

## Ask the funder: California Community Foundation

Thurlow/Associates sat down with Rosemary Veniegas, PhD, senior program officer, health, at the California Community Foundation (CCF), to discuss the foundation's process, philosophy and preferences.

Here's what we learned:

*Your expertise is in health. What type of health-related projects is the foundation looking to fund currently?*

Since 2015, we have provided health grants to help address the root causes of poor health in Los Angeles County, as well as support the integration of behavioral health with primary care.

I'm one of two program officers focused on health at CCF. My colleague, Denise Tom, works with substance use services organizations and nonprofit organizations serving the Centinela Valley/South Los Angeles. I work closely with nonprofit hospitals and with other nonprofits across the county. We both assist community clinics, social services, and policy and advocacy organizations.

We believe that immigration status can be a critical barrier when it comes to accessing health care services, gaining entry into the health care system through insurance coverage, or even just getting information about services that might be of benefit. Addressing the unmet need for substance use treatment is another top priority for us. Health grants provide **core operating support** that many organizations need to cover expenses that their public grants and contracts may not.


*What other funding opportunities are available through the foundation?*

As a community foundation, CCF administers funds created by individual donors and families, who can select the causes and specific nonprofits they care about. Our donor relations teams also work with donors and their representatives to align giving with the greatest needs in the county.

Our own discretionary grantmaking is focused on education, health, housing and immigration, and our program officers and program teams work with community partners to align available funds with local needs and priorities. Currently, we also have initiatives with public sector partners related to the U.S. census and youth development.

*What are some elements that set a solicitation apart from the rest?*

In the health area, we regularly reach out to community members, experts and local leaders to understand unmet needs in the county. It really gets my attention when I receive a phone call, email or question from an organization that many of our existing partners have identified as a key ally or advocate in addressing these needs.



I also regularly approach organizations directly at community forums and summits. Hearing a colleague discuss the realities of conducting their work helps me do a better job of saying “yes” to a request for core support. Organizations that have deep collaborations in the community and are working on systems change also draw our attention.

*What are some common “mistakes” that nonprofits make while trying to solicit funding?*

Not calling Denise or me is often a missed opportunity. We actively encourage phone calls and emails so that we can learn more about your organization and the needs it helps address. Don’t hesitate to call us at (213) 413-4130.

*Any pet peeves when it comes to solicitations/proposals/packaging?*

At CCF, we want your feedback. If our application process has been challenging, burdensome or just confusing, please tell us. If I haven’t asked the question, “How could we have made it easier or clearer?” at some point in our communications, please reach out and let us know.

In the health area, one of the things we’ve done, based on feedback from applicants, is to move the request for a budget and/or budget narrative to the grant agreement-signing phase. At that point in the process, we’ve already reached consensus on the funding amount and the goals the organization expects to achieve. I know from personal experience how much work it requires to prepare a budget, and that’s amplified if you’re then asked to revise the budget and budget narrative multiple times. We wanted to eliminate some of this burden.

*What does the foundation hope to achieve through its funding?*

In the health area, CCF hopes to achieve health for all and the highest-quality health services regardless of where we live, work, play or age in the county.

*Does your organization need help with institutional donor relations? Contact us for a no-cost consultation. You can reach us at (310) 675-6497 or at [hello@thurlowassociates.com](mailto:hello@thurlowassociates.com)*

*The California Community Foundation is driven to find long-term, systemic solutions addressing the root causes of the most pressing issues facing Los Angeles County. To learn more, visit [www.calfund.org](http://www.calfund.org).*