



November 20, 2019

Commissioner Khatera Tamplen
Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission Chair
1325 J Street, Suite 1700
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Proposed Outline for Stakeholder Advocacy Request for Proposals

Dear MHSOAC Commissioners:

We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the proposed outline for Stakeholder Advocacy RFPs. The California LGBTQ Health & Human Services Network is an LGBTQ-specific program of Health Access, bringing together more than 60 non-profit providers, community centers, and researchers to advocate collectively for policies and resources that will advance LGBTQ health. As the co-director for the current LGBTQ Stakeholder Advocacy Contract, we would like to share the valuable insights gathered from our communities over the last two years.

State Lead

We applaud the staff recommendation to maintain statewide advocacy organizations as the leads for the Stakeholder Advocacy grants. This allows for broader advocacy on both state and local levels. This model supports building capacity for local LGBTQ leaders by providing them resources, technical assistance, and coordination from a central statewide lead.

- *Recommendation:* Adopt the proposed RFP outline, with the amendments suggested in this letter.

State Level Advocacy

Significant changes will be happening within the public mental health system in the next couple of years through the CalAIM waiver process, the Behavioral Health Stakeholder Advisory Committee, the budget, and legislation. While we have been a part of many of these developing conversations for years, we have been able to greatly expand our reach into public mental health advocacy as a result of having the stakeholder contract. We believe it is vital for LGBTQ advocates to continue to be present as decisions are made on the state level. The state lead also acts as a bridge between local organizations and state policies. The majority of local LGBTQ organizations do not have

the resources to attend state administrative meetings; they rely on LGBTQ state partners to be active voices in those conversations and to be their conduit for information and advocacy opportunities.

- *Recommendation:* Specify an RFP budget line item that allows for the lead organizations to dedicate at least one .5FTE person to do state level administrative and legislative advocacy.

Culturally Affirming State Events

While events are a great way to bring community together from across the state, long term sustainable mental health equity cannot be created by a one-time event. We suggest the annual event be used as a catalyst to create meaningful ongoing advocacy in local communities, to build the capacity of local communities to engage in systems change advocacy, and to develop or grow affirming mental health programs.

- *Recommendation:* Empower each stakeholder contract with the autonomy to decide what type of state event best addresses the mental health equity needs of their population (i.e. Advocacy/Lobby Days, Skill building conference, leadership development, organization capacity building, etc.) and the target audience (i.e. public mental health staff, LGBTQ community leaders, clinicians, etc.).

Culturally Affirming Local Events

The proposed RFP outline relies heavily on local events (15 total). Again, although this is a great way to bring local communities together – events rarely change systems or address system inequity. Additionally, when it comes to special populations, a “one size fits all” approach could be harmful. For example, mandating the inclusion of certain local partners or behavioral health departments could be a detriment in some communities whereas it could be helpful in others. It is important that the contractors have the flexibility to meet the unique needs of each local community.

- *Recommendation:* State and local stakeholders should have the autonomy to determine which types of local events can best support mental health equity and sustainable systems change. Event requirements should be holistic not prescriptive.

Local Organization Qualifications

In a previous Stakeholder RFP, for TAY, qualifications for local level advocacy groups were detailed. Unfortunately, the minimum qualifications included being in existence for at least two years. Many LGBTQ groups and organizations, particularly in rural areas, are led by dedicated community members who volunteer their time; many of these groups and organizations are new to the process of becoming a non-profit or exist under another non-profit’s umbrella. This is a common experience for many under-resourced communities.

- *Recommendation:* Local level advocacy groups must have a valid tax ID number, provide a valid W-9, be located within the community, and have the experience, skills, and/or ability to engage in community building mental health policy advocacy.

Local Organization Responsibilities

In a previous Stakeholder RFP, for TAY, responsibilities for local level advocacy groups were detailed. Some of the “pre-event responsibilities” included introducing the state leads to local public mental health decision makers and setting up meetings with these decision makers. It is not culturally appropriate to expect under-resourced communities, who have been historically excluded from or oppressed by systems, to have these relationships or policy navigation skills already in place. It also limits potential local partnerships to only those organizations who already have access to system resources. In our experience, it should be the role of the statewide advocacy organization to leverage systems knowledge and relationships in order to best support local groups with developing knowledge and relationships.

- *Recommendation:* Do not require prescriptive activities of the local level advocacy groups. The state contractor should have the autonomy to work with local partners to determine which types of pre- and post-event activities best support the mental health equity and sustainable systems change in their area.

Timeline

The proposed timeline has the RFP application open in December and January. December is the month when most faiths have major holidays. Many organizations are closed for substantial periods during this time. This will cause difficulty in drafting applications that include local partners as substantive collaborators.

- *Recommendation:* Released the RFP in January after the holidays. The state calendar runs July to June but if the funds need to be encumbered for December, release the RFP on 12/31/19.

The stakeholder contract has been a tremendous opportunity to address long-standing mental health inequities for LGBTQ Californians. These contracts have benefited from the considerable expertise that stakeholders have brought to designing programs by and for our communities. Through this process, we have learned a great deal about how to provide support for LGBTQ communities who want to be involved in policy and organizing to improve the mental health in their communities, and expand access to culturally affirming care.

For these reasons, we urge you to approve the proposed RFP outline for the Stakeholder Advocacy Contracts. Thank you for your leadership in advancing LGBTQ mental health equity.

Sincerely,



Amanda McAllister-Wallner
Director
California LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network

CC:

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