

## Request for Proposals

**Posting Date: 1/30/2024 and 2/6/2024**

**Appalachia Digital Accelerator (Connect Humanity) – Project Delivery & Management  
Board of Mahoning County Commissioners (BMCC)**

**Due Date and time: February 21, 2024 at 3:00 p.m.**

### **Communications Restrictions**

**Please note the following policy concerning communication between Consultants and the BMCC during the announcement and selection process:**

During the period between the advertisement and the announcement of the final consultant selection, communication with consultants (or their agents) shall be limited as follows:

Following the RFP Issue Date, Respondents may submit questions regarding this RFP at any time before 1:00 pm Eastern on **2/14/2024** via electronic mail to the following address (the "County Authorized Representative"): **Annemarie DeAscentis at adeascentis@mahoningcountyoh.gov**. Any individual who would like to receive future updates on this RFP must submit their name, organization, and email address to the County Authorized Representative by such deadline as well. Questions submitted to the Authorized Representative do not create exceptions to the terms and conditions of this RFP.

All questions submitted to, and answers provided by the County Authorized Representative shall be shared on or before **2/15/2024** with those individuals who submitted their name, organization, and email address in accordance with the requirements above. Respondents shall not contact any person who is an employee, officer, elected official, or agent of Mahoning County concerning this RFP, except for the Authorized Representative. The BMCC may disqualify any Respondent who makes such contact.

### **Project Description**

The selected Consultant will engage in the planning and completion of Community connectivity plans to develop The Connectivity Plan by following Connect Humanity guidelines that include 3 main sections: Digital Equity, Infrastructure, and Finance, as is necessary to bring high-speed, affordable internet, devices, digital literacy, and adoption to all residents.

These plans will be prepared and structured to enable Mahoning County to submit Broadband Equity, Access, & Deployment (BEAD)/Digital Equity Act (DEA) applications (or applications to other federal funding programs) where appropriate. Additionally, the Selected Consultant will work to identify gaps in funding where federal funds may be ineligible and will create a plan to identify necessary alternative investment resources.

**Estimated Contract:** up to \$45,000.00

**Project Period:** March 2024 to September 2024

**Prequalification Requirements**

Overview of prior experience providing planning & broadband-related technical assistance, familiarity with NTIA BEAD & DEA programs, as well as BroadbandOhio priorities and strategies. The selected consultant will be required to provide references and links to examples of previously completed work.

**Selection Subfactors**

There are no selection subfactors for this project.

**Estimated Date of Authorization**

It is anticipated that the selected Consultant will be authorized to proceed by **March 30, 2024**.

**Completion Schedule**

- |   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| 1. Request for Proposals (RFP) Advertisement: | 1/30/2024 and 2/6/2024 |
| 2. Preproposal questions deadline             | 2/14/2024              |
| 3. Response to questions available            | 2/15/2024              |
| 4. Proposals due:                             | 2/21/2024              |
| 5. Proposal Review completed                  | 2/28/2024              |
| 6. Target award date:                         | 3/07/2024              |

**MBE/WBE/VBE/DOBE Certifications**

Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs) shall have equal opportunity to compete for and participate in agreements included in this request for proposals, either as the prime consultant or sub-consultant. The Consultant must use good faith efforts to include DBE participation. Consequently, the requirements of Title 49 CFR Part 26 will apply. The Consultant must ensure that the DBE firms participating in the agreement are performing a "commercially useful function" as defined in 49 CFR 26.55.

**Suspended or Debarred Firms**

Firms included on the current Federal list of firms suspended or debarred are not eligible for selection.

## **Terms and Conditions**

- This RFP does not commit Mahoning County to issue an award or to pay any costs incurred in the preparation of a proposal in response to this RFP.
- The proposals will become part of Mahoning County's official files without any obligation on Mahoning County's part.
- All proposals received and any or all supporting documentation are subject to the State of Ohio Public Records Act and the provisions of Ohio Law. The County will use reasonable due diligence where lawful to protect materials marked by any Respondent as "proprietary," "trade secret" or "confidential". General technology approach or business model information does not constitute "proprietary," "trade secret" or confidential information.
- Respondent(s) shall not offer any gratuities, favors, or anything of monetary value to any official or employee of Mahoning County.
- The RFP and the related responses of the selected Respondent may by reference become part of any formal agreement between the selected Respondent and Mahoning County. Mahoning County and the selected Respondent may negotiate a contract or contracts for submission to Mahoning County for consideration and approval. In the event an agreement cannot be reached with the selected Respondent, Mahoning County reserves the right to select an alternative Respondent. The County reserves the right to negotiate with alternative Respondent(s) the exact terms and conditions of the contract.
- Mahoning County shall have the unilateral right to reject any Respondent RFP response including, but not limited to the following:
  - a) Failure to submit the RFP response for Mahoning County to receive it by the deadline of 2/21/2024 at 3:00 p.m.
  - b) Failure to submit the RFP response to the correct location.
  - c) Failure to submit the RFP response in the prescribed formats and number of copies.
  - d) Failure to include all requested information.
  - e) Taking exception to the terms, conditions, and specifications herein.
- The issuance of this RFP and the acceptance of a proposal does not constitute an agreement by Mahoning County that any contract or other agreement will be entered into by Mahoning County. The County expressly reserves the right to:
  - a) Reject any or all proposals.
  - b) Reissue the RFP.
  - c) Accept portions of individual or multiple RFP responses.
  - d) Request more information and/or clarification of proposals from any or all Respondents.
  - e) Waive immaterial defect(s) or informality(ies).

## **Compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**

The Board of Mahoning County Commissioners, in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (78 Stat. 252, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d to 2000d-4) and the Regulations, hereby notifies all bidders that it will affirmatively ensure that any contract entered into pursuant to this advertisement, all bidders, including disadvantaged business enterprises, will be afforded a full and fair opportunity to submit bids in response to this invitation and will not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, low-income status, or limited English proficiency in consideration for an award.

## **Selection Procedures**

Mahoning County will directly select a consultant based on the respondent's proposal submission. The requirements for the proposal submission and the Programmatic Consultant Selection Rating Form that will be used to select the consultant are shown below.

Firms interested in being considered for selection should respond by submitting three (3) copies of the requested proposal in a sealed envelope marked on the outside "Proposal for Appalachia Digital Accelerator Broadband Technical Assistance", as well as a digital copy on a USB Drive to the following address **DATE: 2/21/2024 TIME: 3:00 p.m.**

Mahoning County Board of Commissioners  
Purchasing Department  
21 W. Boardman Street  
Suite 100  
Youngstown, OH 44503  
ATTN: Anna DeAscentis, Authorized Representative

Responses received after 3:00 PM on the response due date will not be considered.

## **Scope of Services**

The Scope of Services document is included below.

## **Requirements for Proposal, Programmatic Selection Process**

- A. Instructions for Preparing and Submitting a Proposal
  1. Provide the information requested in the Proposal Content (Item B below), in the same order listed, in a letter signed by an officer of the firm. Do not send additional forms, resumes, brochures, or other material.
  2. Proposals shall be limited to ten (10) 8½" x 11" single-sided pages plus two (2) pages for the Project Approach (Item B.3 below).

3. Please adhere to the following requirements in preparing and binding letters of interest:
  - a. Please use a minimum font size of 12-point and maintain margins of 1" on all four sides.
  - b. Page numbers must be centered at the bottom of each page.
  - c. Use 8½" x 11" paper only.
  - d. Bind letters of interest by stapling at the upper left-hand corner only. Do not utilize any other binding system.
  - e. Do not provide tabbed inserts or other features that may interfere with machine copying.

B. Proposal Content

1. List the Project Manager and other key staff members, including key sub-consultant staff. Include team members for important disciplines and staff members that will be responsible for the work, and the project responsibility of each.

Address the experience of the key staff members on similar projects, and the staff qualifications relative to the selection subfactors noted.

2. Describe the capacity of your staff and their ability to perform the work in a timely manner, relative to the present workload, and the availability of the assigned staff.
3. Describe your Project Approach, not to exceed two pages Confirm that the firm has demonstrable experience performing the Scope of Services and Project Deliverables and address your firm's: 1) Technical approach; 2) Understanding of the project; 3) Qualifications for the project; 4) Knowledge and experience providing relevant services; 5) Innovative ideas.

Items 1 and 2 must be included within the 10-page body of the proposal. The remaining space within the ten (10) pages may be utilized to provide personnel resumes or additional information concerning general qualifications.

Consultant Selection Rating Form  
for  
Programmatic Selections

**Project:** Appalachia Digital  
Accelerator Technical Assistance

**Project Type:** Planning  
**Scoring:** Selection Committee

Firm Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Category	Total Value	Scoring Criteria	Score
<b>Management &amp; Team</b>			
Project Manager	20	See Note 1, Exhibit 1	
Strength/Experience of Assigned Staff including Sub consultants	40	See Note 2, Exhibit 1	
Firm's Current Workload/ Availability of Personnel	10	See Note 3, Exhibit 1	
<b>Project Approach</b>	30		
<b>Total</b>	100		

**Exhibit 1 - Consultant Selection Rating Form Notes**

1. The proposed project manager for each consultant shall be ranked, with the highest-ranked project manager receiving the greatest number of points, and lower-ranked project managers receiving commensurately lower scores. The rankings and scores should be based on each project manager's experience on similar projects and past performance in Mahoning County and the surrounding region. Any subfactors identified should be weighed heavily in the differential scoring.

Differential scoring should consider the relative importance of the project manager's role in the success of a given project. The project manager's role in a simple project may be less important than for a complex project, and differential scoring should reflect this, with higher differentials assigned to projects that require a larger role for the project manager.

2. The experience and strength of the assigned staff, including sub-consultant staff, should be ranked and scored as noted for Number 1 above, with higher differential scores assigned on more difficult projects. Any subfactors identified in the project notification should be weighed heavily in the differential scoring.

As above, other agencies may be contacted.

3. The consultant's workload and availability of qualified personnel, equipment, and facilities shall be ranked and scored on a relative, differential scoring type basis. The scoring shall consider quantifiable concerns regarding the ability of a firm (or firms) rated higher in other categories to complete the work with staff members named in the letter of interest.

### **Scope of Services**

The scope of work to be performed by the consultant may include, but is not limited to, the following:

The County requires assistance in the planning, development, and creation of a Community Connectivity Plan that will eliminate the digital divide in Mahoning County. It will identify and address current infrastructure, affordability, and adoption limitations within Mahoning County.

The selected consultant will ensure the completion of The Connectivity Plan which will contain four main sections: Preliminary Research and Readiness, Digital Equity, Broadband Infrastructure, and Finance.

The scope of work performed by the consultant may include assistance and interaction from various Mahoning County staff, Eastgate Regional Council of Governments, local government officials, and others. However, it is the sole responsibility of the consultant to have The Connectivity Plan completed on time.

The Connectivity Plan is to be completed by August 30, 2024, to enable Mahoning County to submit a Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) application (or applications to other federally funded programs). The Connectivity Plan will identify alternative investment resources where necessary. This effort will include, but is not limited to collecting, processing, and analyzing mapping and other sources of data to identify broadband availability and quality of service issues.

1. Manage the project to develop The Connectivity Plan by following Connect Humanity guidelines and meeting all reporting requirements.
2. Create a geographic and demographic profile of Mahoning County using local and state-provided data. The profile will include current internet adoption and usage data.
3. Develop the County's vision for digital equity and complete a digital equity asset map through meaningful community engagement. Once barriers to digital equity are identified and solutions recommended, develop strategies and tactics to implement those solutions.

4. Identify gaps in broadband availability by reviewing the Broadband Serviceable Location (BSL) data. Tasks may include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - a. Perform an initial assessment of current broadband data for Mahoning County, including address points and tables to evaluate the content and structure of the data and identify any deficiencies or changes needed to use the data for the project.
  - b. Take steps to create a newly revised set of maps of BSL data and work with Broadband Ohio and the FCC in the Challenge Process to ensure accurate data. This includes Analyzing and challenging inaccurate information regarding locations in Mahoning County in the broadband data maps created by the Federal Communications Commission including but not limited to the classification of locations as unserved or underserved and assisting in all aspects of such challenges, including but not limited to assisting Broadband Ohio in preparing challenges and assisting in the resolution of disputes with broadband service providers.
  - c. Once the data is accurate, identify geographic areas within the County that need broadband improvement.
5. Develop a high-level logical network design to identify ways to make broadband improvements in the county given BEAD grant objectives.
6. Develop a financial plan to include, but not limited to, the creation of a revenue and cost model, pro forma statements, and a strategy to obtain required funding and resolve any identified funding gaps.
7. Develop an implementation and operational plan to include in the BEAD grant application(s).
8. The Connectivity Plan is expected to be completed by August 30, 2024.