Application Guidance

This document outlines key responses that should be addressed within the application. This is demonstrated through handy lists after each question to clarify your response, as well as long-form examples of successful responses. We encourage all applicants to review this document, the FAQ document, and the recording of our informational webinar at nycon.org/stabilization.

1. **What operational issue(s) or challenge(s) does your organization face that affect its stability, sustainability, and/or ability to grow in scale or impact?**

   **What to include:**
   - Specific and clearly identified issues/challenges.
   - Your understanding of how these issues/challenges are linked to the organization’s history, capacity, self-awareness, and/or ability to enact organizational change.

   **Strong Response:**
   Throughout my tenure as Executive Director, we have faced different challenges pertaining to staff at the organization - maintaining a staff that was sustainable when considering our budget; maintaining a staff that was sustainable when considering our level of programming; attracting qualified staff to a [very] rural community; developing a 'program' to mentor staff in a very rural community; cultivating a salary and benefits package that would attract candidates; adequately communicating expectations regarding positions. In addition to these continuing challenges, our small staff lacks a dedicated HR department or staff person. Therefore, as the Executive Director who undertakes these responsibilities, I am fully aware of my role in contributing to these deficits as I am spread thin and cannot dedicate enough time to onboarding, employee relations, disciplinary actions, etc. Considering all these factors, this grant provides us a unique opportunity to holistically evaluate the historic staff challenges at our organization and, with the guidance of outside experts, determine new and innovative solutions that can sustainably support our programs with qualified and dedicated staff, and plan for future investment in staff growth.

   **Less Strong Response (does not focus on building the capacities of the existing staff and operation):**
   Our generated revenue has grown yearly, but we need the quality to remain high and the number of kids and programs to continue increasing. With a grant writer, our program could flourish, our Executive Director could focus on building supportive relationships and all the other crucial tasks required to run a successful organization, and our Program Director could focus on quality programming. Grant writing is hit or miss, and we have had great success for a fairly new 501c3. However, a few unfunded proposals can be very discouraging if you are a grant writer and only get paid if the grant succeeds. We want to bring in a grant writer and offer moderate compensation if the proposal isn’t successful. We run a fantastic program. A qualified grant writer means the difference between stability, sustainability, growth in scale or impact, or stagnation.

2. **Beyond an infusion of cash, what kind of capacity building support from this NYSCA program will help your current staff and/or board of directors effectively address these operational
issues or challenges?

What to include:
- Responses that are clearly tied to the issues and challenges identified above.
- Responses that demonstrate that your organization's board and staff capacity (size, engagement) will enable you to effectively participate in this program and accomplish identified goals.

Strong Response:
Two board committees in particular (Operations and Finance) have requested consultant services to address tasks pending for their 2023/2024 goals, such as creating or expanding HR policies, including policies for our large volunteer workforce. Through this NYSCA program, we would like to draw on the expertise of consultants who specialize in the business side of non-profit operations to generate a better understanding of our current position and develop the operational policies, financial strategies, and program revenue goals we need in place to move forward successfully as a business.

Less Strong Response (needs more focus and specifics):
Knowledgeable outside perspective and guidance is invaluable and, given the size and capacity of our staff, something that would be very useful in terms of capacity building support. Further, our Board is still very much evolving from a very hands-on working Board, to a more administrative and fundraising Board. We have all benefited in the past from Board training and I see this has very much in the same vein.

3. Describe how you would work with a consultant to address a current discrete issue or need in your organization?

What to include:
- Are your expectations clearly defined and realistic?
- Do your expectations and ideas for working with a consultant reflect an understanding of the organization's role in the consultancy?

Strong Response
We anticipate a thorough review of job expectations, governance practices, and strategy, but also anticipate a thorough workplace culture review that investigates underlying trust and productivity challenges. Every aspect of our organization would be made available for scrutiny by a visiting consultant. We would hope for a depth and breadth of conversation at the group and individual level that would take us past the veneer of our institution and push us to the honest and reflective feedback necessary for sustainable change and desired growth.

Less Strong Response (does not answer the question):
Since becoming a 501c3 in 2019, we have learned a lot, and we are always receptive to people with more experience in the different areas of running a not-for-profit organization. We aim to have a great organization and positively impact the lives of the youth and families we serve. In 2019, when we decided to apply to become a not-for-profit, we contacted SCORE.org. The needs in our community are countless, and we believe our program model can address many of these needs. However, we do not believe we have all the correct answers or processes.

4. (In 6-12 months) What impact on your organization do you want to see result from this capacity building project?

What to include:
- Is the anticipated impact practical and realistic?
- Does the anticipated impact align with capacity building approach described above?

Strong Response:
We need to graduate to a more clearly defined and shared vision, instill a supportive workplace culture that will reveal the best of our board and staff members, share cohesive and responsive technology that enables better internal/external communication and efficiency, and adopt effective institutional marketing practices that will welcome the visitors that will ultimately grow and sustain our future.

In short, our capacity building starts by becoming a cohesive whole ourselves and then - armed with the proper equipment and programs - allows us to effectively build our audience, to build the future of our organization, and help revitalize our neighborhood.

**Less Strong Response (does not explain how the organization will be more effective as a result of strengthening its capacities):**

Reaching out and making a difference in the community with our kids and parents.