



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** FEBRUARY 20, 2024

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

**THROUGH:** JAMES F. PARAJON, CITY MANAGER /s/

**FROM:** KATE GARVEY, DIRECTOR,  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AND HUMAN SERVICES

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Consideration of a Grant Application to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for the Strategic Prevention Framework-Partnerships for Success for Communities, Local Governments, Universities, Colleges, and Tribes/Tribal Organizations.

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of a grant application, and acceptance of funds if awarded, to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for the Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria (SAPCA), housed within Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS), to expand and strengthen community capacity to implement evidence-based substance use prevention and mental health promotion programs. DCHS is the fiscal agent for this grant.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** That City Council:

1. Authorize the application and potential acceptance of the grant award for funding to DCHS in the amount of \$1,875,000 for the duration of five years with no match required to implement evidence-based substance use prevention and mental health promotion programming in the City of Alexandria.
2. Approve the following positions supported by grant revenues if the competitive request is successful: one Grant Coordinator (1 FTE) to oversee grant activities, one Training and Prevention Specialist (1 FTE) to provide implementation support for grant activities, one Human Services Specialist II (1 FTE) to deliver evidence-based prevention education curricula; and one part-time Data Analyst (0.5 FTE) to support evaluation of grant activities; and
3. Authorize the City Manager to execute all necessary documents that may be required.

**BACKGROUND:** The funding notice for this grant opportunity was issued by SAMHSA on November 16, 2023. SAPCA learned of this opportunity on November 27, 2023. The grant funding supports projects that reduce the onset and progression of youth substance misuse and its related problems by expanding and strengthening community capacity to develop and deliver community-based substance misuse prevention and mental health promotion services. The application was due February 21, 2024. DCHS has not received this funding before. This grant enables SAPCA to continue and enhance related work.

**DISCUSSION:** SAPCA submitted the grant application requesting the maximum five-year award amount of \$1,875,000. The proposal included prevention strategies based on current youth substance misuse prevention and mental health promotion research.

Implementing substance use prevention strategies, with a focus on mental health promotion, through a primary prevention approach can help reduce the onset of youth substance use and its lasting, harmful effects; prevent the onset of diagnosable mental health disorders; promote protective factors and healthy behaviors that support children, youth, and families to be physically safe and healthy, academically successful, and career ready; and reduce risk factors that can lead to negative outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Primary prevention is a set of approaches that can be employed before the onset of youth substance use to prevent adverse health, legal and social consequences to children, youth, and families. Primary prevention includes building an environment that encourages well-being and healthy choices. Strategies included in the grant to prevent youth substance use and promote mental health include:

- *Increasing protective factors and reducing risk factors associated with substance use among Alexandria youth ages 12-18 through the delivery of community-based substance use prevention and mental health promotion services. This will include building community capacity to connect youth with supports and services through the delivery of the following trainings to parents, caregivers, school and City staff and youth-serving providers:*
  - *Everyone's An Asset Builder, a training that teaches parents and caring adults about the essential building blocks for positive youth development and explores concrete ways adults can support young people's success and well-being.*
  - *Youth Mental Health First Aid, a training that provides certification on skills to teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, peers, neighbors, health and human services workers and other caring residents how to help an adolescent (age 12-18) who is experiencing a mental health or addiction challenge or is in crisis.*
  - *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), a training that helps participants to develop a common language around ACEs, trauma, and resilience in our community, thus shifting attitudes about ways to build more resilient and healthy communities.*
  - *Question Persuade Refer, a training that demonstrates how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to seek support.*
- *Promoting social norms that protect against youth substance use, including highlighting local data that shows most youth in Alexandria choose to be substance-free, by collaborating with the Alexandria City High School TV and Media Production program to create a series of youth-led prevention campaigns.*
- *Partnering with Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) to expand the delivery of Life Skills Training, a classroom-based universal prevention program designed to prevent adolescent tobacco, alcohol, marijuana use, and violence.*
- *Partnering with ACPS to deliver the Rise Above curriculum to students at the Juvenile Detention Center, Sheltercare, Chance for Change, the International Academy at Alexandria City High School, and Francis C. Hammond Middle School. Rise Above is a trauma-informed, social-emotional learning (SEL) and evidence-based substance use prevention program that helps children and teens develop healthy coping skills to understand and manage their thoughts and feelings; enhance life skills and adaptive self-control; promote healthy relationships, effective communication skills, and mutual respect; and learn the skills and values needed to cultivate a drug-free life.*
- *Collaborating with Virginia Commonwealth University to translate Rise Above into Spanish to increase the program's reach.*
- *Reducing youth access to substances through media campaigns and the distribution of lock boxes to families to provide methods for safe storage and information about the importance of preventing youth access to substances.*
- *Coordinating with school and community partners to distribute resources to parents to provide tips for fostering open parent-child communication and discussing difficult topics.*
- *Providing opportunities to empower and support underserved youth through alternative activities and leadership opportunities for middle and high school students.*

The overall program goal is to provide additional adolescent development and life skills to develop strong self-esteem; healthy values and attitudes about themselves and others; critical decision-making and goal-setting skills; stress management strategies; and connection to community resources -- resulting in the ability to reduce risky behaviors and impulsive decision-making.

Consistent with one of the grant conditions, SAPCA will continue existing community-based partnerships to provide evidence-based prevention programs. The partners are:

- *Alexandria City Public Schools*
- *Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Activities*

- *Alexandria Police Department*
- *Alexandria Sheriff's Office*

This grant application is consistent with the City Council Strategic Plan (Support Youth and Families) and the Alexandria Children and Youth Community Plan 2025 (Goals One, Two, and Three) and in alignment with advancing Youth Safety and Resiliency efforts.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The budget for this grant is \$1,875,000. The grant period is September 30, 2024, to September 29, 2029, with no required matching funds. The City is responsible for the normal administrative costs associated with this grant. These costs include financial and reporting oversight provided by DCHS, the administering agency. Existing administrative staff will provide these functions.

Grant funding will be used for personnel, program facilitation by partner organizations, grant-required training, and supplies/materials. The individuals who fill these grant-funded positions will be notified that the positions may terminate if grant funds become unavailable in the future.

**ATTACHMENTS:** None.

**STAFF:**

Kendel Taylor, Interim Deputy City Manager  
Federico Gutierrez, Deputy Director, Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS)  
Barbara Paulson, Director, Center for Children and Families, DCHS  
Raphael Obenwa, Fiscal Officer III, DCHS  
Nancy Sarpong, Fiscal Officer II, DCHS  
Noraine Buttar, Division Chief, Youth Development Team, DCHS  
Emma Beall, Management Analyst III, DCHS