**Professional Development Fund**

PURPOSE:

The Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Council encourages professionals in the field of developmental disabilities to attend conferences, training sessions, and comparable activities to assure they are highly qualified in their fields and that Oklahomans benefit from the wealth of knowledge being presented.

INSTRUCTIONS:

The Council shall fund a budget line item entitled “Professional Development Fund” to assist educators and professionals in the field of developmental disabilities to attend conferences, training sessions and comparable activities directly related to the field of developmental disabilities. Such participation should be relevant to persons with disabilities and programs and services in developmental disabilities. All applicants must meet the following criteria:

The person requesting travel reimbursement from the Council must:

1. Be an educator or professional in the field of developmental disabilities working in the state of Oklahoma,
2. Be able to provide assurances that their employer is a state agency or not-for-profit organization which does not have funding to provide such tuition, travel or other expenses, and
3. Assure that the information being gathered from such opportunity will be presented to other professionals in the field, as directed by the Developmental Disabilities Council.

In order to be considered for reimbursement by the Council, the applicant must:

1. Make written request to the Council at least 10 weeks prior to the event if out of state or 30 days prior to the event if in state. Exceptions to this will be voted on by the Council's Executive Committee.
2. Provide a cover letter in which the applicant describes his/her rationale for attending the conference, the applicability of the conference to the Council’s work as defined in the State Plan, and preliminary plans to disseminate conference information.
3. Provide a printed or electronic copy of the full conference brochure which includes designated hotel, registration fee information and forms, date and location of conference, and purpose of the conference.
4. As it is the intent of the Council to reimburse partial travel expenses of persons requesting Council assistance, the Council requires that persons wishing to receive a Council stipend for travel secure partial funding from other sources such as private foundations, public or private service agencies, an employer, or personal funds. The application must provide a full cost estimate of expenses, noting expenses requested of the Council and expenses to be assigned to the traveler or a third party. As applicable, expenses related to a personal care attendant or aide for a traveler with a disability should be included in the budget/application.

In order to be reimbursed by the Council, the traveler must:

1. Adhere to travel reimbursement laws and policies of the State of Oklahoma.
2. Arrange and pay for transportation to/from the conference or event. These expenses are NOT eligible for reimbursement by the Council, due to expense and difficulties in arranging such logistics under the travel policies of the State. Such expenses are eligible for consideration as the traveler’s contribution, as noted above.
3. Arrange all other logistics associate with travel, such as hotel reservations and conference registration.
4. Keep records and receipts of expenses.
5. Provide conference materials and a written and/or verbal report to the Council within four weeks of return. The Council's Executive Assistant will facilitate this process.
6. Write letters of introduction as constituents to State Representative, State Senator, U.S. Representative, and U.S. Senators; copies of which must be submitted to the Council. The Council has sample letters available for use by traveler; and Congressional/Legislative contact information is available at www.vote-smart.org or similar websites.
7. Develop and submit to the Council a brief fact sheet of information from the conference and disseminate it to constituency groups per plan submitted with Consumer Involvement Fund request. Examples can be provided by the Council’s Executive Assistant. The Council’s Contact Information Form is included in this instruction.
8. Complete and return the Professional Development Fund Feedback Form, included in this instruction.

NOTE: Conference registration may or may not be able to be arranged as a direct-bill to the Council. All other expenses agreed to by the Council (local transportation, per diem, lodging, etc.) must be paid by the person traveling and will be reimbursed upon return, consistent with the approved request. The traveler should be aware that hotel overnights deemed unnecessary by the DHS Travel Coordinator will not be eligible for reimbursement. (The traveler will know of such restrictions before traveling.)

The Council will fund no more than one request every two years, per person.

The Council will provide no more than $2500 per individual OR organization/agency per year, including expenses that may be required for a personal care attendant for travelers with disabilities. For events that are recurring throughout a year, such as a professional organization’s Board of Directors meetings, funding is available to individuals. As noted above, the funding will be limited to $2500 per year. Exceptions to this instruction must be approved by a 2/3 majority vote of the Executive Committee.

Priority of assistance will be by order of requests submitted, unless among the applicants there are persons who have not yet attended such a meeting as well as those who have. In these cases, the Council may choose to provide funding for the person who has not yet attended such meetings.

The Council’s Executive Committee will approve travel requests based on the following criteria:

* Does the applicant qualify for the Professional Development Fund as listed above?
* Does the applicant provide an adequate rationale for the Council to consider funding and does the applicant state a specific plan to share the information gathered at the conference to other constituents in the state?
* Are conference topics directly related to the field of developmental disabilities and considered evidence-based practice in the field?

The Council’s Executive Committee shall be the sole authority on approval of requests to the Professional Development Fund. Decisions made by the Council’s Executive Committee are final, non-negotiable, and non-transferable.

NOTE: Council staff should watch trends in applications for the Consumer Involvement Fund as these could be presented in formats such as the Governor’s Conference, or other special event.