Summary of Survey Results: Potential Applicants' perspectives on PCL's 2024 draft grant application and scoring criteria

Background: Developing PCL 2024 draft grant application and scoring criteria

In fall 2023 PCL staff began working with PCL's Community Council to develop the next PCL grant funding application. During fall 2023 and winter 2024, Council and staff reflected on applicant and grant reviewer feedback from the 2019-20 funding process, which focused on simplifying the application. The Council brainstormed key topics, and staff helped the Council compare those topics to PCL's 2019 grant application and identify ways to simplify the application. Staff developed a draft application and scoring criteria based on the Council's guidance. The draft application questions and scoring criteria focused on 3 topics: organization, program, budget.

Survey of Potential Applicants

In January 2024 PCL staff emailed the draft application and scoring criteria, along with an online survey, to over 300 people at over 160 potential applicant organizations inviting feedback on the draft. The survey was open for two months, and 49 people responded to the survey (response rate approx. 16%).

The short survey asked six multiple-choice questions on how well potential applicants understand the draft application questions and scoring criteria and whether the questions and criteria seem reasonable. It asked one open-ended question for any feedback on the draft. It included optional demographic questions. Staff also sent the draft application to help organizations know about the upcoming funding process and sign up for Levy communications.

Demographics of Survey Respondents

Among the 49 respondents:
- 71% said they work at an organization with a current PCL grant, 27% work at an organization without a PCL grant, and one respondent didn't know.
- 53% of respondents identified as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; 35% identified as white, and 12% didn't respond to that question. Among the 26 respondents of color, 73% work at an organization with a current PCL grant.

Key Findings

Respondents understood the application questions and scoring criteria. They indicated the questions were reasonable. Their responses suggest a need to further clarify questions in the program section. Their responses also indicated that while the scoring criteria are generally reasonable, staff needs to further clarify scoring criteria in the program section.

Application Questions

- Over 90% of respondents agree/strongly agree that they understand the application questions.
- Approximately 90% of respondents agree/strongly agree that application questions are reasonable in the organization and budget sections of the application. 78% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that program section questions are reasonable. A few were neutral or disagreed.

Scoring Criteria

- Approximately 80% of respondents agree/strongly agree that they understand the scoring criteria. Some were neutral, and a few disagreed.
- 76% of respondents agree/strongly agree that the scoring criteria are reasonable in the organization and budget sections. Some were neutral or didn't know, and a few disagreed. 71% of respondents agree/strongly agree that the scoring criteria are reasonable in the program section. Some were neutral or didn't know, and a few disagreed.

Themes in Comments

Over half of respondents left open-ended survey responses, which staff themed:

- Positive comments about the application/scoring criteria (6 mentions).
- Potential workload of the application for applicants (6 mentions).
- More clarity on hunger relief questions/criteria (4 mentions)
- Program activity questions may be too constrained and need an option for narrative responses (4 mentions)
- Word limits on application responses (4 mentions)
- Clarifications in different scoring criteria (3 mentions).
- Offer support to applicants, such as information sessions and ongoing communication (2 mentions).
- Increasing points for specific questions/criteria (2 mentions).

Examples of quotes that reflect some themes:

- *Although the application is easy to read and follow it would be great if there can be wording that identifies if there is or isn't a word count limit and what it is in the narrative portions. A section where we can add any additional information on program/organization that may not have had a good place to fit in the questions above. Additionally provide some examples whenever possible e.g., in the budget portion and in narrative section.*
- *The program section (both the questions and the scoring criteria) have a lot of very specific (yes or no) questions - it doesn't leave room for much nuance. This application is still more complex than most grant applications, however, I appreciate that it seems to be more streamlined than the 2020 application, which was very time-consuming and cumbersome.*

Data Limitations

The survey did not ask for organization names, so it's unclear how many organizations are represented in the responses. PCL did not offer incentives for survey responses and given the high workload of reading the draft materials and responding to the survey, that may have resulted in fewer responses.

Implications and Next Steps

PCL staff compared feedback from potential applicants to feedback from PCL's Community Council during their February 2024 meeting. Staff is working to implement the following improvements to the draft application and scoring criteria based on feedback from those two audiences:

- Continue simplifying the application by reducing redundancy in questions and wording questions more clearly.
- Ensure scoring criteria clearly explain what makes a strong response to each application question.
- Add guidance on word limits and offer example responses to questions.
- Refine program section questions and scoring criteria to offer applicants more narrative opportunities about program activities.
- Ensure point values for scoring criteria weight key equity issues such as how an organization advances racial equity, why the proposed program activities will meet the needs of children and youth, and how the program centers community voice.
- Staff will also organize several opportunities to support applicants during the application process, building off the success and tools PCL used

previously, including information sessions, Q & A online, and other online and virtual tools.

City's Web Grants application portal

The City currently uses an online grants application and management system called Web Grants in some City grant programs. PCL staff are developing an application form using the Web Grants platform. This approach will be new for PCL staff and grant applicants.

Applicants will answer a handful of multiple-choice questions in the platform which will help applicants understand if they are eligible to apply for a PCL grant. If eligible, they will answer basic program data questions (e.g. the number of children a program will serve, demographics of the population of people served) directly in the platform using its forms and database. Questions that require a narrative response, such as a description of the applicant organization and an explanation of the need for the program, will be answered in a document and uploaded to the platform. This will offer applicants flexibility on the length and detail of responses as needed. We're taking this approach to make the system easier for applicants and more streamlined for staff and grant reviewers.

Community-based organizations that have applied for other City grants (Portland Clean Energy Fund, Portland Parks and Recreation Community Grants, and the Community Technology grants) have had experience using the Web Grants system. PCL staff have been consulting our city peers on their lessons learned. We're in the process of building and testing forms to ensure a reasonable and functional experience for applicants. We will also develop resources to support applicants with using the Web Grants system to ensure easy access.