

LOCAL NEWS

Marin officials weigh grant requests by nonprofits

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Thirty-seven organizations have submitted applications to Marin County seeking more than \$300,000 in community services grants.

At their meeting on Zoom on Tuesday, supervisors listened to a few of the applicants make their pitches before taking turns to indicate which applicants they favor for funding and for how much.

County Administrator Matthew Hymel reminded the supervisors that the grants are given out in two cycles during the year, with \$150,000 budgeted for each cycle.

“So we’re not going to be able to fund all of these applications at the amounts requested,” Hymel said.

Five of the grant applicants received funding recommendations from three of the five supervisors. It would appear they have the best chance of receiving at least some funding.

Two of the applications are related to the coronavirus pandemic. Conservation Corps North Bay is seeking \$10,000 for additional vehicles and staffing to meet coronavirus safety standards for crews providing fire prevention, flood mitigation and food distribution in Marin. The Marin Senior Coordinating Council wants \$9,577 for touchless equipment, air filters, disinfectant foggers and safety equipment to protect its staff, drivers and riders from the coronavirus.



Another application favored by three supervisors came from Marin Promise Partnership, which is seeking \$10,000 for a project in San Rafael's predominantly Latino Canal neighborhood. The project, as described in a county summary, is intended "to engage in a community process to design a structure for cross-sector collaboration, communication and accountability in the Canal neighborhood."

Ann Mathieson, CEO of Marin Promise Partnership, told supervisors Tuesday, "We would spend some time over the next several months interviewing community activists, getting to the grassroots level of talking to parents and students and community members and really find out what the needs are."

Another application favored by a majority of supervisors was submitted by the YWCA San Francisco and Marin. The organization is seeking \$2,750 to reformat its training curricula for economically vulnerable women ages 50 and older for online learning.

The fifth application supported by three supervisors came from Intersection for the Arts, which is asking for \$10,000. The money would be used to provide online and in-person writing and conversation workshops at Marin County Juvenile Hall and to publish the Marin section of a biweekly magazine.

Hymel recommended that each supervisor limit his or her recommendations to a total of \$35,000, which would still result in \$25,000 more in allocations than what is budgeted. Only one supervisor exceeded that amount; Damon Connolly submitted recommendations totalling \$37,000.

The community services grants program, which used to give each supervisor a certain amount of money annually to dispense to favored projects or organizations, was revised in 2015 after public criticism. A Marin County Civil Grand Jury report in 2012 recommended changes in the practice.

"Among the criticisms of these types of programs are the lack of transparency and the appearance of quid pro quo in fund disbursements," the report said.

Now Hymel makes the final decision regarding how much each organization gets after receiving recommendations from supervisors. Hymel said Tuesday he will announce the fortunate few on Dec. 8.

At the end of 2019, the county also started a "nonprofit community partners" program that allows organizations to apply for \$10,000 to \$40,000 for one-time projects. During the previous fiscal year, the county allocated \$700,000 to the program, assisting 37 organizations. The grants ranged from \$10,000 to \$35,000.

Hymel said he expects to reduce spending in the program by \$50,000 in the current fiscal year as part of budget cuts forced by the pandemic.



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