



**COMMISSION
AGENDA MEMORANDUM**

Item No. 11b

BRIEFING ITEM

Date of Meeting May 11, 2021

DATE: April 21, 2021

TO: Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director

FROM: Alison Beason, Senior Policy Data Analyst, Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
Andy Gregory, Sr Program Manager Environmental Engagement, External Relations

SUBJECT: South King County Fund Recommendations Briefing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The successful first cycle of the South King County Fund (SKCF) was launched in the summer of 2020 with \$250,000 in support for WMBE small business development and \$1 million for Economic Recovery Grants and then followed shortly thereafter in the fall with \$250,000 for Environmental Grants. After the success of awarding twenty-seven contracts totaling \$1.4 million between, External Relations, Economic Development Division, and Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, this briefing is to share recommendations and insights to carry into the next cycle.

Staff recommend the following programmatic updates:

- Refine the eligibility criteria by further defining Near-Airport Communities within the application process to include communities that live, work, play and worship near the airport and to prioritize funding to those groups based on the Port's Equity Index.
- Update the fund timeline to align with the five years following the actual launch of the program in 2020.
- Maintain interdepartmental staffing commitments and institutionalize program policies and best practices to avoid losing hard-earned gains.
- Commit up to 5% of the South King County Fund to support Community Capacity building through an expanded community liaison model, continued community reviewer participation, and support for language access.
- Conduct a "Theory of Change" program evaluation over the next year to develop long-term strategic focus that will best align the fund with the communities' needs and the Port's authority as a funder.

BACKGROUND

The South King County Fund was created in November of 2018 to provide \$10 Million in resources to near-airport communities for projects that address airport noise, environmental health and sustainability. The statutory authority in which the fund was rooted in (RCW 35.21.278) is the same one that dictates the parameters on the (sunsetting) Airport Community Ecology (ACE) program which was newly minted as the SKCF Environmental Grants Program.

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In 2020, the South King County Fund (SKCF) launched a successful cycle for Economic Recovery in the summer and Environmental Grants in the fall. This resulted in the first cycles funding twenty-seven projects leveraging over \$1.4 million.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is much to celebrate in after the first year of SKCF. A new program was designed and launched in a matter of months to support economic recovery efforts in a region economically devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Port leadership, interdepartmental collaborations and committed, hard-working staff all contributed to getting this new program off the ground. Now, as we look towards the next program cycle, there is much to act on to more fully realize the intent of the Fund.

The Port’s SKCF team has reviewed how to make South King County Fund most effectively fulfill its vision of being an equity-driven, community-centered program for developing equity-based partnerships and providing resources and support in historically underserved near-airport communities.

The recommendations that follow are organized by themes the staff feel are vital for the growth and success of the SKCF.

EQUITY:

Eligibility:

Currently, the eligibility description for the South King County Fund is: “Defined as near-airport communities, with other locations considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on the merits and type of program or project.” This description, with the six Highline Forum cities cited in the Economic Recovery RFP as examples, was the most agreeable description when the motion was passed.

Recommendation:

Within the Economic Recovery and Environmental Grants, the first criteria evaluated will be Organization and Community Served. Both programs will emphasize this criteria to focus on giving the greatest weight to near airport community and organizations led by, located in, and serving these communities. Both programs will utilize the OEDI Equity Index to help educate the decisions and criteria among the applicants and further target the South King County communities furthest from justice. This will root the Index in this way would also better center equity as the driver for what the Fund supports. This strategy would require no further action on behalf of staff or Commission to refine the definition of “near-airport communities.” It allows for organizations to self-identify as serving near-airport communities and then for the evaluation panel to examine and rank the quality of those answers.

Language Access:

At its essence, language access means that communities understand what we are saying, that we understand what they are saying and that they can participate in the fullest possible way. There

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must be commitments not only to translate materials and provide interpretation, but also to understand how communities prefer to receive information. Translators sometimes default to literal or academic translations, and community reviewers (professional translators who are also steeped in community work) are able to correct for that and ensure that the words being used have appropriate cultural meaning and context.

Recommendation:

The SKCF staff will make a commitment to financially support a robust language access plan and include community reviewers to check for accuracy, tone and syntax in translated materials.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Timeline:

In the 2018 motion, the SKCF Fund was scheduled to fund \$10 million over five years starting in 2019. The program did not launch until 2020 with the first contracts signed in 2021.

Recommendation:

Due to the delayed launch of the program, the recommendation is to extend the program to 2024.

Interdepartmental Core Team

The SKCF is a new program that required a lot of attention to details and institutional knowledge. The early weeks of the development of the 2020 cycle were hectic, with many people involved in myriad conversations. Being a new program and process for the Port, it required several full time FTE's to develop, maintain and continue the program.

Recommendation:

Within the Economic Recovery/Development and Environmental Grants there should be continuity and communication for the duration of the five year program. Keeping a core team within CPO, OEDI, Legal, ER, and EDD helps the team keep abreast of updates, changes and problem solving. In addition, a core team helps the two program managers ensure consistency across the full South King County Fund program. Processes and policies should be institutionalized through good record-keeping and documentation to account for the inevitable staff turn-over that occurs on longer timescales.

Conduct Program Evaluation:

In the first year of implementation, staff learned many important lessons about how to operate the SKCF at the nexus of the Port's statutory authority and the communities' needs. There is still work to be done to build a comprehensive theory of change to maximize the impact of the program and set measurable numeric metrics for programmatic success.

Recommendation:

Port staff will begin conducting a program evaluation and developing a theory of change in 2022. This is a best practice in the community grant-making world and one that identifies program

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strengths, community needs, and sets metrics against which the program success can be evaluated in the future. Staff will report back to Commission in late 2022 once the theory of change is developed to identify long-term plans for the SKCF.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING**Community Engagement:**

The Port has been investing in building up a community engagement program for the Fund, and the strategy was modified last year because of the pandemic. For the Environmental Grants Program, multicultural liaisons were trained and deployed to conduct virtual outreach and to co-create grant outreach materials. Due to time pressure to get the Economic Recovery funding out as quickly as possible, little community engagement was conducted to support that program.

As we embark on the second year of the Fund, staff needs to be intentional and strategic about engagement and the critical role it plays in moving the Fund closer to its intent of being community centered. The team developed a shared understanding of community engagement, its continuum and how to authentically engage community members. Staff have seen tremendous success from the liaison model both in developing authentic community relationships and driving high-quality applications from diverse communities. There is now an opportunity to replicate and expand this model to support the Economic Recovery Grant Program.

Recommendation:

- Community Liaisons should be utilized across both programs. While circumstances in 2020 necessitated that the liaison model was focused on the Environmental Grants program, for 2021 and into the future, engagement planning and activities need to be approached holistically. Engagement should be meaningful, consistent and continual, throughout the year. Liaisons should receive stipends for their work.
- Community reviewers were vital to the panel process for both programs. These panelists helped Port staff expand their understanding about community needs, priorities and organizations, and provided insights about the impact proposed projects would have in the community. Continuing the process to incorporate community reviewers help diversify the panel perspectives and experience while keeping the commitment to equity and community focused work. Community reviewers should receive stipends for their work
- A portion of the South King County Fund, up to 5% should be allocated to support these community capacity building programs. This will ensure a steady source of funding to support deep community engagement work, language access, and community reviewer stipends. The Port should engage in a contract with a South King County based community organization to support community members and provide fiscal agency to pay stipends.

Annual Budget Status and Source of Funds

The expenses have been included in the annual operating budget, which is \$1.5 million for 2020 and \$2.0 million for 2021. The funding source is tax levy.

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ATTACHMENTS TO THIS REQUEST

- (1) Presentation slides

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS OR BRIEFINGS

April 28, 2020 | **Motion 2020-10**

The Commission to add economic development to the permissible uses for the South King County Fund, in support of local recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

June 25, 2019 | **Motion 2019-10**

The Commission adopting principals to guide outreach and development of the South King County policy.

November 27, 2018 | **Motion 2018-14**

The Commission directing the Executive Director to designating funding in the 2019-2023 plan of finance for South King County communities...;