Advice for Second Round Applicants, based on Comments from the First Round Review Team

The following items of advice were offered by members of the Review Team after the first round of applications. These are to be considered as recommendations, as opposed to requirements, for applicants to consider as they put together their proposals. Keep in mind that, when it comes time for the next Review Team to offer its recommendations for funding, the members will make their decisions based on what they see in the applications in front of them. Reviewers may reach differing conclusions based on what they find persuasive within an application. The following suggestions are offered, however, based on the comments and input of the first-round Review Team.

- Be Specific. We only know what you tell us about your project. Details matter. The Review Team wants to know clearly and in-depth what is intended by this project, included what the intended results are. The Team also wants to be able to see that a project has been thought through. Have the project planners considered all of the issues involved and each of the steps along the way?

- For tree planting projects, let us know as best as you can what trees will be planted. We understand that it is not always possible to be exact. For instance, the determination of the exact species or the exact location might be part of the grant process itself. However, you should be able to let us know whether the trees are intended to be, for instance, large shade trees or smaller ornamental trees, the size (caliper or dbh) of the trees at the time of planting, likely locations and who is to be involved in the planting.

- Along those same lines, a site plan – even if it is a sample site plan – will be helpful, as would be a planting detail or description of how the planting will be done. Similarly, post-planting maintenance and care will also be given consideration by the committee, including who will have the long-term responsibility for care of the project. For trees to be planted, who will be watering those trees during the establishment period? Who will be responsible for those trees over the longer term, after the project has been completed?

- This attention to detail should carry over into the Project Budget. It is helpful to the Review Team for the members to know how much funding is being allocated for trees and other needed materials, as well as whether additional costs such as those associated with watering and post-planting maintenance are included within the budget.

- At the end of the document entitled Application Instructions is a list of 'Helpful References for Applicants'. We encourage applicants to make use of these references as well as those mentioned elsewhere in the RFP and Instructions. Use of tools such as the "Tree Equity Mapping Tool" and resources such as the "Tree Owner's Manual" helps the Review Team understand the degree of thought that has gone into a project proposal.

- Similarly, including the input from people or groups with various expertise can help improve an application. For instance, input from an arborist could help with the tree planting and care aspects of the application, while the input of a group involved in community outreach and with meeting their concerns might help with the community engagement aspects of the grant.

- While the soundness of a project in urban forestry terms received considerable attention in the review process, all of the other aspects of the project were also carefully reviewed. Be sure that your project proposal fully discusses the Climate Change, Equity and Environmental Justice, Community Involvement and Communication aspects of the project as well.

- With respect to Climate Change, the Review Team is particularly interested in how climate change is apt to affect trees and the community locally, as well as how the project may help with the local mitigation of the effects of climate change. Local flooding, the urban heat island effect and greater variability in weather patterns are all aspects of climate change that an applicant may wish to include in their application. Keep in mind, though, that what is important about these effects of climate change is how they affect people. It will help with the review if the application mentions how these climate change efforts are related to the people affected.

- There are additional topics that may relate to climate change but that are somewhat indirect. Examples include environmental quality, biodiversity and public health. If these are topics have been given consideration with respect to your project, please include them in your application. This may be in the Climate Change Statement, or elsewhere. Keep in mind, however, that the Review Team is not apt to be satisfied with a simple mention of a topic. The application should show how the grant proposal leads to, for instance, increased biodiversity, improved local environmental quality or increased public health benefits, and why that matters.

- The issue of Community Involvement received considerable attention during the review process. The Review Team tended to look much more favorably on projects that included specific plans for meaningful community engagement and much less favorably on projects that were simply based on a top-down approach.

- The topic of Community Involvement is broad and can be approached in many ways, ranging from public meetings and educational sessions to engagement with other non-profits and community groups. It could also include using the project to foster broader social change, such as through tree planting being used as part of a job-training program. Each of these are likely to be seen as valuable components within the context of a larger project. The Review Team is not trying to determine in advance which type of Community Involvement works best in the context of a specific project proposal. That is something for the applicant to tell the Review Team.

- In considering the goals put forward by the applicants, it would be helpful if the grant applicants would indicate what they consider to be their indicators of success. If funded, what outcomes will the applicants look for to know that their project has accomplished the intended goals?

- Letters of Support, while not required, are helpful. Such a letter might be used to show support for this effort from individuals and groups separate from the entity proposing the project.

- Innovation is encouraged and can come in many forms, from projects that remove impervious surface so that tree planting opportunities may be increased, to those that seek to allow greater tree rooting area to help trees resist future storms, to those that offer unique ways to encourage community involvement and/or to encourage tree planting on private property. Through this grant program, the CUFC is trying to expand the conversation regarding urban trees and the role that they can play in society.

- The Application Page on the CUFC Web Site allows an opportunity for potential applicants to ask questions in advance of submitting an application. Applicants are encouraged to use this feature, not just to clarify details of the application process, but also if they wish to receive feedback regarding aspects of a proposal, including potential grant proposal ideas.

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