



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 22, 2014

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of the Staff Response to the Report Recommendations of the Alexandria Fund For Human Services Review Committee.

ISSUE: Receipt of the staff response to the Alexandria Fund for Human Services (AFHS) Review Committee Report recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council receive the staff response to AFHS Review Committee Report recommendations, and direct City Manager to begin implementation of the recommendations as outlined.

BACKGROUND: On December 10, 2013, the City Council received the Report of the Alexandria Fund for Human Services (AFHS) Review Committee, which was charged with reviewing the AFHS to ensure alignment with the City's Strategic Plan and to review, reexamine, and explore new directions, concepts and mechanisms for the AFHS. In the docket memorandum, transmitting the report, the City Manager indicated that staff would develop a response regarding the feasibility and practicality of implementing the report recommendations for consideration at the City Council meeting on January 28, 2014.

DISCUSSION: The report contained ten major recommendations. The following is a summary of the AFHS Review Committee Report recommendations with staff responses.

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

Staff Response:

- *Staff concurs that the AFHS awards need to be aligned with established City priorities as outlined in the City Council Strategic Plan.*

- *Priorities will be taken from the City Manager's Performance Plan, and other City Council approved planning documents outlining City priorities, such as the Aging Master Plan, Housing Master Plan and the forthcoming Children and Youth Master Plan, and the community indicators and measures.*
- *Staff will develop grant priorities based on the above cited documents.*

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

Staff Response:

- *Staff concurs with consolidation of the funds.*
- *Grants will be awarded to organizations that are best able to demonstrate that the goals of their program are closely aligned to one or more of the long term outcomes in the documents cited in the responses to Recommendation #1.*
- *Current priorities will be eliminated and new priorities will be developed as outlined in Recommendation #1.*

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

Staff Response:

- *Staff does not support this recommendation and could not determine an inherent benefit for transitioning from grants to contracts.*
- *While contracting may result in multi-year awards, the same can be accomplished through provision of multiple year grants which the staff does support.*
- *AFHS expands the City's human services network by providing supplemental funding used to leverage additional dollars that support the cost of the services by grant recipients.*
- *DCHS experience with moving from providing a grant to contracting for the hypothermia shelter resulted in the doubling of the cost of the service for the same level of service.*
- *City costs under the contracting method may increase in subsequent years because City contracts authorize the Purchasing Agent to increase contract costs based on the consumer price index.*
- *Contracting will not improve outcomes but is more staff intensive and may reduce service levels due to costs.*

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

Staff Response:

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

Committee 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 that are backed by research or have been successful elsewhere.*
- *Extra points will be awarded to joint applications, particularly those that combine similar services.*
- *Extra points will be awarded to programs that have a dollar-for-dollar match.*
- *Staff does not recommend a carve-out or set-aside of funds.*

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 does not recommend staggered funding.*

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

- 7a. Standardize AFHS review panel formation and composition.
- 7b. Strengthen and develop additional guidelines for grant reviewers for ranking grants and allocating resources.
- 7c. Provide more time (a minimum of two weeks) for grant review panel to review the grants under consideration and require panel rankings prior to meeting.
- 7d. Ratings/scoring of applications should, to some extent, be made public to encourage transparency and collaboration.
- 7e. Organizations already receiving city contracts for services should be identified as such during the review process to prevent supplementing existing contract.

Staff Response:

- *Staff concurs with these recommendations and will work to implement them, beginning with the announcement of the next grant cycle, FY 2016.*
- *Staff proposes issuing the request for grant proposals in the fall of the fiscal year prior to beginning of the subsequent grant year.*

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

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

Staff Response:

- *Staff largely concurs with this recommendation.*
- *Agencies seeking AFHS grant funding will be required to clearly 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 and social service related boards and commissions.*
- *Fiscal and programmatic monitoring and site visits will be conducted by DCHS staff over the multi-year grant period.*
- *Staff believes that existing staff can implement the proposed enhancements and does not recommend reducing the fund to cover the cost of a dedicated position.*

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

Staff Response:

- *Staff agrees with this recommendation and recommends that the minimum amount awarded be \$25,000.*

Committee 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 and has begun discussions with City IT and Communications staff to further enhance the online application initiated for the FY 2014 grant cycle.*
- *In tandem with this recommendation, staff will develop an online reporting process, consistent with the application process.*

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

FISCAL IMPACT: None.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Report of the Alexandria Fund for Human Services Review Committee

STAFF:

Debra R. Collins, Deputy City Manager and Interim Director, Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS)

Suzanne T. Chis, Deputy Executive Director, DCHS

Deborah Warren, Director, Center for Children and Families, DCHS

Ronald Frazier, Director, Office of Youth Services, DCHS

Carol M. Farrell, Chief, Early Childhood Division, DCHS

Debbie Brown Anderson, Contracts and Grants Coordinator, DCHS