

Background:

TCDD Executive Committee members requested staff provide information regarding the current proposal selection process and possible alternatives to that process. The document provided presents an overview for the Committee's discussion. If you have questions or would like additional information prior to the meeting, please contact Joanna Cordry or Roger Webb.

Executive Committee**Agenda Item 13.****Expected Action:**

The Committee will review the recommended revisions to the RFP Review Procedures.

Council**Agenda Item 13. D.****Expected Action:**

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

Discussion Guide: RFP Submission and Proposal Review Process

TCDD Executive Committee members requested staff provide information regarding the current proposal selection process and possible alternatives to that process. Committee members specifically wanted to discuss if there might be a way to improve the consistency in the quality of review panel recommendations provided to Committee members, to examine how determinations of “fundability” are made, and to explore whether organizations should be able to provide additional information about their organization or proposal after the submission deadline has passed.

This document provides information about the current process; how a two-step submission process might be employed; and staff recommendations.

Option 1: The Current One-Step Submission Process

Organizations submit grant proposals in response to a Request for Proposals (RFP) using a formatted proposal packet that includes all information that is required to be included in grantees’ workplans. Proposals are limited in length and only certain attachments allowed.

Independent review panels, consisting of 3-5 people who each have expertise related to some aspect of the proposed project, review the proposals using a guide provided by staff. Reviewers are told they may only evaluate the quality of the proposal’s response to the requirements in the RFP and proposal instructions. Information not included in a submitted proposal may not be considered.

Review panel members complete their initial review independently, and then meet as a panel to discuss each proposal. The review panel collaboratively develops a list of strengths and needs and makes final funding recommendations to the Executive Committee. The panel typically arrives at a consensus on three items: whether or not each proposal is of sufficient quality to be funded if adequate funds exist to fund all; the ranking of the “fundable” proposals; and specific strengths and needs of each proposal.

Staff do not edit the content of the Review Panel recommendations. However, staff review recommended proposals and may provide additional information about regulations concerning the use of grant funds; relevant public policy issues; and/or any other concerns or opportunities that staff feel should be brought to the attention of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee reviews all relevant information during the Executive Committee’s review.

After the Executive Committee determines which proposals shall be funded, TCDD grants staff contact the organization(s) and work with them to address any needs identified by the review panel, staff, or the Executive Committee. Organizations that submit proposals that the Executive Committee does not intend to fund do not have the opportunity to submit additional information or to address concerns identified by review panels. In addition, there is no process for those who submit proposals that are not approved for funding to incorporate additional information that was not provided to TCDD by the organizations in their original proposals prior to the deadline.

Option 2: A Two-Step Submission Process

In a two-step submission process, interested organizations would have two opportunities to provide TCDD with information. Organizations would first submit an initial Letter of Intention, abbreviated proposal, or brief summary that would be reviewed and evaluated by independent reviewers, TCDD staff, and/or Council members. This first review would identify a smaller sub-set of organizations from which TCDD would request additional information and/or a complete proposal. Examples of the types of additional information to be requested might include:

- responses to specific questions identified in the review;
- submission of a full proposal (if the original submission was only a partial application, Letter of Intent, or brief summary);
- the opportunity to amend a full proposal (if the original submission was a full proposal); and/or
- an in-person or recorded presentations to the Council, a Committee, or a review panel.

Using a two-step process would most likely lengthen the time between the deadline for submission and the eventual funding by an average of 3 months. Whether or not it would result in an increase in work hours or resources (on the part of the organizations submitting the proposal, Council staff, or Council members) would depend on how, specifically, the process was implemented. It would, however, minimize the time involved by organizations whose initial submission is not accepted.

Option 3: Adaptation of Current Process

If TCDD continues to use a one-step application process, changes could be made to how proposals are reviewed in order to provide the Executive Committee with more specific information about each proposal. In addition, TCDD could adapt the current process to require organizations to “pre-review” their proposal using the same form reviewers will use. This might result in organizations providing, up front, the kind of information sometimes identified by reviewers as missing or inadequate.

This would involve a more prescriptive, standardized review form that would be included in the proposal packet. Organizations would complete part of the form themselves and would be invited to identify the page or section numbers on which reviewers can find the information reviewers will use to evaluate their proposal. Organizations would submit the form as part of their proposal.

Reviewers would use the same form to independently review proposals; TCDD staff would gather the forms from all reviewers and combine their reviews into one document. Reviewers would receive that combined document and would then participate in a panel discussion to review differences of opinion, to agree on a final summary document, and to make recommendations for funding. Only the top proposals would be ranked. Executive Committee members would receive a copy of the evaluation guide for each proposal, allowing them to see, specifically, the areas in which each proposal had strengths and/or weakness.

Option 4: Flexible Review Process

TCDD could adopt flexibility in the review process that would enable the Council, with staff recommendations, to determine and specify the review process for each RFP. If the Executive Committee wishes to consider this option, staff recommend that TCDD:

1. Continue to use independent reviewers in the process to support the integrity of the process and to assure that varying viewpoints are considered. The current process requires the Executive Committee to review a large list of names every other year; the individuals approved are then included in a large pool of possible reviewers from which review panel members are selected. Staff propose the Executive Committee review additional names to the pool on an annual or more frequent basis, if needed.
2. Maintain efforts to reduce the degree to which grant writing skills impact the selection process, so that grantees are selected based mostly on the likelihood they will be able to implement a project rather than the sophistication of their proposal or presentation skills. Staff will continue to develop and enhance the information and support provided to all organizations interested in submitting proposals.
3. Continue to vest the selection process, for most RFPs, in the Executive Committee, as this Committee includes representation from both Committees as well as at least one self-advocate selected by the Council.
4. Consider using different selection processes as needed, based on the nature of the RFP. Stipulate what process shall be used at the time the Executive Summary is approved. This would allow the Council to use a combination of the options noted above and also ensure that organizations interested in applying have full information about the application and selection process at the time the RFP is posted.
5. When a review panel is used, use a more prescriptive form for the review of proposals and to submit specific information about each proposal to the Executive Committee.