

MARIN TELECOMMUNICATIONS AGENCY

555 Northgate Drive, Suite 230, CA 94903-3680

PHONE: (415) 448-0355

FAX: (415) 499-3792

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 8, 2009

TO: MTA Board of Directors

FROM: Barbara Thornton, Executive Officer

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM I: CBG COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTING SERVICES PROPOSAL

Recommended Action: Consider proposal from CBG Communications, Tom Robinson, to provide consulting services to the MTA in support of considering, developing and submitting a NTIA Broadband grant proposal for MTA as a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Authorize the Executive Director to enter into a services contract with CBG Communications for \$40,000.

Background:

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 signed by President Obama on February 17, 2009 provides \$787 billion, represents perhaps the largest federal government economic stimulus effort since the New Deal. The \$787 billion in new funding is allocated among an array of investment priorities and tax credits, with the near-term objective of creating jobs and a longer-term objective of improving national infrastructure. Of the \$787 billion, \$7.2 billion was allocated for grant and loan programs to stimulate the development of broadband infrastructure and services to be administered by two federal agencies. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), an agency within the Department of Commerce, was appropriated \$4.7 billion, with the USDA's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) receiving \$2.5 billion. Most of these funds will be made available in the form of competitive grants to qualifying government, nonprofit, and private-sector entities across the nation. Thus ARRA provides local and state governments, nonprofits, broadband advocates and private-sector providers an opportunity to receive substantial federal funding to hasten the deployment of broadband.

At MTA's Workshop on February 28, 2009 the Board identified that looking into how MTA could compete for ARRA funding to be the highest priority for the very near term and to consider obtaining consulting and grant writing services to facilitate MTA evaluating opportunities, developing a competitive project and having a high quality grant submission in order to obtain Broadband stimulus funding that will further the deployment and use of broadband in Marin County.

Discussion:

Staff has worked with Tom Robinson, CBG Communications to identify consulting and grant writing services support that would be appropriate for the MTA in regard to ARRA Broadband opportunities. The attached document is a proposal from Tom Robinson that identifies proposed services associated with concept development, the beginning to end grant proposal/application development process and the budget for the NTIA grant development project. The following highlights the elements of the Work Plan and the proposed budget.

- **Concept Development** – It will be important for the Project (or amalgam of projects) to be as wide and varied as possible in order to meet as many of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's (ARRA's) evaluation criteria for the NTIA BTOP (Broadband Technology Opportunities Program) Grants, which could mean developing a variety of partnerships between the MTA and allied agencies (as well as a variety of agencies of the MTA's members being involved), while also making sure that the Project meets, and that grant funding would provide benefits to, the needs and the mission of the MTA's member jurisdictions. Because of the potential nature, complexity and extent of the project(s), it will be important to work as diligently as feasible ahead of the issuance of the NOFA (Notice of Funding Availability) or RFP by the NTIA (potentially as early as late April after comments are received concerning the NTIA's Request for Information and feedback and the FCC's determination of key definitions such as "unserved" and "underserved") and then crystallize, refine and detail the concept within the bounds of the application requirements so that it can be submitted on time and have the greatest chance of success.

Overall project components would look to:

- Improve Broadband use by, and access by the public to, public safety agencies
- Provide the greatest broadband speed possible to "unserved" and "underserved" areas
- Provide sustainable access by disadvantaged populations
- Provide provision of equipment and training at schools, libraries, healthcare providers and community centers

As we explore and try to consolidate ideas into a comprehensive, integrated concept, potentially with a catchy, catch-all name, it will also be important to remember five (5) key tests that must be applied to the project and all of its elements:

1. The proposed project would not have been implemented during the grant period without federal assistance;
2. The entire project must be completed within two (2) years of the award;
3. The project should serve as an economic stimulus in as many ways as possible (economic development, creating or saving jobs, developing the workforce for the future, etc.);

4. There must be a verifiable , allocated 20% match in funds for the entire project, from the entities involved or the State, or through in-kind matches (the in-kind match and cash provision evaluation criteria are in 15CFR, Section 24.24); and
 5. The entire project should be sustainable once the grant has been utilized and the project has been completed.
- **Process** – There are a number of elements from start to finish, in the registration, concept development, grant application and proposal development, filing and follow-up process, that will require focus and ramp up efforts, as follows:
 - Registration activities
 - Comprehensive concept development
 - Partnership development
 - Coordination with the State
 - Review of the application forms and development of a grant proposal outline
 - Development of the full grant proposal and completion of the application
 - Grant application and proposal submission
 - Follow-up

The aim is for detailed attention to the above to provide the highest potential for a successful grant award.

- **Budget for the project** –

The CBG Communications Team that will be working on the project will include Tom Robinson - President, Dick Nielson – Senior Engineer, Dr. Connie Book - Lead Researcher, and Katherine Eves, federal grant writer specialist.

The estimated cost for the project is \$40,000 including expenses. Given the anticipated NTIA short timeframe for the first round of ARRA grant submissions the high level breakdown of approximately 200 consulting hours for the project would be:

- 70 hours in April to assist with registration, full concept development, detailed NTIA Application form and criteria review from the grant writer’s perspective and helping define partnership responsibilities and components as part of the overall concept development;
- 70 hours in May to provide a wide range of inputs and insert the comprehensive technical plan, business plan, cost analysis and budget and sustainability plan into the detailed grant application and proposal as required by the NTIA; assist with redrafts and responding to grant-related questions and reviews by project partners;

- 40 hours in June to polish the draft based on the grant writing specialist's analysis; submission by the deadlines, verifying receipt and beginning follow-up; and
- 20 hours in July to frequently follow-up and help respond to NTIA questions and requests.

These timeframes may change based upon ongoing updated information and strategy for submission for NTIA ARRA Broadband Grants.

Financial Impact:

The estimated \$40,000 for this project can be funded within the current MTA budget Professional Services for 2008-09 given the estimated end of year under runs in Legal and Deputy Executive Director line items. There is also \$38,000 available in Contingency for the current year.