

To: California Arts Council  
From: Rachel Rosekind  
Public Comment prepared for 1/27/2023 Council Meeting  
Re: Increased Grantee Support to Advance Equity

1/20/2023

As a recent California Arts Council grant panelist, I observed a phenomenon and pattern that I've experienced on other grantmaking panels and in varied professional and service capacities over many decades: applicants and organizations are disparately resourced with regard to finding grant opportunities, meeting eligibility criteria for them, and applying to them. Many of the most impactful community-based organizations (particularly those in BIPOC and/or low-income communities and that serve vulnerable populations) do not have a full-time development staff member, let alone more than one, leading to missed opportunities, hastier and less well-put-together submissions, and a cycle that awards funds to a perennial set of favorites and leaves behind many others, some of whom sputter for lack of support despite their criticality and centrality to their communities and extensive "boots-on-the-ground" work.

A similar discussion repeatedly emerges within the organizations and governmental sectors that serve vulnerable and/or systems-involved community members in particular. Many grassroots, faith-based, and community-based organizations do not have the time to mine for grant opportunities, vet them, and prepare multiple iterations of a narrative and application to build a polished final submission, especially when the opportunity is highly competitive and they feel there is a lesser probability of securing the funding. Consequently, many of the same (larger, better-resourced) entities receive funding time and again, both for existing programs and for building out their services. It's a significant and critical equity issue across multiple dimensions since it hinders the capacity of community-based, community-born, and *community-led* organizations to build more momentum and sustainability and grow institutionally and aspirationally and expand reach into other community sectors and needs.

It does not have to be like this.

In this vein and in the spirit of redress, I'd love to see the CAC develop a robust program that would directly and meaningfully help support smaller, lesser-resourced or experienced organizations to compete for grants through multi-pronged assistance, such as extended training and more targeted outreach; instruction on how to gather evidence of impact and expanded definitions of how organizations can demonstrate this impact, since not all organizations document their impact and many do not have the technological tools and knowledge that others do; etc. This pathway could take various forms, but the prevailing principle is to try to widen the pool of competitiveness—*not just eligibility*—by directly assisting organizations with less exposure to or facility with grantwriting, which concomitantly leads to diminished access to funding, lesser organizational ballast, and potential loss of other grant funding from foundations that look at an applicant's grant award history.

There's an interesting new program run by The National League of Cities intended to help smaller-sized municipalities (with populations of less than 150,000) compete for infrastructure grants. It's modeled as a series of "grantwriting boot camps," and each camp is tied to a specific program in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, amounting to \$65B in funding opportunities. The modules typically mirror sections of the grant applications, and a final module focuses on long-term sustainability, what to do if you receive a grant, and/or how to retool an application if it fails to secure funding. The bootcamps are

free. This is a promising development to address the imbalance within grantmaking programs of all kinds that tilts more resources toward already well-resourced and higher-capacity entities, be it organizations or, in this case, cities.

In my professional and pro bono work, I help lesser-resourced organizations and individuals apply for grants (and other opportunities and avenues for advancement), but I am one person. We need to embed institutional levers of support and uplift that can reach deep and wide to catalyze stronger communities of belonging and creative empowerment for *all Californians*. I look forward to hearing these issues discussed and this proposal considered by the CAC.

Thank you for your time.

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