

Minnesota Department of Administration Office of Grants Management

Operating Policy and Procedure

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Policy on Rating Criteria for Competitive Grant Review

Minn. Stat. §16B.97

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Minn. Stat. §16B.97 Subd. 4(a)(1) provides that the Commissioner of Administration shall “create general grants management policies and procedures that are applicable to all executive agencies.”

Policy

It is the policy of the State of Minnesota to ensure:

- Fairness, precision, equity, and consistency in competitive grant awards.
- Diversity and inclusion in grant-making

State competitive grant review processes shall be conducted using review criteria that are identified in the notice of grant opportunity or request for proposal and a standardized scoring system to rate each application against the chosen criteria. Competitive grant review criteria and standardized scoring systems must include and identify how a state agency’s grant process will implement diversity in grant-making.

Scope of Coverage

This policy applies to grant-making at all executive branch agencies, boards, committees, councils, authorities, and task forces that make grants. This policy applies only to competitive grant review processes. Legislatively-named, formula and sole/single source grants processes, and instances where the authorizing appropriation legislation explicitly limit the grant outcome scope and process are not subject to this policy.

This policy supersedes other state agency policies that concern competitive grant awards except when the existing state agency policy is stricter.

Grant programs that seek an exception to this policy must complete a Grants Policy Exception Request and submit it to the Office of Grants Management for the approval of the Commissioner of Administration.

Definitions

Competitive Grant:

A competitive grant is a grant that is awarded through an application process in which multiple grant applications are reviewed and grants are awarded to those applicants that most closely meet the selection criteria identified by the granting agency. Procedurally, in a competitive grants process, a state agency issues a grant opportunity notice or request for proposal and eligible grant-seekers submit a grant application. Grants are awarded to the applicants that are rated the highest against the selection criteria, based on the availability of grant funds.

Diversity in Grant-Making:

A process that intentionally identifies how a grant program serves diverse populations, and especially populations experiencing inequities and/or disparities.

Diverse populations include:

- Racial and ethnic communities, including American Indians
- LGBTQI communities
- Disability status
- Veterans
- Geographic diversity within and across Minnesota – including greater MN, urban/metro

Agencies can identify diverse populations served through grant outcomes by pointing to under-served, targeted, and/or grantee populations experiencing inequities and/or disparities past grant funding has not adequately addressed.

Inclusion in Grant-making:

A process that identifies how the grantee community is included in the grant review process.

Review Criteria:

The review criteria for a competitive grant process are the standards by which the grant applications will be evaluated. Typically, review criteria are based both on the programmatic requirements and on an applicant's ability to carry out the grant.

Review criteria may include, but are not limited to the following: project need, project sustainability, soundness of approach, probability of achieving results, financial management capacity (accounting, timekeeping, and funds management), project funds raised to-date, geographic coverage, and knowledge of the community being served. The state agency must include review criteria in a grant request for proposal that identifies diversity in grant-making. The applicant's past performance as a grantee of that state agency should also be considered when evaluating a grant application.

Notice of Grant Opportunity/RFP:

A notice of grant opportunity or request for proposal is a document that notifies grant seekers of a competitive grant opportunity and includes information on grant requirements, selection criteria, timelines, and process.

Standardized Scoring System:

A standardized scoring system is a rating system that assesses how well each grant application conforms to each of the selected criterion. Grant applications are assigned a score for each criterion, based upon the extent to which they meet the standard. Scores for each criterion are tallied to arrive at a cumulative score for each application. The most important criteria to the success of the grant program should have the highest potential score. The scoring system must include weighted criteria that identifies verifiable and measurable diversity, equity, and inclusion in grant-making outcomes and/or grantee performance.

Procedures

1. Grant review criteria are selected and ranked according to their importance to the purpose of the grant program before the grant request for proposal/notice is written and circulated.
2. The notice of grant opportunity/RFP describes the selection criteria and their relative weight in the ranking system.
3. Agency staff develop a grant application scoring sheet that facilitates the scoring process and the scoring sheet is used by all reviewers. To score grant applications with the highest degree of precision, it is recommended though not required, that agencies use a numeric (quantitative) scoring system rather than qualitative rating or ranking systems.
4. Grant review teams conduct a review meeting or conference call to discuss each application and its score.
5. After the grant review team has met and the scores have been finalized, state agency staff may incorporate the scores into final funding recommendations that may also be based on geographic distribution, services to special populations, and the applicant's history as a state grantee and capacity to perform the work.