



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 18, 2020

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of a Submission of a Grant Application for The Center for Tech and Civic Life COVID-19 Response Grant

ISSUE: The Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL) has generated a COVID-19 Response Grant program to all U.S. local election jurisdictions. Backed by a \$250 million private contribution, CTCL goals are to help ensure local election jurisdictions across the country have the staffing, training, and equipment necessary so that during the November General Election every eligible voter could participate in a safe and timely way and have their vote counted.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Ratify the grant application and award of \$201,650 received from CTCL. The City of Alexandria is eligible to apply for a grant amount based on a formula that considers the citizen voting age population and other jurisdiction demographic data; and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute all necessary documents that may be required.

The nation faced added challenges during the 2020 General Election which has incurred costs that were not previously budgeted. Never before has the U.S. held a presidential election during a national pandemic. In anticipation of high voter turnout, the General Registrar's Office made plans and did respond with care and consideration for public health and safety. While additional support was provided by the State, having access to additional funding sources allowed the City to lessen the burden on City as well as federal CARES Act funding.

The City hosted 32 precincts city-wide on Election Day for 101,573 active registered voters. The Virginia General Assembly passed HB 1 earlier this year that permits any registered voter to vote by absentee ballot in

any elections in which he is qualified to vote. During the 2020 June Republican Primary, of those that did vote, 30 percent of voters voted by absentee ballot. Counting mail-in ballots is a multiple step process that requires extended personnel hours and the purchase of new technical equipment and the addition of secure ballot drop boxes.

DISCUSSION: The CTCL grant funds can be used to cover certain election expenses incurred between June 15, 2020 and December 31, 2020. These include, but are not limited to, the costs associated with the safe administration of election responsibilities:

Support Early In-Person Voting and Vote by Mail

- Expand or maintain the number of in-person early voting sites, and
- Deploy additional staff and/or technology improvements to expedite and improve mail ballot processing

Ensure Safe, Efficient Election Day Administration

- Maintain open in-person polling places on Election Day,
- Procure Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and personal disinfectant to protect election officials and voters from COVID-19,
- Recruit and hire a sufficient number of poll workers and inspectors to ensure polling places are properly staffed,
- Provide voting facilities with funds to compensate for increased site cleaning and sanitization costs, and
- Deliver updated training for current and new poll workers administering elections in the midst of pandemic.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, increased safety measures were taken to protect volunteers, staff, and votes. This grant will help the City fund those efforts as well as fund the additional costs associated with processing absentee ballots. City funds would be needed to augment state funding in order to cover the cost of double and triple staffing levels needed to process absentee ballots and ensure votes were counted accurately and on time.

FISCAL IMPACT: There is no match requirement for the \$201,650 award, and therefore no additional cost to the City is incurred by applying for the grant.

STAFF:

Laura B. Triggs, Deputy City Manager

Angela Turner, General Registrar

Emily Poly, Budget Analyst, Office of Management and Budget

Alexis Quinn, Acting Elections Manager