

## **MEETING MINUTES**

### **Advisory Workgroup on a Strategic Plan for County Grants December 15, 2025 – 2:00 p.m. Virtual Meeting**

#### **Workgroup Members Present:**

- Jason Fastau, Program Manager, Department of Recreation (DoR) – Designee for Adriane Clutter, Acting Director, Department of Recreation (DoR)
- Brigid Howe, Executive Director, Nonprofit Montgomery
- Kim Jones, Executive Director, Montgomery County Black Collective
- Hillery Tsumba, Chief Operating Officer, Primary Care Coalition of Montgomery County
- Rafael Murphy, Director, Office of Grants Management (OGM)

#### **Workgroup Members Absent:**

- Dr. Sultan Chowdhury, Chairman, Muslim Community Foundation
- Ron Halber, CEO, Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington
- Dourakine Rosarion, Special Assistant to the Director, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) -- Designee for Dr. James Bridgers, Director, DHHS
- Sara Watkins, Director of Institutional Advancement, Catholic Charities

#### **County Staff Present:**

- Tara Clemons Johnson, County Council
- Gregory Weissman, OGM

### **I. Meeting Overview**

The fifth meeting of the Grants Advisory Work Group was convened to revisit outstanding items from prior meetings, with particular focus on Community Grants and Legacy Grants, which had not reached full consensus in earlier discussions. The meeting was called to order by Co-Lead Clemons Johnson at 2:05 p.m., who noted that prior discussion regarding cost-sharing grants had resulted in general agreement and that the purpose of this session was to confirm those points and advance unresolved recommendations.

### **II. Cost-Sharing Grants**

The Work Group first revisited the cost-sharing grants framework. Members reaffirmed consensus that County funds should align with state-recognized projects and be limited to narrowly defined parameters to ensure appropriate focus and effective use of funds. It was reiterated that projects recommended for funding should be fully developed and implementation-ready upon

award, rather than remaining in a conceptual phase. Members also agreed that the existing pre-screening process should remain in place to assess anticipated demand and determine the appropriate number of awards in each fiscal year. No objections were raised, and the Chair indicated that these recommendations would move forward as settled guidance.

### **III. Community Grants – Purpose and Budget Context**

The discussion then transitioned to Community Grants, which had been identified in earlier meetings as requiring further clarification and refinement. The purpose of Community Grants was restated as providing flexible funding to nonprofit organizations with grassroots understanding of community needs, while noting that such grants are not intended to support the expansion of existing county-funded programs. Members reviewed the current budget context, including the overall funding level, award ranges, and category structure, as well as the disparity between available funding and total application demand. Clarification was provided regarding the underserved communities funding category, explaining that its lower allocation reflected prior competitive funding rather than reduced prioritization.

### **IV. Community Grants – Structural Considerations**

Members discussed structural changes to the Community Grants program, with broad agreement emerging around the recommendation to stagger the application and award process on an annual basis. Under this approach, a portion of the total allocation would be awarded each year while maintaining three-year grant terms, creating overlapping funding cycles and improving predictability for both applicants and administrators. The Work Group expressed support for this model as a means of improving administrative feasibility and continuity of services.

### **V. Outcomes, Accountability, and Transparency**

Considerable discussion followed regarding outcomes, accountability, and transparency. Members referenced prior Office of Legislative Oversight recommendations calling for a more outcome-driven Community Grants process. While acknowledging the difficulty of defining shared outcomes across a diverse range of funded programs, members expressed interest in strengthening public accountability through enhanced reporting. Suggestions included improved public-facing summaries of grant allocations by geography and sector, as well as concise narrative statements from grantees describing the impact of awarded funds. There was general agreement that greater transparency would improve public understanding and trust without imposing undue burden on grantees.

## **VI. Grant Administration and Payment Practices**

The Work Group also addressed ongoing confusion between grant payments and procurement invoicing. Staff from the Office of Grants Management explained the historical context in which grants were treated similarly to contracts, resulting in the continued use of invoices despite the fundamentally different nature of grant disbursements. Members supported efforts to reinforce the distinction between reimbursement for services provided to the County and grant payments intended to support public benefit activities and encouraged clearer guidance and training to support this shift.

## **VII. Eligibility and Local Prioritization**

Eligibility and prioritization criteria were also discussed, particularly the concept of prioritizing nonprofits based in Montgomery County. Members noted that while registration in Maryland is legally required, local prioritization could reasonably be defined through the presence of a business address in the County, including shared or co-working spaces, and should account for modern remote work arrangements. The rationale for such prioritization was framed as supporting local organizations and reinvesting County funds within the community, rather than excluding external entities outright.

## **VIII. Minimum Grant Thresholds and Equity Considerations**

The minimum grant award threshold generated substantial discussion. Several members expressed concern that the existing \$50,000 minimum posed a barrier for smaller and volunteer-led nonprofits. There was broad support for lowering the minimum award amount and introducing tiered funding categories that would allow organizations to compete with peers of similar size and capacity. Members emphasized that application requirements and evaluation standards should scale with award size to ensure fairness and accessibility. Staff cautioned that smaller awards often require more administrative support and that any expansion of smaller grants would need to be accompanied by appropriate staffing resources.

## **IX. Coordination and Planning Across Funding Cycles**

The conversation then turned to coordination and planning across funding cycles. Members raised concerns about potential duplication between departmental grant programs and non-departmental accounts and discussed the need for improved coordination between the County Executive, County Council, and departments when establishing funding priorities. While acknowledging structural limitations, the Work Group expressed interest in recommending mechanisms that would encourage consultation and alignment without constraining executive authority or future flexibility.

## **X. Legacy Grants**

The latter portion of the meeting focused on Legacy Grants. There was strong consensus that the Legacy Grants model should be retired and transitioned into a more competitive and transparent framework. Three potential approaches were reviewed, with the Work Group

expressing the strongest support for transitioning Legacy Grant funding into the broader Community Grants program. This approach included providing advance notice to current Legacy Grant recipients, establishing overlapping multi-year grant cycles, creating funding tiers for organizations of varying sizes, reserving funding for capacity-building, and developing clearer and more transparent funding priorities. Members emphasized the importance of a deliberate transition period to allow organizations to adjust and to maintain service continuity.

## **XI. Administrative Capacity and Oversight**

Administrative capacity and oversight were discussed extensively in relation to both Community and Legacy Grants. The Office of Grants Management noted challenges associated with serving simultaneously as a neutral administrator and a monitoring entity and emphasized the importance of preserving role clarity and program integrity. Members discussed the need for additional administrative resources, including potential investments in departmental capacity and training to ensure grants are monitored appropriately and consistently. The possibility of regranting models, in which experienced nonprofit intermediaries administer grant programs on the County's behalf, was also explored, with recognition that such models would require careful design and sector-specific expertise.

## **XII. Next Steps and Adjournment**

In closing, the Chair outlined next steps and the anticipated timeline. Draft recommendations will be compiled and circulated for review, with the goal of finalizing guidance by early February in order to inform the County Council's budget deliberations for FY27. Members expressed interest in reviewing the draft collectively prior to submission. The meeting concluded with acknowledgment of the importance of timely action, particularly with respect to notifying Legacy Grant recipients and aligning recommendations with the upcoming budget cycle.

Meeting adjourned at 4:20p.m.