

**FUND DEVELOPMENT: ALAMEDA COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICE**  
**AGENCY'S ANSWER TO FOSTERING INNOVATION**  
**AND PROGRAM SUPPORT**

**Melissa A. Mairose**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*“You’re fully committed to your mission and the programs  
that advance it, but none of it comes free.”*

Center for Nonprofit Management

In these times of declining financial resources, fundraising has become an essential tool for public agencies. The Alameda County Social Services Agency has fully embraced this concept. With the implementation of the Fund Development Office, the agency is able to design innovative programs and apply for grants to fund its efforts. Working collaboratively with an interagency group, the office and agency are able to combine resources that give them a better chance to be awarded a grant, implement a program and help the community.

Monterey County Department of Social Services would benefit from a grant unit. Discretionary programs could be funded or enhanced, providing more resources for those that we serve. Working together with the partner agencies would expand the network of available funding opportunities and help support our common population. In turn, assisting and supporting those that the agency serves is its mission.

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**Background**

One of the values of the Monterey County Department of Social Services (MCDSS) is to “assist and support the persons we serve to better meet the challenges of their lives.” The department provides cash assistance, food stamps, access to Medi-Cal, housing assistance, and/or other services that help them meet their basic needs. But department staff know that for customers to thrive, they need more than basic needs. Staff strive to provide them with the resources and tools so that they can help themselves on their way to becoming self-sufficient. In order to offer programs that will aid our customers, staff must have sufficient resources to be able to assist and support. In Monterey County, like all county governments, adequate funding is essential to being able to provide services to the residents of a county. When the recession hit, MCDSS was faced with decreased funding from federal and state sources, as well as diminishing contributions from our own county general funds. Although funding has declined, mandates to provide services to the most vulnerable populations remain. The lack of financial resources results in not being able to fully fund discretionary programs, programs that are designed to go beyond the minimum levels of service provision. These are programs that can bring customers a step closer to being successful. So how can staff continue to help our community and provide them the same level of services that they deserve? Where is the department going to get the financial resources needed to provide these services?

Grants are one way that an agency can receive additional federal finance assistance to fund new and innovative programs. Grants are financial awards and are generally to be used for a specific purpose. Grants are not loans and do not have to be repaid, although the grantee is often required to report back outcomes to the grantor. Alameda County found a way to make grants work for them.

### **Alameda County Social Services Agency's Fund Development Office**

In an effort to increase the number of grants in the county in 2011, the Alameda County Health Care Services Agency (HCSA) created a Fund Development Office (FDO) as a pilot project, collaborating with partner agencies, including the Social Services Agency (SSA) and the Probation Department (PD). The purpose of the FDO was to provide a centralized fundraising unit that will assist county agencies and partners to research and apply for grants.

Prior to the FDO, each department worked on its own for fundraising efforts. The SSA historically did not apply for grants. SSA relied on federal and state-funded allocations or opportunities that it was specifically invited to apply for. The HCSA did have a history of applying for grant; and, the PD unsuccessfully shared a staff person with a local agency to apply for grants. Sharing a common population led these three agencies to partner together and collaborate, increasing their fundraising capabilities.

The structure of the FDO includes a Development Director (Director), a Portfolio Manager (PM) for each of the partner agencies and an administrative assistant. Initially, the Director position

was held in the HCSA office and indirectly supervised the PMs. Recently, as a result of staff transition, each agency is now responsible for its own FDO. But despite the separation of the FDO, each agency has committed to continuing the cross-agency collaboration that makes this program successful.

### **Key Elements of the SSA Fund Development Office**

The Alameda County SSA Fund Development Office is led by Lisa Haefele, the FDO Portfolio Manager. Ms. Haefele's role is to develop foundation and government grant submissions on behalf of the agency. She works cooperatively with the interagency FDO, as well as the agency's own internal program staff.

A Grantwriters' Pool (GP) is available to the interagency FDO. This is a group of contracted consultants that can be utilized when the PM needs assistance or does not have the capacity to complete a specific grant application.

The interagency FDO utilizes eCivis as their primary grant database. With eCivis, the FDO can research grants as well as use it for grant management. Through the grant management module, the partner FDOs can view the grants that their partner agencies are pursuing. This is especially useful when an FDO is applying for a mutually beneficial grant.

There is a Bid/No Bid Assessment tool. This template is a guide to assist the FDO in the grant analysis process. By completing the form, the PM can make an informed decision if the grant will work with the program design and if the office should proceed with the grant application.

## **Alameda County SSA Success**

The creation of a Fund Development Office has been successful for the SSA. Since its inception in 2011, it has been able to secure 19 grant awards worth more than \$10.3M. These achievements have allowed the FDO to continue operating for more than five years. It has also resulted in the SSA having a full-time fund developer within the agency.

In 2014, the FDO submitted four grant applications and was awarded all four. Funding reaching over \$700,000 was secured. These funds allowed the office to release twelve new grant-related contracts out into the community. Grants secured included:

- Funding to support community-based Medi-Cal outreach and enrollment efforts for the homeless, reentry and limited English proficient population.
- Funding to expand SSA Asset-Building programs and workshops.
- Funding to support the creation of a business plan to integrate a black male achievement/BMoC lens into the SSA.

In 2015 the FDO was awarded three federal grants and one state grant. These grants gave the SSA over \$3,000,000 of additional funding and it was able to give out more than five grant-related contracts to the community. Grants secured included:

- Funding for multi-year support for community-based Medi-Cal renewal assistance.
- Funding for multi-year support to establish mobile ACWIB American Job Center inside the Santa Rita Jail.
- Funding to implement the Alameda County Youth Transitions Partnership that includes case management to current and former foster youth at-risk of homelessness.

## **Obstacles and Challenges of the FDO**

As successful as the FDO has been for Alameda County SSA, it hasn't been without its challenges. One issue has been the structure of the FDO. Although the FDO was born in the HCSA with the intention of sharing the infrastructure, staffing and reorganizing has led them to separate the FDOs within the individual agencies, with each agency taking responsibility for its own FDO. Despite being separated, the group has committed to continue working as a collaborative partnership.

The decision-making process is another challenge that the FDO faces. Deciding on grants to apply for is not always an easy process. Not only is there an extraordinary amount of work in completing and submitting the grant application, but there is also a lot of work that must be done to analyze for viability. Most grants specify that they can be used to supplement existing funding but cannot supplant it. Therefore, the grant must be carefully reviewed to determine if submitting an application is appropriate. In 2015, the FDO screened approximately 500 grants, did an informal exploration of 50, completed formal bid analyses of 20, submitted applications for 4 and was awarded 3 grants.

Competing priorities can sometimes be an obstacle for the FDO. There is usually a limited time period available for the preparation and submission of a grant. An application for a federal grant can take between 60 to 200 hours to prepare, depending on the complexity of the grant and program design. There are times that the PM is working on a grant application, but another opportunity comes up at the same time. The competing grants must be prioritized. If it is

determined that both competing grants should be pursued, the FDO has access to the GP for assistance with preparing the grant application.

### **Recommendations and Implementation for Monterey County**

Implementing a grant unit similar to the FDO is something that would benefit MCDSS. As funding in other areas decrease, actively seeking grant opportunities can lead to invaluable financial assistance. Current programs can be enhanced or new programs can be implemented, providing the means to do more for the department's customers.

A grant unit can be minimally staffed with a senior analyst and a support staff, utilizing current staff available. Internally, the grant unit should collaborate with key personnel from other branches in order to agree on program priorities. They would assist the program personnel with designing programs that would benefit from a grant. The unit should also coordinate and work closely with personnel from Finance to develop the budget and the requirements for financial reporting. The unit should also work together with the Contract Unit to prepare for contracting with the community once the grant is secured.

The MCDSS grant unit should collaborate with county partners. The County Administrative Office recently hired a grant coordinator. Similar to the FDO, the coordinator and staff have been tasked with searching databases for grants and forwarding the information to interested departments. If the department wants to pursue the opportunity, the grant coordinator will assist the department with navigating the grant application process.

MCDSS should work together with our partner agencies. The Monterey County Health Department (HD) and Probation Department (PD) each have their own process for applying for grants. As both departments share a common population, working together would increase the network of grant organizations. Both departments will also be able to develop more robust programs in order to serve more of the community than would be possible on their own.

### **Impact for Monterey County**

Creating a grant unit for MCDSS should have a minimal impact. Existing staff could be utilized, eliminating the need to hire. Should personnel need to be hired, the salary and benefits of a senior analyst would be approximately \$130,000. There is no cost to subscribe to many of the available grant databases. Grants.gov and Foundationcenter.org are two online grant databases that are accessible at no cost. Monterey County's financial system currently includes a grant management module. This module can be utilized to track and manage all grants and would incur no additional fees. Should a separate grant management system be desired, purchasing eCivis software would be an annual cost of under \$15,000.

The benefits of having a grant unit at MCDSS would far outweigh the cost of implementation. Current funding would be enhanced. New and innovative programs could be realized. And the more programs that can be created, the more the department can do for the community that it serves.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## **References**

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