

**LEGAL SERVICES TRUST FUND COMMISSION
PARTNERSHIP GRANTS COMMITTEE MEETING
Meeting Summary and Action Items**

Friday, June 18, 2021, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
State Bar of California (Conference Call via Zoom)

Roll Call

Members Present

Chair Christina Vanarelli
Will Boschelli
Eric Isken
Chris Schreiber

Advisors

Judge Lisa Jaskol

Liaisons

Bonnie Hough (JC)
Melanie Snider (JC)

Staff

Christal Bundang
Erica Carroll
Elizabeth Hom

Members Absent

Kim Bartleson
Justice William Murray

OPEN SESSION

Chair Christina Vanarelli called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Roll call was taken, and quorum was established.

II. CALL FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Vanarelli invited members of the public to comment on any items on the agenda. No public comment was made.

Senior Program Analyst Christal Bundang provided an update on the state budget bill, SB 112. Christal reported that the budget was yet to be signed by the governor, but if approved, it would include a potential increase of \$50 million to Equal Access Funds in 2022. Ten percent of that increase would support infrastructure and innovation grants that would be administered by the California Access to Justice Commission; these grants would be available to IOLTA grantees and other civil legal aid organizations. This additional funding would be reduced to a \$20 million increase per year thereafter. Also, an additional \$40 million per year for the next three years would be designated for homelessness prevention.

As the budget has not yet been approved, these potential funding increases would not impact the Committee's current funding recommendations. The Committee confirmed a tentative ad hoc meeting on July 29 in case updated recommendations are needed for the 2022 grant year. Judicial Council Liaison Bonnie Hough agreed that more information will become available in coming weeks and that the influx of funding could allow the Legal Services Trust Fund Commission (LSTFC) to rethink some of the grant parameters, consider larger awards for more meaningful, possibly remote projects. Staff confirmed for the Committee that more planning, options, and recommendations will be discussed with the Committee once more details are known.

III. CONSENT

A. Approval of Meeting Summary and Action Items from May 7, 2021 Meeting

The Committee approved the May 7, 2021 meeting summary and action items by unanimous roll call vote (Isken moved, Boschelli seconded).

IV. DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS

A. Discuss and Approve 2022 Partnership Grant Funding Recommendations

Christal reported that staff reached out to all applicants after the last meeting to provide their rubric scores and tentative funding recommendations. No questions were received, but 15 organizations reported that they would require revisions to their projects, generally proportional to the reduction in proposed versus requested funding amounts. Staff's recommendation was not to update or change the prior funding recommendations made on May 7.

The Committee then had a substantive discussion regarding Riverside Legal Aid's (RLA) response to its decreased tentative funding recommendation of \$70,000, and expressed concern about the viability of the project.

The Committee decided to revisit this agenda item at the July 29 meeting for final approval at the August 13 LSTFC meeting. Following the June 18 meeting, staff will reach out to RLA and reconvene the review team to discuss any relevant updates before the July Committee meeting.

B. Review and Receive 2020 Partnership Grant Evaluation Report

Christal reported that all 38 Partnership Grant reports were received on time. While court closures were statewide during the pandemic, organizations indicated a successful transition to remote projects. Staff plans to meet with the Judicial Council about developing trainings, examples, and resources for grantees, including potentially updating the evaluation report. Committee Member Isken expressed interest in this process, and staff confirmed that he would be invited to participate in subsequent meetings with Judicial Council.

C. 2022 Partnership Grant Scoring Rubric Debrief

Christal provided an overview of the survey and feedback received from the Committee regarding the grant application review process. It appeared that the calibration process and discussions were mostly helpful, as were the staff funding recommendations. Staff received some notes about project impact and believes there is a need to strengthen the grant evaluation component. Staff may include excerpts from 2022 applications (high score examples of innovation) to provide guidance for future RFP resource materials.

The Committee discussed changes to the review guide and whether there could be more guidance to applicants on how to measure project impact. A number of members reported that clarifying definitions throughout the rubric would be helpful (e.g. what is “meets” versus “exceeds expectations”) and perhaps breaking down categories to allow for more nuance, because combining distinct criteria into a single score can be challenging. There was discussion about whether the application score totals reflected meaningful differences in proposals. Staff noted that a score of 70 appeared to be the most meaningful marker, because any scores below that point meant a proposal fell below “meets expectations” in one or more categories. This was communicated to applicants to help them understand the impact on tentative funding amounts and to inform their future proposals.

The Committee concurred that there still seem to be some subjective elements in the scoring but reaffirmed support for holistic review and felt that the calibration sessions were important in ensuring that everyone was approaching application review with the same understanding.

Staff commented that, from prior work experience at some applicant organizations, this new scoring process could and should be helpful; previously it was not always clear what the Committee wanted or prioritized from year to year, making it difficult to anticipate expectations. Moreover, many applicants are familiar with rubric-style grading from other grants. Nonetheless, staff will solicit feedback from the legal aid community about their experience with the application process this past cycle.

The Committee discussed ways to incorporate prior grant cycle evaluations into subsequent application review for returning grantees and how to balance that with new applicants. Staff also inquired about the process of staff assisting with funding recommendations and the Committee agreed that this worked well but would appreciate a reminder of funding parameters/limits and impact of scoring tiers on recommended amounts in order to allow more reflection prior to the meeting discussion in the future.

Staff inquired whether the Committee had specific questions for applicants regarding the application process and experience with the rubric for this cycle and confirmed that feedback would be solicited prior to the Committee’s next meeting in July.

V. ADJOURN

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:58 a.m.