

MEETING DATE: February 13, 2020

AGENDA ITEM: G

TO: BSCC Chair and Members

FROM: Kasey Warmuth, Chief of Research, kasey.warmuth@bscc.ca.gov

SUBJECT: Grant Proposal Evaluation Process: **Requesting Approval**

Summary

This agenda item requests Board approval of the *Grant Proposal Evaluation Process* (Attachment G-1) developed by Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) research staff. Development of the process included consultation with an Industrial Psychologist with experience in psychological measurement and the proper execution of rating processes and focus group input.

Background

One of the responsibilities of the BSCC is to award competitive grant funds to local entities for projects designed to reduce justice system involvement through intervention, education, and prevention strategies. In support of this responsibility the BSCC developed a process by which grant proposals are evaluated to ensure the awards are based on the strength of the proposal and the excellence of the proposed projects.¹ The goal in the development of the proposal evaluation process is to provide a reliable, valid, and fair system for ranking proposals according to merit. The ultimate objective of the process is to select proposals for funding that most completely satisfy the criteria established by the California Legislature, the federal government, and the BSCC Board.

Over the last few years, there have been some changes related to BSCC grant responsibilities that have impacted the nature of the evaluation process. The change that has had the greatest impact is the increase in the number of proposals submitted. While addressing this change with the development of the multiple-panel rating process, the BSCC reviewed all aspects of the *Grant Proposal Evaluation Process* in an attempt to ensure the process is as valid, fair, and impartial as possible. As a result of this review, BSCC staff has made some modifications to the process.

Key modifications to the *Grant Proposal Evaluation Process* are summarized in this report and our proposed for approval by the Board. Modifications include the multiple-panel rating process, elimination of the discussion of ratings, and technical decisions regarding the management of a missing rater. Each of these modifications are described in the section that follows. These modifications were:

¹ Penal Code Section 6024 (d) requires that the BSCC establish priorities for the use of funds as are available pursuant to federal acts, and approve the expenditure of all funds pursuant to such federal acts, while PC 6027 (b)(5) requires the Board to develop comprehensive, unified, and orderly procedures to ensure that applications for state and federal grants are processed fairly, efficiently, and in a manner consistent with the mission of the board.

- guided by BSCC research staff with education and experience in psychological measurement;
- made in consultation with an Industrial Psychologist with extensive experience in psychological measurement and proper execution of panel processes;
- considered input from prior ESC members; and
- guided with BSCC executive management oversight.

Additionally, a focus group consisting of five prior and current ESC members was convened in January 2020 specifically to obtain their input regarding the recommendation to no longer discuss ratings during the final ESC meeting.² Prior to the meeting, the members were presented with the staff recommendation to no longer discuss ratings and provided with the rationale that led to the recommendation. During the meeting, each member actively participated in the discussion of the recommendation, which at times became a spirited debate. The focus group reached a consensus with the recommendation and the group then discussed alternative methods to wrap up the ESC process for members. The focus group's input is reflected in the *Grant Proposal Evaluation Process* document.

Key Modifications to the Grant Proposal Evaluation Process

1. Multiple-Panel Rating Process

With increasing numbers of proposals and increasing complexity of proposal content, there has been an escalation in the amount of time that is required for ESC members to carry out the process of individually reading and evaluating *each* proposal. In response to this concern, the BSCC developed a multiple-panel process in which subsets of ESC members are assigned to different panels. Each panel reads and evaluates a smaller, but representative, sample of proposals. In addition, a small subset of proposals is common across all panels for the purpose of evaluating possible panel differences. Further, standardized scores are used to overcome any possible panel differences. This multiple-panel process is necessary to ensure that the hours of service required by ESC members is manageable while still providing for fair and equitable consideration of each proposal.

BSCC's preferred practice is for each ESC member to read and evaluate *each* grant proposal received. However, when BSCC staff determine that the number of proposals received exceeds ESC members' ability to read and evaluate *all* proposals, a multiple-panel process will be used. The multiple-panel process has been used successfully for many recent grants and has addressed the workload issue such that ESC members can successfully read and evaluate their assigned representative sample of proposals.

² The focus group participants included Linda Penner, Chair, Board of State and Community Corrections; David Steinhart, Commonweal-Juvenile Justice Program and Member, Board of State and Community Corrections; Michelle Brown, Chief Probation Officer of San Bernardino County; Dr. Charles Dorsey, The Dorsey Group, LLC; and Peter LaVallee, Retired, Non-Profit Youth Program Administrator – Humboldt County.

2. **Eliminate the Discussion of Ratings**

Once the ESC members have completed their individual evaluation of their assigned proposals, up until now the process has called for them to meet in-person over a period of one or two days. During this final ESC meeting, ESC members would discuss their ratings with one another. They could ask for explanations of the ratings of other raters, especially those instances where there were notable differences in the ratings. If after the discussion raters decided to change their ratings, they were free to do so. At the conclusion of this in-person meeting, the last iteration of ratings was used to calculate proposals' scores and develop the final rank order of the proposals according to merit. This final rank order of the proposals was then presented in a table that identified each proposal's overall score, funding request, and the cumulative amount of funding requested by rank order of the proposals. A final column indicated the point at which available grant funding is exhausted. The ranked list(s) is developed as prescribed in the RFP (e.g., by funding categories or set asides, include other special criteria) and is the ESC's funding recommendation to the Board.

The *Grant Proposal Evaluation Process (2020)* reflects a staff recommendation to no longer discuss or change ratings. Instead, the ratings submitted by the ESC members resulting from their individual evaluation are used to calculate the proposals scores and those scores are used to develop the final ranked list for the funding recommendation. The driving force behind this change is the inability to ensure all proposals are treated in a comparable manner. Failure to meet this condition negates the fairness and validity of the process. The analyses that led to this recommendation began with a simple question, "how to handle the ratings of ESC members who are not able to attend the final ESC meeting to discuss their ratings." However, this simple question led to hours of discussion and debate and also hours of work to conduct analyses designed to investigate the impact of various alternatives to ratings, proposal scores, and ranked lists. It was during these discussions and analyses that we identified an issue of greater concern. That is, with the increasing number of proposals and their increased complexity, it is challenging to treat all proposals in a comparable manner during the rating discussion that occurs at the final ESC meeting. It was critical to address this issue because comparable treatment is a required component of a valid and fair evaluation process.

Two main challenges to treating all proposals in a comparable manner were identified. First, there is typically an insufficient amount of time available at the final ESC meeting to discuss every proposal. This is due to the logistical challenges of scheduling sufficient time for this meeting. The amount of time required is largely dependent on factors that are unknown at the time of scheduling (e.g., primarily the number of proposals that will be received). Second is the possibility that one or more raters will be unable to attend and participate in the discussion. This challenge impacts the validity of the process – one related to the inability to change ratings or impact ratings with their input and the second regarding the impact on the calculation of proposals scores. Both challenges are complicated in a multiple-panel process, which is increasingly being used, where different raters are assigned to different panels.

Eliminating the discussion of ratings raises two issues. The first issue is how to handle ratings that are relatively disparate (that is, ratings that vary markedly across the raters

who evaluated the proposals). After exploring three options for handling this issue, we recommend using the original ratings of the raters for the calculation of proposal scores. That is, no action would be taken in an attempt to resolve disparate ratings. The second issue is how to wrap up the ESC process for its members. Once the rankings are finalized, BSCC staff will email the ESC members the table(s) of ranked proposals, the funding recommendation(s) that will be presented to the Board, and a link to an online survey. The survey will be designed to elicit feedback from the ESC members regarding the ESC process, the RFP, and the process for evaluating proposals that can be used to improve or refine future grantmaking efforts. At the discretion of each ESC, the members may decide upon an additional method to wrap up the ESC process. If an additional method is selected, and regardless of the method selected, the purpose will be for the ESC members to: a) review the ranked proposals, the requested funds and available funds, and the final grant award recommendations to be made to the BSCC Board; b) reflect on the body of work they completed together as an ESC and discuss lessons learned; and c) provide feedback to staff regarding the ESC process, the RFP, and the process for evaluating proposals. These additional meetings may occur either before or after the presentation of the funding recommendations to the Board and ESC members will not be required to attend.

3. **Management of a Missing Rater**

A technical issue related to the calculation of proposals' scores is the management of a missing rater. If any raters submit ratings for only a subset of the proposals they were assigned to rate, or if they submit only a portion of the ratings required to fully evaluate entire proposals (e.g., do not submit ratings for one or more rating factors), then they are considered missing raters and *all* of the ratings from those raters are excluded from *all* score calculations. Thus, raters must submit a full set of ratings for all of their assigned proposals in order to have their ratings contribute to the evaluation process.

In the event of missing raters, the number of raters remaining will drive the decisions regarding the evaluation process.

- If two or more raters remain on the ratings panel-whether it is a single-panel or a multiple-panel process-the ratings of missing raters are excluded from *all* score calculations.
- If one rater remains in a single-panel process, then the ESC needs to be reformed to recruit additional members. Alternatively, a Scoring Committee could be formed.
- If one rater remains in a multiple-panel process, the panel is disbanded. The panel-specific proposals previously assigned to this now disbanded panel are divided among the remaining panels. Dependent on when the raters are lost, the remaining rater may or may not have already evaluated the proposals assigned to this disbanded panel. If the remaining rater has evaluated the proposals, the rater is made a member of all panels for the calculation of proposal scores and is not assigned additional proposals to evaluate. If the remaining rater has not evaluated the proposals, the rater is assigned to one of the existing panels.

Recommendation/Action Needed

Staff recommends that the Board:

1. Approve the *Grant Proposal Evaluation Process* and authorize its posting on the BSCC website.
2. Authorize staff to follow the approved *Grant Proposal Evaluation Process* for all ESCs moving forward, including those currently convened and in the process of grant development. This change will implement the recommendation to no longer discuss ratings prior to the calculation of proposals' scores.

Attachments

G-1: Grant Proposal Evaluation Process: Technical Report (February 2020).