

FY 2021-22 Budget Board of Supervisor Inquiry Form

Deadline: April 30, 2021

Please email: CAO-Budget@sonoma-county.org

Board Member	
Gorin	
Rabbitt	
Coursey	
Gore	x
Hopkins	

Department: CAO

Date: April, 2021

Inquiry Number: 69

Request/Question:

Requests on Organizational improvements for:

- Grant Writing & Administration
 - o Grant writing = Q: Build internal capacity on contract with grant writing consultants to “Go Get The Money?”
 - o Biden Infrastructure Plan
 - o FEMA BRIC Program
 - o USDA Rural Development loans
 - o State Infrastructure Bank
 - o Project Homekey
 - o etc, etc, etc.
 - o
- Cross Jurisdictional Improvements
 - o Cities, special districts, etc. = Intergovernmental Affairs
- We cannot leave money on the table
- We cannot burn into over existing staff with more grant writing and grant administration
- I would support using a set-aside from PG&E settlements dollars and/or STIMULUS to fund this work.

Response:

Staff are currently working to increase the scope and capacity of grant researchers and writers in order to obtain more grant funding for the County of Sonoma. Staff completed an RFP and increased the number of grant researching and writing contractors in order to broaden the scope of expertise, while increasing the total not-to-exceed amount of the grant to accommodate increased grant writing activities. Additionally, staff is evaluating ways to maximize the use of existing tools such as eCivis, and provide the necessary support to ensure that contractors remain up-to-date and have the information they need to develop successful proposals. Additional details:

Broadening the scope of our grant contractors

In recent years, the County has contracted with the Glen Price Group to perform grant researching and writing activities. The Glen Price Group is well versed in tracking and submitting funding applications for all grant areas, however in recent years their work with Sonoma County has focused on grants for health and human services. The County has additionally contracted with eCivis for access to grant locating software.

In 2021 the Policy, Grants and Special Projects unit completed a Request for Proposals for grant researching and writing services. A committee from multiple departments selected the Glen Price Group, Engineering Solutions Services and eCivis as ideal partners for grant researching, writing and locating. On October 19, 2021 the Board approved five-year contracts for the three organizations.

The addition of Engineering Solutions Services to Sonoma County's portfolio of grant writers and researchers greatly improves the scope of Sonoma County's grant contractors. Engineering Solutions Services' staff ESS staff are former municipal managers with technical and funding expertise particularly in the areas of emergency preparedness, infrastructure including water infrastructure, transportation, parks, energy efficiency and sustainability projects.

Engineering Solutions Services will focus on researching and writing grants that support the Resilient Infrastructure and Climate Action and Resiliency pillars of the strategic plan, in addition to other related priorities. The Glen Price Group will focus their attention on researching and writing grants for the Healthy and Safe Communities, Organizational Excellence and Racial Equity and Social Justice pillars of the strategic plan and other related priorities. This approach will allow contractors to focus on their areas of expertise and increase the chances that all county initiatives receive grant researching and writing support.

In addition to increasing the number of contractors and creating clear areas of focus for each contractor, staff are working with the contractors to improve the methodology for grant research and writing and better utilize the tools that contractors make available. The Glen Price Group and Engineering Solutions Services will utilize a matrix with fundable projects derived from the Strategic Plan (and other funding priorities) to track upcoming funding opportunities. The Strategic Plan provides a detailed picture for funding needs in Sonoma County, which will result in more accurate and useful recommendations of funding opportunities.

The scope and cost of the eCivis software will remain relatively unchanged, however staff will work with eCivis to determine how the County could make better use of the software. The County will expand our use of eCivis' targeted funding location software, and the platform for tracking grant applications and awards.

Increasing capacity of grant contracts

In FY 2020-21 the County contracted with the Glen Price Group for up to \$225,000 in grant writing and research. In FY 2021-22 the County will increase the not-to-exceed amount for grant researching and writing to \$300,000 total annually; \$200,000 with the Glen Price Group and \$100,000 with Engineering Solutions Services. The County will continue contracting with eCivis for about \$35,000 annually.

To fund these contracts the County Administrator appropriated half of the not-to-exceed amount for Glen Price Group and Engineering Solutions Services, along with the full amount of the eCivis contract. The CAO appropriations for the Glen Price Group and Engineering Solutions Services contract will fund grant research and CAO-led and select grant writing activities. Historically departments have

established some appropriations for grant writing, however the CAO does not track how much departments are appropriating for grant writing and the CAO has not made recommendations to departments on reasonable appropriations for grant writing.

The CAO will work with departments to determine the amount of funding appropriated for grant writing activities. The CAO will collect data to analyze how much departments are budgeting for grant writing contractors, how much is typically spent, and the funding that results from the initial grant writing investment. Using this data the CAO will make recommendations to departments regarding how much funding each department should allocate to adequately fund grant writing services.

Internal capacity to support grant identification and writing

Grant researching and writing contracts are an important component to securing funding, however there must also be staff capacity to work with the contractors to fine-tune funding priorities and develop successful applications. Over the past few years, the Board of Supervisors provided funding and supported programs that enhance the County's ability to pursue grants successfully. Specifically, the Board added grant management staff to select programs and restructured the Policy, Grants and Special Projects team.

New Grant Management Staff in Departments

The Board has supported adding staff to programs that have significant grant funding sources. While contractors may lead efforts to research and write grants the Board has recognized that it is critical to have staff assigned to tracking fundable projects and priorities, and communicate developments to grant contractors. Additionally, staff must be ready to assist with collecting information for grant contractors to develop accurate and robust proposals. In particular, the Board established a climate unit, which will be responsible for tracking potential projects and funding sources, and the Board has added similar capacity to Vegetation Management, Emergency Management, Transportation and Public Works and others.

Program Optimization

In FY 2020-21, the Board restructured the Office of Resiliency to create the new Policy, Grants and Special Projects division in the County Administrator's Office and approved the Strategic Plan. The Policy, Grants and Special Projects division is responsible for maintaining the Countywide grant research and writing contracts, facilitating the cross-departmental Grants Steering Committee, and tracking and facilitating implementation of the Strategic Plan. As a part of this effort, the Policy, Grants and Special Projects division is working with departments and grant researching and writing contractors to determine fundable projects or efforts that support the Strategic Plan. The Policy, Grants and Special Projects division will maintain Countywide awareness of funding opportunities and work with grant contractors to make recommendations to departments on when to apply for funding.

The Policy, Grants and Special Projects division will work with the County Administrator's legislative program to identify areas for increased advocacy that will help the County achieve the objectives in the Strategic Plan. Additionally, Policy, Grants and Special Projects will work with the legislative program to understand upcoming grant opportunities. Having additional lead time on grant opportunities will allow for more time to develop successful applications.