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Contract for Management of Austin's Three Public Access Television Channels, Facilities and Programming

Public Access Television: Background

- Community-oriented content is not well sustained by market-driven media. Since 1970, community activists have pushed to help fill the demand for such content, giving rise to Public Access television. The vision has always been about providing and protecting free-speech "soapboxes" for our electronic age.
- The FCC's 1972 rulings set up the framework for securing public access channels from cable companies. Requirements were established for cable companies to provide channel space and support for public, educational and government access channels.
- After several legal and legislative challenges, the free speech mission of public access was reaffirmed and institutionalized by the Cable Act of 1984. It prohibited cable operators from interfering with access content and absolved them of any liability for it.

Access in Austin

- Austin's three public access channels are currently operated by a non-profit contractor, Austin Community Television. Founded in 1973, ACTV is the oldest continuously operating community television center in the country. The City owns the public access studio. The video production equipment is owned by Grande Communications, Time Warner Cable and the City of Austin.
- Contract funding is established via the City's cable television franchises with Grande Communications and Time Warner Cable: the cable companies make quarterly payments to the City in support of public, educational and government (PEG) access TV through a \$0.35 per month charge to Austin's residential, non-bulk cable subscribers.

Access Today

- The current six-year contract with ACTV expires September 30, 2005. The City will put the contract out for competitive bids via a Request for Proposal (RFP). The new contract will also be for six years (2-year initial, with two 2-year extensions). The 2011 expiration coincides with the that of the current Time-Warner franchise.
- The City's Office of Telecommunications & Regulatory Affairs will finalize the requirements and

performance criteria in the Scope of Work section of the RFP with the assistance of the Telecommunications Commission. This will form the basis of the contract with the successful respondent.

- Here is the process:
 - Telecommunications Commission Public Hearing (held 2/9/05)
 - Commission holds work session/special called meeting to adopt scope of work
 - RFP issued and advertised by Purchasing Office in early March 2005. To get on the mailing list, please contact Terry Dyke at 974-2622.
 - Pre-proposal conference held
 - RFP open for about 45 days
 - Evaluation team makes recommendation
 - Optional interviews end; decision finalized
 - Recommendation from Telecommunications Commission
 - Recommendation from Council Committee on Telecommunications Infrastructure
 - City Council approval of contract
 - Negotiate and execute contract with access manager in time for 10/1/05 start date



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