



# CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES

## SOCIAL SERVICE GRANTS COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL  
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**Date:** November 20, 2023

**Time:** 9:00 a.m.

**Location:** 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room; Cyrus K. Holliday Bldg (620 SE Madison)

**Committee members present:** Councilmembers Sylvia Ortiz (Chair), Karen Hiller, Brett Kell

**City staff present:** Carrie Higgins (Division Director Housing Services), United Way of Kaw Valley vendor staff: Brett Martin, Jessica Lehnerr, Joyce Katzer, Juliet McDiffet, Audrey Mott

### 1) Call to Order

Chairwoman Ortiz called the meeting to order at 9:00am Committee members, staff and staff from United Way introduced themselves.

### 2) Vendor Contract Renewal for 2024

Housing Services Division Director Carrie Higgins provided information to the Committee about the United Way of Kaw Valley's (UWKV) contract with the City. The original contract was from 2020-2021, with four optional renewals. The current renewal ends February 28, 2024. It can be followed by one last renewal, which would be a contract period of March 1, 2024 through February 28, 2025.

Committee member Hiller indicated she had been pleased with the service. She requested an overview of the four-year contract and renewal sequence. Division Director Higgins responded that the City has been through three of the four contract renewal cycles with UWKV. After February 28, 2025, a new Request for Proposals (RFP) would have to go out.

Committee member Hiller inquired about the rates and terms of the original contract as well as the three renewals. Staff did not have that information on hand, but would send it to the Committee and would have it available for the next meeting. Planning & Development Services Director Rhiannon Friedman noted that the contract is a continuation, so the amount has already been agreed upon when it was initially negotiated. This is the third term of the contract.

### **3) Approve Minutes from July 12, 2023 Meeting**

Committee member Hiller made a motion to approve the July 12, 2023 meeting minutes. Chairwoman Ortiz seconded. Motion approved 2-0-0. Committee member Kell was absent during this vote.

### **4) 2025 SSG Cycle Items**

Brett Martin with United Way of Kaw Valley introduced the 2025 SSG Cycle items.

#### 2025 Priorities

Mr. Martin noted that the Priorities matched what had been approved for the 2024 process cycle, with the amendment of the increase to the General Fund amount, which increased the total from \$434,942 to \$491,904. The addition of \$24,047 was approved by the Governing Body [August 15, 2023], being the only change for the 2025 cycle process. The mission statement and priority areas, maximum amounts for Shawnee County Medical Society and Positive Connections, the continuation to have no untested programs, or set aside amount, and the requirement that those programs must be in operation for two years prior to the date of application, remain unchanged.

Committee member Hiller felt comfortable with the category remaining the same. She noted there had been an issue about the minimum grant language, when the process was done before, and felt it may need to be addressed. She inquired if there was perhaps a cost-of-living type of raise in the cap would be something to consider. Another consideration suggested was to revisit the grandfathering of two agencies that are allowed to request a higher maximum than the other program applicants. The maximum request is set at \$25K, however Shawnee County Medical Society's maximum request limit is \$50K, and Positive Connections maximum request limit is \$35K.

Committee member Hiller inquired about the definition of the minimum grant request, and asked if that meant programs should be asking for that much or if it meant that the SSG process will not give funds for less than that amount? She noted that that information ties into whether or not the application will even be accepted. She commented that there may be a concern that applications requesting less than \$10K may have been processed and considered in the past. Also, sometimes when the math happens, grants have been awarded with less than \$10K. Committee member Hiller recalled a conversation in a previous meeting that the \$10K minimum was set so that it was worth the agency's time to apply for the grant and worth the City's time to process that application and do the writing, processing, grant management. Mr. Martin suggested that if the

Committee wanted to make an adjustment here, the language would say “the minimum grant request amount”. If the language says a “Ten Thousand dollar grant award”, it is likely that money would be left at the table annually, because there will be agencies that, when United Way takes their score and multiply it by the applicant’s request, then subtract that from the total amount, there is no guarantee at the end that the last program will be awarded the minimum of \$10K. Mr. Martin felt adding the clarifying language “minimum grant request amount” on the funding priority sheet, it will take care of any confusion that folks might have.

There was additional conversation about some programs possibly not needing \$10K, and what the history was on why that amount was set for the minimum request. The concerns were about if applicants would inflate their proposal in order to hit the threshold, and how it might affect the process for other applications. Committee member Hiller noted that part of the reasoning the Committee had come up with requiring a program to have at least two years of operation before they can apply, to show it has been tested and that the SSG money is not being used as startup money. The issue was there were many other small grants that would allow applicants to accomplish little things here and there, but that the idea of the SSG pool was to provide ongoing core program support for tested programs. Chairwoman Ortiz appreciated the idea of requiring programs to show at least a two-year history.

Circling back to the concern of requiring a \$10K minimum, even if a lesser amount would be sufficient, Mr. Martin noted that lowering the threshold may capture a very small number of non-profits, however it is his experience that they rarely see a program that wants or needs less than \$10K. It is possible that such programs exist, and that lowering the minimum amount to \$5K may bring in a few of the smaller non-profit programs. Mr. Martin cautioned that if a program needed \$5K, and they ask for \$5K, the inherent assumption is that they will score 100% and that is not always the case. It is more common that applicants ask for more money than they may need, because they understand that they may not receive that full amount, but that even if they receive less than their request, they will be able to cover their costs. The Committee felt leaving the minimum request threshold at \$10K was appropriate at this time. Mr. Martin clarified that the word “request” would be added to both the minimum and maximum thresholds for continuity and to keep applicants from requesting more than the \$25K maximum amount. Applicants can ask for no fewer than \$10K, and no more than \$25K.

Committee member Hiller inquired if there would be any consensus to want to raise the maximum request amount, since an additional \$57K had been approved to be added toward the SSG process? She did not want to push the suggestion, but noted it was an opportunity to consider it, and noted it would allow a little bit more to the regular agencies that have applied.

Correspondingly, Committee member Hiller inquired if the Committee would want to look at the exemptions for the two agencies that are being allowed to apply for more. Chairwoman Ortiz did not want to change the grandfathered agencies until they had been given a full year of notice that this change may happen. Committee member Hiller stated she did not feel comfortable with making an exception just for two agencies, as every other agency is meeting important needs in the community and do their best to raise money, and that Topeka has growing needs. It is a matter of if the Committee wants to provide even support or even opportunity to everyone. Mr. Martin suggested that leaving the \$25K cap was a fairly good number, unless the Committee would want to prioritize areas based on a percentage, which has never happened. Having just under half a million dollars for the grant, allows for a good amount of core funding for capacity for organizations, while at the same time, not concentrating it into two or three agencies or two or three priority areas.

Committee member Hiller explained that the other side to the challenge for private businesses and non-profits is hiring good people. With salaries and people arguing for providing at least a livable wage, non-profits often struggle because they do not pay as much as other sectors do, and with inflation, \$3K would be a ten percent increase over ten years. In order to help to even continue that core offering to help meet the increased costs of running that business, was the reasoning Committee member Hiller was coming from. Chairwoman Ortiz voiced appreciation for that conversation. Mr. Martin added that, based on conversations UWKV has had with their non-profit partners, they note a competition to hire and retain social workers from a small pool of qualified individuals from larger entities such as the school districts or hospital systems that have a unique set of compensation resources that smaller non-profits likely do not have. He suggested the point that Committee member Hiller brought up was significant and something to be considered for later conversation.

#### Scoring Sheet [video 35:58 minute mark]

Mr. Martin stated there were no suggested changes for the scoring sheet. He noted that when UWKV hosts the training session through the grant workshop with the agencies in April, and talk about outputs and outcomes, the team will want to

make sure that the agencies understand that those are annual, and that the application is requesting to see a full year of outputs and outcomes, and that should address the issues that had arisen this past year.

Committee member Hiller pointed out a mistake on the application form, which has the score sheet on the back, needs to be updated with the total dollars available. Mr. Martin noted that correction to be made.

Committee member Hiller suggested that, on the application, in Section 2 of Page 2, that there is some explanation about the difference between emergency aid and preventative counseling, and she found it interesting, from the conversation earlier. There used to be a separation of emergency aid and preventive counseling and have a set total for each separate category. The decision to get rid of that happened some years ago, and she was not sure if it was still necessary to keep it. Mr. Martin felt it was a vestige of the old application and noted they would remove it from the application.

Chairwoman Ortiz inquired if there was any language in the RFP that makes clear it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure the correct contact information is in the application and on file? Mr. Martin provided two responses. In the grant workshop, when the RFP is introduced, UWKV encourages every agency to go into EcImpact and update their contact information. And, secondly, when the applicants sign the contracts, there is an item in the contract that talks about updated contact information and they it is incumbent on the agency to make those changes, and if there is a major change in personnel, they are required to make that notification and change.

Chairwoman Ortiz inquired if there was anything within the RFP or contract that provides contact information to the applicant, should one of the UWKV staff leave or be out of the office during the application process, to ensure continuity of the process for the applicants? Mr. Martin stated there are multiple contacts from UWKV that are listed in the EcImpact, based on title and relationship to the organization. So UWKV is in communication with programs throughout the grant year. Mr. Martin included that there is also a mechanism within EcImpact that will flag the UWKV team if an individual from an application agency is no longer working with that agency so UWKV can reach out to another individual at the agency to ensure they go into the system on their end and update the information. The applicant agencies typically have multiple contacts on their EcImpact, and they are able to determine who receives those emails, and how

frequently they are received. This helps to not bombard everyone within the agency with those emails.

Calendar [video 46:12 minute mark]

Mr. Martin noted there were no major changes to the 2024 Calendar. The proposed changes are based on the change in the calendar year.

Chairwoman Ortiz read information that she received from the City Council Assistant, Liz Toyne, during the meeting that referenced the grandfathering of the two agencies. These were approved by the SSG Committee on November 8, 2017. Chairwoman Ortiz stated she would like to give this current process in place at least one more year, and to hold a discussion on it next year.

Megan Skaggs, Executive Director of the Shawnee County Medical Society Health Access program provided information about the program. Funding received through the SSG funds the prescription program for uninsured, low-income residents of Shawnee County. To qualify for the program, clients must be under the 150% federal poverty guidelines, they must be uninsured and not eligible for Medicaid or Medicare services. The medical services are donated from the partner physicians. The program is funded operationally by fundraisers and other grants. Many of the physicians donate themselves to the program. Money that is received by the City of Topeka is solely dedicated to the prescription funding. Ms. Skaggs stated that prior to the maximum threshold being set for other agencies at \$25K, the Medical Society had been receiving up to \$100K from the City. The program would likely not be able to continue without the ability for them to request a maximum amount of \$50K.

Sandra Knox with Valeo spoke on behalf of the Medical Society, as she oversees the LINK program, which is a partnership between Valeo and Health Access. In addition to prescriptions, the program also helps with the underinsured that are suffering from mental illness.

Kathleen Link, Executive Director of Positive Connections provided information about their programs. About 90% of the SSG funds that are received covers salary for case managers. Positive Connections currently has three case managers for the 236 HIV positive clients on the caseload. That equals out to about 80 clients per case manager. Industry standard is about half of that per case manager. Ms. Link stated that reductions in funding from the SSG, would mean layoffs would happen and that would lead to putting the HIV community in Topeka and Shawnee County at risk. The case managers do everything from keeping clients enrolled in medical

services, to medications, doctor's visits, and more and provide it for free. Case managers also help with housing. She noted that a lot of the clients are enrolled in the Shelter Plus Care program and other housing services through the City's Housing Services programs. Keeping the HIV infection from spreading is the main thing. Keeping the clients undetectable by ensuring they are going to their doctors' visits and taking their medications properly, helps keep the clients undetectable, which also means untransmittable. The goal is to have no new infections. For 2023, there are 10 new diagnosed infections, which is the highest it has ever been.

Committee member Hiller suggested having additional conversation at the next meeting as to whether the Committee would want to consider raising the cap from \$25K to \$27K.

Chairwoman Ortiz inquired what Mr. Martin's thoughts were toward raising the maximum request amount to \$27K. Mr. Martin stated that, with the additional \$57K for the SSG funds, was about a 15% increase to the maximum grant amount, which would take it to \$28,750. He stated if the Committee would want to raise the cap to \$27K or \$28K, it would be reasonable and would not be disproportionate to the amount that would be seen with inflation.

MOTION: Chairwoman Ortiz made a motion to raise the maximum request amount from \$25K to \$27K. Committee member Hiller seconded. Motion approved 2-0-0. Committee member Kell was not present during the vote.

Division Director Higgins began to read through the contract, however it was discovered that the amount of money paid to UWKV had been increased from the copy that Division Director Higgins had on screen. Staff will locate the current contract and present it to the Committee at the next meeting.

## **5) Adjourn**

Chair adjourned the meeting at 10:18am

Meeting video can be viewed at:

<https://youtu.be/yOSUPNCyMGY?si=0eRlSkRkC3nQpw55>