

Lussier Community Education Center
building community, creating opportunities, enriching education

Feedback on the 2018 Community Building & Engagement Draft Request for Proposals

We are very grateful that the City of Madison and the Community Development Division are beginning to address the dearth of support for underrepresented grassroots communities to build their power to improve life in their own communities and have an impact on City decision-making. That is what Community Building & Engagement funding was created for, and it is critically needed.

We also understand some of the motives behind some of the changes proposed for the Community Building & Engagement funding going forward.

- There is an interest in making funding available to more groups. We support that. A diversity of training, organizing, and engagement approaches is necessary and healthy.
- There is also an interest in making mini-grants available to emerging leaders. This is also an important priority.
- We also are inferring from the draft RFP a desire to set a standard of quality for the proposals being submitted. We agree bad leadership development programming is no good for anyone.

That said, taking a small piece of crust off the pie and cutting it into smaller pieces to spread it around is not a strategy for success.

No matter how much our organizational/institutional cultures want it, organizing and leadership development are not linear processes. They are human development and relational processes with fits and starts and a long winding trajectory. We have to design our programs with that in mind as well as the grinding systemic burdens that bear down on many of the people who are stepping up as leaders.

Below are a number of the unintended consequences of framing the RFP in its current form followed by our recommendations.

- **This RFP focuses on short term (8-12 week) leadership trainings which will not be effective in delivering the outcomes for which Community Building & Engagement was created.**
 - Providing short term training and then setting people loose without support doesn't work. If it did, given all of the leadership trainings that have been offered, our whole community would already be organized.
 - The best training gives people time to practice what they have been trained on between trainings so that learning builds. That is not possible in an 8-12 week training. Being low income is incredibly time consuming. Asking participants to attend weekly trainings AND do community work in between isn't reasonable.
 - How does an organization hire staff for an 8-12 week program and then lay them off every year? People who do this work well in a culturally relevant way are rare. This change will deteriorate the quality of trainers available, the continuity of training from session to session, the level of relationship built in the community and more. This is not a recipe for success.

- **This RFP focuses on all participants jumping into short term projects. While that is convenient on paper for a grantmaking process, good organizing requires us to build around the issues and priorities that most affect/motivate the leaders in our cohorts.**
 - Many community members are working on issues that don't conform to an arbitrary 8-12 week time period. Many are looking to build their leadership/groups/work over a longer period of time. We need to support that.
 - Participants who do have a short term project may find that the time of year most relevant to their project is months away from the time of a short term training.
- **This RFP seems to imply that the content of the trainings on its own will be enough to seed the community with effective leaders. It will not.**
 - Of at least equal importance to the trainings is the individual support provided by staff as participants work on their community efforts. This short term model completely undercuts the ability to provide that support both because the timeline is too short and because the funding level won't support the needed staff over the full year when participants are moving their work forward. Organizing requires organizers.
 - The community of leaders/organizers that develops between members of a cohort is also an important part of making sure that leaders continue to have a network of support after the training is over. That takes time to develop. Cohort members build trust and relationship, support each other's work over time, and form bonds. Eight to twelve weeks and out won't accomplish that.
- **While I understand the urge to define what you are looking for in the "program elements," this section is overly proscriptive and rigid.**
 - The idea of CDD staff dictating to professional organizers seven mandatory training topics in an 8-12 week training is in itself a little insulting.
 - Going a mile wide and an inch deep will not move work forward in the community. Many of the topics mandated (which are all valuable topics/skills) would benefit from a 2-3 day training to do well. Piling them up in a set of cursory workshops will only create a sense of incoherence.
 - Even with the 12 three hour trainings that NOI provides, we recognize the need to focus. And we look for outside opportunities to connect participants to for specific trainings we can't cover well.
 - "Residents will provide the names and contact information of at least 2 other residents..." What? Seriously? To whom? You don't want us to go into the community telling people they have to give names and contact information of their neighbors involved in organizing to the City (which includes the police)?

As far as Community Action Projects are concerned, we again appreciate that the City is trying to make resources available to emerging and grassroots leaders. We think that can be done, and it might be done better with some adjustments.

- The City has made efforts in the past to make it easier to get funding, and as the Emerging Opportunities Program has shown, there are simply structural limits as to how nimble and flexible a government institution can be in providing funding.
- This RFP has the City working with Extension and others to offer mandatory trainings to grantees. That gets the City into program implementation, which does not seem to be its strong suit.

Suggested changes

- **Leadership Development Programs**

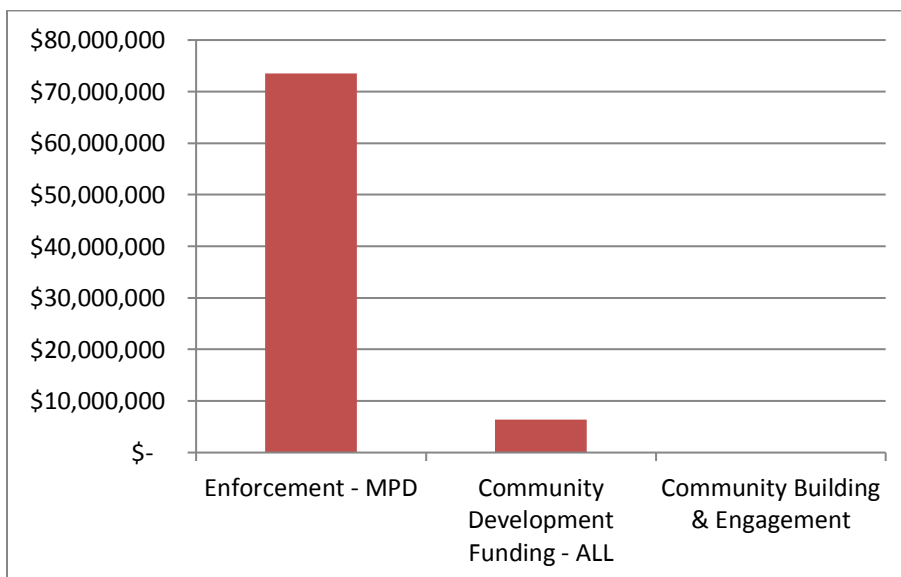
- Programs provide some combination of training and support for the full funding period. That could be regular trainings with ongoing mentorship/support over the whole year or periodic series of trainings with mentorship and support in between.
- Programs have a clear process for providing support to participants as they implement their community work and sufficient staffing to do provide such support.
- Change Program Elements section to identify a variety of elements that could be included in a strong proposal with “such as” language.
- Programs must have a plan for connecting participants to support after the program year is over.
- Change to “CDD will fund 2-3 programs at \$75,000-\$100,000.”

- **Community Action Projects**

- We would suggest that the City RFP out the mini-granting process to a local organization that can be more flexible. (Just to be clear, not the LCEC.)
- That organization should be able to offer those grants at least multiple times a year if not on a rolling basis with turnaround in a matter of weeks at most.
- We would suggest that the funding include support for staff time and an expectation that the organization actively provide support/mentorship where wanted and needed to those applying for the funds. Training is fine, but it is different from support/mentorship.

We recognize that this would cost more than the \$107,000 currently allocated. The City as a whole (not just CDD) has to decide what level of priority it puts on investing in the leadership and power of underrepresented communities. Below is a chart comparing City of Madison funding for enforcement to all community development funding to Community Building & Engagement funding. (I know it may be hard to see the CB&E funding.)

We absolutely recognize that CDD is working in good faith to try to do as much as possible with limited resources. **If now is not a time that the City can invest more in the leadership and power of underrepresented communities, then at least don't break what is already there.** It is critical that you stick to a set of standards that have a chance of actually producing the outcomes sought and advocate for the needed funding at the appropriate time.



Thank you for your consideration of this feedback, and we look forward to working with the City of Madison and CDD to make Community Building & Engagement a strong and enduring part of your positive impact on the community.

Sincerely,

Paul Terranova
Executive Director
Lussier Community Education
Center