

## REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

### ONLINE AND E-COMMERCE INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT HAZLETON, PA

While the Covid-19 Pandemic has been destructive to the local economy in Luzerne County it has been even more so to the Greater Hazleton Area as our region has been struggling for years with higher levels of poverty and unemployment, and lower incomes and educational attainment than the County as a whole. The City of Hazleton has been hit hardest, with 54% of its population considered Low-Moderate Income (LMI) and more than 20% below poverty--prior to the pandemic.

Typical “Main Street” businesses, especially retail, restaurant, and service-based businesses, are most vulnerable. Many small businesses, especially immigrant businesses that make up more than half of Hazleton’s downtown economy, may not recover due to lack of financial solvency, limited financial literacy, and inability to secure government-assisted emergency grant and loan programs. Language and cultural barriers further contribute to communication difficulties during this critical time.

When the pandemic hit, the Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress, together with the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce, CAN DO, the city and local and regional economic development partners, proactively formed the COVID-19 Recovery & Resiliency Task Force to help coordinate small businesses recovery efforts and identify new initiatives and programs to help them rebound. Based upon the results of our Greater Hazleton Small Business COVID-19 Impact Study, we implemented the Hazleton Area Small Business Emergency Relief Microgrant Program, which provided privately funded financial relief to 85 local businesses.

We have also identified the need for several business recovery initiatives, which are designed to supplement the broader “Get Businesses Back on Their Feet” initiative being undertaken in cooperation with the Greater Wilkes Barre Chamber of Commerce and other partners.

**This Request for Qualifications is for online and e-commerce infrastructure development.** This initiative will provide information technology assistance to existing retail and service small business owners with less than 15 employees and less than \$500K in annual revenue to help them meet growing expectations of online/e-commerce, mail order, and delivery.

Based upon the Greater Hazleton Small Business COVID-19 Impact Study our Task Force conducted in April 2020, we found that nearly 35% of businesses do not have a website, and more than 82% don’t sell any of their products or services online. More than 20% of businesses would like to market bilingually and expand their customer base but don’t know how.

Selected firms will be responsible for providing basic e-commerce based web platforms for businesses within the Greater Hazleton area, particularly those considered to be historically disadvantaged. Women-owned businesses, Main Street business located within Downtown Hazleton’s state designated Main Street Program District, and those that have not received any prior federal CARES Act funding (such as Paycheck Protect Program-PPP loans, or the Economic Injury Disaster Loans-EIDL) will be given special

consideration for assistance. Applications for small business assistance will be prepared and screened by members of the Greater Hazleton COVID-19 Recovery & Resiliency Task Force.

Funding for this initiative is being provided by the Luzerne County Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act grant via the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce.

## **SCOPE OF SERVICES SUMMARY**

The anticipated scope of work for this project is expected to consist of the following tasks. However, the final scope of services will be negotiated with the selected firm(s) and may include modified tasks to meet project goals:

1. Applications for small business assistance will be prepared and solicited by members of the Greater Hazleton COVID-19 Recovery & Resiliency Task Force. Applicants will be screened and a maximum of 25 qualified applicants will then be selected by the Task Force in cooperation with firm(s).
2. Consultant(s) will be responsible for building basic, landing page style, websites for the business, which may include e-commerce infrastructure in easy to modify drag-and-drop platforms. This will require:
  - Review of business operations prior to the pandemic, how they have modified or “pivoted” during the pandemic, and what they would like to achieve from having a website
  - Review of financial commitment to keep up with domains, web hosting, and e-commerce maintenance after site is built. Consultant should be prepared to review different platforms with selected businesses to ensure future maintenance is affordable.
  - Basic tutorial to the business owner to explain how to update, add product info, photos, etc.
  - Websites need to be built in programs that allow for translation services such as a translation plugin or google

Firm(s) will be responsible for setting appointments to meet with business owners (either in person or virtually) in accordance with PA Department of Health COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Firm(s) should be prepared to discuss their approach to the scope of services in an interview to be held virtually.

**Website development must be completed by December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020.**

## **COMPENSATION**

Consultant(s) compensation for services will be based upon a maximum amount not-to-exceed method of compensation utilizing hourly billing rates of the firm/team. This will be based upon a maximum fee allowance assigned to each business client. The goal is to provide web design services to a minimum of 25 business owners with an anticipated budget of \$2,000 per site. *Note: If more than one consultant team is selected to provide services, each will be given a maximum fee allowance for their respective services.* Consultant invoices will be accepted upon launching of each business website. Payments will be processed at the end of each month.

## **QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY**

All respondents should submit a written Qualifications Summary to include information about the consultants team directly related to the selection criteria outlined below.

1. Description of development team. Provide all information for the primary contact person, along with all of the key people that will be a part of the firm and their proposed role.
2. Describe the firm's related experience, including but not limited to: web development, e-commerce platforms
3. Describe the firm's experience working with lower income, historically disadvantaged (especially Hispanic), and/or women-owned businesses.
4. Describe the firm's familiarity with the City and region.
5. Describe the firm's ability to speak and write in English, Spanish, and any other languages.
6. List at least two references for services provided, similar to this proposed initiative.
7. Include a disclosure of any known competing interests or potential conflicts of interest for the consultant and any subcontractor(s).
8. Hourly rates of firm performing desired services as well as estimated time needed for development. Please also include maximum page numbers or size of the website in summary and if you're willing to include a timeframe of hosting for e-commerce sites to maximize budget.
9. Signed Contractor Acknowledgment agreeing to abide by federal and state statutes and regulations governing use of federal funds (Exhibit A).
10. Optional: Provide project example(s) of similar type, where the firm has been able to provide creative, yet realistic, online and e-commerce solutions to small business owners.

## **SUBMITTALS**

Qualification Summaries must be received no later than 5:00 PM on October 21, 2020. Electronic submittals are required (PDF format).

Questions regarding this RFQ may be submitted via e-mail to Jocelyn Sterenchock at [jsterenchock@hazletoncando.com](mailto:jsterenchock@hazletoncando.com).

It is the responsibility of the prospective consultant to ensure that their submittal is received prior to the deadline. Any submittal received after the deadline may not be considered.

## **ANTICIPATED SCHEDULE (please note this may be subject to change)**

- October 21, 2020: Qualification Summaries due
- October 23 & 26, 2020: Firm interviews via Zoom (if needed)
- October 30, 2020: Consultant selection/contracting
- November 2, 2020: Project begins
- December 23, 2020: Project ends

## **CONTRACTOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (EXHIBIT A)**

By signing this acknowledgment, consultant(s) agree to abide by the following federal and state statutes and regulations governing use of federal funds (Article V of the Luzerne County COVID-19 Relief Block

Grant Contract #C000074007: Compliance with Applicable Statutes and Regulations), attached as Exhibit A, and including but not limited to:

- Prohibition of Illegal Alien Labor on Assisted Projects Act (P.L. 173, No. 43)
- Nondiscrimination and Sexual Harassment Provisions and its applicability to all subcontractors
- State Contractor Responsibility Program regarding suspension, debarment and tax liabilities
- Americans with Disabilities Act
- Reimbursement for Travel
- Contractor Integrity Provisions
- Right to Know Law Provisions
- Federal Contracting Provisions regarding Small and Minority Businesses, Women's Business Enterprises, and Labor Surplus Area Firms (2 CFR 200.321)
- Termination Provisions (2 CFR Par 200 Appendix II (B))

By (signature): \_\_\_\_\_

Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_