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MORE CITIES TURNING TO LOBBYISTS; Strategy: Local Projects Are Affected By Federal Decisions, So Officials Rely On Expert Help.

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Temecula received \$4 million to improve Pala Road. Highland got \$6.5 million for local roads and bridges. And Moreno Valley may get \$300,000 in funding for public safety and vocational training programs.

All three Inland cities employ a lobbyist in Washington, D.C., to help navigate the federal bureaucracy and wring money out of Congress. Officials in these cities said having a lobbyist is critical to getting access to the right people.

"Those who have the ears of decision makers have an advantage over those who don't," Moreno Valley City Councilwoman Bonnie Flickinger said by phone.

Moreno Valley is one of the latest Inland cities to hire a federal lobbyist, retaining David Turch & Associates in March for a \$55,000-per-year contract. The city had not employed a federal lobbyist in at least the last 15 years, if ever, Flickinger said.

Steve Frates, a senior fellow at the **Rose Institute** for State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College, said it's not uncommon for cities to have lobbyists in Washington, D.C. Large cities such as Los Angeles have armies of lobbyists, and even smaller cities try to band together and split the cost of employing lobbying firms, he said.

The practice is becoming more common as the federal government exerts more control and influence at the local level through funding and law-making, Frates said. Local governments increasingly find themselves engaged with Congress and federal agencies, he said.

"It's the nature of the beast," Frates said by phone.

Moreno Valley is hoping to soon gain \$150,000 in federal funds for public safety programs such as the Police Department's anti-gang task force and Special Enforcement Team, and another \$150,000 for a vocational training program, city spokeswoman Angela Rushen said by phone.

Temecula and Colton also employ the Turch firm. In addition to allocations for the Pala Road improvements, Temecula also got more than \$3 million in funds for agricultural-related programs, and \$3.75 million for the Overland Bridge, said Tamra Middlecamp, a city senior management analyst.

Colton also uses the Turch firm to assist on local issues, such as the endangered Delhi Sand flower-loving fly and perchlorate contamination, city spokeswoman Amanda Rhinehart said.

Other cities, such as Hemet and San Jacinto, have hired "coordinators" or consultants instead of registered lobbyists. The coordinators track legislation and issues in Washington, D.C., that might have an impact locally and help assist the cities in applying for federal grants, officials said.

Former Moreno Valley resident Edward Allen said the city needs redlight photo-enforcement cameras and more police

officers to deter motorists from speeding, a common problem in the Moreno Valley Ranch area. Allen said his family moved out of that neighborhood after he and his wife were almost hit by speeding motorists in separate incidents.

But Allen said he is suspicious of lobbyists, questioning how much they know of local communities and likening them to inside traders. Allen, who now lives in Menifee and hopes to build another house somewhere in Moreno Valley, said he hopes the federal government won't stick the city with something bad amid all the back-scratching he believes goes on in Washington, D.C.

"It may be good, it may be bad," Allen said of employing a lobbyist. "I would watch it very closely."

Lobbyists will focus next year on transportation funding. David Turch told the Moreno Valley City Council earlier this month that the federal government will put together a new, multi-billion dollar spending bill that will help fund transportation projects nationwide for the next six years.

California may have more influence because Sen. Barbara Boxer is chairwoman of a committee on surface transportation, Turch said.

"Transportation improvements are very expensive. It's almost impossible for local governments to fund them independently," Flickinger said.

Staff writers Herbert Atienza, Steve Fetbrandt, Jeff Horseman, Melanie Johnson and Steve Moore contributed to this story.

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INLAND LOBBYING

Here are some Inland cities that employ lobbyists in Washington, D.C., and how much they pay annually:

Colton pays David Turch and Associates \$48,000.

Hemet pays consultant Joni B. Goodman \$26,000 plus expenses;

Highland pays Innovative Federal Strategies \$30,000.

Moreno Valley pays David Turch and Associates \$55,000.

San Jacinto pays a Washington-based coordinator \$9,600.

Temecula pays David Turch and Associates \$40,200.

SOURCES: CITIES OF HEMET, HIGHLAND, MORENO VALLEY, SAN JACINTO AND TEMECULA.

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