LFUCG Clarification Request Submission for Bluegrass Council of the Blind

1. **Is your proposal still viable for implementation as originally submitted?**
   The COVID-19 Pandemic has required us to make changes to the way we deliver our services, which has increased our costs in some areas, changed the number of consumers served, and forced us to adapt other services, like food distribution. Although we anticipate fewer consumers seeking in-person services, we have already seen an increase in the number of consumers requesting delivery of supplemental food and personal items such as soap, hand sanitizer, paper towels and toilet paper. The program cost will be roughly the same, just adjusting what we purchase, replacing in-person, hot meals with an increase in our supplemental food distribution. We do not anticipate a change in our budgeted expenses because we have received funds specifically for COVID-19-related expenses, the majority of which was spent in the previous fiscal year; however the deliverables have changed as outlined below. And, unfortunately, we anticipate a significant decrease in income, due to COVID-19 and the loss of revenue from canceling our annual fundraising events, individual and corporate donations being directed to front-line workers, and the devastating loss of the Lions club Bluegrass Fair, which provides nearly $20,000 of funding for BCB program implementation and overhead. BCB was relieved to receive a PPP loan and that will help us through the first quarter. We desperately need funding from the Fayette County Urban Government to maintain these essential services, otherwise, Lexington residents who are blind or have low vision will not receive necessary services from BCB, placing a significant burden on the city government.

2. **Please detail any modifications you will be making to the original submission in order to comply with the new service delivery requirements in the COVID-19 environment? (i.e. social distancing, capacity requirements, group event restrictions, etc.)**

   As the only nonprofit exclusively meeting the needs of adults who are blind or visually impaired, the Bluegrass Council of the Blind simply cannot just stop services. However, we serve some of the most vulnerable to COVID-19. The majority of BCB consumers are seniors, and beyond vision impairment, most also have some form of additional medical conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity and other conditions that put them most at-risk for serious or fatal outcomes when contracting COVID-19. People who are blind or visually impaired are also already isolated and the current sheltering at home makes them even more so. **But perhaps the thing that puts people who are blind or visually impaired most at risk is how much they rely on touch.**

   Those who are blind or have low vision use their hands to see. And the way COVID-19 spreads raises greater concern for people who depend on their sense of touch to navigate their surroundings. Most of the people served by BCB also depend on public transportation, which increases the concerns of contamination. While many of our consumers get food through our food distribution, they do not get personal items such as soap, sanitizer or sanitizing wipes. In addition to our monthly food distribution (which has more than doubled since March) we have secured funds to purchase these items to distribute to our consumers as well as to sanitize our office and equip our staff and consumers coming to the office with appropriate personal protection equipment such as masks, face shields and gloves.

   We have instituted COVID-19 procedures in the office that include:

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- Creating (and updating) a Coronavirus handbook, establishing policies and procedures for staff and volunteers, ensuring compliance with CDC guidelines and mandates from the state and local governments.
- Moving the majority of our peer support services to virtual gatherings via conference calls or Zoom meetings, at least for the first 6 months. While this has increased our costs and staff time to manage this change, these services are vital to combat the isolation our consumers experience, which has been magnified by the social distancing required to combat the spread of COVID-19.
- Staff working remotely as much as possible and wearing PPE when in the office.
- Scheduling in-person appointments with consumers for assistive technology training and peer support only two days a week.
- Contracting with a cleaning company to sanitize the office the nights preceding those days to be sure the office is as risk-free as possible.
- Requiring staff to disinfect equipment and office areas between appointments and in-person meetings.
- Tripling the amount of food distributed and adding necessary personal items needed by our consumers who struggle with shopping and transportation, and transitioning to home delivery, rather than in-office pick-up.

Statistics from the National Federation of the Blind show more than 70% of adults who are blind or visually impaired are not employed, leaving most in poverty. So while BCB is providing services virtually, many of our consumers do not have access to smart phones or tablets to access the apps that will allow them to participate.

The BCB assistive technology program distributes iPads and iPod Touch devices because of their advanced accessibility features for people with low vision or blindness. Our consumers use them to listen to the news, check the weather, and stay connected with family and friends. Due to the pandemic, they need them more than ever to do things like order groceries, access tele-health, schedule transportation and to access the BCB services they have come to rely on. We have the devices and are eager to distribute them to those who would like to join the Zoom meetings -- available through 'one touch' on an IOS device. The one-touch access makes it much more simple for our seniors and those who struggle with technology.

While we can provide devices, our consumers still need to be trained on them, which is extremely difficult to do virtually. When we work with individuals with low vision to teach them how to work with assistive technology, especially with the iPad and iPod touch, we must sit in close proximity and demonstrate finger gestures, often touching the back of their hand to demonstrate how a double tap or three-finger swipe would work on the device. For that, we have secured funds and purchased PPE for both our consumers and staff, plus sanitizing supplies to maintain a safe environment for everyone.

During this pandemic, our consumers need us more than ever. BCB is the "call center" for Kentuckians with low vision or blindness seeking resources and asking for help. Since the pandemic shut Kentucky down in March, we have been fielding calls, assisting with technology advice and training, relaying resources for accessing help for unexpected situations caused by

the pandemic and partnering with several other agencies to get the appropriate info to the people who need it most.

With the help of the LFUCG ESR grant, we will be able to continue our services in this new era of COVID-19.

Below are the updated annual numbers for **Section 5.1.2 Service Delivery Model:**

- 300 assistive devices/ items distributed (originally 255)
- 600 cumulative, individual hours of training on assistive devices (originally 1,000 hours)
- 155 individual/group trainings on devices and techniques used for overcoming the barrier of vision loss (originally 255)
- 50 individuals complete the intake process, gaining knowledge of services, resources/referrals available (originally 150)
- 3,600 lbs. of food delivered to consumers with vision impairments to reduce food insecurity. (originally 1,200)
- 250 meals served to program participants providing opportunities for socialization, learning and sharing (originally 500)
- 4 membership meetings inspiring leadership and offering local, state and national connections, provided via Zoom for first half of year with in-person offered second half of the year (originally all would have been mainly in person)
- 15 mentoring conference calls or video meetings supportive in nature (originally 10)
- 6 in-person group meetings in the second half of the year, encouraging socialization and support (originally 11)
- 6 jobs provided to persons with blindness (if fully funded, this remains the same)
- 30 Intake appointments where consumers gain knowledge of services/resources/referrals (originally 56)
- 10 monthly support group meetings offering socialization, access to resources, tools and tips: 4 offered via video or phone only; 6 offered in person or video and phone. (same number; different delivery methods)
- 300 personal phone calls provided as wellness checks for those who live alone or may be at risk of loneliness or depression (**new**)

3. **Will these new modifications increase or decrease your proposed budget? Please detail any increases or decreases to your proposed budget including additional costs and/or other secured funding.**

   Due to the increase and decrease in varying areas, we anticipate the program expenses to balance out and remain the same for this fiscal year. The added costs for PPE and sanitization of the office was acquired in June 2020 and purchased in the previous fiscal year; however, we anticipate a significant decrease in our agency income due to canceling our annual fundraiser (with a 7-year average income of $23,000), grant funding being redirected to front-line workers, and the cancelation of the Lions Club Bluegrass Fair, which provides nearly $20,000 annually to BCB for program implementation and overhead. Like most businesses and nonprofits, we are uncertain of the future and what we will be able to provide to our consumers and to our

community in the upcoming year. Resuming our funding partnership with the LFUCG ESR program is essential for Lexington residents who are visually impaired to receive these vital services that are only provided by the Bluegrass Council of the Blind, sparing the city of Lexington from facing the added burden of meeting the needs of some of our most vulnerable neighbors.