

# Request for Proposal

## Software Development for a Mobile App

GraniteGrok.com

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## Project Purpose/Summary

This Request for Proposal is a solicitation for technical services to create a mobile application that will complement the current GraniteGrok.com activities, presence, and offerings to our on the Internet (see [here](#) and later in this document; we can't move forward without knowing our past or current status.

Since developing “GraniteGrok 3.0” on a much updated WordPress engine, we have seen an uptick in our traffic such that 40% of that traffic is now mobile. Thus, the wish to better tailor GraniteGrok's current Presentation to that marketplace instead of just the “enhanced mobile” WordPress one and lay down a foundation to better use mobile devices in enhancing our political activism and Activists' activities”.

GraniteGrok does have a clean modern PC interface that

- presents our traditional posts and our media offerings content well,
- allows us to present organic ads from our activists
- handles our two ad servers (LockerDome/Decide and Underdog Media), with a mix of,
- providing the capability for our Readers to have a lively commenting section.

Thus, to both better service our current mobile audience (who read GraniteGrok via a phone's browser) and to grow that audience, it was decided to create a mobile app that would continue to present those major functions outlined above but in a format more in line with the current mobile experiences.

We also decided that, that in both reviewing various apps and crowdsourcing suggestions from our readership as to what THEY liked, the current application that most people liked was that of the Epoch Times (yes, we have a subscription to it as well).

What we like about its presentation is the large number of “header” columns for different issues, both broad and targeted, across the top, as well as “quick one liners” in several of them (e.g. a “Latest News summary” after their topmost News item). It also allows not only swiping down and then up against but also swiping right and left to quickly go from one “issue/news type” column to another.

Also, it is well organized and shows well what they cover for stories and opinions.

This is something that this project will force us, as content providers, to do better once we determine what OUR equivalent data structures would be in creating a work-alike.

This Mobile application will need to have these minimum capabilities:

- Maintain, as much as possible, the current GraniteGrok presentation (e.g., coloration, text, images) while emulating the Epoch Times navigation. .
- Be able to reach back into the present GraniteGrok WordPress database to serve out new and old posts, along with SEARCH capabilities with little latency.
- Continue to be a platform for our own ads as well as our ad servers
- Keep using DISQUS to provide our commenting

There will be a number of staged deliverables during the development where each stage/”ring”/sprint's purpose will be to deliver a “complete” set of functionality which must be completed before advancing to the next stage. Each will have its own standard of acceptable errors:

- Critical System error (complete System Failure)
- Major Incident (subsystem is down, other functionality is fine)
- Minor problem (unit is down, workaround is available)
- Aesthetic error (spelling error, button/switch error)

The normal complement of development tools are expected to be used at the choice of the developer. However, this project will be managed using Trello as the project management software in tracking progress and costs.

While the above items are mandatory, the development architecture must be such that new future capabilities including (but not excluding others) must be supported in a plugin process :

- A Call to Action Page – providing personalized messaging on NH State bills and advocacy events / issues.
- A Resource Page – what are the resources that can I can turn to?
- Support Dual Action video/audio citizen-journalism support
- Podcast Page
- Others TBD.

It will be mandatory to demonstrate that the developing Architecture will support these new capabilities that will be done in the future.

GraniteGrok will own all rights to the developed materials and own the copyright to the software work, both in process and at the end of development. All software that is developed will be done in agreed upon stages, viewable by GraniteGrok during development, and held in escrow until the project is complete.

The Developer will also assist in getting the software accepted by the various “Play Stores” in addition to setting up the process of downloading it directly from GraniteGrok.com.

We also, as each stage is completed, want allow our readers (many of which are both tech savvy and developers in their own rights), to act as Beta testers. After all, this is for them.

## Background

### GraniteGrok History

GraniteGrok.com was born after a chance meeting between its founders, Doug Lambert and Skip Murphy, on a Lakes Region radio show (“The Advocates”) here in NH back in 2004. It turned out that while Murphy was just becoming politically aware (and realized that politicians were making decisions about his family that he wasn't aware of and had no input into), Lambert had already been playing in local and State politics for years. When the host declined to expand his reach into the nascent blogging environment, we split off and started GraniteGrok in 2006.

It rapidly became popular as Doug was widely known, we also started a radio show called “Meet The New Media” that quickly became the #1 show in our time spot, Murphy was writing a number of Letters to the Editor, Lambert had a weekly column in the local papers.

It didn't hurt that we talked about, and naming names of those good ole' boys that didn't like the idea we had no problem in “airing out the town's dirty laundry” (and those around us) and got involved in helping those that were seeing bad things in their towns to get them stopped, heard about how we were handling them in ours, and solidified a reputation that we were straight shooters, Consistent (capitalization intended), and that folks always know where we stood.

### Defined Marketplace / Audience

When we started GraniteGrok, we thought that, including our families, we might have 5 or 6 readers per week. However, because of our local / State activism, we grew rapidly. Shortly afterwards, a number of larger blogsites started to link back to our stories and we rose quickly in the ranking to that spot right in between being one of the most successful state level blogs and being a rather small national one.

At that time, however, the nature of blogging was changing. Newspapers and other media sites decided to get in on this new format and hired formerly independent bloggers onto their staffs. Commercial entities were being created to aggregate differing blogsites. We saw that the window opportunity for individual (or even we with two individuals) blogs to go national was closing, so we decided to just stay as a State-wide blog (which turned out to be the right decision for us being in a very small State, we could do things that others couldn't in a California, New York, or Texas sized State – we could know EVERYONE!)

Our target audience are those political activists on the Right, the hardcore few people that actually do stuff, that agree with our outlook on daily events from the lens of both the US and NH Constitutions. That does not mean that those on the Left don't know about us or don't read us as well – they do and they certainly have words to describe us that I won't repeat here.

While our tagline, Dominating the Political Bandwidth in New Hampshire, was a bit early, we have earned that right to claim it. Now, even readers that are only casually involve in politics here read the 'Grok on both sides of the political aisle.

Our audience is still concentrated in NH (The *Granite* State) and that we do “understand deeply and fully” (the *Grok* part). However, we are increasingly gaining audience numbers in Vermont, Maine, and

Massachusetts. We also have readers across the US and internationally.

**Sidenote:** we had thousands of Chinese mainland readers until we discovered that the Government there decided to drop the Great Electronic Wall of China down across our electronic neck – who knew?

## **Reputation**

We have been Consistent in message and outlook and we've been thanked for being so; we don't “blow in the political wind”. That's one reason why we have outlasted all other political blogs here in NH as well as dominating the Alexa.com ranking for all other State level newspapers for online reach.

Murphy was awarded the RightOnLine Activist of the Year in 2011; Mac Donald received that Award for the Activist of the Month back in 2015. We've also had several other of our writers receive various awards.

We are often told that we say things that others wish they could (but can't for one reason or another). For us, that is high praise. While we often take Republicans to task (we really don't care what you have as a letter after your name denoting your stance in the political realm), we are asked to speak at events both in- and out-of state. We are also asked to participate on a number of radio stations across the State as well.

## **Volunteer Writers**

We have no payroll – we are all volunteers and run on a 4 digit budget with most of that spent on meeting our hosting charges and the various subscriptions, newspaper and software, that help to keep the site running.

We would not be where we are today without the dedicated volunteers that both agree with our stances and write passionately about their topics. In the past few years, we have opened up our pages to Op-Ed writers on an ad hoc basis. Some, because of the quality of their writing, have been offered “Grokster-ships” and accepted.

In doing this, we can cover topic and issues that would be impossible and have offered our readership a variety of writing styles.

## **Reach**

Depending on the day, the current issues in the news, we can have anywhere between 3,000 to 8,000 unique readers per day with a number of them returning to read our updated stories later on in the day. We also have a daily eblast newsletter called The Daily 'Grok that reaches another 1,700 readers every day.

Mac Donald has also start a short podcast called “The Last Resistance” while Murphy also started a 5 minute/segment podcast called “Skip's Sauntering Snippets”. In addition, we have just reconstituted our weekly hourlong GrokTALK! in working towards extending our reach.

We also have just restarted our GrokMeetup schedule where readers and Grokster authors get to talk with each other in social situations.

## **Current Activities:**

Most bloggers do just that – blog/write about “stuff”. We have pushed into a number of different areas beyond simple blogging in 1) being technically oriented, 2) we figured out how to do audio/video streaming when it was HARD to do, 2) able to put together AV packages to enhance our coverage of political events, and our level of political activism.

Our Opinion Writing takes the day's current events from around the State, roll them through the lens of the Constitutions, and make it personal to and for our readers that what we write has practical applications. In such, we are trying to activate them to be able to stand up and say “That's not right”.

In short, “Be Brave. Do Something” (re: Project Veritas). Thus, get involved in Citizen Journalism – see something, write something and send it to us. Or just send us a tip. Teach them how to articulate what they know to be wrong (e.g., the “good ole' boy networks, above) and then do something.

We aren't just writers – EVERY single Grokster is a Political Activist. We don't just write about politics and how it impact Culture – we DO it and that gives us more credibility than other bloggers just sitting in an office.

We take on local events, we chide those politicians that do bad things and let those that are know we're standing and “watching their six”. We run for local or State-wide office. If we can't, we get involved in campaigns in helping to get good people, ordinary people, the people that our Founding Fathers called citizen-politicians (“drop their tools in the field, become an elected official for a while, and then return back to the jobs instead of politics BECOMING their jobs).

As stated before, we are also Citizen-journalists and this project is directly related to this activities and in enhancing our offerings to our readers. Whether or not is is a State or local event, we want to give them the tools and capabilities.

Most people can't write – either they don't have the time or are fearful in trying. However, they can point a video camera or a smartphone at an event and get video that others would be willing to watch.

We are also looking to do some limited merchandising. We a relation with both Land's End and Tee-Spring and are evaluating other ideas.

## **Future Activities**

Just before COVID hit, we had redone our Audio equipment in preparing to further our reach in conducting Forums and Debates. We expect that the Mobile App will assist in these endeavors as well (e.g., take comments and questions from the online audience that couldn't not have a physical presence.

**To the point** from above of “they can point a video camera or a smartphone at an event and get video that others would be willing to watch.”, the Mobile App will need to also function as a news gathering device by activists in our attempt to “Beat WMUR” (NH's only “over the air” state-wide TV station)” that would be hyper-local

## Current Technology Stack

GraniteGrok.com is hosted by Nexcess on a CentOS platform in a Managed WordPress plan. The system is using a current MySQL database underneath WordPress 5.9.3.

The presentation is a custom GraniteGrok Theme created by Perceptions Studio here in NH. They have created the last two versions with a number of custom modifications.

DISQUS is used for our commenting section. It is expected to continue to use this on this app to provide continuity for our readership; we oft get very lively discussions which can only grow our readership.

Various other WordPress Plugins are also used.

We are using two ad servers, Lockerdome/Decide and Underdog Media. We also have political groups / candidates / advocacy group that provide us with “organic” ads.

We currently use RSS for MailChimp to acquire the last 24 hours of posts to send our our Daily 'Grok newsletter. We will be moving to the Newsletter Plugin soon.

We use three video platforms: Youtube and GabTV for recordings and LiveStream/Vimeo for livestreaming events.

And yes, we use Trello project management.

## Proposed Development Staging

The following is just a preliminary set of Stages for development. At the present time, this is meant only to give potential developers our thinking of the minor and major efforts that will be necessary to successfully bring the required deliverables to the finish line.

It is expected to use the following as both discussion elements by both sides and to find “holes and incompatibilities” in this first round and it will need to be fleshed out before an agreement is signed. While we know what it is that we want for functionality, we are not experts in mobile software development; there will need to be a back and forth.

### Stage 1:

1. deliverable is local storage and exercise a dynamic fetch operation from the site for a required data element.
2. minimal logging capability

This will be demonstrated by the the typical “Hello, World” in four steps:

- Log is cleared
- A minimalist app will just show the the stored GraniteGrok logo and tagline previously stored.
- Delete the logo/tagline, show it is deleted and then dynamically fetch it from the site and display it
- display the log.

### Stage 2:

Display the GraniteGrok home page header and Right Sidebar:

- All of Stage 1.
- Logo, name, tagline
- GROKTV, GROKTALK icons (without links), search icon,
- About, Authors, Donate, HOME
- Display (only) fixed elements on the Sidebar
  - CONNECT icons
  - Daily Grok email icon
  - Ads
  - NOT the GrokTV or GrokTALK! widgets

No “active” widgets.

### Stage 3:

- All of Stage 2
- Display the current topmost post that is on GraniteGrok.com (front page snippet)

- Display the Featured Image + Date stamp.
- Support “clicking” on the post to open it.
- Support any embedded links in it.

#### Stage 4:

- Access a new table in WordPress that outlines our analogous version to the “column headers” seen under the Epoch Times header:
  - The column ordinal (e.g., 1-8)
  - The column title. These will include
- Example (**definitely** subject to change):
  - 1 Hot On The Grok
  - 2 Most Recent (last 20)
  - 3 Next Most Recent (next 12)
  - 4 GrokTV
  - 5 GrokTALK!
  - 6 Podcasts
  - 7 Palate Cleansers
- Display the Hot On The 'Grok column posts (5) in column 1
- Display the Most Recent column posts (20) in column 2
- Other columns to remain blank
- Be able to click on any post on column 1 to see the entire post.
- Click on column 2 title to see those posts
- NO “swipe right” or swipe left is required.

#### Stage 5:

- Implement all Column headers
- Implement “Select” and “Swipe Right” capability to traverse all the columns
- Implement “Select” and “Swipe Left” capabilities to traverse backwards.
- Select a post from any column
- Demonstrate that a comment can be entered into the DISQUS comment area.

#### Stage 6:

- Enable all header links (GrokTV, GrokTALK!, About, Authors, Donate, Home)
- Fully activate all Right Sidebar widgets

#### Stage 7:

- Implement more robust logging (TBD)
- Admin login
- Enable unit / subsystem / site wide logging (TBD)

- Display logging on mobile phone
- text / email log to the Admin's email.

### **Stage 8:**

- Fully implement all column posts:
  - By Column type
  - By Date
- Exception: Hot On The Grok (based on recent activity)

### **Stage 9:**

- Turn on Lockerdome/Decide ads
- Turn on Underdog Media ads

## **NOT Part of This Project**

- Create a better toolset, in stages, to help activists.
- Right To Know Library
- Deep library of political activists history here in NH
- Resources Page
- Call to Action Page (NH Legislature bill monitoring service, advocacy group activities, issues advocacy activities)
- Podcast Page for both GraniteGrok creators but others around the State.
- Create an interactive facility in which activists can both view and upload video

## Other

### Logging Facility

It will be mandatory that the GrokApp have a logging / debugging facility that can be toggled on and off by an admin account signing in on the smartphone. This logging capability is meant to verify correct operations as well as in general debugging during and after development.

The purpose is simple – report on current system state. This can involve:

- System tables
- Code flows
- Data values

It can also be triggered at different levels:

- short sections of code
- individual functions (subroutines)
- subsystems
- complete system

As well as triggered by:

- hard start/stop points
- data point value change

Its major purpose is to do unit testing during development by technical experts. The other is for when software packages go to Beta testers and they experience malfunctions. They will be equipped with Admin accounts that will allow them to set various levels of logging, log the errant parts, and send the completed logs back to a contact for review.

That log will contain identifiers as to the code sections being run, return data values, as long as the logging was being run.

While this facility is seen to be a background task for most operators, for technically oriented operators familiar with code and data, it may also run in an interactive mode.