



COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION
DRIVE, ROOM 102A
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 8/26/2025

To: Board of Supervisors of County of Sonoma

Department or Agency Name(s): County Executive/Administrator

Staff Name and Phone Number: M. Christina Rivera and Jennifer Solito, (707)565-4592

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

Community Grants

Recommended Action:

Authorize the County Executive Officer, or designee, to execute a \$500,000 agreement with the Community Foundation Sonoma County's - Resilient Organization program for period ending on December 31, 2026, subject to review and approval by County Counsel.

Executive Summary:

During the June Budget Hearings for the Fiscal Year 25/26 budget, the Board approved an allocation of \$500,000 to support a new process for community grantmaking. Historically, grants to Community Based Organizations (CBOs) made during budget hearings had been awarded through an informal process which, while compliant with the law by serving the public interest, fell outside of procurement best practices. The County Executive's Office (CEO) has reviewed options for bringing the process within best practices and providing additional community transparency, and recommends to participate in Community Foundation Sonoma County's (CFSC) [Resilient Organizations program <https://www.sonomacf.org/resilient-organizations-program/>](https://www.sonomacf.org/resilient-organizations-program/) as a new approach to support CBOs requests to the Board for fiscal support.

CFSC's Resilient Organizations program aligns with the Board's interest in supporting our community's CBO partners and it is focused on encouraging sustainable infrastructure and operations as well as collaboration to strengthen collective impact across the nonprofit ecosystem. CFSC's' Resilient Organization program is supported by the [Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership <https://cvnl.org/>](https://cvnl.org/) and [Northern California Grantmakers <https://ncg.org/>](https://ncg.org/).

The recommended agreement will specifically include CFSC opening an application grant process funded with the \$500,000 of General Fund County discretionary funds and intended to support CBOs who are trying to ensure continuity of services in sectors that have seen significant reductions in state and federal funding. The standard 15% indirect rate would apply to the County's award but would be matched by a minimum of \$100,000 by CFSC, resulting in a total of \$525,000 released in the initial grant opportunity, and would have the potential to leverage additional funding from other donors and funders.

Discussion:

Background

Over the last ten years, awards of more than \$9.9 million of County general funds allocations have been approved during annual budget hearings. Award amounts have varied greatly year to year, from \$0 in awards made in three of those years to more than \$5.3 million awarded during the FY 22-23 budget hearing.

Following a [County-wide study on procurement policies and procedures <https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6379299&GUID=DD0C733F-B468-4900-9010-DDFBA63E35B0&Options=&Search=>](https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6379299&GUID=DD0C733F-B468-4900-9010-DDFBA63E35B0&Options=&Search=>) completed in 2023, an internal examination of this practice in relation to procurement best practices determined this practice fell outside of best practices in terms of accessibility and transparency. Subsequently, and following the large number of CBO requests for funding received for consideration during the FY24-25 Budget Hearing, staff researched options for alternative processes that would better align with County procurement guidelines.

In an effort to ensure a fair, transparent and efficient process for reviewing community public requests for County general fund allocations, staff proposed during the March 2025 Budget Workshop a formal system to guide these requests. This approach aims to create a process to standardize the community budget request process, ensuring that funding decisions are based on well-evaluated needs, including relying on community data, needs and feedback, thereby promoting equity and reducing the tendency to seek informal paths for funding requests. During the June Budget Hearings, the Board approved an allocation of \$500,000 in support of the Community Grants process.

Staff considered two main structures for managing the process: 1) internally through the County Executive's Office (CEO) staff, or 2) partnering with an external partner. While many excellent CBOs provide grants to support specific issue areas and/or regions of the county, the [Community Foundation Sonoma County <https://www.sonomacf.org/>](https://www.sonomacf.org/) (CFSC) is structured to support CBOs with missions across issue areas and across all Supervisorial districts in the county. Additionally, CFSC offers several options and flexibility in designing the program, and importantly, the opportunity to explore leveraging County funding with donations from private donors, should areas of interest align.

The following options were explored by staff:

Option 1: Manage grants process in-house

The CEO does not regularly engage in grant application solicitation and review nor contracting processes due to the nature of the department's work and thus has neither the expertise, capacity, nor systems in place to effectively manage a request for proposals or award grants in a timely manner. As such, developing and implementing such a process through the CEO would be slow, inefficient, and costly in terms of staff time and focus, and create delays in getting the funds into the community to address current needs.

Option 2: With CFSC, partner on new fund

Grants to CBOs awarded during previous years' budget hearings have had a broad range of intent. Some have been one-time awards for specific projects, some have supported operating costs with one-time funds, and others have focused on multi-year campaigns. If the Board wishes to continue the broad nature of awards, a new, County-specific fund could be opened at CFSC to support a very broad range of nonprofit needs. CFSC staff would work with CEO to develop the grant criteria, solicit applications from CBOs, review applications and recommend awards, manage grant agreements and payments, and review final reports after the end of the grant period. Because this fund would be designed specifically around County interests, there is a low likelihood of private donors making donations into the fund. CFSC would require their standard 15% indirect rate on this fund. This option would provide consistency amongst awards to CBOs similar to what has been issued by the Board in past budget years.

Option 3: With CFSC, partner through existing Resilient Organizations Program

Given the incredibly challenging economic environment being experienced by the nonprofit sector and the importance of the services they provide, CFSC started the [Resilient Organizations Program](https://www.sonomacf.org/resilient-organizations-program/) in 2024. Focused on building the skills, strategies, and connections CBOs need to adapt and thrive, CFSC has been providing training opportunities on fiscal management and fundraising, governance, partnerships, and other topics focused on building strong organizations. Additionally, grants have been awarded to organizations at critical moments of their development, injecting funding when critical changes would facilitate sustainability of the organization's mission. In other words, in addition to trainings and collaborative opportunities, CFSC also work one-on-one with keystone nonprofits to ensure our social service safety net stays whole through challenging times. This existing Program closely aligns with the County's interest to support the CBO community and encourage sustainable infrastructure and operations within our community partners.

Under this option, County funding would be used to expand the Resilient Organizations Program and CFSC would conduct a specific open application grant process utilizing County funds. This grant opportunity within the existing Program would be designed to provide support to CBOs who are adapting to ensure continuity of services in sectors that have seen significant reductions in state and federal funding. These grants would be intended to help nonprofits meet the moment and provide support in addressing current and future organizational challenges. A draft Request for Proposals created specifically for this County-sponsored effort can be found in Attachment 1.

The structure of this proposal, with the focus on sustainable and continued operations, and a focus on existing programs that have been impacted by loss of funding, would provide additional support to both the nonprofit sector and individual organizations at a point in time when federal and state funding is decreasing markedly. The standard 15% indirect rate would apply to the County's award but would be matched by a minimum of \$100,000 by CFSC, resulting in a total of \$525,000 released in the initial grant opportunity, and would have the potential to leverage additional funding from other donors and funders.

Further, CFSC will gather information from this process on the current state of the non-profit community and CBO needs and will provide a report to the County. Lastly, applications that are not able to be funded through this immediate County-sponsored effort, may be funded in the future through future opportunities, as this grant process and community needs assessment will daylight needs and CFSC may be able to leverage their private donor community.

Recommendation

As a result of analysis of these options, staff recommends option 3, partnering with CFSC through a County-specific grant opportunity under the Resilient Organizations Program. With the fiscal changes coming from the federal government and the State of California's budget projections, availability of Board discretionary General Fund to support CBOs remains uncertain. Working with CFSC's Resilient Organization program will support the sector more widely than the investment of \$500,000 could do otherwise through leveraging a public/private funding opportunity with a focus on enhancing resiliency as well as providing CBOs' leadership training and collaboration support.

CFSC's mission is "At Community Foundation Sonoma County, we believe in the power of connecting people, ideas, and resources to benefit all who live here." Further, the [Resilient Organizations program](https://www.sonomacf.org/resilient-organizations-program/) provides development services that include:

- Diversifying Fundraising for Sustainable Growth
- Board Governance: Leadership
- Board Governance: Committees, Assessment, & Development

- Funding for nonprofit collaboratives

Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

Pillar: Organizational Excellence

Goal: Goal 1: Strengthen operational effectiveness, fiscal reliability, and accountability

Objective: Objective 5: Align procurement and grant guidelines with strategic priorities and racial equity principles.

Racial Equity:**Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?**

No

Prior Board Actions:

10/17/2023 - The Board received the consultant's recommendations from a review of the County's procurement function and directed staff to develop implementation plans and resource requirements for the Board's consideration.

6/10/2025 - The Board adopted the FY25-26 Budget, which included an allocation of \$500,000 for a "New Community Organization Funding Process."

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY25-26 Adopted	FY26-27 Projected	FY27-28 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$500,000		
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	\$500,000		
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF	\$500,000		
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$500,000		

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

During the FY25-26 Budget Hearings on June 10, 2025, the Board approved an allocation of \$500,000 to support the Community Grants process.

Agenda Date: 8/26/2025

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Attachment 1 - Draft Request for Proposals from Community Foundation Sonoma County

Attachment 2 - Presentation

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A