

The New York Times: A Guide Through the Government Maze

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SHE was helping others get into the game, but did she have what it takes to be a player herself?

That self-posed challenge, Ann Kayman says, was among the reasons she went in 2002 from working as a New York City economic development official to running a small start-up business. Another reason, she says, was her desire to return to the private sector, though not to the world of corporate law, which she had practiced earlier for a dozen years but had lost interest in.



Ruby Washington/The New York Times

HELPING HANDS Ann Kayman, right, chief executive of the New York Grant Company, working with Vera D'Elisa, a senior grant analyst, in their Lower Manhattan office.

As a senior vice president of the city's Economic Development Corporation from 1998 to 2002, Ms. Kayman helped businesses get started or expand. "I would connect a business with any resources I could find, and I saw hundreds of companies start up," she said. Eventually, she caught the entrepreneurial bug herself. "I wondered if I could do it."

Today, Ms. Kayman is the owner and chief executive of the New York Grant Company, which helps companies find and apply for government subsidies and incentives meant to foster business development.

From a utilitarian 30-by-30-foot office on Fulton Street in Lower Manhattan, Ms. Kayman, 44, and seven employees mine the maze of federal, state and municipal programs that provide tax exemptions and abatements, reduced-interest loans, job training grants and energy cost discounts.

They determine which programs their clients may qualify for, advise them on steps needed for compliance, prepare the often extensive documents they need and make sure the applications do not fall into bureaucratic crevices. So, like more than a few former public officials, Ms. Kayman has woven strands of her government experience into a private-sector career.

When she joined the New York Grant Company in September 2002, it was four months old, having been founded by a businessman, Salim Ismail, with a timely focus - and a built-in limitation. Its specialty was helping Lower Manhattan businesses obtain grants and loans from programs that had been established to foster the area's financial recovery after the Sept. 11 attack. That was still its focus when Ms. Kayman came on board, she said recently.

But most of those programs were temporary, so the company would have to have a wider scope if it was to be more than a way station in her career.

She began expanding, first by seeking aid beyond that connected to 9/11, steering her Lower Manhattan clients to programs that predated the attack. "We also began representing clients in Midtown," she said. A current client, for example, is redeveloping a building and adjacent property near Times Square. "We've gotten initial approval for them for real estate tax incentives that will be worth millions of dollars," she said.

Her company now also writes program proposals that nonprofit groups, like arts and social service organizations, submit in seeking financing from foundations, corporations and government agencies.

Ms. Kayman bought the New York Grant Company from Mr. Ismail in 2003 for "several hundred thousand dollars," using up all her savings, she said. Since the company began, she said, it has helped about 850 businesses and nonprofit groups obtain \$40 million. The company's revenues last year were about \$2 million, she said, providing a "decent, not huge" profit.

Some government agencies and nonprofit groups provide free help to people seeking to form or expand small businesses, but Ms. Kayman said she did not see them as competition because "they don't give the kind of intensive" assistance her company does.

Intensive assistance was what one client, Joshua Aaron, president of a technology consulting firm in Lower Manhattan, said he needed when his company suffered sharp losses after the terrorist attack. The New York Grant Company helped his firm, Business Technology Partners, obtain \$350,000 from various 9/11 aid programs. "I don't think we would have had the resources and time to follow the process" required to get the aid, he said. "We were concentrating on rebuilding our core business."

While with the city, Ms. Kayman helped administer the same 9/11 recovery programs that the New York Grant Company was assisting its clients with. The city's Conflicts of Interest Board said that joining the company would not pose a conflict for her as long as she did not deal with the agency she

had left for a year. Ms. Kayman said she had heeded that and other strictures.

As might be expected, her company has obtained for itself the kind of government aid it seeks for its clients - in its case, \$25,000 from a program that provided incentives for businesses to move into Lower Manhattan.

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