

CITY OF OAKLAND



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IGNACIO DE LA FUENTE, PRESIDENT
CITY COUNCIL
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

PRESIDENT DE LA FUENTE AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

SUBJECT: AUDITOR'S SURVEY OF OAKLAND FUND FOR CHILDREN AND
YOUTH (OFCY) REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

In March 2000, the City Auditor conducted a second survey of the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth (OFCY) Request for Proposal (RFP) process. A questionnaire was developed and sent to 240 individuals and organizations that had been included on a list provided to the City Auditor by the staff of OFCY. The purpose of the survey was to gauge the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the RFP by the nonprofit community and to provide the City Council with the feedback necessary to improve the RFP process wherever necessary.

The survey focused on three aspects of the RFP: the application, the panel review process, and the evaluation. Thirty-five questionnaires, or fifteen percent, were returned.

FINDINGS

THE APPLICATION

Judging by the responses given to the questionnaire, the 1999-2000 RFP was considered too lengthy and complicated. Sixty eight percent said it was excessively long and required a level of detail that was too high. Some individuals stated that the RFP was the longest they had experienced. Their comments included:

- "Felt like we were asked the same questions over and over again."
- "Much more detailed and complicated than necessary."
- "We counted 14 attachments, which seems unreasonable and far in excess of most RFP's."

In addition to the length issue, many respondents had difficulty following the RFP's instructions. Seventy-two percent said the instructions were "sometimes" clear. Comments included:

- "Instructions were conflicting at times."
- "There was very vague language in the RFP."
- "It was so confusing and filled with double talk..."

Although some respondents praised the RFP, (e.g. "the process was not complicated and not too long"), the majority did not agree with this assessment.

When it came to staff assistance, several respondents praised the staff for their efforts. However, most found the Bidder's Conference and Technical Assistance workshops to be only "somewhat helpful." The major response was that both the ability of the public to ask questions, and of staff to provide answers "on the spot" were limited, producing a less than effective form of guidance and assistance.

Overall, fifty-two percent said the process was better managed than the year before. Despite this, forty-six percent gave the RFP application document a D or F, while only twenty-one percent gave it a grade of A or B.

PANEL REVIEW PROCESS

Despite several respondents' positive reaction to the questionnaire, a significant number did not rate the overall review process favorably. Forty-eight percent said that panel members seemed clear about review procedure, while only forty-two percent said panelists were attentive and conscientious about their review tasks. Comments about the Panel Review Process included:

- "Staff was very enthusiastic about the review process and being able to respond to questions..."

However, other written comments indicated that problems still existed within the review portion of the RFP process:

- "I found it frustrating because I was not allowed to clarify or amplify."
- "The procedure was very unpleasant, isolating..."

All respondents seemed to agree that having youth involved in the review process was positive. However, here again, written comments indicated problems:

- "The youth panelists were overwhelmed by the adults..."
- "Youth panelists had difficulty grasping the long and complex RFP's"
- "The youth were conscientious...but more training (was needed)."

Overall, thirty-nine percent gave the panel process a D or F, while the same number, thirty-nine percent, gave it an A or B.

EVALUATION OF PRIOR YEAR GRANTEES

The evaluation portion of the questionnaire provided a range of responses, from highly critical to quite favorable. For example, while forty-four percent said evaluators were sensitive to both the program and the facility during the site visit, thirty-three said evaluators were not sensitive. On another question, fifty-five percent said the evaluation process provided helpful or somewhat helpful feedback, while forty-four percent said it did not. Thirty percent even said that they found the evaluation team to be incompetent.

Overall, seventy percent of respondents rated the evaluation with a C or better, while thirty percent gave it a D or F. Both positive and negative comments included:

- "I liked the evaluation team; nice people, caring and respectful."
- "(Evaluation process) helped us recognize strengths and weaknesses."
- "I had to call, track down the evaluator and specifically ask for feedback."

AUDITOR'S CONCLUSIONS

At sixty-eight pages, the 1999-2000 RFP application document was found to be a formidable document, very long, requiring much detail and redundant in parts. It required information that did not make sense to a significant number of applicants, and in some cases, appeared to be contradictory. The size of the application document suggests that it is itself a barrier to applying for funding, rather than a way to access OFCY.

The majority of respondents found the technical assistance workshops to be "somewhat helpful." It appears that specific answers to questions were not always possible, which proved frustrating for applicants.

While respondents to the questionnaire praised the involvement of youth, many indicated that they did not appear to be well prepared for the review process, and that in some cases the "youth were overwhelmed by the adults..." The youth remain, it would appear, in a secondary role in the process, meaning that youth involvement as a goal of the Kids First! Initiative is, at best, still in development.

The evaluation process suffers from a lack of: well-trained evaluators; unobtrusive evaluation; and appropriate, timely feedback. While some respondents did have a good experience, the fact that others did not suggests that quality may not have been consistent.

AUDITOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council needs to carefully review the staff's understanding of the role of the RFP to ensure that it enhances the public's ability to apply for funds. Staff should host a focus group of nonprofit organizations to take specific criticism and ideas for making the application less cumbersome and formidable. The goal should be to streamline the application as much as possible and eliminate unnecessary redundancies. The Council should also ask staff to review other RFP applications such as Alameda County's *Every Child Counts Community Grants Initiative 2000* and the Alameda County Child Prevention Task Force.

Technical Assistance should be structured so that staff is better equipped to answer the questions raised. To do otherwise requires the applicants to either try getting through to staff by telephone, or muddling through on their own. The best approach would be to simplify and shorten the application, and make instructions as clear as possible, thereby reducing the ambiguity that gives rise to a wide range of questions. Technical assistance sessions need to be structured in such a way that whatever questions are raised, they are answered on the spot.

Council should request a report by youth members of the Policy and Oversight Committee and the Review Panels on ways that they can enhance their participation, input and leadership.

Council should request a report on the evaluation component of the process as a separate item in which each step is explained, including: how evaluators are trained for site visits; how they address nonprofit staff members; the questions they will ask; and how feedback will be given to the program staff.

The City Auditor hopes this report is of assistance to the City Council.

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Attachments: Six pages (Available at the City Clerk's Office)

Cc: Honorable Mayor Jerry Brown
Robert Bobb, City Manager