



Richland County Council
Community Impacts Grants Committee
MINUTES
November 16, 2023 – 3:00 PM
Council Chambers
2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29204

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Jesica Mackey, Chair, Jason Branham (via Zoom), Paul Livingston, Gretchen Barron (via Zoom), and Cheryl English

OTHERS PRESENT: Chakisse Newton, Yvonne McBride, Derrek Pugh, Chelsea Bennett, Anette Kirylo, Kyle Holsclaw, Lori Thomas, Stacey Hamm, Leonardo Brown, Abhijit Deshpande, Aric Jensen, Tamar Black, Angela Weathersby, Ashiya Myers, Jennifer Wladischkin, Michelle Onley, Elizabeth McLean, and Wayne Thornley

1. **CALL TO ORDER** - Chairwoman Jesica Mackey called the meeting to order at approximately 3:00 PM.
2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
 - a. September 12, 2023 – Mr. Livingston moved to approve the minutes as distributed, seconded by Ms. English.
In Favor: Branham, Livingston, Mackey, and English
Not Present: Barron
The vote in favor was unanimous.
3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA** – Ms. English moved to adopt the agenda as published, seconded by Mr. Livingston.
In Favor: Branham, Livingston, Barron, Mackey, and English
The vote in favor was unanimous.
4. **ITEM FOR DISCUSSION/ACTION**
 - a. FY2024-2025 Community Impact Grants Application – Ms. Mackey noted we completed the first Community Impact Grant application process and have made those awards. The committee is back to discuss any edits to the application and to ensure the application is ready to be released at the scheduled time.
Mr. Livingston stated on p. 8 it says religious organizations can use public funds, but not for religious purposes. He inquired if we need to clarify what a religious purpose is.
Assistant County Administrator Lori Thomas indicated there is a State statute that states government money should not be used for religious purposes. It must be open to all individuals, not just those in a religious setting. Typically, you are looking for the group the project supports and how the project will be administered.
Ms. Mackey inquired if we need to reference the State statute or is it understood.
Mr. Livingston indicated he was looking for something that details what is and is not acceptable. He inquired if the 60% for the Community Partners would remain the same.
Ms. Thomas stated it is up to the committee if they would like to change the percentages.
Ms. Mackey responded the request did not exceed 60%. She indicated we may want to look at the criteria for how you become a community partner. For example, if you are on the list, are you on the list every year? Is there consideration that after three years, you roll off? She acknowledged that she received questions

from other non-profits wanting to know what constitutes the list and whether they will ever have a chance to be on the partner's list.

Ms. Barron expressed that she would like to see a two or three-time limit for organizations to be on the Community Partners' list. This will allow the organization to receive funds and find other ways to sustain its programming. She does recognize that some of these are community staples, but some up-and-coming community groups could also be placed on the list.

Mr. Branham asserted Council would want to reserve the right to modify the list of Community Partners. His understanding is that the current Council is not allowed to bind future iterations of Council regarding budgetary expenditures. He suggested including a statement affirming that Council is not waiving its rights to use its discretion in the grants despite the fact there will be scoring in the process.

Ms. McBride suggested establishing criteria for how we select the Community Partners. She noted she would send her suggestions to the staff. She indicated many residents in her district would not know how to access the programs we are funding. In the future, we could ensure the organizations are collaborating Countywide. For example, she tried to help some constituents with a particular program and has even gone through the Ombudsman's Office, but she has gotten the runaround.

Ms. English suggested the following criteria: the number served, focus on unincorporated Richland County, and definitive outlines for the grantees. For example, how the organizations will work and provide referrals in collaboration with us.

Ms. McBride noted under "Program Requirements," it says, "Organizations receiving Accommodations Tax or Hospitality Tax funds will not be considered for funding unless waived by a majority vote of Council." The Community Impact Grants are usually service-oriented, and the Accommodations Tax and Hospitality Tax funds are not service-oriented. She believes we should include all grants received if we use that as a basis. If the organization receives any grant, it would need to go before Council. We greatly need non-profits to provide services to the communities, but if a small majority takes up all the funds, nothing is left for them. To be fair to all programs, we need to try to help as many programs as possible. She acknowledged that, unfortunately, some programs do not have the skills to write grants.

Ms. Newton stated it is sometimes challenging for her to understand the total funding an organization receives from the County. She suggested when the applications are presented to Council, there is a full view of their funding. To her, an organization getting a CDBG grant is not the same as receiving other funding and requiring the matter to go to Council for a vote.

Ms. Thomas expressed some organizations received Hospitality and Accommodations Tax allotments and applied for Community Impact Grants.

Ms. Newton inquired if they had applied for the same type of program.

Ms. Mackey replied it was for different programs. Staff provided a spreadsheet noting if the organization had received other funding.

Ms. McBride maintained Council did not waive the requirement for those organizations that received Hospitality and Accommodations Tax funding.

Ms. Mackey noted staff shared them with Council, but no one made a motion to provide funding even though they received Hospitality or Accommodations Tax funding. Perhaps we can clarify the language to articulate the requirement better.

Ms. McBride noted she does not believe the statement should be included in the requirements, but if an organization does receive grant funding, the information should be provided to Council.

Ms. Mackey requested someone on the committee to suggest the clarified language for the requirements.

Hypothetically, Ms. Newton stated we could strike the statement and replace it with the following: "Organizations that receive other sources of Council funding may have the amount of their award adjusted." That way, it will not say the organization cannot apply or would not be considered.

Ms. McBride inquired under the heading "The Program Will Not Fund," where it lists Medical Research/Health Related Issues, does that mean research-related fields?

Ms. Thomas replied the County has had this as an exclusion because some agencies who received these funds would not be in a position to make health-related determinations.

Ms. McBride inquired if you have a health education program (i.e., diabetes), would that be excluded?

Ms. Thomas responded she believed that would be an educated-related item.

Ms. McBride suggested changing the exclusion to "Medical Research Related Issues."

Ms. Newton stated she has some concerns regarding the application evaluation scoring. Theoretically, you can score high on something that you may not actually be able to make happen.

Ms. McBride stated she has the opposite belief. She gave staff credit for developing a good points system based on grant standards and the fact that there is importance given to the need and not the organization. Unfortunately, we gave so much to the organization in another area that the need did not weigh much. If you look at the bullet points, it helps address the concerns Ms. Newton expressed. The rubric helps to identify how many points each factor receives.

Ms. Barron noted we have to be careful with what we are doing because the same challenge is being presented with us saying here is a great grant, and they are going to do "XYZ," and not doing it could be turned around against us. We know some small non-profits are doing an excellent job but cannot properly articulate it in their application. As a part of this application process, she wants us to continue to look at how we can educate those small non-profits to have a seat at the table and get the funding they need.

Ms. English thanked staff for outlining the specific measurables in the application evaluation.

Mr. Livingston suggested including a bullet point under "Project Summary" that centers around how the organization will reach out to the residents to inform them how to access their services.

Ms. Newton stated her objective is to ensure our points accurately reflect the work people can do. She wanted to ensure we have not locked ourselves out of awarding the funds to the best candidate(s).

Ms. Thomas inquired if the committee wished to approve this as part of the budget.

Ms. Barron suggested establishing a timeline where the applicants know what is happening behind the "magic door." Once they submit their application, there is a significant amount of time before anything is stated. We cannot leave people in the dark as to where we are.

Ms. Mackey requested Ms. Barron to review the timeline on p. 8 and provide any suggestions to staff.

Ms. McBride inquired about what happens with the FY23 grants since they did not have a full year of funding.

Ms. Thomas responded they allowed the organizations to recoup funding back to July 1st.

Ms. McBride maintained that there is no geographic equity in the disbursement of funds to ensure each district receives some services. She requested the committee to consider a means of ensuring all of the districts can receive services. She does not feel the Countywide services address the community's unique needs.

Ms. Barron suggested on p. 13 (Item #5 - Which impact area will your project serve?) to remove "Affordable Housing" and replace it with "Youth and Veteran Services."

Ms. McBride stated we need to know how the Countywide programs are reaching out to all areas of the County.

Ms. English stated we can reach out to the schools, and the schools can suggest which children/residents need what services.

Ms. Mackey noted staff will take the suggestions from today's meeting and incorporate them into the application packet. At the next committee meeting, we will review the suggestions and take any action necessary. If there are any additional items, please share with Ms. Thomas or herself.

5. **ADJOURNMENT** - Mr. Livingston moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. English.

In Favor: Livingston, Barron, Mackey, and English

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:59 PM.