MHCRC Equity & Inclusion (Grants) Committee
Remote Meeting via phone or computer – Portland OR
September 10, 2020 Meeting Notes

SUMMARY

ATTENDEES:
Richard Roche, Jeff Dennerline, Jacquenette McIntire, Rana DeBey, Elisabeth Perez, Cinthia Diaz Calvo.

Welcome:
Roche welcomed attendees and appreciated everyone for their thoughtfulness and participation in the conversation. DeBey provided an overview of her professional background and reviewed the agenda: discuss the Community Technology grants program eligibility criteria, equity indicators, pre-application draft and final application draft, as well as program updates. DeBey thanked all for making the time to review the documents and take part in this meeting.

AGENDA:

- Review proposed revisions to definitions of stated public benefit areas for Community Technology Grant Program:

  DeBey went over the changes in Eligibility Criteria document and explained the reasoning behind the changes. Dennerline asked if the MHCRC was limiting itself by using the word video instead of media. These changes are to take us to the end of this cycle, which can be revised in the future. The wording could be “production and video related”. McIntire suggested a regular cycle to review the language and purpose based on the needs and changes in society. McIntire asked about the barriers and if all categories were captured, to which the answer was yes.

  DeBey said staff reached out to legal counsel to see about these changes that the original resolution document did not include. Legal counsel was unsure there was a need for a resolution to change the definitions. If this committee needed to formalize the process and take it to the MHCRC for formal resolution, it would need to be reviewed by jurisdictions. The only concern or risk about this is if there was a candidate willing to challenge the outcome and want to prove that they qualified before the changes, but not after the changes. Dennerline said the risks are slim and unlikely since the new changes are more inclusive. The committee agreed that a new resolution reflecting the proposed changes was unnecessary at this time.

- Review proposed equity indicators:

  Next, DeBey reviewed the proposed equity indicators. The intention of the equity indicators is that the MHCRC would monitor them (reference them) when reviewing pre-applications. The indicators would be posted on the website and guide the review
process. The language in the document was written to mirror the MHCRC’s Black Lives Matter statement, which was posted on the MHCRC website in June 2020. DeBey proposed moving forward with the inclusion of the indicators as well as an additional question on the application and pre-application to assess how and how well equity is being centered by our applicants. In the future, staff could attach a metric to these indicators if appropriate (e.g. 50% of grants must center on racial equity).

The committee was supportive of the use of the equity indicators and agreed that they would be implemented immediately.

- Brief Q&A regarding pre-application and application revisions

DeBey said the MHCRC has been equitable by including a shorter pre-application as the first step into the grant process, but that there is a need to reduce the size and scope of the work to make it less burdensome and therefore hopefully, the MHCRC will receive a greater number of pre-applications. DeBey reached out to our past grantees in order to gain some feedback about what was and what wasn’t working in our current process. In particular, smaller organizations (“grassroots”, community-based organizations) who do not have professional grant-writing staff shared that the application was challenging to complete. In order not to lose the richness of our communities, DeBey is proposing edits to streamline and shorten the information required for applicants to submit. She asked the committee to consider if the pre-application and application questions provide them with enough information to feel comfortable making good choices regarding funding projects.

DeBey suggested removing the evaluation plan from the pre-application process. Evaluation takes significant time to prepare for a pre-application, and often shifts in the final application process as the measurable outcomes are further defined. Dennerline suggested requesting that the applicants be more concise about the narrative. Dennerline suggested limiting the field to no more than 500 characters. McIntire agreed with Dennerline on limiting the characters, so the applicant has to refine their message and focus.

It has been clear that if an application is accepted there is no guarantee that they will receive funding. McIntire asked if in the past the applications have identified other sources of funding, and if not, can this be added? DeBey confirmed that the application does ask for sources of funding. On the final application, DeBey confirmed that applicants are asked to identify project partners, which often provide matching resources for the project.

There have been discussions with Open Signal and Metro East about being coaches/mentors to the applicants in the application process in order to inform what equipment and training to include in their project budgets. Currently, the community media centers have noted that they don’t have a lot of additional capacity to do so. In the future, the MHCRC could consider including funds for this type of support in the annual contracts.
Final Application:

DeBey went over the final application and significant changes.

1. In her conversations with former grantees, many noted how difficult it was to attain the project partnership letters in as great of detail as requested. As a result, DeBey proposed that the application requires that applicants instead list their project partners and note if they are confirmed or not. The application will also ask for their contact information and MHCRC staff can follow up to confirm the relationship. The committee was supportive of the change.

2. DeBey proposed removing the executive summary. This section took significant staff time to coach applicants through how to craft an executive summary and the committee members mentioned that they didn’t need the field. MHCRC staff write-up an executive summary for commissioners at the MHCRC meetings in which the final applications are presented for approval.

3. Evaluation criteria for the grant review process will shift to reflect the changes that were agreed upon today. DeBey’s goal is to open the application period in mid-October with a deadline for pre-applications of December 10.

Dennerline mentioned the materials are sent a week in advance but they review them 3 days in advance. He said streamlining the application materials was highly appreciated.

DeBey welcomes input on the process and work. The committee felt that the questions were sufficient in order for them to make good decisions regarding funding allocations, and that the changes were supportive of moving the equity-driven work of the MHCRC forward.

- Community Media Center Compliance Input

DeBey asked how often they would like an update from the community media centers. Perez asked, more than frequency, what would commissioners like to know from community media centers. McIntire suggested that maybe commissioners can write up an outline with questions they want to know. Dennerline likes having both EDs in the same meeting. He also would like to know what they did with the $50,000 they got earlier this year. DeBey agrees that the ask is appropriate. Dennerline asked what they typically present at city council meetings. Perez says they do a presentation and the highlights of the past year; information is kept at a high level and includes an overview and significant impacts-shifts of their biggest programs only. Perez also mentioned that a standardized format is 15 minutes or less and would like them to be able to show a video. Roche agrees. McIntire suggested providing a list of questions that we always want to know.

Dennerline would like information on the Open Signal Community Technology grant, the Black Filmmaker Fellowship, which was over $200,000. What was the outcome of that project? DeBey will follow-up with the MHCRC to provide this information.
Additional Comments

DeBey mentioned the need for more report-outs on the progress of the grants funded by the MHCRC. She said staff will be adding the grantee highlights and some possible grantee presentations to future MHCRC meetings. She suggested the committee meet again to talk about scope of work for a proposed impact evaluation of the community technology grant program in 2021.

At the September 21 MHCRC meeting, Perez will share changes in operations that we are implementing. Dennerline suggested meeting again in person at Edgefield. They have plenty of space to meet outside, safely.