


## City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 6, 2010

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: REQUEST FROM ACT FOR ALEXANDRIA FOR THE CITY TO PARTNER IN ESTABLISHING THE ACTION ALEXANDRIA NETWORK TO BETTER ENGAGE RESIDENTS IN CIVIC PROBLEM SOLVING AND TO INCREASE PHILANTHROPY IN THE COMMUNITY

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of a request from ACT for Alexandria for the City to be a partner in establishing a Web 2.0 ACTION Network to better engage residents in civic problem solving and increase philanthropy to local non profits and others.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council:

- (1) Appropriate funds from unspent Comprehensive Services Act general fund support to the Department of Human Services budget in the amount of \$50,000 which will then be encumbered specific to this project; and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute all necessary documents.

As a partner, the City would invest \$50,000 over the first two years of the project (calendar years 2010 and 2011). The project has received a grant of \$102,000 from the Knight Foundation, and an additional \$100,000 is committed from local sources pending the City's willingness to participate.

**BACKGROUND:** ACT for Alexandria (formerly known as the Alexandria Community Trust) is a local community foundation founded in 2004 to be a convener, collaborator and catalyst for increasing philanthropy focused on the City of Alexandria. In that role, ACT for Alexandria commissioned a \$20,000 study in the summer of 2009 to assess feasibility, cost and impact of developing a Web 2.0 program designed to enhance giving through volunteerism, donation of goods and financial contributions to local non-profits and others. The four-month study, was

conducted by expert analysts, overseen by a steering committee comprised of diverse city constituents i.e. ACPS, non profits, City officials, business community, and reviewed by the broader community. The study concluded that Alexandrians were ready for a next-generation solution for civic engagement.

Supporting evidence included high levels of activity in community list serves, deep participation in social networking platforms (e.g. Facebook), a limited but promising trial called “ACT Now” in conjunction with the Giving Circle of Alexandria, and the success of similar external initiatives known collectively as Government 2.0.

**DISCUSSION:** In the midst of the economic downturn, non profits, community members and the School Division articulated on-going challenges to get the word out about specific needs that would link goods, services and residents in need, in real time. Additionally, there was recognition that many Alexandrians are generous and willing to give their time, treasure and talent, but there is not a comprehensive avenue to seek opportunities to contribute. ACT for Alexandria convened a series of meetings to ascertain the need to develop a *Connect Alexandria* system. Once local buy-in was achieved, the aforementioned study was commissioned.

ACTion Alexandria, this initiative’s roll-out name, is a customized online ecosystem for Alexandrians to engage and interact on civic matters, especially human service matters. The ecosystem’s design and functionality will translate online interest into offline action that makes a tangible difference in the lives of Alexandrians. Core functionality will include: civic problem solving, email list building and distribution, surveying, ranking, voting, online discussion organization, project management, project archiving, and the capability for online donations to multiple entities.

A full-time “community manager” will monitor the online ecosystem, soliciting participation, resolving technical issues and shepherding enthusiasm into offline action. A part-time “business manager” will oversee the operation, develop partnerships, and migrate the initiative towards long term financial sustainability. Initially the ecosystem will organize around collectively identifying and solving civic problems—both big and small—that citizens prioritize as important and want to solve them. The ecosystem will evolve and enhance its functionality based on results and citizen feedback.

ACTion Alexandria will be a stand-alone initiative, administered by ACT and overseen by a small advisory board comprised of qualified citizens. This will be a public/private partnership with the City taking a role as partner, but not being the lead. Solutions will emanate from the community and not government; however, the City’s support is critical for the fund development from the Knight Foundation and local foundations.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The two year project will require a total budget of \$292,500. A \$102,000 cash matching grant from the Knight Foundation is already in place, with an additional \$100,000 committed from local sources, pending City support. Yielding 5:1 leverage for each City dollar spent, the City is requested to commit \$50,000 over two years. The Department of Human Services in conjunction with the Alexandria Community Policy Management Team (ACPMT) and Office of Management and Budget has refined the Comprehensive Services Act (CSA) budget projection process over the past two years. The most recent and conservative projection shows that there will be sufficient General Fund monies unspent in FY 2010 to be able to be reallocated to cover this project.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment I. Funding request from ACT for Alexandria

Attachment II. Project Budget

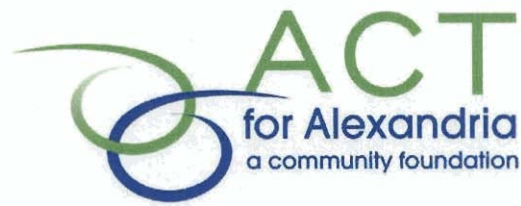
Attachment III. Platform Functionality Diagram

**STAFF:**

Debra Collins, Assistant City Manager

Bruce Johnson, Chief Financial Officer

Tony Castrilli, Director, Office of Communications



December 23, 2009

Mr. James Hartmann, City Manager  
City of Alexandria  
Room 3500, City Hall  
301 King Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Mr. Hartmann:

As a result of repeated requests from community members, deliberations by a steering committee and an extensive study, ACT for Alexandria proposes establishing the ACTion Alexandria network to better engage citizens in civic problem solving and to increase philanthropy in our community. ACT believes that in order for this effort to be successful, the City must be an active partner in the endeavor.

The attached overview, budget and technology functionality one-pager provide more detailed information in relation to the background of this initiative, the associated technology components and costs. A portion of the costs to implement ACTion Alexandria will be provided through a \$102,000 grant from the Knight Foundation. ACT has received notice of the Knight Foundation's approval of our grant request. ACT is poised to fully commit once the partnership of the City is secured.

Implementation of the ACTion Alexandria network has the potential to provide much for our community in many areas. Using available technology for Alexandrians to engage and interact on civic matters, particularly in the human services arena, will provide the opportunity for more citizens to be involved in the decision making process. This technology promises to engage citizens who may not have been previously involved, those who do not attend meetings or work sessions but have excellent thoughts and ideas on how to address some of our more crucial issues. From offering a forum to seek input to surveying the citizenry to providing online city forums to

seeking assistance with emergency issues, this effort is limitless as to the positive impact it can have on our community. If this effort proves to be as successful as we believe it will be, there is also the potential for both immediate and long term savings as alternative solutions to problems are discussed and problems are resolved before they become larger. This is particularly important in today's economic and budget climate.

As an active partner, an investment of \$50,000 from the City is requested over the first two years of this project noting that funding from other sources provides the City with a 5:1 leverage for every dollar invested. Furthermore, the human and financial benefits from this effort could clearly exceed this initial leverage figure.

As the Knight Foundation grant has been approved for distribution to ACT, we need to know the City's intent to partner as quickly as possible in order to determine whether to accept the grant and proceed. We strongly believe this project is an exceptional opportunity for Alexandria to lead the way in establishing this new level of civic problem solving and one which should also prove advantageous for our community.

Sincerely,

John L. Porter  
Executive Director

Attachments (3)

**Action Alexandria Budget, 2010-2011**

|                                 | 2010            |                 |                 |                 | 2011            |                 |                 | Total            | Notes  |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|--|
|                                 | Q2              | Q3              | Q4              | Q1              | Q2              | Q3              | Q4              | 2010-2011        |  |
| <b>Staffing</b>                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                  |  |
| Community Manager               | \$15,000        | \$15,000        | \$15,000        | \$15,000        | \$15,000        | \$15,000        | \$15,000        | \$105,000        | Full-time: \$60k/year (including benefits)                         |
| Business Manager                | \$7,500         | \$7,500         | \$7,500         | \$7,500         | \$7,500         | \$7,500         | \$7,500         | \$52,500         | Half time: \$60K/year (including benefits)                         |
| <b>Sub-Total</b>                | <b>\$22,500</b> | <b>\$22,500</b> | <b>\$22,500</b> | <b>\$22,500</b> | <b>\$22,500</b> | <b>\$22,500</b> | <b>\$22,500</b> | <b>\$157,500</b> |  |
| <b>Office</b>                   |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                  |  |
| Rent                            | \$2,000         | \$2,000         | \$2,000         | \$2,000         | \$2,000         | \$2,000         | \$2,000         | \$14,000         | Office and group meeting space                                     |
| Hardware & Software             | \$5,000         | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$10,000         | Computers, computer software, phones, printer, etc.                |
| Utilities                       | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$7,000          | Electricity, heat, water, etc.                                     |
| Supplies & Miscellaneous        | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$7,000          | Paper, pens, toner, coffee for group meetings, etc.                |
| <b>Sub-Total</b>                | <b>\$9,000</b>  | <b>\$4,000</b>  | <b>\$4,000</b>  | <b>\$4,000</b>  | <b>\$4,000</b>  | <b>\$4,000</b>  | <b>\$4,000</b>  | <b>\$38,000</b>  |  |
| <b>Outsourced IT</b>            |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                  |  |
| Site Development & Testing      | \$22,000        | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$32,000         | Front-loaded initial development, then enhancement                 |
| Training & Tech Support         | \$8,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$1,000         | \$18,000         | Front-loaded initial training and support, then maintenance        |
| <b>Sub-Total</b>                | <b>\$30,000</b> | <b>\$1,000</b>  | <b>\$1,000</b>  | <b>\$1,000</b>  | <b>\$1,000</b>  | <b>\$1,000</b>  | <b>\$1,000</b>  | <b>\$50,000</b>  |  |
| <b>Branding &amp; Marketing</b> |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                  |  |
| Design                          | \$10,000        | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$14,000         | Full identity suite for online and offline presence                |
| Printed Collateral              | \$5,000         | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$0             | \$11,000         | Posters, pamphlets, and other print materials for offline outreach |
| Advertising & Promotions        | \$2,000         | \$2,000         | \$2,000         | \$4,000         | \$4,000         | \$4,000         | \$4,000         | \$22,000         | Ongoing online and offline marketing campaigns                     |
| <b>Sub-Total</b>                | <b>\$17,000</b> | <b>\$2,000</b>  | <b>\$2,000</b>  | <b>\$4,000</b>  | <b>\$4,000</b>  | <b>\$4,000</b>  | <b>\$4,000</b>  | <b>\$47,000</b>  |  |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>\$78,500</b> | <b>\$29,500</b> | <b>\$29,500</b> | <b>\$60,500</b> | <b>\$31,500</b> | <b>\$31,500</b> | <b>\$31,500</b> | <b>\$292,500</b> | We believe that this is a conservative and replicable budget.      |



# Technology Platform Functionality

We will unite the best open-source programs into a platform that delivers the functionality that we need, when we need it.



New functionality can easily be added as we learn and develop.

*Attachment III*