



Memo

To: Honorable Mayor Armitage; City Council
 From: City Manager LaPere, MPAP
 Date: April 15, 2022
 Re: Staff report on Grant Consulting proposals

Background

At City Council’s request, administration put forth a request for proposals (RFP) for grant consultant services to solicit proposals from grant writing professionals to assist the City in researching and obtaining grant funding. The scope of work requested included researching grant funding opportunities based on the city’s eligibility and needs, writing grant proposals for the city, and providing grant administration as needed. We received three responses to the RFP, see bid tab below:

Company Name	Rate per Hour	Base Services Included per Month	Extra Costs	Annual Cost
G&G Municipal Consulting and Grant Writing	n/a	- Unlimited grant research - Unlimited number of grants written, up to 50h each month per grant - Monthly meetings	- Grant administration not covered by grant at \$145/h upon request - any service not covered under scope of work \$145/h	\$39,900 per year
Lance Consultants, LLC	\$93.45/h administrative \$114.60/h grant research \$48.56/h grant writing	- max of 67.5 hours per month on all meetings, grant writing, and research	n/a	Variable based on hours worked
Grantsmanship Consulting, LLC	\$75 per hour	- 10 hours per month for grant research - 25-40 hours per grant project	- All hours worked billed at \$75/h, minimum 10h per month	\$9,000 per year base plus variable for grant writing

The firms who responded all proposed slightly different funding models. The Council asked for more details regarding the third firm, Grantsmanship Consulting, LLC. This is a local, Michigan-based provider and they have provided a number of successful grant projects funded demonstrating their experience in this area. They are proposing a flat fee per hour, with a base retainer of 10 hours per month to be used for grant funding research/consulting with variable hours spent on grant writing per month (25-40). If we assume one grant written per month, at average of 32.5 hours per grant, their monthly fee would be

approximately \$3,200 (including research hours). A sample invoice was provided in their bid proposal detailing a grant project that required 25-hours of writing. A copy of the bid proposal is attached for Council's review.

As a point of reference, the city staff currently averages approximately 12-15 grant applications per year. Administration has a history of seeking out grant funding opportunities, especially when the grant programs align with the city's planned projects and ability to provide match funding. Another factor staff uses to evaluate grant funding opportunities is the city's ability to complete the administration of the grant, including reporting requirements, incurring additional costs associated with implementing new processes/procedures required of the grant, and operating and maintenance costs beyond the grant program.

Financial Impacts

At the rates provided, the City could expect to pay as much as \$30-40k per year for any of the consultants to provide grant research and writing services at the current staff application level. The addition of these consulting services before June 30th would necessitate a budget amendment. Depending on the services provided and consultant selected, this could be less than two-thousand dollars or as much as ten-thousand. At this time, the city's General Fund is projected to end the year with a surplus of \$258k; however, the city is still faced with requirements to rebuild its unassigned fund reserves and to reduce its unfunded pension liability.

As mentioned in previous discussions, Council passed a policy to maintain unassigned fund reserves in the General Fund to 17% of expenditures. At the end of FY21 (June 30th) those fund reserves were at 6% of expenditures. Related to that policy, there were three equally ranked goals of the current (FY22) budget. First was to address the structural deficient wherein expenditures were exceeding revenues year-to-year, second was to allocate additional funding into our pension system to address our unfunded pension liability of approximately \$11 million, and third was to set aside monies into those general fund unassigned reserves in accordance with the adopted policy. Utilizing that surplus for hiring a firm to provide grant consulting services leaves the City with less available to accomplish those tasks. Alternatively, the Council can consider this service for funding beginning next FY (July 1) and this topic has been part of the budget discussions.

Recommendation

If Council wishes to move forward with engaging with any of these firms for grant consulting services, I recommend City Council award the contract to Grantsmanship Consulting, LLC. Of the three firms, they have the most experience in this area while also being locally based. Given the current financial position, I would concur with the Council discussion that spending for this service be capped at a not-to-exceed amount to ensure the city is maintaining a cost-control over the program.

In implementing this program, I would recommend Council consider outlining metrics to be used to evaluate the success of the program after a certain timeframe. For example, is the goal to increase the number of grants written? Relieve administrative burden by shifting grant writing to a contractor? Is the goal to strategically apply for grants which are likely to be funded and ensure high ROI? Are there specific projects or programs that Council would like to see move forward with grant funding? It will be important for Council to have clear objectives to ensure a satisfactory return on investment and for staff to provide clear direction to the consultant.

eel

attachment

CITY OF CHARLOTTE
RFP 2022-02A
GRANT CONSULTANT SERVICES



Date of Submittal:

4.14.2022

Company Name:

Grantsmanship Consulting LLC

Contact:

James Hissong, Owner
James@grant-man.com
269.599.2559

Address:

2324 Skyline Dr., Kalamazoo, MI 49006

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JAMES HISSONG

GRANT PROFESSIONAL

ABOUT


James Hissong, owner of Grantsmanship Consulting LLC, has worked with nonprofits, foundations, K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, and local government entities to secure millions of dollars in competitive grant funding.

EDUCATION

Western Michigan University
Master of Public
Administration - Nonprofit
Leadership, 2011-2014

Western Michigan University
B.A., Art Education
2004-2008

CONTACT

 2324 Skyline Dr.
Kalamazoo, MI
49006

 James@grant-man.com

 269.599.2559

 /jameshissong

WORK EXPERIENCE

Grantsmanship Consulting LLC, Owner

JUN 2018 - PRESENT

- Grantsmanship Consulting LLC provides support for all phases of the grant life-cycle. Grantsmanship Consulting LLC clients include nonprofits, K-12 schools, foundations, and local government entities.

Grant Writer, City of Three Rivers

OCT 2019 - DEC 2020

- Served as a shared grant for the City of Three Rivers and the City of Sturgis, supporting both cities and the respective community foundations.

Grants & Development Coord., Kent Intermediate School District

JUL 2017 - OCT 2019

- Provided grant writing support for the district. Worked closely with school leadership to secure funding and provide technical assistance to local school districts in Kent Co.

Community Development Coord., St. Joseph County

AUG 2015 - JUL 2017

- Served as a shared grant writer for St. Joseph County (employer of record), City of Three Rivers, City of Sturgis, Park Township, and the Village of Centreville.

MEMBERSHIP

- Board Member, St. Joseph County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (2020 - Present)
- Member, Grant Professionals Association (2015 - Present)

Tricia Meyer

P.O. Box 171, Three Rivers, Michigan 49093 269.506.6789

tricia@grant-man.com

Relevant Work Experience:

Grantsmanship Consulting LLC (Consultant) 2022 – Present

- Supports community development initiatives with a focus on downtown development, placemaking, arts and culture, and parks and recreation projects.
- Consults with communities on community/public engagement and project planning.

Three Rivers DDA/Main Street (Executive Director) 2018 – 2022

- Responsible for coordinating downtown revitalization activities in the City of Three Rivers using the Main Street Four-Point Approach: Design, Promotion, Economic Restructuring and Organization.
- Oversight of Redevelopment Ready Community Certification process.
- Participation in Master Plan for City, Parks and Rec, and DDA/TIF Plans.

All About Travel of Three Rivers (Owner/Travel Planner) 2012 - 2019

Education:

Colon High School - Class of 1991 - High School Diploma

Glen Oaks Community College - Class of 1993 - Associate of Arts

Kalamazoo Valley Community College - Certificate of Paralegal Studies (1993)

Volunteer Positions:

Three Rivers Downtown Development Authority Board Member (2013 - 2018)

Key/Relevant Skills:

Excellent communication and people skills

Creative approach to problem solving

Ability to work under pressure, multi-task and juggle projects/deadlines

Impeccable organization skills and high-level attention to detail

Extremely self-motivated

Extensive background in event planning

Ability to oversee and lead teams and value relationship building

Experience with strategic planning and branding

Research, draft and submit grant proposals

Extensive knowledge of local government operations

List of 5 Recent Grant Awards / Projects:

- FY22 Federal Congressionally Directed Spending Requests (Earmarks) - In 2022, Congress once again began accepting proposals for congressionally directed spending requests, commonly known as earmarks. In 2022, Grantsmanship Consulting LLC worked on behalf of its clients to secure the inclusion of \$2,550,000 for local projects in federal discretionary spending appropriations bills. City of Three Rivers (\$750,000 - Sen. Gary Peters), Glen Oaks Community College (\$900,000 - Rep. Fred Upton), and the Kent Intermediate School District (\$900,000 - Rep. Peter Meijer). Federal earmarks can be used to support a variety of projects including water infrastructure, local transportation projects, and economic development opportunities.
- Sturgis Splash Pad - Often, it takes more than one single grant to fund a project. This was true with the Sturgis Splash Pad initiative. In 2021/2022, Grantsmanship Consulting LLC assisted the City of Sturgis secure a \$150,000 grant through the MI Department of Natural Resources Recreation Passport Program, over \$200,000 from the Sturgis Area Community Foundation, and over \$100,000 through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's Public Spaces Community Places program.
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Business Development - The CDBG program is an important tool for community and economic development projects. However, for smaller non-entitlement communities, such as the City of Charlotte, navigating this program can be complicated and time consuming. Grantsmanship Consulting LLC has experience securing CDBG, CRP, and other sources of funding for projects through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and assisting communities through the process until they can engage with a grant administrator. In 2021, Grantsmanship Consulting LLC helped the City of Three Rivers secure \$2,000,000 in CDBG funding to help their largest employer expand operations.
- Byrne JAG, Michigan State Police - Grantsmanship Consulting LLC is experienced in supporting local law enforcement and first responder grant applications. In 2021 and 2022, we assisted St. Joseph County to secure over \$80,000 annually to hire a jail diversion specialist to ensure offenders with substance abuse and mental health needs were able to access needed treatment, reducing sentencing and recidivism rates.

- Hillsdale County Family Treatment Court - Competitive federal grants can be difficult to pursue due to the amount of time and energy needed to complete the application. Grantsmanship Consulting is experienced in navigating federal grant portals (SAM.gov, Grants.gov, JustGrants, HealthSolutions, EHB, etc.) to help simplify the process for clients. In 2021, we assisted Hillsdale County secure over \$990,000 for its Family Treatment Court program through the Dept. of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Grant Funding Research:

Grantsmanship Consulting LLC is experienced in conducting grant research for municipal entities in Michigan. There are two approaches we use to alert our clients to available funding opportunities.

Customized Grant Searches:

Grantsmanship Consulting LLC will meet with staff and community stakeholders of the client's choosing to identify grant needs. These needs can be "wish list" items, projects, or key community priorities that have not been able to be addressed through the typical budgeting process. From this list, Grantsmanship Consulting LLC will conduct grant prospect research reviews to identify potential funding sources. These reviews use a variety of tools dependent on the nature of the project. For instance, federal and state funding opportunities will be assessed using publicly available data on applicable grant programs. Opportunities for private, corporate, or other forms of community funding will be assessed using industry-standard grant research tools.

The price for our consultant's use of these tools is included in our service rate and does not result in an additional cost to our clients beyond the time it takes to conduct the research. Grantsmanship Consulting uses the Foundation Center Online Directory and the GrantStation Database to conduct research. For private foundation sources, we use Inside Philanthropy and GuideStar/Candid to review organizational tax filings (990s) which include valuable information on funding patterns and giving priorities. If purchasing these tools separately, these subscriptions would cost a client nearly \$2,000 annually.

Proactive Grant Alerts:

In addition to custom funding searches, we also acknowledge that the world of grant funding can be opportunistic in nature. It is common for competitive grant opportunities to be announced via a Request for Proposal (RFP) or similar announcement. Due to the high volume of grant opportunities, it can be difficult for clients to stay current with available funding opportunities, or clients often find themselves responding to grant opportunities at the last minute due to not being notified of the grant with enough time to develop a quality application. In response to these challenges, Grantsmanship Consulting LLC has developed a local government grant alert newsletter that is sent out to our clients. Clients are able to identify up to 10 staff members to receive grant alerts. This newsletter is specific to local government entities in the state of Michigan. Newsletter frequency can vary depending on the timing of grant announcements, but typically, there are two newsletters / grant alerts sent out each month. An example of this newsletter can be found [here](#).

Methodology:

We believe that in order to be successful, our consultants must work collaboratively with our clients to develop a high-quality grant proposal. We view ourselves as subject matter experts in the world of grants and we consider ourselves fortunate to work alongside our clients who have the expertise in the specific project identified. Our goal is to help clients understand and navigate the grant process and put their best foot forward to compete for funding. While all grants vary in their requirements and thus will vary in how work needs to be done, the following page serves as a standard process for grant development work. This is based on an ideal timeline of starting a grant application approximately 45 days before the due date. Modifications are required for shorter timeframes.

(Attachment - SAMPLE GRANT TIMELINE)

SAMPLE GRANT TIMELINE

Six Weeks	Five Weeks	Four Weeks	Three Weeks	Two Weeks	One Week & Submission
Review Request for Proposal (RFP)	Select and invite potential partners	Draft need statement for the project	Obtain review of budget by Finance staff	Make narrative revisions based on feedback	Compile final narrative and all attachments
Create RFP summary	Create Request for Info (RFI) for partners	Develop measurable goals and objectives	Send job descriptions and salary requests to HR staff for approval	Collect letters of commitment	Have forms signed by authorized official
Schedule meeting about grant requirements	Prepare sample letter of commitment	Draft evaluation plan	Compile draft narrative for 1st review	Compile required attachments for review	Make copies of completed proposal (one extra for filing)
Go/no-go decision, pull together grant team	Create shared Google folder for collaboration	Draft timeline / management plan	Prepare roles and responsibilities chart	Complete program abstract	Submit proposal to funding agency
Develop proposal work plan	Present outline for approval by admin / board (if needed)	Draft budget narrative	Start online application, if applicable		Send final proposal to grant team
Schedule follow up meetings with staff	Meet with potential partners	Collect resumes and job descriptions for key staff			Verify receipt of proposal
Prepare proposal outline/template	Draft preliminary scope of work and budget				

References:

Teresa Doehring
St. Joseph County Administrator/Controller
DoehringT@stjosephcountymi.org
(269) 467-5675

Michael Hughes
City of Sturgis, City Manager
mhughes@sturgismi.gov
269-659-7223

Joe Bippus
City of Three Rivers, City Manager
jbippus@threeriversmi.org
269-506-3883

Additional References Available Upon Request

Pricing:

Grantsmanship Consulting LLC has developed a grant services model for local governments that combines a basic retainer-style contract to provide on-going consultation and grant research with the ability to authorize additional hours to assist with grant applications when they arise. We propose using this same structure to support the City of Charlotte but are open to other models as well.

Monthly retainer: Grantsmanship Consulting LLC will charge \$750 per month to retain consultant services to advise and conduct research on available grant opportunities. This rate is based on \$75 per hour for an estimated commitment of 10 hours per month. In the event that Grantsmanship Consulting LLC does not utilize 10 hours in a given month, unused hours will rollover for one subsequent month. The intent of these hours is to assist with grant research, developing a strategic plan for pursuing grant opportunities, and to gain a better understanding of the needs of the community. This fee also includes the cost of the grant alert newsletters. In the event that a grant

opportunity arises that will exceed the budgeted hours in a given month, Grantsmanship Consulting LLC will submit a request for additional hours prior to incurring additional costs.

Estimated Cost for Grant Applications: Most grant applications will exceed the 10 hours per month budgeted for the base level of consultation. While the specific amount of time will vary depending on the grant requirements, a typical state-level grant can range from 25 - 40 hours. Federal grants may require additional time. Prior to starting a project, Grantsmanship Consulting LLC will provide a not to exceed estimate for the project based on the grant requirements. All work will be based on the same hourly rate of \$75 per hour.

Example monthly scenario:

Grant Research / Consultation: \$750 (10 hours)

Project XYZ Grant Application: 25 hours at \$75 per hour = \$1,875

Total Month Invoice: \$2,625

Certification:

I hereby certify that the statements contained in this proposal are true and correct to the best of my knowledge. Grantsmanship Consulting LLC has no exceptions to the City's scope of work.



James Hissong, Owner

4.14.2022

Bonus Information:

In addition to the sample grant news alert included for your review, we would also like to highlight the communication tools we use to ensure that our clients have access to the support they need. Grantsmanship Consulting LLC provides our clients with a link to a scheduling tool that allows staff to access our calendars directly to schedule calls or meetings at their convenience. This scheduling tool (Calendly) is included in the signature line of the consultants you will be working with directly.

(Attachment - Sample Grant Alert)

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GRANT ALERTS

Schedule a meeting with us to discuss a grant opportunity!

[Schedule a Meeting](#)

Grant News:

Late last night, Michigan lawmakers passed a large supplemental spending bill, allocating federal COVID-19 relief dollars. Read a summary below:

[Whitmer, lawmakers agree on sweeping \\$4.7 billion water and infrastructure deal](#)

Open Grant Opportunities:



2022 Buy Nearby Grant Program

Due Date: 4/1/2022

Michigan Retailers Association
(MRA) through its on-going public



Small-Scale Housing Rental Pilot Program (SHRP)

Due Date: 4/22/2022

Up to \$600,000 (\$200,000 per unit)

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program to help promote the Buy Nearby message in your local community. We will award \$7,500 (one per quarter) to four (4) Michigan communities.

[Link to Program Website](#)

utilizing the Neighborhood Stabilization Program – Program Income (NSP-PI) as a financing mechanism within the Neighborhood Housing Initiatives Division to make available small-scale rental development units in rural areas. Small-scale development can have a significant impact in smaller rural communities, which is where the pilot funding will be focused.

[Link to Program Website](#)



Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program

Due 5/23/2022

The Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program (RURAL) was created in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and will support projects to improve and expand the surface transportation infrastructure in rural areas to increase connectivity, improve the safety and reliability of the movement of people and freight, and generate regional economic growth and improve quality of life. Eligible projects for



Michigan Arts and Culture Council - Project Support Grants

Due Date: 6/1/2022

Up to \$30,000

Project Support is a competitive grant program that provides support for the production, presentation and creation of arts and culture that promotes public engagement, diverse and excellent art, lifelong

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freight, safety, and provide or increase access to an agricultural, commercial, energy, or transportation facilities that support the economy of a rural area. This year alone, DOT will award up to \$300 million in grants through the rural program—part of the \$2 billion included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law over five years.

[Link to Program Website](#)



Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA)

Due: 5/23/2022

The Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) program is an existing competitive program that will see a more than 50 percent increase in this year's funding due to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. These grants advance the Administration's priorities of rebuilding America's infrastructure and creating jobs by funding highway, multimodal freight and rail projects that position America to win the 21st century. Projects will improve safety, generate economic benefits, reduce

communities through the arts. Open to colleges/universities, municipality or non-arts related nonprofit organizations.

[Link to Program Website](#)



National Infrastructure Project Assistance (MEGA)

Due: 5/23/2022

The National Infrastructure Project Assistance (MEGA) program was created in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to fund major projects that are too large or complex for traditional funding programs. The program will provide grants on a competitive basis to support multijurisdictional or regional projects of significance that may also cut across multiple modes of transportation. Eligible projects could include highway, bridge, freight, port,

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eliminate supply chain bottlenecks and improve critical freight movements.

[Link to Program Website](#)

and regional significance. These could be bridges or tunnels connecting two states; new rail and transit lines that improve equity and reduce emissions; and freight hubs integrating ship, train and truck traffic while improving environmental justice.

[Link to Program Website](#)

Other Grant News We're Following:

[Department of State announces \\$8 million in grants for local election officials](#)

[LaSata plan encourages collaboration, broadband investment in Michigan](#)

[Michigan gets \\$211 million for earmarked projects from Congress: Here's the list](#)

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