



# **F**requently **A**sked **Q**uestions

## **Large Grants** **Due December 16, 2004**

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GRANT PROCESS**

**Q: Who decides which groups receive the grants?**

A: Letters of Intent are reviewed by at least two Commission members. Applications are reviewed by some Commission members, plus local experts and community members. This review group makes recommendations to the full Commission. Final decisions are made by the nine-member Commission appointed by the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors, excluding any member who has a conflict of interest. (For a complete list of Commissioners, see our website.) The staff of FIRST 5 Mendocino also participates in all reviews.

**Q: What is the typical grant size?**

A: There is no typical grant size, though all of our "Large Grants" are \$7,500 or more. See our website for a complete list of previous grants.

**Q: Can we submit more than one Letter of Intent? More than one Application?**

A: This process is unusual in that we are happy to review more than one Letter of Intent. This way, if you aren't sure which of several ideas might be most likely to receive funding, you can get guidance from Commission members.

An organization can also submit more than one Application. Further, a single organization can appear as a partner in several different Applications. Just let common sense be the guide so that you don't overextend yourself.

**Q: Do you need a paper copy of the Letter of Intent by November 12th, or can we send a fax or an e-mail by that date?**

**A:** For the Letter of Intent a fax or e-mail is fine. For the full Application a paper copy is required.

**Q: The Application Instructions ask that several documents be attached to the narrative, including a list of our Board of Directors. Are those attachments included in the 10 page limit, or are they over and above the 10 pages?**

**A.** Over and above the 10 pages.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT FUNDING LIMITATIONS**

**Q: We know that FIRST 5 funds programs for children ages 0 to 5, but how exactly is that defined? Can we get a grant for a program that addresses the effect of substance abuse on unborn children? How about a pregnancy prevention program?**

**A:** Our target population is children pre-natal to five years old and their families. Any program that improves the health and wellbeing of unborn children would fit the criteria. However, a pregnancy prevention program may not, unless the program also included parenting preparedness or other information that would clearly benefit (future) children.

**Q: Could we get a grant for capital expenditures, like building improvements or a van?**

**A:** Grants can be made for capital expenditures, but in order to be competitive capital requests should clearly be tied to high-quality programming. For example, a request for a van that focuses on your clients' need for transportation, but doesn't convince the Commission that your clients would benefit from services they are transported to, is less likely to be funded.

**Q: Your materials say that funding is available for "capacity building." What does that mean?**

A: Capacity building means just about anything that an organization might need to enhance its ability to provide services to children and families. This could include, but isn't limited to, building expansion, a vehicle, computer equipment, recruitment and retention of qualified staff, or staff and board training.

**Q: We understand that we cannot use FIRST 5 funding to replace other funding. Does that mean that a Large Grant can't be used to replace previous funding from FIRST 5 itself?**

A: Unfortunately, that's exactly what it means. The prohibition on using funds to replace other funding applies to ANY funding, including funding from FIRST 5.

If you want a more detailed understanding of this issue, take a look at an Advisory Opinion from the state Attorney General's office, available at [www.ccfc.ca.gov/PDF/advisoryopinion123.pdf](http://www.ccfc.ca.gov/PDF/advisoryopinion123.pdf). Under the California Revenue and Taxation Code, funding pursuant to the Children and Families Act of 1998 "shall be used only to supplement existing levels of services and not to fund existing levels of services." Further, the Code says that no monies "shall be used to supplant state or local General Fund money for any purpose."

In interpreting this language, the Advisory Opinion points out that the prohibition on funding existing levels of services is not qualified by reference to any particular source of funding. The opinion therefore concludes that the prohibition extends to existing levels of services funded by ANY source. That, of course, would include FIRST 5 Mendocino.

**Q: OK, but what does "existing levels of services" really mean? What if our funding, from FIRST 5 or any other source, runs out before April 1, 2005, when services funded by Large Grants are scheduled to begin? Could we stop the program then use a Large Grant to restart it on April 1, 2005?**

A: That would depend on when the program ended. In other counties, local Children and Families Commissions have defined existing levels of services in various ways. For example, services will be considered "existing" if they are in effect at the time that the Commission acts on the request for funding or, by contrast, services will be considered "existing" if they were in effect within 12 months of the time that the Commission acts on the request for funding.

Here in Mendocino County, our Commission has not taken a formal position on what constitutes existing levels of services. It is unlikely, though, that the Commission would approve a grant at its meeting on February 7, 2005 if the services were still in effect on February 7, 2005.

**Q: We understand that these Large Grants are supposed to be used only for "new or expanding" programs. What level of change is necessary for a program to be considered "new or expanding"?**

A: "New" means a program that is not an "existing" service. See the previous two answers for a more thorough discussion of what "existing" means. Any program that has been in effect for some time and is still in effect when the Commission makes grant decisions (February 7, 2005) would not be considered a new program.

"Expanding" means serving additional children and families, or adding additional services. This would include, for example, a program that has successfully provided car seats to 300 local families, and would like to provide them to 100 more families. It would also include, for example, a program that has provided medical services to young children in the past, but now wants to include dental care as well.

**Q: We know that state law prohibits FIRST 5 from using these Large Grants to "supplant" other government funds. Would this apply to the situation where Medi-Cal pays only \$7 of a provider's actual cost of \$10? It doesn't sound like "supplanting" to use a Large Grant to pay the provider the missing \$3.**

A: Paying the missing \$3 would not be considered "supplanting" other government funds, but it is not permissible for other reasons. When a provider agrees to accept Medi-Cal, that \$7 payment is considered payment in full. It is a term of the contract between the provider and the government.

However, there are two related situations where a Large Grant might be used. If a child is uninsured, and the provider is therefore not subject to Medi-Cal regulations, a Large Grant might be used. Also, if there is a service that Medi-Cal does not provide, for example, certain health screenings at child care centers, a Large Grant could potentially be used to cover these non-Medi-Cal costs.

Since the laws governing both Medi-Cal and FIRST 5 funding can be tricky, please clarify in your Letter of Intent what your leveraging plan is or contact us to discuss your situation before completing the Application.

**Q: A child care center administered by a federally recognized tribe must comply with federal health and safety standards, but it does not need to comply with state licensing requirements. This usually prevents such centers from receiving state funds. What is the Commission's position on this?**

A: The Commission's goal is to support and expand quality child care. Also, the Commission recognizes the sovereignty of a tribe. Therefore, if the tribe's own standards meet generally accepted practices of quality child care, the Commission can award a grant without requiring the tribe to meet California state licensing requirements.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT FISCAL MATTERS**

**Q: We want to fund a dental van. Approximately 40% of the clients will be ages 0 to 5. Can we ask FIRST 5 for 40% of the cost and use other funds to cover the remaining 60%?**

A: Yes, that application would certainly be considered for funding. Make sure you explain how you estimated that 40% of the clients would be ages 0 to 5, and make sure you explain how you will raise the remaining funds.

**Q: We understand that a Large Grant is more than \$7,500. We need less than \$7,500 during the first 15 months of the grant period, although our total request for the entire 27 months of the grant period will be more than \$7,500. Can we still apply for a Large Grant?**

A: Unless you need more than \$7,500 during the first 15 months, you should wait and apply for a FIRST 5 Small Grant. That process focuses on grants less than \$7,500 and will take place in summer/fall 2005.

**Q: We want to include in our request enough funding for administration and evaluation. What percent of the total grant should be budgeted for such costs?**

A: Most grantees spend less than 15% of funds on administration and evaluation. If you have budgeted more than 15%, please include a careful explanation. In special situations, such as tribal grantees, we have allowed more than 15% to be spent on administration and evaluation.

**Q: In order to increase the chance of sustaining the project after the grant period, can we include funds for a grantwriter in our request?**

A: You certainly can, but you should also provide a description of your overall fundraising strategy and a list of potentially available sources.

**Q: If we are awarded a grant, when would we receive the funds?**

A: Our goal is that services begin promptly and fully on April 1<sup>st</sup>. If the grantee has a clear history of financial reporting, it is possible to disburse 100% of the funds when services begin on April 1, 2005. Where no history is available, we can provide at least 50% of the funds by April 1, 2005. With appropriate contractual language in place, we will consider providing an advance on funds before April 1, 2005.

**Q: Three groups plan to submit a joint proposal. How do we work out fiscal accountability?**

A: The Commission will certainly require fiscal accountability, but you should also create a user-friendly process that streamlines paperwork and bureaucracy. You may want to choose a partner agency which has or can build the capacity to handle the fiscal aspect of the work; or you may want to hire an independent fiscal agent so that fiscal matters are less likely to interfere with your collaborative work. Please call us if you need help researching fiscal agents. We would consider hiring a firm for this purpose if several grantees need similar assistance.

**Q: We are a group of 20 neighbors with a great plan. We are not a non-profit and have never handled foundation or public funds. How can we handle the money responsibly?**

A: The Commission is eager to encourage capacity building among grassroots groups. For example, neighbors may get together and organize a cooperative child care center. They could hire one pre-school teacher with education and experience, then divide up other duties among themselves. The group could use a local non-profit, or a for-profit pre-school, or some other organization as a fiscal agent. Please call us if you need help finding possible partners and fiscal agents.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS**

**Q: Our region is so large, and it is so difficult for our clients to find transportation, that the most practical choice is for us to serve only part of our region. Can we apply to serve that small an area?**

A: Absolutely. Create a program that makes practical sense for the children and families you wish to serve, whether that is part of one region or several regions grouped together. Explain your reasoning thoroughly in the application.

**Q: The project we have in mind can best serve two regions of the county. How do we apply for funding?**

A: Connect with partners in each region and lay out your plans. Clearly explain how you calculated the percent of the grant to be spent in each region. Use a separate Budget Overview and Budget Detail sheet for each region or explain the division of funds in your narrative. Is the calculation based directly on population, and if so why is that appropriate? Do you plan to locate staff in both regions, or will clients have to travel to a central location? Will transportation be provided? If needed, you may receive written permission to increase the number of narrative pages.

**Q: We provide services not just to children from Mendocino County, but also to children from another county. Can we still apply for a grant?**

A: Funding from FIRST 5 Mendocino can be used only for children who reside in Mendocino County. If you serve children from multiple counties, figure out what proportion of the services you provide benefit Mendocino County children, and apply for funds only for that amount.

**Q: FIRST 5 used to divide the county into six regions. Why are there now seven regions?**

A: Following discussion with residents and service providers, we came to agree that the Laytonville, Leggett, Piercy area should be a separate seventh region. This region was formerly grouped with Willits, but it has such different characteristics, transportation needs, and infrastructure that its children deserve to be funded separately.

**Q: We've been told that for organizations in Willits and Round Valley, there are some differences in the application process. Why is that, and what are the differences?**

A: FIRST 5 Mendocino recently applied for a state First 5 California grant for Special Needs programs in Willits and Round Valley. If these regions are fortunate enough to get the state grant, children who live there will receive twice as much funding as they otherwise would.

In order to qualify for the state grant, FIRST 5 Mendocino must provide matching funds. The only funds available for this purpose are the funds allocated to Willits and Round Valley in the current round of Large Grant funding. If we use these funds to match the state grant, however, they will no longer be available to individual applicants in these two geographic areas.

On approximately December 10th, we should know whether Willits and Round Valley received the state Special Needs grant. At that point one of two things will occur:

- 1) If FIRST 5 Mendocino does receive the Special Needs Project grant we will contact all organizations in these two regions that submitted Letters of Intent. We will tell them that, this time around, we will not be accepting applications for Large Grant funding from these two regions. Although this may disappoint individual applicants, the overall result will be a significant increase in resources for children in Willits and Round Valley.
- 2) If FIRST 5 Mendocino does not receive the state grant, we will contact all organizations in Willits and Round Valley that submitted Letters of Intent and invite them to submit Applications. The deadline for these organizations will not be December 16th, as it is for all other applicants. That would require too quick a turnaround. Instead we will extend the deadline for Willits and Round Valley applicants until January 3, 2005 at 5:00 PM. That should leave these organizations about two weeks before the holidays, as well as ten days during the holidays, to complete their Applications.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT COLLABORATION**

**Q: There are many types of collaboration. What is the Commission really looking for?**

A: Common sense is the best guide. The Commission's goal is enhancing the wellbeing of young children and their families through service delivery systems that are integrated, cost-effective, and family-friendly. How can your organization best work with others to achieve that goal?

Remember that there are many, many ways to include other organizations in your plans. Examples include creating a small advisory board, developing a system of mutual referrals, or asking an organization to act as a mentor to strengthen your skills in a particular area. Don't forget about potential for-profit partners as well.

Never force an uncomfortable or unnecessary collaboration because you think it might attract funding. On the other hand, if a particular collaboration would significantly enhance your work but the collaboration presents some challenges, do budget in the time needed to work on underlying relationships and develop the tools needed to keep the group focused and productive.

See Application Instructions page 6 for questions you should address.

**Q: What if our project doesn't need any other formal partners in order to succeed. Can we still apply for funding?**

A: Anyone is welcome to apply. But remember that collaboration is often necessary to create an integrated, family-friendly service system. Collaboration also increases the likelihood that funds will be used efficiently and projects sustained over time. For organizations that choose not to collaborate the question is not "Can we apply?" but "Will our Application be competitive?"

**Q: In order for our project to succeed, we really need help from a particular organization, but a staff member told us that she didn't think her supervisors would be interested. Any suggestions?**

A: The advantage of living in a small semi-rural town, is that everybody knows somebody on a personal basis. Talk to your friends and partners. Identify who serves on the organization's advisory board or boards of directors and ask their advice.

Determine how your project might help the organization meet its goals, then meet with staff and present your strongest argument. FIRST 5 staff may also be able to help you strategize and connect with partners.

**Q: We are a large agency and believe that we are competent to effectively serve all the County's children in a given focus area (e.g., mental health, child care).**

**A:** Great...but here are some questions the Commission is still likely to ask about your Application: How does your piece of the system play into a comprehensive, integrated system of early childhood development services? Is your project consumer-friendly? Do you welcome innovative partners who are outside your circle? Do you have ethnic and geographic and gender representation in your planning or advisory process? If you've been sketchy in these areas in the past, what steps have you taken to broaden your relationships?

**Q: The Letter of Intent requires information about "Systems Improvement and Collaboration." What do you mean by "systems improvement"?**

"Systems improvement" means making services to young children more integrated, more cost effective, and more family-friendly. Taxpayers should not have to foot the bill for duplicative services; nor should families have to make unnecessary trips to multiple providers to enhance their children's well being. The Letter of Intent groups "systems improvement," so defined, with "collaboration" because the Commission believes that collaboration is crucial to improving services along these lines.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT EVALUATION**

**Q: Why is evaluation considered so important?**

**A:** The point is to obtain the most improvement in child wellbeing for our dollars. So, we must determine which services are efficient and effective, and which are not. If we don't pay attention to evaluation, we end up wasting money and time, and losing popular confidence in our ability to create people-friendly systems that truly make a difference in children's lives.

**Q: How will the Commission track evaluation outcomes?**

A. First 5 California has developed its own evaluation system; FIRST 5 Mendocino collects data that feeds into that system. We contract with local evaluators to coach grantees in determining indicators and to analyze outcomes. This will provide grantees with the framework and support they need to evaluate their own programs effectively while also making sure that their data contributes to the broader analysis.

**Q: We have no expertise in evaluation, and we're not even sure what sort of consultant we might hire to help us figure it out. Is there any chance that our Application will succeed anyway?**

Absolutely. The Commission has its own expert consultants whose job is to help grantees design and implement effective evaluation systems. So if you represent a large agency with extensive experience in evaluation, refer to that experience in the Application. But if you represent a small, less experienced organization, just make sure that your Application shows that you understand the importance of evaluation; that you are willing to learn how to do it effectively; and that you are ready to commit the time necessary to help the Commission to gather and analyze data.