



Arapahoe County

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Board Summary Report

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Agenda Date: 5/24/2021

Agenda #:

To: Board of County Commissioners

Through: Michelle Halstead, Director, Commissioners' Office

Prepared By:

Jacquelyn Bayard, Administrative Specialist, Commissioners' Office

Presenter: Jacquelyn Bayard, Administrative Specialist, Commissioners' Office

Subject:

11:00 AM *Aid to Agencies Evaluation Follow-Up Discussion

Purpose and Request:

Staff will recommend a proposal for the Aid to Agencies grant program for Board consideration based on dialogue during the March 30, 2021, and the April 19, 2021 study sessions.

Background and Discussion:

In an effort to create a sustainable budget for the next 5-7 years, Arapahoe County is evaluating all programs, including Aid to Agencies, to implement fiscal belt-tightening in the years ahead. This evaluation effort included the Aid to Agencies review team ("team") as well as the agencies themselves. The team identified several issues that were discussed at the March 30 study session. These issues include a perception that funds are guaranteed, the wide range of funding amounts, the length of the grant process, and the lack of detailed reporting on how funds are being spent.

At the March 30 and April 19 study sessions, the Board expressed concerns about the level of competitiveness and accountability in the current Aid to Agencies program. In response, the team reconvened to propose a new approach for the program to help address these concerns. The overarching goal of this effort is to improve accountability, increase exposure and recognition of Arapahoe County's support to local non-profits, and foster more competitiveness to allow new applicants an opportunity to receive funding. To help further align the program with the county's strategic plan, the proposal also includes an increased focus on inclusivity, fiscal

sustainability, and responsiveness. If desired, this approach could be implemented for the 2022 grant cycle.

Research

It cannot be overstated that Aid to Agencies funds are a necessary lifeline for organizations serving Arapahoe County citizens. This program augments the safety net provided by the County and supports agencies that deliver necessary services. To help inform this proposal, the team researched where the largest gaps in service exist within the County. The findings indicate the need for services among our population is greater than ever, an issue that has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the Denver metro area, conversations are being had on how to handle the growing number of **individuals experiencing homelessness**. Between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020, at least 31,207 people in the metro area accessed services or housing supports related to homelessness, according to the State of Homelessness 2020 report. Data from the Metro Denver Homelessness Initiative's Point in Time survey showed that 245 individuals from Arapahoe County experienced homelessness in 2020. Both these statistics highlight the growing need for services.

The research conducted by the team indicates that **rates of domestic violence** are also increasing. According to the National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice, the number of domestic violence incidents in the United States increased by 8.1% after lockdown orders. Unfortunately, domestic violence statistics were staggering long before the pandemic began. In Colorado, 5% of all fatal domestic violence-related incidents in 2019 occurred in Arapahoe County, according to the Colorado Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board 2020 annual report.

Likewise, mental health is not a new concern, but the pandemic has worsened the situation considerably. Out of 5,470 respondents over 18 who completed representative panel surveys between June 24-30, 2020, 40.9% reported at least one adverse **mental or behavioral health** condition. However, even before the pandemic, data on mental health in Arapahoe County was alarming. Among adults in the County, 10% experienced 14 or more days of poor mental health within the last 30 days, according to a 2018 health update from Tri-County Health Department. These figures underscore the need for affordable and accessible behavioral health services in the community.

Finally, inquiry into the **aging population** in Colorado also exposed a gap in services. It is estimated that by 2050, over 2 million Coloradoans will be over the age of 60, accounting for more than a quarter of the population. According to the 2018 Arapahoe County Assessment Survey for Older Adults, 25% of older adults reported "minor" problems with independent living and 27% experienced difficulties with activities like eating and walking. As the aging population grows and more people want to live independently, the need for care management services will increase.

Establish Program Funding Categories

It is clear from the data that service gaps continue to exist throughout Arapahoe County in key areas. The team recommends establishing specific funding categories for future Aid to Agencies program grants, replacing the broad language that applicants should fund vulnerable populations and instead focusing on four specific categories:

- Behavioral and Mental Healthcare
- Homelessness
- Seniors
- Domestic Violence

By identifying key programmatic areas of interest, the County could deliver services more efficiently and improve the quality of life for thousands of citizens. Directing our focus to these specific issues would also help us better understand the diverse needs of these populations.

Augment Existing Safety Net

Within those categories, staff recommends annually allocating a portion of the Aid to Agencies budget to fund nine programs that supplement the County's existing safety net programs, offering community-based assistance to populations in need. These programs are:

- Behavioral and Mental Healthcare
 - AllHealth Network
 - Aurora Mental Health Center
 - Aurora Mental Health Center - Detox
- Homelessness
 - Comitis Crisis Center
 - Family Tree - GOALS
- Seniors
 - Jewish Family Service of Colorado - Aging Care and Connections
 - Tri-Valley Senior Citizens Association
- Domestic Violence
 - Gateway Domestic Violence Services

- Family Tree - House of Hope

The rationale for these specific recommendations is multifold. First, some of these organizations are community health centers which serve uninsured, underinsured, and indigent clients. These programs deliver mental health and substance use services to thousands of clients each year. AllHealth Network also serves as a drop off resource for law enforcement when a resident has a behavioral health emergency. Existing revenue streams do not cover the costs to provide these services to the broader community. Given this, these agencies have received Aid to Agencies funding every year.

Second, some of these organizations provide services to residents at the request of the county. For example, Jewish Family Service of Colorado was asked by the County to provide care management services through their Aging Care and Connections program, as other options were deemed to be too expensive. Between June 1981 and August 1983, Gateway Domestic Violence Services (at the time, Aurora-Arapahoe Battered Women's Shelter, Inc.) was actually part of the Arapahoe County Community Services Department. In the 40 years since then, they have had a strong partnership with the county. These two examples highlight the importance of the County's relationships with non-profit partners.

Finally, several of these programs are the only one of their kind within Arapahoe County. For example, Aurora Mental Health Center - Detox is the only non-hospital detox facility in the county and fills the gap that was left when Arapahoe House closed. Tri-Valley Seniors Citizens Association focuses specifically on the eastern plains to assist older residents in the more rural part of the county. Comitis Crisis Center serves as the only emergency shelter in the eastern part of the metro Denver region. Family Tree - GOALS is the first residential 2Gen program for families experiencing homelessness in the county. Gateway Domestic Violence Services and House of Hope offer the only domestic violence-specific shelter and family services in the county. If these programs did not receive annual funding, they would need to reduce services, negatively impacting the most vulnerable people in the community and our own County programs.

Many of the agencies listed above have received funding each year of the program since its inception, which further affirms the importance of these safety net services. Rather than have the agency and county staff spend the time submitting and subsequently reviewing these applications, it is recommended the County require these organizations to meet stringent quarterly reporting requirements.

The team proposes placing a \$300,000 cap on the amount awarded to these identified annual programs, maintaining 2021 funding amounts with two exceptions: (1) Gateway Domestic Violence Services, which would be reduced by \$45,000, and (2) Tri-Valley Senior Citizens Association, which would be reduced by \$2,000. Please refer to the fiscal impact section for the proposed amounts by agency.

Competitive Grant Program

The team recommends leveraging the remaining program budget (\$528,897) to establish a truly competitive grant program by implementing the following modifications:

- Limit new applications to the four program areas listed above
- Place a cap on the amount that can be awarded to a single agency of \$100,000
- Adjust grant agreements to include more expectations around awareness and public education in order to better evaluate metrics and outcomes
- Add a timeline, checklist of materials to submit, a sample grant agreement, and additional information to the website in order to increase transparency
- Update the application to include more detailed questions about work being done related to diversity and inclusivity
- Eliminate the current Tier I/Tier II category system that is used to delineate between agencies that have received funding in the past and new applicants

Reporting Requirements

In an effort to improve accountability, the team recommends requiring more rigid reporting for all fund recipients. All annually funded agencies would be required to present quarterly updates electronically, with at least one in-person presentation to the board *at least* once per year. Agencies receiving competitive grants would be required to report once a year, and at the request of the Board. The Board would retain the right to reduce or discontinue funding amounts further if reporting metrics are not met or the County's fiscal situation changes.

Specific reporting metrics would include:

- Detailed information on how funds are being used
- What services are being provided
- Outcomes for Arapahoe County residents
- Impact of funding on the population served
- Number of total clients served
- Number of Arapahoe County residents served
- Demographic information of clients served
- Work being done to promote inclusivity and diversity
- Percentage of funding going towards administrative costs

- Funding percentage of total revenue
- Geographic areas served
- Activities and events held within Arapahoe County
- Outreach efforts to promote services and acknowledge the county's investment
- Fundraising events held

Any additional criteria the Board would like included can be added to this list.

Timeline

Lastly, the team proposes shortening the application and review timeline to the following schedule:

- Late June/early July: the application is posted on the website through Award Force
- August: application deadline six (6) weeks after application is posted
- September: the review team meets to discuss rankings and funding amounts
- October: study session with the Board to present award recommendations
- December: budget public hearing and notification of decisions to agencies
- January: awarded agencies submit required materials and funds are disbursed

Fiscal Impact:

If the recommended proposal was implemented, there would be \$528,897 left in the Aid to Agencies budget that would be available for agencies applying to the competitive grant program. The table below outlines the individual funding amounts for each agency.

Program	2021 Award	Proposed Award
AllHealth Network	\$179,540	\$179,540
Aurora Mental Health Center	\$180,063	\$180,063
Aurora Mental Health Center - Detox	\$280,000	\$280,000
Comitis Crisis Center	\$68,000	\$68,000
Family Tree - House of Hope	\$20,000	\$20,000
Family Tree - GOALS	\$80,000	\$80,000
Gateway Domestic Violence Services	\$345,000	\$300,000
Jewish Family Service of Colorado - Aging Care and Corrections	\$33,000	\$33,000
Tri-Valley Senior Citizens Association	\$12,000	\$10,000

2021 Aid to Agencies Budget	\$1,679,500
2022 Proposed Award	\$1,150,603
Remaining Aid to Agencies Budget	\$528,897

Alternatives:

The Board has several alternatives to this proposal:

- Make no exceptions for the safety net agencies and make all agencies apply to a competitive program.
- Choose to fund all agencies serving a specific service area(s) instead of the recommended safety net agencies.
- Add funds to the Aid to Agencies budget to make the program more competitive.
- Make no changes to the program and continue awarding agencies the same or reduced amounts within the allotted budget.
- Discontinue the program altogether and fund essential services through an alternative funding source.

Alignment with Strategic Plan:

- ☒ Be fiscally sustainable
- ☒ Provide essential and mandated service
- ☒ Be community focused

Staff Recommendation:

This proposal reflects the team's concern that reducing funding amounts would lead to fewer available services, decreased number of clients served, and potentially even staff reductions. This would only expand existing gaps when the need is greater than ever due to the pandemic. The team also recognizes that many agencies utilize these funds to leverage federal grant monies and removing this funding source might impact their ability to receive other funds. At the same time, the team recognizes the need for increased accountability from these partners and therefore recommends several metrics be reported on to help the County know where funds are going.

Concurrence: Human Services; Community Resources