MEETING MINUTES
Advisory Workgroup on a Strategic Plan for County
Grants
September 2, 2025 – 2:30 p.m.
Virtual Meeting

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Workgroup Members Present:
-Ron Halber, CEO, Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington
-Brigid Howe, Executive Director, Nonprofit Montgomery
-Kim Jones, Executive Director, Montgomery County Black Collective
-Rafael Murphy, Directory, Office of Grants Management (OGM), County Executive staff
-Hillery Tsumba, Chief Operating Officer, Primary Care Coalition of Montgomery County
-Sara Watkins, Director of Institutional Advancement, Catholic Charities
-Jason Fasteau, Program Manager, Department of Recreation (DoR) – Designee for Adriane Clutter,
Acting Director, Departement of Recreation (DoR)

Workgroup Members Absent:
-Dr. James Bridgers, Director, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
-Dr. Sultan Chowdhury, Chairman, Muslim Community Foundation

County Staff Present:
Tara Clemons Johnson, County Council
Mark Hodge, DHHS
Gregory Weissman, OGM

The Joint meeting was called to order by Workgroup Co-Lead Clemons Johnson at 2:35 p.m.

I.   Presentation – Multi-Year Community Grant Awards

Workgroup Co-Lead Rafael Murphy provided an interactive presentation covering Multi-Year Community Grant Awards, which are supported by the County's Community Grants Non-Departmental Account (NDA).

Mr. Murphy began by reiterating the nine stages of grant standardization covered in his presentation to the Workgroup at the most recent meeting on July 30, 2025. The stages are Appropriation, Design, Preparation, Competition, Review, Awarding, Notification, Clean Up, and Implementation. The Workgroup members were asked if they had any additional questions or comments from that previous meeting. It was noted by Workgroup members that the one-month application window can be insufficient time for some potential applicants, based upon the feedback heard from local nonprofits.

Mr. Murphy then called attention to the second recommendation of the [2018 Office of Legislative Oversight report on Community Grants](): to change the Community Grants process to be outcome driven. This was a goal of Montgomery County Government (MCG) that was also supported by nonprofit stakeholders. The Office of Grants Management (OGM) strove to meet this goal during the subsequent re-competition of Community Grants in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24). However, no formal definition of targeted outcomes for Community Grants was established within that re-competition process.

Prior to FY21, County Executive and County Council community grants were listed in separate NDAs. Applicants could apply to both or either NDA. During the pandemic, there was a process moratorium and the County froze community grants funding to provide continuity of funding to community grants recipients. FY23 Community grant recipients received bridge funding in FY24 to avoid a service gap for contracts expiring before December 31, 2023 (before the FY24 grants were awarded). Organizations who did not receive renewed funding still received these Bridge Funds to appropriately wind down their operations. During FY24, the Office of Grants Management facilitated a re-competition of all funding remaining within the Community Grants NDA with winners receiving multi-year awards.

The goal of Community Grants is to support projects that target needs not directly addressed by other Montgomery County departmental efforts, address critical gaps in specific communities, cut across traditional sectors, or offer innovative and experimental approaches to complex issues. One of the other consensus recommendations was to move grant funding, where appropriate, to County Department base budgets and have the respective departments manage that grant funding. What remained in the NDA were grant programs that didn't have a more logical administrator elsewhere in MCG. Community Grants are also designed to provide flexibility to allow nonprofit organizations, who have grassroots understanding of community needs, to design and propose projects that will best meet these needs. These grants cannot be used for the expansion of existing County-funded programs.

The Community grants categories are Underserved Communities, Youth, Seniors, and Person with disabilities. The FY26 budget: $5,410,231 (Continues funding for all FY24 Community Grant award winners for a 12-month performance period plus inflationary increase – FY26 Budget) -- FY26 total County Government NDA budget - $13,379,684. By comparison the FY25 budget: $5,252,651 (Funds for all FY24 Community Grant award winners for a 12-month performance period - FY25 Budget) -- FY25 total County Goverment NDA budget - $10,920,201.

The current timeline for current Community Grants are multi-year awards, specifically a 3-year period, FY25 –FY27 (July 1 2024 – June 30, 2027). The FY24 Community Grants were awarded in the latter part of FY24 (May/June 2024) and were funded by FY25 resources. Community Grants grant agreements were back-dated for the terms to begin on July 1, 2024 (Fiscal Year 2025) and covered costs starting on that date. A 3% inflationary adjustment is provided to grantees each year. If the same grant cycle is maintained, new grant awards would begin FY28, July 1, 2027. The grant NOFO would be announced during FY27, sometime between July 2026 – February 2027.

During the FY24 Community Grants awarding process, OGM received 309 applications for approximately $50 million in funding but only had $5.7 million to award. OGM set the range of awards from $50,000 minimum to $375,000 maximum. Accordingly, the process was highly competitive across all funding categories, but especially so for funding to support Underserved Communities, where the ration of funding requests to available funding was 33.3:1. For the purposes of the grant competition, OGM used the definition for "Underserved Communities found in the [January 2021 Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#).

Priority in awarding funding was given to proposals that: demonstrate a strong understanding of their target population's/community's needs and an effective program strategy to effectively meets these needs; provide services, advocacy, or other support to the target population/community that is not already funded by other County resources; provide technically, culturally, and/or linguistically proficient services to the target population/community; demonstrate a broad base of impact through their proposal to their target population/community; and, for the Underserved Communities target population pool, are submitted by nonprofit organizations based in Underserved Communities within Montgomery County and have a mission focused on serving these communities.

Further, OGM sought proposals from organizations that: exhibit cultural proficiency; are inclusive of LGBTQIA+ community members; and use a racial equity lens in providing services. The range of programming allowed was intentionally very flexible. Applicants were encouraged to identify new needs and other innovative projects for their target populations/communities. Projects already funded by the County were not eligible for additional funding through FY24 Community Grants. Organizations with other County funded projects could still apply for separate projects under Community Grants.

During the application scoring process, 63 MCG staff members reviewed and scored 309 applications. Reviewers ranged from Regional Service Center (RSC) to Department Directors, Contract Monitors to Program Managers, technical and administrative experts, and many County staff

who were former nonprofit leaders. Each application was independently reviewed and scored three times resulting in a total of 927 reviews. Reviewers provided a score of up to 100 points shaped around pre-set criteria, an overall recommendation to fund or not to fund the proposal, an assessment on the organization's underserved base, and an assessment on whether this filled a County gap or not. "Not Sure" was an option for the latter two assessments to allow for neutrality on applications in any areas where a given reviewer may have lacked expertise.

Because achieving consensus rankings were impossible with such a large reviewer pool, a purely data driven approach using reviewer scores and recommendations was employed. Average scores were used to statistically rescale to mitigate fortune, or misfortune, of having generous or strict reviewers (methodology: https://www.larsenlamiconiqimpactaward.org/fairness/). OGM sorted and filtered data in the following order: Average Rescaled Scores – Sorted highest to lowest; Overall Funding Recommendation – Filtered to applications who had positive consensus; Filling County Gaps Recommendation – Filtered to applications who had positive consensus with "Not Sure" responses discounted; Underserved Community Base Recommendation – Filtered to applications who had positive consensus with "Not Sure" responses discounted.

For the Resource Allocation Process, OGM ensured Funding award amounts were set at average of funding levels recommended by reviewers, with some modification based on availability of funds. OGM confirmed that the target population cited in application was the actual focus target populations of the application, noting splits where applicable, and worked from highest to lowest Average Rescaled Scores allocating funding from the appropriate Funding Category (or categories) until all Funding Categories were exhausted. The lowest ranking application for which funding was available received whatever funds remained for the applicable category.

OGM strictly adhered to the process and methodology, and all the data from the application review process has been preserved for oversight and review purposes. OGM also views the FY24 process as an equity success story – Black-led nonprofit organization were awarded 19% of all Community Grant awards and 32% of total Community Grant funding. Black-led nonprofits were defined as grant program applicants whose Executive Director (or equivalent position) identified as Black within their application. Applicants had the option of not responding to demographic questions on their leadership and their answers were hidden from the reviewers during the scoring process.

During the process, OGM reviewers questioned whether a given grant proposal really met an urgent community need, why the applying organization and/or program was best suited to meet the need, whether a program or service was duplicative of other programs, and whether another actor was already meeting this need. The key takeaway from the review process was that applicants need to clearly define the gap they are filling and why their program/organization is the best one to fill it.

II.   Discussion – Community Grant Awards and Program Goals

Following the presentation, Ms. Clemons Johnson and Mr. Murphy encouraged Workgroup members to share their feedback and perspective on Community Grants. There was interest in seeing the grant application process occur annually as opposed to every three years, or staggered so that at

least some Community Grant funding would be available more frequently, perhaps as frequently as every other year. The County's multi-year review for grant renewal has been positively received, and allows grantees to tweak their programs and submit reports to MCG but not have to re-apply to keep receiving the grant.

Workgroup participants found agreement that the goals for the Community Grants program are strong and create helpful definitions for areas of work, and that the priorities identified for the program seem correct.

The Youth, Seniors, and Underserved Populations funding categories were established during the FY24 funding cycle, with some grant proposals touching upon more than one category. There was some interest in the Underserved Populations category receiving an increased funding allocation in the next application cycle, given how these populations have been uniquely targeted in the current national political climate, but there was also general agreement amongst the Workgroup that such a decision could wait until about six months before the next Notification of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for Community Grants is published. Ms. Clemons Johnson noted that the County Council can make a recommendation level on the categories for Community Grants, but the final decision rests with the County Executive.

Regarding grant funding, Workgroup members noted that the $50,000 minimum grant level in the FY24 process might be too high. Small-dollar grants may make a huge difference to new and small nonprofits in the County.

Workgroup members also noted that a multi-stage grant review might help if the program receives a similarly high volume of applications again in FY27.

III.   Next steps

Ms. Clemons Johnson noted that the Workgroup will next prepare an interim report for the Council that will serve as an update for Councilmembers prior to the Workgroup's final recommendations being delivered to the Council on November 1, 2025. The next meeting of the Workgroup will be at the end of September. Members will be polled to establish a time.

The meeting adjourned at 4:32 p.m.