebuilding Together include restrictions. Those include money that can only be used to help people in certain age ranges or with a certain number of children. With

the hope of having an additional unrestricted \$1 million pulled out from under her, Radachi found herself frustrated.

"It's really simple," she said. "It makes you wonder why this wording wasn't included to begin with, that way we could get right to work."

Amy Radachi

Radachi said she is tired of piecing together small grants with heavy restrictions to make up her \$350,000 operating budget. And without the stimulus money, she would need to continue applying for grants worth a few thousand dollars to pay for some of the repairs homeowners' need.

However, not one to take the news lying down, Radachi lobbied U.S. Rep. Mike Turner (R-Centerville) and got a bill drafted this summer — H.R. 3204 — that would open up the neighborhood stabilization money to Radachi's group and others who provide repairs and rebuilds to people in need.

"We could perform major repairs for

area homeowners on a year-round basis to help keep people in their homes, instead of money being used on homes after they are vacated," Radachi said. "The way it stands now, we're not stabilizing our neighborhoods, we're evacuating them."

Radachi isn't the only nonprofit executive frustrated with strings tied to stimulus money use.

Jan Lepore-Jentleson, executive director of East End Community Services, said it's the name of the game when using federal money.

"We expected any federal money to come with strings," Lepore-Jentleson said. "So it does not surprise me that there would be a lot of strings and complicated requirements."

However, the requirements for the neighborhood stabilization money are working in favor of East End Community Services, which provides social services in the east part of Dayton. The group received a \$500,000 contract this month to deconstruct more than 40 vacant houses. Because of the money, Lepore-Jentleson was able to help launch the deconstruction program to disassemble houses and sell off the parts through the Habitat for Humanity ReStore.

"It will take a lot of training to figure out just how the money can be used, but it's millions of dollars coming into the community that we wouldn't otherwise have," Lepore-Jentleson said.

Meanwhile, Radachi is awaiting her turn at the money. She said Turner's bill is stalled in the finance committee, awaiting more sponsors and approval to be

heard. There's no timeline for approval, so for now, Radachi is back to working with her \$350,000 budget. No one knows how much in total funding is available for neighborhood stabilization through the stimulus, she said, but the bill's passage would automatically give Radachi the initial \$1 million she budgeted for, as well as additional funds for more projects throughout the region.

Money from the Neighborhood Stabilization Program is funneled through the city. Other stimulus funding opportunities are available at grants.gov and FedBizOpps.gov. Each site has a designated stimulus opportunities section.

Radachi hopes to hear word on her funding soon.

"I would definitely sleep easier at night," Radachi said. "It would mean more work for me, but I would definitely feel a lot better."

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