

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Consulting

REGION A BROADBAND MAPPING FABRIC

Proposals due February 1st, 2023

Requested By:



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

**Posted
December 16, 2022**

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 grant funded 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 and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The SWC provides technical assistance to the local governments in the region and facilitates partnerships to reach regional goals.

The Project covers Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain Counties. According to the North Carolina Broadband Infrastructure office, 25.5% of people in the seven westernmost counties of North Carolina lack access to quality, high-speed internet. The next round of funding that will be available to address broadband access is referred to as the BEAD (Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment) program. This funding will be available in 2023 and eligible areas will be based on the Federal Communications Commission's new broadband mapping referred to as the FCC Mapping Fabric. The FCC has created a new Broadband Data Collection system (BDC) which will be used to publish broadband availability. As part of this new system, they have developed a geocoded database of all Broadband Serviceable Locations nation-wide which is referred to as BSL Fabric data. The Fabric data is used as a basis for all reported broadband availability and is used to correlate broadband services to individual locations.

If households are misrepresented on these maps or omitted altogether, funding will not be available to serve that location. To help improve the accuracy of the Fabric and reported broadband availability data, the FCC has created processes for providers, government, and other entities to challenge the data and submit proposed corrections. The first step is for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to generate a map of each county which identifies which parcels have structures located on them. Counties will be asked to log in to the system to download those maps and compare them to the county’s existing maps. They are then able to correct those maps through a challenge process to ensure more accurate data. If the county fails to respond to this opportunity, any houses not shown on the map will be ineligible for broadband funding.

To ensure that the counties within North Carolina are correctly represented in the new FCC data, and to ensure that the state of North Carolina receives appropriate grant funding levels, it is imperative for regional and county governments participate in the challenge process. Unfortunately, not all counties in WNC Region A possess the GIS resources or knowledge to participate in this process. This project would be to contract with GIS professionals to assist local governments in this protest process by helping them to download the county relevant data, assess that data against its own data, and prepare and submit the protest documentation for local governments.

B. Scope of Work

The Southwestern Commission seeks to create a resource which can assist the seven counties of Region A in the FCC Fabric Challenge process.

Skillset/knowledge requirements

- GIS analysis
- Familiarity with the FCC BDC processes including Fabric Challenge
- Familiarity with county GIS structures datasets within Region A
- Familiarity with the North Carolina AddressNC database

Specific tasks

- Assess GIS capabilities and available resources of the individual counties
- Identify county datasets that can be used for analysis and comparison against Fabric data
- Assist with the creating of a county structure dataset where one is not available
- Provide training for county staff GIS resources to learn the challenge process
- Work with county GIS resources to define a processing flow for performing fabric analysis
- Establish a clearing house and process for submission of individual Fabric challenge reports to the FCC
- Create a tool to assist local government staff with ongoing FCC Fabric Challenge Processes.

C. Proposal Instructions

a. Deadline

Proposals must be received by 5:00 PM eastern time **February 1st, 2023**.

b. Submittal Instructions

Proposals should be emailed (russ@regiona.org) or delivered to:

Southwestern Commission
ATTN: Russ Harris
125 Bonnie Lane
Sylva, NC 28779

c. Project Contact

The point of contact for the Project is Russ Harris, 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: russ@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.

December 16, 2022	Request for Proposals advertised
February 1st, 2023	Proposals due to SWC
February 1st, 2023 – February 28, 2023	Selection and contracting
March 1, 2023	Notice to Proceed
August 1, 2023	Submission of all fabric protests to the FCC

F. Proposal Evaluation

Consultants responding to this RFP will be evaluated on the following basis:

- 50% Process and work approach, including proposed solution and project sustainability plan/components
- 30% Record of performance, including references, past projects, and staff biographies, demonstrating experience in FCC Reporting as well as in working with local governments
- 10% Budget
- 10% Timeline

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.