

Frequently Asked Questions Impact Austin Non-Profit Workshops

Q: Could you provide a bit more detail about the grant selection process and the committees which make those decisions?

Impact Austin (IA) accepts grants in five categories: culture; education; families; health and wellness; and the environment. There is one Focus Area Committee for each category. Each committee consists of approximately 20-25 women who are tasked with evaluating proposals according to IA eligibility criteria and five key evaluation criteria. Following a very structured protocol, each committee will make a group decision as to which programs/projects make the cut at each phase: LOI phase >grant application phase >site visit phase >finalist phase.

The committees are tasked with ultimately selecting finalists they believe the entire IA membership would proudly support. At the conclusion of the FAC process, each committee will have selected two finalists for its focus area, who are then presented to the entire IA membership for a vote to determine which finalists receive a grant in each area.

Q: Is there anything keeping non-profits from choosing any focus area category?

A: There are no formal guidelines for selecting the category under which an organization submits its proposed program or project, nor does Impact Austin provide any input to non-profits regarding which category to select. It is recommended that the organizations select the category which truly, most closely matches the area the grant would impact. So, for example, if family was the category identified and the program or project demonstrated little or no impact on families, this could be viewed as a negative in the committee's evaluation. There are certainly many projects which significantly impact more than one of the five impact areas. In that case it is suggested that the non-profit determine which of the possible areas is most heavily impacted by the endeavor in a direct way.

Q: Are the LOI's evenly distributed among the five FAC categories?

A: Since IA exerts no influence over the category selected by a non-profit for its program or project, there is no means to guarantee an even distribution among the five Focus Area Committees. Each year we have received different numbers of applications to the five Focus Areas.

Q: Could you provide additional clarification on potential uses of IA grant funding?

A: Funding can be allocated for salaries and other administrative costs affiliated with the program or project, as long as it is clear that they are directly related to the program/project and are in logical proportion—and are clearly not for the daily ongoing operation of the non-profit's activities.

Expenditures can be allocated for building and construction costs, again, to the extent they are directly related to the program/project. For example, Literacy Austin

utilized a significant portion of its grant for expanding their literacy and ESL programs for the build out of existing unused space for additional classrooms.

The following are not eligible for funding:

- Ongoing operating or overhead expenses
- Development expenses
- Expenses for grant writers

Q: Is there a preference for funding programs over projects?

A: No.

Q: Can a grant program or project involve more than one aspect?

A: Yes, a program/project could involve more than one aspect—in other words it could include several parts. In that case, the Focus Area Committee would be assessing the following:

- the overall cohesiveness of the endeavor;
- the relationship between all aspects and the overall goal of the program/project; and
- the alignment of the endeavor with the non-profit's overall mission.

A prime example can be seen in the proposal submitted by 2006 grant recipient, Literacy Austin (LA). The program sought to expand its literacy and ESL classes via two means: 1) the build-out of a large unused space for additional classrooms; and 2) the hiring of a part-time Outreach Coordinator to oversee the expansion of LA's offsite literacy/ESL programs. It was estimated that between the two segments, the agency would be able to double the number of clients served, thereby significantly reducing current wait lists. Both aspects clearly relate to the expansion of LA's services for a cohesive expansion effort; and the project was in perfect alignment with their mission: teaching literacy skills to adults who read below the fifth grade level.

Q: Does IA accept applications for program expansions? How does IA define a program or project expansion?

A: Yes, IA will consider new programs/projects as well as expansions of existing ones. An expansion of an existing program or project should be clearly discernable as such. This might involve reaching into additional communities, e.g. additional specified counties or areas of the city; or serving more clients via additional offices or other locations. An expansion could also represent the provision of services to additional segments of the target population, or providing existing services in a different manner to expand the agency's reach.

Program Expansion Examples

Literacy Austin (2006 recipient) expanded its existing programs to double the number of clients served via the addition of classroom space, and adding off-site class locations overseen by an Outreach Coordinator. College Forward (2007 recipient) expanded their existing services to Williamson County by extending their college access program to Stony Point High School in Round Rock.

Q: How does IA define a collaboration and what drives the decision as to which agency should function as the lead agency?

A: A collaboration is defined as a project or program which requires the assistance--in some fashion--of another organization to be able to deliver the services being proposed. That assistance could be in various forms, e.g. allocated staff or the provision of facility space for program delivery.

Impact Austin does not set forth any requirements as to which organization should act as the lead in the project being proposed. The contributions to the overall project or program (and its goals) by each collaborating entity should be clearly set forth. Suggestions for identifying the program/project lead for application purposes may include--but would not necessarily be limited to--the organization with the greatest proportion of oversight responsibility for the endeavor; or the organization with the greater (in relative terms) contribution to the project or program.

If the collaborative project is awarded a grant, the lead organization will be required to sign the Impact Austin grant agreement, the lead organization will receive the funds, and the lead organization will be responsible for producing the interim and final reports to Impact Austin.

Q: If the non-profit is collaborating with other organizations on the project, does the non-profit have to allocate part of the funds to the other non-profits involved?

A: No.

Q: Is the number of people impacted by the program or project a factor in evaluating grants?

A: There are no formal guidelines as to the number of people assisted or impacted by the program or project, and over the years we have funded projects impacting large and small numbers of people. The committees desire to exercise good stewardship of the funds which could potentially be expended, and many of the women take this aspect into consideration as part of their evaluation. However, for some committee members, a higher number of people served means more impact; for other committee members, a deeper impact on a smaller number of people means more impact. Since projects/programs compete against other projects/programs within their designated focus area, this could become a distinguishing factor. But because it is a group decision, either scenario could prevail and proceed to the next phase.

For those projects impacting smaller numbers of people "directly", ripple effects are seriously considered. A good example of this would be the Del Valle Children's Wellness Center program (2006 recipient). This program formally trained a total of 24 young people as clinic assistants over the course of the two year program. The goal of the program was two-fold: to prepare these young people for potential careers in health care, and to increase the number of children served by the Wellness Center. The ripple effect on the families was deemed significant for future earnings potential, positive role modeling for children, etc. As the only outlet in the Del Valle area for these services, the ripple effect was also greatly enhanced with the significant increase in clients served by utilizing the trainees in the Wellness Center.

Q: If other funds are required for the operation of the non-profit, or for delivering the program or project, do they have to be in hand at the time of the application?

A: While the funds do not have to be in hand at the time of application, the application should demonstrate the funds would be available at the time required to carry out the project or program or continue organization operations. The application will require you to disclose any secured sources of funding (including amounts secured) as well as sources you are applying to for funding (including amounts). We also want to know the probability/confidence that the funds will be received. If there is a possibility the funds would not be forthcoming as needed, a realistic contingency plan for obtaining alternate sources of funding in either case would need to be laid out.

Q: What are the basic reporting requirements for grant funding?

A: Depending on the length of the grant and the payment schedule, interim reports are required every six months. For example, if the grant is funding a two-year project or program with four payments, there will be four interim reports plus a final report that is due three months after the end of the grant period. For a one-year grant, there may only be two payments and two interim reports plus a final report.

We ask that the reports discuss the progress which has been made toward the project/program goals; describe any unexpected challenges and unexpected successes; and whether any changes in the terms of the grant (such as the performance period or scope) are anticipated.

Q: Are there any resources for assistance with grant writing for non-profits?

A: Impact Austin does not offer this type of assistance but we would recommend you contact Barry Silverberg at ACCCBNO or Greenlights. Both of these organizations have a mission to support the development of non-profits and their capabilities.

Q: Do you have any tips to keep in mind when submitting the application?

A: IA focus area committee members have given the following feedback over the years:

- Answer the question asked.
- Be simple and straightforward in your responses; superfluous "marketing language" repeated multiple times doesn't add any value.
- Read your finished submission and ask yourself if you have successfully communicated proof of our key criteria: your organization's credibility, capability and commitment; and the project feasibility and significance. Better yet, have a third party not familiar with your proposal read your submission using the same lens: has the information demonstrate evidence of meeting IA's key criteria.
- Know what other organizations are doing what you propose. Don't tell us you are the only one if there are others in Austin already addressing it the issue. If there are existing efforts to target your project/program's issue, know what they do and how they do it versus

what you are proposing. Communicate why your approach is different or more effective.

- We want to be passionate about your proposal. Show us how it will make a difference so we can be as excited about it as you are.