



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR
STRATEGIC VISIONING AND
PLANNING

PURPOSE

The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) has initiated a Request for Proposal (RFP) process to identify a vendor qualified to design and execute a strategic visioning and comprehensive planning process.

WHO MAY RESPOND

RCAP requires a vendor who has demonstrated experience in successfully developing consensus-based strategic plans, is knowledgeable in collective impact or collaborative strategic initiatives, has strong facilitation skills, and has completed extensive work with non-profit strategic planning.

The vendor must not be barred from receiving federal funding. To be considered responsive, all submissions must include a statement indicating that the respondent is not on the US General Services Administration's System for Award Management's (SAM's) list of excluded entities.

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1. About the Organization

Founded in 1973, the Rural Community Assistance Partnership, Inc. (RCAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit service delivery network comprised of a national office and six regional partners that provide technical assistance, training, and financial resources to community owned and operated water, wastewater and solid waste utilities in 2,000 small rural communities – including tribes – each year throughout the U.S. and its territories. Most communities RCAP assists are economically disadvantaged and have a population under 2,500, and many have significant minority populations. RCAP's approximately 200 field staff members include registered professional engineers, certified operators, utility finance and board management specialists, community planners, and people with other relevant backgrounds.

RCAP work historically centered on achieving these outcomes in small rural communities:

- Improved environmental and community health
- Utilities that are in compliance with federal and state regulations
- Sustainable water and waste disposal systems
- Increased capability of local leaders to address current and future needs
- Improve coordination among federal, state and local agencies in the delivery of water and waste services

Each regional partner offers an array of services that directly respond to the needs of its area. These region-specific services include affordable housing development assistance; loans for water and wastewater infrastructure, as well as housing and business development; community and economic development; job training and placement; community-based education programs; and special programming for underserved populations. RCAP field staff track performance data to enhance our capacity to fulfill our mission of “improving the quality of life in rural communities.”

The RCAP national office engages in program management, applied research, policy development, public education, and advocacy on rural issues, especially with respect to community infrastructure. It also supports the work of the network by obtaining financial support, sharing knowledge and best practices across the network, and promoting dialogue to help communities understand the relationship between the environment, public health, and economic viability. More information is available at <http://www.rcap.org>.

RCAP is now at a unique crossroads, having brought in a new Executive Director in May. RCAP will continue to provide technical assistance to water and wastewater systems, but will also look to build on the capabilities of its staff and regional partners to create a more holistic approach to assisting rural communities, especially focused on building capacity through economic development opportunities. This strategic planning process should focus not just on the existing capacity of the organization, but where RCAP has opportunities to grow in future years as a network.

2. Project Overview

The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) is a national network of nonprofit organizations that have historically focused on ensuring rural and small communities throughout the United States have access to safe drinking water and sanitary wastewater and solid waste disposal. The six regional RCAPs provide a variety of programs in their region of the United States to accomplish this goal, providing technical assistance to rural communities across the country. RCAP is beginning a new era of expansion, looking to more cohesively help address capacity issues in rural communities while elevating the story of rural America today. The last RCAP strategic plan was created in 2013, and the organization is looking for a consultant to work with RCAP to create a three-year strategic plan through a comprehensive, data-driven, and participatory process.

3. Scope of Work & Deliverables

We expect the project to include the following:

- Project management
- Design and execution of a strategic visioning and comprehensive planning process
- Develop an actionable three year strategic plan, including a projected budget for its implementation
- Develop recommendations regarding the plan's implementation and support structure

The project might also include:

- The bidder should describe its understanding of the work to be performed, estimated hours, and other pertinent information.
- The bidder should describe its organization, size (in relation to similar databases developed), and structure. Indicate whether the firm is a small or woman- or minority-owned business.
- The bidder should also describe the qualifications of all staff to be assigned to the project and specify the project manager.
- Include resumes of staff to be assigned to the project. Education, position in firm, years and type of experience, continuing professional education, etc., will be considered. Vendor is not able to sub-contract out any of the work without the pre-approval of the sub-contractor by RCAP.

It is expected that these tasks will be accomplished through a combination of activities, including:

- Background research by consultant on RCAP history and current leadership team, including environmental scan of organization and opportunities ahead.
- Benchmarking RCAP organization with other similar sized non-profits or additional organizations with similar focus.
- Focus groups, interviews, surveys and/or any other method that will be useful in receiving partner and community input

- Facilitated group meetings with board, staff and partners to create consensus regarding a strategic vision and plan
 - These meetings will typically be conducted in Washington, DC, but may also be done virtually in some situations.
- Review and present available data and partner strategic plans as well as any relevant research and best-practices relating to the work RCAP accomplishes

4. Project Goals & Target Audience

While RCAP seeks the consultant’s recommendations regarding the best process to develop an actionable strategic plan, the organization envisions the scope of work being completed in stages. The consultant will serve as the facilitator for this process, with leadership from the RCAP board and staff.

Stage 1. Discovery - Vision and key goals with RCAP Board

This stage includes consensus building among the RCAP partners to:

- discover a shared strategic vision that:
 - is clearly stated
 - is compelling
 - is timely
 - describes a clear and present need
 - motivates people to act
 - is a worthwhile challenge and
 - is audacious.

Stage 2. Research and Validation - Needs assessment, gap analysis, SWOT analysis, research, etc.

This stage should produce the substantive documentation and solutions needed for validation of discovered vision and key goals and inform the strategic planning process.

Stage 3. Identify strategic goals and write the strategic plan, including detailed budget

After the discovery and research phase, stage 3 entails the identification of four to seven key RCAP strategic goals and the development of an actionable strategic plan that will serve as the overall blueprint for RCAP’s work. This plan should include:

- An Executive Summary
- Working committees of regional partners, RCAP staff, and Board to put together framework

- A comprehensive, detailed plan that identifies:
 - Shared vision
 - Goals
 - Objectives
 - Strategies
 - Tactics
 - Responsible Partners and their Roles
 - Measures
 - Outcomes
- This plan should also include:
 - Resource development strategies
 - Initial communications strategies (What are the key messages? Who are the targets for those messages? How are the messages delivered? Who delivers the messages?)

Stage 4. Development of implementation recommendations

This stage includes the development of recommendations regarding the implementation phase of RCAP's work. Included within this phase should be recommendations regarding:

- A detailed budget to implement the plan
- Launch event
 - Infrastructure (e.g., backbone organization, staffing, etc.) needed to support the Initiative's implementation phase
 - Initiative Leadership and Working Committees structure needed to act on the plan
 - Data tracking
 - Dashboard for RCAP goals and implementation that can be easily published on the web.

5. Ownership and Confidentiality

All intellectual property will become the property of RCAP. All data remains the sole property of RCAP. The vendor shall further agree to keep information related to any and all contracts with RCAP in strict confidence, including, but not limited to, the terms of the contract(s) and any confidential business information or proprietary information learned through its dealings with RCAP.

6. Proposal Format

To best evaluate the ability of the vendor to meet our goals, please include the following in your proposal:

- Examples of similarly-complex projects
- Your approach to strategic planning
- A summary of strategic planning experience
- A summary of experience in water, economic development and/or rural
- Three client references
- Suggested project timeline with major tasks and milestones
- Project budget by line item
- Sample Project Plan
- Identify who will be involved on your project team, their role, and including their relevant experience.

7. Proposal – Must include the following:

General Information

RCAP understands that the scope of work requested may be conducted by a single consultant, a consultant group, or by a partnership of consultants. The proposal should provide the name, title, address, telephone number, and email address for each person engaged in the project. If a consultant group or partnership of consultants, the proposal should indicate who will serve as the “point” person.

Consultant Qualifications and Roles

The proposal must describe the consultant’s qualifications to conduct the RFP scope of work activities, including his/her expertise, knowledge, and experience. Experience should include examples of conducting similar or related work (i.e., working with other collaborative or collective impact initiatives to create a strategic vision and strategic plan), work in facilitation and conflict resolution, as well as experience working in or around water, economic development and rural communities.

To accomplish the scope requested, the consultant will need to possess the following qualifications:

- Experience at successfully developing consensus-based strategic plans
- Knowledgeable of collective impact or collaborative strategic initiatives
- Strong facilitation and conflict management skills
- Knowledgeable of rural community systems and issues

- Experience at creating a neutral environment for, and soliciting input from, individuals from various sectors
- Experience at gathering and utilizing data to inform the strategic planning process
- Knowledgeable of budgeting
- Knowledgeable of marketing, communications, and branding
- Knowledgeable of resource development
- Ability to constructively challenge key stakeholders
- Experience inspiring others to think innovatively
- Project management experience

If a consultant group or partnership of consultants is proposed to conduct the RFP scope of work, the proposal must indicate which activities each consultant will conduct as well as information about their level of expertise, knowledge and experience to conduct those specific activities.

Work Plan

The proposal should contain a detailed description of the activities to be conducted by the consultant in order to complete the requested scope of work, including:

- the specific activities to be conducted at each stage,
- a timeline for the activities at each stage,
- milestones and deliverables tied to those activities, and
- a detailed budget for each stage, along with a proposed payment schedule tied to project milestones and/or deliverables.

References

The proposal should include at least three references of individuals who can speak to their experience with the consultant in conducting projects of similar scope. Information regarding each reference should include the individual's name, address, telephone number and email address.

Previous Work Product

The proposal should include at least two examples of written work similar to the scope of work requested within this RFP (e.g., strategic plan).

8. Scoring

Proposals will be reviewed and evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Qualifications – 35%
 - Consultant has the qualifications necessary to successfully complete the scope of work
 - The consultant has prior experience working on similar projects
 - The consultant has prior experience working with similar organizations
- Scope of Proposal – 30%
 - The proposal demonstrates an understanding of the project objectives and desired results
 - The proposal illustrates an approach to the scope of work that will likely lead to the successful development of an actionable strategic plan
 - The proposal illustrates the consultant’s ability to successfully execute the proposed approach
 - The proposal includes an appropriate process to interact with committee members and community stakeholders
- Work Plan – 25%
 - The proposal adequately details project activities and milestones or deliverables associated with each stage of the scope of work
 - The proposal includes a detailed timeline for each stage
 - The work can be completed within the project timeline
- Budget – 10%
 - The proposal includes a detailed budget for each stage of the scope of work
 - Proposed costs are reasonable

9. Process for Proposal Submission and Evaluation

Instructions for submission

a) Closing Submission Date

Proposals are due by 5:00 PM Eastern on Wednesday, November 17, 2017.

b) Inquiries

Inquiries concerning this RFP should be directed to Nathan Ohle (contact information below) no later than Friday, November 10, 2017.

Nathan Ohle, Executive Director
nohle@rcap.org

c) Conditions of Proposal

All costs incurred in the preparation of a response to this RFP are the responsibility of the bidder and will not be reimbursed by RCAP.

d) Submission Instructions

Proposals should be submitted in PDF format via email to nohle@rcap.org before the closing submission date. If the file is too large for email, a link to the file should be provided.

Late arrivals will not be accepted. Mail submissions will not be accepted.

It is the responsibility of the bidder to ensure that the response is received by RCAP by the closing submission date. A response may be judged nonresponsive and excluded for further consideration if it is not received by the deadline or does not follow the specified format.

e) Right to Reject

RCAP reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to reject any and all responses received in response to this RFP. A contract for the accepted response will be based upon the factors described in this RFP.

f) Small Businesses, Minority-Owned Firms, and Women's Enterprises

RCAP will make efforts to utilize small businesses, women's business enterprises, and/or minority-owned firms. A bidder qualifies if it meets the definition established by the Small Business Administration.

g) Confidentiality

If the bidder deems any material submitted to be proprietary or confidential, that must be indicated in the relevant section(s) of the response.

h) Notification of Selection and Timeline

It is expected that a bidder will be selected within two to three weeks of the closing submission date, although this timeline is subject to change. RCAP reserves the right to cancel this RFP at anytime. Upon conclusion of negotiations with the successful bidder, all bidders submitting responses to this RFP will be informed in writing of the name of the successful firm or individual.

RFP Released: November 1, 2017

Proposals due: November 17, 2017

Interview vendors: November 27-29, 2017

Vendor selection made: December 7, 2017

Project begins: January 2017

i) Criteria for Selection

RCAP will select the proposal which it feels will deliver the highest quality deliverable at the best value. Proposals will be initially reviewed by the Executive

Director. Interviews will be completed by the Executive Director and Strategic Planning committee, who will submit the best option to the RCAP Board for a final decision.

Price will be a significant, but not the only, criteria in evaluating the proposals. Consideration will also be given to the following:

- Ability of the bidder to provide all aspects of the proposal.
- Compliance of the vendor and proposal with the project requirements outlined above.
- The extent to which the proposed deliverable meets the scope and goals outlined below.
- Past experience with similar organizations and portfolio of work.

The award will be made to the qualified bidder whose proposal is most advantageous to RCAP with price and other factors considered. RCAP may, in its sole discretion, reject any and all proposals without providing a detailed explanation for decisions.

RCAP, in its sole discretion, may request proposal presentations by meeting with any or all bidders to clarify or negotiate modifications to proposals. However, RCAP reserves the right to make an award without further discussion of the proposals submitted. Therefore, proposals should be submitted initially on the most favorable terms, from both technical and price standpoints, that the bidder can propose.

RCAP contemplates award of the contract to the responsible Bidder with the most cost-effective solution and the capabilities to perform the contract services.

j) CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Bidder must disclose, in an exhibit to the proposal, any possible conflicts of interest that may result from the award of the Contract or the services provided under the Contract. Except as otherwise disclosed in the proposal, the Bidder affirms that to the best of its knowledge there exists no actual or potential conflict between the Bidder, the Bidder's project manager(s) or its family's business or financial interests ("Interests") and the services provided under the Contract. In the event of any change in either Interests or the services provided under the Contract, the Bidder will inform RCAP regarding possible conflicts of interest, which may arise as a result of such change and agrees that all conflicts shall be resolved to the RCAP's satisfaction or the Bidder may be disqualified from consideration under this RFP. As used in this Section, "conflict of interest" shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Giving or offering a gratuity, kickback, money, gift, or anything of value to a RCAP official, officer, or employee with the intent of receiving a contract from RCAP or favorable treatment under a contract;

2. Having or acquiring at any point during the RFP process or during the term of the Contract, any contractual, financial, business or other interest, direct or indirect, that would conflict in any manner or degree with Bidder's performance of its duties and responsibilities to RCAP under the Contract or otherwise create the appearance of impropriety with respect to the award or performance of the Contract; or ^(L)_(SEP)
3. Currently in possession of or accepting during the RFP process or the term of the Contract anything of value based on an understanding that the actions of the Bidder or its affiliates or Interests on behalf of RCAP will be influenced.