



Takoma Park City Council Meeting – July 20, 2022 Agenda Item 11

Work Session

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Procurement – Contract Award Recommendation for Implementation of Direct Cash Assistance Program with a Program Launch in September 2022.

Recommended Council Action

The Office of the City Manager recommends that the City Council approve the contract award to LiveStories, a for-profit business entity, who will partner with a local non-profit organization to assist the City in recruiting beneficiaries, processing applications and distributing ARPA-funded Direct Cash Assistance grants to eligible residents.

Context with Key Issues

Background

The City Council approved the City's ARPA Spending Plan on March 2, 2022, as outlined in Ordinance No. 2022-3 approving and adopting the budget for ARPA-funded projects. The list of ARPA projects to be implemented includes a Direct Cash Assistance Program in the amount of \$2,300,000. The FY23 budget includes funds for \$1,760,000 for this program. The 1st FY23 Budget Amendment adds \$540,000 in ARPA funds that were allocated for the Direct Cash Assistance Program in FY22, but not expended, for a FY23 budget total of \$2,300,000.

The City Council has directed staff to distribute the \$2.3 million allocation for direct cash assistance as rapidly as practical. The purpose of the Direct Cash Assistance Program is to provide immediate relief in the form of cash payments to vulnerable residents who were economically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including residents living in rent-stabilized apartments or enrolled in income-tested assistance programs.

The City of Takoma Park Direct Cash Assistance Program will provide a one-time, lump sum payment per eligible household in the amount of \$1,000. Eligible households include those with incomes of \$50,000 or less per year who live in Takoma Park. In the City of Takoma Park, this represents approximately 2,131 households. This target group and level of benefit provides an impactful amount of money for residents who need assistance and may have suffered disproportionately from the pandemic.

The form of the Direct Cash Assistance payment to eligible households will be finalized with the selected contractor. The recommended contractor can support ACH (an electronic bank-to-bank payment), paper checks and debit card options for fund disbursement.

Request for Proposals (RFP)

On June 17, 2022 the City of Takoma Park posted an RFP seeking proposals from qualified organizations to assist the City in recruiting beneficiaries, processing applications and distributing ARPA-funded Direct Cash Assistance grants to eligible residents. The Direct Cash Assistance Program will have a maximum duration of 12 months based on the contract award date to be determined.

Qualified organizations include:

- Certified (501c3 status) nonprofit organization(s) with a social service focus and having established networks with other community-based organizations located in Prince George's County, MD or Montgomery County, MD;
- Private sector entity (e.g., LLC, C-Corp) in collaboration with a certified nonprofit organization as described above (the lead entity may be either the private sector entity or the nonprofit organization);
- Organizations with knowledge of target population located in the City of Takoma Park;
- Organizations with experience working with low- to moderate-income households preferred.

One proposal was received by the closing date of July 11, 2022 at 11:59 p.m. Geocko, dba LiveStories, in partnership with Shephard's Table, submitted a proposal to manage the City's Direct Cash Assistance Program, ensure that eligible applicants are identified, and grant funds are distributed to residents of Takoma Park who are in need of financial assistance due to the negative economic impact of the pandemic.

The Recommended Contractor

LiveStories was established in 2015 and is headquartered in Seattle, Washington. Live Stories has worked with more than 350 local, state and federal governments on ARPA, CARES and CDBG programs. The recommended contractor is proposing to use a proprietary platform, FORWARD, to provide end-to-end support for the Direct Cash Assistance Program. The FORWARD tool provides the foundation of LiveStories's program administration and operational capabilities and has the capacity to design and administer the City's program. The four components of FORWARD include a searchable resource catalog, an application and intake portal, application processing module, payment processing module and an outreach and marketing module. Using the FORWARD platform enables Live Stories to provide complete operational support for marketing and outreach, application creation and intake, eligibility verification and processing, and payment processing. The recommended contractor can support ACH, paper checks and debit card options for fund disbursement.

The recommended contractor is sensitive to cultural, linguistic, and technology needs within the communities served and will make every effort to mitigate potential barriers. LiveStories has expressed their commitment to incorporating equity into every phase of the assistance program and will work with the City to reach traditionally hard-to-reach communities. The FORWARD platform can support 68 languages. LiveStories will receive guidance from the City in the development of application materials in all languages and formats required by the applicants.

Shepherd's Table, located in Silver Spring, MD, has been serving the community for 38 years and provides services that address food insecurity and homelessness through an array of programs designed both to meet immediate needs and to provide sustained social support. LiveStories will partner with Shepherd's Table to (1) provide safe, secure physical locations for prepaid card distribution, and (2) create and distribute marketing materials. Both LiveStories and Shepherd's Table have significant experience administering direct assistance programs.

Contract Price

The contractor has proposed a fee of \$149,900 which is equal to 6.5% of the ARPA budget amount of \$2,300,000. The proposed contract budget is responsive to the not-to-exceed amount of \$150,000 stipulated in the RFP.

Council Priority

Mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the Community and City Operations
Engaged, Responsive & Service-oriented Government

Environmental Considerations

Multiple projects included in the ARPA Spending Plan will have an environmental benefit to the City and further implement the Takoma Park Climate Action Plan goals. The Direct Cash Assistance Program does not have an identified environmental impact.

Fiscal Considerations

Per federal guidance, the City has until 2024 to obligate or encumber ARPA funds, and until the end of calendar year 2026 to fully spend down the funds. Any remaining balance of the \$17.4 million not spent by that date will be returned to the State of Maryland. ARPA funds are a one-time funding source and should not be spent on recurring costs that extend beyond 2026. The list of ARPA projects to be implemented includes the Direct Cash Assistance Program in the amount of \$2,300,000. The FY23 budget includes funds for \$1,760,000 for this program. The 1st FY23 Budget Amendment adds \$540,000 in ARPA funds that were allocated for the Direct Cash Assistance Program in FY22, but not not expended, for a FY23 budget total of \$2,300,000.

Racial Equity Considerations

Targeting ARPA relief to vulnerable populations is in line with Executive Order 13985, "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," which laid out a federal priority to support "equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality." The Direct Cash Assistance Program will provide resources and supportive services at no cost to vulnerable residents in Takoma Park.

Attachments and Links

Draft Ordinance

Introduced by: Councilmember

Single Reading:

CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND

ORDINANCE NO. 2022-

CONTRACT FOR DIRECT CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

WHEREAS, the City of Takoma Park City Council approved \$2,300,00 for the Direct Cash Assistance Program using funding received through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant award; and,

WHEREAS, the ARPA Manager developed a request for proposals (RFP) and posted RFP # ARPA-2022-07-11 on June 17, 2022; and,

WHEREAS, one proposal was received in response to the RFP from LiveStories, an eligible contractor type as defined in the RFP; and,

WHEREAS, the eligible contractor will partner with a local non-profit organization, Shepherd's Table, to ensure there is robust community representation in program marketing, outreach and support, and to provide participants with a safe, secure physical location to disburse grant funds; and,

WHEREAS, after evaluation, staff recommends awarding a contract to LiveStories based on the merits of the proposal submitted which includes an end-to-end solution for the administration and management of the program, a sound work plan, experience working with local governments and federal grant programs (including ARPA), and significant experience in the administration of direct assistance programs; and

WHEREAS, the contractor will refer program applicants to other resources if additional support is needed by an applicant; and,

WHEREAS, the contractor will initiate marketing of the program by September, 2022 and begin distribution of funds to eligible residents as applications are submitted.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TAKOMA PARK, MARYLAND, THAT:

SECTION 1. The City Manager is authorized to enter into a contract with the LiveStories for the administration and implementation of the ARPA-funded Direct Cash Assistance Program in the amount of \$149,900.

SECTION 2. This Ordinance shall become effective upon adoption.

ADOPTED this _____ day of July , 2022 by roll-call vote as follows:

AYE:

NAY:

ABSTAIN:

ABSENT: