

**Agenda Item 5
February 4, 2015**

DATE: January 22, 2015
TO: Children and Families Commission of Orange County
FROM: Christina Altmayer, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Receive Capacity Building Grant Program Update

SUMMARY:

The Children and Families Commission's June 2014 Annual Planning meeting included a presentation on federal and national funding trends. One key trend that was documented was investors' interest to expand proven solutions, taking to scale solutions with demonstrated outcomes, and support efficiencies and growth with targeted investments. Additionally, the scan of national and federal funding opportunities identified the importance of multi-agency collaborative working to achieve common goals and objectives, known as collective impact strategies. As part of the follow up discussion, the Commission directed staff to develop a strategy to use the Commission's Capacity Building granting process to strengthen nonprofit organizations' ability to collect and report outcomes to better position local agencies to compete for national funding. Included in the following staff report is a summary of the work done to identify opportunities to support Commission grantees in focusing on targeted outcomes.

DISCUSSION:

Over the last four months Commission staff has been working with The Olin Group to develop and implement a survey and focus groups to better assess the skills, capacity and knowledge of Commission grantees assessing:

1. To what extent are Commission grantees implementing evidence-based programs and what is their experience with replicating or expanding evidence-based models?
2. What is the experience of Commission grantees with participating multi-agency collaboratives, known as collective impact?
3. How do Commission grantees rate themselves regarding their experience and ability to evaluate their programs?
4. What do Commission grantees consider their best strategies for sustainability of their programs?
5. What desire, capacity, experience, and success do Commission grantees have with applying for federal grants?

Thirty-seven of the 50 invited organizations responded to the survey. The respondents participate in a diversity of Commission program areas including AmeriCorp VISTA, Bridges Maternal Child Health Network, Developmental Screenings, Early Learning, Obesity Prevention, and Primary Pediatric Care. Attachment 1 includes a summary of the survey results. Based on the preliminary survey data and focus group findings to date, it appears that Commission funded-grantees, while

achieving positive results and collaborating to grow programs and impact regionally, need to develop competencies in the following areas to increase their competitiveness for national, federal or other discretionary grant competitions:

1. Deeper understanding service coordination and collaboration as they relate to collective impact
2. Implementing and effectively utilizing evaluation systems
3. Federal grant preparedness, grant application procedures, reporting, resources/personnel
4. Fund development.

To support the development of these competencies, The Olin Group has developed potential strategies in which the Commission could invest to address specific agency needs and build the capacity of the region to successfully attract federal, state, and national funders such as:

- Support federal and national grant readiness assessments for individual grantees,
- Provide individual grantee technical assistance to support evaluation and outcomes reporting,
- Provide long-term, customized capacity building support for each cohort that includes;
 - training on best practices and successful regional collective impact systems,
 - providing information on funding opportunities in pursuit of research, evaluation and system-enhancing grants on behalf of regional projects,
 - technical assistance in support of developing regional theories of change and shared measurement approaches, and
 - strengthening regional indicators by focus area and the creation of regional need statements.
- Explore building on the Commission's match dollar reserve that could be used by cohorts.

Anne Olin, President and CEO of The Olin Group will be available at the February meeting to provide an overview of the findings to date and discuss potential funding strategies. Commission staff will continue to work with The Olin Group to complete the focus groups and refine the opportunities for Commission investment in cohort and agency capacity building. Staff will return to the Commission in March with options for Capacity Building program design options for consideration and action.

STRATEGIC PLAN & FISCAL SUMMARY:

This agenda item is consistent with the Capacity Building Goal Area. The FY 2014/15 Commission budget includes an allocation of \$250,000 in the goal area of Capacity Building.

PRIOR COMMISSION ACTION:

March 2014- Receive Update on Capacity Building Funding Strategies

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Receive report and provide direction to staff regarding Capacity Building grant program.

ATTACHMENT:

1. Executive Summary- Sustainability Assessment Findings Related to Children and Families
Commission of Orange County Priority Areas and Grantee Federal readiness.

Contact: Kim Goll

Executive Summary

Sustainability Assessment Findings Related to CFCOC Priority Areas and Grantee Federal Readiness

January 2015

To support its continuing efforts to seek sustainable funds for the region's most promising programs and practices in support of the health and wellbeing of children, the Children and Families Commission of Orange County has sought out to learn more about the capacity of Orange County's nonprofit service providers to participate in collective impact initiatives; apply for federal and other large grants; and in the face of increasing pressure, compete for outcomes-based funding. Through a survey designed to focus on these issues, 37 nonprofit organizations shared their experience with evidence-based models, collective impact initiatives, evaluation, sustainability planning, and federal grants. On average, the respondents had 89 full and part-time staff and an annual budget of \$6.7 million. The median annual budget was \$2.8 million.

General Survey Findings

The respondents indicated their organizations had implemented numerous strong, moderate and preliminary evidence-based models. However, the examples they provided included programs and generic services that did not fit the definition of evidence-based. Because federal grant programs often specify or give priority to programs and services that are evidence-based, it is important for applicants to understand what constitutes an evidence-based model.

Federal grants are more likely to support the replication or expansion of existing programs that have proven effective. Survey respondents indicated that funding for operations and capital were the greatest challenges in replicating or expanding programs. Maintaining the integrity of the model and garnering the commitment of their board were the least challenging aspects.

Many of the respondents seemed to confuse collective impact with collaboration. When asked to provide examples of previous participation in collective impact initiatives, most responses did not fulfill the five criteria for collective impact: a common agenda; shared measurement system; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communication; and a backbone support organization. Instead, the examples given were more closely aligned with collaboration. Although federal programs favor collaborative projects, collective impact participation strengthens the application.

Experience with data collection and analysis is typically required for federal grant recipients. Overall, survey respondents rated their organization's experience and capacity for evaluation fairly high, but were least likely to agree that their organization has sufficient technology to support intensive data collection and reporting. Respondents utilize a variety of data collection methods, including pre- and post-service questionnaires, interviews, and their own program data. Less than half use focus groups for evaluation purposes. Nearly all respondents said they could benefit from additional staff skilled in evaluation and data analysis; and two-thirds could use additional technical assistance (evaluation training and database development). Almost two-thirds said their organization had worked with an outside evaluator in the past five years.

Federal grant applications typically ask how the program will be sustained once federal dollars are exhausted. Although the most difficult part of a grant application, organizations with diverse funding streams and a well-developed sustainability plan are generally better positioned to

respond to this question. According to the survey, over half of the respondents said their organization has a written sustainability plan. The top two strategies for long-term sustainability were to diversify revenue streams and cultivate donors. Holding fundraising events and advocating for incorporating program services into government-funded programs were the lowest ranked.

Organizations that have previously received federal grants or cooperative agreements are usually better positioned to receive federal funding. Over 70% of the organizations had experience with Federal grants in the last five years, but only 44% had been awarded federal grants. Others (60%) had been a sub-recipient of a federal grant or cooperative agreement. Most respondents have already received a DUNS number (**Data Universal Number System**) but fewer are registered with grants.gov or System Account Management (SAM). Three-quarters said they would be interested in participating in a federal grant, with most saying their board would support them being the lead agency on a grant. Only a third of the respondents said their organization had completed an A-133 audit in the last five years.

Findings by Cohort

From the full list of survey respondents, four subgroups were selected based on their response to the question “Which Commission program or initiative does your organization participate in: ***Oral Health, Developmental Screening, Early Learning and Literacy, and Family Support-Strong Families?***” Although the cohorts shared similar responses with all respondents on many questions, there were some distinct differences:

Oral Health

- Had the fewest number and the lowest average annual budget of the four cohorts.
- Least likely to have implemented a strong-evidence-based model; more likely to say existing infrastructure lacked capacity to support expansion/replication of evidence-based models.
- Consistent with the average on evaluation; less likely to say very experienced at collecting data, or had done well at establishing data collection, reporting systems and processes.
- Was more likely to say they needed technical assistance and technology investment to improve how they demonstrate program impact.
- Had the highest percentage of organizations that had worked with an outside evaluator.
- Shows a deep understanding of requirements for rigorous evaluation, and a willingness to pursue the resources necessary to achieve it.
- Fewer have a written sustainability plan, and rated outreach and engagement higher than other respondents as a strategy for long-term sustainability.
- Had the most experience with federal grants; highest percentage that had been awarded a federal grant in the past five years; highest percentages that have a DUNS number and are registered with grants.gov and SAM.
- None thought it would be very difficult to meet the federal financial compliance requirements.

Developmental Screening

- Had an average annual budget \$2.5 million below the mean of all respondents.
- Agreed less strongly with all of the statements about evaluation and especially came in lower on the statements about whether they had done a good job establishing data collection and reporting systems and processes.

- Was more likely to say they needed technical assistance and technology investment to improve how they demonstrate program impact.
- Fewer have a written sustainability plan, and rated developing partnerships lower than other respondents as a strategy for long-term sustainability.
- The percent with federal grant experience was similar to the overall average, but fewer said they had applied for a federal grant in the last five years.
- Was least likely to say they were very familiar with federal financial compliance requirements
- Most likely to say it would be very difficult to meet the compliance requirements.

Early Learning & Literacy

- Was the largest cohort and had an average annual budget just above the overall average.
- Was most consistent with overall average on evaluation; were less likely to agree they have done well reporting client outcomes and using data to make decisions about programs.
- Reported less use of all the data collection methods except for focus groups.
- Below the average in indicating a need for each of four types of resources to improve how they demonstrate program impact.
- More have a written sustainability plan and their ranking of eight strategies for long-term sustainability was similar to the overall rankings.
- Higher percentage with federal grant experience than the average, most interested in participating in a federal grant.
- Less likely to say they are very familiar with federal financial compliance requirements, more likely to say it would be very difficult to meet those requirements.

Family Support-Strong Families

- Had an average budget just above that of the overall average.
- More strongly agreed with every evaluation statement and most strongly felt that they have the capacity to collect data and use evaluation data to make decisions about their programs.
- Least likely to need staffing, technical assistance or technology to support evaluation.
- Second highest indicating they have worked with an outside evaluator in the past five years.
- Had the highest percentage of organizations with a written sustainability plan and their ranking of strategies for long-term sustainability was similar to the average ranking.
- Smallest percentage with federal grant experience, yet had the highest percentage that had completed an A-133 audit in the past five years.
- Least interest in pursuing federal grants either as the lead agency or as a sub-recipient.

Focus Groups

To delve deeper into survey respondents' capacity and desire to participate in a collective impact initiative and federal grant projects, two cohort focus groups were conducted with two more scheduled through Quarter 1 of 2015. To date, focus groups with Developmental Screening and Oral Health have been completed. The following are general findings:

Collective Impact: Nearly unanimous willingness to participate. However, still many questions need to be answered and concerns addressed. Autonomy, mutual respect, establishing a common agenda, funding, and shared measurement are top concerns. They suggested the Commission could support such an initiative by providing technical expertise, developing an asset map to identify gaps in

services, connect grantees with funders, convene partners, facilitate discussions for readiness, and provide feedback at end the end of the project.

Federal Grants: Participants felt federal grants require significant resources and effort. Completing an application is costly and time-consuming, and implementation can come with numerous requirements that are not always funded. Suggestions for how the Commission could facilitate federal grant applications included: advocating for OC at the federal level, establishing a clearinghouse of federal grant opportunities, paying consultants to write grant applications, help identify common agenda/goal, support evaluation process, and providing technical assistance to help agencies navigate the federal grant application process.

Evaluation: The biggest concerns around collecting data as part of a collective impact initiative were agreeing on a set of shared indicators to measure progress and determining whether organizations would have to enter data into a centralized database or could, instead, upload data from their own organization's data system. Want to link data to child's overall wellbeing. Need better systems to share with schools. Need third-party evaluators for higher level of expertise (analysis and evaluation) and objectivity. Participants were in general agreement that the Commission could help in moving beyond counting services and look at data/indicators that reflect the impact of the delivery of services; help identify technology/applications that can help with the continuity of measurement; help with the integrity of data in its data collection and reporting.

Preliminary Findings and Recommended Action

Based on the preliminary survey data and focus group findings to date, it appears that Commission funded-grantees, while achieving positive results and collaborating to grow programs and impact regionally, need to develop competencies in the following areas to increase their competitiveness for national, federal or other discretionary grant competitions:

- 1) Deeper understanding of CI model; service coordination and collaboration as they relate to CI
- 2) Implementing and effectively utilizing evaluation systems that align with CI initiatives/methods
- 3) Federal grant preparedness, grant application procedures, reporting, resources/personnel
- 4) Fund development

To support the development of these competencies, address specific agency needs, and build the capacity of the region, the Commission could consider the following potential actions:

- Support federal national grant readiness assessments for individual grantees,
- Provide individual grantee technical assistance to support evaluation and outcomes reporting,
- Provide long-term, customized capacity building support for each cohort that includes;
 - training on best practices and successful regional collective impact systems,
 - providing information on funding opportunities in pursuit of research, evaluation and system-enhancing grants on behalf of regional projects,
 - technical assistance in support of developing regional theories of change and shared measurement approaches, and
 - strengthening regional indicators by focus area and the creation of regional need statements.
- Explore building on the Commission's match dollar reserve that could be used by cohorts.

As further data is collected from the remaining focus groups, staff will suggest more detailed recommendations in support of capacity building opportunities at the March Commission meeting.