

## Impactful Grantmaking Best Practices

These best practices are intended to describe the characteristics of an impactful grant program. The best practices are intended to a) comply with or exceed State [grantmaking policies](#) and b) provide direction for how grant programs can maximize impact through simple and accessible grantmaking processes along with activities that have a high likelihood of achieving desirable outcomes. This document has been developed by representatives from across State government and by people from outside the state, including representatives of non-profits.

MMB plans to update this semi-regularly based on feedback from internal and external partners.

Additional information on Learnings from an Enterprise-wide Review for Grant Impact is available on [the MMB website](#).

*For additional information or questions about this report, please contact the Results Management Team at Minnesota Management and Budget: [ResultsManagement@state.mn.us](mailto:ResultsManagement@state.mn.us)*

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*Note an asterisk (\*) indicates a best practice that is applicable for activities with grant program goals related to health, human services, education, workforce, housing, food/hunger, and criminal justice. Executive branch granting agencies that administer State grant programs whose purpose and goals fall outside of these activities are encouraged to choose and apply the standards with an asterisk, as appropriate.*

### Grant program goals and activities

1. The grant program goals are focused on outcomes and not on processes, inputs, or intermediate outputs.
2. The grant program goals are simple and easy to understand, avoiding jargon and technical terms as much as possible.
3. The grant program goals prioritize the advancement of equitable outcomes.
4. The grant program goals are developed in consultation with relevant communities.
5. \*To achieve the goals, the grant program requires or incentivizes community-based best practices.
6. \*To achieve the goals, the grant program requires or incentivizes evidence-based practices by either:
  - a. \*Requiring the use of evidence-based practices by all grant recipients,
  - b. \*Setting aside a specific portion of the overall grant program funding amount for grant applicants that propose evidence-based practices, or
  - c. \*Including scoring criteria that rewards evidence-based practices.
7. If grant-funded activities are not or cannot be evidence-based, then they should have a strong logic model, a strong likelihood of achieving an outcome, and a strong impact evaluation component. The grant program offers technical assistance to grantees to help develop these strategies.

### Fair, open, and equitable RFP solicitation, submission, and scoring processes

#### Request for Proposal (RFP) content

8. The RFP identifies grant program goals.
9. \*The RFP defines evidence-based practices (using Minnesota's enterprise-wide [definition](#) or by establishing a comparable standard) and community-based best practices; and it provides examples of each along with associated resources.
10. The RFP describes how the grant program advances equitable outcomes.
11. The RFP focuses on supporting activities that achieve the desired outcomes. As allowed by law or funding parameters, the RFP does not define specific activities that respondents should submit (unless those specific activities have been demonstrated to achieve desired outcomes).
12. The RFP does not preclude any organization from responding to or receiving a grant award unless certain organization types are specifically prohibited by law.
13. \*The RFP provides a dedicated funding category for evaluation activities (unless State or federal law specifically prohibits funding evaluations). The grant program offers technical assistance to grantees to help conduct impact evaluations.
14. The RFP includes a reference to the Minnesota Office of Grants Management (OGM) [Policy 08-08](#) and describes how grant payments will be made – i.e., method, schedule, reporting requirements, etc. This

can include describing the option of issuing an advance and the requirements that come with that option per OGM policy.

15. The RFP uses plain language.
16. \*The RFP indicates that, as part of the grant contract agreement negotiation phase, the State may request that a Responder amend their proposal to accommodate overall budget needs of the grant program. As part of this process, the State will prioritize activities that are evidence-based practices and community-based best practices.
17. The level of effort needed to respond to an RFP is proportional to the size of grant awards.
18. The RFP provides the timeline by which award decisions will be made.
19. The agency has built in time to solicit feedback from the grantee community about past RFP's issued to help to inform and improve current and future RFP's.
  - a. For example, an agency can choose to communicate that they are openly seeking feedback from a past competitive RFP they issued for a defined period of time as part of ongoing process improvement and stakeholder engagement.

### **RFP Solicitation and Sharing**

20. Passive and active distributions of grant opportunities are targeted to eligible groups (for example, a non-profit can elect to search for or receive notices for grant programs that make awards to non-profits).
21. The RFP is shared directly with grantees who may be good candidates but are unlikely to know about it through broad community list-servs, social media, etc.
22. The RFP, information regarding timing of the RFP release, and other information including links to previous similar RFPs, when applicable, are posted on a single website with all other RFPs.
23. Translations of the RFP will be provided for non-English speaking communities for the grant program, if requested.
24. All questions submitted related to the RFP are recorded and all answers to them are shared one week in advance of the RFP close date.
25. The RFP is posted publicly for at least six weeks (including up to three weeks as a "tentative" funding opportunity or with a previous year's RFP).

### **RFP Submission**

26. The RFP asks prospective grantees to respond to specific questions and encourages brief responses.
27. The RFP shows all questions that will be asked of the grantee. For example, if the granting organization is using a survey-tool, all questions asked are made available in a separate document so that potential grantees do not have to begin answering to see all questions.
28. A template for submitting all RFP response materials is included with the RFP.
29. The RFP's questions ask for mutually exclusive information (i.e., no-overlap between responses).
30. Copies of the RFP questions are provided in an editable, savable, sharable format so that applicants can easily draft responses. (Prospective grantees should not need to manually copy questions from a PDF or grant management software.)

## Review and Scoring

31. The RFP scoring criteria emphasize the quality of proposed interventions, potential for success, organization qualifications/capacity, and proposed budget. The RFP scoring criteria do not consider the quality of the grant writing itself.
32. \*The RFP scoring criteria rewards evidence-based best practices.
33. \*The RFP scoring criteria rewards community based-best practices.
34. \*The RFP scoring criteria rewards impact evaluations that seek to understand whether the grant program activities caused improvements in outcomes.
35. The RFP scoring criteria rewards proposals that prioritize the advancement of equitable outcomes for individuals by awarding points based on:
  - a. Characteristics of the organization that will deliver the services (is the organization located in and/or are the organization's leadership, board and staff representative of communities currently experiencing inequitable outcomes?)
  - b. Characteristics of the population that will be served (is the organization proposing to serve communities currently experiencing inequitable outcomes? Does the organization have previous experience building trust and working with this community?))
36. The RFP scoring panel includes at least one reviewer who is not affiliated with State or local governments, and otherwise has no potential conflict of interest.
37. The RFP scoring panel includes individuals who have lived experience in the communities the grant program intends to serve.

## Performance Management

38. All formal reporting requirements are simple and directly derived from the grant program's goals and associated outcomes.

## Definitions

**Evidence-based practices** are activities/programs/services that, based on findings from experimental or quasi-experimental designs (i.e., an impact evaluation), have been demonstrated to favorably change an outcome of interest. An intervention is considered an "evidence-based practice" if it is:

- Rated as "proven effective" or "promising" on the [Minnesota Inventory](#),
- Rated as evidence-based by another reputable clearinghouse, AND/OR
- Has high-quality research that meets [standards of evidence](#) for "proven effective" or "promising"

**Community-based best practices** are activities/programs/services developed by or in close partnership with a community group and:

- Underwent a rigorous community-led assessment process, has demonstrated a positive effect on targeted groups. The learnings from the assessment can be in any sharable form (report, video, website, etc.),
- Were developed over time through practice and experience, are embedded in the culture and are accepted as effective by local communities, AND/OR
- Includes all core elements of an evidence-based program (described above) that make it evidence-based, except those that have been modified specifically to allow for a culturally-based implementation