



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

SOCIAL SERVICE GRANTS COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL
City Hall, 215 SE 7th Street, Suite 255
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Date: April 1, 2024

Time: 2:00pm

Location: 1st Floor Conference Room; Cyrus K. Holliday Bldg 620 SE Madison
virtual attendance option also available

Committee members present: Councilmembers Sylvia Ortiz, Brett Kell, Neil Dobler

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

Committee member Dobler called the meeting to order at 2:00pm. Committee members introduced themselves.

2) Election of 2024 Committee Chair

Committee member Ortiz nominated Committee member Dobler to serve as the Chair for 2024. Committee member Dobler accepted the nomination. Committee member Kell seconded. Motion approved 3-0-0.

3) Training for SSG Committee Members on Grant Process

Brett Martin, with United Way of Kaw Valley, provided a high-level overview of the City of Topeka's Social Service Grants (SSG) process. Mr. Martin shared the final version of the Request for Proposals (RFP) that will be made available for agencies with programs that meet the various requirements, to apply to receive Social Service Grants funding.

The SSG dollars are a combination of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, which are Federal dollars, as well as general fund dollars from the City of Topeka. Mr. Martin stated the RFP would be released on April 15, 2024. A workshop is hosted to provide support on process improvement. That workshop came from a request from the SSG committee two grant cycles ago. It allows applicants a little bit of time to review the RFP before attending the workshop. The applications are due May 27, 2024.

For the 2025 grant cycle, there will be a total of \$492,000 available to be awarded. The two areas of investment for the grants are emergency aid and preventative

services. There is language within the RFP that provide specific details for the applicants to ensure that they submit an application that is in line with the eligible activities outlined. Initial scoring will occur the first week of June, with recommendations being reviewed and approved by the SSG committee near the end of July, and then moving to the Governing Body for approval in August.

Proposals will be submitted through EcImpact, which is the online grant management portal. It is used by United Way for their various grants, but has also been used by the City of Topeka for a number of years, even prior to working with United Way.

The technical assistance application workshop will be held April 29th at 10:00am and folks can RSVP with the United Way staff to receive the Zoom link. That meeting is also recorded and is archived under a “Resources” tab in EcImpact so that anyone unable to attend the meeting can refer to it at a later time and gather the information that they need.

The funding priorities have not changed in a number of years. There are also set minimum and maximum grant request thresholds, that have been set by the Committee and Governing Body.

The next page in the RFP provides the scoring sheet that has been used over the past few years and is reviewed by the committee to make process improvements, based on feedback from applicants, as well as reflecting changes to best practices in grant making. Mr. Martin added that adding the scoring sheet to the RFP has been a positive improvement, as it allows the applicant to see in writing the various things they will be scored on. It also shows how the grant reviewers will weight various responses to questions. This totals 100 points.

With regard to the review process, United Way recruits reviewers who must meet certain criteria, based on the recommendations of the SSG Committee. Each of the reviewers score the applications individually. They are then brought together and, through a facilitated process, they come to agree on a single score for each of the sections for each application. This process of meeting with the reviewers usually runs between five (5) and eight (8) hours. After the reviewers agree on scores for each of the sections, the scores are tabulated. The scores are figured by multiplying the score with the funding request of the applicant. Then the dollars begin to be subtracted from the \$492,000 until they have been allocated. Typically, the program at the bottom of the list does not get the percentage of their request but rather they receive the remainder of the funding.

Those recommendations are brought before the SSG Committee. The applicants are notified of the preliminary scores and are given an opportunity to appeal. They must sign-up for the appeal, but they are allowed to appeal in person or via Zoom. The Committee hears those appeals and either decides to change the scores or keep them as presented. If there are any changes to figures, a final set of scores are presented to the Committee at a subsequent meeting for approval. Once the Committee has approved the scoring and award recommendations, it is moved before the Governing Body for final approval, and is recommended as part of the larger budget process.

Committee member Ortiz stated that the Committee had been successful in increasing the total budget allocation for this process. She thought that everything in the RFP looked correct and was easy to understand. She thanked him for United Way providing a way to provide technical support to the applicants as they move through the grant process.

Committee member Kell commented similar sentiments to Committee member Ortiz. He thanked United Way for doing a great job with getting this cycle set up again.

Chairman Dobler inquired about the process for reviewing outcomes for prior years. He referenced the 20 points that are assigned to that section and inquired about how confident Mr. Martin felt the metrics were for allowing the reviewers to analyze how well a program did with the money from the previous year? Mr. Martin answered that the score for the previous year's outcomes are based on the reports that are submitted by those grantees in EcImpact. Mr. Martin added that there are not standardized outcomes across the board, and that the conversation has been had internally with staff. The RFP is so broad that it makes it difficult to standardize the outcomes because there are programs providing services across a wide breadth of social service activities, so as a result, it would be difficult to come up with standardized indicators. This would not be impossible, however. The applicants are able to choose their own outcomes, and those are the outcomes that they submit reports about. They are required to report on those, and then those are the outcomes that are used to determine the program's success as part of the 20% scoring section. Mr. Martin added that, over the years, they have worked with partners to ensure they develop good/strong outcomes for their programs. They work together on data integrity, and data collection systems to ensure they are capturing that data in an effective way. Mr. Martin concluded that he feels United Way is fairly confident that they have provided the applicants

with what they need to be successful to self-report those outcomes on their programs.

Chairman Dobler commented on what he has observed to be a great process and partnership between the City, United Way and with the applicants. Housing Services Division Director Carrie Higgins expressed a similar sentiment and agreed that a great partnership with United Way has been developed and has been running smoothly for a few years, and she is thankful to have them.

4) Review Timeline; Set Future Meetings

Chairman Dobler reviewed the timeline. The Committee will need to schedule a meeting the week of June 24th. United Way will have scoring recommendations ready to send to the Committee by June 21st. Mr. Martin stated that the Committee would meet again the week of July 8th to hear any appeals that come forward. The appeal process will be closed after that time. This allows United Way to make any final changes based on direction of the Committee, and to submit them back to the Committee for final action prior to then moving forward to the Governing Body.

5) Other Items

No additional items.

6) Adjourn

Chairman Dobler adjourned the meeting at 2:20pm.

Meeting video can be viewed at:

<https://youtu.be/AfJQJbfh9pw?si=fIcWo5neO2dmp1HT>