

City of Alexandria, Virginia

# Alexandria Fund For Human Services Staff Response to Review Committee Report Recommendations

Presented to City Council

January 28, 2014



# Purpose



- The Alexandria Fund for Human Services (AFHS) Review Committee report, with recommendations for strengthening the AFHS & better aligning it with City's strategic plan, was submitted to City Council on December 10, 2013.
- The City Manager tasked staff with developing a response to implementing the report recommendations.

# Staff Response



Recommendation #1: Promote stronger alignment between AFHS awards & the City of Alexandria's Strategic Plan.

Staff Response: *Staff concurs with the need to align AFHS priorities with established City priorities outlined in the City Council Strategic Plan, City Manager's Performance Plan & other City Council approved planning documents such as:*

- Aging Master Plan,*
- Housing Master Plan &*
- Children and Youth Master Plan*

# Staff Response



Recommendation #2: Consolidate three AFHS funds into a single fund with established priorities to focus on children, youth & community needs.

Staff Response: *Staff concurs with the consolidation of funds.*

- *Grants will be awarded to groups best able to demonstrate that their program goals align with one or more of the long term outcomes in documents cited in responses to Recommendation #1.*
- *Current priorities will be eliminated & new priorities developed as stated in Recommendation #1.*

# Staff Response



Recommendation #3: Establish a narrow procurement process that extends contracts to selected awardees meeting specific criteria.

Staff Response: *Staff does not support this recommendation & could not determine a benefit for transitioning from grants to contracts.*

- *Both contracts & grants may be awarded in multi-years.*
- *AFHS provides supplemental funding used to leverage additional dollars to support the cost of providing services.*
- *Staff has past experience with moving from granting to contracting for a service; it resulted in the doubling of cost (hypothermia shelter).*
- *City costs under the contracting method may increase as increases are based on the consumer price index.*
- *Contracting will not improve outcomes & is more staff intensive & may result in reduced service levels due to costs.*

# Staff Response to Report Recommendations



Recommendation #4: Provide City Council with lessons learned from each grant cycle & recommendations for the next cycle with the report on grant awards.

Staff Response: *Staff concurs with the recommendation.*

- *Staff recommends that any information gleaned from the review process be included in the docket memorandum to City Council conveying grant decisions.*

# Staff Response to Report Recommendations



Recommendation #5: Create a mechanism for promoting innovative solutions to existing challenges through solicitation of joint applications and new solutions.

## Staff Response:

- *Extra points will be awarded to proposals which:*
  - *offer innovative solutions to existing challenges, backed by research or have been successful elsewhere.*
  - *are joint applications, combining similar services.*
  - *have a dollar-for-dollar match.*
- *Staff does not recommend a carve-out or set-aside of funds.*

# Staff Response to Report Recommendations



Committee Recommendation #6: Establish a multi-year (2- to 5-year) cycle for grant awards.

## Staff Response:

- *Staff concurs with the recommendation to provide multi-year grants and recommends moving to a three-year cycle. Funding in the subsequent years would be based on successful completion of program outcomes in the previous year and continued City Council funding.*
- *Multi-year funding would enhance service delivery by ensuring program continuity over a longer period of time.*

# Staff Response to Report Recommendations



Recommendation #7: Strengthen the review process to promote & reward innovative solutions.

- a. Standardize AFHS review panel formation & composition.
- b. Strengthen & develop additional guidelines for grant reviewers for ranking grants & allocating resources.
- c. Provide more time (a minimum of 2 weeks) for the grant review panel to review grants under consideration & require panel rankings prior to meeting.
- d. Ratings/scoring of applications should, to some extent, be made public to encourage transparency & collaboration.
- e. Organizations already receiving city contracts for services should be identified as such during review process to prevent supplementing existing contracts.

# Staff Response to Report Recommendations



Staff Response: *Staff concurs with these recommendations & will work to implement them, beginning with announcement of the FY 2016 grant cycle.*

- *Staff proposes issuing a request for grant proposals in the fall of the fiscal year prior to the beginning of subsequent grant year.*

# Staff Response to Report Recommendations



Recommendation # 8: Improve oversight, monitoring & measuring of grant performances to ensure grants are achieving desired objectives.

- a. AFHS should strengthen mechanisms that measure or capture impact of grant awards as well as conduct rigorous oversight of awards to ensure that stated objectives & goals are being met.
- b. Allocate new resources for dedicated staff to manage grants (and/or contracts).
- c. Conduct visits to awardees (above a threshold) as a standard part of annual review; enlist & train volunteers from boards & commissions

# Staff Response to Report Recommendations



Staff Response: *Staff largely concurs with this recommendation.*

- *Agencies seeking grant funding will be required to articulate how their proposals align with City's grant priorities.*
- *Training on outcome measurement will be provided to award recipients to enhance program reporting.*
- *Online grant reporting will be implemented.*
- *Funded programs will be invited to make presentations to appropriate human & social service related boards & commissions.*
- *Fiscal & programmatic monitoring & site visits will be conducted by staff over the multi-year grant period.*
- *Existing staff can implement proposed enhancements & does not recommend reducing the fund for a dedicated position.*

# Staff Response to Report Recommendations



Recommendation #9: Establish a funding “floor” or level below which applications will not be considered.

Staff Response: *Staff agrees with this recommendation & recommends minimum of \$25,000.*

# Staff Response to Report Recommendations



Recommendation #10: Introduce additional technological changes to the online application process to improve its effectiveness (login/PIN, ability to save and review, Excel budget, online evaluation process, etc.).

Staff Response: *Staff concurs with this recommendation & has begun discussions with City IT & Communications staff to further enhance the online application initiated for the FY 2014 grant cycle.*

- *Staff will also develop an online reporting process, consistent with the application process.*

# Implementation Timetable



Staff will begin immediate implementation of these enhancements, with full implementation, beginning with the issuance of the FY 16 request for grant proposals.