

TO: Appleton Public Library Board of Trustees

FROM: Colleen Rortvedt, Library Director

DATE: 3-11-2026

SUBJECT: Request approval to award the Strategic Planning Consultant contract to Fast Forward Libraries that will be funded with Friends of Appleton Public Library grant funds for an amount not to exceed \$29,000.

Following the completion of the library's building project, the Appleton Public Library (APL) is entering a new phase. To guide this transition, the library issued a Request for Proposals on January 5, 2026, to identify a consultant to facilitate a new five-year strategic plan. This process included a formal assessment of our existing "hub and spoke" strategic framework to ensure our future direction provides a clear and actionable guide.

The library received twenty proposals prior to the deadline. Two were received after the deadline and were disqualified. A selection committee reviewed the twenty eligible proposals using a 100-point scoring matrix. Following a thorough review of written submissions, the consultants with the four highest scores were interviewed during the week of February 23, and the committee unanimously agreed on our top selection.

I am pleased to recommend that the Library Board approves the selection of Fast Forward Libraries (FFL), led by Amanda Standerfer, to lead our strategic planning process. FFL is a small consulting group that specializes in working with libraries and non-profits. FFL demonstrated exceptional performance across all five evaluation categories:

- **Experience & Qualifications:** The lead consultant brings 22 years of experience in facilitating strategic planning and organizational development. Three of the four consultants hold MILS degrees and three have served as trustees. They possess a proven track record of facilitating strategic planning processes for public libraries of a similar size to APL.
- **Approach & Methodology:** They proposed a structured, multi-phase planning process designed to be highly participatory and collaborative. Their method emphasizes human-centered design to ensure that the resulting plan is grounded in both the community's aspirations and the library's organizational strengths. They use publicly available data rather than proprietary software, which does not require the library to subscribe to an ongoing service. Their survey tool will easily translate to our system (SurveyMonkey), so we can realistically manage surveys in future years ourselves.
- **APL Context:** They demonstrated a strong understanding of APL's mission, values, and community context. They recognize this as the right time to deepen community connections after the completion of the library building project and share a commitment to rooting the new strategic plan to our community's needs. FFL proposes a collaborative review of the existing "hub and spoke" framework to determine how it should evolve for the future plan.

- **Cost-Effectiveness:** FFL provided a competitive proposal with a total project cost of \$29,000 in a field of proposals that ranged from \$19,500 - \$169,450. Their itemized cost estimate provided a high-quality approach with clear costs that are fiscally responsible and competitive.
 - **Note:** They provided separate optional pricing for Spanish language and interpretation services. We will seek additional grant funding to cover translation and interpretation services. Should we be successful, it will be brought to the board for approval.
- **References:** They provided four relevant references that shared strong feedback across the board.

FFL's proposal is especially strong in its focus on implementation, which is identified as a typical weak spot in strategic planning processes. After this process is complete, we will have an implementation guide with an activity plan and evaluation framework to ensure it remains a clear, actionable guide throughout its lifespan.