

FUND DEVELOPMENT IN ALAMEDA COUNTY

Julie Sabbag-Maskey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2011, Alameda County put in place a collaborative Fund Development Office (FDO) as a pilot program. Housed within the Health Care Services Agency (HCSA), the FDO also includes the Social Services Agency (SSA) and the Probation Department (PD) as participating partners. The FDO is set up to be a centralized fundraising infrastructure with the purpose of fostering a grant-seeking culture within its partner agencies and providing services for grant research and applications. Some of the benefits of such a collaborative structure are increased cross-sector cooperation and improved fund raising capacity.

The Alameda County SSA provides fund development support for its programs by investing in a full-time, permanent Fund Development Portfolio Manager. The fund development function within the SSA has brought in millions of dollars in additional funding that has provided critical resources and technical assistance to the agency and its clients.

This case study explores the key elements of the FDO and the SSA Fund Development Portfolio Manager position to determine the components that are a best fit for Sonoma County and its Human Services Department (HSD): establishing an FDO within the county's Upstream Investments Policy initiative and incorporating fund development functions into the duties of current Planning, Research, Evaluation, and Engagement (PREE) staff.

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Introduction

Grant writers are revered for their role in bringing in money for new or expanding programs. Many community-based organizations rely on fund development activities to sustain themselves. Yet grant dollars brought into a government agency pale in comparison to the regular allocations received from state and federal funding streams, becoming just a bit of “budget dust.” In Alameda County, however, the Health Care Services Agency (HCSA), Social Services Agency (SSA), and Probation Department (PD) have been collaborating on a pilot project since 2011 called the Alameda County Fund Development Office (FDO) to provide fundraising infrastructure for a wide-variety of participants. This case study examines the structure, successes, and challenges of the FDO, and the SSA’s role in it, to see how Alameda County’s experience can inform Sonoma County’s and its Human Services Department’s (HSD) fund development options.

I. Why Now?

HSD is currently engaged in an internal strategic planning process. It is also supporting an evaluation of the Upstream Investments Policyⁱ (Upstream). Upstream is sponsored by the Board of Supervisors to prioritize county funding for evidence-based, prevention-focused interventions as part of a collective impact approach to achieving common goals. HSD provides staffing and leadership for Upstream and is preparing to bring recommendations based on the Upstream evaluation to the Board in August 2016. The HSD Strategic Plan is slated for completion in September 2016. Determining viable fund development structures at this time is necessary to:

best utilize HSD's personnel and financial resources; meet HSD's goals for the department; and address the needs of the many agencies and partners dedicated to Upstream's goals.

II. Alameda County's Experience

The collaborative structure of the FDO and the role of the Fund Development Portfolio Manager (PM) embedded in the SSA are important themes to explore in determining implications for Sonoma County.

A. Collaborative Structure - The Alameda Fund Development Officeⁱⁱ

- The Alameda County Health Care Services Agency (HCSA) leads the FDO with a full-time development director (director) and an administrative assistant contracted on a part-time basis.

The director provides leadership and oversees the daily functions and strategy of the FDO, as well as offers fund development consultation to the partner agencies and other entities in

Alameda County, especially at the executive-level. The FDO administers a centralized fundraising structure that helps agencies apply for a variety of funding opportunities and

facilitates cross-agency collaboration on grant applications. Partner agencies have hired Fund Development Portfolio Managers (PM) as either full-time employees or full-time consultants.

The PMs meet regularly as a team with the FDO Development Director to discuss and coordinate grant-seeking efforts, determine grant writing needs, negotiate funding opportunities, and

mitigate obstacles or unnecessary competition in order to advance cross-system approaches whenever possible. A Grantwriters' Pool is set up by the FDO to provide third-party fund

development professionals to the partner agencies, as well as to other contracted partners in the community when needed.

- Many diverse resources come into play to support the structure of the FDO. The revenue structure includes the salaries and benefits of the director, salary of the administrative consultant,

as well as the space for the FDO office. Since the Director is an HCSA employee, the HCSA picks up these costs. Each partner agency pays the costs associated with their own embedded PM(s). In addition, a negotiated commitment is solicited from the partner agencies for the Grantwriters' Pool based on expected usage. Human capital and expertise is integral to the success of the FDO. The director and PMs are well-respected and experienced, as well as, skilled in facilitation and relationship building so that they can build the trust necessary to increase fundraising capacity and collaboration within and among agencies/partners.

- The Alameda County FDO has been in place for five years and has had significant success, not only in the amount of funding that has been brought into the County, but also in the impact such funding has had for residents of Alameda County and the collaborative grant-seeking culture that has been developed. From 2011 through 2015, the FDO collaborative secured \$44 million in grant funding for Alameda County and assisted with 181 applications. These grant funds allowed for spending to take place outside of the strict categorical spending usual found in county budgets. Grant funds allowed resource-constrained agencies “to implement new, innovative programs tailored to the dynamic needs of their clients.”ⁱⁱⁱ In addition, the FDO Team’s meetings have fostered strong relationships among the PMs. Specific funding opportunities undertaken by the FDO have provided forums for a multitude of partners to discuss shared goals and to collaborate on, rather than compete for, limited funding.

- It has been difficult, however, for the FDO to quantify the benefits of collaborative grants, quantify costs and savings, and quantify the increase in fundraising capacity of the various county and community partners. Additionally, the FDO’s organizational structure has come into question. The placement of the FDO in the HCSA was expedient and logical – the director had close ties to the HCSA, the HCSA had a rich history of grant writing, and the HCSA shared

many of the same clients and goals as the other partners of the FDO. However, “participating agencies differ in their assessment of whether the FDO is a truly collaborative program, or if HCSA exerts disproportionate influence on the FDO’s agenda.”^{iv} The FDO has flourished for the last five years; yet, there seems to be some pressure to reorganize, perhaps by bringing the FDO to a county-wide level rather than house it within one particular service agency.

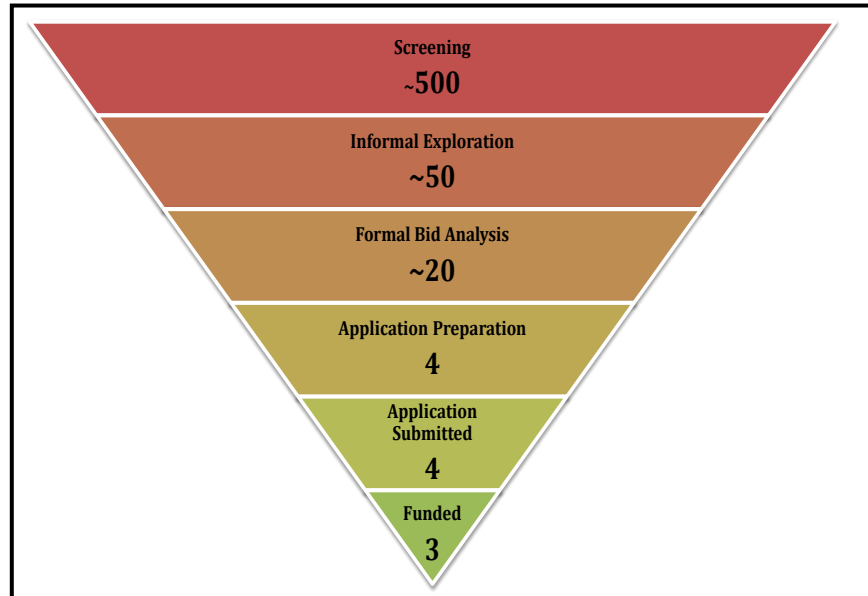
B. Internal SSA Structure - Embedded Fund Development Portfolio Manager: *The role of SSA’s PM is of special interest to HSD as it looks at possible fund development structures within the department that could interface with a broader county-wide structure.* As a dedicated employee responsible for fund development for the wide-variety of programs in the SSA, the embedded PM provides intensive internal support but does so from the vantage point of the larger FDO structure. The PM is housed in the SSA’s Policy Office and works closely with the programs, finance, contracts, and evaluation teams to develop funding priorities, identify grant prospects and cultivate donors, design programs and write proposals, and provide administrative support and reporting for awarded grants. At the start of the FDO pilot, the PM focused on establishing relationships and networking, both internally and externally, with relevant staff to determine funding priorities and to find funding opportunities. Yet, over the years, the grant-seeking culture has become more established and more focused on priorities such that the number of potential grant opportunities far outweighs the number that is actually applied for (see Table 1 for 2015 numbers). Assessing whether to apply for a grant is a critical task. The PM regularly meets with executive-level and upper management staff to determine whether particular funding opportunities align with strategic priorities and if there is capacity and willingness to move forward to the application

preparation stage. It is up to the individual programs to work with the PM in developing the grant proposal. If the PM has multiple demands in a given time period, the Grantwriters' Pool may be utilized to relieve some of the workload. Upon grant award, the programs have sole responsibility for implementing the proposed program and fulfilling the grant requirements.

However, the PM often

Table 1: SSA Grant Development Pipeline 2015

stays engaged as new grant-funded programs launch, ensuring continuity between the program conception and implementation and taking on grant management tasks to ensure that budgets are



being spent out and outcomes are being documented.

- Many resources are needed to support a fund development focus within the SSA and also collaborate with the FDO and its partners. The SSA created the Fund Development and Grant Specialist position (called 'Portfolio Manager' by the FDO and in this paper) and funds over \$120,000 yearly for salary and benefits, plus the corresponding resources needed for office space, communication, computer equipment, travel, and professional development. The SSA staff, from executive-level to program and administrative (information technology, evaluation, policy, finance), dedicate many hours to planning, development, and implementation of grant-funded programs. As in the greater FDO structure, communication is a key skill required as

information needs to be shared among the parties during each step in the fund development process, especially for creating effective grant proposals and reporting successes.

- The SSA has seen a great deal of fund development success. In 2015, the PM reported securing over \$3 million in funding, plus a technical assistance grant. In addition, over 31 partnerships with public agencies and community-based organizations were involved in the fund development process. The SSA's 2015 Annual Report^v is a culmination of the PM's efforts for the year: researching available grants; assessing the grants to ensure eligibility, feasibility, staff capacity, and sustainability; and interfacing with various teams to develop and produce the grant applications. From 2011 to 2015, the SSA PM personally contributed to securing 19 grant awards worth more than \$10.3 million dollars. The awards helped the SSA address specific areas of need and helped build technical expertise within the agency and community. As a dedicated SSA employee, the PM has been a champion for the SSA in collaborative endeavors.
- Although the PM brings in millions of dollars to the SSA, there are still tensions between the program resources needed to fulfill core mandates and the additional demands associated with grant-funded programs/activities. There are constraints regarding how the grant money can be spent, whether new staff can be hired, and what particular outcomes are to be achieved. Many in management may not be convinced that the benefits of grant-funded programs outweigh the costs. One of the greatest challenges is the capacity of program staff to manage a grant once it has been awarded. Grant management is not an official role of the PMs in the FDO, yet the SSA PM takes on many of these duties as time and workload allow. The SSA is exploring its fund development staffing to determine if more support is needed for grant management that will help encourage more buy-in by programs.

III. Implications for Sonoma County

The opportunity exists for HSD to support a framework for internal and county-wide fund development by adapting Alameda's experience to best fit with Sonoma County's circumstances.

***Recommendation #1:** Advocate to the Board of Supervisors and County Department Heads to establish a Fund Development Office within the Upstream Investments Policy structure.*

The County of Sonoma has a reputation for deep and meaningful collaboration between and among its county departments and community partners within the Upstream framework, as well as within many other local initiatives. Upstream focuses on making county investments that can reduce monetary and societal costs in the long term. Yet, one of the preliminary findings from the Upstream evaluation is that many community-based agencies expected more funding to become available to them once they had evidence-based, promising, or innovative programs accepted onto the Portfolio of Model Upstream Programs (Portfolio). A collaborative FDO could be structured as part of the Upstream Investments Policy and could be open to all agencies on the Portfolio. This would show that the Board of Supervisors recognizes the need and is willing to support its Upstream partners in seeking alternative and collaborative funding opportunities. Since HSD is the lead agency for Upstream, it makes sense for Sonoma County's FDO to be housed within HSD's Planning, Research, Evaluation, and Engagement (PREE) Unit where Upstream staff is located. HSD has the reputation and expertise for working on broad, collaborative efforts that support the variety of partners contributing to Upstream. However, to avoid the tensions experienced by Alameda County's FDO, it may be prudent to house the Sonoma County FDO in the County Administrator's Office, especially since the CAO is currently responsible for procuring and overseeing the services of the eCivis Grants Network and a county-wide grant writer. In either case, establishing an FDO as an extension of Upstream will

necessitate a proposal to the Board of Supervisors that includes a director-level position to lead the collaboration. Getting buy-in from a variety of County Department Heads, as well as interested community partners, to support the collaborative fund development structure would also be needed. Having an FDO is essential to the collaborative process; a contracted grant writer can provide support but may not have the experience or trust necessary to build cooperation among the many partners. Unless there is leadership and space to collaborate and pursue mutually beneficial funding opportunities, agencies will continue to compete for scarce resources and may feel increasingly disenchanted with the current Upstream Investments Policy.

Recommendation #2: *Expand the role of HSD's Program Planning and Evaluation Analysts (PPEA) at the Planning, Research, Evaluation, and Engagement (PREE) unit to take on grant coordination activities.*

Not only did a hiring freeze take effect in April 2016, but Sonoma County's HSD is far smaller than Alameda County's SSA, therefore, recommending a full-time dedicated staff position for fund development at HSD would be rash. PREE PPEAs who are embedded in particular divisions for research and evaluation activities could also be involved with grant coordination activities. Utilizing PREE's PPEA staff to support fund development efforts in each division seems the most expedient and relevant option and would mirror the benefits of having an embedded fund development manager. These PPEAs are close to the strategic planning processes within each division; they have built up extensive knowledge of the programs, developed relationships with division management and program staff, and would be ideally suited to help the division monitor possible grant opportunities and support grant administration. If needed, the PPEAs can liaise with the county-contracted grant writer to provide grant writing and technical assistance. Providing PPEA support for grant coordination would expand program capacity to

pursue grants and dispel fears associated with the administrative aspects of such opportunities. In addition, each PPEA could participate in roundtables and collaborative grant opportunities sponsored by an Upstream FDO and include fund development as an agenda item for regular PREE staff meetings, thus, connecting Upstream more closely to the needs of the divisions. This recommendation could be implemented fairly quickly with initial fund development training for the PPEAs and without an Upstream FDO yet in place.

IV. Conclusion

HSD can learn from Alameda's experience to advocate for county-wide collaborative fund development and can actively pursue grants as part of its strategic planning, research, and evaluation activities already in place. Internal fund development can focus on those grants that fit with HSD's Strategic Plan and lead to closing gaps in identified needs. Supporting collaborative fund development at a broader county-wide level is one way HSD can help increase the funding prospects for evidence-based, promising, and innovative services being provided in the community. Instead of grant funding being just a bit of departmental "budget dust," strategic fund development can provide the pixie dust to help fill niche needs and increase the impact of the Upstream Investments Policy in Sonoma County.

V. Acknowledgments

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I would also like to thank my colleagues at the Sonoma County Human Services Department for providing their insights and support.

VI. References

ⁱ <http://www.upstreaminvestments.org/>

ⁱⁱ Information about the Alameda County Fund Development Office comes mainly from a Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley, report “Creating a Cross-Agency Fund Development Office: A Success Story From Alameda County” Spring 2015, by first-year graduate students Ilona Kramer, Jessica Mausner, Miriam Rosenau, and Carrie Roszenzweig.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, page 14

^{iv} Ibid, page 15

^v Alameda County Social Services Agency Fund Development & Grant Administration 2015 Annual Report