

Greenbelt Arts Advisory Board Report 17-1
Recommendation to the Greenbelt City Council
August 22, 2016

Subject: Recommendations on Proposed Recognition and Contribution Group Program Updates

Background

At the August 2, 2016 meeting of the Arts Advisory Board members discussed the Recreation Department's proposed recommendations to the Contribution and Recognition group process. Board members praised the Recreation staff for addressing the issue of funding procedures, which has long been a concern of the AAB.

In general, Board members supported the process as proposed in the memo to the City Manager. Many recommendations are similar to the recommendations contained in AAB Report 14-3, submitted in March 2014. The Board especially appreciated the suggestion to have a dedicated budget for Contribution Groups, and a more rigorous review process that encourages "the health of community organizations, rewards, good stewardship, ensures accountability in the expenditure of public funds, and controls cost."

During the Board's August meeting, members discussed each of the four recommendations in detail. Notes and suggestions are included below.

1. AAB welcomes a three-tier, streamlined grant system. The Board has long struggled with comparing groups requesting essential operating funds with those that are doing more creative, dynamic project-based work, and welcomes the opportunity to formally distinguish between the two types of grants.

AAB recommends removing the language in the application regarding "Complementary Services." (Page 3, point 6.) While we acknowledge the desire to not have city funds go to two organizations doing the same or similar work, AAB members wondered if including this language in the guidelines would have a chilling effect on new groups, making them less likely to request. We recommend asking the Grant Review Panel to comment on the "uniqueness" of applications, especially as it pertains to overlap with existing community group or City of Greenbelt services and activities, and leaving it up to the applicant to distinguish how their project or activity serves a different audience from currently available programs.

2. The AAB has long been concerned about the issue of organizational fundraising, and supports a 1:1 match as indicated in the current and proposed guidelines. We strongly encourage Council to enforce this requirement, and think the proposal to limit subsequent year's funding based on the past year's match appropriate and enforceable. We anticipate that most current Recognition groups would be able to provide the financial summary statement, and did not think it was an unreasonable requirement.

3. The Board had no comment on the recommendation concerning lump sum budgeting.

4. AAB supports the idea of creating a Grant Review Panel to review community group applications. The Board encourages the Recreation Department to be open to regular changes and evaluation of the process, especially as it pertains to review criteria and number of panel members. We encourage the city to consider holding a wrap-up work session a few weeks after the initial panel meeting to evaluate the process and get feedback from reviewers.

The Board supports the proposed grant evaluation structure which provides clear yet open-ended questions for the Panelists' use in evaluating the applications and awarding points within specified ranges.

Board members recommend that any application that lists a city employee as a Board member also provide a letter clarifying if that employee is exempt/non-exempt and any implications that may have for funding. Since the applicant may or may not be present during the panel review process, a letter would clarify city employment for all parties, and avoid confusion regarding eligibility.

Finally, AAB members strongly advised keeping the Grant Review Panel in the range of 5-7 people in order to facilitate discussion. Advisory Boards that would not normally send a reviewer (Green ACES, for example) could be an alternate source if additional review panelists were required. Each Board should be provided with a list of Panelist responsibilities and selection criteria, especially for groups that do not traditionally participate in the Contribution Group review process.

Conclusion

The AAB welcomes the proposed changes to the City Contribution Group review process, and strongly supports city staff's existing recommendations. Broadly, the Board is most interested in creating a process that fosters creativity in city-funded groups, while allowing for new groups to participate in the process as community needs change. We are especially concerned with new or existing guidelines being applied to all groups, regardless of tenure in the community. We look forward to working with the City and Council as this new process is further evaluated and formalized during the next application cycle.