An Equity Based Nonprofit Funding Model for Arlington County

Process Recommendations

Designed by Arlington BIPOC community leaders, with input from the County Board (represented by Chair Katie Cristol) and Arlington County staff (represented by Chief Race and Equity Officer Samia Byrd and Director of Human Services Anita Friedman), during meetings conducted May and June of 2022.

Background

The following recommendations are the result of a series of conversations about reforming systemic inequities in County grantmaking and priority-setting processes and creating new practices that center the needs of Arlington's Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) residents.

In October 2021, a working group of community leaders and Arlington County representatives convened a process to evaluate community needs through the lens of racial equity. A series of discussions and ultimately, a co-designed process, over the following months surfaced structural obstacles within County funding *and* engagement practices to achieving shared goals of racial equity and community-centered decision-making.

As a starting point for a larger engagement with community leaders and residents in promoting racial equity across Arlington's funding practices for human and community-services, the working group has generated a set of recommendations to inform the County Board's process for awarding discretionary nonprofit funding. The process outline below reflects an equitable partnership between community service providers and local government: The recommendations are "co-owned" by Arlington BIPOC leaders and representatives from the County Board and County Manager's Office.

This funding model was presented to members of the Arlington County Board in September of 2022 by members of the community leaders group; this revised draft reflects input and ideas from Board members.

Overarching Recommendations: What Will Shift

1. *From organizational needs → community members' needs*
   The historical process of County Board-awarded funding for community services is not transparent or equitable. These new recommendations are designed to keep the focus on the services received by community members vs. on the needs of the organizations who provide those services.

2. *From "response only" → root causes*
   The historical process of County Board-awarded funding is focused on addressing the needs of community members who are experiencing crisis and/or whose income does not afford the necessities of life in Arlington. These recommendations will welcome organizations and services that also address the root causes – not just the outcomes – of these community needs, and are designed to fund and measure the effectiveness of proactive approaches.

Outline of the Recommended Process

Step One: Call for Proposals

Recommendations:

1. There must be a clear, competitive, and transparent process established. A Notice of Funding Available (NOFA) for community services is recommended.

2. The NOFA should define "community service" in relation to County Government's mission and vision and include illustrations and examples (so organizations can clearly understand that their work is eligible). However, the definition should not be restrictive.

3. County Government should hold technical assistance sessions in person and make FAQs and videos to explain the NOFA eligibility and process available. Direct technical assistance and information should be available as the application deadline approaches, not just at the point the NOFA is released.

4. The NOFA should be transparent about deadlines, including when funding decisions will be made and the timeline for organizations to access funding/funding disbursements.

5. The NOFA should be structured in a framework that identifies all required information from applicants and provides learning resources for applicants to prepare the best applications. Follow-up requests and requests for subsequent information for decision-making should include time to respond that is proportionate to the request.

   a. This process for requests should differentiate between information included in the framework (for all applicants) and information that specific to the evaluation of an individual applicant's proposal. The process should also maintain the highest level of transparency in what is being requested across the applicant pool.

Step Two: Evaluating Proposals

Recommendations:

1. Proposals should be evaluated holistically (i.e., not divided into service areas) based on an organization's ability to meet community needs. Multi-domain projects are welcome.

2. To reflect trust in community-based organizations to understand their communities, County government should not define needs or service areas. Organizations are invited to define the need *they* see in the community and describe how they can use County funding to meet it.

3. Proposals should be evaluated by a panel, including:
   - Subject matter experts
   - Community members who are eligible for and/or receive services without being affiliated as a client of applicant organizations (examples of these types of community members could include housing grant recipients and Community Services Board clients)

- Voices of community members who will be impacted by these funding decisions should be included on the evaluation panels where feasible and appropriate.
- All members of evaluation panels (and staff working on matters related to evaluation) should be trained on the same principles of equitable evaluation and racial equity/social justice.

4. Evaluation criteria should explicitly include racial equity and social justice, e.g.:
   - Demonstrated alignment to the Department of Human Services' new, race-centered [Mission, Vision and Values](#).
   - Quality of narratives about how organizations and proposals reflect the value of "closeness to the community." This is not a rubric; organizations need to provide the details that matter most to them and the community they serve, which could include:
     i. Lived experiences of organizations' leadership, staff, and boards
     ii. Adopted internal policies and practices regarding racial equity
     iii. Examples of hiring members of the community they serve, particularly youth
     iv. Discussions of how the organization's past work in other jurisdictions connect to the Arlington community (given the County's history of displacement).

5. Joint ventures with 'larger' community-based organizations (as determined by difference in size, budget, population served, staff demographics, etc.) are encouraged if such organizations can demonstrate how the joint venture is a partnership and not sub-contractor arrangement with a 'smaller' organization.

Step Three: Awards

Recommendations:

1. Recommended awards may be for one year or multiple years and/or include recommendations for possible timelines for renewal.
   - The NOFA results cannot bind future County Boards (i.e., cannot make allocations for future fiscal years), but can include a recommended total of current year funding to be paid out over multiple years (i.e., a FY25 award of $100,000 to be disbursed as $50,000 grants in FY25 and FY26).
2. Transparency: County government should make public lists of current and previous grantees, and the amounts received.
3. For organizations that do not receive funding, County government should provide individual feedback and written recommendations (aligned with County technical assistance and information workshops) on how to be successful in future years.
4. Funding restrictions should be only limited to State and Federal obligations. Funding should permit flexibility to community-based organizations to adapt their budgets so that they can fulfill the same outcomes they identified in their proposals.
5. Funding awards are made through a vote of the County Board, which has access to NOFA information (including the full list of applicants). The County Board vote should be on the full set of funding recommendations, not line-items.

Step Four: Accountability

Recommendations:

1. At the time of signing an agreement with County government, an organization receiving funding will consult and come to an agreement with the County on how their services will be evaluated:
   - Evaluation measures will be specific to the grant but should include the perspectives and feedback of community members served.
   - County government should offer technical assistance and services to help organizations (particularly smaller organizations) meet their measurement and monitoring plans.

2. Reporting structures should be responsive to the grant while balancing oversight of reporting needs.