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## COMMITTEE SETS CRITERIA FOR JUDGING LEVY BIDS

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Summary: The panel overseeing Portland *children's levy* hopes to make its first grants by Oct. 1

A panel that will spend about \$8 million this year in property taxes on Portland children wrestled Tuesday over how it will judge programs applying for a piece of that voter-approved money.

Much of the meeting was given to seemingly arcane discussions of process, but sorting through those questions in the levy's first year may establish precedents for how the committee operates during the five-year levy.

The panel heard testimony from officials with children's programs that reflects some of the philosophical dilemmas.

For example, should the committee set aside money for established programs? Should it avoid imposing evaluation requirements that cash-poor programs say they can't afford?

The committee settled on a list of criteria but not the importance of each item. Instead, the five members will rank their preferences before the next meeting in mid-August, and use those rankings to generate an evaluation for levy applications.

Criteria include each applicant's organizational strength, including its costs for administration and how it will evaluate its performance; and whether a program can demonstrate success or promise of success.

Also on the list: whether a proposal will help more children; whether it fits with Multnomah County's framework of early-childhood programs; whether the applicant can show a history of working well with other agencies; and how a proposal matches the cultural needs of the entire community.

The committee aims to make its first round of grants for early childhood programs by Oct. 1. The spending plan also must go before the county Board of Commissioners for review and the City Council for approval.

"The objective is to get this done by October 1, and that is very doable," levy director Andy Olshin said.

After the round of early-childhood spending, the committee will turn to allocating money for child abuse prevention and intervention, then after-school and mentoring programs.

On Tuesday, the committee also decided against setting limits on grants -- such as 10 percent of an applicant's overall budget or an overall cap on any one grant. Those limits may come later, committee members said, once the panel has gone through an allocation process.

Multnomah County Commissioner Lisa Naito, a committee member, did persuade the committee to permit applications from programs that were hit by budget cuts after the levy's approval in November.

She said programs such as Head Start and the Children's Receiving Center -- a refuge in Gateway for abused and neglected children -- should not be excluded because of concerns about "backfilling" prior cuts.

Instead, the committee agreed to establish guidelines to keep politicians from cutting programs with the idea that the levy would fill the gaps.

"The best thing we can do is have a clean slate and move forward," Naito said. "These programs are sort of in a no man's land."

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