

STATE OF CONNECTICUT | SOCIAL EQUITY COUNCIL REINVESTMENT WORKFORCE COMMITTEE  
(DRAFT)

November 15, 2023, Meeting 2 P.M.  
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft TEAMS

1. Call to order

Meeting was called to order by Chair Naeem at 2 p.m.

2. Attendance

Corrie Betts  
Andrea Comer  
Andrea Hawkins  
Michael Jefferson  
Ojala Naeem  
Paul O. Robertson  
Shirley Skyers-Thomas  
Kelli-Marie Vallieres  
Kevin Walton

Council members absent:

Avery Gaddis  
Subira Gordon

Staff: Vera Lembrick, Program, Manager for Reinvestment; Tiffany Araujo, Workforce Program Manager; Jennifer Edwards, Program Manager; Karen Colebut, Paralegal Specialist

Chair Naeem declared there was not a quorum, which meant no votes would be conducted.

3. Approval for the September 20, 2023, Meeting Minutes

Chair Naeem noted that the item could not be voted on, so it would be moved to later if there was a quorum. Otherwise, it would be tabled until the next meeting.

With there being a quorum later in the meeting, Chair Naeem entertained a motion to approve the minutes.

Motion – by Michael Jefferson  
Second – by Paul O. Robertson  
In favor – All  
Opposed – None  
Abstention – None  
Motion passed.

- October 18, 2023, meeting cancelled.

#### 4. Reinvestment/Workforce Update

- Introduction of Tiffany Araujo, Workforce Program Manager  
Councilmember Vallieres introduced Tiffany Araujo, Workforce Cannabis Coordinator.

Coordinator Araujo stated that she was looking forward to working with everyone. She commented that she had done three plans this week. She discussed her background. She asked that folks reach out to her.

- Reinvestment Timeline

Executive Director Clay provided slides and discussed best practices and lessons learned related to the grant-making process; providing guidance to grant-makers; organization funding, and she thought there should be more definition and criteria for eligibility; technical assistance to applicants prior to submitting their applications; extending time grant-makers would have to spend funds; opportunities to applicants to make presentations in addition to the written application; limiting the eligible number of applicants for a specific organization; and limiting the eligible applicants and possibly capping the budget to make funds available to the grassroots population. She recommended that council and SEC staff be more involved in the application process before it would be kicked off. She explained why she thought the grant-making process was very good.

Discussion Ensued.

Councilmember Jefferson asked when Executive Director Clay would have recommendations for some of the concerns. Executive Director Clay answered that all issues had been addressed in the timeline. Councilmember Jefferson thought there should be a cap on the funds and that no one should receive six figures and that no one organization should submit more than one application. He discussed some organizations not being ready to receive funds, and he suggested they collaborate with an organization that was qualified. Chair Naeem agreed.

Councilmember Vallieres suggested there be a two-tier approval process with community organizations making recommendations to the SEC as to who should receive funding and the council determining what should and should not move forward. Chair Naeem expressed that had been proposed in the pilot, and council had been concerned with approvals being time consuming. It seemed that it would provide visibility before incorporating organizations in the event of concerns. She requested Executive Director Clay provide options when bringing the proposal forward, so there could be committee discussion.

Chair Naeem had heard from the community that the grant-makers establishing review boards should take care regarding who serves on them and that there not be conflicts of

interest. Executive Director Clay indicated they did their best to vet the community review teams, and there were criteria being assembled so grant-makers would know who should not be a part of the review team.

Executive Director Clay had sent the timeline to the committee, which included the detailed timeline, planned steps, and the estimated timeline for certain happenings. If council should decide on the grant-makers, the grant-maker time frame was included, and council would need to approve that process or the timeline and the next rounds of community conversations and the updates to the reinvestment plan. There would be an update to the reinvestment plan at the next meeting for the committee to make some determinations, and staff would have some recommendations.

Councilmember Shirley inquired if there was a plan for additional grant-makers and, if so, how they would be selected. Executive Director Clay replied they had considered additional grant-makers, which was needed. Staff would do another RFQ, and they would interview other opportunities and partners.

Councilman Walton questioned who would be eligible to apply for the next round. Chair Naeem noted that Director Clay and staff would return to the committee on December 20 with that criterion, which would be discussed at that time. Executive Director Clay added that DIA communities would be eligible to apply.

Chair Naeem thought the proposal should be on December 20, but she was concerned about there being a quorum and getting enough feedback for possible changes. She wanted to ensure that Executive Director Clay would have time to do updates by January 9, and she asked her to consider that. Councilman Jefferson thought that was a good point.

Councilmember Jefferson did not think there needed to be universal approval and that DIAs with grant-makers should be reviewed for approval on a case-by-case basis. He did not think every single grant-maker needed to be in place before disbursing the funds.

Councilmember Walton thought the timeline could be controlled by the committee. He queried if the Attorney General's office would be in alignment with this, so there would not be a delay in distributing funds. Executive Director Clay responded that there should not be issues getting grants out and contracts signed, and it would take about three weeks for the AG to approve contracts, which had been worked into the timeline.

Chair Naeem noted that the timeline between contracts being signed, and disbursement of funds seemed short, and she thought they should be given more time, and maybe consideration should be given to them providing a timeline, which still would fit within an agreeable window. She did not want potential grant-makers to not apply because of a constrictive timeline. Executive Director Clay noted that the timeline reflected the current process, and their recommendations were going to be that the grant-makers have more time once they had the funds. She explained that there may be rounds of funding. Chair Naeem requested there be a document showing the timeline of each piece. Executive Director Clay stated she has that document, and as council made future decisions, the

timeline would be adjusted. She asked the committee to send staff suggestions. Council Member Jefferson stated he would send Executive Director Clay a couple suggestions. He discussed food insecurity, and thought foodbanks, churches, etc., should be considered.

Councilmember Walton asked if there was a chance for grant-makers to have prepared statements in terms of what the committee might be looking for, so there could be a consistent message across the state. Chair Naeem remarked that the Q&A for the previous round may be a good starting point.

Chair Naeem spoke of council's goal regarding distributing funds. She asked if the goal was to ensure funds would be disbursed through the grant-makers ASAP or if they should be given 12 or 24 months to use the funding. Councilmember Vallieres inquired if in the application progress for grant funding the entities were being clear and concise as to their timelines and how they would use the funding. If they were, she did not think there should be a delay of the grant-maker providing the funding. If there was not clarity as to timelines and how funding would be used, she questioned if grant-makers should be given more time to collect the applications so that grantees implementing programs would have more time to put together their proposals so programs could be launched ASAP. Chair Naeem voiced that the applications looked comprehensive in terms of the plan and timeline, but that could be a piece of this in the process. She inquired if the grant-makers must disburse funds before the end of the calendar year and the receiving organizations must spend it within 12 months. Executive Director Clay noted that funds received December 1 must be spent by June 30. She explained that it did not take into consideration any summer programs. The next round would give opportunity for summer programs. Chair Naeem thought a way to address that would be to say spending must occur 12 months from contract signing, receiving funds, etc. Councilmember Jefferson thought it was unfair to say funds must be spent by June 30 and suggested that be changed. Executive Director Clay had suggested to grant-makers that summer programs be funded before June 30, and some organizations were able to do that and some not. Councilmember Vallieres suggested that the RFP provide a timeline for spending funds as part of the evaluation process, which would provide the ability for different lengths of time to enable completion of a project with a no-later-than date. Executive Director Clay provided an example of a rolling application/tranches for programs at different times of the year; however, the programs would have 12 months, not 24 months, from the date of the notice of award. Councilmember Jefferson voiced that was a good idea.

Councilmember Shirley asked if there was a difference in spending versus commitment. He asked to consider a recipient committing funds to a project but some of the funding not taking place until a future point. Executive Director Clay asked if he was referencing prework, for example renderings, that a project would not happen until securing other funding. He did not think it should be conditional. He discussed a project being in place and some spending taking place in the future but there being a current commitment. Executive Director Clay thought consideration could be given to a particular project on a case-by-case basis.

Chair Naeem requested that Executive Director Clay provide any updates to timeline changes and to send the final timeline as a full timeline as well as individual ones broken out to the full Council, and it could be reviewed at the council meeting. Executive Director Clay added that the timeline would be a proposed timeline until the council voted on the process, reinvestment plan, etc. The timeline would be final once all final decisions were made. Chair Naeem questioned what final decision was needed. Executive Director Clay answered that upon approval of the reinvestment plan, then the timeline would be incorporated to reflect the final approvals.

Councilmember Jefferson requested a timeline be in place to present to the full Council by the next meeting, which could be adjusted accordingly. Chair Naeem agreed. Councilmember Jefferson asked if Reinvestment could meet before the next scheduled council meeting. Chair Naeem did not believe Executive Director Clay would have an opportunity to have the proposal ready before the next council meeting. Executive Director Clay stated that she was planning on presenting a proposed spending plan with the criteria and parameters on December 20, and if the plan was agreed to by council, everything would fall into place. Chair Naeem noted that the areas of focus for the funding, restrictions in terms of time to spend, restrictions on number of grants per organization, and caps on number of dollars to an organization should be outlined in the plan. Executive Director Clay indicated that she would provide that and NOFA information.

Councilmember Jefferson queried if the timeline needed to be voted on. Chair Naeem answered that the timeline would not be voted on, but she wanted it to be clear that the timeline reflected the expectations being set by the Executive Director and staff. If there was not agreement on the reinvestment and spending plans, etc., at the January 7 meeting, the timeline would be extended. She requested that Executive Director Clay confirm that it would be manageable. Executive Director Clay would review it, and any changes would be presented to council.

5. For the Good of the Order

There were no comments.

6. Adjournment

Chairwoman Naeem entertained a motion to adjourn.

Motion – by Edwin Shirley  
Second – by Paul O. Robertson  
In favor – All  
Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 3 p.m.