COVID-19 RELIEF & RECOVERY

VIRTUAL STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM GUIDELINES
VIRTUAL SIP GUIDELINES - COVID-19 RELIEF & RECOVERY

PURPOSE
The purpose of the Virtual Storefront Improvement Program (SIP) is to increase the resiliency of Soldotna small businesses harmed during the COVID-19 pandemic. By providing access to tools to better position themselves now, small businesses may be in an enhanced position for a faster recovery as we emerge from the crisis.

The City seeks to assist local business owners as they establish or expand their web presence to better market themselves during the pandemic. Improved marketing may also include the integration of social media with business web pages. It is the goal of this program to expand the visibility of, and access to, local businesses and increase their sales and customer contacts; and to increase the stability of our local economy and provide a wider marketplace for local goods and services.

GENERAL INFORMATION
The Virtual SIP is a grant program to be used for establishing or improving the online capability of Soldotna businesses. The grant amount available to each business is the cost of approved work, up to a maximum City contribution of $2500. No match is required. Grant applications are reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis until project funds are exhausted. Grants are paid upon completion of pre-approved, applicant-paid work. Under no circumstance will grant funds be disbursed for work completed before a Commitment Letter is provided and signed. The deadline for application is October 30, 2020, and all projects must be completed by December 30, 2020.

ELIGIBILITY
Eligible work: This program is available for the development of websites for Soldotna businesses that may not have an online presence, or the improved functionality of an existing website. This may include the hiring of a web designer to assist with the design, installation, and maintenance of a website. It may include the creation or modification of websites to enable mobile-devices to access information (‘mobile friendly’); e-commerce functionality; security certificates; domain name purchases; embedding maps and shipping information; and reports and analytics. It may also include the integration of social media and other marketing tools into a website.

The emphasis of the grant program is to encourage existing Soldotna businesses that have no, or limited, web presence to develop online functionality. This program is not intended to fund regular updates or to ‘refresh’ an existing website.

Greater consideration is given to proposals that incorporate multiple elements of a fully functional website, and not just a listing of hours and a phone number.

Ineligible work: The following items are ineligible for funding:
- Regular ‘refresh’ or updates;
- Work completed before a Commitment Letter is provided and signed;
- Work without invoice or receipt.

Eligible participants include business owners with an existing brick and mortar business in the City of Soldotna, as well as Soldotna residents that may have a home-based
business. All businesses must have at least $10,000 in gross revenues in 2019, regardless of whether the business operates out of a storefront or a home. Nonprofits are not eligible.

**Ineligible participants:**
- Government offices and agencies;
- Businesses located outside the City of Soldotna.

**APPLICATION AND SELECTION**
The first step is to submit an application form to the ED+P Department. The form requires a short project description and a cost estimate of the work you plan to do. **Applicants must include bids or quotes that clearly state the itemized costs and the work to be performed.** The City of Soldotna reserves the right to prioritize projects and reject applications.

To prioritize and award grants, the selection committee will consider the following factors:
- Absence or presence of an existing website and its current functionality;
- Extent to which the new or improved website allows customers to research, review and purchase products;
- Extent to which the new or improved website increases the ability of the business to market itself and make sales;
- Website functions to include the ability to navigate and order from the website with a mobile device, security of the website, e-commerce capability, use of embedded maps and clickable links;
- Code compliance issues (businesses with existing code compliance issues may be ineligible).

The program administrator will notify you whether your project was selected for funding. If selected, you will sign a ‘Letter of Commitment,’ as noted below.

**BIDDING**
The City of Soldotna requires that you obtain at least one bid for your project. The City of Soldotna encourages the use of licensed professional web designers, however this is not a requirement of the program. All contracts for website improvements will be between the applicant and your selected contractor, and it is the owner’s responsibility to ensure all work is performed according to state and local regulations. If you decide to build your own website, the City will reimburse expenses related to the purchase of templates, payment modules, domain names, etc. Owner labor, however, will not be reimbursed under the program.

**LETTER OF COMMITMENT**
The final grant amount will be determined by the bids you submit from your web designers or contractors. Once received, the City will draft a ‘Commitment Letter,’ which will outline any additional terms and conditions of the grant, and will serve as the legal commitment of both parties as to the scope and quality of work, and the amount of funds committed. The Commitment Letter will also set a deadline for the project to be completed by, as agreed to by the applicant and the City.
BUILD IT
After the Commitment Letter is signed by the City and the applicant, proceed with the development of your project. Please retain all invoices and material receipts during the project, as you will need these later when you request reimbursement. Please also remember that only those project elements outlined in the Commitment Letter are eligible for reimbursement, so it will be your responsibility to keep sufficient records.

GRANT AWARDS
Most grant awards will be provided as a reimbursement upon completion of the project. The City, however, recognizes that there may be unique circumstances that require the grant to be awarded at the time of project approval.

Prior to reimbursement of funds, City staff will review all completed work for compliance with the Commitment Letter. The City will verify receipts and invoices, and will issue a reimbursement check to the owner for the amount indicated in the agreement, or the actual project cost (if less than the amount indicated in the agreement).

The City of Soldotna has the authority to determine eligibility of proposed work and confirmation of completed work. Certain work may be required or precluded as a condition of funding. All work must comply with city, state, and federal regulations.

GENERAL CONDITIONS
The following general conditions apply to all projects:
- Websites that are created or improved though this grant program shall be maintained and remain operational for a period of at least two (2) years;
- Applicants must be current in their payment of Borough property and sales tax, and shall have no debts in arrears to the City when the Commitment Letter is issued;
- Eligible businesses qualify for a maximum of $2500;
- The applicant must complete, sign and submit a W-9 for disbursement of funds;
- The Grantee agrees to allow the City to develop materials related to the project and highlight the Grantee’s participation including, but not limited to, web sites, brochures, reports or newsletters.

TAX INFORMATION
You are urged to consult your tax advisor concerning the taxability of grants. The City of Soldotna is not responsible for any taxes that may be imposed as a result of your receipt of this grant payment (directly or indirectly).

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For more information, please contact:
Jennifer Hester, Associate Planner
(907) 714-1234 | jhester@soldotna.org

The City of Soldotna reserves the right to make minor exceptions to the program guidelines.