Dear Dr. Zieba,

I’m reaching out to you on behalf of the Healthy Eyes Healthy Children (HEHC) Awards Committee. As you know, the HEHC Community Grants program provides awards up to $5,000 to optometrists with projects increasing access to and raising awareness about the importance of comprehensive pediatric eye care. Applications for HEHC grants are due on August 5, 2020 and we are very excited to award more than $65,000 in grants this year.

As part of the grant application, each applicant must submit a letter of support from the AOA state affiliate in which their project resides. Many of you have experience providing this letter of support through the 2019 process or as part of your own project, but we wanted to clarify a few details for the 2020 application cycle to aid in your decision-making if you are uncertain about providing a letter of support. These instructions are also available for applicants to view online.

The required letter of support serves several important purposes:
1. Disbursement of the funding – The award is administered with assistance from the affiliate and by offering the letter, you’ve indicated a willingness to accept the check from HEHC and disburse to a grant recipient if they are selected.
2. Verification of a valid project – Your familiarity with the provider and the project through membership, a standing relationship, or conversations as a result of their request for support will act as confirmation to the HEHC Committee that the project has a reasonable likelihood of success and that the need exists in the targeted community. Community partners in the project (schools, for example) must provide a letter of recommendation as well.
3. Verification of meeting AOA standards of care – Your letter of support will give the HEHC Committee assurances that the quality of care provided through the project meets AOA standards of eye and vision care for children.

AOA Membership is not a requirement of the grant program and therefore should not be the sole reason for a decision not to provide a letter of support for an applicant. We have encouraged applicants to contact his or her state’s affiliate early to allow you the time to ask important questions or make recommendations. If you are unfamiliar with an applicant or their project, we hope you will take the time to consider their project’s details and you may even consider making recommendations such as the involvement of doctors/organizations with whom you are already familiar.

Also, we have requested that the letter of support come from the affiliate’s Executive Director. If we receive a letter from an affiliate’s Board Member or other leadership position, we will reach out to the Executive Director to verify the support since the EDs will be our primary point of contact for the award checks.

Attached, you will find a template you may use to notify Optometry Cares and the HEHC committee why you have not provided a letter of support for an applicant. If an applicant informs us that a letter of support was denied, we will ask you to let us know your reasoning. Then, we can determine if any accommodations can or should be made by Optometry Cares.

Finally, for the 2020 grant cycle, HEHC applicant projects in US territories, or anywhere without a state affiliate, do not meet the grant qualifications because the project does not reside in a location with a state affiliate. There is currently no opportunity for a proxy to provide the letter of support and distribution of funding. While there must be an affiliate in the project location, we do not limit the number of awards recipients for a particular state or location. In past years, several states have hosted more than one HEHC grant recipient.

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this further, please contact me directly at 314-983-4176 or BBroombaugh@aoa.org. Thank you for your generous support of Optometry Cares and our various programs.

Sincerely,

Brittany Broombaugh
Director, Optometry Cares – The AOA Foundation