

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 27, 2023

TO: JAMES PARAJON, CITY MANAGER

FROM: ROBERT SNYDER, CHIEF INTERNAL AUDITOR 

SUBJECT: DCHS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM VDSS VIRTUAL DESK AND SITE VISIT (FS23-09)

Background

On September 9th, 2022, the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) contacted the Domestic and Sexual Violence Division Chief and notified them that the City of Alexandria's Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) had been selected for a virtual desk and site visit for the month of October (2022). This visit was conducted in regard to the FAM-22-0788 VDSS Grant.

Requirements

On November 28th, 2022, VDSS sent a site visit follow up letter and informed the City that in totality and based on their review, the City of Alexandria met the threshold for *acceptable performance* (See Attachment 1 Page 4). However, VDSS did note that there were three (3) findings that had required actions with a deadline as well as two (2) recommendations. Requirements must be addressed to comply with the federal or state guidance and recommendations should be addressed to increase program effectiveness. Below are the findings/requirements:

Requirement #1

Mandated reporting – the City of Alexandria has incorporated language designating program personnel as mandated reporters but did not specify on which grounds personnel are mandated to report. As such, the Office of Family Violence (OFV) requires that program leadership follow up with the City Attorney and conduct any research necessary to ascertain whether program personnel are indeed mandated reporters. Please provide these findings to the OFV within **30 days** of receipt of this letter.

On December 8th, 2022 the City of Alexandria shared with VDSS a new policy that they implemented for all staff, interns, and volunteers:

SAC and DVP staff, volunteers, and interns who go through the Department of Social Services approved mandatory reporter training. Based on the training staff, volunteers, and interns will have a legal obligation to report any suspected child abuse or neglect to Child Protective Services (CPS). Whenever possible, the SAC/DVP will notify the client prior to making a report

to CPS and will attempt to involve her/him in the referral process. However, the SAC/DVP may choose not to involve a client in the CPS referral process during emergency situations and/or when doing so would increase the risk of harm to the client or others.

Requirement #2

Documenting Our Work – no Documenting Our Work (DOW) surveys were recorded, and service/program evaluation methods need improvement to ensure clients’ experience inform the ongoing development of the program. Develop an action plan to implement/improve DOW practices and any other methods for supplementary service/program evaluation. The action plan had to be submitted to VDSS by **January 30, 2023**

On October 21, 2022, the Domestic and Sexual Violence Division Chief reached out to VDSS and informed them that they developed a new plan to increase DOW surveys and client participation in those surveys. All advocates have a yearly goal to hand out at least five (5) surveys per quarter and ensure that they are documenting that they have done so in their case notes along with checking the box in VAdata system¹.

Requirement #3

Parking expenses – the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) budget required a clear distinction between Level 1 and Level 2 funds. Level 1 funds could support organizational infrastructure or victim support, while Level 2 could only support direct victim support. The travel funds that were budgeted were indicated as Level 2 expenses. The budget narrative detailed that the funds would be spent for client transportation and therefore are not eligible for an inline adjustment to be used for staff training, staff parking or staff transportation. Therefore, the OFV requires that the City of Alexandria repay the \$570 spent on employee parking. The payment had to be made by **January 30, 2023**.

On November 22, 2022, the City of Alexandria sent a check made payable to the “Treasurer of Virginia” for the amount specified with all of the above information.

Recommendations

As mentioned above VDSS also gave the City two (2) recommendations. These recommendations did not have required actions as the “Requirements” did. Listed below are the recommendations.

1. Hotel housing data collection and outcome measurement – as data collection is a required aspect of all OFV subrecipients, we recommend that the City of Alexandria draft and implement a plan to ensure that adequate practices are in place regarding data collection for clients housed in hotels and for concrete outcome measurement documentation.

According to the Domestic and Sexual Violence Division Chief this was a miscommunication. The City handles all clients that are housed in hotels in the same manner as other clients. VDSS incorrectly thought the City was not collecting data from the clients in hotels.

¹ *VAdata was developed to enhance and improve the collection of statewide data from all survivors who use the services of sexual and domestic violence agencies across the state. This project began in April of 1996 through the support of the Violence Against Women Act.*

2. **Award expenditure** – we recommend that the City of Alexandria observe spending patterns over the course of the fiscal year and, if necessary, submit a budget amendment to allocate funds for additional expenses, consistent with the approved work plan, that will allow the program to expend the full grant award.

OIA reviewed the program budget and expenditures and noted that approximately \$93,071 for FY2022 and \$17,701 for FY2021 were not expended. The department indicated that the lack of expenditures was largely related to a vacant position which was unable to be filled due to a hiring freeze. OIA believes that in the event of a future hiring freeze, the Finance Department and Office of Management and Budget should issue additional guidance to require departments to submit updated budgets to their grantor agencies.

Conclusion

On December 14th, 2022, VDSS sent the City of Alexandria a letter stating that all of their requirements and recommendations were fulfilled (See Attachment 2 Page 7). Based on the departments completion of the measures specified by VDSS we consider this engagement closed. Should you have any questions, please contact internalaudit@alexandriava.gov or via phone a 703.746.4742.

cc. Kendel Taylor, Deputy City Manager
Kate Garvey, Director DCHS
Debra Evans, Domestic Violence Program Division Chief



Commonwealth of Virginia
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

November 28, 2022

Debbie Evans, Division Chief
City of Alexandria
Department of Community and Human Services, Domestic Violence Program
123 N Pitt Street, Suite 225
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Ms. Evans:

I am following up regarding the virtual desk and site visit conducted with the City of Alexandria in October 2022. This experience helped me learn more about your agency's supportive services and how you continue to address the needs of survivors and community partners in Alexandria. The site visit included interviews with grant-funded staff as well as administrative, fiscal, and programmatic reviews during the grant cycle. I appreciate the time and effort of gathering and organizing the requested documentation and our discussions, as well as the time spent discussing your program with us.

The site visit demonstrated many strengths of the program, including the presence of a very diverse leadership team, whose members have years of experience with the city. The leadership team have expressed their ongoing dedication to supporting survivors by lending a helping hand to ensure continued service provision amid recruitment and retention difficulties. The program maintains impressive organizational practices with invoicing and employee evaluations. However, the site visit did reveal a need for updates in data collection practices for the program, and clarification on fiscal records and reporting. In totality and based on this review, we find that the City of Alexandria meets the threshold for an *acceptable performance*. To encourage continued success, please refer to the below findings of this site visit as well as required actions (if applicable), recommendations, and deadlines:

Requirements:

1. **Mandated reporting** – the City of Alexandria has incorporated language designating program personnel as mandated reporters but did not specify on which grounds personnel are mandated to report. As such, the Office of Family Violence requires that program leadership follow up with the city attorney and conduct any research necessary to ascertain whether program personnel are indeed mandated reporters. Please provide these findings to the OFV within **30 days** of receipt of this letter.

- | |
|--|
| <p>2. Documenting Our Work – no Documenting Our Work surveys were recorded, and service/program evaluation methods need improvement to ensure clients’ experience inform the ongoing development of the program. Develop an action plan to implement/improve DOW practices and any other methods for supplementary service/program evaluation. Share this action plan by January 30, 2023</p> |
| <p>3. Parking expenses – the ARPA budget required a clear distinction between Level 1 and Level 2 funds. Level 1 funds could support organizational infrastructure or victim support, while Level 2 could only support direct victim support. The travel funds that were budgeted were indicated as Level 2 expenses. The budget narrative detailed that the funds would be spent for client transportation and therefore are not eligible for an inline adjustment to be used for staff training, staff parking or staff transportation. Therefore, the OFV requires that the City of Alexandria repay the \$570 spent on employee parking. Payment should be made payable to the "Treasurer of Virginia". Please reference CVS-19-057-A-05 June ARPA with the payment. The check should be sent to: Virginia Dept. of Social Services, Attn: Nancy Fowler, 801 E. Main Street, 11th Floor, Richmond, VA 23219. Make this payment by January 30, 2023.</p> |

Recommendations:

- | |
|---|
| <p>1. Hotel housing data collection and outcome measurement – as data collection is a required aspect of all OFV subrecipients, we recommend that the City of Alexandria draft and implement a plan to ensure that adequate practices are in place regarding data collection for clients housed in hotels and for concrete outcome measurement documentation. Please reach out to your grant monitor if any technical assistance is needed on this matter.</p> |
| <p>2. Award expenditure – we recommend that the City of Alexandria observe spending patterns over the course of the fiscal year and, if necessary, submit a budget amendment to allocate funds for additional expenses, consistent with the approved work plan, that will allow the program to expend the full grant award.</p> |

This site visit has demonstrated that the City of Alexandria has an experienced and passionate team dedicated to supporting survivors and their families. I look forward to learning of any updates and accomplishments in your semi-annual reports and in any future collaborative meetings. Thank you for your time, patience, and engagement during this site visit. Please contact me if you have any questions.

All best,

Cherelle Cotton

Cherelle Cotton
ARPA Grant Administrator
Office of Family Violence, Virginia Department of Social Services
(804) 401-3383, cherelle.cotton@dss.virginia.gov
Cc: Kate Garvey



Commonwealth of Virginia
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

December 14, 2022

Debbie Evans, Division Chief
City of Alexandria
Department of Community and Human Services, Domestic Violence Program
123 N Pitt Street, Suite 225
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Ms. Evans:

I am following up regarding the requirements and recommendations shared with you following the City of Alexandria's virtual desk and site visit in October 2022. As of today, December 14, 2022, all of your recommendations have been resolved. Thank you for your and your team's diligent attention to these matters.

All best,

Cherelle Cotton

Cherelle Cotton
ARPA Grant Administrator
Office of Family Violence, Virginia Department of Social Services
(804) 401-3383, cherelle.cotton@dss.virginia.gov