

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Researchers at Portland State University's (PSU) Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services (CCF) conducted a comprehensive review of the Portland Children's Levy (PCL) grantmaking process. Our purpose was to understand strengths and challenges, and to develop recommendations for improvement. We approached our work with a strong racial equity lens, looking for opportunities to create more just practices that impact not only applicants, but also the communities they serve.

Using the 2014 PCL funding cycle as the primary foundation for our review, we collected and analyzed the following data:

- Interviews and focus groups with funded and unfunded applicants, Allocation Committee members, funders from local foundations, and PCL staff
- Text analysis/document review, including: a sample of submitted proposals; PCL policies and procedures; the Request for Investment materials, including scoring rubrics; previous Audits performed by external accountants and the City Auditor's office; and RFI/RFPs from similar levies in other cities
- Analysis of video footage of previous Allocation Committee (AC) meetings
- Literature reviews of best practices in participatory grantmaking and equitable practices in grantmaking

We organized our review design, analysis and report according to the following framework:

- *Pre-proposal Process*: The actions that occur from the release of the RFI until the proposal writing process begins
- *Proposal Process*: The writing of the proposal
- *Review Process*: The review process including the scoring by reviewers and the PCL staff recommendation process
- *Allocation Process*: The period after PCL staff has announced reviewer scores and their own recommendations. This process includes public testimony, private advocacy, and public funding decisions

Our report highlights strengths, challenges, and recommendations identified in each of the four processes. Results of our comprehensive review are described in full in this report.

The data demonstrated many strengths in the current PCL process, including:

1. Applicants appreciated the elevation of equity issues by the Children's Levy as demonstrated in their bonus points awarded for culturally specific programming and programs that serve populations east of 82nd Avenue
2. Applicants praised PCL staff for their
 - a. Deep knowledge of the funded programs; nearly everyone described feeling confident that the most informed assessment of programs came from PCL staff
 - b. Availability and willingness to communicate during and after the grantmaking process; they also appreciated the clarity in the division of labor as they always knew which staff to communicate with about their proposal
3. Applicants appreciated the efforts to include community reviewers in the process
4. The Request for Investment, including the scoring rubric is clear, thorough, and well organized

The full report includes 30 recommendations plus additional recommendations focused on a grant fund for small and emerging organizations and a two-step process. The recommendations are directly related to the challenges that were documented in the grantmaking process and can be broadly grouped in two categories: increasing transparency and strengthening equitable practices. These two constructs do, of course, overlap at times.

Although all of our recommendations deserve careful consideration, we suggest prioritizing the following:

1. Development of a fund dedicated to small grants to support small, emerging organizations, not previously funded by Portland Children's Levy. This fund would have a different minimum and maximum grant amounts than PCL uses for its typical grants.
2. Redesign Section IV of the RFI to include more explicit definition of culture; separate out the culturally specific bonus points to a newly created Section V and increase the number of bonus points from 3 to 12 as indication of the importance of culturally specific work
3. Reconsider the public testimony process, including increasing time allotted for testimony and making the testimony private (following public meeting law, noting that this is a testimony, not a deliberation or decision-making event)
4. Reconceptualize the testimony/advocacy process altogether, including allowing multiple opportunities for agencies to meet with Allocation Committee members, including in "off cycle" years
5. Offer multiple opportunities for more transparent processes:

- a. Adopt a policy or process that AC members must follow should they diverge from PCL staff recommendations
 - b. Adopt an appeals process
 - c. Use the PCL website to upload questions/answers from applicants, FAQs, etc.
6. Consider increasing PCL staffing capacity. In order for our recommendations to be implemented, we believe there needs to be more available FTE. This increase can be accomplished by two different means:
 - a. When PCL is due for reauthorization, change ballot language to raise the administrative cap above 5%
 - b. In the meantime, reconsider how PCL staff work is classified – whether as administrative or programmatic duties. Increased capacity for programmatic work attends to developing and maintaining grantee relationships, building capacity, and providing technical assistance that so many programs desire and appreciate
7. Review the efforts in achieving these recommendations in one year’s time. This process could include developing, as allowed by AC by-laws, a sub-committee to monitor progress

In this section we have summarized our methods and highlighted some of the findings that came from our institutional analysis of the Portland Children’s Levy grantmaking process. The full report provides more details about our approach and methods and findings related to strengths, challenges, and recommendations for improving the process. Finally, we want to thank everyone who contributed to our review and generously shared their time and experiences with us, including: applicants from programs that were both funded and unfunded, PCL staff, members of the Allocation Committee, and representatives from local foundations and the philanthropy community.