

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: **CONSULTANT SELECTION FOR CITY BRANDING**

BACKGROUND:

As you will recall, the City Council has established as one of its top goals to “Promote Economic Development” with an objective to “develop a brand communications plan.” **In February 2015, the City Council refined its focus to a more specific campaign that targeted young adults transitioning to families to relocate to Ames.** The geographic market was identified by the City Council as the Ames to Des Moines, Iowa, I-35 corridor. In accordance with new direction, a Request For Proposal (RFP) was developed that required a mechanism to determine success through measurable, observable results. In addition, the RFP required the branding campaign to be based on the community vision, vocabulary, and information gleaned from the 2011 Ames community vision process. The City Council appropriated \$200,000 in FY 2014/15 for this project, which has been carried forward to this fiscal year.

The RFP specified that the consulting firm should have experience in market research (both qualitative and quantitative), strategic planning, organizational visual identity, graphics, branding, interactive marketing, and promotions.

The RFP sought the following specific deliverables to reach the target demographic and geographic market:

- Identify the most effective marketing tactics and implementation tools,
- Outline marketing priorities,
- Prioritizing the tools and tactics to most effectively implement a strategy that fits Ames,
- Report other communication strategies the City should consider,
- Prepare cost estimates, budgets and realistic timeframes for each task, and
- Identify the best practices for marketing and branding.

The RFP was issued to 33 firms with responses received from six. A committee comprised of City staff and local marketing professionals (See Appendix A) reviewed and ranked six returned proposals using a uniform ratings matrix (See Appendix B). Each proposal was evaluated based on a combination of the cost, project understanding, clarity and content of the proposal, experience with similar projects and the creative methods used to accomplish the goals, qualifications of key personnel, the proposed timeline and work plan. The score for each of these criteria was based on a scale of 1 to 5 and then assigned a corresponding weight factor. The maximum possible score, combining all six evaluators, was 3000. The knowledge and experience related scores represented 85% of the overall score, and proposed fees accounted for 15%. The proposal rankings and fees listed below:

Firm	Total Score	Rank	Fee Proposal
ZLR Ignition, Des Moines, IA	2490	1	\$55,000
Red Dot Advertising + Design, West Des Moines, IA	2066	2	\$200,000
ChandlerThinks, Franklin, TN	1961	3	\$198,780
Flying Hippo, Des Moines, IA	1821	4	\$195,000
LPCA Public Strategies, Des Moines, IA	1111	5	\$200,000
Happy Medium, Des Moines, IA	1026	6	\$200,000

The evaluation team invited the top three firms for interviews. All three were asked to provide a brief presentation introducing their team members, their roles and demonstrate their understanding of the scope of services. Interviews were evaluated based on creative methods used to accomplish the goals, a clear understanding and clarity of the project, implementation of another project similar to ours, qualifications and connection of the team and what set the firm apart from the other firms. As with the proposal scoring, each criteria was weighted and given a score based on a scale of 1 to 5. (See appendix C). The interview scores, with a maximum possible of 3000 were as follows:

Firm	Score
ZLR Ignition, Des Moines, IA	2405
Chandlerthinks, Franklin, TN	2170
Red Dot Advertising +Design, West Des Moines, IA	1730

Based on a unanimous decision by the evaluation team following the interviews and responses to follow up questions, the firms were ranked as follows:

Firm	Rank
ZLR Ignition, Des Moines, IA	1
Chandlerthinks, Franklin, TN	2
Red Dot Advertising +Design, West Des Moines, IA	3

Each of the three firms had experience in “place” marketing (the concept of using research to differentiate one destination from another and using those unique aspects to build a brand). These firms had reviewed the Ames Visioning documents and felt the data was thorough and well-done. **However, it was pointed out the Visioning process was completed with a different goal, and new research would be needed to study the demographic being targeted for this project.**

PROPOSALS

Each firm introduced a different plan to accomplish the stated goal, but all of them included initial data collection followed by campaign development.

RED DOT ADVERTISING+DESIGN:

Having worked for cities (Johnson, Ankeny) previously, Red Dot Advertising+Design offered a proposal that focused on creating a positive brand for Ames. The firm provided great examples of graphics and marketing pieces. The evaluation team felt the firm emphasized their strengths in the creative arena, but lacked depth in market research.

Red Dot introduced a four phase plan that included:

Phase 1: Discovery and Roadmap (\$7,500)
Phase 2: Campaign Development (\$58,500)
Phase 3: Campaign Kickoff (\$134,000)
Phase 4: Measuring Success (0)
Total cost: \$200,000

CHANDLERTHINKS:

Chandlerthinks offered a fresh perspective as an outside agency, but had limited knowledge of central Iowa. The presentation was fast-paced and researched based. The Chandlerthinks portfolio included many examples of destination branding and several case studies of cities attempting to distinguish themselves from other communities. While the proposal was data driven – focusing on attitudes and perceptions about Ames and gathering information about the target demographic – the process seemed to follow a standard formula used in all cities. The team felt a more customized approach would be more appropriate for this project. This group did not offer a strategy to measure success.

Chandlerthinks suggested a five-phase plan that included:

Phase 1: Community Brand Dive and Audit (\$24,725)
Phase 2: Ames Target Group Perception and Profile Assessment (\$24,725)
Phase 3: Brand Experience Delivery Plan (\$11,000)
Phase 4: Creative Campaign and Messaging Development (\$11,000)
Phase 5: Implementation and Brand Coaching (\$8,050)
On-going campaign costs (\$119,280)
Total cost: \$198,780

ZLR IGNITION

ZLR Ignition provided only a first phase. When questioned about the lack of additional phases, the presentation team was direct and honest. **Without a clear understanding of the demographic and why they have opted not to live in Ames, ZLR professionals believe it would be premature to suggest a specific campaign strategy.** As CEO Louis Laurent explained, “You have to match the message with the audience, than use the proper tools to deliver the message in the most effective ways.” In his opinion, there were too many variables missing to move into next phases. Also, ZLR questioned the geographic target. Would it be better to look north of Ames rather than try to pull from the Des Moines metro or have we considered a partnership with the ISU Alumni Association to focus on ISU graduates? The development of either of these campaigns would be completely different with diverse

creative material and campaign delivery, and the cost structure would vary considerably. The evaluation team felt this type of critical thinking was helpful and thought-provoking. Being successful in the goal of attracting “young adults transitioning to families” bolsters our skilled, experienced workforce, which is critical to our community’s economic growth. The team felt making sure our goal is appropriately focused and achievable is an important first step.

ZLR Ignition provided a seven-step process to produce the data that would direct the next phases of the campaign.

Step1 – Ignition Day (\$4,500)
Step 2 – Brand Audit (\$4,500)
Step 3 – Issue Discovery Research (\$32,000)
Step 4 – Brand Construct (\$4,000)
Step 5 – Brand Launch Plan (\$10,000)
Step 6 – Ongoing Education & Promotion
Step 7 - Measurement
Total cost: \$55,000

The **Ignition Day** is the strategic discussion that defines the parameters of the project. It includes the development of objectives, identification of the audience, and the foundation for an action plan. The **Brand Audit** is review of the current City of Ames brand, the message, and analysis of how the brand is portrayed internally and externally. For the **Issue Discovery Research** step, ZLR will retain the Vernon Research Group to gather data that will drive brand development over the next several years. Four focus groups, internal and external, will help define challenges and motivators common to the target demographic. The results will be delivered to the City in final report with key findings and recommendations. After completion of the research, the firm will create a **Brand Construct** that includes defining Ames’ brand advantage and creating key message strategies. Finally, ZLR will collaborate with the City of Ames to develop a comprehensive plan to introduce the brand to internal and external audiences. Included in the **Brand Launch** plan phase of the proposal is a campaign strategy, messaging, and a media placement plan. The final step is establishing metrics to measure success in the future.

Once the first phase is complete, ZLR Ignition offered an option none of the other agencies considered. They would hand over the completed research, creative templates, and marketing strategy for the City to take in-house, take to another agency, or continue to work with them through a contract extension. This provides some flexibility the evaluation team thought could be helpful. It allows opportunities to check back with the City Council for guidance, and it could create opportunities to reduce some expense. **The team felt the biggest advantage ZLR provides to the City of Ames identified was the ability to be agile if the data identifies unexpected challenges.**

ZLR Ignition emphasized their experience working with the State of Iowa, the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Downtown Alliance, and Iowa State

University, as evidence of targeted marketing and experience working in the public sector. Their work with Iowa State University's "Choose Your Adventure" has been cited as directly influencing the university's record enrollment, which they believe demonstrates they are a results-based firm.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve the contract with ZLR Ignition for the first phase of brand consulting services for \$55,000. This phase will include the seven-step strategy to gather data, identify the targeted audience, develop key messages and templates, and providing media strategies.

This alternative should be supported only if the City Council agrees that before a marketing plan should be developed, research must indicate whether or not a marketing campaign targeting the I-35 Corridor can be effective in attracting young adults to Ames.

2. Approve a contract with one of the other consulting firms.

This alternative should be pursued if the City Council does not agree with ZLR's approach to first test the validity of attracting young adults from the I-35 Corridor to Ames.

3. Re-solicit proposals for this branding project.

MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The final three agencies provided interesting, but different strategies for meeting the Council's desire to attract young adults transitioning to families to Ames. After evaluating the plans, meeting the consultant's staff, listening to the presentations, and asking questions; the review committee recommended ZLR Ignition as the top choice. In particular, **the committee appreciated ZLR Ignition's phased approach to researching the City Council's targeted demographic, to identifying trends and challenges, to examining the geographic market (Ames to Des Moines/I-35 Corridor), and to being prepared to refocus the campaign if the research identifies insurmountable barriers to success. Furthermore, the committee believed ZLR is the preferred firm because their staff understands the goal of the project, has experience working on similar projects, asked probing questions in order to clarify the project, and suggested a phased approach that provides flexibility to City staff.**

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council approve Alternative #, 1 thereby approving the contract with ZLR Ignition for the first phase of brand consulting services for \$55,000.

APPENDIX A

Brand RFP Review Committee

City of Ames

Susan Gwiasda, Public Relations Officer

Derek Crisler, Cable TV Coordinator

Derek Zarn, Graphics/Print Shop Technician

Outside Agencies

Julie Weeks, Ames Convention and Visitors Bureau

Steve Sullivan, Mary Greeley Medical Center

Alison Doyle, ISU Research Park

Facilitator: Karen Server, City of Ames Purchasing Manager

EVALUATION FORM REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL NO. 2015-259										OFFEROR:	
Integrated Brand Communication Plan											
1	Submission of Qualifications	Acceptable						Not Acceptable			
		(-) Score (+)					Points		Weight		Weighted
Evaluation Criteria		1	2	3	4	5	Scored		Factor		Total Score
Submission of Proposal											
1	Project understanding, clarity and content of proposal							x	30		
2	Proposed timeline and work plan							x	20		
3	Previous experience with similar projects and the creativity methods used to accomplish the goals							x	20		
4	Key personnel							x	10		
5	Responsiveness - completeness							x	5		
6	Submitted fee proposal						Purch	x	15		
									100		

EVALUATION TEAM MEMBER: _____

Instructions

1. Input your score to each criteria on the qualitative factors (1-5) only. Purchasing will input the score for then submitted fee proposal (6) factor and then tabulate the total.
2. Sign Evaluation Form and return to Karen Server.

The ratings are as follows:

- 1 = Does not meet requirements
- 2 = Marginally acceptable, very weak, minimally meets requirements
- 3 = Meets requirements (meets requirements as outlined in the technical requirements section)
- 4 = Meets requirements (above average)
- 5 = Meets requirements (exceeds expectations)

3. Sourcing Cost:

The lowest proposed cost will receive 5 points. To score the next lowest proposed cost, divide the lowest proposed cost by the second lowest proposed cost. This will give a percentage that will be multiplied by the weighting factor. The third lowest proposal will be scored in the same manner.

4. Each member of the evaluation team prepares an evaluation matrix for each proposal by checking the score that reflects his/her evaluation of the Company's capability regarding each criterion. (1 is the lowest score and 5 is the highest score).

5. The formula to calculate the weighted total score for each criterion is as follows: $\text{points scored} \times \text{weighted factor} \div \text{highest number of points possible} = \text{weighted total score}$. The weighted total scores are then added together to determine the matrix total.

6. Company by Company, the matrix totals are added together and then divided by the number of matrices to determine the Company's overall average score.

EVALUATION FORM REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL NO. 2015-259										OFFEROR:		
Integrated Brand Communication Plan - Interview												
1	Interview	Acceptable						Not Acceptable				
Evaluation Criteria		(-) Score					Points Scored		Weight Factor		Weighted Total Score	
		1	2	3	4	5						
	Components of the Interview											
2	Clear understanding, clarity of the project							x	25			
3	Implementation of another project similar to ours							x	10			
4	Creativity methods used to accomplish the goals							x	30			
5	Qualifications & connection of the team							x	10			
6	What set's them apart from other firms							x	25			
									100			
<p align="center">EVALUATION TEAM MEMBER: _____</p> <p>Instructions</p> <p>1. Input your score to each criteria on the qualitative factors (1-5) only.</p> <p>2. Sign Evaluation Form and return to Karen Server.</p> <p>The ratings are as follows:</p> <p>1 = Does not meet requirements</p> <p>2 = Marginally acceptable, very weak, minimally meets requirements</p> <p>3 = Meets requirements (meets requirements as outlined in the technical requirements section)</p> <p>4 = Meets requirements (above average)</p> <p>5 = Meets requirements (exceeds expectations)</p>												

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