

# **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

## **Consulting**

### **REGION A COMMUNITY BROADBAND ASSESSMENT**

**Proposals due July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**Requested By:**



**Southwestern Commission  
125 Bonnie Lane  
Sylva, NC 28779**

**Posted June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

## **A. Overview**

The Southwestern Commission (SWC) seeks the professional services of a qualified consultant to conduct a Community Broadband Assessment for the seven western counties of North Carolina (hereinafter “Project”). The Project is funded by a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission and will be administered by the SWC. The SWC is the council of government for North Carolina’s Region A, which includes the 7 westernmost counties in the state. The SWC provides technical assistance to the local governments in our region and facilitates partnerships to reach regional goals.

The Project covers Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain Counties. The purpose of this project is to develop a plan to advance broadband infrastructure investment in the region by training local officials on pertinent issues and conducting community assessments/profiles. The project will fund broadband training and community assessment/profiles for the counties of Region A. Training will be a 1-1/2 day retreat with seminar topics such as legal and regulatory matters, net neutrality, “broadband friendly” policies and administrative procedures for local governments, types of public/private partnership models, review of resident and business survey instruments to be provided by consultant for use by the counties, and review of the community profile tool.

The community profiling process will begin with a needs assessment based on an online survey of residents and businesses, as well as community support organizations serving vulnerable populations. The next step will be train and assist local governments to use the community profile tool to catalog resources, broadband friendly policies, streamlined administrative procedures, assets, and service provider revenue opportunities that could attract a provider. The consultant will then meet with communities to identify findings, share information and ideas, and discuss emerging strategies. The consultant will combine findings into a comprehensive regional assessment and inventory.

## **B. Description of Services Requested**

### **a. Conduct Broadband Training for Elected Officials**

- Conduct 1 and ½ day training for officials in the 7 counties on following topics:
  - Net neutrality, legal and regulatory matters
  - “Broadband friendly” policies and administrative policy
  - Types of public/private partnership models
  - Review of community survey and community profile tool

### **b. Community Assessment/Broadband Profile**

- On-line survey of residents, businesses, and organizations serving vulnerable populations
- Assist communities with using information gained from survey to conduct a needs assessment
- Develop strategy for each county based on results of needs assessment
- Types of public/private partnership models
- Combine findings into comprehensive regional assessment and inventory

## **C. Proposal Instructions**

**a. Deadline**

Proposals must be received by 5:00 PM eastern time on **July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017**.

**b. Submittal Instructions**

Proposals should be emailed ([sarah@regiona.org](mailto:sarah@regiona.org)) or delivered to:

Southwestern Commission  
ATTN: Sarah Thompson  
125 Bonnie Lane  
Sylva, NC 28779

**c. Project Contact**

The point of contact for the Project is Sarah Thompson, Executive Director for the SWC.

Prospective firms may make inquiries to obtain clarification of the requirements contained in this Request for Proposals (RFP). All inquiries must be submitted in writing by email to the following address: [sarah@regiona.org](mailto:sarah@regiona.org). A response will be issued typically within two business days.

**d. Proposal Format**

Proposals should be limited to 15 numbered pages or less. Please include a cover letter that identifies a contact person and all contact information. The following format is not required but is encouraged to provide consistency between proposals, aiding in evaluation and comparison. If the format is modified please include the following information at a minimum.

- 1) **Project Approach.** Describe your team's approach to successfully delivering the Project. Provide details on how each task will be completed. Include any recommendations for maximizing effectiveness and efficiency.
- 2) **Relevant Project Experience.** Provide a summary of your experience with similar projects, including location and client contact information. Specify the services provided, the office location from which the work was performed, and staff members' responsibilities. Web links to recent plans and past work, if available, may be included in addition to project summaries.
- 3) **Project Team.** Provide an organizational chart identifying all staff assigned to Project, including any sub-consultants, defining roles, responsibilities, and task assignments of each member for the duration of the Project.
- 4) **Qualifications of Personnel.** Provide relevant experience and qualifications of all personnel assigned to the Project.
- 5) **Plan for Completion.** Provide an outline for keeping the project on schedule and within budget. Include projected workloads and staff availability, as well as a projected schedule for completion of significant milestones and the draft and final Plan.
- 6) **References.** Provide contact information for at least three references for clients familiar with your work.

**D. Evaluation Criteria**

Proposals should address all aspects of the RFP and clearly express an understanding of the requirements and qualifications to conduct these services in a thorough and efficient manner. Evaluation of proposals will be performed by SWC staff. Proposals will be evaluated on the firm's ability to meet the requirements of this RFP. Some evaluation criteria, among other factors, will include:

1. Project approach and demonstrated understanding of the goals for the project;
2. Familiarity with and understanding of the nature and challenges of the region and stakeholders;

3. Creative approaches for deliverables that can be easily utilized in a variety of mediums including hard copy and digital reports, websites, etc.
4. Qualifications and availability of staff assigned to the Project;

Candidate firms may be asked to present their proposal to SWC staff before the final selection is made. Final selection and contracting will be subject to approval by SWC.

**E. Tentative Project Schedule**

In order to ensure high-quality products, adequate time for review and revisions will be scheduled and included in the contractual agreement. All meeting materials (maps, presentations, handouts, displays, etc.) will be submitted for review prior to scheduled meetings. Timelines for reviews and revisions will be detailed in the contractual agreement. The following schedule is provided as a guideline only.

<b>June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017</b>	Request for Proposals advertised
<b>July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017</b>	Proposals due to SWC
<b>July 7-28<sup>th</sup>, 2017</b>	Selection and Contracting
<b>July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017</b>	Notice to Proceed
<b>December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017</b>	Draft Broadband Assessment Due
<b>December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017</b>	Final Broadband Assessment Due

**F. Budget**

The budget for this project is \$15,000. No additional expenses shall be incurred without the express prior written authorization from SWC.

**G. Administrative Information**

- e. All proposals become the property of SWC upon submission and will only be returned at SWC’s option. Any restrictions on the use of the data contained within must be clearly stated in the Proposal itself.
- f. The cost of preparing, submitting and presenting a proposal is the sole expense of the consultant. SWC is not liable for any costs prior to issuance of a signed contract.
- g. SWC reserves the right to reject any and all proposals, to consider alternatives, to wave irregularities and to re-solicit the request for proposals.
- h. SWC reserves the right to cancel the RFP in part or in its entirety. This solicitation of proposals in no way obligates SWC to award a contract.
- i. SWC makes no guarantees to any proposing firm until such time SWC approves the negotiated contract.
- j. All Proposals must be valid for a period of 90 days after the due date.

- k. The contents from the selected firm will become contractual obligations if a subsequent agreement is reached. Failure of the selected firm to accept these obligations may result in cancellation of the award.
- l. SWC will provide information and assistance with this project where available. SWC will be the primary point of contact with all county and municipal governments. SWC staff will present the Final Plan to its Board for endorsement and/or approval.