



City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL DATE: MAY 5, 2026

FROM: OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER WARDS: ALL

SUBJECT: APPROVE A POLICY EXCEPTION ON USAGE OF A CITYWIDE GRANT WRITER BID PANEL TO ASSIST DEPARTMENTS IN COMPLETION OF OUTSIDE COMPETITIVE GRANT FUNDING APPLICATIONS

ISSUE:

Approve a policy exception to the September 20, 2022 City Council-approved requirement that all grant panel bids would automatically be awarded to the lowest bidder, as set forth in this report, for the use of consultants on a Citywide grant writer panel established to assist citywide departments in completion of outside competitive grant applications.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council:

1. Approve a policy exception to the September 20, 2022 City Council-approved requirement that all grant panel bids would automatically be awarded to the lowest bidder, as set forth in this report, for the use of consultants on a Citywide grant writer panel established to assist citywide departments in completion of outside competitive grant applications.

BACKGROUND:

The City is a robust grant writing operation and submits specialized grants across departments from small sums to multimillion-dollar applications. The City hired its first grants specific staff for the Office of the City Manager in late 2021. Since that time, the Office of the City Manager in partnership with City departments has built out the Citywide grant management function by developing processes to strengthen strategic alignment, provide trainings, facilitate robust internal reviews, share resources and funding opportunities citywide, and improve fiscal accountability. The availability of new grant writing tools has paid dividends for the City. In 2025 alone, the City of Riverside benefitted from over \$40 million in awarded external grants, earmarks, and entitlements. The goal of the City’s grant program is to secure funding for services and projects for which the City otherwise would be required to utilize local tax dollars.

DISCUSSION:

On September 20, 2022, the City Council authorized Master Service Agreements with 10 grant writing firms that had gone through the process of applying for Request for Qualifications (RFQ)

2168. With RFQ 2168 the City sought to develop a pool of short-term and technical grant writers who would be available to assist departments when time and/or in-house expertise is not available to complete complex funding applications. This pool is accessed through the City Manager's Office and departmental budgets bear the cost of services. The goal is to build an as-needed resource to enable more complex funding applications to be completed. From its inception, this panel has been used by City departments approximately 25 times.

According to the City's Administrative Policy (Administrative Manual Numbers 07.022.00 and 07.023.00), departments are permitted to utilize contractor and consultant panels for professional services and construction projects (excluding design-build). All members of an established panel in the applicable category must be solicited when seeking proposals, whether for informal or formal procurement. Departments must obtain necessary approvals to initiate procurement, develop project scopes, and submit them to the Purchasing Division for posting on the City's bidding platform. Purchasing reviews submissions, ensures compliance with relevant laws and best practices, and forwards proposals to evaluation teams, which assess and rank responses. Departments then negotiate agreements, route contracts for required approvals, and submit them to the City Council if thresholds are exceeded. Supplemental agreements, budget transfers, and contract execution all follow defined procedural steps to ensure transparency, fairness, and alignment with the City Charter. These policies establish a structured, standardized process while still allowing for limited discretion in cases where departmental justification and minimal additional costs are demonstrated.

In the original City Council approval, staff had mistakenly stated that that all grant panel bids would automatically be awarded to the lowest bidder. In practice, this rule might functionally disallow grant writers who, for nominally higher bid pricing, may offer greater expertise in a specific funding area and/or have the benefit of previous awards for a grant where the City was interested in potentially seeking funding.

In November of 2025, the Grants Administrator allowed a department to make a distinction between a "low bid" and a "responsive" bid for a grant writer where a particular consultant had extensive past experience in a funding area and prior awarded grant applications. This respondent was not a, "low bidder", under current rules, but the experience of the grant writer was judged to give the City a better chance of obtaining outside funding (although most grant applications are competitive). In the above instance the Grants Administrator asked for a rationale from the department and further required the department head to validate the justification. Additional costs in this instance were nominal (under \$5,000.00).

In consultation with the Finance Department Purchasing Division, staff is requesting that the City Council approve a policy exception to rules governing the Citywide Grant Writer Panel as discussed below. These "guidelines of use" are a restatement and exception of parameters that were detailed to the City Council with its September 2022 approval of the Grant Writer Panel.

Proposed Policy Exception to City Council September 20, 2022 City Council-approved requirement that all grant panel bids would automatically be awarded to the lowest bidder:

- Hiring costs for a grant writer should not exceed 10% or any potential grant award;
- If one specific grant writer is utilized by multiple departments for more than \$100,000 annually combined, a City Council authorization will be obtained before further usage of that specific consultant;
- Use of a consultant on any one project will be limited by the consultant maximum stated in the City Purchasing Resolution. Larger consultant services above that amount will require City Council authorization;

- In certain limited circumstances, a department requesting grant writing assistance may make an argument that a bidder from a completed Request for Proposals, who is not necessarily the lowest cost respondent, may be chosen if:
 - There is a clear demonstrated strength in funding background and/or past awarded grants that makes an alternative bidder a better choice;
 - The department head and/or deputy department head requesting services concurs;
 - The City Manager’s Office concurs with the argument; and
 - Additional costs are minimal (e.g., under \$5,000.00).

The current grant writer panel for the City extends to approximately late 2027 (i.e., a five-year panel). Because of the time required to rebid the panel, staff will begin a new RFQ process in late 2026 to ensure uninterrupted access to an important consultant service that has enabled the City to grow and diversify its grant activity. It is anticipated that a new Grant Writer Panel will be presented to the City Council for approval in mid-2027.

The original agreement was approved by City Council in accordance with Purchasing Resolution 24101 Section 508 which states, “Contracts procured through Formal Procurement shall be awarded by the Awarding Entity to the Lowest Responsive and Responsible Bidder, except that...(c) Contracts procured through Formal Procurement for Services or Professional Services, where a Request for Proposals or Request for Qualifications was used to solicit Bids, shall be awarded by the Awarding Entity in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth in the Request for Proposals or Request for Qualifications...”

Purchasing Resolution 24101 Section 1104 “Change Orders” states that “Modifications to a Purchase Order shall be made only by Change Order. Subject to the availability of funds, Change Orders may be utilized for purposes of...(3) modifying scope of work/services being provided, where the modification is reasonably related to the original scope of work/services...(5) modifying contract completion time or the term of a Contract, [or]...(6) any other change approved by the Manager.”

The Purchasing Manager concurs that the recommended action is in compliance with Purchasing Resolution 24101.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This is a policy update request that has no fiscal impact.

Prepared by: Jeff McLaughlin, Grants Administrator
Certified as to
availability of funds: Julie Nemes, Interim Finance Director
Approved by: Edward Enriquez, Assistant City Manager and Chief Financial Officer
Approved as to form: Rebecca McKee-Reimbold, Interim City Attorney