

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES (RFQ)



**NEW NORTH
BROADBAND ACCESS STUDY AND EXPANSION PLAN**

CFDA Number: 11.307

EDA Investment Number: 06-69-06313

Economic Development Adjustment Assistance - CARES Act Supplemental

Requesting Party:

New North, Inc.

c/o Barbara Koldos

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Submittal Deadline:

12:00 P.M. (CT) – July 30, 2021

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I. Introduction & Background

The New North, Inc. (New North) is seeking creative and innovative proposals from qualified and professional consultants to develop a Broadband Access Study and Expansion Plan for the region. The project will focus on an 18-county region including Brown, Calumet, Door, Fond du Lac, Florence, Green Lake, Kewaunee, Marinette, Manitowoc, Marquette, Menominee, Oconto, Outagamie, Shawano, Sheboygan, Waupaca, Waushara, and Winnebago counties, located within Northeastern Wisconsin. The eighteen county area is encompassed by the combined New North, East Central Wisconsin Regional Plan Commission (ECWRPC), and Bay-Lake Regional Plan Commission (BLRPC).

The COVID-19 pandemic raised the awareness and need for broadband access expansion. Current baseline data related to broadband infrastructure in the region is severely limited, outdated and, in many cases, inaccurate. Broadband service area models produced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) apply estimated service metrics across Census tracts, which tend to be very large in this rural setting of northeastern Wisconsin. In addition, there is no current information regarding the usage characteristics, demand, quality, or reliability of broadband Internet in the study region. It's critically important to track data at a sufficiently geographically granular basis to appropriately address the local nature of broadband services. Due to the high degree of geographic disparity in broadband status across the region and highly localized neighborhood and community variability, a full survey model is more appropriate than utilization of random sample methodology.

The consultant is to develop, working in collaboration with a Stakeholder Team of local government and economic development representatives from the 18 counties, a **Broadband Access Study and Expansion Plan for each of the 18 counties within the New North Region.**

Benefit Region: The benefit region will be all of the New North region (an 18-County region; see Map 1). The economies of the broader New North region are inextricably linked, as demonstrated in the respective Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDs) of the New North region, defined by the ECWRPC and BLRPC, which led to the formation of New North, Inc., an 18-county economic development organization in 2005.

Responses to this Request for Qualifications (RFQ) must satisfy the criteria identified within the scope of work included in this document to be considered. Modifications or enhancements proposed beyond the scope of work included in this document may be acceptable, but the applicants must clearly describe how these modifications or enhancements will contribute to achieving the Broadband Access Study and Expansion Plan's desired outcomes.

The successful consultant will clearly demonstrate:

- Previous experience with the development of similar broadband access studies and expansion plans.
- The technical capabilities of the staff who will work on the program.
- A strong understanding of broadband infrastructure and build out issues and costs.
- Experience working with local units of government and planning departments.
- The ability to develop the broadband access study and Expansion Plan within the timeline and budget.

Consultants and sub consultants that are awarded funds with this contract must comply with all 2 CFR 200 requirements.

Responses to this RFQ must be received by New North at 12:00 p.m. CT, Friday, July 30, 2021 via email. Interviews with selected applicants will be scheduled and conducted at the discretion of New North and its partners by video conference.

II. Scope of Work

This project is an 18-county broadband planning initiative with the following authorized scope of work needing to be completed by consultant:

- Working with New North -
 - Develop a regional stakeholder team. (A core stakeholder team currently exists.)
 - Develop strategic partnerships from various industry sectors
 - Create the organizational structure(s) for implementation of the plan.
- Define process to identify broadband assessment of services and gaps which will include the collection and analyze of data based on the current competitive environment to include existing fiber networks and all other Broadband providers and services within the county, pricing strategies, speed, coverage area and availability for use by other network providers (providers to included wired, fixed wireless, cellular and satellite)*
- Create mapping of routes and locations for fiber and broadband internet infrastructure, providers, facilities and other equipment in a format usable by GIS systems.
- Identify community readiness/barriers to address gaps.
- Complete Regional Broadband Access Study with coverage and gap maps by county.
- Complete Regional Infrastructure Development Plan with recommendations and cost estimates by county to include scenarios for building out new or expanded networks through open access, proprietary networks or combination to include financing options, legal requirements, risks and regulations relevant to building/operating networks and partnership agreements.
- Provide New North with data for their submission of all required written reports to EDA.

Project Deliverables

1. Regional Broadband Access Study complete with coverage/gap maps by county
2. Regional Infrastructure development plan with recommendations and cost estimates by county

III. Proposal Structure

The proposal must address all elements of the scope of work as outlined in this RFQ. Any modifications or enhancements proposed beyond the scope included in this RFQ must be clearly and concisely identified and explained.

Proposal Format

In order to assist in the evaluation process, please include the following components in the statement of qualifications document:

1. **Cover Letter** - The cover letter must be submitted by an individual with authority to legally represent the organization or team submitting the proposal.

*Software available to assist in crowd sourcing speed tests.

2. Introduction to the Applicant(s) – Applicant(s) shall provide the following information about their organization. The same information must be provided for each sub-consultant with which the lead organization intends to work on the program, if applicable.

- Firm name and business address, including telephone number and primary email contact
- Name and location of consulting firm and subsidiaries (if any)
- A brief history of the organization
- A summary of the organization’s presence in Wisconsin

3. Program Approach/Work Plan/Schedule - This section shall include a detailed description of the applicant’s understanding of the intent of the program’s scope and its objectives, the character of the required deliverables, and overall approach to the Broadband Access Study and Expansion Plan. The applicants shall also identify the level of assistance required from New North and its project partners to complete each program task.

- Time required to complete individual tasks (duration)
- Inter-relations between tasks (dependencies)
- Key events during the project (milestones)
- Critical input points from the New North and the Stakeholder Team

4. Qualifications and Relevant Experience of the Firm - Applicants shall describe their firms’ recent experience that is relevant to this program. Applicants shall include a summary of each relevant past project, a reference for each relevant past project, and contact information for each past project reference. Applicants shall emphasize past projects that involved the same personnel who will be working on the New North Broadband Study and Expansion Plan.

If an applicant anticipates using sub-consultants for the program, the applicant will identify:

- The role(s) and extent to which these firms will participate in the program.
- The means by which the consultant will oversee the work of these firms.
- The experience and credentials of these firms that are relevant to the program.

5. Qualifications, Contributions, and Relevant Experience of Staff - Applicants shall identify the personnel who will work on the New North Broadband Access Study and Expansion Plan. Applicants shall also describe:

- The role of each team member working on the program including the extent of project manager involvement. Identify the frequency of meetings proposed with the Stakeholder Team to meet the objectives of the program and any additional meetings, as the consultant believes necessary to enhance the project.
- The qualifications of each person and how these qualifications relate to their role in the program. Describe key project team members’ roles on similar projects and unique qualifications that make them a valuable resource on this specific project, including experience with other consulting firms

- The estimated amount of time each person will spend working on each element of the program. Number of people and hours assigned to this project with information to be provided in a format that clearly identifies staff and hours. **Staffing costs must not be listed in this section, as expenses will be submitted with the budget separately.**

If an applicant anticipates using sub-consultants for the program, the same information shall be provided for the relevant personnel of each sub-consultant.

- 6. Program Schedule** - A schedule for the Broadband Access Study and Expansion Plan will be developed for the program by the proposer. Time is of the essence in this project as this information is needed to apply for and access funding programs for Broadband expansion. Therefore, consultant needs to spell out their timeline for project completion, including ability to complete prior to or by December 31, 2021.
- 7. Program Budget** - Applicants should propose a detailed budget for the program that ensures the total cost will not exceed \$547,000. The budget must identify the cost associated for each element described in the Scope of Work section of this document. **The budget must be submitted as a separate digital file** as this is primarily a qualifications-based decision.

Intent to Submit a Proposal

All interested consultants/firms are required to send an email to Barbara Koldos (barbara.koldos@thenewnorth.com) stating interest and identifying a point person as the primary contact for questions/answers and general information updates by July 14, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. (CT).

RFQ Questions

Any questions regarding the proposal may be submitted by email only to Barbara Koldos (barbara.koldos@thenewnorth.com) with a subject line “New North Broadband Access Study and Expansion Plan RFQ.” The deadline for submitting questions is July 14, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. (CT).

New North will respond to all questions received by the deadline, and the answers will be posted on New North website (www.thenewnorth.com) by July 16, 2021. During the review or preparation of statements of qualifications, if a proposer discovers any errors, omissions, or ambiguities within the RFQ, they should identify them in writing to New North prior to the RFQ submission deadline.

Submittal Instructions

Applicants shall submit one digital copy of their proposal and one digital copy of their budget as an Adobe PDF file (two separate PDF files) and submit via email to Barbara Koldos (barbara.koldos@thenewnorth.com). **Digital copies must be submitted by the proposal deadline of 12:00 p.m. (CT), July 30, 2021.**

IV. Tentative Project Timeline

Request for Qualifications (RFQ) advertised	July 7, 2021
Written questions regarding RFQ	July 14, 2021, 9:00 a.m. CT
Answers to written questions posted on New North website	July 16, 2021
Proposals due to New North	July 30, 2021, 12:00 p.m. CT
Core Stakeholder Team review period	Week of August 2 - 6, 2021

Consultant Interviews	Week of August 17 – 20, 2021
Consultant selection and notification	August 23 - 25, 2021
Consultant contract negotiation and agreement	August 26 - 31, 2021
Program initiation	September 1, 2021
Project Completion	December 31, 2021

Budget

The Broadband Access Study and Expansion Plan for each of the 18 counties within the New North Region should be complete, in total, including all meetings, discussion groups, team time, contract labor support, expenses like travel, etc. at a cost not to exceed \$547,000. Payment will be disbursed at three milestones: at contract execution, midway, and a final completion of the project. The selected consultant must successfully complete the program and all deliverables prior to or by December 31, 2021.

V. Consultant Selection Criteria and Weight Factors

Selection of the most qualified consultant will be based on the following criteria (not listed in priority order):

1. **Experience with Similar Projects (25%)** - Demonstrated experience in developing broadband access studies and expansion plans as exemplified by past projects and client contracts. The results of reference checks regarding previous work on programs similar to this project scope.
2. **Capability and Qualifications (30%)** - Qualifications of the firm and personnel (including any sub-consultants) who will be working on this program and the capacity of the firm to complete this program in a timely manner. Knowledge of needs and challenges faced by businesses and communities, especially diverse businesses and communities.
3. **Project Understanding and Approach (25%)** - Demonstration of overall understanding of the program’s objectives, clarity of the proposed approach to implementing the program, and thoroughness of descriptions of how the firm will address the program elements identified in this RFQ. Proposed schedule and capacity to accomplish all tasks outlined in the Scope of Work.
4. **Desired and Value-Added Capabilities (10%)** - The consultant may submit any information they believe relevant that does not fit within the body of the proposal. This may include, but is not limited to brochures, company information, supplemental resumes, additional project descriptions, and any other information the consultant believes is useful. You may use this section to include innovative approaches your firm would take in working on this project or additional items that would complement the approaches outlined. This additional submittal will be reviewed and used by the Stakeholder Team
5. **Budget and Cost (10%)** - Proposals will be assessed relative to their proposed costs, but the selection of a consultant will be primarily a qualifications-based decision.

VI. Proposal Terms and Conditions

New North shall, to the fullest extent possible, provide to the consultant all resources requested. The municipal members of the New North shall, to the fullest extent possible, provide the consultant with GIS mapping and database information.

New North reserves the right to seek clarification of any submitted proposal, reject any and all proposals in response to this solicitation, negotiate with any qualified consultant, or cancel this RFQ in part or in its entirety if it is in the best interest of New North. This solicitation does not obligate the New North to award a contract.

A short list of qualified consultants will be selected from the submitted proposals for interviews. The interview format will include an oral presentation by the consultant to be followed by a question and answer period. It is expected that the interviews will be conducted via videoconference during the week of August 17 – 20, 2021.

If New North determines that changes to the contents of this RFQ are necessary, an addendum will be issued by the New North. Any addendum that may be issued will be posted on the New North website, and the applicants will be notified of its availability. Each consultant will be required to acknowledge receipt of the addendum in the proposal.

New North reserves the right to award the contract to any qualified applicant. All proposals become the property of New North upon submission. The cost of preparing, submitting, and presenting the proposals lies solely with the applicants.

All reports and other materials developed for the New North Broadband Access Study and Expansion Plan shall be transferred digitally to the New North upon completion of the program and will become the property of New North.

1. RFQ Document

Information provided herein is intended solely to assist proposers in the preparation of their proposals. To the best of New North's knowledge, the information provided is accurate. However, New North does not warrant such accuracy and any errors or omissions subsequently determined will not be construed as a basis for invalidating this RFQ.

2. Ownership of Records

New North will retain ownership of all interim and final documents as well as related materials that are either produced or developed in conjunction with the consultant's contract. The consultant is prohibited from copying or distributing any of these documents or other reports developed in conjunction with New North without written permission from New North.

3. Acceptance of Proposal Content and Public Information

Proposals will be treated as proprietary and confidential from the time of receipt and throughout the review process; however, the proposer shall understand that all submitted proposals become the property of New North and information included therein or attached thereto shall become public record pursuant to Wisconsin Statutes after recommendation for endorsement of the contract is made. Any specific portions of the proposals which the submitting firm desires to remain confidential due to legitimate "proprietary information" or "trade secret" must be clearly labeled as such upon submittal. New North will be the final authority as to whether the information qualifies as confidential. In the event that New North the information to be non-confidential, the proposer will be notified and given the opportunity to change the designation or withdraw the proposal prior to evaluation.

4. RFQ Proposal Costs and Reimbursements

New North is not liable for any costs or expenses incurred by any proposer in the preparation of the proposal, attendance at any conference, or meeting related to this RFQ. New North is not liable for payment of any amount to the selected proposer until the contract has been awarded and executed by New North and the contractor has performed services pursuant to the contract that entitle the contractor to receive payment under the terms of the contract.

The Broadband Access Study and Expansion Plan for each of the 18 counties within the New North Region should be complete, in total, including all meetings, discussion groups, team time, contract labor support, expenses like travel, etc. for \$547,000.

5. Separate Bank/Fund Accounts

The consultant is not required to establish a separate bank account but may do so. The consultant, however, must maintain accounting records to adequately identify the source and application of program funds. Other considerations, such as Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation coverage, shall be in accordance with the provisions of 2 CFR Part 200.

6. Rejection of Proposals

New North reserves the right to waive any informality and/or to reject, at any time and for any reason, any and all proposals received as a result of this RFQ. New North's intent is to enter into a contract as a result of this RFQ. However, if after reviewing the proposals received, New North determines that New North should not enter into any contract, or enter into a partial or different contract from the contract contemplated by this RFQ, New North will act in accordance with what New North determines at that time to be in its best interest. No proposer or any other party has any entitlement, interest, or right in this decision by New North, and, by submitting a proposal, acknowledges New North's right to exercise its discretion in this regard without any right of recourse by the proposer.

7. Insurance and Hold Harmless

The successful proposer will be required to provide proof of insurance prior to signing the contract. In addition, "hold harmless" provisions will be contained in the contract with the successful proposer.

8. Contract Negotiations

New North reserves the right to negotiate the award and conditions of the proposal prior to entering into a written agreement.

9. Applicability of State and Federal Regulations

The selected contractor shall comply with all applicable terms and conditions of the New North and EDA Program Funds and will be responsible for following Uniform Guidance as outlined in 2 C.F.R § 200.317 through 200.326. Such conditions shall be outlined in contract documents, which will be submitted for review to EDA prior to the execution of the contract.

10. Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity

As a recipient and sub recipient of state and federal funds, New North complies with State of Wisconsin and Federal Equal Opportunity Regulations (s, 16.765, Wis. Stats., s.51.01 (5), Wis. Stats.; Section 109 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974). New North also complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Civil Restoration Act of 1987 (P.L. 100.259). Any

contract resulting from this RFQ shall contain provisions referencing New North's and the contractor's compliance with these regulations. New North also complies with Title 15: Commerce and Foreign Trade, Section 24.36E regarding affirmation steps to encourage small and minority firms, women's business enterprise, and labor surplus area firms to respond to this RFQ.

11. Audits

The consultant agrees to comply with audit requirements, relative to the project, as directed by New North.

Map 1

