

Meeting Minutes
Program Administrator / Economic Advisor Selection Committee
Destin City Hall Annex
Destin, Florida
October 20, 2017
10:00 a.m. CT

Members Present:

Don Gaetz, Chair
Allan Bense (by phone)
Pam Dana, PhD
Jason Shoaf

Chair Gaetz called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. CT and noted that all members were present.

Chair Gaetz stated the charge of the committee to include determining the need for program administration, evaluation and scoring, and an economic advisor and developing recommendations to take to the board. He shared an outline that he had prepared based on his notes from previous meetings and research he had done on several large funds that do business similar to the work of Triumph Gulf Coast and asked the committee members for any comments, additions, or changes to the outline which was designed to focus the discussion of the committee. Members agreed to work off of the outline.

Chair Gaetz said that Dr. Dana and the Applications Drafting Committee had identified the need for an evaluation process, and then a process for monitoring the performance of grants, as well as the need for economic direction. He noted that the administrator could be an entity or a person who would be available to meet with prospective applicants to acquaint them with the process, assist them with the process, and redirect them to appropriate funding sources if Triumph Gulf Coast is not the right fit for their ideas. He noted that Enterprise Florida has offered to assist those that need technical advice in putting together the applications, required research, etc., not to be a vetting entity, but to provide technical assistance as needed.

Chair Gaetz said that he thought the two options for fulfilling the program administrator function would be to hire someone on a contract basis to report to the executive director, or contract with some firm or institution. Mr. Shoaf agreed and said that he was leaning towards having one firm handle the administration and evaluation component to provide better accountability to the board. Dr. Dana said that her thoughts have evolved through the years, and that she now envisions the program administrators, and economic advisor working as a team, with the grant evaluation function separate and distinct. She said that it might lend legitimacy to the process to have someone who is not from the eight county

area that looks at what the criteria and priorities are and then weighs those against an application, grading and application, A,B,C,D, totally outside of the other factors that the board will consider on a project review. She said that an outsider's perspective from a very highly regarded economist in the evaluation process could be helpful. Dr. Dana said they would look at facts, national trends, job creation, etc., but would be only about a quarter of the overall scoring process by the board. She said the economic advisor would then perform a more in-depth review given factors within the region.

Chair Gaetz asked if the recommendation should be to look for a firm or entity, or should it be a position on staff as contract employee. Mr. Shoaf said he would prefer looking at outside contractors for purposes of liability concerns. He said he would be comfortable with some separation in the event that there was a lawsuit based on that function. Mr. Remington indicated that it would not make much difference, but that there could be some insulation depending on how a suit is structured and what type of indemnity language is included in the contract with the entity. Executive Director Susan Skelton reminded the members of the overhead costs for hiring internally and the statutory cap on salary or fees for both employees and outside contractors that could be a factor in the decision process. Chair Gaetz acknowledged that it is important not to create too much overhead cost. Mr. Bense suggested that if you do hire staff at that level that you contract with them as a 1099 employee.

Chair Gaetz then asked about the Evaluator function, suggesting that perhaps there could be a stable of evaluators on call depending on what type of application needed to be evaluated. Dr. Dana said that it would be wise to seek guidance from experts in all relevant fields. She said the Applications Drafting Committee envisioned a technical review as part of the process. She said the Economic Advisor could help in determining what expert review might be necessary, and would know where to turn to get that information and expertise. Chair Gaetz agreed.

Chair Gaetz then moved to the topic of the Economic Advisor. He said that the Economic Advisor takes a broader view of the economic big picture, follows trends, and then recruits and assigns evaluators based on project review needs. He said such an advisor would also be someone who could identify opportunities to leverage these funds to bring in bigger projects, and put together partnerships and joint funding opportunities. The economist would work with legal counsel to develop performance contracts since that person would be able to identify the appropriate milestones that should be measured for success of a project.

Chair Gaetz said that the options for hiring such as expert would be to hire and economic expert, perhaps on a part-time basis, to advise the board, or to hire an economic analysis firm. He said there were people in the region that could be engaged to do the work. He mentioned that the Pensacola Chamber of Commerce had offered to have Dr. Dale Brill assist Triumph Gulf Coast; he said

some firms have shown an interest, as well. He said he had a lot of experience working with Dr. Rick Harper, who, along with Dr. Dana is recognized as the pre-eminent regional business economist for the area. Dr. Dana said it is important that the economic advisor should be someone who recognizes and understands the issues of the region. She said that Dr. Harper is a fine economist and has experience in program administration as a result of managing the IRREF funds appropriated by the legislature for economic projects immediately following the oil spill. Chair Gaetz noted that Dr. Harper is a tenured professor at University of West Florida, and that if the decision were made to approach him there would need to be consideration of conflict between such employment and his role at the university. He said he had asked Mr. Remington if there were ways that any conflict situations could be resolved, whether in the case of Dr. Harper, or anyone or entity that the board might engage. Mr. Remington said that the resolution of conflict issues would depend largely on what types of roles and responsibilities are assigned to a particular individual or entity. He said that it would be prudent to have a conflict economist available who could do scoring, or other related tasks, in such a situation. He said it would be necessary for Triumph Gulf Coast counsel to reach an agreement with the institution's general counsel on how and when such conflicts would need to be addressed. He said if it is the pleasure of the board to enter into discussions about retaining Dr. Harper, it would be necessary for discussions to be held in that regard with the university. He said that, at the direction of the board, he would be able to initiate such discussions. Dr. Dana pointed out that it is quite common for tenured professors to take on outside engagements, do grant work, and to take leaves of absence.

Chair Gaetz asked if the committee wanted to make a decision at this meeting on whether to recommend either a contract employee or a firm to perform the functions of program administration. Mr. Bense said he thought Dr. Harper was very, very good, but in case the university has concerns, he wondered if it might be wise to look around to see what other options might be available. He said he did not know what the workload requirements for these positions might be, and speculated that the economic advisor would probably be part-time. Dr. Dana noted that she had had previous contact with several economists, including Dr. Antonio (Tony) Villamil from Coral Gables. She said he served as the Chair of her Counsel of Economic Advisors while she was at OTTED, and that Dr. Harper served on that counsel as well. She said that Dr. Harper would be more relevant in the role of economic advisor because of his knowledge of the region, but that Dr. Villamil, along with Jerry Parrish, the Chief Economist for the Florida Chamber of Commerce, could make a good team of evaluators. She said such a combination of local and statewide economists could be a very good solution. She said that program administration doesn't need to be a massive operation, but needs to be competent staff with good leadership.

Chair Gaetz asked if it would be the recommendation of the committee to approach Dr. Harper and the University of West Florida regarding the availability

of Dr. Harper to serve as Economic Advisor to Triumph Gulf Coast. Mr. Bense indicated he was ok with a part-time arrangement, understanding the salary limitations. He said in his role as Chair of Triumph Gulf Coast, he would recommend that Chair Gaetz be authorized, following proper university protocol to have a discussion with the university about the possibility of such a work arrangement. Dr. Dana and Mr. Shoaf agreed.

Chair Gaetz then said that the committee had discussed the role of evaluator, and that the sentiment seemed to be for expert evaluations to be done a la carte based on subject area expertise.

Mr. Bense said he thought that the approach used in hiring the board's CPA and legal services firms should be used to identify qualified and interested persons or firms to provide the program administration component. Chair Gaetz asked Dr. Dana to use her expertise to pull together recommendations for program administration solutions. Dr. Dana noted that if Dr. Harper is a part of the team, he could be helpful in identifying such persons or entities. She noted that there were program administration teams out there, and Dr. Harper has experience in this area that could be useful to our deliberations. Chair Gaetz said that Dr. Harper's first assignment should be to assist in putting together such a team.

Mr. Remington noted for the record, that all actions taken by the committee are in preparation for making committee recommendations to the Triumph Gulf Coast Board for consideration. Chair Gaetz concurred and said that the committee did not have authority to take any official actions, but only to make recommendations to the board.

Public Comment

Taylor Gravois, CSRS, and Michael Songy, CSRS, introduced their organization to the committee and asked for consideration in the search for a program administrator. Mr. Songy indicated that the firm had been involved with several large programs similar to Triumph Gulf Coast, and that he found the discussion by the committee to be right on point, addressing the exact issues that an organization must resolve to be able to function properly. He said that a lot of the short-term focus is about the selection process and the economic analysis, and that long term it will become more important to focus on how a project will move forward, with many moving parts that can become very complicated to monitor. He said his firm could offer a broad array of technical services and resources that will be needed in the program administration function. He noted that the firm has a wide variety of those types of services in-house and readily available for deployment. Chair Gaetz asked if the firm was familiar with the statutory limits for payment, and told him they should review those limitations.

Austin Mount, representing the Northwest Florida Regional Planning Council, asked for clarification about the November 15 Pre-Application Deadline. Ms.

Skelton explained that there is no deadline, but that the November 15 date is a cut-off date for the first set of pre-applications to go forward for consideration in the process. She said that while some counties have set up internal deadlines, Triumph Gulf Coast does not have anything to do with that process, rather that process is left up to the counties to decide. She said that there is no prohibition on anyone applying at any time. Mr. Mount said that the cities are concerned that if they don't go through the county process and get placed on the county priority list it could affect the project's chances. Chair Gaetz indicated that counties will provide a valuable vetting process, and that counties will develop their priorities based on consultation with other public entities and then make recommendations to the board. He reminded everyone that the funds are required to be spread across all eight counties. He said there is no deadline, this is an ongoing rolling process that lasts for many years, and everyone should try to work together to establish what is most important in each county. He said counties will come up with many lists over the years and this is just the beginning. Mr. Remington noted that there would likely always be consideration cut-off dates in order for staff to be able to prepare reviews and information for the board's upcoming meetings. There is no deadline though.

Nathan Monk, representing One Hopeful Place of Fort Walton Beach, indicated the importance of taking a close look at applications, and said perhaps having a citizens' review panel could be helpful in identifying projects that would really work in a community. He said that sometimes the success factor of a project may not shine through in a written application, but could be gleaned by further personal review.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:19 a.m. CT