

Background:

TCDD received an appeal for a funding decision from West Central Texas Regional Foundation, who submitted an application for the Higher Education Collaborative RFP. Per TCDD policy, an investigation has been conducted and a summary report prepared for review. The report was submitted to the Executive Committee within 30 days of the receipt of the appeal.

The following documents are included for review:

- Copy of the Appeal Letter from West Central Texas Regional Foundation
- Summary Report of the Investigation
- Copy of TCDD Appeals Procedure
- Copy of the Letter Acknowledging the Appeal

The purpose of TCDD's Appeal Process is to ensure that TCDD procedures were followed, and that information provided in the original proposal was reviewed fairly and objectively. The process to appeal a funding decision is not designated as an opportunity for an applicant to provide additional information for consideration that could have been included in the original proposal. To do so would in essence create a two-stage review process that is not part of TCDD's current procedures.

The Executive Committee will be asked to make a final decision on this appeal.

Executive Committee — Agenda Item 9**Expected Action:**

The Executive Committee will consider this information and make a final decision on this appeal.

Council — Agenda Item 12. C.**Expected Action:**

The Council will receive a report on the Executive Committee decisions.

WEST CENTRAL TEXAS REGIONAL FOUNDATION

BOARD MEMBERS

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- HASKELL COUNTY

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August 15, 2016

Ms. Stalvey

Executive Director

Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities

6201 E. Oltorf, Suite 600

Austin, TX 78741-7509

Ms. Stalvey:

The West Central Texas Regional Foundation (WCTRF) responded to a proposal for the Higher Education Collaborative Grant. The goal of the grant was to develop a sustainable Higher Education Collaborative to include previous grantees of the Higher Education for Employment grant as well as other post-secondary programs that demonstrate success in fully including students with developmental disabilities. In addition to the above goal, it was recommended to include activities in the proposal that will gather information about gaps and system changes, provide technical support for at least 10 post-secondary programs, increase awareness to include websites and provide written materials for individuals to utilize as they complete the enrollment process and requests for financial assistance. Due to the lack of parameters on the budget, WCTRF responded with a proposal that would have the likelihood to develop a statewide collaborative approach to the goals of the RFP. Please see below for the reasoning behind the statement that the WCTRF created a logical, quality proposal that more than meet the goals and outcomes of the grants Request for Proposal in a manner that is more inclusive and proficient than any other applicant that applied for funding.

- The WCTRF has the support and willingness to collaborate from 95 counties in Texas, 27 of which are designated as poverty areas, as well as two of the three current Higher Education for Employment grantees, with one grantee stating that they would work with the WCTRF if funding was granted to WCTRF instead of performing the duties themselves.
- If the funding parameters had been established, the WCTRF would have submitted a proposal more closely in line with funding amounts being proposed within guidelines. WCTRF would still be willing to reconsider the budget with the understanding that it may lessen the number of counties served.

3702 LOOP 322
ABILENE, TEXAS 79602
PHONE: 325-672-8544
FAX: 325-675-5214

- The WCTRF proposal establishes a “grass roots” approach to gaining support in the areas served, which is key to maintaining sustainability once grant funds are fully expended.
- The proposal has the potential to reach beyond the borders of the grant focus area to become a statewide approach to post-secondary programs after grant funds have been expended.
- The proposal presented by the WCTRF was ranked as the number one proposal to consider funding, per the Summary of Recommendations: Higher Education Collaborative meeting notes, received on August 11, 2016 from Danny Fikac.
- The areas of concern noted by the review panel are easily modified and amended to correct and/or clarify any problems that may occur.
- The Project Director, as well as her immediate supervisor, worked in Youth Programs at the West Central Texas Council of Governments for 16 plus years combined. Project Director completed her bachelor’s degree in education at one of the Abilene universities and taught all ranges of student ages, including students with disabilities. In addition, staff at the WCTRF have a good rapport with post-secondary institutions, as well as intern placement organizations, through associations and collaboration on other development procedures and practices in the region.
- Long term partnerships for the department include but are not limited to the following: McMurry University, Abilene Christian University, Hardin Simmons University, Workforce Solutions, Care Connections Center for Independent Living (CIL), Disabilities in Action CIL, and Disabilities Resources Incorporated.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that you reconsider the denial of funding for the WCTRF in regards to the proposal for the Higher Education Collaborative Grant. Attached are the Summary of Recommendations that I received from TCDD on August 11, 2016. Thank you for your time in looking into this situation and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,



Alesha Willis
West Central Texas Regional Foundation
Managing Local Ombudsman

cc: Tom Smith, Michelle Parker



TEXAS COUNCIL *for*
DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES

Mary Durheim, Chair
Kristen L. Cox, Vice Chair
Beth Stalvey, Executive Director

6201 E. Oltorf, Suite 600, Austin, TX 78741-7509
E-Mail: tcdd@tcdd.texas.gov
Website: www.tcdd.texas.gov

(512) 437-5432
(800) 262-0334
Fax (512) 437-5434

TO: TCDD Executive Committee
FROM: Danny Fikac, Planning Specialist
SUBJECT: Summary of Recommendations: Higher Education Collaborative
DATE: August 3, 2016

TCDD staff convened a review panel to evaluate proposals for the Higher Education Collaborative Request for Proposals (RFP). One project can be funded. The summary of comments follows this memo.

Higher Education Collaborative Goal: Develop a sustainable Higher Education Collaborative that includes TCDD's "Higher Education for Employment" grantees and other post-secondary programs that have demonstrated success in fully including students with developmental disabilities. The Collaborative will provide educational resources, technical assistance and infrastructure development to support universities, colleges, and technical schools to recruit, retain, graduate, and transition students with disabilities into employment and/or meaningful day activity.

In addition to reaching the above goal, primary activities required by the RFP include:

- Gather information about gaps and system changes that are needed to support successful transitions of people with disabilities to post-secondary programs.
- Provide technical assistance to and support at least ten institutions by the end of the project to implement approaches to provide post-secondary education for people with disabilities.
- Increase awareness, which may involve developing "How To" guides, websites or materials to assist with completion of the enrollment process and financial assistance applications.
- Develop and implement a plan to measure outcomes of students completing programs.
- Ensure sustainability for the collaborative and make recommendations for the sustainability of the programs developed.

Authorized funding amount per RFP: TCDD has made available funds for one project for up to five years. The maximum funding amount needed for implementation of the selected project was not specified and would be a negotiated amount between TCDD and the selected organization.

TCDD received two proposals and ranked them in the following order:

1. West Central Texas Regional Foundation
2. Texas A&M University

The panel noted that both proposals were of high quality and that either proposal was fundable. They further noted that they believed this was an important project that should be funded.

**2016-2 Higher Education Collaborative
Proposal Ranked First**

Organization: West Central Texas Regional Foundation
Location of Main Office: Abilene, TX

Funding Requested: \$727,582
Match: \$181,913

Summary of Proposal:

The West Central Texas Regional Foundation (WCTRF) seeks to create and replicate inclusive support models for individuals with developmental disabilities in post-secondary education institutions throughout at least one third of the state of Texas, covering 95 counties including 27 designated poverty areas. Through partnerships with five different Texas Aging and Disability Resource Centers, Project Amistad, Heart of Central Texas Independent Living Center (HOCTIL), and the three current Higher Education for Employment projects, WCTRF encourage and support individuals with development disabilities in pursuit of post-secondary education and jobs. They will also identify gaps in service and possible solutions in an effort to advocate for system changes and supports needed at a statewide level.

Strengths Noted by the Review Panel:

- This proposal appears to have a clear set of goals and outcomes to achieve the intent of the RFP.
- The approach is consistent with a potential promising practice, and the provider/applicant has evidence of extensive community support.
- The inclusion of internships is a critical component to assist with the expansion of long-term employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- The number of collaborators on this project demonstrates the development of an exceptionally strong collaborative effort.
- The project attempts to address the critical need for the full inclusion of individuals with developmental disabilities in post-secondary education.
- The proposal has identified organizations that have been successful at providing services to individuals with disabilities.
- This project is an innovative idea with a solid logic model.
- The proposal talks about establishing an internship for each individual.
- The proposal includes the number of individuals being supported.
- The numbers of potential participants appear to increase as the grant project continues. This action has the potential for expanding public awareness, creation and expansion of potential employment options for students, and impacting communities for years.
- The narrative provides information about the plan to develop programs throughout at least one third of the state of Texas.
- The proposal shows a track record of collaboration with diverse group of partners, including Centers for Independent Living, and proposes a "grass roots" approach.

Additional Strengths Noted by TCDD Staff:

- The applicant expresses aspirations of expanding the base of institutions and students whose lives are positively impacted by postsecondary educational opportunities.
- The applicant notes the importance of outreach to underserved ethnic minorities and people living in rural regions of the state as consistent with the objectives of the DD Act.

Concerns Noted by the Review Panel:

- Many of the key personnel on this project are yet to be determined (i.e., Project Coordinators 1-7), which prevents any attempt to review their qualifications.
- The proposal lacks critical detail as to how the goals and objectives will be met.
- Recruitment of project participants appears to be largely left up to partner institutions.
- Sections in the proposal do not address issues of career self-determination or talents of people with disabilities. The proposal could have included steps to have the recruited individuals identify a career area or areas of their own interest.
- As presented, the proposal does not effectively outline the process for design and implementation of a service delivery system that will explore educational and training options that promote inclusion. It should be noted that the proposed outcomes target students entering college or job training experiences with minimal focus on talents or respect for experience.
- WCTRF has not been working previously in higher education so there may be a delay in project implementation.
- The evaluation plan is pretty general and does not appear to collect data from key stakeholders, such as administrators/faculty in higher education.

Additional Concerns Noted by TCDD Staff:

- West Central Texas Regional Foundation's proposed budget needs clarification and revision.

6201 E. Oltorf, Suite 600, Austin, TX 78741-7509
TCDD@tcdd.texas.gov
tcdd.texas.gov

(512) 437-5432
(800) 262-0334
(512) 437-5434

TO: Executive Committee Members
FROM: Beth Stalvey, Executive Director
SUBJECT: Review of Appeal: West Central Texas Regional Foundation
DATE: October 3, 2016

West Central Texas Regional Foundation submitted an application to receive grant funding under the Higher Education Collaborative Request for Proposals. The applicant submitted a proposal on May 13, 2015. The proposal was reviewed by an independent review panel on July 6, 2016. The reviewer comments and recommendations were presented to the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities Executive Committee during the August 3, 2016, meeting.

The Executive Committee reviewed comments from the independent review panel and discussed comments and considerations. Following discussion, the Executive Committee did not approve funding for this proposal.

TCDD provided notice to West Central Texas Regional Foundation about the funding decision on August 11, 2016, and included a detailed summary of the review panel comments. TCDD received an appeal of the Council's funding decision from Alesha Willis, Managing Local Ombudsman for West Central Texas Regional Foundation, within the 15 workdays allowed by the Council's Policy for an appeal of a funding decision. The Appeal Letter provided by West Central Texas Regional Foundation is attached.

The appeal from West Central Texas Regional Foundation asks TCDD to reconsider the decision to not approve funds for the Higher Education Collaborative Project. In the appeal letter, West Central Texas Regional Foundation addresses many of the review panel comments related to the original grant proposal and provides information to clarify or respond to reviewer comments and recommendations about the proposal. We note that the purpose of the Council's Process to Appeal a funding decision is to ensure that TCDD procedures were followed, and that information provided in the proposal was reviewed fairly and objectively. The Process to Appeal is not designed as an opportunity to provide additional project information for consideration when such information could have been included in the original proposal. To do so would in essence create a two-stage review process that is not part of TCDD's current procedures. A copy of the TCDD Appeals Procedure is attached.

TCDD staff have examined the process followed to review the West Central Texas Regional Foundation proposal for Higher Education Collaborative Project and find no concerns regarding any procedural matters. The information provided to the Executive Committee on the Summary of Recommendations for the August discussion was found to be fair and objective, and followed TCDD policies and procedures for independent review. Specifically:

- The Council uses independent peer reviewers to evaluate proposals submitted. This review panel is asked to submit a recommended priority ranked list of applicants for possible funding. Final approval of organizations to receive grant funding is determined by the Executive Committee. West Central Texas Regional Foundation was one of two proposals for the Higher Education Collaborative Request for Proposals. The independent review panel provided a ranking with West Central Texas Regional Foundation in position one, however the panel noted that “both proposals were of high quality and that either proposal was fundable.” (Source: Summary of Recommendations: Higher Education Collaborative meeting notes). In determining this funding award, the Executive Committee evaluated and discussed the two proposals submitted based on program quality as determined by the peer review process, the cost of the proposed project, the financial ability to perform services, state and regional needs and priorities, improved access for unserved or underserved areas and groups of individuals, ability to continue services after conclusion of grant funding, and past performance and compliance with other awards. Following this discussion, West Central Texas Regional Foundation’s proposal was not selected for funding.
- In their letter of appeal, West Central Texas Regional Foundation states that “if the funding parameters had been established, WCTRF would have submitted a proposal more closely in line with funding amounts being proposed within guidelines.” The maximum funding amount for the Higher Education Collaborative project was not specified in the Request for Proposals and the Executive Committee was informed and aware that the final amounts are subject to negotiations between TCDD and the selected organization. No concerns with the budget amount were noted by the independent review panel. Similarly, the budget amount was not a primary factor in the evaluation of this proposal, therefore no budget negotiations between West Central Texas Regional Foundation and TCDD were needed.

Based on our review of this matter, we do not find evidence of any procedural concerns during the review process. And as noted earlier, much of the information provided by West Central Texas Regional Foundation in this appeal was not provided in the original proposal. Considering additional information about the project at this time creates two-step review process that is not permissible by current Council-approved procedures.

Attachments:

- Written Appeal from West Central Texas Regional Foundation
- TCDD Acknowledgement Letter
- TCDD Appeal Procedure

Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities

Council Policies

Section X. TCDD Grant Projects

I. Appeal of Funding Decisions

1. Appeals may be submitted from applicants for grants who did not receive funding or from grantees whose grants have not been awarded continuation funding. The person or entity appealing shall be known as the appellant.
2. Appeals of funding decisions shall be received, processed, and resolved with fairness and promptness.
3. The appellant shall file an appeal in writing addressed to the Executive Director. The written appeal must be postmarked within 10 workdays of the date of the written notice of suspension or within 15 workdays of the date of written notice of denial of new or continuation funding. The written appeal shall include all relevant facts and information that the appellant wishes to have considered as well as the proposed remedy being sought. The Executive Director will acknowledge receipt of the letter with a copy to the Executive Committee.
4. The Executive Director will investigate, compile, and study all relevant information about the appeal and, within 30 workdays of the receipt of the appellant's letter and submit a written report to the Executive Committee. The report will contain recommended action and the evidence supporting the recommended action.
5. The Executive Committee may approve the recommendations of the executive director, make such modifications as deemed appropriate, order further investigation, or take other appropriate action.
6. The decision of the Executive Committee is final.
7. Council staff shall notify the appellant of the final determination of the appeal.



Mary Durham, Chair
Kristen L. Cox, Vice Chair
Beth Stalvey, Executive Director

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TCDD@tcdd.texas.gov
tcdd.texas.gov

(512) 437-5432
(800) 262-0334
(512) 437-5434

August 25, 2016

Alesha Willis
West Central Texas Regional Foundation
3702 Loop 322
Abilene, TX 79602

Subject: Acknowledgment of Appeal Received

Dear Ms. Willis:

Please accept this notice as written receipt of your letter by TCDD on August 22, 2016, appealing the TCDD decision not to fund your proposal for Higher Education Collaborative project. Consistent with Council Policies concerning an Appeal of Funding Decisions, TCDD staff will review this appeal with the Council's Executive Committee that will make the final decision. At that time, TCDD staff will notify you regarding the outcome of this appeal.

Thank you for your interest in advancing the mission of the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities.

Sincerely,

Beth Stalvey

Digitally signed by Beth Stalvey
DN: cn=Beth Stalvey, o, ou,
email=beth.stalvey@tcdd.texas.gov, c=US
Date: 2016.08.25 10:27:43 -0500

Beth Stalvey
Executive Director

Copy: TCDD Executive Committee

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