Social Innovation Fund

Corporation for NATIONAL & COMMUNITY SERVICE

SUBMITTING YOUR BEST APPLICATION TO SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND (SIF) PAY FOR SUCCESS (PFS) GRANTEES

SIF PFS grantees have held competitions to award assistance with PFS feasibility studies, capacity building, and transaction structuring. Below are highlights from a report examining the strengths and weaknesses of applications that were not selected by these grantees through early Summer 2015. It also offers specific strategies for organizations to adopt as they pursue assistance with PFS feasibility studies, capacity building or transaction structuring in the future. The strengths and weaknesses are indicated by average (arithmetic mean) scores on criteria used by grantees in the selection process, and recommendations are sourced from the grantees themselves. Both scores and tips are grouped into four major categories of scoring criteria: commitment, capacity, data, and program design. For more information, please reference the report **here**.

For Applicants Seeking Assistance with PFS Feasibility Studies and Capacity Building

Commitment

- **Average score** on commitment criteria among applicants not selected by grantees: 77% (vs. 89% for selected applicants)
- **Recommendations** from grantee staff for future applicants:
    - Demonstrate highly visible, dedicated, and collaborative government champions, including those who would eventually bear responsibility for "signing off" on any PFS project that comes to fruition. These champions need to have a strong ability to hold accountable those government staff who will be doing the work with the Grantee if selected. Show that support ideally through a letter of support from an elected official that states PFS is one of the official's top two or three priorities for the year. Nonprofit applicants can demonstrate that support by securing a government co-applicant, for example.
    - Demonstrate as specifically as possible a deep commitment among the "doers," those staff who would be doing the work. Show that support by, for example, listing the names – not just the offices or types of positions – of the individuals who will be working on the engagement to indicate that conversations have not just begun but have also resulted in the dedication of specific people's time to the proposed activity for which the organization is applying for a subgrant.

Capacity

- **Average score** on capacity criteria among applicants not selected by grantees: 71% (vs. 83% for selected applicants)
- **Recommendations** from grantee staff for future applicants:
    - Demonstrate you have dedicated staff with sufficient bandwidth for this PFS initiative if funded, and articulate a plan for ensuring that the initiative would not get off-track if any particular position becomes vacant. Here too, show that capacity by listing the names of these individuals along with the number of hours that each staff person will dedicate to the project. Where the grantee has articulated the minimum number of hours that will be required of the subgrantee for each component of the initiative, show that your team has more hours available than these minimums required.
    - Demonstrate that other teams within your organization – such as legal, procurement, HR, accounting – know already about PFS.

Data

- **Average score** on data criteria among applicants not selected by grantees: 68% (vs. 82% for selected applicants)
- **Recommendations** from grantee staff for future applicants:
    - Demonstrate that you have already made effort – and describe what you have done – to connect administrative data across silos. (Note that local universities often already have embarked upon such endeavors in partnership with government offices and might be a helpful partner to you.) For example, if you are a Mayor's office, can you connect individual-level data from different systems about persons receiving food stamps and about persons who spend time in the City's homeless shelters?
    - Acknowledge the limitations of the systems and infrastructure related to the relevant outcomes data (e.g., only one IT person who is familiar with food stamps data) and how you would address those challenges.
    - Articulate whether the right outcomes data is already collected. If it is, make an assessment of its quality and whether it is collected in sufficiently proper way. If it is not already collected, or if the data is of poor quality, state what it would take to get quality data that can be used to evaluate the impact of an intervention on the outcome(s) you seek to influence.

Program Design

- **Average score** on program design criteria among applicants not selected by grantees: 67% (vs. 81% for selected applicants)
- **Recommendations** from grantee staff for future applicants:
    - Demonstrate a clear focus and rationale for exploring PFS, and demonstrate that you have already done a lot to explore PFS, but also emphasize your flexibility to handle unexpected developments moving forward.
    - If applying to a grantee with a specific issue area focus, demonstrate an understanding of:
        - The evidence base of specific key interventions provided by your organization (if you are a service provider) or that you would be interested in pursuing for a PFS project.
        - How PFS would fit within the local landscape of activity at present and if possible historically.

For Applicants Seeking Assistance with PFS Transaction Structuring

Commitment

- **Average score** on commitment criteria among applicants not selected by the grantee: N/A[1]
- **Recommendations** from grantee staff for future applicants:
    - If you *are not* the outcomes payor, describe as granularly as possible what it means that you have a partnership with a potential outcomes payor. For example, how regular is your engagement with this entity, and what is your engagement like?
    - If you *are* the outcomes payor, describe your commitment to pay for outcomes as granularly as possible. Was legislation enacted? What specific senior officials have provided support and in what ways? What political priorities could a PFS project help meet?

Capacity

- **Average score** on capacity criteria among applicants not selected by the grantee: 74% (vs. 100% for selected applicants)
- **Recommendations** from grantee staff for future applicants:
    - Demonstrate the strengths of the multiple organizations that will be party to the PFS project.

[1] None of the discrete selection criteria of the SIF PFS grantee providing support for transaction structuring was primarily about commitment. The criterion, "Capacity and Commitment of Selected Partners / Partner Selection Plan" blended considerations of commitment with other factors. Please see the longer report for more information.

- Clearly articulate specific roles and responsibilities of multiple parties involved in the PFS project.
- Demonstrate that you, as the applicant and potential subgrantee, would be able to solicit, integrate, and reflect to the grantee the feedback from other parties to the PFS project.
- Demonstrate how you will not only advance objectives related to transaction structuring but also manage the myriad requirements for compliance with federal grants.

Data

- **Average score** on data criteria among applicants not selected by the grantee: N/A[2]
- **Recommendations** from grantee staff for future applicants:
  - Demonstrate the extent to which you have thought and worked through the path forward to collecting, accessing, and analyzing outcomes data that will be relevant for your PFS project.
  - Demonstrate what, if any, data sharing agreements are in place that will be relevant to your PFS project. Identify the parties to those agreements, what the agreement allows, and how that is relevant to the PFS initiative.

Program Design

- **Average score** on program design criteria among applicants not selected by the grantee: 64% (vs. 75% for selected applicants)
- **Recommendations** from grantee staff for future applicants:
  - Demonstrate which components of a PFS feasibility study have been completed and which, if any, have not. Explicitly articulate what specific questions have been answered.
  - Articulate distinct work streams that are required to launch the PFS project through a signed contract, and acknowledge that these work streams are not linear or consecutive. Reflect an understanding that you need to parallel track the work streams of transaction structuring, and articulate the connection between them (e.g., this particular piece cannot move forward until this other piece is complete).

[2] None of the discrete selection criteria of the SIF PFS grantee providing support for transaction structuring was primarily about data. However, factors related to data were considered as part of other criteria.