



Process Improvement Report: 2024-25 Large Grants

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Executive summary

After each round of grantmaking, Portland Children's Levy (PCL) staff assesses the process for strengths, areas of dissatisfaction, and improvements. Staff used the following methods to gather feedback on the 2024 – 25 large grants funding process: a reviewer survey, an applicant survey, written evaluations from PCL Community Council members, and individual interviews with both Community Council and PCL Allocation Committee members.

For background on the 2024-25 large grants funding round, see Appendix 1.

Findings: strengths of the PCL funding process

Community voice: Applicants, reviewers, Community Council members, and Allocation Committee members expressed satisfaction with the integration of community voice in the process. Reviewers reported positive experiences. Community Council members reported feeling like their voice and perspective were reflected in the outcomes of the work. Applicants shared positive comments about Community Council's involvement, PCL's community engagement process, and engaging community volunteers to review applications. Allocation Committee members said the involvement of community reviewers and Community Council helped their decision-making.

Access to information and support during the funding process: Applicants, reviewers, Community Council members, and Allocation Committee members indicated that they had the materials and support they needed during the funding process. They reported that PCL staff made substantial efforts to communicate frequently and to be responsive. Applicants had high rates of satisfaction with the PCL website and info sessions to help prepare them. Reviewers said that PCL training helped them understand their role and how to do it. Community Council members reported appreciation for staff's work to facilitate and involve them. Allocation Committee members appreciated materials and staff's time in meetings to answer questions and prepare for decision-making.

Findings: areas of dissatisfaction with the PCL funding process

Decision-making: Applicants, Community Council members, and Allocation Committee expressed concern with Portland City Council's decision-making, including City Councilors' lack of understanding and preparation, and their responsiveness to political influences. In addition, applicants reported lower rates of satisfaction with the Allocation Committee's decision-making, including lack of understanding about the Committee's rationale for their decisions and how staff facilitated their decision-making.

Funding recommendations, scores, and communications: Applicants had lower rates of satisfaction with the information staff provided to explain funding recommendations. In addition, their comments show confusion about how PCL staff used score, performance on PCL grants, and Community Council priorities to develop funding recommendations. Some applicants also reported confusion with the layers of decision-making; harm from how PCL staff reported grant performance concerns publicly; and frustration with scoring variance among reviewers, including the lack of comments offered or comments reflecting a reviewer's lack of understanding.

Implications: improvements for future funding processes

Staff funding recommendations and communication

- Outline a clear approach for how staff will create funding recommendations by balancing factors, such as application score, past PCL grant performance, and other community factors to be used.
- Communicate that approach to applicants and provide individual communication with each applicant to explain their funding recommendation.
- Ensure that PCL staff communicate directly and consistently with grantees about grant performance concerns during the course of the grant partnership with PCL and use more care in how those concerns are communicated publicly in grant funding recommendations.

Decision-making about funding

- Assist applicants in understanding the decision-making process for PCL funding, including the roles of the Allocation Committee and City Council. Help applicants, especially those less connected to PCL or to City Council, understand their options for testimony and/or advocacy to both bodies.

- Develop more visual ways to communicate the layers of community voice and decision-making in PCL's funding process.
- Develop a clearer approach to staff facilitation of the Allocation Committee's decision-making meeting(s). Designate time on the agenda for each committee member to share their reflections on applicant testimony and their individual rationale for decision-making.
- Involve Community Council members in presenting to the Allocation Committee about their involvement in the funding recommendations.
- Involve the Allocation Committee members in presenting funding recommendations to City Council and communicating with City Council members to answer their questions.

Community reviewer support

- Continue to improve reviewer training to reduce score variance, such as more time building shared understanding of scoring criteria with practice scoring applications; ensure reviewers understand how applicants experience comments and scores.
- Streamline the application questions and scoring criteria to make the application shorter, focused on the proposed services, and better align the questions and scoring criteria.
- Increase the reviewer stipend to recognize the contribution of reviewers, including additional time for training and practice.

Applicant workload

- Continue to streamline the application questions and reduce the overall workload on applicants.

PCL community reviewers feedback, 2025

Survey methods and response rate: reviewer feedback

After the review period closed in January 2025, PCL staff conducted an online, anonymous survey using Smartsheet. Survey was emailed to reviewers and open for more than 7 weeks during January – March 2025. The survey was in English. Reviewers were offered translation and accommodations for their application reviews and for the survey. No reviewer requested either.

Of the 91 reviewers, 44 responded to the survey (48%). The survey asked for feedback on the review process and collected reviewer demographic information.

Respondent demographics

Reviewers answered an open-ended question asking to identify their race/ethnicity. PCL staff categorized responses, and the table below shows the results. Among reviewer survey respondents, 45% Identified as Black, Indigenous, and person of color; 20% as being LGBTQIA2S+; and 18% as having a disability.

Race/Ethnicity	Number of respondents	% of respondents
BIPOC	20	45%
White	15	34%
Not Given	9	21%

Survey respondents seem reasonably representative of the reviewers overall. While reviewers were not required to disclose their race/ethnicity when they signed up to volunteer, many included details about their lived experience when discussing their qualifications. At least 54% identified their lived experience as a person of color, immigrant/refugee, living with a disability, navigating poverty, survivor of abuse, or with experience in the foster care system. Over 80% had lived and/or professional experience in one or more of PCL's program areas.

Community reviewer perspectives: survey results on Likert-scale questions

Reviewers responded to 5 Likert-scale questions about their perspectives on the reviewer experience, particularly on the application questions and scoring criteria.

- Overall, reviewers expressed satisfaction with their experience, including the training and PCL staff's support of reviewers.

- Reviewers agreed that questions asked in the application helped them understand proposed program services and the applicants' commitment to racial equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Reviewers' responses varied most around the criteria they used to score the applications: while 89% said the criteria were helpful to assess applicants' commitment to racial equity, diversity and inclusion, only 77% said that overall criteria were effective to evaluate the applications.

The table below summarizes results on the Likert-scale survey questions and is ordered by highest to lowest percentage of agree responses per question.

Survey question	Agree/ strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree/ strongly disagree
Overall, being a PCL grant reviewer was a positive experience.	98%	2%	0%
Training and staff support			
PCL staff offered the support I needed to do the reviews.	98%	2%	0%
Training provided by PCL staff helped me understand my roles as a reviewer.	98%	0%	2%
The training helped me understand how to review applications.	93%	7%	0%
The online reviewer folder was easy to use.	93%	7%	0%
Application questions			
The questions asked in the application helped me understand the program services applicants want to offer to children, youth, and/or families.	95%	5%	0%
The questions asked in the application helped me understand applicants' commitment to racial equity, diversity, and inclusion.	93%	2%	5%
The questions asked in the application helped me understand the organizations applying for grants.	91%	4%	5%
Score forms and criteria			
The criteria in the score forms helped me assess applicants' commitment to racial equity, diversity, and inclusion.	89%	4%	7%
The score forms in Web Grants were easy to use.	89%	7%	4%
The criteria in the score forms were effective to evaluate applications.	77%	16%	7%

Reviewer perspectives: survey results from open-ended question

The survey also asked one open-ended, narrative question regarding the review process. Among all respondents, 18 provided additional qualitative comments. Themes from the comments are listed below. Appendix 2 to this report lists all comments as written.

- **Positive experience and support** (11 comments): gratitude for the opportunity to be involved and learn more in-depth about PCL and the organizations that applied; process was well organized; staff was supportive.
- **Ways to improve the experience for reviewers** (10 comments): a clearer relationship between questions in the application and the associated scoring criteria, including more time in the training for explaining and understanding the scoring criteria and for practice scoring; simplify the application to reduce barriers for applicants; make the stipend higher and easier to access.

Implications for process improvement

- Spend more time during reviewer training to build shared understanding of the application scoring criteria, including more practice scoring applications
- Continue to streamline the application questions and scoring criteria to make the application shorter, focused on the proposed services, and ensure questions and scoring criteria align better
- Increase the reviewer stipend to recognize the contribution of reviewers, including additional time for training and practice

“It was a great experience for me to understand what information and data that goes into applying for grants. I like that you asked us lived experience experts to review these and gave us an opportunity to use our lens. I've learned about other community partners and their mission and what they will be using the grant for. Thank you again!” – Community reviewer

“The questions on the grant applications should be worded the same exact way on the scoring questions. That way grantees can be sure to answer the questions the same way we are expected to score them. The DEI & Racial equity questions were the most difficult to score as the way they were worded on the application and the way we were asked to score were a bit challenging. As I was hoping for a better way to measure/score the answers.” – Community reviewer

PCL applicant feedback, 2025

Survey methods: applicant feedback

After the conclusion of PCL’s 2025 grantmaking, PCL staff sent an anonymous survey to 172 people to ask for applicant feedback on the PCL funding process. This audience represents 167 applications and 110 organizations. The anonymous survey was online via Smartsheet and open for 5 weeks. The survey was in English, however the email message that transmitted it and two reminder emails offered accommodations and translations. No one requested translation or accommodations for the survey (or for the grant applications).

Response rate

PCL received responses from 79 people. We do not know how many applications or organizations are represented. Some organizations submitted multiple applications, and the same individuals were contacts for those applications. Multiple people from an organization may have responded.

Here are the estimated response rates, depending on type of audience:

- 72% of organizations (79/110)
- 47% of applications (79/167)
- 46% of individuals receiving the survey (79/172)

Respondents’ connection to the funding process

The survey asked a few descriptive data questions about the respondents to understand their connection to the funding process.

Funded applicants: Funded applicants are over-represented in the survey respondents compared to the overall applicant pool.

Application status	Applications N=168	Survey respondents n=79
Funded application	55%	72%
Not funded	45%	28%

Applicants with past PCL grant and funded application: As shown in the next table, PCL grantees in fiscal year 25 that had at least one application funded in the 2024-25 large grant funding round are slightly over-represented in the sample. The group most under-represented is organizations that were not PCL grantees in FY25 and their applications were not funded in the 2024-25 round.

	Applications N=168	Survey respondents n=79
Funded app/grantee org in FY25	40%	51%
Funded app/not grantee org FY25	16%	21%
No funded app/not grantee org in FY25	29%	18%
No funded app/grantee org in FY25	15%	10%

Respondent demographics

Survey respondents were asked optional demographic questions. Nearly one-third of the 79 respondents did not answer the race/ethnicity demographic question. This limits data interpretation based on demographics. Among respondents:

- 38% identified as white.
- 32% didn't identify their race/ethnicity.
- 30% identified as Black, Indigenous, and person of color.
- 16% identified as having a disability (60% did not; 24% didn't answer)
- 25% identified as LGBTQIA2S+ (48% did not; 27% didn't answer)

The following analyses offer options to consider respondents compared to the applicant pool. As shown in the table, PCL funded proportionally more applications to organizations with majority BIPOC staff; they comprised 71% of funded applications. Similarly, as shown above, 72% of survey respondents had a funded application.

	Applications N=168	Funded app(s) N=94
Organizations with majority BIPOC staff	62%	71%
Organizations with less than majority BIPOC staff	38%	29%

Among the BIPOC survey respondents specifically, 79% said they had a funded applications, while 77% of white respondents had a funded application, and 60% of respondents who did not provide race/ethnicity had a funded application.

Together, these demographic data reinforce that funded applicants are over-represented in the survey respondents. Data also suggest that survey respondents who did not share their race/ethnicity identity comprise a greater portion of responses from unfunded applicants. Still, with one-third of respondents opting not to identify their race/ethnicity, we advise caution with interpreting results.

Applicant perspectives: survey results on Likert-scale questions

The survey included Likert scale and open-ended questions. The table below shows the number of responses for each of the Likert scale questions, and shows results disaggregated based on whether respondents had at least one application funded or no application funded.

Strengths

- materials on PCL's website and in the info sessions helped applicants prepare their applications
- receiving reviewers' scores forms before providing testimony was helpful
- PCL's funding process reflected a commitment to increasing access and opportunities for children and families experiencing inequities

Areas for improvement

- Allocation Committee's rationale for its funding decisions
- facilitation of Allocation Committee's decision-making
- information staff provided to applicants about the funding recommendations.

Respondents with funded applications were substantially more satisfied with all elements of the funding process. Survey results and improvement recommendations should be considered in light of this correlation and the underrepresentation of unfunded applicants among respondents.

The table below and tables on the following page summarize results by topic and the associated survey questions. Results listed in descending order by most agreement to least agreement within the topic.

Overall funding process	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
Overall, PCL's funding process reflected a commitment to increasing access and opportunity for children and families in Portland communities experiencing inequities.	70%	9%	21%
<i>Funded applicants (n=57)</i>	84%	7%	9%
<i>Unfunded applicants (n=22)</i>	32%	14%	54%

Application support and review process	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
The application materials on PCL's website helped me prepare my application.	89%	5%	6%
<i>Funded applicants (n=57)</i>	93%	3%	4%
<i>Unfunded applicants (n=22)</i>	77%	9%	14%
I found it helpful that PCL provided me with the reviewers' score summary for my application before the April deadline to submit testimony to PCL's Allocation Committee.	78%	14%	8%
<i>Funded applicants</i>	88%	9%	3%
<i>Unfunded applicants</i>	52%	29%	19%
The applicant info sessions helped me prepare my application.	74%	22%	4%
<i>Funded applicants</i>	85%	13%	2%
<i>Unfunded applicants</i>	45%	45%	10%
PCL's engaging community volunteers to score applications helped bring community voice to the funding process.	65%	25%	10%
<i>Funded applicants</i>	74%	24%	2%
<i>Unfunded applicants</i>	41%	27%	32%

Staff communication	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
In general, PCL communicated clearly with me about the entire funding process and timeline.	65%	16%	19%
<i>Funded applicants (n=57)</i>	77%	12%	11%
<i>Unfunded applicants (n=22)</i>	32%	27%	41%
I understood the information staff provided to explain their funding recommendations on March 7, 2025.	63%	15%	22%
<i>Funded applicants</i>	75%	14%	11%
<i>Unfunded applicants</i>	32%	18%	50%
PCL staff reduced concerns of favoritism by not allowing direct contact with applicants.	57%	23%	20%
<i>Funded applicants</i>	70%	20%	11%
<i>Unfunded applicants</i>	23%	33%	43%

Allocation Committee	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
I understood the process used to facilitate the Allocation Committee's decision-making during their April 23 public meeting.	60%	16%	24%
<i>Funded applicants (n=57)</i>	69%	13%	18%
<i>Unfunded applicants (n=22)</i>	35%	25%	40%
I understood the rationale that the Allocation Committee members used to make funding decisions during their April 23 public meeting.	58%	12%	30%
<i>Funded applicants</i>	71%	7%	21%
<i>Unfunded applicants</i>	20%	25%	55%
The options to submit written and/or recorded testimony to PCL's Allocation Committee were better than the option to provide oral testimony during a public meeting.	56%	28%	15%
<i>Funded applicants</i>	63%	25%	12%
<i>Unfunded applicants</i>	38%	38%	24%

Applicant perspectives: survey results on open-ended questions

The survey asked two open-ended questions regarding strengths to continue in the process and areas of dissatisfaction in the funding process.

- Please share strengths you saw in PCL's funding process that you would want PCL to continue doing.
- If you were dissatisfied with parts of PCL's process, please share details about what was dissatisfying for you and offer suggestions for future improvements.

Among all respondents, 50 provided qualitative comments on strengths, challenges, or both. Appendix 3 lists all comments, as written. Some comments were short and focused on a singular issue, others were long and touched on multiple topics and issues. The following summary shows the major themes in the responses along with subthemes or topics mentioned.

Strengths: applicant perspectives

Transparency and communication in the process (24 comments)

- Overall transparency in the process, including explanations provided to applicants about the funding process steps and timelines, scoring rubric and criteria, and ways for applicants to participate.
- Staff's work to communicate clearly and frequently with applicants.
- Providing applicants with score summaries and reviewer comments
- Providing all applicants in a program area with the total score of all applications in the program area.

Equity and community voice in the process (20 comments)

- Equity considerations in process design overall, priorities for who is served, and which services were selected to receive funding.
- Engaging community volunteers to review and score applications
- PCL's creation of Community Council to advise this funding process, including their voice in application questions and scoring criteria, funding priorities, and their priorities to balance score in funding decision-making
- PCL's community engagement process that informed the funding priorities and needs, and engaging prospective applicants

Application process and materials (9 comments)

- Application questions, length of time for application preparation, supports on website and from info sessions, and ease of online WebGrants system

Staff support for applicants (7 comments)

- Staff were helpful to applicants, including communication, managing overall funding process; timely responses to questions.

Areas of dissatisfaction: applicant perspectives

Actions of City Council and impact of the remand/reversal (23 comments)

- City Council appeared to have not reviewed PCL materials provided to them, appeared to not understand PCL funding process or its results, and to have used misinformation in their decision-making.
- City Council decisions to remand the Allocation Committee decisions, and the subsequent reversal had serious impacts on applicants including employment of staff, services for clients and administrative burden.

- Some applicants seemed to have political connections to City Council; others didn't understand how to have that access.

Factors used for funding recommendations (17 comments)

- High-scoring applications weren't funded or funding was reduced, how score was used in combination with past performance on PCL grant, sharing scores and recommendations with other applicants in program area,
- Felt evaluated on criteria not provided, unclear how Community Council's priorities on organization size or organizations that haven't previously received grants were used in this process; applicants didn't get chance to address those factors because they came after applications were submitted

Applicant workload (12 comments)

- Application is a lot of work and too long; some questions were unclear and duplicative, had repeated focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion

Testimony to Allocation Committee (9 comments)

- Unclear if Allocation Committee used testimony, options for written/audio/video were ok but want in-person too

Reviewers (8 comments)

- Scoring variance among reviewers on single application; some gave no comment or comments did not make sense or suggest little understanding

Inequity in results (7 responses)

- Process favored same organizations, process is hard for small organizations; and 2 responses said PCL didn't equitably fund culturally specific services

Performance on past PCL grants/staff bias (6 responses)

- Unclear how staff used grantees' past PCL performance in funding recommendations; didn't appreciate information shared publicly and unclear how grantee could have addressed it with PCL sooner

Communication by PCL staff (6 responses)

- Feedback on applications was minimal and unclear; want to hear results of applicant survey; want to hear PCL's overall results; grant eligibility unclear

Implications for process improvement

Based on results of the applicant survey specifically, PCL staff have identified the following areas for process improvement.

Staff funding recommendations and communication

- Outline a clear approach staff will use to balance various factors in creating funding recommendations, including application score, past PCL grant performance, and other community factors.
- Communicate that approach with applicants so they can understand how factors were balanced overall in staff funding recommendations, provide more individual communication with each applicant on the balance of factors for their funding recommendation specifically.
- Ensure that PCL staff communicate directly and consistently with grantees about grant performance concerns during the course of the grant partnership with PCL, and staff use more care in how those concerns are communicated publicly with grant funding recommendations.

Decision-making

- Assist applicants with understanding the decision-making process for PCL funding, including the roles of the Allocation Committee and City Council, and help applicants understand options for testimony and/or advocacy.
- Develop a clear approach for staff facilitation of the Allocation Committee's decision-making. Consider opportunity for in-person testimony options with the Allocation Committee prior to decision-making.

Community reviewers scoring

- Continue to improve reviewer support and training to reduce scoring variance, including more practice scoring of applications as part of the bias-awareness training that PCL staff gives reviewers, and ensure reviewers understand how applicants experience their comments and scoring.

Application workload

- Continue to streamline the application questions and reduce the overall workload on applicants.

"I think creating a committee outside of the allocation committee was a good idea as well as using community volunteers to score the applications. This in my opinion was PCL's attempt at making this process as fair and as equitable as possible."

-Applicant

"This application process was the most transparent grant process I have applied for in my career. All of the information was clearly given to applicants and available on the website. There were many steps in this process, and feedback was given to applicants at each step. It was impossible to not understand where each application was along the way."

The process involved too many steps, and took a significant amount of work to complete each task. In particular, we had to find an external filmmaker to put together our video testimony which I felt had no impact on the scoring."

I think individuals will have different opinions about how the scoring rubric should be constructed; this could be examined in the future. For example, is the weight of scoring put on previous performance to reward high performers, or would PCL like to fund new organizations?"

Finally, I sincerely hope that this information is shared with the City Council so they understand how their actions could have negatively impacted thousands of families in the City and led to stress, confusion, and extra work for all of the grant recipients. For us, it meant moving PCL funded staff to other grants, considering layoffs, bringing them back onto this grant, and then moving them a second time. The decision to remand took a toll on our staff and senior leadership."

-Applicant

PCL Community Council feedback, 2025

Community Council purpose and membership

The Community Council is composed of 13 volunteers who advise PCL staff and Allocation Committee members on PCL policies and procedures. 9 of the 13 volunteers identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color; 3 of the 13 identify as disabled; and 3 of the 13 identify as a member of the LGBTQIA2S+ community.

Community Council role in the large grants funding process

The Community Council played an integral role in shaping the large grants funding process, meeting 13 times over 2 years to advise staff and Allocation Committee members. They provided input on goals and priorities for community engagement, provided detailed feedback on application questions and scoring criteria, recommended recruiting community volunteers for the grant review process, and finalized funding priorities and funding recommendations to the Allocation Committee for review and final decision-making.

Community Council written evaluation & themes

The Community Council met July 28, 2025 to debrief the 2024 – 2025 large grants funding process. Ten of 13 members submitted a written evaluation reflecting on the strengths and opportunities to improve Community Council participation, if they felt their voice was heard by staff and reflected in the outcomes, and any other feedback. High-level takeaways include:

- 9 of 10 respondents report feeling like their voice and perspective was heard by PCL staff and reflected in the outcomes
- 7 of 10 respondents offered ideas for improving PCL funding process:
 - desire to mitigate the influence of more politically connected and powerful organizations
 - more relationship-building between City Council and PCL to increase councilor understanding of the funding process and applicants
 - ensure that choices offered to Community Council are meaningful and distinct (example: March 3, 2025 meeting and voting between 2 portfolios of funding recommendations; see Appendix 1)
- 6 of 10 respondents spoke of appreciation for how staff:
 - facilitated Community Council meetings and decision-making

- designed the large grants funding process and invited Community Council to collaboratively reimagine the grant-making process
- fielded City Council questions and concerns
- 4 of 10 respondents spoke to the strengths of the funding process:
 - appreciation for the process staff used to facilitate Community Council prioritization of applications
 - increased accessibility and transparency
 - balance of funding for current grantees with funding for organizations that hadn't previously received PCL funding.

Community Council interview themes

PCL staff conducted 1:1 interviews with 12 of 13 Community Council members in September 2025 to ask if they had any further feedback on the funding process.

- *6 of 12 respondents vocalized concern about how City Council exercised their power in the funding process and wondered how to adjust lobbying rules or mitigate the influence of politically connected organizations.*

PCL staff clarified that they had control over the advocacy and testimony process that occurs with PCL staff, the Community Council, and the Allocation Committee, but that PCL staff has no influence or control over lobbying with City Council. Staff asked if PCL should revise the testimony process with the Allocation Committee.

- *7 of 12 respondents recommended keeping the current testimony options.* The current process offers opportunity to submit video, audio or written testimony in advance of the Allocation Committee decision-making, rather than in-person testimony at a public meeting. 3 of the 12 respondents didn't have an opinion or could see both sides; 2 of 12 recommended reinstituting in-person testimony at Allocation Committee decision-making meetings.

"I don't have a problem with the testimony process with the Allocation Committee – it is the ways that City Council is able to be swayed by lobbying from more politically connected organizations that is concerning. I'm concerned that very politically connected organizations can put their thumb on the scale in ways that aren't very ethical – it would be great for City Council to have a plan for how they're going to navigate that." - Community Council member

PCL Allocation Committee feedback, 2025

During the Allocation Committee's October 6, 2025 meeting, PCL staff presented the results of interviews with Community Council members, and preliminary results of the applicant and reviewer surveys. Staff subsequently themed all the narrative responses in the surveys and drafted a report on Process Improvement for PCL Large Grants. Staff sent the draft report to Allocation Committee members in November 2025 and conducted individual interviews with each Allocation Committee member.

Allocation Committee perspectives on strengths and challenges

Strengths in the process

- 4 of 5 members spoke about the ***strength of community voice***, particularly the different layers of community involvement in PCL's funding process.
- 3 of 5 members shared ***appreciation for staff's work in preparing them*** for decision-making, including individual meetings and responsiveness to questions about funding recommendations.

Challenges in the process

- 3 of 5 members discussed ***City Council's lack of understanding*** of community involvement in PCL's funding process and ***the interference of politics*** with City Council's role in decision-making

Allocation Committee ideas for improvement in future funding processes

- 4 of 5 members suggested the ***Allocation Committee members be more directly involved with City Council's decision-making on PCL***, including Allocation Committee members presenting the Allocation Committee's funding decisions to City Council with or instead of staff presenting, and Allocation Committee members meeting with individual Council members to ensure they understand PCL's funding process and to answer questions. One member suggested inviting reviewers and Community Council members to City Council meetings where decisions will be made, and that Community Council members could help Allocation Committee members present to City Council.

- 2 of 5 members suggested creating **communication materials focused on explaining the layers of community voice** in the decision-making process
 - create an infographic or more visual way to explain to applicants and City Council, in particular, the layers of community involvement in the funding process: staff, reviewers, Community Council, Allocation Committee, City Council
 - outline for applicants the type of information PCL provides to City Council and exactly what City Council's role is in the process
- 2 of 5 members suggested **decision-making transparency improvements for the Allocation Committee**
 - structure the meeting agenda for Allocation Committee decision-making to include designated time at the beginning of the meeting for each member to share reflections on applicant testimony and context about their individual rationale and preparation for decision-making
 - have Community Council members present to the Allocation Committee on their involvement in the funding process and their funding recommendations
- 1 member suggested **revisiting how the Allocation Committee considers lower-scoring applications** and whether they should set a threshold for how large a gap between high scoring and lower scoring applications that can be recommended for funding.
- 1 member suggested clarifying advocacy rules as applied to the City Council member of the Allocation Committee and making sure the clarification is communicated to applicants and other City Councilors.

"I would say I was surprised by City Council and maybe if I were to change anything I didn't realize that I should have been there. I don't think it's staff's job to defend the decisions of the Allocation Committee, because those weren't their decisions, they were the Committee's decisions. I would make it a priority to show up in the future."

Appendix 1: Background on large grants funding process

The 2024 – 25 grantmaking process began when the Portland Children’s Levy was renewed by voters for the fourth time in May 2023. It included the following components:

Community Engagement: In spring 2023, PCL staff worked with PCL’s 13-member [Community Council](#) to design a community engagement process. The goal of the engagement process was to identify community funding priorities in early childhood, child abuse prevention/intervention, foster youth, after school, mentoring and hunger relief program areas as required by the ballot measure and Act ([Ordinance 37610](#)) referring the Levy to voters. Between September 2023 and January 2024, more than 750 people (community members and service providers) participated in the community engagement process through surveys, focus groups and interviews. Participants engaged in the process in more than 25 languages.

Funding Application: The [community engagement report and recommendations](#) were presented to the Community Council and Allocation Committee in May 2024. The Community Council worked with staff to distill funding priorities based on the community engagement process results. They also worked with staff to develop the funding application and scoring criteria. The community engagement results, and draft application and scoring criteria were shared with a broad list of providers of services to children and families for feedback. Feedback from the Community Council and providers was incorporated into the final application. The [application](#) included questions on the organization, proposed program and budget.

PCL used the city’s new online WebGrants grants managements system for all applications. Staff provided WebGrants user guides and support through its website, virtual information sessions about the funding process and WebGrants, a weekly question/answer digest for applicant questions, and videos with WebGrants navigation tips.

Outreach: PCL conducted significant outreach to organizations providing services for children and families and received 168 applications in the funding round (45% increase compared to 2019 funding round). The number of applicants that do not currently receive any PCL funding increased by more than 200% compared to the 2019 funding round.

Application Review: PCL recruited a diverse pool of community volunteers to score applications. Volunteers were screened for personal, lived and professional experience in the Levy's program areas, and equity, diversity and inclusion. Staff recruited and trained 96 reviewers; 91 ultimately scored the applications. Each application was scored by 4 reviewers, and the final application score was the median of the 4 scores.

Declining Revenues: In December 2024, PCL received updated revenue projections from the City economist. Revenues were projected to decline as compared to the December 2023 forecast. Applicants were notified of the projected decline in resources after their applications were submitted in November 2024.

Community Council Input: The Community Council reviewed characteristics of the entire applicant pool (e.g. program area, focus populations, size of applicant organization and current PCL funding status) and prioritized application characteristics for funding. The Council prioritized funding programs focused on serving children/families that identify as Black, Indigenous and of color, programs that are not currently funded by PCL, and programs provided by organizations with less than \$6 million in annual revenues.

Staff Funding Recommendations: Staff developed funding recommendations based on these priorities plus application score, program feasibility, past performance for currently funded programs and creating a balance of services for priority populations. Staff prepared 2 portfolios of recommendations. Staff presented anonymous versions of the portfolios to Community Council on March 3, 2025, focusing on key characteristic differences between the 2 portfolios. Council did not receive lists of applicant names. Council considered the characteristics of the two portfolios (total number of grants, resources allocated to each program area, score, focus population, organization size, current PCL funding status) and recommended one for funding.

Staff recommendations and rationale were sent to applicants and the Allocation Committee in March 2025, along with key data on all submitted applications and a guide to staff funding recommendations. The guide included data on the level of competition, available resources, community council priorities and the approach to funding recommendations.

Testimony: Applicants had the option to submit testimony in support of their application (400 words of written testimony or 3 minutes audio/video recording). Translation was provided for testimony submitted in a language other than English. All testimony was provided to the Allocation Committee for review in advance of funding decisions.

Allocation Committee Funding Decisions: The Allocation Committee made funding decisions at their April 23, 2025 public meeting. Prior to the meeting, Allocation Committee members submitted their individual funding preferences to staff, and staff aggregated the individual preferences. Staff used the aggregated preferences to facilitate decision making, starting with applications that all or most members preferred to fund and proceeding to applications where funding preferences differed.

City Council Decision-Making Process: After the Allocation Committee unanimously approved funding recommendations on April 23, the package went to City Council for final approval. The Act that governs PCL operations requires that City Council approve Allocation Committee funding decisions or remand by funding category. The authority to remand by funding category means that Council may send the Allocation Committee decisions in an entire program area back to the Allocation Committee for reconsideration if those decisions were not made based on the application scores and other community conditions to foster a balanced and integrated citywide system of services. City Council, as the remanding body, does not have the authority to substitute its own decisions for the decisions made by the Allocation Committee.

On May 13, City Council and PCL staff met for a work session. City Council does not take verbal or written testimony at work sessions. Staff presented the funding round process, and councilors were able to ask questions or raise concerns.

On May 21, City Council had a first reading of the ordinance to approve the large grants funding decisions of the Allocation Committee. Verbal and written testimony were accepted during the May 21 first reading. Council considered a remand during the first reading, but the ordinance moved to a second reading. Council members requested more information on a range of issues. PCL staff prepared written responses to the concerns Council raised and sent them to Council prior to the June 4 second reading of the ordinance.

On June 4 after an extensive discussion of the awards, the council voted 7-5 to remand all of the Allocation Committee's decisions. They then voted unanimously to extend the FY24-25 grants for one year while developing instructions for the remand and next steps. In the wake of the remand, City Council and PCL staff received advocacy and testimony asking if it would be possible for the City Council to reconsider and revote on their decision.

On June 18, the Allocation Committee met, and staff presented an update of City Council discussion and decisions. The Allocation Committee heard testimony from organizations who were not receiving PCL funds who would have received money starting July 1 had the City Council approved Allocation Committee decisions. On June 25, City Council heard testimony from organizations impacted by their June 4 decision, reconsidered their decision, and ultimately voted 12-0 to reverse their remand and approve the Allocation Committee funding decisions made on April 23. Funding for the new large grants started July 1, 2025.

Appendix 2: Comments from reviewer survey, as written

Reviewer responses to open-ended question inviting any additional feedback about the process.

So grateful for the training, support, and grant reviewing process PCL team set up! My only feedback would be in the training session, the grant we practice reviewed was maybe 1-2 paragraphs long and then when I opened my first grant, I was caught off guard to see it was 32 pages long. I would state during the training that the real grants will be around 30 pages of reading. As a first time reviewer for PCL, I was so grateful for all the incredible guides, amazing organization of materials, and consistent support from the PCL team. Thank you for the checking in emails, the folder with our materials, and the great training! I would love to be a grant reviewer again next year. Reading about the incredible intentional work of these extraordinary local nonprofits filled my heart with joy and hope for the future.

I shared with PCL staff that it would be helpful to share the program materials that applicants see with reviewers, so that they can better understand the program goals, criteria, priority populations, etc. I realize that this information is likely available on your website, but I think including it (or a summarized version) in training for reviewers would be very helpful. It felt like the training focused much more on the technical and logistical aspects of reviewing than understanding the criteria we were meant to be evaluating. I would also be interested in understanding more of the full process, e.g., what happens with our scores after we submit them?

Otherwise, the training and review process were well-organized and staff were extremely supportive and responsive.

It would be really helpful to have a reviewer handout that includes criteria that we're looking for as we review. I've served on several review panels for RACC and they have a really good example of what that could look like.

It would be helpful to talk through all of the review criteria in the training meeting. In particular, I was confused about how to rate in the programming section the questions about activities versus focus. It would be helpful to talk through these as a group and benefit from the experience of other reviewers and staff.

I liked having staggered deadlines for review but would have preferred to have the first deadline require review but not submission. I really prefer to submit all at once so I can make sure my scores feel right across organizations.

Along those lines, I love that on the RACC review panels, we can adjust scores right up until the day they are due.

I know that I tend to score on the "low" side and had convos with a couple colleagues that score on the "high" side. From my conversation with Brian, I understand that the average is taken from all reviewers without accounting for the averages of each reviewer on their own (does this make sense?). I'm worried that my tendency to score low affects the orgs that I review and wonder if the approach that RACC takes here, too, could be helpful-- they calibrate each reviewers score to account for each individual's average.

Staff was INCREDIBLY helpful and responsive and I am so appreciative of your hard work!

Thank you for the opportunity!

I'm glad I was a reviewer. I learned more about the process and about the organizations.
It was a great experience for me to understand what information and data that goes into applying for grants. I like that you asked us lived experience experts to review these and gave us an opportunity to use our lens. I've learned about other community partners and their mission and what they will be using the grant for. Thank you again!
Having been a reviewer for other organizations, I was pleasantly surprised with how streamlined the PCL process was. I appreciated the scoring rubric and evaluation questions as a guide.
Thanks to the staff for making this review process so easy to follow despite needing to navigate a couple of different platforms to get materials and to upload scores. I appreciated the support and encouragement along the way. It was very educational to learn more about the types of programs the PCL supports and helped me to understand the challenges many in my community face and the organizations that are supporting childrens' needs.
I appreciated the opportunity to support The Children's Levy in determining funds distribution.
The process was easy to follow and clear within the Web Grants system. I found this experience to be rewarding, and I enjoyed learning about the different organization's efforts and successes. Thank you for the opportunity.
I wish there was a standardize format to present the budget that was followed by all applicants. The descriptions/justifications varied widely. It made think that the applicants didn't know how to complete this section. More information on the 15% admin rate and more details on what was included in that category is needed. I saw the table of allowable costs, but still confusing. Some applicants gave a lot of details on what they thought the 15% included for them and some didn't. Thank you for the opportunity to be a reviewer.
Some of the questions on the grant application didn't totally align with the questions for us to score the questions.
The questions on the Grant applications should be worded the same exact way on the scoring questions. That way grantees can be sure to answer the questions the same way we are expected to score them.
The DEI & Racial equity questions were the most difficult to score as the way they were worded on the application and the way we were asked to score were a bit challenging. As I was hoping for a better way to measure/score the answers.
Most groups failed in responding very well for disability inclusion and following GAAP guidelines
Much of the language used in the application can serve as a barrier to organizations. While they organization maybe addressing funding priorities and fitting the need of the targeted communities, they may have difficulty translating the good that they do into the language used on the application. An organization not fully understanding what the questions are asking them does not make them less worthy of funding, nor does it make them any less active within their communities.

The questions on the form were worded a bit different than the questions on the score form. I meant to ask about this.
It would be helpful for the stipend to be larger as the review process is very time consuming.
The way the scoring was asked to be done and the way the narrative was written did not line align clearly and made it a challenge to navigate reading and scoring.
I wish the final paperwork process for reviewers to be paid was more user friendly and stream lined.

Appendix 3: Comments from applicant survey, as written

Applicant responses to the following questions.

STRENGTHS Survey question: Please share strengths you saw in PCL's funding process that you would want PCL to continue doing.

I am new to the Portland, Oregon, and PNW funding community. The PCL large grant application was, by far, the most rigorous, meaningful, and equitable process that I have experienced. I found that objective scoring and qualitative summary feedback were very helpful for managing my team and non-profit. I commented to my board and leadership team that I was grateful for the thorough process; it not only gave us insight about where to improve, but also data about where we are excelling. I was deeply concerned about the behavior of the city council members and lack of respect for the countless hours of work the staff and volunteers put into reviewing applications. I am grateful for the tireless commitment that the PCL team has for taxpayer dollars and fiduciary responsibility. Social impact is the goal and measuring impact is essential. Thank you for your tremendous efforts, even through complex and political environments.
The process was clear and transparent. The PCL staff were excellent to work with and demonstrated neutrality throughout.
I appreciated the communication that I received throughout the funding process. I always felt aware of where we were in the process and I was given opportunities to participate - either by watching a meeting or providing written/recorded testimony.
This application process was the most transparent grant process I have applied for in my career. All of the information was clearly given to applicants and available on the website. There were many steps in this process, and feedback was given to applicants at each step. It was impossible to not understand where each application was along the way.
I appreciated the frequent updates throughout the review process about what was happening, when, and what would come next. This clarity of timeline and process is not always available from other funders and helped me to understand what was happening.
The organizations ultimately receiving this funding are undoubtedly doing impactful work in our community.
PCL staff answered my emailed questions very quickly and with attention to detail.
We appreciate this opportunity to provide feedback.
The scoring process and points system by question was very transparent.
I appreciated the use of community in the decision making process. I appreciated that the process felt mostly streamlined and straightforward, easy to understand and not cumbersome to complete the requirements of the grant application. I admire the way PCL represented themselves, the integrity of the process and the grantees in front of the Portland City Council.
One of the strengths we saw in PCL's funding process was the clear communication and transparency at each step. The application guidelines, timelines, and expectations were easy

to follow, which helped us focus our energy on presenting the strongest proposal possible. We also appreciated the opportunities to connect with PCL staff for clarification and guidance along the way — that support made the process feel approachable and collaborative rather than intimidating. Finally, we value that PCL’s review process emphasizes equity, impact, and community priorities, which reinforces our confidence that proposals are being evaluated fairly and thoughtfully. We would strongly encourage PCL to continue these practices in future funding cycles.
There was clear communication around guidelines, grant funding focus areas, anticipated award amounts, timelines, etc.
I appreciated the transparency at each step of the process.
Being provided not only my own org's application score, but being able to see all of the scores really increased transparency and helped me understand how my own org rated in relation to other CBOs competing for the funding.
I have been very impressed with PCL's ability to facilitate the contracting process in a timely manner, given that the actions of the City Council set the process back so far.
Documentation of the process was substantial...PCL succeeded in reversing the idiotic decision by the city council to cancel the entire grant round.
It was inclusive, transparent, intentional, clearly thought-out, and methodical. I have written many grants in my career. PCL's application process, by far, was one of the most transparent and thoroughly vetted processes I have participated in.
Transparency
Transparency and open engagement with the public are hallmarks.
The staff were great with communication around the grant process and the new steps for assessing the grant applications including the community volunteer deliberations. We had some general confusion about the community volunteer decision-making process. Having so many new voices as opposed to PCL staff at times felt like a group of well-informed (staff & Board) deliberators were exchanged for a random group from left field. We appreciated that PCL's aim was to open up funding to new organizations and perhaps fund in new ways to support the city's youth, but overall this new approach seemed unwieldy and the emphasis of that group was to make an impact by changing how PCL has funded entirely, which felt somewhat arbitrary (new orgs with smaller budgets - as if those orgs who have received funding and have become larger may not need the funding or that the work they do is not as necessary or perhaps the volunteers just wanted to make some changes because otherwise their contributions may not be useful, were thoughts we had after the process.
We appreciated PCL's looking at proposals and organizations comprehensively, balancing application scores with the community advisory group priorities. It was also helpful to have scoring rubric and directions for each application posted on the PCL website.
Overall, the PCL funding process was clear and transparent, with many months to prepare and submit our proposals. Overall, the scoring process and recommendations felt fair. We want PCL to continue to:
a. Solicit community input and feedback for PCL goals and priorities

b. Offer opportunities for community input on RFA before it is officially released
c. Provide ample time for organizations to prepare their application packages
d. Recruit reviewers from varied backgrounds and experiences
I appreciate seeing our scoring from the reviewers to understand scoring.
the community engagement, volunteer reviews of grant applications, frequent updates and communication with applicants
Receiving a copy of the community evaluator panel's comments and scores, and being able to see high-level comments for all the organizations who applied, provided valuable information and insight for our organization.
This helped us better understand how our organization is perceived in the community, how we can strengthen future proposals, and the current funding landscape in the Portland metro area. This also provided greater transparency about the PCL process and decision-making while including community voice and choice.
We appreciate how hard PCL staff have obviously worked to make this complicated process as transparent and equitable as possible. It's sometimes a little difficult to track all the different review processes, committees and timelines involved, but we feel PCL has done the best it can under the circumstances.
I believe the PCL funding committee did the best they could with some very tough decisions and budget cuts. I am not exactly sure what their decision-making process was, but they were transparent with me along the way.
The opportunity to provide video testimony following receiving feedback from the scorers allowed for me to ensure that I was able to answer any questions they had following reviewing our application. The fact that this section of the application was allowed in written, oral, or video format made this component extremely accessible and I applaud PCL's inclusivity.
The process seemed fair in that it included diverse community members in the review and clear information in the process. Better communication.
PCL's community engagement process—encompassing the voices of communities served, current grantees, and prospective applicants—was the best I've seen in my 15 years of work in hunger relief in Portland. The establishment of the Advisory Committee, and its active involvement in shaping both the application questions and the overall process, ensured that equity was embedded throughout every stage. This approach stands as a model of how equity can be meaningfully operationalized within a system that has historically fallen short. Their work deserves real credit.
Community based volunteers, the training for volunteer reviewers, and the overall process formed from community overview and feedback
I think that PCL staff were helpful and communicated regarding the process.
Sessions to ask questions. The platform used was pretty good.

I think creating a committee outside of the allocation committee was a good idea as well as using community volunteers to score the applications. This in my opinion was PCL's attempt at making this process as fair and as equitable as possible.
Not applicable. I appreciated the communication attempts but the overall experience was very poor.
Keep the funding going.
Overall I think the process that the PCL team, volunteers and allocation committee are strong- have deep understanding and use multiple groups, focus areas and experience to determine how funds are allocated.
No notable strengths. This funding process had significant negative impacts on organizations who had been receiving PCL funding prior to the 2025-2026 funding year and risks doing so again if repeated in the next grant cycle.
I feel like we had plenty of time and plenty of materials on the website to support us in writing application(s) and submit them without undue stress.
I appreciated the effort the PCL took to receive community input on funding priorities. This clearly allowed for more prioritization of organizations who have not received funding in the past and strengthened the diversity of grant-funded organizations. It was nice to see so many of our community partners receive funding, as the ecosystem of organizations providing support to the most vulnerable in our community is better when resources are shared and we can all be stronger together. A few organizations cannot serve the children and families of Portland alone. It's important to lift up organizations who haven't traditionally had the resources and opportunity to receive funding.
The RFP was well-written and clear. We appreciate the way community volunteers are the ones scoring the applications.
Communicate the changes to the process for writing and submitting the applications
Continue doing the wonderful in processing, and deliberations to ensure that equitable outcome for all applicants.
<p>The PCL staff was professional, kind and responsive.</p> <p>The application process was very rigorous but felt fair and comprehensive.</p> <p>The PCL director conducted herself in a highly professional and steady manner in the face of some real nonsense.</p> <p>We were overjoyed to finally be eligible for the opportunity to apply for PCL support. And it is great to see PCL functioning at a more grass-roots level, vs. mostly being available to a much smaller number of very large organizations. I see the benefit of that, not just as a nonprofit leader, but as a longtime Portland resident.</p>
I appreciated having the testimony be given either in writing or verbally. However, it appeared that some agencies also had the opportunity for public comment during the Council meetings. I don't know that this opportunity was as widely publicized as an option for agencies.

I love the concept of utilizing community volunteers for the scoring process. I would love to see this continue.
I strongly agree with the desire to prioritize services for communities of color. I would love to see this continued as a priority.
I believe that the utilization of community voice in developing funding priorities that would inform final decision making was a very good step. Enhancing the impact of the voices of our community members is a practice that should continue.
Seeing our city's continuing commitment to serving vulnerable/bipoc kids in this chaotic day and age makes me proud to be a Portlander.
Continue to offer this grant program.
The fact that this funding included organizations like us who serve one of the most underserved communities is a testament of the high level of fairness that was introduced in the selection process.
Relatively clean and straightforward application process, though long.
I had difficulty understanding the process by which the applications were scored to then be recommended. In conversations with other colleagues, they had similar experiences which made it even more difficult to disseminate the information that was given to us. I understand this year was a newer and more community involved process but would have appreciated more transparency about the process details.
The Levy does intend to bring more funding and opportunities to communities that need support.

DISSATISFACTION Survey question: *If you were dissatisfied with parts of PCL's process, please share details about what was dissatisfying for you and offer suggestions for future improvements.*

The City Council's decision to remand and then reverse their decision for new grantees. Please continue to work closely with the new grantees like us since we've had to change gears so often during this process as a result of the City Council's actions.
The process created undue stress on direct service staff, program leadership, and accounting and contracting teams. The city council, in their decision to rescind the original recommendations was problematic and made the whole process feel pointless. Then, to go back to the the original recommendations, created even more work and hardships. It is understandable in this economic climate that funding dollars are stretched. However, the funding does not seem equitable, and quite honestly the city council has lost trust due to this process. Staff are being laid off and youth are not going to receive the support that they deserve.
I struggled with some of the volunteer advisory committee / council's decisions on what to prioritize/deprioritize and felt that organizations did not have a chance to address if and how they aligned with those in the application process. For example, the organization I applied as has a small operating budget (less than \$1,000,000) but because we have an affiliation with

PSU (we are not funded by PSU but we are housed their), our budget looked massive vs what it actually is, which is super tight and efficient.

In addition, while I absolutely support funding new initiatives, Oregon's education system is in absolute crisis and it feels like deprioritizing proven initiatives and programs is not the solution.

Regarding testimony, it was unclear as to whether that was reviewed or considered. Again, the PCL staff clearly communicated that it had been received, but there was no reference to it by the actual decision makers. Doing it live would have felt better in my opinion although I know that is easier said than done.

Finally, and again this is not a critique of the PCL staff, I was pretty flabbergasted at the council meetings that took place related to this and feel that the council members aimed to blame PCL staff for their lack of understanding/listening to the process. It seemed that they were reacting to media pressure by remanding the recommendations, and not actually considering the information in front of them. Our organization was not originally recommended, and then due to the remand we understood we were receiving funding and proceeded accordingly with staffing and budget planning. And then to find out that it changed again was incredibly destabilizing.

1- The process involved too many steps, and took a significant amount of work to complete each task. In particular, we had to find an external filmmaker to put together our video testimony which I felt had no impact on the scoring.

2- I attended the Portland City Council Meeting when the fund was remanded and was shocked at the reckless nature of this decision, which seemed to be built around a few different organizations having the ear of specific council members. In the two meetings where PCL was discussed, Councilors had different (and even conflicting) reasons for remanding the process, but none of it had to do with the process itself. All of it was built on hearsay and not on concrete facts. The process was followed exactly as laid out (as arduous as it was) and could not be clearer. As an organization that did receive funds in the previous PCL cycle, we understood that we likely would not get as much funding in the next cycle because of the way the scoring system was built. This was disappointing for us, especially because we achieved our targets, but this process was clear.

I think individuals will have different opinions about how the scoring rubric should be constructed; this could be examined in the future. For example, is the weight of scoring put on previous performance to reward high performers, or would PCL like to fund new organizations?\

Finally, I sincerely hope that this information is shared with the City Council so they understand how their actions could have negatively impacted thousands of families in the City and led to stress, confusion, and extra work for all of the grant recipients. For us, it meant moving PCL funded staff to other grants, considering layoffs, bringing them back onto this

grant, and then moving them a second time. The decision to remand took a toll on our staff and senior leadership.

While we were not dissatisfied with PCL's process itself, we were extremely dissatisfied with City Council's response to the funding recommendations. That response created significant uncertainty and nearly jeopardized the future of our program. Without PCL's funding, our CTS services would have been directly impacted, which would in turn affect the thousands of families who rely on us. We strongly encourage City Council to respect and support the recommendations made by PCL in the future to ensure continuity of critical community services.

The limit of 300 words does not allow for sufficient information to be shared about this issues that needed to be addressed. Not to mention that it seemed clear that the written testimony was not going to make any difference at all, so why bother. Almost like we really don't want to hear about it, but if you must, you have to say it in 300 words or less.

The changes that were made to the process by the new City Council were inappropriate at best and traumatic at worst. Changing the process midstream was an unacceptable trauma to put my staff through. We had prepared to lose a program and staff person, then it changed and changed again just days before the end of the fiscal year. That type of decision making is beyond inappropriate.

The Portland City Council's initial remand of the recommended funding decisions caused a lot of chaos and confusion in the local nonprofit sector. We're grateful for the Council's remand of their remand, to reinstate and approve the original funding recommendations.

I watched the recordings from the original meeting (the remand) and the follow-up meeting (remanding the remand). I feel sympathy for all of the stress this must have put PCL staff and volunteers through, and grateful to PCL staff and volunteers for how you handled the process throughout that entire time.

PCL staff and volunteers, thank you for everything you do for our community!

For future improvements, hopefully the Portland City Council and PCL staff will improve their communications with each other so that the Portland City Council is fully informed of how the PCL review process works, and they can raise any concerns much earlier in the process rather than at the time of making final funding decisions.

PCL staff and the Allocation Committee fulfilled their duties with professionalism, keeping all applicants informed and operating free from political influence.

In contrast, the Portland City Council's handling of both the original remand and the remand of the remand was politically driven and based on misinformation. Several allegations made by Council members were unfounded, as was clear to anyone following the process. I watched both meetings and found Councilor Smith's conduct particularly troubling.

I request disclosure of which Council members reviewed the full PCL reports, scoring, and recommendations, and which sought clarification from PCL staff before making decisions. The record should reflect who engaged with the facts—and who did not.

My only dissatisfaction was the lack of engagement from city councilors in the overall understanding of the process. My thanks and praise to the PCL staff members.
The application-award-decision timeline didn't allow for enough time for City Council to review and ask questions
No fault of PCL's: The Portland City Council jumped to rash decisions with potentially devastating impact. It was hard to witness.
In its original deliberations, the City Council majority behaved in a way that felt more capricious and impressionable than informed and responsive. The Council's original vote demonstrated that the majority was willing to ignore an established government contracting process to achieve a different outcome. This was an unforced error and a blow to council integrity. It was dismaying to watch them be so easily swayed in the face of pressure from one politically influential nonprofit. It was also dismaying to hear individual council members cast aspersions on PCL staff and volunteers, while also seeming unfamiliar with their board packets or basic board practices. It was a relief when the council reversed its original decision, and we appreciated the Council president's leadership in this manner. Thank you for asking.
The politics behind this funding--and the debacle associated with the city council's preemptory decision-making and PCL's more skillfully savvy--but also underhanded and self-serving--response is an embarrassment to the city. And several of the council members--including ones with long histories in political office--embarrassed themselves. The information PCL subsequently put out to the media in defending its "process" was not fair--it demonstrated more concern in maintaining PCL's status than being accurate about the community-based organizations involved (and attacked). PCL needs a leadership change--too many grudges and prickliness (and entitlement) evident at the top--from all have read/heard, there was more concern about "controlling the narrative" and "winning" than serving the community. CBOs need to be held accountable for how they spend public money and what "outcomes" they achieve--but city programs like PCL also need to be held accountable--as in how much money is spent justifying what it does and in setting up these convoluted grant processes. Portland deserves better--the public keeps supporting institutions and politicians that let us down; there is too much "insider" politics, too much ego and too many petty personal agendas involved. We are in a national crisis: attacks on DEI, people of color, women, civil rights, democracy itself--resulting in major losses of federal funding for nonprofits across multiple sectors. PCL's funding has declined--CBOs are forced to compete against one another in a climate of scarcity and mistrust--PCL has to "own" a portion of blame for that...
The application process was confusing and unclear. It was hard to follow what was happening during funding process with the City Council.
We were dissatisfied with the development of new funding priorities (that were not clearly laid out in the RFP) after organizations had already submitted applications. This did not allow

organizations to frame their responses in a way that could demonstrate if/how their work aligned with PCL priorities. It also wasn't entirely clear how or why the priorities were developed. For example, the process deprioritized large, established organizations with a long, solid history of providing services. This included organizations who are deeply connected to the communities they serve. Some note that now that the process has wrapped up, our preference for the next round would be to have a clear understanding of priorities before the RFP process has closed and finding a balance between funding new, smaller organizations and organizations with long, established histories of providing solid services. This process should remain committed to serving all community expertise, including work that is led by and for communities served, including communities prioritized by PCL as approved by voters.

We were concerned that the city council did not approve the PCL and the allocation committee funding recommendations the first time around. We knew many city councilors were new because of the expanded city council and new form of government that started in 2025 and were happy to hear that they ultimately approved the funding recommendations after the rigorous RFP process. We remain committed to supporting bridging the knowledge gap between new city councilors who are representing new city districts, the PCL funded organizations within their new districts. In lead up to the next process, we would be interested in exploring new ways or continued support of understanding around PCL and PCL's mission to the Portland City Council. For example, we'd be open to having council members visit our PCL funded programming between now and the next RFP funding round to illuminate how our work aligns with the mission of PCL.

I scored questions 14 and 15 above based on the process prior to the point where the Portland City Council rejected the entirety of the proposed PCL funding. After that point I would score both communication and a commitment to increasing access and opportunity as a 'strongly disagree,' and not on the part of PCL staff.

City Councilor concerns around process (especially as a new entity) are understandable, but the process in which they did their research and decision-making was not transparent for the public, nor allowed time for public input. Seeing organizations who had not even applied receiving funding while many other organizations integrated awarded funding into their budgets to have it removed after decisions had already been made created instability in a time when funding is even more challenging to access.

While the City Councilors have reversed their decision, working through any future considerations would benefit from transparency, a longer and more intentional timeframe & goals, and representation from a variety of constituents.

Following the application submission, I was deeply disappointed with PCL's process.

The introduction of community volunteers—individuals who appeared to lack context about our programming, our mission, and the broader landscape of our sector—undermined the integrity of the evaluation. What was originally intended to be a review by informed partners shifted into a process driven by misinformed critique. As a result, we found the feedback not

only unhelpful but, at times, unfairly critical and lacking nuance.

Upon reviewing your website again, we could not find any clear communication from PCL that applicants would need to tailor their applications to a general audience unfamiliar with sector-specific work. Had this been made explicit, we would have framed our submission differently. Without that transparency, applicants were effectively evaluated by criteria they were not aware of.

Compounding this issue was the public sharing of reviewer comments. This not only threatened the reputation of our organization but also created an environment where transparency came at the cost of context, harming rather than helping community trust. We were left disheartened and seriously questioning whether subjecting our organization to this process again would be worth the reputational risk.

Perhaps most egregiously, we were initially rejected, then unexpectedly funded, only to have that funding rescinded in July. This sequence was entirely unacceptable. It wasted countless staff hours as we revised budgets, restructured programming, and built plans around a funding commitment that was abruptly revoked. The confusion and instability this created were not just frustrating—they were damaging.

In its current form, the PCL process lacks the reliability, clarity, and respect that nonprofits deserve. Serious reconsideration of how community reviewers are trained and deployed, how feedback is communicated, and how funding decisions are made and upheld is urgently needed.

Lastly, we would like to know: Will PCL be publicly providing our feedback in a similar way? If not, how is it considered fair that our organization was publicly critiqued by the grantor, while grantees are not offered a similar opportunity to publicly respond? How does this asymmetry build stronger community relationships or foster genuine accountability?

We raise these questions not only out of frustration, but out of a commitment to better, more equitable practices for all organizations working to serve our communities.

The community reviewers seemed to lack understanding of the types of services that organizations offer, how they function, and what their impacts are. Many of the comments we received from the reviewers reflected a lack of attention to what was presented in our application as well as personal biases about what our program outcomes should have been. I understand the desire for a 'community voice' in the review process, but reviewers should be knowledgeable about the types of programs they are reviewing.

Following the initial funding decision, wherein we were to no longer receive funding from PCL, we put a great deal of time, effort, and care into restructuring our programs and budget in order to continue serving our partners and participants. This included notifying partners about the increased cost of our services and program changes. When PCL announced that they would, in fact, continue a percentage of our funding for another year, we had to, again

restructure our budget and programming to meet PCL's requirements and the funds available and to notify our partners of this change. When this decision was revoked soon after, we had to repeat that process a third time. This resulted in many wasted staff hours in a small organization where administrative time is precious and limited. This flip-flopping also jeopardized relationships with our partners, some of whom we have been collaborating with for years.

The whiplash about whether funding would or wouldn't be awarded to selected grantees caused considerable strain and concern for us. While the Allocation Committee alone may be responsible for that turn of events, it nonetheless feels worth mentioning.

When making a decision about funding that affects the community it serves and the organization and staff connected to the funding it is important to weigh all the options of your decisions and to schedule time to carry out that process before making the actual decision because that decision affects everyone in different ways. Organizations that apply for the city funding are prepared for the process and recognize that with every submission there is a possibility that they may not be funded and look to the documented reasons for the decision to adjust and move forward in the best way possible. When that process is changed for whatever reason that decision affects lives in real time. The funding awarded to the organizations to carry out services have real people attached to them who all have lives and families, so as soon as it becomes a reality that the program will not be funded the organization takes steps to inform everyone connected to the contract. Now to reverse a decision when the ball is rolling on the initial decision is a recipe for chaos for everyone involved and then you reverse it again is just plain cruel. I look to the city to do better.

It was a rollercoaster ride for all potential grantees and not knowing the decisions until mid-June made difficult to plan for the future as far as staffing, pay equity salary increases and budgeting.

Process favored same orgs that get funding every time. New small orgs left out. We will never apply again, felt it was biased towards orgs that reviewers favored.

The grant questions were a bit unclear in what they were actually asking especially since every grant question was through a DEI lens it was hard to give new information to every question.

I think the hardest thing was that our application was scored very highly, and yet we were only given 50% of our requested amount (and less than we had received in prior years). Our program is led by a woman of color and we have a very diverse staff who engage children and families who are largely from communities of color. It is frustrating to work hard on an application, to really tell our story and share the incredible outcomes that we've had, and then have it be seemingly arbitrarily decided to underfund the work that has been very successful. When organizations have demonstrated positive outcomes and good stewardship of funds, that should be reflected in the funds that are allocated to do that work. In my opinion, more weight should be given to organizations who have demonstrated successful outcomes and who put together thoughtful applications that provide evidence and context for the work.

Our organization's scores were wildly inconsistent with one another. Also upon reviewing the feedback we received, much of it did not make sense or seemed like the scorer did not pay

attention to the application fully? It was very frustrating to see both very positive reviews of our application and scathing ones that we couldn't figure out what exactly their complaints were.

No dissatisfaction on PCL's part. I wish the City, County or State would do more to provide additional funding for this initiative. While we are very grateful for being selected and receiving funding - the decrease definitely hurt and as a homeowner, getting hit again on my property taxes is not the move!

While our organization has not historically reflected racial or cultural diversity in its founding team, we now serve an increasingly diverse population of preschoolers—many of whom come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. As a new “Preschool for All” provider, this shift highlights how urgently we need to enhance our programming to better meet the needs of children, parents, and staff.

In our recent grant proposal, we sought funding to strengthen our educational offerings and provide meaningful support for these families. Unfortunately, although reviewers had the opportunity to include feedback on their decisions, we received little or no feedback. We were also disheartened to see that larger providers received awards, while mid-sized organizations like ours were overlooked.

Given the changing demographics of the families we serve—and our growing commitment to equity—we need resources to evolve and meet this new demand. Supporting our organization will enable us to build culturally responsive, inclusive, and effective programming tailored to diverse learners and their communities.

I feel that I lacked clarity about PCL's eligibility criteria. I read the available materials online, attended a webinar session, and believed that my organization and project would be eligible for funding. However, we were declined for ineligibility just three days after submitting our application, "withdrawn from consideration." The feedback we received was that we were not considered "direct service." This is a challenging thing to prove in our field, and I feel our direct service impact could have been better explained if we were able to communicate directly with a program officer ahead of time. If accessibility to arts education for children in Portland was a priority, I still feel that we would have been an excellent fit for this funding opportunity. This application represented a significant time investment for us, and it was disappointing to be so quickly dismissed without even the valuable feedback about our work that could have come from a community panel review. Furthermore, I was then kept on all ongoing email communications from Portland Children's Levy throughout the year, continuing to detail a review process over many months from which my organization did not benefit. Overall, I'm disappointed with this miscommunication about eligibility.

The application itself was a huge undertaking. Probably the longest application I've had to complete in my grant-writing career of 4 years. Many of the narrative questions seemed to ask for the same information over and over.

I believe making the application shorter and more succinct would not only be a kindness to nonprofit staff who are often working multiple roles, but to the reviewing committee as well. With a shorter application, more people on the review committee could review each

application, thus making the process more fair and equitable.

The multiple steps in the the review process were unclear to me and we were unaware that we were still allowed to submit video testimony until a few days before that deadline.

Other nonprofit peers I spoke with were unsure of why the process involved presenting portfolios to city council. This did not seem like an equitable practice. Why not just present the top scorers?

The ultimate decision to simply fund organizations from the prior levy cycle seemed a bit lazy and was a bit of a slap in the face to all of us who spent countless hours on the application.

My organization was not recommended to funding due to "serious performance concerns". We didn't receive this information until it was presented publicly. It was a surprise to us to be given this information well after our application was turned in (we could have addressed concerns in our application if we'd have known this would be the reason). Additionally, there was no context provided on why or what areas were concerning. And paired with an extremely short testimony option, we had no idea how to even begin to address those concerns and chose to lead with a client story instead. We honestly didn't even know if a direct response would have had any bearing anyways as it's unclear who reviews the testimony. It was also incredibly frustrating to not receive this information until a public recommendation went out, and with no context, it was potentially harmful to our reputation. I absolutely believe nonprofits should hold high expectations and meet outcomes, but PCL expectations are often extremely inflexible and don't allow us to respond to emerging needs within our program. So putting out publicly that we have performance concerns when our own data shows otherwise has the potential to harm our relationships and trust in the community. My hope is that future applicants that do have performance concerns are addressed much earlier on, given notice that those concerns will affect their recommendation on a future application, and given opportunities to provide context. I appreciate that the staff try to be transparent and objective by not talking with applicants in the process, but the serious lack of transparency leading up to final decisions was incredibly disappointing. We understand that hard decisions have to be made, but the manner in which they were left us feeling confused and frustrated.

If there were times in which CBO's could come in to give oral testimony would be great to know. We are here to support these efforts and highlight the great work that is being done. Don't be scared to ask for this support.

I don't question the Levy staff's or city's commitment to increasing access and opportunity for children and families experiencing inequities. However, I feel some of the decision making criteria weren't as clear as they could have been, in that currently funded (as of '24-25) organizations and larger organizations were going to be de-prioritized for funding for the grant cycle beginning '25-26. There were quite a few instances of lower scoring applications being funded over higher scoring ones. I would prefer a process based entirely on scoring as being most clear, and an alternative might be in-person interviews with scoring and comments, as well as written applications with scoring. We would have also appreciated the

<p>opportunity to bring families we serve to a City Council or Allocation Committee meeting to engage in advocacy for themselves.</p>
<p>I think the length of application could be shortened.</p>
<p>I would appreciate if comments from reviewers was a required field. Our scores differed wildly -- from one reviewer that scored us very highly to another that scored us very low with no explanation from either reviewer. This makes it really hard to know where we could have improved. There also has not been a formal process that I have been aware of to receive feedback on our application. As a smaller organization, we did invest a lot of time into this application -- from attending multiple PCL meetings in advance to hear about the priorities and what the committee was focusing on, to reading all the online materials, attending the grant info session and compiling our application. In total, it was a pretty significant investment of time. Being able to hear direct feedback would be very helpful to know how we could improve in the future, or to learn if we simply aren't a strong fit.</p>
<p>Page limits were challenging, especially given font size. It was difficult to provide all necessary information within space allotted.</p>
<p>The improvement that I would like to see is to make PCL grants every 3 years instead of every 5 years. It seems that some big organizations have dominated for receiving these grants while mid-sized/small organizations struggled for same funding.</p>
<p>Basing awards on current grantee outcomes/outputs is a challenge in the funding process and it's unclear if that decision is only made by PCL staff. If an application has a high score but is not recommended for funding based on unmet goals, what context is given to the community volunteers and the allocation committee? Sometimes programs have not met their goals due to circumstances beyond the organizations control and there should be consideration for growth and improvements made over the course of the contract. Additionally, what is the purpose of scoring applications if decisions are made regardless of the score. The recorded and written testimonies did not feel effective because there was no way for the grantee to know for certain that their testimonies were actually read and watched. Public testimony is way more powerful, even if it takes more time and planning.</p>
<p>I found the questions on the application (in the narrative portion) pretty duplicative. It became hard to figure out what exactly the question was asking without repeating a lot of information over and over.</p> <p>No question on the application clearly focused on "what is your plan/proposal." It was challenging to figure out how to explain the actual plan within the questions that were posed. Then we actually received feedback from a reviewer stating that we received a lower score for exactly that reason - we hadn't clearly explained our plan.</p> <p>While I appreciated receiving the scores from the reviewers, few of them provided feedback that helped us understand why we received the score that we did (particularly if the score was low). This makes it challenging to understand how to better explain our answers in the future. We also received some feedback that didn't seem to line up with our understanding of average wages in the community. For example, one reviewer noted that our staff should be making over \$30 per hour which doesn't seem in line with community averages for the type</p>

of position. I don't disagree with the comment, but I was unclear how our score could be lowered because of that.

1. I was very dissatisfied with the implementation of community recommendations. I do not believe that the spirit of what the Community Advisory Council put forward was enacted to fidelity. The analysis of the community recommendations was still done by PCL staff and the Allocation Committee, and it was the analysis of community recommendations that ultimately impacted decision making, not the community recommendations themselves. I do not believe that the Allocation Committee is an accurate reflection of the communities that PCL serves and this disparity in influential decision making took power away from community voice when the ultimate decision making is concentrated with the same people of power that it has always been. The Allocation Committee that is making final decisions on both, the analysis of community priorities, and the final funding decisions, needs to better reflect the communities PCL serves and the community voices that it is seeking to interpret and analyze.

2. There was no formula or quantifiable process that was shared with applicants on how recommended priorities were utilized and weighted to make final decisions. The scoring process was clear. But what is the weight given to an organization that is a new applicant, or small applicant, or serving a specific priority population? What is the level of weight that is taken away from a current awardee, or large applicant? Are these things worth 2 points, 3 points, 5 points? Does an org lose points if their description as large causes them to be deprioritized? This process of making decisions based on how the PCL staff and Allocation Committee interpreted community priorities created confusion and subjectivity, and allows for accusations of bias, whether or not those accusations are accurate. The process was held up by the process designers as being transparent. But this piece of the process is the opposite of transparency, and no one could quantify how this worked other than a group of people who sit in seats of power making completely subjective decisions. The way the stated priorities are implemented and utilized in the decision-making process must be explained and quantified. Then if I am not funded but have a score that is higher than someone who IS funded, then I can see how and why that decision was made objectively. I believe that this specific reality created a lot of the confusion that played out in the process.

3. Culturally Specific services MUST be prioritized. It was a great step to prioritize services for Communities of Color. However, WHO is providing those services must also be a priority, and this priority should carry the GREATEST weight. For example, in a quantifiable system that I called for in the previous response, if an applicant is serving a priority population, then that could constitute a 2-point increase. But if an applicant is FROM the priority population that it is serving, then that should then constitute an additional 5-point increase. There is no substitute for the empowering impact of Culturally Specific services. And Culturally Responsive is not even close to the equivalent in terms of truly empowering the community populations that we want to prioritize. The number of examples, specifically in the Mentoring Category, of White/Mainstream agencies that were funded to serve communities of color was egregious. Who is served is something that should continue to be prioritized. But who is SERVING them must be prioritized even more. White agencies have been getting funded (in every space of public funding, not just PCL) to "save" communities of color for FAR too long. I

believe that there is universal agreement that communities of color can, and should, be funded to save and serve ourselves when other factors are generally equal.

4. I have 2 more examples regarding impact of past performance and the lack of impact of submitted testimony. But there is no more space to go deeper with these.

The funding was not based on the scores and therefore high scoring applications didn't always get funding and that was confusing.

PCL overwhelmingly funds orgs that don't serve BIPOC Youth which is not the purpose of this fund.

This fund is compromised and the leadership is wildly out of touch.

This process has been harmful and the fund doesn't do what it was created to do. Over 70% of Thai fund doesn't go to BIOC Kids. The \$5mil to mt hood community college is wild too. That's not even in our city. Portland tax payers shouldn't be funding that.

I suppose my last response encapsulates how we were dissatisfied, also that the process this past year seemed to really put additional pressure on PCL staff. We also felt somewhat miffed that we took the time to respond to reviewer comments which took a good deal of this and cost but it had not impact. Overall though we're just grateful to receive funding this cycle and were relieved to have the grant awards approved. The prospect of going through the entire grant cycle again was daunting as it takes a lot of effort and staff time to apply and manage every step of the process - so definitely grateful to be funded.

We were dissatisfied to see our proposal score skewed so heavily by one volunteer evaluator. Most of the evaluators understood our proposal and scored it within the same range (+/-10 points), which helped offset the one evaluator who scored us 30 points lower than any others.

PCL's dedication to DEI policies in the orgs it funds is obviously admirable, but there was so much focus in the application on sharing what the DEI policies are behind our organization and its programs bordered on excessive. I felt like I answered versions of the same DEI question three different times while simultaneously feeling hard-pressed to find places to fit in narratives explaining what our programs themselves actually *are*.

All criteria that will be used in decision making about funding should be shared transparently before the proposal writing process begins. It was disappointing to score very highly, and get funding at levels much lower than lower scoring organizations. The prioritizing of organizations that had not received PCL funding in the past was not clearly communicated before the RFP process began. Clearly, City Council also had concerns about this but it really was too late at that point to have a fair remedy.

Ensure that a % of the funded programs every year are new, to encourage innovation and new ideas. Logically, if there is a large inequity in Portland and Pcl has been funding the same programs every cycle, is the approach working?

By having a new opportunity category, you get new ideas w the chance to achieve new and perhaps better results.

Also consider programs that lift up every child equally vs just a single group. Ask questions about inclusion but don't eliminate someone who isn't a niche program that only markets based on skin color or whether someone is LGBTQ.

We felt that the PCL staff recommendation was not only biased and narrow-sighted, but also completely overshadowed our excellent new application and program.

Communication at it's base is the most important suggestion I can provide.

Thank you.

PCL's processes does not give enough of a barrier to staff's bias in the decision making process. This problem goes further, however, and staff could use a reminder on what makes an effective equity based program. It goes beyond strictly reaching key performance indicators but a holistic view of the overall impact of the program. The feedback we were provided for the upcoming large grant was biased, did not provide details or any attempt to work with us to improve and continue our work with families in three different communities.

We wish the application could be shortened further since it's a huge lift for staff to complete. Some questions feel a bit redundant and could probably be condensed. Otherwise, we understand that there's probably no way to simplify the application process and still give PCL staff and committee members enough information to go on during the review.

Appendix 4: Additional race/ethnicity demographics of survey respondents

Answers shown in the table show verbatim how survey respondents answered an open-ended question, “how do you identify your race/ethnicity?” Some respondents wrote the same answers, and some wrote unique answers. The numbers show count of responses for each answer. PCL grouped responses.

	Applicant survey respondents (n=79)	Reviewer survey respondents (n= 44)
Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)	African American 1 Asian American 2 Black 5 Black African 1 Black/ African Immigrants 1 Black/Africa 1 East Asian 1 I am Black. 1 Indigenous 1 Latine 1 Mixed race, Xicana 1 Multi-racial 1 Native 1 Native American 2 Non caucasian 1 Pacific Islander (Samoan) 1 Person of color. 1 White and Filipino/ Mixed Race 1 TOTAL BIPOC 24	African American 2 African American / Black 1 Asian 3 Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Slavic, White 1 biracial 1 Black 1 Black not african american 1 blackity black 1 Hawaiian and Black (non Hispanic) 1 Hispanic 3 Hispanic/Latina 1 Latinx 1 Mexican and Fillipino 1 Native American 1 White and Indigenous 1 TOTAL BIPOC 20
white	Caucasian 3 White 22 White non-Hispanic 1 White woman 1 White/caucasian 3 TOTAL white 30	Caucasian 1 White 10 white - European descent 1 white american 1 White, Jewish 1 White/Nordic 1 TOTAL white 15
Unclear/blank	jewish 1 no answer 24 TOTAL unclear 25	no answer 9

Appendix 5: Comments from Community Council

Evaluations

This evaluation was conducted as a part of the Community Council's July 28, 2025 public meeting in reflection on the conclusion of the large grants funding process and full group discussion. 10 of 13 Community Council members submitted responses.

Question 1: What stands out to you?
I felt that the responses you provided in defense of the process were poised, knowledgeable, and defended the process very well. I think the speedbump of that process with the city council was due to some outspoken orgs and novice counselors that wanted to be responsive to Black orgs. I am grateful the council reversed their vote. I think the additional testimony you provided helped assure the council that the PCL was in good hands.
Nothing in particular
I appreciate the deep thoughtfulness that staff has brought to the entire process, including with this update and share out.
The demand for funding requests exceeding the amount of funds available, and will only continue to be an issue given the current threats of federal funding, and the impacts that will have on the nonprofit sector.
Lots of good data showcasing that the program was designed ground up with equity in mind and it applied it very well. It discussed the problems of trying to make everything fair and the limited resources we work with, while also showcasing some of the problems that led to large grantees to protest.
Staff have been extremely thoughtful and thorough with their response to questions and feedback from city council and grantees. I think in the next funding round the council and allocation committee need to very deeply consider the role that testimony plays in funding decisions. It does not make sense for a more politically connected organization to derail a multi-year process by being able to access council or allocation committee members. Additionally, I would encourage city council to more directly and proactively engage with PCL staff as experts in their work, and for allocation and city council members to spend some time and effort in building relationships toward a better understanding of the process prior to grant decisions being made.
How smart, thoughtful and intentional the staff are. However, I always think that! What also stands out is the limitations on how honest we can be in this conversation because it is recorded and anything we say is public record. That, for me at least, limits some of what I want to say and talk about re: City Council.
I was amazed about the knowledge and detail you provided to the city council in order to justify the decisions that the allocation committee made. You all do so much amazing work. I'm sorry the city council did not appreciate it at first.
What stood out to me with the large grants was the current city council initially remanding the Allocation Committee's funding decision. I think that there does need to be more

communication and mutual understanding between the Allocation Committee and the City Council. There is a lot of intentionality and nuance to the funding decision process that was missed by the Council.

Good discussion

Question 2: Is there any action you'd urge staff to take?

No, I think the work you've done has been excellent.

Not that I can think of

Nothing in particular except proper training and ensuring you prepare any potential successors to your roles in the future of how to properly handle this as well as documenting the decisions so that they may have access to the information for guidance.

I think you all need a two week vacation and several margaritas.

Jokes aside, I think staff should continue to operate in the transparent and deeply intentional manner that they have shown us is possible. PCL should be a model for other government grantmakers and I am so deeply appreciative of the grace and expertise that the staff has shown throughout this process.

Encourage/prep the big boss (whomever Lisa reports to) to advocate and build a solid relationship with City Council. I don't think Councilor Ryan is doing enough to advocate and position PCL as trustworthy. I might also urge staff to share positive outcomes of grantees whenever possible to City Council -- help them understand how much good is happening in our community through these dollars. Maybe encourage grantees to contact their Councilor to share updates and/or invite their councilor to grant-funded events. In summary, I urge lots of communication and goodwill building efforts (as appropriate).

It's important to consider what is the best way to keep the city council from misunderstanding the information presented to them. As well it's important to make sure that applicants who are more well connected or well known do not have an edge over those who are newer to the community or not as well connected. Finding a way or designing a way for applicants to appeal decisions without one applicant agency having more sway than another is very important.

I urge the staff to continue to build relationships with the City Council to bridge the gap in misunderstandings. Also, to consider the role of testimonies and the power dynamics that may play out between organizations that have stronger relationships with the City. Overall I think PCL staff did a good job clarifying the misunderstandings.

No

Question 3: What worked well about how the Community Council participated in the large grants funding process?

Lots of group time for discussion.

There was a lot of open communication within the Community Council. I believe having enough time to meet as a whole group and in smaller groups was beneficial for voices to be heard.

I really valued the altitude (and depth) to which staff engaged the Council. I think it was just right – we didn't have to review each application, but we still had the ability to understand and influence what was prioritized.
Our small and group discussions before voting felt really helpful in allowing us all to share our thoughts and consider the perspectives of others in order to get to an agreement.
We were able to shape a comprehensive, accessible, fair application process that provided newcomers a strong opportunity to stand toe to toe with previous grantees, and made it transparent and fully formed.
I appreciated the opportunity to set priorities and help define some of the application characteristics. Staff guided council in a balanced way, and provided excellent context and feedback about our work.
What worked well is how you led us so thoroughly and intentionally through the process of reimagining a grant program. Your commitment to transparency, accountability and collaboration is so appreciated.
I think most of us are very serious and committed to the process. We put a lot of thought and energy into the tasks placed before us. The staff put a lot of time and energy into preparing for the meetings. The staff is very supportive and I really appreciate the way the staff helped me manage my disability without making me feel less than.
I think what worked well was balancing the number of programs selected for funding that have not received funding and those that have received funding before. I also think we did a good job making the process of applying more accessible, especially to communities that have been hard to reach. I think it is a win that for the first time a LGBTQ+ culturally specific organization received funding. I also think it is great that the number of applications increased. Although the amount of money available to reward is less.
Everyone participated

Question 4: What would you change about how the Community Council participates in the next funding round?
Sometimes the choices felt too similar. The one area of the process I didn't love was downvoting and upvoting orgs for certain criteria. That aspect felt murky to me of why we would need to do that instead of going with the orgs straight score.
I'm not sure I would change anything.
Perhaps only just having a report to city council provided by the allocation committee prior to the final decisions, with community councilor testimony possible.
I would like for there to be some more pre-work for council members to have a better understanding of not just PCL and the grants but about the nonprofit social services sector in Portland more generally. I heard a lot of myths and statements in council meetings that make me think that members may need some more knowledge and context about the service array in our city to help guide our decisions.
RE: the small grants cycle, it sounds like we are already participating differently and in ways that I value, e.g., reviewing applications and making recommendations. RE: the large grants

cycle, I can't think of any suggested changes. I am happy to hear that PCL is collecting feedback from impacted folks and I look forward to learning more about what they say.
I felt really disappointed that we didn't have more say and more sway into how the process moved forward. A lot of the time I felt like we were learning and coming to understand the process but not really changing anything or making our mark on the process. Sometimes it just felt like checking boxes that were already marked. I also would like to see the audio and visual work more consistently and more timely. That was a consistent problem throughout the process. I'm sure new equipment would help but I also think there were some issues with the people working the equipment as well.
I think that the allowance of testimonies should be further explored or at the very least the process be reconsidered. It can create unfair power dynamics with those who have stronger relationships with the city.
Nothing

Question 5: Do you feel your voice and perspective was heard by PCL staff and reflected in the outcomes of our work together (i.e. funding recommendations, funding priorities, the grant review process, the application questions and scoring criteria, community engagement goals, priority populations)?
Yes, I think there were a lot of different experiences represented in council. Sometimes I wonder if we had enough diversity within perspectives because we often voted very easily in an overwhelming majority.
I do
Yes, though I suppose one consequence of the Council staying out of specific applications is that we were a bit removed from the actual orgs/programs and may not understand the funded orgs (as well as those not selected) as well. I wonder if there could be an opportunity for us to get some snapshots of organizations, even along the way, to understand some of the actual applicants.
yes
Generally very much so. I feel as if I had the most impact I reasonable could as one person in a group of 12 without dominating it. I'm proud of my work, the support of staff, and look forward to using this to inform my decision making process and leadership in the future.
Definitely
Yes.
I felt personally heard and respected by the staff. I didn't feel overall that my voice and perspective were reflected in the outcomes of the work. In many respects I feel the outcomes of the work were already decided and the parameters so rigid that there wasn't room for any meaningful change.
Yes, I did feel like my voice was heard. I liked the prompt questions because it invited good conversation and brainstorming. I also see our recommendations reflected in the priorities and application process.
Yes

Question 6: If not, what would you ask PCL staff to do differently?
N/A
Staff have been incredibly helpful!
n/a
I know it's important for us to understand the process, but I think it can be pretty repetitive at times, at least I found it that way. Frankly I would rather read the text that you're going to show me on the overhead or read to me in a meeting. That would save me hours of time. And then we could have that time to really talk things over in a broader sense rather than these very narrow questions we're often given. At times it really felt a bit patronizing, especially the meeting where we were choosing between funding group a or group b. They were basically the same and it really felt like a waste of my time.

Question 7: Do you have any other feedback or reflections about the large grants funding process that you'd like to share with PCL staff?
I felt well supported and guided through this process.
No
Thank you for holding and designing such a complex process!
n/a
Not particularly.
No feedback, just more appreciation for your grace, steadiness, and intentionality at all steps of the process
I am so sorry that it got so topsy-turvy. Having volunteered with the Levy for the past 3+ years, I have only been impressed by the rigor with which you approach your work. You did not deserve to be accused of things that had no bearing in truth, nor to be forced to be in a defensive position. I hope the next round of recommendations are warmly received.
I think you are all wonderfully lovely people who are very hard working. I also think you should trust the people you've chosen for this committee to make bigger decisions than you've allowed us to make this time around.
No, I have shared all the feedback I have at the moment.

Interviews

PCL staff conducted 1-1 interviews throughout September 2025 to ask more detailed follow-up questions about the large grants funding process. 12 of 13 Community Council members participated in an interview. Below are the two questions staff asked and Community Council members responses, which were transcribed during the interview and confirmed for accuracy by council members afterwards. Not all council members answered all questions.

Question 1: Is there any other feedback you'd like to share about the large grants funding process?

There needs to be a stronger relationship between City Council and PCL's Allocation Committee and Community Council. Lobbying at city council leaves room for some organizations to have more influence than others – important for us to have more discussions about how to make that portion of the process more fair. Communication aspect is problematic between PCL and City Council – this leads to more misunderstanding in community as well. There needs to be clear communication and more of an effort by City Council to understand what's going on; to go through this process as we did this past summer is a lot.

As a community council there were really good intentions, and also a lack of understanding of the context that PCL is operating in in the non-profit sector - noticed some toxic non-profit myths crop up. For new council members it might be helpful to have more orientation to the service continuum for kids and families that PCL works within (small v large, new v established). CC members seem to understand PCL; not so much the context we're operating within.

I think the City Council failed community in not being informed before making decisions. Appalled at what happened and City Council's lack of knowledge.

Overall, I think it went quite well – proud to be part of it. Wanted more specific data.

In general, enjoyed process. It didn't feel like we were making large decisions – making small refinements to a framework that was already established. Are we being very helpful or not? We [Community Council] all vote pretty similarly – it's so smooth. Can feel like an echo chamber – would be nice to have more diversity of perspective on the [Community] Council. Disappointed at first round of City Council decision.

Disappointed that Dan Ryan was unprepared to advocate for PCL and its recommended grantees during initial council discussions. Are there other city councilors who can be cultivated to be advocates for PCL?

2 portfolio process – didn't quite understand why or how we were weighing them against each other because they were so similar; feels redundant to do this. In future – could consider doing 1-1 or say we no longer need to do meeting because portfolios are so similar.

Large grants funding process was a pretty fair process – I thought it was efficient. How we executed it this past time was a good starting foundation for y'all [staff] moving forward. Overall, additional prep work before large meetings seems to help move Community Council along when there are heftier meetings. Giving the [Community] Council too many options can get us into the weeds – sometimes less is more when we're making decisions as a large collective. Starting small and giving us parameters is helpful. Keeping decisions narrow and specific is helpful. Keep in mind scope and role of Community Council in determining types of engagement. In response to tension about scope of Community Council role: We're trying to make sure we're responsive to what community is saying and to make this as equitable as possible, streamline it – that's it, we're not doing anything else.

Orientation was too detailed and in the weeds (thinking of 2023) – too much minutiae that we didn't end up needing – that fed into expectation that we would be more in the details than we ended up being – I think more focus on the bigger picture and what part the

Community Council had to play in the bigger picture would be a better use of time and probably be more time effective. A lot of the information was interesting, but it wasn't always necessary; in general too much information, to the degree that it can become confusing. Evaluate information in presentations through the lens of: Does the Community Council need to know this? Not – is this something I would want to know as a staffer? Discussions could be really fruitful, but sometimes where we had an idea it couldn't come to fruition because there wasn't enough time for discussion. Everyone did an excellent job trying to figure out how to manage everything. I enjoy looking at how systems work. Staff respectful and thoughtful. Thing that frustrated Council member through whole process: here you have a lot of brilliant minds; we got to do almost nothing – almost no impact – that was so wasteful. I thought we had some really good ideas. Ex: in 2023, we were talking about housing – the need for housing for youth and families with children. A lack of creative thinking – “there is a way when you think you cannot make it.” How can we stretch the boundaries?

Appreciate how staff were able to break down big items into digestible pieces; appreciated transparency of entire process. Making time for each CC members give feedback, helps folks feel like they're a part of something.

Q2: Do you have any thoughts on whether we should revise the testimony process with the Allocation Committee? This past round we allowed written and video testimony. Verbal testimony at in person Allocation Committee meetings was not permitted.

This component of the process is fair, and so long as it is enforced, should stay as is; more fair than 1-1 situation with City Council. There are restrictions put in place on AC side to leave less room for influence. There are so many ways that different organizations have influence that are hard to control.

No thoughts – current process is fine; best process given concerns named

I don't have a problem with the testimony process with the AC – it is the ways that City Council is able to be swayed by lobbying from more politically connected orgs that is concerning. Concerned that very politically connected orgs can put thumb on scale in ways that aren't very ethical – it would be great for City Council to have a plan for how they're going to navigate that.

No thoughts

Overall – I think testimony process with AC should stay the same; communicate process to applicants. Main issue to tackle would be lobbying with City Council.

No thoughts

Ask applicants what they prefer. Personal opinion – verbal testimony at AC meetings is an important civic engagement opportunity and would include; when it's at the leisure of the AC to review it seems unlikely to rise to the top of priorities.

On the fence – sees both sides, benefits and drawbacks – would support either way

Keep process as is and maintain flexibility for how testimony is submitted – keep it optional. Helpful to have some form of testimony outside of applications – there maybe things that don't fit or that don't feel sufficient when responding to application questions that you may

be able to articulate, share in a qualitative way – to me that could give organizations another opportunity to go more in-depth, or it can provide AC additional context that may answer a question that could be determining their decision. I personally think a variety of ways – video or written – and eliminating in person – is good, don't require testimony. Ask AC if they feel like testimony is beneficial in helping them make decisions; eliminate testimony if it's not contributing to decision-making.

Keeping testimony verbal/written with AC works. Would be nice to get grantees to work together better.

Current process is fair – adjusting won't make it any more favorable to anybody

Ensure that public officials are hearing testimony and considering testimony in their decision-making; downside is that current process is not made as public and from external perspective feels more challenging to hold AC members accountable as City Council members are accountable – there's something about submitting testimony into the ether versus giving testimony directly in person to the decision maker; AC/City Council processes should be the same. Reality is that these organizations are competing against each other. Are there ways in which you could frame the conversations or testimony so that they don't feel like it was competitive. When it came down to City Council the testimonies that were shared were pushing against those that were awarded; the reality is that this is a competitive process, and switching it to virtual helps folks feel like they're not competing when that's not the reality. One idea is it worth considering allowing public testimony during CC.

Appendix 6: Notes from interviews with Allocation Committee members

During November 2025, staff met with each Allocation Committee member individually and asked the following questions. The notes below summarize the reflections of each member.

- In light of the funding process feedback, what changes (if any) would you make to the Allocation Committee's decision-making process?
- What else would you like to share about your experience in the process and are there any other ideas you have for improvements?

Communication to City Council also include more clarity on the layers of decision-making. Seemed like they didn't understand the process or their role in the process.

Making sure to outline to applicants what was provided by PCL to city council. Making sure they know their role and applicants understand city council's role.

AC followed the instructions to avoid advocacy/lobbying. Layers in PCL process helps build in more fairness- community reviewers, staff, community council, allocation committee. Lobbying occurs when there aren't layers of process, and when individuals or groups want to help give information to decision-makers.

Sometimes challenging to see why staff recommended some lower scoring applications for funding. Wants to value score with programs most likely to perform well. Want some ability to pull up lower scoring but caution against big gaps between scores of apps recommended. If lower scoring but high performing, reaching priorities are good factors. Important to keep using past performance. Does AC want to have a threshold on how much gap/jump is allowed between higher scoring apps recommended and much lower scoring?

Positive experience overall and appreciated level of detail from staff. Appreciated having ample time to review recommendations and scores before having to make decisions. Was able to ask staff questions, get additional context, and consider

recommendations. Wants to make sure future processes continue having time for AC members to meet individually with staff for questions, preparation in advance of decision-making.

Based on the recent experience, would be willing to go to city council to present AC decisions. “I would say I was surprised by City Council and maybe if I were to change anything I didn’t realize that I should have been there. I don’t think it’s staff’s job to defend the decisions of the Allocation Committee, because those weren’t their decisions, they were the Committee’s decisions. I would make it a priority to show up in the future.”

PCL made many improvements over the years based on past feedback. Complaints felt like damned if you do, damned if you don’t. Personally tried to keep politics out of AC decision-making. Used information provided to AC members that were result of layers of process- scores, community council and allocation committee decisions. Is not AC members’ jobs to pick personal favorites or to ensure earmarks for any particular organization. Some orgs were new to me, and that shouldn’t be a disadvantage to them.

“There was never going to be a good enough. The way they handled that would make me think twice about volunteering. To be so attacked on a character level – Allocation Committee, grant reviewers, Community Council members- for those of us who weighed in on the process, it was demeaning – I didn’t politically interfere with work of dozens and dozens and dozens of volunteers.”

Some of the narrative from City Council and from advocates around what was funded and wasn’t funded was inaccurate. Some applicants provide very specific services that culturally specific providers do not offer. Some of the narrative overlooked the experience of other communities like children with disabilities. I was more interested in ensuring excellent services, across a variety of needs and communities, and not virtual signaling.

It wasn’t clear whether rules that precluded Allocation Committee members from speaking to applicants about the funding round should also prevent the Committee member who also serves on City Council from speaking to applicants after Committee funding decisions were made. Committee member/Councilor

opted to follow AC rules and not meet, talk to, or connect with applicants before or after AC decisions were made. City councilors didn't understand that advocacy rules were different for the Allocation Committee, and the implication was that somehow the AC wasn't doing their job and the Councilor was denying applicants the right to advocate with City Council.

Appreciated staff's facilitation/prep, support for decision-making.

Supports ways to ensure city council has time to get information, ask questions before going into their decision-making. Try to have AC member(s) meet with city council members or their staff in advance to help make sure materials from PCL are read/reviewed before council decisions.

Wanted more time to talk with other AC members individually in advance of decision-making. Politics of it was hard and was great learning. Felt like learned more from the way it was challenging rather than if it had gone smoothly. Appreciated staff prep for questions- knew how busy staff were and didn't want to ask for more.

Staff could schedule the individual AC meetings to be 2:2 especially where AC members may or may not know each other as well or experience working together. Build more team.

Ways to help better communicate process to applicants, AC and city council- info graphic showing layers of process and decision-making, showing factors considered.

Could ensure that agenda for decision-making has designated time at the beginning for reflections from each AC member, such as some of their takeaways from testimony they reviewed, rationale for their own choices and if they opt not to follow funding recommendations from staff/community council, then what they want to change and why.

Involve AC members with city council after AC makes its funding decisions. AC members could offer to meet with council staff/staff members to answer

questions, brief/prepare them in advance of city council decisions on PCL. Try to work by Council district.

In past PCL funding processes, there was no Community Council, but now AC has more help and can use more community-voice in decision-making because of the input from the Community Council.

When AC has to make funding decisions in the future, ask Community Council members to come and present recommendations/work alongside staff at AC meetings.

Once AC makes its funding decisions, ask AC members to present those decisions to city council. Ask volunteer reviewers and community council members to come and be in the audience too so that city council can see more of the people who were involved and understand the range of community involved. Or AC and CC member could present to City Council.

Wants to help ensure community is presenting to Council to try to protect against Council's political influence, wants to lift up all the community work done by PCL so that city council can understand it better and see it. This approach also gives Allocation Committee chair who is on city council more leverage to see the range of community voice and process that led to the Allocation Committee funding decisions.

For upcoming Small Grants process, staff could invite a former small grantee that transitioned to large grant, can speak to getting technical assistance and support to grow.

If AC member can attend CC meeting, that may help too. Could be available to answer questions. In addition, CC and AC members could pair up and reach out for individual meetings with city councilors/their staff before city council decisions.