Board of County Commissioners
Agenda Request

Date of Meeting: April 7, 2020

Date Submitted: February 19, 2020

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

From: Wesley Hall, Interim County Administrator

Subject: Approval of Federal Funding Action Plan for Gadsden County and Congressional Partners

Statement of Issue:
Gadsden County is seeking assistance in pursuing Federal Grant Funding. Congressional Partners is a Federal funding agency that specializes in helping counties and cities, colleges and universities, hospitals and medical centers, social services organizations, and other non-profits win federal dollars for their priority financial needs.

Background:
The process for securing Federal funding is extremely challenging. Congressional Partners would function as Gadsden County’s Washington D.C. staff to pursue grant opportunities. Over 90% of the work involved in securing grants would be performed by Congressional Partners. This would include identifying grant opportunities and access both eligibility and competitiveness before grants are released to the public. Managing the grant application timeline and deliverables on each grant. Finalizing the grant proposal by providing multi-level reviews to ensure editorial input cohesiveness and clarity.

Analysis:
On April 23, 2019 a conference call was held between Gadsden County and Congressional Partners. Congressional Partners stated that there is over Four Trillion dollars available in Federal Grant opportunities, and they’re experts in securing grant funding for cities and counties. Attached is a checklist of Federal funding possibilities.

Staff reached out to Congressional Partners recently to see if they were still willing to work with the County to assist in pursuing grant opportunities. They confirmed they would welcome the assignment.
**Fiscal Impact:**

Staff was issued an Action Plan for a 6-month period to determine if the agreement is beneficial.

**Options:**

1. Approve the Federal Funding Action Plan between Gadsden County and Congressional Partners and the monthly payment plan of $4,000.00 for a 6-month trial period.
2. Do not approve.
3. Board direction.

**Interim County Administrator’s Recommendation:**

Option 1.

**Attachments:**

1. Action Plan
Federal Funding Action Plan for Gadsden County

Objective:

Congressional Partners ("CP") proposes to help Gadsden County ("the County") secure major federal support to fund your priority needs.

Federal funding will be achieved through competitive grants, discretionary grants, and Congressional appropriations.

The ultimate objective is for every federal dollar we secure to provide budget relief for the County and/or help you take a leap forward in serving your residents.

Situation Analysis:

- Gadsden County’s federal funding history shows the County recognizes the federal government as a strategic partner. That’s great! However, all of Gadsden County’s grant awards come from just three federal agencies (EPA, DOJ, and USDA) -- and the awards are relatively small. Simply put, the County is missing out on significant federal dollars.

- CP specializes in helping local governments diversify and grow their federal funding portfolios.

- As you may know, within the federal government’s $4.7 trillion budget, there are many competitive and discretionary grant programs across multiple federal agencies to support counties like Gadsden County.

- Beyond EPA, DOJ, and USDA, we’re actively tracking major dollars for municipalities through the EDA, ETA, DOD, DOT, USDA, and other federal agencies -- dollars for economic development, transportation infrastructure, brownfields, pedestrian walkways, housing, fire prevention initiatives, water/wastewater treatment, smart policing, workforce training, and much more.

- The keys to winning federal grants are to 1) have a crystal-clear understanding of what the federal program officers are looking for in an award-worthy submission and 2) begin writing the grant long before it’s publicly announced.

- Gadsden County currently does not have a designated grant writer to pursue grants on a regular basis. CP's role is to serve as the County's "multiplier force" to identify, write, submit, mobilize Congressional support for, win, and comply with federal grants.

- Given Mrs. Dee Jackson’s previous experience as a grant writer for Gadsden County, she would help CP get traction immediately.
CP will leverage the Florida Congressional delegation to support every Gadsden County grant application.

**Scope of Work:**

1. **Develop Funding Strategies:**
   
   A. Conduct an in-depth Resource Inventory in Quincy to determine and document Gadsden County’s strengths and needs as they relate to pursuing federal support.
   
   B. Plan and implement a comprehensive federal grants program matching the County’s priority funding needs with federal grant accounts.
   
   C. Develop proposal themes and produce background materials that provide a compelling, persuasive presentation of Gadsden County’s priorities to potential federal funders.

2. **Win Federal Grants:**

   A. Identify grant opportunities and assess both eligibility and competitiveness before grants are released to the public. (While Gadsden County may technically be eligible for a given grant(s), it's CP’s job to ensure the County is truly competitive before we invest your resources in applying.)
   
   B. Help Gadsden County establish relationships with key agency staff ahead of grant announcements.
   
   C. Utilize agency staff recommendations on best practices from current grantees and review winning applications for similar projects.
   
   D. Manage the grant application timeline and deliverables for each grant from start to finish for the County.
   
   E. Guide Gadsden County’s content experts to help write the actual grant proposals.
   
   F. Assess the need and availability of external subject matter experts to develop or improve program design and/or specific application components.
   
   G. Review the individual grant-scoring criteria to ensure proper emphasis in the application.
   
   H. Finalize the grant proposal by providing multi-level reviews to ensure editorial input cohesiveness, and clarity. Check budgets for cost-effectiveness, completeness, and accuracy.

   I. Schedule substantive meetings with Members of Congress, Administration officials, and their staff in D.C. and in Florida to highlight the County’s federal needs.
J. Generate quality third-party support letters.

K. Ensure Gadsden County’s projects make the priority list of your Congressional champions.

L. After winning grants, CP will provide the County with compliance support, as needed.

The Congressional Partners Team:

Congressional Partners is a federal funding agency that is passionate about serving local governments and organizations that house people... feed people... educate people... heal people... and create jobs for people. CP professionals have prepared grant applications that secured over $180 million in federal funding from EDA, DOD, DOL, DOJ, HUD, EPA, and other agencies for municipalities and a wide range of nonprofits. Our senior team consists of:

1. Xavier Warren served as the Development Director for a leading federal government relations firm, where he tracked grant programs and legislation, planned and implemented successful federal funding strategies, and secured Congressional and Administration support for local governments. He previously worked at the U.S. Department of State, where he received a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of his work.

2. Kristina Clark is a federal program design and grants expert who has helped municipalities win awards ranging from $200,000 to $6 million – dollars from DOJ, SAMHSA, and other federal agencies.

3. Rebekah Cross has written and produced winning federal and foundation grants for 30 years. She has a passion for working with counties, cities, and other nonprofits.

4. Marian Chambers has more than 20 years of experience in grantsmanship for nonprofits. During the past two years, Marian has secured over $12 million in grant awards.

5. Brandon Bookout assists CP clients in implementing their federal objectives through analyzing policy and leveraging Congressional and Administration relationships. Brandon previously worked at a public-private organization in which he helped local governments communicate their needs at the state and federal levels.

6. Brandon Northington, J.D., is a seasoned trial attorney. He provides legislative and regulatory advocacy to CP clients. Prior to joining CP, Brandon served as staff counsel for GEICO. He previously worked as an Assistant State Attorney for the State of Maryland.

We view ourselves as an extension of Gadsden County’s staff. In that spirit, CP will help the County build its internal grants capacity -- you will become more knowledgeable and skilled in the federal funding process.

We never chase money. Rather, we will pursue only grants that align with Gadsden County’s priorities and for which the County is truly competitive.
Budget:

When Xavier Warren served as the Development Director for a leading federal government relations agency, that agency’s typical monthly minimum retainer was $7,500, plus expenses -- and some clients paid as much as $10,000/month. Xavier loved helping clients build successful federal funding strategies but had to turn away many worthy counties solely because of price. When you’re passionate about serving municipalities, that’s painful!

He opened Congressional Partners to assist counties exactly like Gadsden County. CP’s typical minimum retainer for the scope of work described here is $6,500/month, plus expenses, for one year. Our typical retainer fee is less simply because we reduced overhead.

We recognize and appreciate the County’s budget constraints. A core principle at CP has always been to try to not let money get in the way of serving worthy clients. Therefore, please allow us to propose an initial six-month “audition” at a reduced retainer of $4,000/month. The only expense would be for the travel cost of two CP professionals to conduct the Resource Inventory in Quincy.

During the audition period, Congressional Partners will produce these five deliverables:

1. Conduct a Resource Inventory to identify specific federal funding requests.
2. Prepare a comprehensive Federal Grants Grid (our strategic plan for Gadsden County) so the County’s leadership can review and assess firsthand the federal funding opportunities CP is targeting.
3. Arrange substantive Congressional and Executive Branch meetings in D.C. with the federal program officers who have jurisdiction over the funding for Gadsden County.
4. Help the County start preparing an award-worthy grant application(s).
5. You will get to evaluate Congressional Partners' strategic thinking and added value.

If Gadsden County is pleased in every respect with CP during this initial six-month period, you may then decide whether to retain CP for our typical minimum service period of one year at an increased monthly retainer (negotiable).

Our objective is to deliver the highest possible ROI so the County Administrator, County Commissioners, and professional staff exchange high-fives and say, "Let's do that again!"

Conclusion:

For all the reasons described in this document, Congressional Partners would welcome the assignment to maximize federal support for Gadsden County in the months and years ahead. Thank you for your serious consideration of this Federal Funding Action Plan.

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