



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

SOCIAL SERVICE GRANTS COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL
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Date: May 20, 2020

Time: 10:30 a.m.

Location: City Council Chambers; 214 E. 8th Street

Committee members present: Councilmembers Karen Hiller (Chair), Christina Valdivia-Alcalá, Michael Padilla

City staff present: Corrie Wright (DNR), Rachele Vega-Retana (DNR), City Manager Brent Trout

1) Call to Order

Chairwoman Hiller called the meeting to order at 10:00am, and described the goal of this meeting.

2) Staff Introduction of third-party outsourced vendor, United Way

Corrie Wright, Division Director of Housing Services, introduced Jessica Lehnherr (President & CEO) and Brett Martin (Vice President of Community Impact) with United Way.

Committee members, United Way Staff, and social service agency attendees introduced themselves.

Mr. Martin provided an update on the current status of the grant process:

- Grant workshop held May 6th via Zoom. Questions received were added into a FAQ document, which was posted to the EImpact system. A slide deck from the meeting was also included.
- Joyce Katzer, Director of IT, and Juliette McDiffett, Director of Community Impact, have been receiving emails and providing technical assistance for applicants who have begun the process.
- As of 9:00am on May 20th, there are 17 agencies who have entered the system and are in the process of the application, and there are 19 programs. Mr. Martin noted some agencies will be applying for both emergency services and preventive side.

Mr. Martin continued with the larger timeline:

- RFP was released on May 1st at noon. Applications are due May 29th, 2020 at 5:00pm. Once received, Juliette will review those applications.
- Proposals that do not meet the minimum standards will be notified by June 3rd, 2020.
- United Way will then work with the reviewers per guidelines set by SSG Committee, and the score sheet.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired if United Way had any questions with regard to intent or clarifications from what was delivered to them. Mr. Martin noted a number of meetings took place between City staff and United Way staff prior to submitting a final proposal to ensure language and expectations of the relationship were clear. As the process moves forward, communications will continue.

Mr. Martin spoke about quarterly reports and payments, and noted that United Way will distribute the contracts to agencies who are awarded grants, but that the payments will be distributed by the City of Topeka.

Ms. Wright commented that the intention of the meeting was to reassure the Committee that the City staff and United Way were working together to follow the guidance that had been provided by the Committee.

3) Questions/Answers with the Committee

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá thanked United Way for their work and expressed her perspective for the need of professional customer service.

Committee member Padilla contributed to the comments made by Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá and stressed the need for teamwork and timely communications between all parties; he would like to see the Committee receive any pertinent information as early as possible to avoid any surprises.

Mr. Martin noted that with regard to professional customer service, United Way was in full agreement that this was a high priority. In past grant administration processes, he and Ms. Lehnherr met with agencies in person with both contract meetings and in the case of denials. This is something to continue. Mr. Martin noted that with regard to communication, United Way preferred to provide regular and open communications.

Ms. Lehnherr thanked the Committee and echoed sentiments stated by Mr. Martin.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired if any issues had presented themselves. Mr. Martin noted that there had been some issues with glitches when agencies enter the United Way portal of the EcImpact rather than on the City of Topeka portal page. The United Way IT staff have been able to work through those issues and so far they have been caught early. United Way staff have updated their FAQ page to provide instructions for other applicants who may be experiencing the same issues, and have worked directly with applicants to solve the issue. Those areas are frequently checked.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá voiced a concern regarding some agencies with staff who have limited grant administration knowledge and experience receiving the help on EcImpact to ensure their applications are submitted on time. Mr. Martin noted that United Way staff check the portal applications daily. He felt that the only possible glitch that would cause an application to be submitted late would be if the agency was logging into the system for the first time and trying to submit an application at 4:00pm on the day of the deadline. He felt that would be a very slim chance of happening. Staff is responding to emails within 24 hours and so far has been a smooth process.

Kathy Votaw had an inquiry about loading financial pieces. Mr. Martin provided contact resources for her to reach out to.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about the status of a survey. Ms. Wright stated Staff would appreciate guidance from the Committee about the content of the survey. Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá would like to discuss the suggestions that were presented to the Committee regarding the survey during the meeting would be helpful. Chairwoman Hiller suggested including questions about: tech, customer service, scoring, and feedback on the application process.

4) Set Next Meeting; Adjourn

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about the steps for the next meeting dates, noting two would need to occur in July once the scores have been received and to hear the appeals. Those would occur July 8th and 15th.

Ms. Wright suggested a meeting in mid-June, prior to results being announced, to discuss the survey responses.

Chairwoman Hiller stated the survey could be completed prior to the results being announced, or afterward which would include final comments about the full process. The Committee weighed having one or two surveys.

Mr. Martin noted a survey could be built into the EImpact program which would allow for agencies to provide feedback while filling out their applications. Committee members agreed that this suggestion would work well.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired if a final price was for the outsourcing process. Chairwoman Hiller did not recall receiving that information either and asked for City staff to provide that to the Committee.

Final comments were made, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:11am.

Meeting video can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/7ZLNsj8BinY>