

Sitka Commission on Health Needs and Community Services
Community Grants Program Redesign Recommendations
Please see the full text of the report at www.cityofsitka.com or www.sitkaaoc.org

Executive Summary

February 21, 2007

Purpose: The Commission was asked by the Assembly to seek community input and to provide advice about improving the Community Grants Program process. Concerns about an unclear decision-making process, a lack of consensus about funding priorities, uncertainty over the results of community grants, along with the unpredictability of the amount of funding available from year-to year, as well as a concern that those making funding decisions lacked knowledge about the non profit sector, lead the Commission to design and recommend funding to achieve a re-designed Community Grants Program that is transparent, fair, simple and accountable.

Recommendations:

1. Publicly establish funding priorities and preferences as a part of annually releasing a Request for Proposals. Use the funding priorities and preferences as the evaluation criteria and “scoring rubric” for recommending grant funding.
2. Adopt the Request for Proposal and grant application forms developed by the Commission which are tailored to provide grantseekers with simple and fair questions as well as to fit the scale of the grant request and the need for information by which to, in the future, evaluate the results of the grant.
3. Acknowledge community needs through the allocation of community grant dollars among two categories. Review the allocation annually to make certain that it continues to correspond with community need. At present, the following allocation is recommended:
 - Health & Human Services – 60%
 - Arts, Culture & Recreation – 40%
4. Honor an annual grant cycle by allowing grant applications to be submitted only once per year. Furthermore, we recommend setting aside 5% of the Community Grants budget for the Assembly’s use throughout the year to respond to true emergency situations being experienced by non profit organizations.
5. Appropriate 3%, approximately \$660,000 for FY 2008, of the City’s general fund budget annually to the community grants program. Include within the appropriation a modest amount for staff and volunteer support of the grantmaking process.
6. For the near term, add to the Commission’s duties responsibility for the review of community grant proposals and the development of funding recommendations to be confirmed by the Assembly.
7. Allow the Commission time to develop review criteria to evaluate past grantees as to the appropriateness of continued funding through the Community Grants Program versus as a line item of the City’s General Fund budget. The Commission would then make recommendations regarding this issue to the Assembly.

For the long term health of the community, it is further recommended that the Assembly support the exploration of developing a community foundation, to be financially supported by community members, the Rasmuson Foundation as well as the City of Sitka. If feasible, a Sitka Community Foundation could become the future apparatus through which the City accomplishes its community grantmaking.