



Step-by-Step Grant Process

Step 1 - Publish Grant Guidelines

Review and update grant guidelines annually. Post to SVP's website, e-mail and/or mail to all relevant prospective investees and previous applicants, and mail to the relevant mailing lists.

Step 2 - Grant Chair Selection

The primary role of the Grant Committee chair is to provide leadership and facilitation of the grant committee process. The Committee chair works closely with SVP staff to ensure that committee members understand SVP's grantmaking process, key deadlines, and their responsibilities. Criteria used to select new grant chairs include previously sitting on a grant committee and lead partner or volunteer experience with an investee. Chairs should understand and value both the importance of selecting promising investees (capacity building mission) and the importance of the committee as an educational experience (philanthropy development mission).

Staff should meet with the chair no fewer than two months prior to the beginning of the grant cycle. Staff provides recent post mortems, evaluations, the grant committee schedule and upcoming meeting materials in advance of their meeting. The hour and a half meeting helps clarify the role and responsibilities of the chair, updates them on the process and any changes since their last grant committee, and ensures they are supporting the staff facilitator in sharing the lessons learned of previous grant committees.

Step 3 - Confirmation of Committee Participation

SVP Partners indicate on their partner profile if they would be interested in joining a grant committee. Committee members are then selected to participate on the grant committee by priority of those who have not been on a committee before.

Committee members receive the calendar, Grant Committee job description, grant guidelines, and confirmation letter six weeks before the first meeting. Three weeks before the committee begins all committee members receive access and instructions for accessing the committee's online workspace, an issue area overview and pre-readings, SVP Capacity Building Model, and an investee case study. Committee members are instructed to read materials prior to the kick-off meeting.

Step 4 - Kick-off Meeting

The kick-off meeting introduces grant committee members to each other and to the work ahead of them. After introducing themselves and describing why they wanted to be on the grant

committee, members completed a pre outcomes survey. The survey allows SVP to determine the impact and personal growth committee members experience through this process. The survey normally takes about 15 minutes to complete.

The staff facilitator and grant chair walk the committee through the following:

Overview: The overview places the new grant committee within the larger context of the mission and the SVP model. The Committee members gain an insight into how the New Grant Committee and the Portfolio Grant Committee interrelate. They also gain a greater appreciation for the importance of their role as the stewards of the pooled grant funds.

Grant Committee Process Overview: The staff facilitator will provide a brief process overview so members know what to expect over the following six months.

Discussion of grant guidelines and focus area: Staff explains the current grant guidelines and the process for getting the message out to the local nonprofit community.

Ground rules for participation: All members must complete a confidentiality and conflict of interest policy to ensure we maintain confidential funding discussions and to ensure SVP maintains an open, competitive process. The policy allows members with a conflict to remain on the committee but they must follow an explicit set of guidelines throughout the process. Ground rules also include regular attendance, participation in meetings and site visits, and reading pre-reading meeting materials.

SVP Connect space: Staff provides a brief introduction to the SVP Connect space and check in with Committee members that may need additional assistance.

Step 5 - Get Smart Phase - Panel Discussions & Research Calls

The panel discussions with community experts provide Grant Committee members their first opportunity to learn about key issues, elements of quality programs, trends in the field, and local nonprofits working in the issue area in which they will be funding. Staff submitted key topics and questions for each panelist to discuss in advance. Committee members had the opportunity to review panelists' biography in advance of the panel session. Each panel discussion lasts an hour and a half. The final thirty minutes allows committee members to identify themes and discuss what they learn. Two or three panel discussions are recommended. The first panel provides a high level overview of the issues. The second panel discussion includes specific approaches and best practices within the issue. The second panel often includes a representative from a current investee, who can also speak about their organization's relationship with SVP.

Most committee members find the panel sessions an extremely valuable learning opportunity:

"Phenomenal access to local leaders" –Grant Committee Member

"The best part of the committee process was the opportunity to learn from experts in the presentations and the site visits" - Grant Committee Member

"Getting the lay of the land was probably the most useful aspect of the grant committee work – getting an overview of the community, types of social service organizations, and opportunities to help." - Grant Committee Member

The second piece of the 'Get Smart' phase includes research phone calls with a community expert or completing web research on a relevant topic of interest. This second phase allows Committee members to expand upon and round out what they learned from the panelists with additional opinions from other experts in the field. All Committee members select at least one expert to call. The research calls are then written up and distributed via the SVP Connect space.

Step 6 - Capacity Building and SVP Fit

The Capacity Building and SVP Fit session provides the proper knowledge transfer from the Portfolio Grant Committee to the New Grant Committee. The PGC Chair and PGC Staff member are invited to share their knowledge from overseeing and refunding existing investees. The PGC Chair re-iterates the importance of the New Grant Committee to act as stewards of the pooled grant funds and frames the new investee selection process and SVP Fit criteria. During the meeting, the PGC Chair and PGC Staff member share the rationale behind our capacity building mission, how SVP utilizes its resources to meet this mission, what the relationship with a new investee looks like, key success (SVP Fit criteria) and risk factors to look for, the current issue area portfolio, and a few case studies on successful and not so successful investee relationships.

Step 7 - Developing and Practicing the Letter of Inquiry Scoring Tool

The LOI Criteria tool provides the New Grant Committee an evaluation tool that develops a potentially subjective process to more of an objective process. Through the use of the LOI Criteria tool, the committee will evaluate LOIs utilizing the same set of criteria. Explain to members that organizations are not going to meet all the criteria, but those that meet more should be examined more closely. While the PGC provided the SVP Fit criteria to the committee, the programmatic area and attributes were not addressed by the PGC. From the beginning of the "Get Smart" phase, committee members were asked to think about the programmatic criteria that should be used for this tool.

The staff facilitator begins the meeting with an overview of any key learnings from the “Get Smart” phase and the SVP Fit session, explains the purpose of developing criteria and reviews the LOI Criteria template. The Committee members are provided in advance with a list of potential criteria gleaned from the panel sessions, the research calls, other research documents posted to the SVP Connect space, and members’ contributions. From this starting point, Committee members then discuss and modify the potential criteria based on what they learned to be the most important.

“Given the diverse group of grant committee members, we had a good thought provoking discussions during the criteria meeting and afterwards.” –Grant Committee Member

Committee members are provided the previous grant cycle’s LOI Criteria tool with the programmatic area and attributes removed so they come up with their own programmatic criteria. Committee members are often resistant to developing the criteria before reading the letters of inquiry and don’t feel prepared to make a decision with the programmatic criteria. While the six month New Grant Committee Process does not allow for an extensive amount of time to research and define programmatic criteria, the development of the LOI Criteria tool continues to be a critical learning piece that all grantmakers should know.

Once the committee finalizes its LOI Criteria tool, members practice using it with two letters of inquiry from previous grant cycles. The letters provide an example of an organization that understood the SVP mission and capacity building strategy and an organization that did not.

Step 8 - Small Team Review of Letters of Inquiry

SVP receives many letters of inquiry. In order to review them all effectively, Committee members are divided into groups of three or four person review teams. Staff randomly assigns Letters of Inquiry to each small group. Each Committee member is asked to read through all their letters to gain an overall sense of the organizations, to then score each letter individually using the LOI Criteria tool and finally to stack rank the letters. Once each individual reviews the letters, the small review teams convene to discuss the letters and select four organizations that

should be invited to submit proposals. Most of the small groups meet for coffee to discuss the letters. Many Committee members remark how enjoyable the small group process is. The small team review is the first opportunity for members to get to know each other in a small group setting and to evaluate nonprofits.

Step 9 - Review Top LOIs

Through the small team review, the committee selects several finalists to review. Each Committee member is tasked with reading and reviewing all of the final top LOIs and to be prepared to discuss how each letter does or does not meet the evaluation criteria. The committee is given two and a half weeks to review the top LOIs.

Step 10 - Discussion of top LOIs / Proposal Invitation

The discussion of the top LOIs begins with a review of the LOI Criteria tool and an overview of the meeting and voting process. The conflict of interest policy is enforced at this stage. The process begins with an “approval” vote during which everyone casts a vote for any LOI that they “approve” of. Approval indicates that they would feel good about recommending this organization to the board for funding. Organizations that only received a few votes are removed from the discussion. The next phase includes reviewing all remaining LOIs and discussing how they meet the SVP Fit criteria and the committee’s programmatic priorities. After briefly discussing each letter, members vote. Each member is allowed the number of votes equal to the total number of proposals that the Committee will invite. The top vote-getting organizations are invited to submit a full proposal. SVP staff sends out the invitation for proposals as well as the rejection letters to the applicants who are not selected.

Step 11 - Preparing for Site Visits and Proposal Review

This session provides an overview of the site visit time commitment and structure; walks the committee through the proposal evaluation process; provides instructions on how to evaluate an organization and what to look for in its proposal; gives an overview of nonprofit budget and financial statements; explains how to participate, what to expect, and how to lead a site visit; and provides pointers on how to conduct reference calls. Committee Members are also given an

example of a site visit agenda and list of questions.

After a review of the role of a site lead, Committee members volunteer to be site leads. By acting as the primary liaison between the organization and SVP, the site lead is responsible to: schedule a site visit with the identified organizational contact; ensure the correct organizational representatives will be present at the site visit; compile and condense questions from the review team; provide the organization an agenda and list of questions to cover in the meeting five working days in advance of the meeting; and complete the proposal evaluation report outline and presentation outline.

Step 12 - Proposal Evaluation and Site Visits

Once proposals are submitted, committee members have one and a half weeks to review their proposals and prepare for the site visits, three weeks to attend the site visits, check references, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, four days to submit proposal summaries, and an additional week to review proposal summaries.

The 'Preparing for Site Visits and Proposal Review Session' encourages Committee members to make the most of their site visit by preparing in advance. Committee members are instructed to read the proposal and submit any questions or concerns one week in advance to the site lead. The site lead condenses and compiles the questions and creates an agenda to help guide the meeting. The Lead emails the agenda and questions to the prospective investee to help prepare them for the site visit.

The site visit review team meets for one hour prior to the scheduled site visits. This pre-meeting allows the team to review the agenda, decide how questions would be asked, and to prioritize what they want to learn in the site visit.

The actual site visit lasts between 2-3 hours depending on the site visit review team and whether the organization conducts a program tour or presentation. The opportunity to see the program in action give the site visit review team a better understanding of the organization.

Immediately following the site visit, the site visit review team meets to debrief. This time allows the review team to discuss the site visit, identify any outstanding questions or concerns they have about the organization, and to review the Proposal Evaluation Report Outline. Site visit team members are assigned reference calls to complete due diligence. While the prospective investees provide the reference names, Committee members are also welcome to initiate additional reference calls relevant to the program or organization.

Step 13 - Proposal Summary Review

Upon completion of the site visit, each site visit review team is responsible for submitting a written summary, the Proposal Evaluation Report. The Site Lead is responsible for completing the report. Once an initial draft is complete, the site visit review team reviews it. Modifications to the document are the result of on-line discussions and reference calls. Upon completion, the document is posted on SVP Connect for the rest of the committee to review before the final decision meeting. This four page summary documents the proposal and the site visit and provides recommendations for funding. The report also includes a summary from the reference calls. Committee members have one week to review the proposal summaries.

Step 14 - Final Decision Meeting

The meeting begins by reminding the Committee of their role as stewards of the pooled grants fund – potentially providing thousands over 3-5 years with additional time and expertise contributed by partners. The chair and staff clarify the objective: selecting promising organization(s) that meet the SVP Fit and Program criteria; and provided a final review of the Criteria Tool.

Each Site Lead prepares bullet points for five topics - overview of the proposal/project, overview of how partners can engage with the investee, summary of why the proposal is a good fit with the committee's priorities, drawbacks, and any final points. Staff consolidate all of the presentations into one PowerPoint presentation handout. The aim of the structured format is to limit the extent to which "salesmanship" or varying levels of preparation influences the final decision-making process. The working assumption is that committee members have read the proposal summaries prior to the final meeting. The Site Lead, whose team recommends funding, presents a brief eight minute presentation followed by 5-10 minutes of Q & A from the Committee. Proposals that are not being recommended for funding by the review team are not presented.

The Committee is given thirty minutes for general discussion about the remaining finalists. In order to focus the discussion, the Committee members complete an "approval" vote with each member casting a vote for any finalist of which they "approve," or would recommend to the board for funding. This vote measures breadth of support for an organization by the committee. Organizations that receive few votes are removed from the discussion. The number of votes for each organization are divided by the total number of people eligible to vote for the organization to give an approval percentage.

Staff monitors the discussion and guides the conversation towards SVP Fit and the committee's giving priorities and to ensure each remaining organization got an equal amount of discussion time.

The final vote is a "Boorda" vote, in which everyone stack ranks the finalists. Add the rankings for organization A and divide by the number of people eligible to vote to get an average Boorda ranking. Boorda rankings capture depth of support more than breadth of support.

Both types of votes are done because breadth and depth of support can be very different. Often the top choice is the same by both methods, but when that's not the case a majority-rules run-off between the top two determines the investee.

Site leads call the new investee to congratulate them and make the "let-down" calls to the

organizations that are not selected.

Step 15 - Wrap up Meeting

Committee members meet in an informal setting (typically a restaurant or partner's home) to celebrate their decision and debrief on the process, providing a sense of closure. In advance of the meeting, Committee members are sent an evaluation and the post outcomes survey to complete. The first half of the meeting provides time to socialize. The second half of the meeting provides the opportunity to brainstorm suggestions to improve or modify the New Grant Committee Process, share strengths and weaknesses of the process, and share reflections on what each committee member learned. Committee members' comments and suggestions are integrated throughout this post mortem and are used to improve upon on future grant committees.