Request for Proposals: Online Community Consultant

Smart Growth America; December 7, 2012

Summary

Smart Growth America (SGA) is requesting proposals from online community consultants capable of increasing the level of engagement on a professional social network that has a targeted audience within SGA’s larger work. The purpose of this RFP is to provide a fair evaluation for all candidates and to provide the candidates with the evaluation criteria against which they will be judged.

Project Overview, Scope of Work and Timeline

Project Overview

Smart Growth America has created a private professional networking website that allows a specific group of people to connect with resources, events and each other online. The National Sustainable Communities Learning Network launched in March 2012 and has grown from the originally targeted 200-300 people to nearly 900 users. The website provides access to resources, events, and discussions related to a variety of projects supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

While the first seven months of the network’s existence has been successful on many levels, the amount of member engagement has not met our goals. Thus, SGA seeks a contractor to provide the expertise necessary to increase engagement on the site. The online community has some unique constraints: while the users are all engaged in related work, they are geographically diverse, have different levels of engagement in their HUD and/or EPA funded projects, different professions and a wide range of responsibilities within the related work. These constraints should be taken into account when developing strategies to increase engagement and activity.

Scope of Work

Once hired, the consultant should:

- Analyze and evaluate our efforts thus far through a variety of means including (but not limited to) data/analytics of the site’s performance, interviews with the administrators, users, etc.;
- Develop a 12-month workplan including benchmarks, goals, tasks and a timeline; and
- Offer some guidance and/or training to our staff on basic principles of online community development and maintenance.
- Be available periodically for basic follow up questions.
Timeline
This RFP is dated December 7, 2012. Proposals are due no later than 12:00 PM EDT, Friday, December 21, 2012 and will be evaluated immediately. SGA will strive to schedule interviews with qualified consultants during the week of January 1 and finalize this contract by the following week, with work to begin immediately after a decision is made.

Proposal Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

Submission
This is an open and competitive process. Proposals received after 12:00 PM EDT, Friday, December 21, 2012, will not be considered. The proposal must contain the signature of a duly authorized officer or agent of the company submitting the proposal.

SGA estimates the cost of this work to be up to $10,000 over a 4 to 6 week period of time. Proposals should adjust the cost and time estimate as they see fit (though a shorter turn around for the work is preferred). Prices quoted should be inclusive. If a price excludes certain fees or charges, please provide a detailed list of excluded fees with a complete explanation of the nature of those fees.

Format for proposals should be as follows (not to exceed 6 pages).

1. Cover letter
2. Name of firm and primary contact
3. The firm’s proposed workplan, including all tasks mentioned in the scope of work above.
4. The firm’s experience in this type of work.
5. Specifically address the following questions:
   • What makes for a robust professional networking community?
   • What experience do you have in helping organizations build, develop and grow online communities? Please provide concrete examples.
   • What is your experience providing training and/or technical assistance to organizations growing online communities?
   • Samples (screenshots or links) of online communities you have helped build.
5. Short biographies of the staff that would carry out the work, including their experience in this area.
6. Detailed budget for all proposed work and explanation of firm’s ability to meet the outlined deadlines.

Proposals that meet the requirements stated above will be evaluated with the following criteria: suitability of the proposal; detailed budget; time horizon for the work; expertise; proposal presentation; understanding of our unique challenges; quality of references/comparable products; and demonstration to quality customer service.

Proposals should be submitted to Jeri Mintzer via email: jmintzer@smartgrowthamerica.org. Questions should also be addressed to Ms. Mintzer at the email address above or via phone: 202.207.3355 x145.