

Stakeholder Feedback: 2014 Funding Process

Introduction and Background

This report presents the themes generated by a request for feedback on the Portland Children's Levy (PCL) 2014 Funding Process. Input was gathered from 4 stakeholder groups: Application Reviewers (written survey), Applicants/Community (on-line survey), Allocation Committee members (interviews), and PCL staff (discussion). Themes that surfaced are organized below by components of the funding process. Since not all stakeholders were asked the same set of questions and different methods were used to gather feedback with each of the 4 groups, there were not many common themes. However, the feedback helps identify key areas of the funding process that may warrant modification.

Key Findings

Each of these themes were raised by at least two of the stakeholder groups:

- **Funding Process Timeline:** All stakeholder groups specifically stated or implied that a longer funding process is preferable. Ideally, the community input, application review, and decision making phases would all include an extended timeline.
- **Public Testimony:** Allocation Committee members and applicants were dissatisfied with the public testimony format because there was not enough time for meaningful discussion and testimony did not seem to influence funding decisions.
- **Decision Making Process:** Allocation Committee members and applicants both expressed frustration with the decision making process. From the applicant perspective, it appeared that the Allocation Committee inconsistently used the criteria, staff recommendations, and application scores. Allocation Committee members found the process challenging because it did not allow them to discuss preferences with each other, ask applicants questions, or confer with each other outside of a public forum.

Additional and more specific findings from each stakeholder group are outlined in the following pages of this report. Each stakeholder section includes an explanation of the methods used to gather the feedback. A summary of the narrative comments from Reviewers and Applicants/Community are provided in the appendices. Survey data should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of respondents, and other issues discussed in each section of the report.

Limitations and Implications for Future Stakeholder Feedback Processes

While the information collected through this stakeholder feedback process helped to identify areas for improvement, the data have significant limitations. Notably, for two stakeholder groups, Reviewers and Applicants/Community, written surveys were the only method used to gather input. Surveys do not allow for follow-up questions or clarifications of comments made. Additionally, the community survey was intended to gather feedback from multiple stakeholders but feedback provided was almost exclusively from applicants. To obtain richer feedback in the future, PCL may want to consider hiring a third party to conduct a qualitative review and to interview specific groups of stakeholders.

Next Steps

As part of PCL's commitment to continuous quality improvement, the Allocation Committee will hold a work session in early 2015 to review and discuss the feedback received from stakeholders, as well as data regarding the applications received and funded, to develop a set of recommendations for future PCL funding processes.

Reviewer Feedback

Methods and Data Limitations

PCL staff recruited 79 volunteers to review and score funding applications. Following each reviewer panel meeting, reviewers were asked to complete a written survey on their experience. They were asked to rate their level of agreement with five statements related to the review process: reviewer orientation, instructions, score form, understanding of reviewer role, and number of applications. In addition, reviewers were asked to suggest improvements to the review process. 70 of 79 reviewers completed the survey (89% completion rate). Among respondents, 87% were female. Of the respondents 40% identified as People of Color (Asian 8.6%; African American 18.6%; Native American 8.6%, Latino 5.7%; this totals more than 40% because some people reported indicate more than one race or ethnicity); and 60% identified as White.

Likert Scale Responses

Unfortunately, the data from this portion of the survey are not usable. In almost 40% of the surveys, the narrative comments either contradict the Likert scale scores, or the narrative comments include both positive and negative comments that both contradict and affirm the Likert scale scores. It is possible that some of the reviewers misunderstood which number on the scale represented a “high” score and which represented a “low” score. Therefore, the Likert scale data were not analyzed for this report.

Findings

Narrative Responses

Forty three respondents (61%) provided narrative feedback regarding PCL’s review process. Below is a summary of suggestions for improvement organized by the topic areas that were most frequently mentioned by reviewers in their narrative comments. The bulleted points feature comments made by more than one reviewer. (Appendix A contains narrative responses, organized by topic area.)

Scoring (14 comments)

- Include an evaluation of the quality of the information provided in the scoring criteria.
- Value program outcomes and viability more highly in the point distribution.

PCL Expectations of Reviewers (13 comments)

- The process involved much more time than anticipated. Reduce the number of applications assigned to each reviewer and clearly communicate the time commitment involved.
- Build in more time for reviewers to discuss the applications. Consider holding a group meeting halfway through the process to discuss the applications as a group and/or have staff contact reviewers one week before the review meeting to discuss any questions the reviewer may have.

Reviewer Orientation and Training (13 comments)

- Provide reviewers with more guidance regarding scoring, including specific instruction on when a section should be given “0” points.
- Provide an opportunity for reviewers to practice scoring applications during training.

While the survey specifically requested suggestions for improvement, reviewers made 31 positive comments regarding the review process. Reviewers expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be involved in the process, felt the instructions and training for reviewers was well-organized and clear, the opportunity to discuss the applications as a group was helpful, and it overall was an excellent process.

Applicant/Community Feedback

Methods and Data Limitations

PCL staff created a survey via Survey Monkey to gather feedback from applicants and the community at large, including from participants in last summer's public input on PCL funding priorities. The survey included 7 Likert scale questions and 1 open-ended question for additional comments.

The survey link was emailed three times each to PCL's contact database (about 1,000 people) and to all grantees. Recipients were encouraged to forward the survey internally among their organizations and to staff members who were involved in the process. The survey link was on PCL's website home page from early November through November 26th, and was posted several times to PCL's Facebook page.

Despite being available to hundreds of people over 4 weeks, only 72 responses were received, an extremely low response rate. 97% of respondents identified as applicants in the PCL funding process; 18% also identified as community members/leaders/advocates, and 8% also identified as parents/guardians/foster parents.

The survey did not ask respondents to indicate the organization or application with which they were affiliated, or whether the application(s) they were affiliated with were funded. As such, it is unclear how many different organizations the 72 respondents represent, whether multiple people from the same organization responded, or whether respondents' applications were funded or not. Given the potential bias in the survey sample, the data have significant limitations and should be interpreted with caution.

Findings

Likert Scale Responses

Respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of the funding process by responding to the statements included in the table below. The table on the following page indicates the portion of total respondents per question that answered in each category.

From this data, two key findings emerge:

- **Communication:** Almost all respondents felt PCL did a good job keeping them informed of the funding process and Allocation Committee meeting dates.
- **Grant Awards:** The highest level of dissatisfaction, with 38% of respondents indicating they disagreed or strongly disagreed, was with the grants made in this PCL funding process.

Survey Question	N	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral / No Opinion	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
I feel like the input I gave was used to shape PCL's funding priorities.	70	38.6%	34.3%	22.9%	4.3%
I am satisfied with PCL's funding priorities.	71	69.0%	8.5%	22.5%	0.0%
I am satisfied with the grants made in this PCL funding process.	72	52.8%	9.7%	37.5%	0.0%
I was kept informed of PCL's funding process including how to apply, when Allocation Committee meetings would occur, and when funding decisions would be made.	72	94.4%	2.8%	2.8%	0.0%
The scoring criteria used by volunteer reviewers to evaluate applications was satisfactory.	71	54.9%	12.7%	25.4%	7.0%
Holding Allocation Committee meetings for public testimony separate from funding decisions meetings worked well.	72	56.9%	18.1%	20.8%	4.2%
The length of time between when PCL staff released funding recommendations and when the Allocation Committee made funding decisions allowed adequate time for advocacy by applicants.	72	69.4%	11.1%	16.7%	2.8%

Narrative Responses

Thirty eight respondents (54% of them) provided narrative feedback regarding PCL's funding process. A summary of the narrative responses, organized by topic area, is included as Appendix B. Following is a summary of topics that were most frequently mentioned by respondents in their narrative comments. The bulleted points highlight specific issues within the topic that were mentioned multiple times.

Decision Making

- Criteria, staff recommendations, and application scores were not used in a consistent manner by the Allocation Committee when making funding decisions. (17 comments)
- It appeared to some applicants that the funding decisions were made in advance of the Allocation Committee meetings. (6 comments)

Policy, Criteria, and Priorities

- The criteria stated in the Request for Investment (RFI) applications were overly specific and prescribed, limiting opportunity to a small range of organizations/programs. (4 comments)

Public Testimony and Advocacy

- Public testimony during the Allocation Committee meetings did not appear to influence Allocation Committee members in their decision-making, making it feel unhelpful for applicants to have taken time to do it. The time allotted for testimony is too short for a meaningful discussion. (3 comments)
- It appeared that "true" advocacy happened outside of the public forum. There need to be clear guidelines regarding public testimony and advocacy from the outset that provide an opportunity for equal access to Allocation Committee members. (3 comments)

Allocation Committee Feedback

Staff met with each Allocation Committee member during fall 2014 to receive their feedback about the funding process. Each member was asked to provide overall feedback about strengths and weaknesses of the process, to reflect on specific features of the process, and to suggest improvements. Themes from those discussions are organized by topic below:

Public Testimony

- Members preferred having the public testimony meetings separate from the decision making meetings. (4 members)
- The public testimony format doesn't work well. There is too much information to process in too little time. Members suggested hearing testimony in multiple settings, in locations other than downtown, and to find ways to get more input from parents. (3 members)

Decision Making Process

- Change the process to allow time for more interaction between Allocation Committee members and applicants. Members had different types of suggestions on how this might be done such as using a two-step process with fewer finalists that Allocation Committee could interview, assigning each member to a program area to develop expertise and knowledge of organizations, changing public testimony so that it's more interactive. (4 members)
- Members voiced frustration with process design: it did not allow Allocation Committee members to discuss preferences, ask questions, and exchange information with each other outside of a public forum. They contended it is difficult to make informed decisions in the current format because there is no opportunity to discuss the pros and cons of different funding approaches in public. Two members suggested that Allocation Committee members meet with each other in groups of 2 prior to decision making to better understand each member's individual priorities and rationale. (3 members)

Staff Feedback

In September, after completing the funding process for the renewed Children's Levy, staff provided the Allocation Committee with their reflections about what worked and what could be improved. A detailed record of the staff input will be available in the September 2014 Allocation Committee meeting minutes which will be posted on PCL's website after the Allocation Committee approves them in February 2015. Following is a summary of staff input, organized by various aspects of the funding process.

Adopting Goals and Strategies

- Adopting Levy-wide and program area goals and strategies that were specifically informed by public input worked well as a framework for funding.
- To better screen applicants for fit with goals and strategies, consider developing a two-stage process with a brief first stage in which potential applicants submit a one-page summary of the program they want funded, and staff provides feedback solely on whether the proposal fits the strategy or strategies for which the program intends to apply.
- PCL did not articulate at the beginning of the process whether it was seeking to increase investment in culturally specific organizations or programs, or both and depending on its intent, PCL may need to adopt different funding policies and priorities.

Funding Process Timeline

- Staff recommend that the funding process (from public input to funding decisions) be conducted over 1.5 - 2 years instead of the 1 year process used in the past. More time to carry out the public input process, discuss and develop strategies, carry out a two-step process as articulated above, additional time for applicants to respond, and for reviewers to score and discuss applications would all be useful.

Request for Investment Application

- Eligibility Clarification: The text of the RFI should specifically state that in order to be eligible for funding, an organization must have had at least \$150,000 in revenues during the last closed fiscal year.
- Quality of Examples Provided: Staff and reviewers repeatedly found that applicants either did not include examples as requested, or gave examples that were not particularly relevant or responsive to the section. Staff may need to refine the language of the requests, and/or change the scoring rubric to further flesh out this requirement.
- Minimum Points Requirement: The minimum points requirements appears to have worked as intended. 14 applications representing 12% of total applications were eliminated, and all but one of the disqualified applications scored in the bottom quartile of the applications in the program area in which they were competing. It is unlikely that any disqualified applications would have been funded due to the concentration of funding among higher scored applications in each category. However, requiring achievement of minimum points based only on a written application means poorly written applications will be disqualified even if the underlying program is a strong program and would meet PCL requirements for funding. Staff and the Committee may need to revisit this issue to assure the policy does not unfairly penalize some applicants.
- Definition of Cultural Specificity: The issues below emerged for both staff and reviewers in trying to apply the definition of culturally specific organizations/programs when scoring the applications:
 - Determining whether the staff, management and board of applicant organizations were “reflective” of the population served because reflective is not further defined
 - Determining whether organizations/programs that served multiple cultural groups should be deemed culturally specific, and if so, for which groups
 - Difficulty in judging how/whether a cultural community sees an organization/program as culturally specific based only on the written evidence supplied by the applicant
- Other Disadvantaged Communities Not Prioritized: Applicants and reviewers noted that the cultural responsiveness section and the bonus points for cultural specificity were focused primarily on race/ethnicity, and not on other characteristics that have historically disadvantaged people such as disability and sexual orientation. The Levy may want to consider enlarging its definition of cultural specificity to include such groups or to provide other ways to prioritize services for these groups.

Review Process

- Recruit a smaller number of reviewers.
- Screen reviewers ahead of time.
- Provide more in-depth training and opportunities to practice scoring, and require reviewers to attend any training provided
- Require that reviewers score a greater number of applications.
- Offer a small stipend for participating in the process.

Decision Making Process

- Splitting the testimony phase and the decision making phase seemed to be a positive change.

Reviewers: Summary of Survey Narrative Responses

Appendix A of Stakeholder Feedback on 2014 Funding Process

Introduction and Background

PCL staff recruited 79 volunteers to review and score funding applications. Immediately after each reviewer panel meeting, reviewers were asked to provide feedback on their experience via a written survey. They were asked to rate their level of agreement with five statements related to the review process: reviewer orientation, instructions, score form, understanding of reviewer role, and number of applications. In addition, reviewers were asked to provide suggestions for improvement in the review process. 42 of 70 respondents (61%) provided a narrative response.

Summary of Comments

PCL staff coded the comments in an effort to identify themes. The following tables, organized by topic area, summarize the comments received.

Positive Feedback (31 comments)								
Happy to be part of process/ appreciated opportunity	Excellent process	Great experience	Well organized, clear instructions	Opportunity to discuss was helpful	Staff helpful	Score sheet was clear; easy to use	Liked the part about key mgmt	Liked pre-determined meeting date
10	6	3	3	3	2	2	1	1

Scoring (14 comments)							
Need a way to get more to quality vs. complete	Lots of info to pull together	Focus more on project outcomes & viability	Shuffle apps so reviewers don't read in the same order	Check inter-rater reliability	Score sheet too detailed	Reconsider scoring (weighting) to align with RFP questions	
5	2	2	2	1	1	1	

Reviewer Orientation and Training (13 comments)						
More guidance regarding scoring	Add a practice session	Clarify what warrants a score of "0"	Provide better estimate of time commitment	Need more instruction about budget section	For new reviewers: Add questions to consider when reviewing apps	Use microphone at orientation
5	2	2	1	1	1	1

PCL Expectations of Reviewers (13 comments)						
Took a lot more time than anticipated	Ask reviewers to score fewer apps (6, 9, 1-2 fewer)	Provide all apps to review at once (and in hard copy)	Meet 1/2 way thru to discuss scores	1 week before mtg phone mtg to discuss reviewer questions	Group discussion was a bit confusing	Need more time for group discussion
4	4	1	1	1	1	1

Application (10 comments)								
Add questions about governance & board structure	Provide applicant's training on logic models	# sections in a way that makes it easy to find	Logic model wasn't helpful	Need consistency in budget format	Streamline questions on population background/needs	Separate race and ethnicity	Include all attachments as part of text	Disqualify if over page limit
2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

General/Misc. (6 comments)					
Needed to do background research	Vet apps for match with strategy - if don't fit shouldn't be scored	Felt "out of my league" reviewing apps	Have parking closer to meeting location	Wasn't able to attend group session	Reframe hunger relief to prevention
1	1	1	1	1	1

Applicant/Community Members: Summary of Survey Narrative Responses

Appendix B to Stakeholder Feedback: 2014 Funding Process

Introduction and Background

PCL staff created a 10-question survey via Survey Monkey to gather feedback from applicants and the community at large, including from participants in last summer's public input on PCL funding priorities. The survey included 7 Likert scale questions and 1 open-ended question for additional comments. 72 people responded to the survey; 97% identified as Applicants in the PCL funding process.

Respondents were asked to indicate with which of the six PCL program areas they are familiar, and they were provided the option to indicate all that were applicable.

Program Area	Percent of Respondents Familiar with Program Area
Early Childhood	51.4%
Child Abuse Prevention & Intervention	50.0%
After School	37.5%
Mentoring	34.7%
Foster Care	30.6%
Hunger Relief	23.6%

Summary of Comments

PCL staff coded the comments in an effort to identify themes. The following tables, organized by topic area, summarize the comments received.

Decision Making (37 comments)								
Inconsistent use of criteria, staff rec. & scores	Appears decisions were made prior to the AC meeting	Satisfied with AC work	Staff recommendations should be given more weight	Not enough weight given to scores/ranking	Too much staff influence	Too much weight given to scores	Decisions need to be made earlier (too close to the start of the new fiscal year)	More weight should be given to programs with track record of providing quality services
17	6	3	3	3	2	1	1	1

Policy, Criteria & Priorities (16 comments)									
Criteria overly specific and prescribed	Place more emphasis on East PDX	Concerns about approach of providing more \$ to fewer programs	Concerns about who & how best practice is defined	Hold agency to goals, not delivery mechanisms	Disagree with emphasis on East PDX	Grants less targeted	Need to dedicate \$ for innovation	Too much emphasis on culturally specific providers vs culturally responsive svcs	Should not have added Hunger Relief (should have restored previous cuts)
4	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1

Overall Process (13 comments)						
Improved process on the front end	Process needs to include interviews, site visits & recommendations from the community	Complicated application	Process was transparent	Process lacked transparency	Process lacked diversity	Process not inclusive
5	2	2	1	1	1	1

Miscellaneous (13 Comments)					
Satisfied with Staff work	Staff Errors	Questions about community input process	Communication with applicants was good	PCL demonstrated a lack of community knowledge	Reviewers: Inconsistent use of scoring criteria
5	2	2	2	1	1

Public Testimony & Advocacy (8 comments)			
Public testimony during AC meetings not helpful/no influence	Clarify guidelines for advocacy with AC members; access to AC members	Testimony separate from decision meeting is an improvement	Translation (for public testimony) should be paid by PCL
3	3	1	1

Programs Funded (4 comments)			
Some duplication in what was funded	Projects funded in FC too focused on keeping kids in FC	Losing emphasis on proven programs	Diverse pool of nonprofit organizations
1	1	1	1