

County of San Diego: 2024 CSAC Challenge Awards Executive Summary

TITLE OF THIS ENTRY: EQUITY IMPACT GRANT PROGRAM (EIGP)

OVERVIEW: EIGP offers unrestricted grants for small nonprofits, empowering marginalized communities in San Diego County.

CHALLENGE: Grassroots and small organizations led by individuals from Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) communities often face many barriers in securing funding to support their vital work.

This challenge can be multifaceted: **Accessing Funding Opportunities:** Many organizations lack the staff, knowledge, or capacity to research and identify suitable grants or funding opportunities. **Navigating Complex Application Processes:** Long, complicated grant applications can be a significant barrier, especially for organizations with limited resources and time. **Grant Writing Support:** Professional grant writing services can be expensive, placing an additional burden on organizations that need every available resource to serve their communities. **Grant Requirements:** Some grants come with restrictions and deliverables that may not fully align with the organization's existing workflow or structure, further complicating the process.

SOLUTION: The County of San Diego, Office of Equity and Racial Justice (OERJ) launched the EIGP, which provides 20 small nonprofits with \$100,000 each in unrestricted operating grants, along with coaching and training. Solutions are summarized as follows: **Accessing Funding Opportunities:** Through collaborative learning sessions with the University of San Diego (USD) and the cohort, the EIGP fosters capacity building, empowering organizations to identify and pursue additional funding opportunities beyond the program itself. **Navigating Complex Application Processes:** The EIGP's streamlined application process, hosted on SurveyMonkey and requiring approximately one hour to complete, serves as a model for simplifying grant applications and reducing barriers for organizations with limited resources. **Grant Writing Support:** USD's partnership provides invaluable opportunities for organizations to learn from experts in grant writing and proposal development. **Grant Requirements:** The EIGP grants flexibility by offering unrestricted operational funds, freeing organizations from rigid outcomes and enabling them to adapt their work as needed.

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Furthermore, the EIGP prioritizes lived experience and power-building in its eligibility criteria and evaluation process. The program intentionally focuses on small nonprofits with operating expenses under \$500,000 or fewer than five full-time employees. OERJ and its partners ensured accessibility through various means, including information sessions, language translation, and a simplified grant agreement.

INNOVATION: OERJ's EIGP stands out as a pioneer in providing substantial, unrestricted funding to very small grassroots organizations across diverse areas of work. Our program centers on lived experience and power building, ensuring that marginalized communities have the resources and autonomy to advocate for themselves and drive systemic change. We've also reimagined the grant process, simplifying it to empower these organizations and remove traditional barriers to funding.

RESULTS: The response to the EIGP has been incredible! We received a staggering 325 applications in the first cycle alone, demonstrating the immense need for this type of support. The first cohort, selected in May 2024, is a vibrant tapestry of organizations representing diverse geographies, populations served, lived experiences, and impact areas. Over half of these grantees operate on less than \$50,000 annually, highlighting the program's focus on reaching the smallest and most impactful grassroots organizations. After just three months, grantees report that the program has provided the crucial resources they need to continue their vital work and amplify their impact.

REPLICABILITY: The EIGP can be replicated and serve as a best practice model, with adequate funding. The grant webpage and resources are publicly available and can be adapted to fit the specific needs and context of other counties. This approach ensures that the program's core principles, such as centering lived experience and providing unrestricted funding, can be replicated while allowing for flexibility and customization.

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ADDITIONAL MATERIALS: [equity-impact-grant \(sandiegocounty.gov\)](#)