Student Service Fees Event Grant for Non-Fee Funded Student Organizations

January 24, 2014

Student Services Fee Request for 2014–2015 and 2015-2016 Academic Years

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“We acknowledge that the Fees Committee does not award actual dollars, but rather a penny fee that earns dollars based upon student enrollment levels. Any differences between anticipated and actual income resulting from changes in enrollment are the responsibility of the Administrative Unit, not of the Fees Committee.”

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Is your organization an IRS 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit?  Yes__________  No ___ X ___
If yes, please provide proof of your organization’s 501(c)(3) status.

Funds are being requested for (check all that apply):

General Operating Support:  Start-Up Costs:  Capital:

Project / Program Support:  X  Technical Assistance:  Other (List):

Budget

- SSF Dollar Amount Requested  $75,000
- Total Annual Organization Budget  $ N/A
- Total Program Budget (apart from General Operating)  $ N/A
Section 1: Narrative

Introduction
A number of studies have found that students who experience a sense of campus community are more satisfied with their undergraduate experience and are more likely to graduate. For example, the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE; 2008) found that students who spent more time in co-curricular activities experienced higher levels of engagement and overall satisfaction with their college experience. Given the diverse background of the students and the large percentage of commuter students, the University is challenged to get students involved in communities and provide them with social networks to ensure success. Student groups are instrumental in helping build a sense of community and providing a niche for students. Student groups play a significant role in the education of University of Minnesota students, teaching leadership skills through involvement and enhancing the out-of-classroom learning component that is instrumental in improving our campus.

Student Unions & Activities (SUA) is committed to students, and is heavily involved in all aspects of student groups. Student Activities provides advising, consultation, and resources to registered student groups, cultural centers, student government, late night programming and the campus-wide programming board in order to help groups be successful in achieving their goals.

SUA offers a comprehensive grant program for student groups, including the Administrative Grant, the Student Services Fees (SSF) Event Grant, and two Coca-Cola Grant Initiatives. The Administrative Grant is funded by a central University allocation. A portion of the University’s current Coca-Cola beverage contract, renewed in 2008 for ten years, includes the two grant initiatives that Coke sponsors for student groups (Coca Cola Activity Initiative and Coca-Cola Development Initiative) and one initiative that is sponsored for University departments and individual students (Coca-Cola Academic Initiative). SUA’s “one-stop shop” for grant opportunities allows student groups the ability to host a variety of programs throughout the year. Each grant initiative, including the SSF Event Grant, has its own eligibility criteria, purpose, and primary audience. All groups who apply for grants are automatically considered for the Student Services Fees Event Grant provided their grant application meets the criteria. The following grants information is available on the SUA Grants website at www.sua.umn.edu/grants:

- Policies and procedures
- Grant criteria
- Grant eligibility matrix
- Judging criteria form
- On-line application
- Statement of agreement
- Project evaluation
- Financial report

SUA respectfully submits the following proposal to the 2013-2014 Student Organization Student Services Fees Committee so that it can be considered in the same context as requests from other student groups.

History
The 2002-2003 Student Services Fees Committee approved a recommendation that Student Unions & Activities develop a proposal to establish a programmatic grant for non-fees receiving student groups. For the 2003-2004 Student Services Fees Committee, SUA went forward with the proposal, developing plans for the Student Services Fees Event Grant (formerly named the Event Partnership Grant). In the eleven years since inception, the Student Services Fees Committee has provided consistent support in funding the SSF Event Grant.

Vision
Student Unions & Activities envisions a dynamic, inclusive, and diverse community where students and student groups thrive and achieve their full potential outside the classroom. The Student Services Fees Event Grant ensures that more student groups have an opportunity to provide campus-wide programming for their peers and promote a broader sense of community. This in turn has a positive impact on student life, retention, and graduation for all students, including those who do not participate in SSF Event Grant funded events.

Purpose
There are 813 currently registered student groups on campus and of these only 70 receive student services fees. Financial support for the remaining groups is limited. Student groups may fundraise, apply for SUA grants, or apply for other University of Minnesota grants. The high level of involvement by these registered student groups at the University of Minnesota creates a demand for more funding opportunities than the grant pools are able to provide. The SSF Event Grant is critical to providing much needed financial support to the numerous student groups on campus. We are determined to continue to support and encourage student group involvement in 2014-2015.

This request seeks to continue the Student Services Fees Event Grant Program. Student Unions & Activities has served as the fiduciary agent for the grant fund the past ten years and would continue in that role. Utilizing SUA to administer this grant will continue to allow us to serve as a one-stop grant resource center for student groups.

Need
In our first eleven years, the grant has been incredibly successful. Since August of 2005, the Student Services Fees Event Grant has funded over $518,084 in student group programs and initiatives. We are proud of the wide-reaching nature of the grant and the variety of programs it has sponsored. As of January 15, 2014, the grant evaluation committee has awarded $72,084 to student groups from the Student Services Fees Event Grant. To date, we have already exhausted three of the five grant initiatives (Administrative, Coke Development and Coke Academic) for the 2013-2014 cycle. We anticipate increased funding from the Student Services Fees Event Grant for the remainder of the year, totaling our allotment of $75,000, demonstrating the need for the grant to remain fully funded at $75,000 for 2014-2015.

During the 2012-2013 academic year, student groups applied for over $634,000 in Student Activities grant funding to support various programs. This year, need has increased as we are on track to exceed last year’s requests. Halfway through the 2013-2014 grant cycle student groups have requested over $570,750 in Student Activities grant funding across all five initiatives. 

Every year, we seek to improve the grants process both internally for our management and externally for ease of the student group applicants. After reviewing the 2013-2014 grants program, any improvements for 2014-2015 would be implemented during the summer. We would ensure changes do not impact eligibility requirements, as our main goal is to serve student groups.

SUA and the grant evaluation committee strongly believe in the value of the fees committee’s original concept for this grant and will continue to primarily support student group collaboration. Partnerships are eligible to receive more SSF Event Grant funding than single non-fees receiving groups are eligible to receive.

Student Benefit & Involvement
The Student Services Fees Event Grant is a unique program in that it is meant to serve students, paid for by students, and heavily involves students throughout the entire process. The programs and events submitted to the grant evaluation committee and awarded SSF Event Grants are implemented and developed by students from registered student groups. All applications are submitted online and all initiatives must occur a minimum of 30 days after the grant application deadline. All events must be inclusive of the University of Minnesota campus community (U of M students must have the option of attending the event at little or no cost).
Student group members are expected to be involved in all parts of the planning process to develop the necessary skills of event planning, collaboration, grant writing, and financial management through the grants program. By setting high expectations, SUA and the grant evaluation committee hope that students strive to implement programs that are well planned, far reaching, meet the needs of University students, and demonstrate the importance of diversity on campus.

The SSF Event Grant helps offset programmatic costs including, but not limited to:

- Room reservations, security, and facility costs
- Publicity and marketing of events
- Food
- Supplies
- Honorariums
- Technical support

The grant evaluation committee structure also supports student involvement. This year’s committee consists of 17 individuals from the University of Minnesota community and of these; two-fifths are students. Committee participation allows students the opportunity for input in the types of programs they would like to see on campus and how their fees dollars are spent. Two full-time Student Unions & Activities staff members serve as the committee co-chairs and facilitate committee discussions and decisions. In addition, SUA involves a student employee as the grants assistant. The balance of grant evaluation committee members come from different areas of the University community, representing the University’s commitment to supporting the work of student groups.

The grant evaluation committee members receive applications one week prior to monthly committee meetings, meet to discuss applications submitted, make award decisions, and determine which grant fund is most appropriate for each application. The schedule of grant deadlines and committee review is posted on the SUA Grants website.

The grant evaluation committee evaluates grant applications based on a set of viewpoint-neutral criteria specific to each of the five grant initiatives. Initiative criteria are listed on the Grants Website so that all groups applying are aware of the how their applications will be evaluated and what events are eligible for funding.

Student groups receive notification via email of their grant award within two days of the grant evaluation committee meeting. Upon award notification, the student group is responsible for:

- Scheduling a pre-event meeting with a Student Activities advisor within two weeks. At this meeting, they submit a statement of agreement and discuss details of their event.
- Picking up a grant check within 3-5 weeks of award notification (this is the amount of time it takes to process check requests).
- Holding their event/initiative.
- Scheduling a post-event meeting within 30 days after the event. Student groups must bring copies of receipts along with a completed financial report and project evaluation to the meeting so the advisor can ensure that the money was spent appropriately.

The grant program continues to be well received by student groups. To date, we have received 458 applications across all five initiatives including the SSF Event Grant, which exceeds the number of applications from the same time last year. The increase of grant application numbers demonstrates the continued need for financial support of student groups through the SSF Event Grant. In addition, 24 partnership initiatives (exceeding the 14 partnership initiatives at this time last year), comprised of 51 student groups, have been awarded funding by the SSF Event Grant to date, for a total of over $32,695. We believe this grant is incredibly valuable to student groups. As previously stated, the SSF Event Grant is projected to be fully awarded by the end of the academic year. This signifies that a significant number of groups are receiving funding, and as a result, are able to provide programs on campus.
Section 2: Organizational Chart
The organizational chart below illustrates the 2013-2014 grant evaluation committee. This year we have an excellent mix of students, staff, and other representatives who contribute greatly to the grant evaluation process.

2012-2013 Student Activities Grant Evaluation Committee

*Denotes student

We will begin campus-wide recruitment for the 2014-2015 grant evaluation committee later this spring.

Section 3: Performance Report

Quantitative Measures
As of January 15, 2014:

- The grant evaluation committee has distributed $70,680 from the Student Services Fees Event Grant. There is $19,438 remaining to be awarded during the second half of 2013-2014.
- The grant evaluation committee has received 458 grant applications for all five grant initiatives totaling approximately $570,750 in requests.
- The committee has awarded more than $279,264 from all five grant initiatives to 301 applicants.
- To date, the SSF Event Grant has funded 24 student group partnerships in 2013-2014 totaling over $32,695.
- To date, the SSF Event Grant has funded 86 individual student group initiatives in 2013-2014 totaling $37,986.
- An estimated 8,060 students attended events funded by the Student Services Fees Event Grant this past fall (see attached addendum regarding the events that were funded during the fall 2013 semester).

Criteria for Success
SUA and the grant evaluation committee will consider the Student Services Fees Event Grant successful if the initiative is able to assist an increasing number of student groups the opportunity to provide campus-wide programming to benefit the campus community. In addition, the SSF Event Grant will be considered successful if it continues to provide developmental opportunities for both student group members and the students serving the grant evaluation committee.

The goals for the grant program are as follows:

- Improve the grants application process to make it clear and concise for student group applicants.
- Encourage student groups to participate in diverse, collaborative programming with other campus groups and constituencies.
- Advise applicants and recipients on the grant application process, as well as program planning, to ensure excellent, diverse, campus-wide events.
- Distribute funds to student groups that assist in developing programs and activities that enhance diversity on the University campus.
- Provide valuable feedback to grant applicants on the quality of their application.

Indicators that we have met our program goals:

- The increase in applications in 2013-2014 indicates more student groups have utilized the grants process to help support their programs and events. This on-going trend is expected to continue into 2014-2015.
- Six undergraduate students, including the SUA Grants Assistant, are part of the 2013-2014 grant evaluation committee.
- There has been an increase in the number of student groups who meet with a Student Activities advisor prior to application deadline to review a draft of their application and receive feedback. These applicants have high rates of success in the award process.
- The award notification email includes clear instructions for grant recipients regarding the grants process. In addition, reminder emails are sent to recipients who have not scheduled their pre-event meeting within two weeks or their post-event meeting within 30 days of the group’s event/project.
- The non-award notification email invites applicants to schedule a meeting with a Student Activities advisor to receive specific feedback regarding the committee’s decision and suggestions for future applications.
- A grant’s information session was created to educate student groups about the grant’s process and procedures to assure higher success rates in the award process. The information session is scheduled multiple times throughout the spring 2014 semester.

Evaluation

As with any successful initiative, on-going assessment is required to enhance the overall program and customer satisfaction. Every awarded group is required to complete a Project Evaluation, which includes the question “How would you restructure the Grants program to increase its effectiveness?” We receive both compliments and constructive criticism through this process. The following are a few examples of comments we have received so far this year:

Positive Feedback

- “I find that the Grant program is extremely helpful and I speak for the club when I say that I feel very fortunate that there is a program like this offered. The process and communication with the SUA staff is always positive.”
- “I thought that the grants staff and students were very helpful in providing feedback and ideas as well as very organized in the planning.”
- “This event would have been impossible without funding from the Grants program (thank you!). The application process was straightforward and the pre- and post-event meetings have been helpful in planning and reflecting upon the event.”
• “The new application is more accessible and the budget sheet is easier to work with.”
• “We are very grateful for the support SUA has provided throughout the grant process. Such an amazing experience would not have been possible without this help, and SUA advisors and staff have always been knowledgeable, helpful, and friendly to us.”

Room for Improvement
• “The one suggestion I have is that it would be nice if there was a PDF, printable copy of the grant application with the specific questions that would be printed and used as a ‘worksheet’ when preparing the application. I just highlighted and copied the application and saved it in a document to work on, but the formatting was not great, and some of the questions only appear once you select which grant initiatives you are applying to.”
• “The process is simple enough and works well. I would suggest maybe more training on how to fill out all of the information. I’m not sure if this has already been implemented, but a workshops would be very useful.”
• “The online application process was frustrating. Many questions about events were not applicable to attending a conference, but the form still forced us to answer those questions. Please work on the form so that it makes sense for all types of activities that are eligible for funding.”
• “Our only critique would be to advertise [that we are supposed to apply for grants about two cycles ahead of time] a little more so student groups know what to expect with timing of money and such.”

We take these comments into account when considering changes and improvements to the grants process. Student Unions & Activities has made improvements to the grants process as a part of the annual plan goals in order to make progress in this area a priority. Feedback gathered from the evaluation process will be considered for implementation into the grants process for 2014-2015.

Section 4: Reserve Accounts
At this time, we do not plan to carry an operational reserve as this would take away from the primary mission of the SSF Event Grant, which is to maximize grant funding to student groups. If needed, an operational reserve could be implemented by awarding less grant funding to student groups.

Section 5: Fees Request
Student Unions & Activities and the grant evaluation committee are very appreciative of the opportunity to work on such a positive project for the entire University of Minnesota community. The grant has had significant success over the past eleven years. As previously indicated, the grant evaluation committee has awarded approximately $72,084 of the Student Services Fees Event Grant to date in the 2013-2014 academic year. SUA and the grant evaluation committee have seen the number of grant applications and request for funds generally increase over the past few years and are committed to optimizing the use of the funds in supporting student groups at the University of Minnesota. We have supported a fiscally responsible operating budget the past ten years and firmly believe that with the increased number of student groups and those groups seeking support for additional campus programming that we will utilize the funding to its fullest in the future. We are on track to spend our entire 13-14 allotment, and want to be responsible with funding; therefore, we are only asking for the standard request of $75,000 for 2014-2015.

The fees committee awarded the grant $75,000 for 2013-2014. A carry-forward balance of $15,120 puts the total 2013-2014 budget for the SSF Event Grant at just over $90,000. The carry-forward is the result of student group forfeitures and reimbursements late in the fiscal year which are difficult for the committee to re-award and are carried over. Last year’s carryover was larger than most year’s due to an accounting error in which we did not award the previous year’s carryover as well. The high demand for the grant reiterates the need for it to be funded again at $75,000 in 2014-2015.
Summer Operations
The Student Services Fees Event Grant is offered year-round as an increasing number of groups are holding events over the summer months. The continuous availability of grant funds also allows groups to be proactive in planning for fall semester events. The grant evaluation committee will wrap up fiscal year 2014 funds in June and begin allotments for fiscal year 2015 at the July meeting. Therefore, the SSF Event Grant will be 100% operational during the summer months.

Section 6: External Funding
The Student Activities grant program is funded by three main contributors; Coca-Cola, University administration, and Student Services Fees. Coca-Cola provides funding for the three Coca-Cola grant initiatives, University administration contributes funds for the Administrative Grant, and the Student Services Fees Event Grant is funded solely by Student Services Fees. We rely on our funding partners to financially support student group events and projects. The SSF Event Grant relies on SSF funds to provide financial support to students.

The Student Services Fees Event Grant is fully funded by SSF. The cost associated with managing the Student Service Fees Event Grant process is estimated at $9,000 annually and has been fully absorbed by Student Unions & Activities. The $9,000 cost covers grant database administration, website updates, the student grants assistant’s salary, check issuance, and supplies for the grant committee meetings. Previously, we used a portion of the awarded fees to support grant committee supplies; however, in order to direct 100% of the fees back to students, we have shifted this cost to the general SUA operating budget.

Any reduction in fees would mean that fewer student groups would benefit from the grant program. For example, if there had been a 10% reduction, up to this point in the year, approximately 17 fewer events would have been funded and approximately 2,870 fewer students would have attended SSF Event Grant funded events. SUA and the grant evaluation committee are currently able to assist in the development of diverse programs and partnerships throughout campus and fewer funding resources would mean fewer opportunities for communities to collaborate on events.