GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ISSUES AND EMPLOYMENT

Accessible Communities (AC)
Subcommittee Operations Manual

Revised: 4/15/2024

Table of Contents [*Hover over the wording and press ctrl + click to jump to that section.*]

SECTION 1: GCDE and Accessible Communities Overview

The Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE) is made up of 25 volunteer members appointed by the Governor and living throughout Washington State. Most are people with disabilities, representing a wide range of physical, mental, or sensory disabilities. GCDE's mission is to provide state level advocacy and leadership with the disability community to obtain equity in economic opportunity and community inclusion.

Accessible Communities' Mission

The mission of the Accessible Communities (AC) Subcommittee is to support counties in improving accessibility, inclusivity, and equal access to opportunities for people with disabilities by helping counties establish Accessible Communities Advisory Committees (ACACs) and providing them with funding and technical assistance.

Accessible Communities Act

GCDE implements ENGROSSED SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL (ESSB) 5902—PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES—INCREASED ACCESS, signed into law in 2010. This legislation (commonly identified as the "Accessible Communities Act") called for counties to create Accessible Communities Advisory Committees (ACACs) that increase awareness of disability issues, as well as increase access for people with disabilities. These ACACs may seek grant funding from GCDE for such projects.

The AC Subcommittee oversees funding for ACAC projects. AC also supports work on maintaining an Accessible Communities' website. The website provides examples of best practices, reference materials, and materials for local governments, ACACs, and other public accommodations.

Structure

The AC Subcommittee is a GCDE subcommittee. It is directed by a chairperson. Its members are appointed by the GCDE chairperson.

Activities

The AC Subcommittee meets to review and make funding decisions regarding project proposals submitted by ACACs. An initial review is performed to determine if a proposed project meets the general objectives of the GCDE and AC Subcommittee. If a project is deemed eligible for funding, a detailed review is then conducted. In that review, counties make presentations on projects, and AC members can ask questions or request additional information.

The AC Subcommittee engages in outreach to counties that have not established an ACAC, offering to help with forming an ACAC.

Annual Operating Budget

The Accessible Communities Act established that $100 of the parking fine issued for illegally parking in or blocking a space reserved for persons with physical disabilities be deposited into the Accessible Communities Account.

That funding may be used for:

1. Grants to ACACs for disability-related projects.

2. Providing technical assistance for ACACs.

3. Reimbursing travel and meeting expenses for ACACs.

4. Creating and maintaining the Accessible Communities website.

The Office of Financial Management (OFM) establishes funds to be made available to GCDE for AC operations and grants.

The AC Subcommittee Chair will determine, after seeking advice from Subcommittee members and GCDE staff, how to allocate the funds available for AC grants.

AC Subcommittee Member Position Description

AC Subcommittee members participate in outreach and project review work. Members are detail oriented, able to work cooperatively within a team, review projects fairly, and work in situations where decisions are made by majority vote.

Work includes participation in monthly meetings, independent review of project proposals, asking questions, and making comments within the AC Subcommittee.

AC members should not be members of their county's ACAC and should recuse themselves from voting on any grant proposals for counties where they live or work.

SECTION 2: County Accessible Communities Advisory Committees (ACACs)

Overview

The Accessible Communities Act says that when people who have disabilities are welcomed and included as members of communities and provided with equal access to the opportunities available to others, their participation enriches those communities, enhances the strength of those communities' diversity, and contributes toward the economic vitality of those communities.

The Act calls for Washington State counties to form Accessible Communities Advisory Committees (ACACs), which include people with disabilities in planning that provide equal access to opportunities, and to the community.

Objectives

ACACs support disability awareness, inclusion, and access for people with disabilities.

ACACs assist the county and community in identifying accessibility projects. They also assist the county in writing project proposals to be submitted to the GCDE for funding from the Accessible Communities account.

Composition of ACACs

At their core, ACACs are a partnership between citizens with disabilities and county government. ACACs are made up of people with lived experience of disability and county staff.

ACACs must include community members with disabilities as well as representatives from the county.

AC Outreach and Assistance to Counties

The AC Subcommittee contacts, at least annually, counties that have not formed an ACAC. A database of contact people is maintained by the AC Program Coordinator.

If county officials ask for help forming an ACAC, the AC Subcommittee chair will designate an AC Subcommittee member who, together with the AC Program Coordinator, will assist that county.

Formation of ACACs

The Accessible Communities Act identified four ways that a county could form an ACAC:

1. **Expand the scope of a county voting access advisory committee that is required under** RCW 29A.04.223**.**
   To use this option, a Letter of Assurance, signed by the County Auditor indicating their approval of the expanded duties, must be submitted to the GCDE.

2. **Designate an existing disability advocacy organization** to be the ACAC.

3. **Create a new committee** by recruiting and appointing members with a diverse range of disabilities who understand the barriers faced by people with disabilities.

4. **Counties may join and share a single ACAC**, as long as no more than one of the participating counties has a population greater than 70,000.

Letters of Assurance

Counties must submit a Letter of Assurance using a template when they form an ACAC.

Counties submit a new Letter of Assurance every two years certifying that they still meet the requirements to be an ACAC. With the letter, ACACs must include a list of the current members and their qualifications, to include individuals with a diverse range of disabilities and who are knowledgeable in identifying and eliminating attitudinal, programmatic, communication, and physical barriers encountered by people with disabilities.

SECTION 3: AC Subcommittee Meetings

The AC Subcommittee chair leads scheduled monthly meetings. If the AC Subcommittee chair is unable to lead a meeting, the Vice Chair leads that meeting.

Meeting schedules are determined annually and occur on a pre-determined day and time each month. Meeting times are set based on the schedules of subcommittee members.

Meetings are held over Zoom or Teams. GCDE staff will work with the AC Subcommittee Chair to determine the best communication method to ensure that all participants are able to fully understand the content of meetings, including making available accessibility accommodations for members requiring them.

Quorum Requirements

A quorum is met for an AC Subcommittee meeting if not less than 50% + 1 of the members of the AC Subcommittee, including the AC Subcommittee Chair, are present. Electronic votes are not allowed.

AC Subcommittee Record Keeping

The AC Program Coordinator will keep records of AC, including assurance letters, outreach, status of ACACs, eligibility and approval of projects, and follow-up reporting regarding projects.

SECTION 4: Project Funding Applications

Application Format

A fillable form outlining the information required to apply for project funding is available on the Accessible Communities website.

ACACs must use this form to ensure their project applications are complete. ACACs may submit supporting information at their discretion.

Proposal Tracks and Timelines:

Project funding proposals are considered two times per year. Project funding proposals of less than $10,000 are accepted March 31st and October 31st each year. Larger grants of over $10,000 are only considered for the March 31st deadline and following proposal review period.

PROCEDURE	PROPOSAL	
	Track 1:	Track 2:
Grant proposals received shall be categorized according to the amount of funds requested in the proposal	Grants requesting AC funding of $10,000 or less.	Grants requesting AC funding of more than $10,000
Maximum amount of AC funds eligible for each grant	$10,000	Guideline of $50,000 with exceptions possible
Consideration of by AC of grant requests for approval.	Twice per year	Once per year
Deadlines for grant submission	March 31 and October 31	March 31
Format and content of grant applications	Current format, subject to revisions that the AC subcommittee may propose in coming months	Same as for Track 1, but ACACs to be made aware that deeper information and justification is encouraged given AC's expectation of strong competition for funds

Criteria for ACAC Project Funding

Proposed projects should focus on improving access for people with disabilities, as well as promoting awareness, inclusion, or acceptance of people with disabilities within the local community.

Proposals should address the following:

• What is the county proposing to do?

• Why did the county select this proposal?

• What is the timeline for this project?

• What outcomes or performance measures does the county hope to achieve?

• What is the proposed budget for the project, how does the county propose to apply the funds it is requesting, and why is each proposed expenditure necessary for the project?

• Matching funds are not required for these projects; however, if a project is expected to generate a local match, including in-kind contributions such as volunteer hours, the nature and value of any such local match should be described in the proposal.

More detail on the questions that should be addressed is available in the section "Criteria for AC Proposals." Please ensure the application is complete. If any question is blank let the Program Coordinator know why the info is unavailable.

County ACACs are encouraged to work with GCDE staff as they develop their project ideas and prepare their proposals.

Application Timing and Guidelines

Project funding applications must be submitted electronically to the AC Program Coordinator by the due date for that funding cycle.

If an ACAC is submitting multiple project funding applications simultaneously, the ACAC should also submit information prioritizing the project submissions.

The AC Project Coordinator, after performing a brief review to determine basic completeness of the application and whether the ACAC is certified with a current assurance letter, shall forward the application to the AC Subcommittee Chair.

The AC Program Coordinator will distribute the project funding proposal to all AC members.

SECTION 5: Project Review for Eligibility

The first step in the review process is that the AC Subcommittee will determine if a project funding proposal is "eligible" for funding from the Accessible Communities account.

Eligibility means that the project increases accessibility for people with disabilities, increases inclusion of people with disabilities, or increases visibility of disability issues and justice. Basic eligibility may be granted for proposals where the AC Subcommittee wants more information.

Distribution of Project Applications to AC Subcommittee members

Project funding requests that have been received by the AC Program Coordinator prior to the funding cycle deadline will be distributed to all AC Subcommittee members at least seven days in advance of a monthly AC Subcommittee meeting.

Granting of Project Eligibility

Eligibility is given to projects that fit the objectives of the Accessible Communities account and the mission of the GCDE.

Eligibility means that the project will move forward so that the AC members can learn more about it. Eligible projects have not been given funding yet.

Projects shall be granted eligibility by majority vote of at least 50% + 1 of AC Subcommittee members.

SECTION 6: Project Review

Lead Reviewer

Each eligible project has a lead reviewer who is appointed by the AC Chair.

Requests for Additional Information

The lead reviewer will gather questions from AC Subcommittee members regarding the project and reach out to the county ACAC to get answers or additional information. The lead reviewer then reports back to the AC Subcommittee on what they have learned.

Timing and Guidelines for Project Analysis

AC subcommittee members use the following criteria when reviewing project funding proposals:

- How many people with disabilities benefit from the project?

- What is the depth of impact on people with disabilities?

- Feasibility of the project, including whether the project can be done in a single year. Can the project be done without additional funding? Based on a quick review of the budget, does the project seem reasonable?

Other information for project reviewers:

- Counties have different structures, procedures, and processes, we cannot require counties to alter those procedures.

- Some small counties may not have multiple entities who can bid on projects, costs will vary from county to county.

- GCDE AC Subcommittee members should guard against telling counties or ACACs what to do—the AC act encourages counties to partner with people with disabilities in creative ways. This could mean that the people writing applications are not professionals, kindness and assuming best intent is critical in maintaining relationships with counties and ACACs.

- Communication to counties is made through the AC Program Coordinator to ensure records are kept and available in the event of a public records request. Questions can come from the AC Subcommittee member, sent through the GCDE email address.

AC Subcommittee members submit questions and requests for additional information to the lead reviewer in the week following the AC Subcommittee meeting where eligibility is granted to a project.

The Lead Reviewer will communicate questions and requests for additional information to the County ACAC not later than 15 days after a project has been granted eligibility.

The lead reviewer will communicate answers to questions and new information about the project to the AC Subcommittee.

SECTION 7: Project Approval Decisions

Consideration of Project Applications

The lead reviewer and Chair of AC will ensure questions and requests for information are complete prior to the project funding vote.

At project review meetings of the AC Subcommittee, the lead reviewer will be responsible for a brief presentation summarizing the project and making a recommendation regarding approval or denial of the project funding request.

Decision to Approve Project for Funding

Project funding is approved by a yes vote of at least 50% + 1 of AC Subcommittee members who attend the project review meeting.

Decision to Deny Project for Funding

Projects receiving less than the number of votes required for approval are denied for funding.

Decision to Defer Consideration of Project for Funding

The AC Subcommittee Chair can propose that projects that have been approved for funding be deferred. Deferrals are recommended when:

- There are insufficient funds in the current budget.

- The group wants to maintain grant funds for a later funding cycle.

- A county has multiple projects approved and deferral would follow the county's requested order of priority.

- The county submitting the project has a high frequency of projects being funded, there are other counties that have made proposals, and ensuring equity in awarding funds is a consideration.

Deferral of projects shall be approved by a yes vote of at least 50% + 1 of AC Subcommittee members present at the meeting.

Communication of Decision to County ACAC

Funding decisions of the AC Subcommittee shall be communicated to ACACs by the AC Subcommittee Chair and the Program Coordinator.

Communication is made to the county contact person, copying the AC Subcommittee Chair and the ACAC Chair, informing them of the AC Subcommittee's decision.

Deferred Projects

If a project has been deferred, the AC Subcommittee Chair will invite the ACAC to resubmit the project funding proposal to the AC Subcommittee at the next appropriate funding cycle.

Resubmissions are accepted by email to the AC Program Coordinator. This email should say whether the scope, cost, timing of the project, or any of the supporting information related to the original application has changed.

The AC Program Coordinator will forward resubmissions to the AC Subcommittee Chair. The AC Subcommittee Chair shall determine if funding for the project is possible based on the considerations outlined earlier in this section and will make a recommendation to the AC Subcommittee.

Funding of a project previously deferred shall be approved by a yes vote of at least 50% + 1 of AC Subcommittee members present at the meeting.

SECTION 8: Project Follow-Up and Reporting

The GCDE wants information on projects it funds, including how that project has impacted individuals with disabilities.

ACACs are required to submit a brief report describing the project and its impact.

Fillable formats for this report are available on the [Accessible Communities website](#).

Deviations from Original Project Plans

ACACs should contact the AC Program Coordinator as soon as possible if changes in circumstances result in changes to a project. Those changes include changes to the project description, cost, and timeline for project completion.

The AC Program Coordinator and the AC Subcommittee Chair shall decide if the change should be brought to the attention of the AC Subcommittee at their next meeting.

Project Completion Report

When an AC funded project is completed, a report must be submitted by the county or ACAC. This report is due within 30 days of project completion, at the time when the final bill is submitted for payment. The completion report shall detail the actual cost of the project and explain deviations from the original project cost. The report will also include information on how the project has impacted the community. Information should include usage data, and information on how the local disability community has been impacted by the project.