

CATALYZE SV

July 15, 2022

Office of Economic Development

RE: Official Protest in Response to Catalyze SV OED-RFP-2022-04-01 Rating

Hello,

I am writing to express concerns with the Office of Economic Development's RFP process on OED-RFP-2022-04-01 . There are a number of specific concerns we have regarding the points awarded in various sections. We have submitted a formal protest to city staff due to the barriers to access in the application process. Catalyze SV received a 6 out of 10 in categories such as "DEI knowledge" and "Population of Interest" for "lack of detail." We contest that this assessment is inaccurate and request Council review the grading process.

Like you, we believe San Jose works best when the community is engaged in the development process. Catalyze SV partners with fellow community-based organizations (CBOs) to engage a diverse population on difficult topics. Our approach is informed by community volunteers and strengthened by collaboration with the nonprofit & private sectors.

Alongside other orgs, we are concerned that CBO participation was not specifically considered in San Jose's Office of Economic Development selection process for OED-RFP-2022-04-01. We have filed a formal protest highlighting our concerns with the process.

We believe by working together to solve mutual concerns, the community, the city and businesses can find mutually beneficial solutions. However, this conversation cannot be had effectively without true community participation. Our colleagues at **Local Color** share our concerns and are also interested in increasing engagement between CBOs and the City of San Jose. By solely awarding bigger private firms, the City of San Jose has missed an opportunity to diversify and expand its community engagement practices and partners.

The grading process reveals there may be an implicit bias against CBOs. [Stanford Center for Social Innovation has been exploring methods to address implicit bias in the grantmaking process](#) and publishes reports meant to inform grant makers on how to avoid these pitfalls. One of the first things they mention is to avoid the impulse of solely awarding firms with larger capacity and finances because this leaves out those that serve vulnerable and diverse populations, which tend to be underfunded.

We have a number of specific concerns with this award process:

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1. **CBOs were not considered equitably with larger firms.**
2. **CBOs were docked points for formatting, not content.**
3. **Award amounts were designated in large amounts per category.**

We request that a portion of funds be set aside to be awarded to high scoring CBOs. This will offset the possible bias in the application process, while maintaining the results of the original RFP. The already awarded firms would simply be sharing some of the pot with their community-based counterparts.

Thank you for considering these concerns. We hope that as policymakers, you can act on and implement some of them.

Sincerely,

Rocio Molina, Community Engagement Manager, Catalyze SV

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August 5th, 2022

RE: Item 8.2 on the August 9 City Council agenda related to Master Agreements for Community Engagement Consultants

Hello,

I am writing to express Catalyze SV's appreciation for OED's efforts to address our concerns with the OED-RFP-2022-04-01 selection process. We are encouraged by OED's transparency and cooperation during this phase of review.

OED submitted a supplemental memo for today's Council agenda to accompany their recommendations for the OED-RFP-2022-04-01. This supplemental memo indicates plans to issue a separate procurement process to establish a bench of CBOs to provide community engagement services.

We are glad to see the department addressing our calls for equity and inclusion. This is a significant step toward building a culture of collaboration and partnership between the City of San Jose and the community based organizations doing community engagement programming.

Catalyze SV will continue to follow the execution of this new RFP and have some initial questions regarding time and funding. The awards associated with the original RFP are not to exceed \$4,000,000 and begin immediately on short-term projects related to the formation of an advisory group. Our questions are:

1. Will this new RFP be funded from the same pool of funding, and therefore contribute to the \$4,000,000 ceiling on community engagement services?
2. Will this new RFP be issued in the next 6 months to limit the gap in funding and participation between the CBO community engagement organizations and the private firms already awarded?
3. Will this new RFP provide real opportunities for community organizations to participate, or is it in jeopardy of tokenizing nonprofits in which they sit on a lower tier and thus aren't invited to assist the City? We'd hate for CBOs to spend energy applying, get selected for the bench and then never called into the actual game.

OED's supplemental memo, provided on August 9th, states that:

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Moving forward with the nine recommended consultants will help meet immediate, specific needs for consulting services. Staff also recognizes the importance of partnering with CBOs on community engagement and outreach. While some CBOs may provide traditional consulting services, most are focused on community organization, service provision, capacity building, and other functions. With respect to community engagement, CBOs can bring many important assets to the table, such as robust networks, deep insights on the needs and aspirations of impacted communities, and trusted relationships with community members...

That process could be catered to the specific functions, assets, and partnership opportunities unique to CBOs and help meet the complementary need for strong community partnerships as part of the City's engagement processes.

While we agree that CBOs can provide a critical connection to the community, we are still concerned with the presence of an implicit bias against CBOs in OED's assessments. The language above indicates a view that CBOs are not equipped to meet the general community engagement needs of the city, but should be delegated to specific projects with "specific functions." We are excited about the prospect of CBO inclusion in community engagement, however, we challenge city staff to consider CBOs in an equitable light to the private firms they will award. CBOs are better positioned to grow and succeed with support from our public partners. Biases against our capabilities due to our limited capacity or connection to the community creates a loop which leaves CBOs out of critical discussions. The City of San Jose creates equity when it disrupts these loops that create self-fulfilling prophecies.

As mentioned in my previous letter, this is not a phenomenon unique to this RFP. [Stanford Center for Social Innovation has been exploring methods to address implicit bias in the grantmaking process](#) and publishes reports meant to inform grant makers on how to avoid these pitfalls. One of the first things they mention is to avoid the impulse of solely awarding firms with larger capacity and finances because this leaves out those that serve vulnerable and diverse populations, which tend to be underfunded.

Moreover, we want to revisit the importance of the City being cautious stewards of taxpayer money. Many nonprofits can provide similar services to for-profit companies at a more affordable rate. We don't want a city in which private firms get wealthy off highly profitable contracts from the City while nonprofits are excluded when they could be saving the City money.

Going forward on future RFPs, we encourage staff to create categories on RFPs like "connection to the community" "alignment with the City's goals" and/or "cost of services" so nonprofits can compete on more fair footing with private companies.

As Council and staff consider the best step forward, we encourage you to consider increased training for grantmaking staff on inclusive assessment practices. The Stanford Center for Social

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Innovation and the Silicon Valley Council of Nonprofits both have research-based, recommended practices to increase equitable funding. We look forward to working in community with you. Thank you for considering these concerns.

Sincerely,

Rocio Molina, Community Engagement Manager, Catalyze SV