MEMORANDUM

TO: Austin Community Technology & Telecommunications Commission

FROM: 2012 GTOPs Grant Review Task Force
           Via: John Speirs, Program Coordinator
                   Office of Telecommunications & Regulatory Affairs

DATE: September 14, 2011

SUBJECT: 2011-12 Grant for Technology Opportunities (GTOPs) Task Force Recommendations

The purpose of this report is for the Commission to review and approve the recommendations of the 2011 Grant for Technology Opportunities Program (GTOPs) Task Force chaired by Lemuel Williams, with members Elizabeth Quintanilla and Melvin White in attendance.

Introduction

The GTOPs program provides matching funds to Austin organizations and citizens' groups for projects focusing on use of information technology and connecting our citizens with computers and the Internet.

The task force recommends the Commission discuss the vision, mission and goals at the conclusion of this report, and recommend any changes as necessary.

Vision: A community where all citizens have access to the facilities and the necessary skills to participate in an emerging digital society.
Mission: To provide matching grant funds to Austin organizations for projects that create digital opportunities and foster digital inclusion.
Goals:
- Support programs that provide public access to computers and information technology, especially among underserved segments of our community.
- Support programs that provide information technology literacy, education, and training.
- Support programs that use information and communication technologies in innovative ways that serve the community.
- Provide seed funding for Austin community and non-profit organizations for their technological outreach efforts.

Recommendations

1. GTOPs Branding and Marketing

Staff presented the Task Force with an update on GTOPs Branding, including a new logo to be presented at the August 10th Commission Meeting. A marketing plan is currently being developed in coordination with the Communications and Public Information Office. Some characteristics of marketing plan, increased engagement of non-profit organizations, improved marketing through outreach. A goal for the branding effort and marketing plan is to increase the number of applicants for GTOPs providing increased competition and strengthening the competitive grant model which the program is built on.

As the City prepares to launch its new website, staff will continue to update www.gtops.org; but will redirect the site to austintexas.gov/gtops on December 19, 2011.

2. GTOPs funding increase of $25,000 to $175,000.

Recommendation to increase range of funding per organization from ($5,000 to $25,000) to ($10,000 to $30,000). The task force recognizes the importance of GTOPs funding within our community, and increased funding is consistent with the realistic funding requests being received for GTOPs. Last FY alone, the average request of all GTOPs applications was $23,334. While it is important to recognize the maximum amount an organization could apply for was $25,000, the demand is there, and a prime opportunity to adjust program guidelines to the needs of the organizations we are serving. This will also allow current staff (Program Coordinator) to manage the program without requiring additional staff support.

3. Mandatory GTOPs Orientation

The Task Force is recommending the GTOPs Orientation transition into a mandatory orientation with (2) dates proposed. The proposed mandatory orientation will be marketed as an introduction to the 2012 GTOPs cycle and provide information and resources for organizations applying for GTOPs. The mandatory orientation is proposed to be held; October 18, 2011: Evening GTOPs Orientation and October 19, 2011: Morning GTOPs Orientation.

4. Grant Application

Staff presented Task Force with revised Grant Application for 2012 Grant Cycle.

- Restructuring of Application, consisting of three sections; Introduction and Timeline, Application and FAQ's.

- Restructure required documentation additional documentation requirements.

- Welcome letter from key players for potential applicants developed for each Grant Cycle.

- Consistent use of the word "program" throughout application and program guidelines, this prevents disambiguation with the use of the word "project."

5. Review Board

Implement definitions to scoring system.

To achieve for consistent grant scoring from the Review Board, the Task Force Recommends the following scale be implemented;

Score	Descriptor	Additional Guidance on Strengths/Weaknesses
10	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
9	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
8	Excellent	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
7	Very Good	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
6	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
5	Satisfactory	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
4	Fair	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
3	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
2	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses
1	Question completed	No strengths and major weaknesses
0	Incomplete	Question not responded to

6. Timeline

September 14, 2011	Upon approval from Commission and pending Budget adoption; GTOPs Applications & Grant Review Committee Applications Released (Marketing Blitz Begins), 2012 GTOPs Grant Cycle Released
October 18, 2011	Evening GTOPs Orientation
October 19, 2011	Morning GTOPs Orientation
November 3, 2011	Grant Review Committee Applications Due
November 9, 2011	Commission Meeting – Review Committee Selected
December 9, 2011	GTOPs Applications Due
December 14, 2011	Review Committee Orientation
January 6, 2012	Written Questions Due (Reviewers)
January 20, 2012	Written Responses Due (Applicants)
February 1, 2012	First Round of Scores Due
February 17, 2012	Oral Presentations
February 24, 2012	Final Scores Due
March 2, 2012	Final Deliberation
March 14, 2012	Commission Meeting – Awards Recommendations Presented