

Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council (LOHC)
Conservation Partners Grants Committee Meeting Minutes
Sunday, February 22, 2009
5:00 p.m.
Saint Anthony Room
Kelly Inn, St. Paul, MN

Members Present: Chair Scott Rall, Sen. Bill Ingebrigtsen, Darby Nelson, David Hartwell, Bob Schroeder, Wayne Enger, Jim Cox, Les Bensch, Mike Kilgore and Temporary Staff Bill Becker

Call to Order

Chair Rall called the meeting of the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council Conservation Partners Grants Committee to order at 5:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

Review and Approve Agenda

Senator Ingebrigtsen moved approval of the agenda for the evening. **Motion approved**

Review and Approve Minutes

Bob Schroeder moved approval of the minutes of February 8, 2009. Scott Rall mentioned that the sentence “Grant funds should be distributed on a reimbursement basis and grant accounting by the grantee should be reimbursable.” is not how he remembered the conversation. Bob Schroeder moved to revise the sentence as follows: “Grant funds ~~should~~ may be distributed on a reimbursement basis and grant accounting by the grantee should be reimbursable.” The amendment was approved. **Motion approved**

Public Comments

Nancy Fasching of the Southwest Initiative Foundation presented a description of the Foundation’s grant making experience. She asked the committee to consider the Southwest Initiative Foundation as the home for the Conservation Partners Grants Program.

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) – Donn Waage, Director, Central Region, NFWF, Fort Snelling, Minnesota

Mr. Waage presented on the mission and experience of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. He pointed out that it was created in 1984 by an act of Congress as a 501(c) (3) organization to act as a fiduciary for conservation grant programs. It seeks to create partnerships and leverage Federal, corporate and private dollars. Operating expenses are funded by grant programs using the services of the foundation. Nationally there are three regions, Eastern, Central and Western, with the Central Region headquartered at Fort Snelling, MN. Their mission is to create strategic conservation partnerships by identifying emerging issues, promoting innovative conservation, building partnerships, providing seed funding and ongoing funding, and providing technical assistance to grant applicants and grantees. In so doing they receive and hold funds in segregated accounts, administer those accounts, and ensure fiscal accountability of grantees and grant programs. Since 1984 the foundation, nationwide, has handled \$1.5 billion in grant funds and matching funds. It is a

best in class conservation grant foundation with a four star rating from Charity Navigator and general administration expenses at 3% and fundraising at 5%. The Minnesota office is administering 242 grants amounting to \$32 million. Their grant administration includes: Issuing and publicizing RFPs; Soliciting proposals; Convening expert advisory groups; Notifying officials of award recommendations; Notifying applicants of award decisions; Developing and managing grant agreements; Coordinating media events and press releases for grants; and providing feedback to unsuccessful applicants so as to improve their future grant competitiveness. They use a three step grant application process to make it easier for applicants to determine their project's eligibility and serve as a grant center directing applicants to the most appropriate programs. Applicants are invited to advisory team meetings, partner workshops, on site visits-tours and receive regular grant announcements. NFWF monitors and assesses the success of grants it manages. It is currently managing four grant programs directed at Minnesota, in part or in whole. Advantages for the Outdoor Heritage Fund Conservation Partner Grant Program working with NFWF are: Low cost, professional and responsive grant management; on-stop shopping for grant applicants; Efficient delivery of public and private funds for a common purpose; Notification of public officials for all projects; Non-controversial conservation funding; Fosters new partnerships increasing resources for conservation; and has a local presence and local experience.

Council members discussed the question before the committee, "Who administers the program?"

Wayne Enger said LOHC should keep the program streamlined, cost effective and locally administered with local technical support. He advocated for one-on-one assistance, a uniform selection process and program oversight with inspection at project completion. Mr. Enger pointed to the BWSR program as an example of the kind of administration he envisions.

Scott Rall pointed out that the way the program is administered in year one may be different from future years. He advocated engaging a third party to administer the program.

Bob Schroeder said the legislature will at who the administrator is and what kind of track record they have. He further commented that the decision before the committee is a "make or buy" decision. Preferably we can find an effective organization with a track record demonstrating successful execution, a high level of accountability, an ability to communicate and state run.

Les Bensch agreed we need to use an existing agency or entity.

Senator Ingebrigtsen asked what the agencies would charge.

Jim Cox favored using an agency other than the usual state agencies that have poor relationships with the conservation organizations. That said Mr. Cox favored a strategy that enables the program to be up and running quickly. Senator Ingebrigtsen agreed that a new entity would be desirable.

Bob Schroeder said he thought we needed a model that ensured success from the very beginning, prompting Wayne Enger to say the LOHC would be better off if it found an entity that was in existence.

Mike Kilgore asked Mr. Waage how the foundation would get expertise in reviewing proposals. Mr. Waage replied that he needed criteria from the council and would set up an advisory board. Mr. Kilgore refined his question to considerations that can't be differentiated by objective criteria. Mr. Waage responded the he pointed out he had access to over 90 natural scientists with the ability to guide the grant program through more subjective considerations.

Members agreed they should hear from BWSR on how they would run the program, specifically what they would use as a process for solicitation, administration and evaluation, what fees they would charge, and how they would involve the council.

Next Committee Meeting

The group agreed to meet at 5 p.m., Sunday, March 8, 2009

Adjourn

Chair Rall adjourned the meeting at 7:25 p.m.

APPROVAL:

Scott Rall, Chair

Date