

Lions Comprehensive Preschool Vision Screening Program

An LCIF Core 4 Grant Funding Opportunity

Interim Program Guideline

Introduction

LCIF's **Core 4** program funds high-impact and hands-on Lions' service projects in four program areas: *preserving eyesight, combating disability, promoting health, and serving youth* (hence the name "Core 4"). A guiding aim of Core 4 is to focus a larger portion of LCIF's grant making on projects that address critical needs and take advantage of new opportunities for service under Lions' top humanitarian commitments. A district or multiple district may only have one Core 4 Grant application or approved Core 4 Grant in process at any one time. If in doubt, please confirm with LCIF staff that an open slot exists before undertaking any program planning.

Under the "preserving eyesight" core area, LCIF is offering financial support to Lions preschool vision screening programs organized and implemented on a multiple or single district basis. The Lions preschool vision screening program is an exciting service project that presents Lions with an opportunity to work with local eye care professionals and institutions to help make a measurable impact on preventable blindness among children. This application guideline explains the key components of a successful screening program, and gives instructions on how to design, develop and apply for an LCIF Core 4 grant.

Why is Preschool Vision Screening a Core 4 Priority?

Amblyopia is a childhood vision disorder that occurs when the brain receives unequal or abnormal visual input from the eyes. It occurs when the optical powers of the eyes are different; where one or both of the eyes are misaligned, or when a disease blocks light from being focused on the retina. In the U.S., for example, amblyopia is the most common form of childhood monocular blindness, affecting between three to five percent of all American children. If untreated, amblyopia can lead to impaired academic performance, low self-esteem, and restricted social development in children, and limited occupational possibilities for adults. The loss of vision in one eye can also have serious effects in adulthood if glaucoma or other diseases later develop in the healthy eye. However, amblyopia is treatable if addressed in the early years of a child's life.

The best way to prevent amblyopia from causing permanent vision loss is early treatment. Unfortunately, the majority of children do not receive proper eye exams until they enter school, by which time it may be too late to correct the disorder. Furthermore, amblyopia is a condition with physical characteristics that cannot be easily detected by a parent or guardian. Another reason why amblyopia often goes undetected is that most children only have their eyes checked by general health practitioners and pediatricians who may not have the experience, equipment or techniques to do a thorough eye exam.

A solution to this problem has been developed by innovative companies that have created tools for the detection of problems that cause amblyopia in children. The Core 4 program has traditionally used the PhotoScreener™, by PhotoScreener Inc. The PhotoScreener is a portable, hand-held camera, which is easy to use by lay operators (including Lions), takes two instant Polaroid photographs of a child's eyes that develop on the same film. The light that bounces off the retina is instantly recorded on Polaroid ASA 3200 film. Crescent marks appear in the child's pupils if the eyes are not focusing properly. The photographs may then be interpreted by an ophthalmologist, optometrist or an experienced lay technician for the presence of possible amblyogenic factors. A second company, Welch Allyn, has developed the SureSight™, a digital handheld autorefractor that offers the same ease of use for the volunteer population. The SureSight does not require photograph interpretation, as it prints out a digital reading of a child's screening result. Each tool is an effective, non-invasive method of screening pre-school age children.

Key Components of a Lions Comprehensive Preschool Vision Screening Project

Several Lions multiple districts have partnered with medical institutions to establish successful statewide preschool vision screening programs that now serve as examples for Lions in other states and countries. The programs are built upon teams of committed Lions, armed with either the PhotoScreener™ or the Welch Allyn SureSight, traveling to day care centers, preschools and other locations where young children are located. The Lions screen each child. Results are determined by the medical advising staff. Children whose results show signs of amblyogenic factors are then referred to partnering eye care providers in their own community for further examination and possible treatment. The Lions assume the costs of care for those children not covered by private or public insurance. National cumulative results have been published and presented at the American Academy of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus by LCIF's medical advisor.

To summarize, we have provided a brief overview of the essential components and qualities of a successful Lions Core 4 preschool vision screening program.

Screening. Screening will be conducted by small teams of Lions who have been trained in the proper use of the screening instrument, and who have received a training session on the procedures of the Lions multiple district preschool vision screening program. LCIF highly recommends that multiple or single district representatives take advantage of the training resources available by LCIF in conjunction with existing statewide LCIF-funded programs. As for the location of the screenings, it is highly recommended that the Lions focus themselves to day care centers, preschools and other facilities where children between the age of 1 and 6 years (12-72 months) can be easily found. Lions clubs already using the screening instruments have learned that screening children in these types of establishments improves the efficiency, cost effectiveness and outcomes in comparison to mass public screenings.

Screening Result Interpretation.

Welch Allyn SureSight:

The Welch Allyn SureSight provides digital screening results. Results should be sent to the program coordinator, who, under the advice of the medical advisor, will determine the appropriate referral criteria and report results back to the parents via the screening site.

PhotoScreeener™

The PhotoScreeener™ requires that the Lions team confirms that the pictures are readable. The pictures must then be forwarded to an eye care facility which has experience in examining photoscreener pictures. In particular the institute must have specially trained photo interpreters on staff, strict quality control mechanisms and a rigorous pass/fail grading system. LCIF recommends working with Lions-affiliated hospitals or eye institutes, as these are likely to be credible in the eyes of the Lions and general public; and have strict quality control procedures in place and access to state of the art equipment and doctors. The results are then forwarded back to the Lions clubs and the facility where the screening took place.

Referral Network and Follow-up Care. The Lions of a multiple district should establish, through the work of the program coordinator, a network of eye care providers willing to examine and treat children referred by the preschool vision screening program on a fee for service basis. A follow-up coordinator, whose function may initially be conducted by the paid program coordinator, will make follow-up calls with doctors and parents. The Lions should be prepared to assume the treatment costs for those children who need eye care but are not covered by private or public insurance.

Key Qualities of a Lions Comprehensive Preschool Vision Screening Project

Targets a vulnerable population that may not receive screening at the appropriate time. Amblyopia can usually be completely treated if detected in the early years of a child's life. After the age of five, the structures of the brain controlling vision will increasingly be unable to compensate for any damage that may have taken place. Unfortunately, most children do not undergo a proper eye exam until they enter school by which time it may be much more difficult or too late to correct amblyogenic problems.

Involves Lions. Lions must lead and actively participate in all levels of the development and implementation of the Core 4 preschool vision screening project. Besides the previously mentioned Lions screening teams, there will also be regional coordinators who will work with local clubs on scheduling screening events, and other issues. The project plan of action must include the approval of the council of governors. The multiple district must also establish a committee to oversee the training of the screening teams, monitor the performance of the program, liaise with the program's operational partners, and establish program priorities and protocols. Once funding is complete, Lions remain active to assure that the program continues to screen children for amblyogenic factors. For a multiple or single district to receive grant consideration, at least 25% of local Lions clubs or 100 clubs (whichever is less) must agree to participate.

Requires sustainability. A Core 4 preschool vision screening project is structured and managed so that activity continues once LCIF funding is complete. Although Core 4 funds are designed for program set-up (i.e., “training the trainers”, screening devices, office equipment), the LCIF Trustees do permit certain operational expenses (result interpretation if necessary, club level training) to be included in the project budget. Once the Core 4 grant funding is concluded, the multiple district must assume responsibility for future operating costs of the preschool vision screening program.

3 to 1 matching funds. The multiple district or single district applying for a grant must raise local funding equivalent to 25% of the project budget. The Core 4 grant may be requested for up to 75% of the project budget not to exceed the US\$200,000 limit. Matching funds listed in the project budget must represent contributions for the Core 4 preschool vision screening initiative. Lions currently operating a preschool vision screening program are welcome to describe separately the amount of funds expended so far. This information will be included in the project summary submitted to the LCIF Trustees.

Project Management Structure

The multiple district or single district applying for the grant must appoint a project committee consisting of Lions and representatives from partnering institutions. The committee will be led by a project chairperson who ideally has experience in eye care or community health programs. The committee will be responsible for the financial administration of grant funds, the promotion of the program to clubs and the organization and oversight of the screenings. The project chairperson should serve, at minimum, for the duration of Core 4 grant-funded activity, which could exceed two to three years. Each subdistrict should have representation on the committee. It is recommended that, when possible, the program be coordinated under the umbrella of an existing state Lions office or Lions state-level service program.

The Lions should also hire an individual to coordinate the day-to-day operations of the program. This individual could have his or her office at a Lions eye institute helping to run the program or, alternatively, a statewide Lions office if one exists. The project coordinator will help train Lions in the use of the screening instrument and coordinate the program once it is operational. Along with the Lions, the coordinator also assists with publicity, liaises ophthalmologists helping to determine appropriate referrals or examine children, maintains a program database for easy case tracking and result storage, and follows-up with the parents or guardians of children screened. The cost of the person’s salary, insurance and other expenses could be included in the project budget.

Training

A key element in the success of a Lions preschool vision screening project is the quality of training that Lions receive. Preschool vision screening is a hands-on activity that requires Lions, from those conducting the screening, to the Lions who sit on the multiple district coordinating committee, have an in-depth understanding of how preschool vision screening works. To this end, Lions interested in establishing a multiple or single district preschool vision screening program should develop a two-tiered training scheme. First, during the application process, the Lions MD project committee should visit an existing preschool vision screening program to receive an orientation session. The costs of sending a team of key Lions (i.e., project committee, project coordinator, regional chairperson, representative from partnering

medical institution) for training may be included in the project budget. Following receipt of the grant, a more detailed training session will be provided by LCIF staff on-site. The trustees believe that this type of training system is cost effective and will present the Lions with an opportunity to learn from the experiences from other multiple or single districts.

Once the project committee has received its orientation and training sessions from LCIF, the second step will be to train the Lions at the district level and club level on how to use the camera and to run screening events. The goal of training the screening teams and administrators is to enable them to effectively oversee the program and better recruit local Lions in their area of responsibility for the screening teams. As for the Lions screening teams, they would receive in-depth training in the use of the screening device and the policies and procedures of the program, and work on an actual screening.

Preparing the Grant Application

Preparation of the grant application begins after positive discussions concerning the project have been held with appropriate Lions multiple district and sub-district leadership, local ophthalmologists and optometrists, local public health officials and a medical center of excellence (preferably a Lions-sponsored eye center) that will assist with project implementation and referral verification. It is recommended that a brief abstract of the project be submitted to LCIF before work on the application begins.

For a project to be considered for Core 4 funding, the official preschool vision screening application form attached at the end of this guideline must be completed and submitted to the LCIF Sight Programs Department. If possible, the application should be prepared in English, and the budget presented in U.S. dollars. It is important to carefully read the criteria and regulations and answer each section completely. Supporting information should include pro forma invoices for equipment and accessories; data on anticipated administrative costs, and travel expenses. The budget must itemize all sources of income and all anticipated expenses. Also, a plan of action, indicating the roles and responsibilities of each participant, and anticipated expenditures for each phase of activity is required. The completed application is reviewed and endorsed by the multiple district council chairperson and each of the sub-district governors.

LCIF understands that the development and implementation of a comprehensive preschool vision screening program is a complex endeavor. The Lions who agree to take on this tremendous responsibility will need to manage a great number of tasks, relationships and issues. LCIF staff and other Lions who have coordinated preschool vision screening projects stand ready to assist you as appropriate.

In this regard, LCIF suggests that Lions who are finding it difficult to organize their multiple district consider presenting their Core 4 preschool vision screening application as a program that will be geographically implemented in a phased manner.

Proposals presented in this manner may be conditionally approved by the LCIF Board of Trustees with grant funds disbursed as the multiple or single district reaches certain targets or goals. The same may be done with proposals whose intent is to immediately implement the program on a multiple or single district-wide basis if the board decides that certain aspects of the project are in need of clarification or refinement.

Grant Review Process

Completed Core 4 grant applications must be submitted to LCIF at least 60 days prior to a board of trustees meeting. Meetings to review applications are held three times a year, approximately in October, March and June. Please contact the LCIF Sight Programs Department for the specific dates of the review meetings.

Applications undergo a preliminary screening by the LCIF Sight Programs Department staff to assure that project proposals meet the specific requirements and provide adequate information for committee evaluation. Applicants may be asked for additional information and revisions by a specific deadline. The board of trustees carefully reviews each application and recommends funding for those projects that appear well planned and meet the Core 4 grant criteria. The trustees' decision may be conditional, citing specific areas that must be clarified or revised before funding will be granted. The committee may ask that the application be resubmitted following recommended revisions.

Each applicant is notified of the status of the grant application following the board of trustees meeting. Approved projects receive an award letter from the LCIF chairperson, accompanied by instructions on project management and a grant agreement, which must be signed by the grant administrator.

Project Management Responsibilities:

When a multiple district or single district accepts an LCIF Core 4 grant, they also accept a great deal of responsibility. Project success depends upon a good management team and one of the first steps the Lions should take is to appoint a committee to spearhead the project. The exact composition of this body is left to the discretion of the multiple district, however, the Trustees suggest that at minimum it include the multiple district council chairperson, the district governors, the project coordinator and a representative from the partnering institution. The committees' overall responsibilities include: project implementation, funds administration, progress evaluation, liaison with project partners and the preparation of a final report to LCIF. Another step is the signing of the LCIF Grant agreement that outlines the conditions of the grant. The Lions may also be asked to obtain memorandums of understanding from their institutional partner and other organizations involved in the project.

The LCIF Trustees would also encourage the multiple district to hire a project coordinator to oversee the day-to-day functions of the program as well as serve as a point person for Lions in the field. The individual may be brought in on full-time or part-time basis. In addition, it is expected that the project coordinator would serve as the key trainer in the program, hence full knowledge of the screening device, the structures and protocols of another state-wide Lions program, and result verification techniques is highly recommended.

Core 4 Steps to Success

1. Lions Multiple District determines that the children in their region are not being screened for amblyogenic factors. Holds preliminary discussions with sub-districts, potential local partners, and (if available) other organizations with experience in conducting statewide eye screening efforts.
2. Project idea presented to multiple district cabinet. Project development begins, carefully following Core 4 grant criteria.
3. Multiple District project chairperson coordinates project development with local eye care community, other organizations, and LCIF Sight Programs Department staff.
4. All parties agree to move forward with project. Official Core 4 preschool vision screening grant application is prepared by multiple district. A detailed plan of action, budget and timetable are included.
5. Completed grant application, with all required signatures, received by the LCIF Grants Department at least 60 days prior to the next meeting of the LCIF Board of Trustees. The committee meets three times a year (approximately October, March and June).
6. Preliminary review conducted by LCIF Grants Department staff.
7. Applicants asked for additional information or revisions, if necessary. Project applications providing all requested information are placed on the agenda for the LCIF Board of Trustees.
8. Final approval given by LCIF Board of Trustees.
9. Applicants notified of grant awards. Approval may be conditional.
10. Project activity begins under supervision of the multiple district project committee. Regular reports and funding requests are submitted to the LCIF Grants Department.
11. Project complete. Evaluation concludes that the target population has been reached and that Lions preschool vision screening efforts will continue.