



WASHINGTON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT NONPROFIT RELIEF FUND

Summary Report on Process and Results to Washington State Department of Commerce

School's Out Washington
December 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 2020, the Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) partnered with School's Out Washington (SOWA) to implement the Washington Youth Development Nonprofit Relief Fund (the Relief Fund) to provide one-time grant awards to youth development programs and organizations most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, serving young people who are furthest from educational justice.

Federal funding of \$9.8 million was made available to Commerce through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Of the \$9.8 million, Commerce's initial contract with SOWA allocated \$9.3 million for Relief Fund grants to nonprofit youth development programs/organizations and \$500,000 for outreach and locally provided technical assistance; accessibility supports and language translation; and project management and grant administration.

SOWA developed and administered an inclusive application process that addressed three priorities, assessing how, and to what extent, youth development programs/organizations were:

- Engaging priority youth populations, furthest from educational justice
- Reflecting those priority populations in their programs'/organizations' staff and leadership
- Experiencing a fiscal and programmatic impact from COVID-19

SOWA's goals in administering the Relief Fund were to facilitate an equitable, informed, and low-barrier grant making process and mitigate growing inequities among Washington's youth, which have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Working within tight time constraints, SOWA committed to ensuring that every available dollar was wisely and equitably invested in youth development programs/organizations.

Award decisions were based on input from peer reviewers across the state who engaged in a rigorous application review process. In addition to the recommendations of review groups, SOWA considered equitable representation among priority populations statewide, and equitable geographic distribution anchored by two data points specific to six regions¹ across Washington: youth 18 and younger living in poverty; and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) youth, 18 and younger.

Determinations on grant size were based on a percentage of awardees' 2019 expenses, with smaller programs/organizations receiving grants that amounted to a greater percentage of their total 2019 expenses than larger programs/organizations.

¹ Aligned with Washington's Department of Children, Youth and Families' (DCYF's) six administrative regions.

Through internal cost savings, SOWA was able to direct an additional \$100,000 to grant awards, and in November 2020, SOWA and Commerce announced awards totaling \$9.4 million to 421 youth development programs/organizations across Washington. Grants ranged from \$10,000 to \$50,000.

In mid-December 2020, Commerce notified SOWA that further funding was available to make Relief Fund awards to additional applicants. The opportunity for a second round resulted from underspent funds identified by Commerce at year's end. Supplemental funding allowed SOWA to make 20 additional awards, bringing the total number of Relief Fund awards to 441 and Commerce's total investment in youth development programs/organizations across Washington to \$9,866,000.

Commerce's initiative to provide relief funds for youth development nonprofits is evidence of the state's commitment to supporting youth development in Washington to the greatest extent possible. The Relief Fund provided the only dedicated COVID-19 relief funds for youth development at a critical time as the sector has stepped up in profound ways to support young people and help counteract the inequities that have been exacerbated by economic, social and academic disruptions from COVID-19.

The success of the Relief Fund was the result of multiple well-orchestrated elements:

- Commitment from SOWA and its partners to broad and deep outreach to engage applicants and recruit peer reviewers
- A low-barrier and well-supported application process
- A diverse cohort of highly qualified peer reviewers, trained and supported by the SOWA team
- An equitable investment approach focused on priority populations and statewide geographic distribution

Undergirding the effectiveness of the Relief Fund effort was SOWA's capability to take on an initiative of this scale and importance, in a tight timeline. The following pages provide detailed descriptions of key elements:

- Project Management: *Approach and tool*
- Outreach and Communication: *Partners and strategies*
- Request for Proposal: *RFP development and stakeholder engagement*
- The Relief Fund Application: *Process and supports*
- The Relief Fund Application: *Content*
- The Review Process: *Engaging peer reviewers*
- The Review Process: *Application review and peer review groups*
- Funding Recommendations: *Confirming eligibility*
- Funding Recommendations: *Application cut scores*
- Funding Recommendations: *Determining award size*
- Funding Recommendations: *Ensuring equity*
- Finalizing Grant Awards: *Disbursing funds*
- Finalizing Grant Awards: *Awardees*
- Finalizing Grant Awards: *Communication*

PROJECT MANAGEMENT: *Approach and tool*

SOWA relied on a highly skilled project management consultant, and an excellent technology tool, as critical elements to implement the Relief Fund. The consultant used Smartsheet, a platform which allowed the SOWA team to collaborate in real time by enabling workflow efficiencies and managing project content. Using Smartsheet as the primary tool ensured that there was “one source of truth” through a single shared data source. Smartsheet capabilities were applied to:

- 1) **Overall project management.** The consultant developed working sheets, dashboards and reports; and maintained a workplan that provided easy access to information on pending tasks and responsibilities. By automating key processes, SOWA saved time, lowered costs and reduced errors. Each of these contributed significantly to communication and efficiency within the SOWA team.
- 2) **Structure for application review and funding recommendations.** Smartsheet was a critical asset at every step, including:
 - Collection of peer reviewer interest forms, peer reviewer selection, and assignment to peer review groups
 - Compiling applicants’ eligibility data and application content²
 - Capturing individual reviewer’s scoring data and developing review dashboards to integrate reviewer data, scoring data and application data
 - Summarizing data concerns and creating reports to facilitate analysis and documentation, and inform funding recommendations

OUTREACH and COMMUNICATION: *Partners and strategies*

Upon receiving funding from Commerce, SOWA partnered with the following 11 regional and culturally specific BIPOC-led intermediary organizations to support multiple aspects of the Relief Fund implementation:

- Black Education Strategy Table
- CAIR-WA (Council on American-Islamic Relations)
- Innovia Community Foundation
- Greater Tacoma Community Foundation
- Pacific Islander Community Association of Washington
- Philanthropy Northwest
- Potlatch Fund
- Spokane County United Way
- Washington Nonprofits
- Yakima Valley Community Foundation
- Youth Development Executives of King County

² Bubble software was used to develop the online application, allowing for customization to reduce applicant errors and improve data quality. Bubble reduced the need for data manipulation and cleanup after the fact by incorporating character limit capability and other conditional requirements.

The participation of these strong partners was critical to ensuring an equitable and accessible funding approach. Memoranda of agreement between SOWA and each partner included criteria for partners' stipends and details of partners' roles, which encompassed:

- Outreach to youth development programs/organizations across the state to spread the word about the funding opportunity through partners' email lists and websites, and targeted engagement of youth development nonprofits in their networks and regions, especially small, rural, and/or BIPOC organizations.
- Serving as peer reviewers and recruiting additional individuals from among networks of youth development organizations and stakeholders.
- Participation in review sessions convened by SOWA to gather feedback and inform the final RFP (request for proposal) content and funding strategy.

The media outreach plan for the Relief Fund included a digital media campaign and advertisements for the funding opportunity in Spanish language, regional, and BIPOC publications.

The other key communication tool was SOWA's Relief Fund website which served as the primary point of access for applicants and stakeholders seeking information and resources. The landing page launched with an introduction of the funding opportunity, a link to sign up for SOWA's Relief Fund email, and a call for peer reviewer applications. Ongoing, the site included links to all critical aspects of the process, including: the project's timeline/key dates; the RFP in English and 14 other languages; the online application; contact information for accessing technical assistance; sign-ups for information sessions; and FAQs (frequently asked questions).

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL: *RFP development and stakeholder engagement*

SOWA completed an initial draft of the request for proposal (RFP) which addressed:

- Priorities and parameters of the Relief Fund and an overview of the application process
- Technical assistance available to applicants
- Process for application review, including peer reviewer recruitment and training, and geographic distribution of review groups
- Rationale and goals for funding distribution
- Application review criteria
- Approach to determining grant awards
- Project timeline
- Full text of the Relief Fund application and a link to complete it online

Prior to finalizing the RFP, SOWA convened three meetings over Zoom for youth development stakeholders in early September 2020; 33 providers, and 11 intermediary partners and funders, participated statewide. The purpose was to present the Relief Fund opportunity and seek stakeholders' guidance prior to making final strategy and process recommendations to Commerce.

Stakeholders raised multiple topics for consideration related to the proposed application questions, the grant award size, and the distribution of awards. Much of the feedback from stakeholders was integrated into the final RFP and the online application for funding. Stakeholders' specific comments, and SOWA's responses, are detailed in the full summary of the stakeholder engagement meetings.

THE RELIEF FUND APPLICATION: *Process and supports*

The application was posted on SOWA's Relief Fund website on September 22, 2020. Applications were due by midnight on October 6, 2020.

Prior to releasing the application, SOWA and Commerce established a suite of supports to ensure that applying to the Relief Fund was an accessible and equitable process:

- 1) **Translation.** The RFP was translated to Amharic, Arabic, Chinese Mandarin, Korean, Marshallese, Russian, Samoan, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tongan, Ukrainian and Vietnamese. Links to the translated RFPs were highlighted on the Relief Fund website, in the translated languages.
- 2) **Technical Assistance.** Commerce contracted with technical assistance providers to help applicants complete the application, including understanding RFP requirements and providing support with grant writing. Applicants were encouraged to reach out directly to access technical assistance from among a diverse cohort of organizations across the state, which provided services in English and multiple other languages.
- 3) **Information sessions.** SOWA offered two meetings over Zoom to walk through the application requirements and for applicants to ask questions about the RFP and application. These sessions were recorded and made available online. Questions that could not be answered immediately were subsequently included in the FAQ.
- 4) **FAQ.** In addition to gathering questions through the information sessions, SOWA also fielded questions through email. Over the two weeks the application was open, answers to approximately 80 frequently asked questions were posted to the Relief Fund website.

THE RELIEF FUND APPLICATION: *Content*

The application comprised three major sections:

1. Program/organization information

The online application offered a low-barrier opportunity for youth development programs/organizations serving young people furthest from educational justice to alleviate some of the impact of the pandemic. Simultaneously, applicants' identifying information broadened SOWA's knowledge base of the programs/organizations which are engaging young people in communities across the state. Data gathered through the applications included specifics regarding locations and administrative structures, and brief organizational overviews and program descriptions. These details are now included in the public youth program directory in [Elevate Washington](#).

2. Eligibility criteria

Programs/organizations were required to confirm all of the following to be eligible to apply for a Relief Fund grant award:

- 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization or fiscally sponsored by a 501(c)(3)
- Program/organization provided youth development services to children and youth ages 5-24 prior to COVID-19

- Between March and December 2020, program/organization provided and/or plan to provide services to youth through in-person, virtual, or direct-needs support
- Program/organization has experienced a negative fiscal impact as a result of COVID-19

Further details specific to eligibility were also required to clarify the services provided by the program/organization prior to COVID-19:

- expanded learning programs such as afterschool and summer programs
- mentoring
- wrap around services that connect youth with social/emotional and non-academic supports integrated within a school setting

and, programs/organizations were asked to identify the ages of children and youth served:

- 5-12
- 13-18
- 19-24

3. Application questions

The application focused on three overarching questions:

- 1) **Priority populations:** Relief Fund investments prioritized young people furthest from educational justice. Applicants were asked to indicate the priority youth populations which are the focus of their youth development program/organization:
 - Youth in poverty, as measured by eligibility for free- or reduced-price lunch
 - BIPOC youth
 - Migrant youth
 - Refugee and/or immigrant youth
 - English language learners
 - Youth experiencing homelessness
 - Youth in foster care
 - LGBTQ youth
 - Youth involved in the criminal justice system
 - Youth with disabilities, including physical, developmental, and/or intellectual disabilities; or special health care needs
 - The program/organization does not focus on any of the priority youth populations listed

In programs serving BIPOC youth, applicants were asked to check which BIPOC youth populations are engaged in their programs:

- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Asian/Asian-American
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic or Latino/a/x Descent
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Multiracial
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Applicants provided an estimate of the percentage of youth typically served who are included within one or more of the priority youth populations. In narrative, applicants were asked to

describe how their program's/organization's young people are represented within one or more of the priority populations and whether their populations had changed as a result of COVID-19. The response was limited to 2,600 characters; the question was worth 50% of the total score.

- 2) **Programs'/Organizations' Staff and Leadership.** Relief Fund investments prioritized programs/organizations with staff and leadership reflective of their priority youth populations. Applicants discussed how their staff, leadership, board of directors and volunteers are reflective of their priority youth participants. The response was limited to 2,200 characters; the question was worth 20% of the total score.
- 3) **Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic.** The Relief Fund was intended to alleviate some of the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth development programs/organizations across Washington. Applicants provided calendar-year financial information for 2019 and (projected) 2020 on their program's/organization's revenue and expenses. In narrative, applicants discussed how their youth development program/organization had been financially impacted by COVID-19, including the implications on services provided, and the impact on revenue and expenses. Applicants were asked to list other public or private COVID-19 relief funding they had received, including Payroll Protection Program funding. The response was limited to 2,200 characters; the question was worth 30% of the total score.

THE REVIEW PROCESS: *Engaging peer reviewers*

SOWA pursued comprehensive peer review of Relief Fund applications to ensure a fair, transparent and equitable process. Reviewers were recruited through SOWA's Relief Fund partners across the state, and through the Relief Fund website. Of the 236 individuals who submitted applications, 77 were selected to serve as reviewers, and 35 were selected to serve as lead reviewers. Collectively, the reviewers scored 612 applications.

Of the 112 reviewers, 55% identified as BIPOC and 84% reported having lived experiences/identities connected to the priority youth population. 11 youth were engaged as reviewers. In selecting reviewers, SOWA specifically sought to:

- Avoid direct conflict of interest
- Ensure regional representation
- Ensure BIPOC/priority population representation
- Prioritize experience with youth development and priority populations
- Prioritize experience with grant review

THE REVIEW PROCESS: *Application review and peer review groups*

Upon selection, reviewers were expected to allocate at least 13 hours: one hour for training; ten hours to read and score their assigned packets of approximately 20 applications; and two hours to meet (virtually) with the other two reviewers who had also read and scored the same packet of applications.

All peer reviewers participated in mandatory online training which encompassed anti-bias training, and guidance on using the [scoring rubric](#). Sessions were recorded and offered at three separate times to accommodate reviewers' schedules.

Upon completion of training, reviewers were provided packets of approximately 20 applications. Reviewers completed online scoring rubrics for each application in their packets. Each reviewer's scores were recorded and calculated as their rubrics were submitted. Dashboards for each review group were compiled through Smartsheet as the tool for discussion in review group meetings. The dashboards included scores broken out by priority funding areas; additional application data were linked on the dashboards for reviewers' reference.

Equipped with each reviewer's scores, and average raw scores calculated from among the reviewers in each group, the review group meetings positioned reviewers to discuss areas of agreement and disagreement on each scored section.

Seven review group meetings were scheduled in the last week of October 2020. Groups convened briefly with the SOWA team before moving into Zoom breakout rooms. Lead reviewers were responsible for facilitating the meetings and achieving consensus on scores; populating their groups' reports with the final consensus scores for each application in each of the three priority areas; and recording reviewers' comments on applications.

SOWA conducted a survey of reviewers and the Relief Fund team and completed a comprehensive [post mortem review](#) to evaluate the Relief Fund review process and inform future work.

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS: *Confirming eligibility*

Upon completion of peer reviews and compilation of scores, SOWA verified all applicants' eligibility prior to making funding recommendations. The Relief Fund application had required that applicants attest that they were 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. To confirm, SOWA verified the employer identification number (EIN) provided by each applicant through the IRS database. Where necessary, applicants were contacted to correct or clarify the information provided in their applications.

SOWA also verified that applicants were indeed youth development organizations. Where questions were raised by reviewers, the SOWA team reviewed applications and, as necessary, applicants' websites, to ensure that all applicants met the youth development definition as presented in the application. To be eligible for a Relief Fund investment, programs/organizations must provide expanded learning, mentoring and/or wrap-around services.

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS: *Application cut scores*

To make decisions on awardees, within the total funding available, it was necessary for SOWA to establish cut scores, below which applicants would not be funded. These cut scores (along with other applicant data below) apply to the 421 awardees in round one.

Region	Applications per region	Weighted average: final consensus score	Weighted average: cut score	Percent of applicants funded
Region 1 / Northeast	80	3.6	3	75%
Region 2 / Southeast	63	3.7	3	79%
Region 3 / Northwest	87	3.8	3	75%
Region 4 / King County	220	3.7	3.8	60%
Region 5 / South Puget Sound	85	3.5	3	69%
Region 6 / Southwest	77	3.4	3	72%

Applicants that serve multiple regions are divided proportionately across the relevant regions. Applicants that served multiple regions not including Region 4 were assigned a cut score of 3.0. Applicants that served multiple regions including Region 4, or that serve all of Washington State, were assigned a cut score of 3.4.

Additional funding from Commerce allowed for 20 additional applicants to receive Relief Fund awards. Thirteen were King County-serving programs/organizations with consensus scores of 3.6 and 3.7.³ Round two funding also allowed awards to eight non-King County serving programs/organizations with consensus scores of 2.8 and 2.9.

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS: *Determining award size*

Decisions on award sizes were based on a percentage of awardees’ 2019 expenses. These were determined by the SOWA team, following the peer review of applications. Percentages were based on financial information included in proposals, and the number of proposals received. Smaller programs/organizations were awarded grants that amounted to a greater percentage of their total 2019 expenses than larger programs/organizations.

³ These awards did not include programs/organizations that received DCYF or other Commerce CARES Act funds in the period since round one of the Relief Fund, specifically the Philanthropy Northwest Equity Fund and DCYF emergency childcare reimbursement.

2019 expenses	Minimum percentage of expenses	Minimum grant amount	Maximum grant amount
<\$100K	10%	\$10,000	\$10,000
\$100K - \$250K	8%	\$10,000	\$19,999
\$250K - \$500K	6%	\$20,000	\$29,999
\$500K-\$1M	4%	\$30,000	\$39,999
\$1M - \$1.5M	3%	\$40,000	\$44,999
\$1.5M - \$2M	2.5%	\$45,000	\$49,999
>\$2M	(less than 2.5%)	\$50,000	\$50,000

To adjust for a more equitable geographical distribution of funds in the first round of funding, final grant amounts for awardees serving Region 2 only were increased by 50% and Region 6 only were increased by 7% (up to \$50K cap) over the amounts represented here.

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS: *Ensuring equity*

After capturing final consensus data for all applications, SOWA completed a rigorous review of scores to ensure fairness and equity. Among the applications with scores that might merit funding, the SOWA team confirmed that all priority populations were being served by multiple awardees in each region and by each applicant selected for funding.

The team cross checked consensus scores of zero, verifying that not enough information was shared by the applicants to allow the reviewers to determine a score. The team found that some review groups applied a zero score unreasonably, and a few otherwise high-scoring applicants were moved to ‘fund’ status based on this review. The team also checked for any review group high/low scoring aberrations by looking at differences in control application scoring and average scores by review group. As a result, one review group was identified that consistently scored high relative to the rubric criteria. An adjustment to their scores resulted in four applicants being removed from the award list.

SOWA reviewed high and low scoring applications on the Washington map to check for patterns of rural/regional exclusion. The team adjusted the cut scores for each region and applicants serving multiple regions to achieve a more geographically equitable distribution and increased the award sizes for two regions that remained below target.

FINALIZING GRANT AWARDS: *Disbursing funds*

Relief Fund applicants awarded funding were notified of their award amount by email. Awards were paid electronically through Automated Clearing House (ACH). As part of the online application, all programs/organizations requesting funding had provided contact information for the individuals responsible for completing the ACH forms as well as W-9s. School's Out Washington sent ACH authorization forms and W-9 forms via DocuSign to grant awardees. Return of these documents was required within seven days of receipt.

Applicants that were not funded were informed by email as well. Of the 196 programs/organizations whose applications were declined, 20 requested an opportunity to discuss their application with SOWA. Telephone conversations were offered to all 20; 16 discussions were scheduled and completed.

FINALIZING GRANT AWARDS: *Awardees*

In the first round of funding, awards were approved for 421 youth development programs/organizations, from every region in the state. An additional 20 received awards in the second round, bringing the total number of Relief Fund awardees to 441.

Among the 441 awardees, 34% had 2019 annual expenses budgets under \$100,000. On average, 87% of youth served by awardees are in the Relief Fund's priority populations (including BIPOC, LGBTQ, migrant/immigrant, youth experiencing homelessness and youth in poverty); 47% of awardees report serving 100% priority youth.

All awardees will join [Elevate Washington](#), a source for comprehensive, statewide data about youth programs administered by School's Out Washington. Programs new to Elevate Washington will benefit from being part of this resource. The Relief Fund has brought to light many new organizations working to support young people.

FINALIZING GRANT AWARDS: *Communication*

Following SOWA's public announcement of Relief Fund awards, awardees were encouraged to publicly announce their own awards. Programs/organizations were provided with an [information kit](#) to support their efforts.

SOWA and Commerce received many letters and emails from youth development programs/organizations across the state expressing thanks for the opportunity to secure some measure of funding relief in this challenging time. Several stand out as reflective of the need for, and impact of, Relief Fund investments:

"This will provide such a boost to our organization and the youth we serve in our valley!"

Kayla Helleson, Thrive Chelan Valley

"We wish to thank WSDC for this grant which will go a long way to support interventions for resilience building among immigrant youth, escalated by the Covid-19 pandemic."

Anna Irungu, Teenagers Plus

Several of the emails affirmed the commitment of SOWA, Commerce and stakeholders around the state to an equitable and accessible process, as the Relief Fund reached out to youth development programs/organizations most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, serving young people who are furthest from educational justice.

“Thank you for also letting this be a grant process that almost anyone could apply for based on technical skills. As a Black leader, too often I am asked to apply for a grant and end up feeling inadequate and overwhelmed. Thank you for this opportunity and having an equitable grant.”

Baionne Coleman, Rainier Valley Leadership Academy

“Our gratitude and sincere thanks to School’s Out Washington and the Washington State Department of Commerce for believing in the work we do -- especially in this unprecedented time.”

Jennifer DiMarco, Blue Legacy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING

This project was supported by a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Treasury. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Treasury. These funds are administered by the Washington State Department of Commerce.