

NCEC Committee of the Whole

Staff Report

TO: Members of NCEC Committee of the Whole
From: Howard Blin, Community Engagement Manager
Date: March 6, 2013
Subject: **Community Innovation Fund Update**

Action Requested

This item is before the Committee of the Whole for purposes of discussion. No action is requested.

Discussion

As the Community Innovation Fund is developed, the Commission determined that we would hold listening sessions with neighborhood organizations to hear ideas for program goals and how the program should be structured. We have held eight of the nine scheduled meetings on the CIF. Although attendance has been light, with a total of 27 people from neighborhoods attending thus far, there appears to be enthusiasm for the program and we have gained valuable suggestions for structuring the program.

The CIF was originally proposed in the 2008 report, *Framework for the Future*. This document charted the future of the City's programs for neighborhoods after the NRP. The *Framework* establishes the intent of the CIF to fund "locally relevant approaches to City identified goals or problems". Since these goals or problems have yet to be identified, the Commission decided that neighborhoods would be asked for suggestions at these meetings. With a few exceptions, participants at these meetings have not indicated strong preferences for the goals to be addressed through the program. Instead, it has been suggested that the goals be left fluid to allow creativity in project submissions. The Commission will have to address the subject of program goals in future meetings.

Other ideas for the program are summarized in the meeting notes below:

Community Innovation Fund

Discussion Notes

Linden Hills Park

January 29, 2014

6:30 PM

Discussion on Potential Goals for Program:

- Enhancing livability of neighborhoods
 - Making neighborhoods easier to navigate
 - Preserving human scale in face of growth and development pressures
 - Encouraging children to learn about community
- Improving personal security in neighborhoods
- Park improvements
- Environment - green initiatives.
- Development of neighborhood businesses
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Other ideas on Community Innovation Fund:

- Fewer grants with larger funding preferred over more smaller grants.
- Reduce the paperwork involved, particularly for smaller grants.
- Some neighborhoods may not have the resources to manage and implement a project funded by a grant.
- Solicitation for proposals must be clear on how projects will be evaluated.
- It would be helpful to know what other neighborhoods are doing with Neighborhood Priority Plans.

Community Innovation Fund

Discussion Notes

Pearl Park

February 5, 2014

6:30 PM

Discussion on Potential Goals for Program:

- Making city more livable for seniors. This is particularly important in light of the City's diminished support for seniors, exemplified by the elimination of the Senior Ombudsman's position.
- Projects that help seniors stay in their homes.
- General issues relating to crime prevention and safety.
- Intergenerational opportunities should be developed where senior and youth can interact.

Other ideas on Community Innovation Fund:

- Keep application and process simple, particularly if small grants are provided.
- Objectives of program should be well defined.
- Stability in program funding should be sought. The likelihood of increasing funding was discussed.
- Geographical balance in neighborhoods receiving the grants may be necessary.
- Whether or not a match to the grant is required needs to be determined.

Community Innovation Fund

Discussion Notes

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Park

February 6, 2014

6:30 PM

Discussion on Potential Goals for Program:

- Bicycle and pedestrian improvements.

- Involving renters in civic affairs.
- Communication with new residents to Minneapolis, a group which includes young people living in the city for the first time.

Other ideas on Community Innovation Fund:

- Make the funding criteria clear and the process as simple. Many neighborhoods lack the ability to respond to complicated applications and reporting processes.
- Prioritize applications that leverage other funding sources. This could include NRP funds.
- Collaborations with other neighborhoods or organizations will increase the complexity of managing projects.
- Fund fewer grant that are larger for projects that test innovative concepts that can be applied elsewhere in the city. Emphasize projects that are transferable.

Community Innovation Fund

Discussion Notes

Matthews Park

February 6, 2014

6:30 PM

Discussion on Potential Goals for Program:

- Keep goals broad and fluid. This will allow neighborhoods to develop creative projects.

Ideas on Community Innovation Fund:

- Use a two-step application process, much like CURA uses for grant program. First step would be a very simple project proposal. Projects that are approved on this first screen would then be asked to prepare a more detailed application. This way the best projects are funded, not those with the best grant writer.

- It is suggested that smaller grants be provided to a larger number of neighborhoods. This reduces the burden and cost of administering the grants by neighborhood organizations. It also avoids the issue of a quick ramp up in funding to administer the project than an equally rapid ramp down at the end of the project.
- Multiple year projects should be considered. This will result in projects which are more sustainable and spread the funding out. In any case, the duration of funding should be clear.
- The size of grants could vary, such as one or two large grants and several smaller grants.
- Collaboration is a valid goal. It should be acknowledged, however that there is a cost to collaboration.
- The program objectives should be clarified. Is the intention to provide seed funding for projects to continue, or to fund pilot projects to demonstrate concepts?
- Consider the timing of the application process. Some times of the year are busier than others for neighborhoods. As an example, don't have the application period for the grants coincide with the Community Participation Program application period.
- Attempt to build as much flexibility into the grant process as possible.
- Grant recipients should report results from projects and make presentations at the Community Connections Conference.
- It is important to anticipate and allow projects to fail.

Examples of Potential Projects:

- Expanding Community Connection Project to bridge cultures
- Expansion of Spokes Bike Center
- Food classes at Co-op
- Innovative approaches to stormwater management
- Pedestrian crossing on busy streets such as Franklin Avenue.

Community Innovation Fund

Discussion Notes

Crown Roller Mill

February 18, 2014

6:30 PM

Discussion on Potential Goals for Program:

- Sustainability issues, such as LEED certification for neighborhoods.
- Goals should not be too defined and should relate to the goals the City is developing.
- Appropriate development for individual neighborhoods. Currently City approaches development as “one size fits all for neighborhoods”

Ideas on Community Innovation Fund:

- Neighborhoods should be able to partner with a City department.
- There should be fewer grants which are larger in dollar amount. Perhaps have a tiered approach with a few large grants and a greater number of smaller grants.
- Some consideration should be given to geographic distribution of the grants, but it should not be a primary consideration.
- Given the amount of money available, capital projects should not be funded. Innovative projects like utility box wraps, while demonstrate a concept, could be considered.
- Art project or major events should be considered.
- Will the program allow funding for innovative expansion of existing projects which could serve as a demonstration for other neighborhoods?
- Keep the application process simple. Look to the CURA process.
- How projects are evaluated should be made clear. An example is the City Public Works Department’s graffiti grants.
- Allow advances for funding, since many neighborhoods do not have the resources to initiate a project.

- Allow administrative fee, but have limits or a flat fee.

Community Innovation Fund

Discussion Notes

North Commons

February 19, 2014

6:30 PM

Discussion on Potential Goals for Program:

- Goals should be broad to allow innovative ideas.

Ideas on Community Innovation Fund:

- Entire process, such as evaluation criteria, who is reviewing applications, etc., should be transparent.
- Interviews of project applicants should be considered.
- In addition to NCEC members, others should be considered for the evaluation panel.
- Provide at least 50 percent of the grant up front.
- Require quarterly reports and a year-end report.
- Allow neighborhood organizations to match funds with funding from CPP, NRP, foundations, etc.
- The funding years should be clarified (2015-16?).
- It is doubtful whether grant recipients should be allowed to reapply for funding for the same project in subsequent grant cycles.
- One neighborhood organization should be designated as the primary grant recipient. Others who partner in a project, but are not the primary grantee should be allowed to collaborate in another project.

- In evaluating applications, weight should be given to a projects applicability to other neighborhoods.
- The City should be careful about neighborhoods partnering with institutions which may have significant sources of funding elsewhere.
- Applicants should be evaluated on how engaged or representative the neighborhood organization is.
- Have a contact person at NCR that applicants can communicate with.

Comment received after the meeting:

How representative a neighborhood organization is should be considered. Quite specifically, if a board for a neighborhood doesn't represent the demographics of the neighborhood within reason (example: a nearly all white board in a neighborhood with a majority of residents of color, or boards with little to know diversity), that should factor in strongly to consideration on this grant. The CPP language is strong about engaging under-represented residents and if an organization isn't doing that well with it's current city funding it shouldn't be as eligible to receive additional funding. Some sort of transparent reporting and weight to that as a factor in the application should be considered.

Community Innovation Fund

Discussion Notes

Folwell Park

February 24, 2014

6:30 PM

Discussion on Potential Goals for Program:

- Should follow goals currently under consideration by the City Council.
- Allow flexibility, not specific goals.

Ideas on Community Innovation Fund:

- Spread the grant around with more, smaller grants.

- Applications should be evaluated on merit without trying to achieve geographic balance in grant awards.
- A consideration should be given to the needs of neighborhoods. The Northside neighborhoods have greater need than most other areas of the city.
- Keep process simple.
- Allow neighborhoods to submit NRP Phase II projects that were not funded.
- Like the CURA program, all grant recipients should be required to give a presentation on their project at the end of the grant cycle.

Examples of Possible Projects:

- Expanding availability of food, such as a feasibility study for a grocery store.
- Projects like the Tiny Fields project that grows food on small plots.
- Health and wellness projects.
- Collaborative activities such as the North First project.
- Youth gathering places.