

Proposals for Municipal Digital Equity Planning Consultant Prequalification

(No. 2023-MBI-03)

Questions and Answers
 October 6, 2022

	Question	Answer
1.	Do bidders have to have a physical presence in the state?	Respondents are not required to have a physical presence in the state. However, potential travel costs for in-person meetings or events will be considered when evaluating qualifications.
2.	How do you do fixed price if communities are different sizes?	If the size of the community would impact the service cost associated with a base case fixed fee please reference that in the variable cost section of your Attachment C Budget.
3.	Do you have a range of fee(s) in mind for each planning activity?	There is no preconceived range of costs. Respondents should conceptualize the delivery of the services outlined in the solicitation and include what they believe is an appropriate level of effort and associated costs in their response.
4.	What does MBI anticipate the fees for each model - acceptable range?	See answer to Question #3.
5.	Will there be WBE/DBE requirements for a prime consultant to have on the team?	There is no WBE/DBE requirement for consultants but additional consideration will be given for those proposals that include WBE/DBE entities.
6.	Is there any way to indicate how costs could change if contracted to do multiple charrettes/planning processes? "start up" costs of doing one could be different from subsequent charrettes/planning processes	If respondents believe there will be cost savings over time by reusing materials/templates etc., please indicate this in your narrative response.
7.	How many municipalities are we required to work with?	There is no requirement for a minimum number of municipalities a consultant has to work with. MBI will provide a list of prequalified consultants to a municipality and it will be up to

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		<p>the municipality to select the consultant. MBI will approve work in a way that does not overburden the capacity of any particular prequalified consultant.</p> <p>Please note that selection as a prequalified consultant does not guarantee work.</p>
8.	<p>Do we just have to work with all municipalities that request services or is there a cap per year?</p>	<p>There is no cap per year, all work to be performed by a pre-qualified consultant will be mutually agreed by the parties and approved by MBI.</p>
9.	<p>Can you please provide the process by which a vendor will be selected for a given community? What criteria, weighting, and process will be followed? Will vendors have the chance to adjust/tailor their proposed approach to interested communities?</p>	<p>Upon review of a municipality's expression of interest to receive digital equity planning services, MBI will ask prequalified consultants that can provide services in the municipalities geographic area and their desired service option (planning or charrette) if they would like to be considered as a consultant for a particular planning project. MBI will forward the prequalified consultants proposed approach to services to the municipality along with contact information. Municipalities will then use their own internal decision making process to select a consultant. MBI will not provide any criteria, weighting, or scoring guidance to a municipality. If selected, the consultant will execute a work order with MassTech based on a scope of work to be developed based on the municipality's expression of interest. In so doing, the consultant will have the opportunity to adapt its approach to interested communities, so long as they are consistent with the general approaches outlined by the consultant in their response to the RFQ.</p>
10.	<p>Are you expecting that the proposed solutions will match one of MassTech's existing programs in place such as housing authority internet access programs or wifi neighborhood mesh networks - or are you looking for new ideas?</p>	<p>The solutions that MasTech hopes consultants can provide to applicant communities should match the needs of the communities. MBI would encourage to the extent possible that those solutions align with the funding programs available by MBI or other state or federal grant</p>

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		programs to ensure implementation feasibility, but it is not a requirement.
11.	What's the funding source for this work?	This program is funded through a \$50M legislative allocation of Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery funds under ARPA.
12.	How does the municipality make their choice from the list of approved consultants? What materials and information will be provided to the municipality to choose a consultant?	See answer to Question #9.
13.	Can you provide insight as to how you are weighting and evaluating responses to the RFP? e.g., is their a point scoring system for details such as qualifications versus cost versus approach, etc.?	<p>MBI will review respondent applications to prequalify consultants that will provide the best value to the Commonwealth in regard to following criteria:</p> <p>Documented previous work related to digital equity/broadband planning:</p> <p>Demonstrated expertise, approach, and ability to execute all activities associated with the service option(s) the Respondent seeks to be prequalified in, as outlined in Section 2.2:</p> <p>Staff qualifications in: Community Engagement, Data Analysis and Mapping, Project Management, Translation/Interpretation in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Khmer, Vietnamese, Arabic, Portuguese, Chinese, and other major languages spoken in the Commonwealth:</p> <p>Status of the Respondent and/or any subcontractor(s) as a minority business enterprise, women's business enterprise or a labor surplus area firm.</p> <p>Reasonableness of Fee Structures and Hourly Rates Offered.</p>
14.	Is there a template for "estimated time on task"	There is no template for estimated time on task. We are asking Respondents to indicate their best estimate at the time associated with tasks

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		based on previous experience and expertise in planning.
15.	Is the prequalification a pass/fail or will there be rankings or scores assigned to firms that the municipalities will see as they select their firm?	Municipalities will not be provided with any rankings or scores for the prequalified consultants on the list provided by MBI.
16.	Can we indicate cities/towns or regions in which we are most interested to work with given expertise, networks, etc?	Respondents should indicate which cities/towns/regions they have the capacity, experience, and expertise to work in.
17.	If RPAs are chosen to be a consultant, would we only work with Munis in our region?	See answer to Question #16.
18.	What is the timeline for the grant application period(s) for municipalities? Is it on a rolling basis?	Once the municipal planning program is open, communities can submit applications on a rolling basis. Please note that all ARPA funds must be committed by December 31, 2024.
19.	What is the expectation for how quickly consultants can staff and start a project?	The work executed by MBI and the consultant selected by the municipality will include a scope of work, budget and schedule. The project schedule will include the lead time for the consultant to commence work. The project schedule will take into consideration a municipality's desired start and end date which will be a component of their expression of interest. MBI's expectation is that consultants should be able to begin work within 30 days of the execution of a work order, unless otherwise agreed to by the consultant, the municipality and MBI.
20.	Will MBI provide municipalities guidance on process to select a consultant? Will they need to public advertise, require at least 3 proposals to be submitted and hopefully not just go by lowest fee. Will MBI be part of the selection process beyond just giving a list of qualified consultants?	<p>MBI will provide the municipality with a list of prequalified consultants that includes general information about each consultant and their approach to providing the planning services. MBI will not provide advice to the municipality regarding which consultant to select.</p> <p>Municipalities will not need to follow any Chapter 30B requirements because MassTech will hold the contract with the consultant and</p>

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		execute a work order when a municipality makes a selection.
21.	Is the 17th 18th a required training for the Municipal digital Equity Planning Services? is the 17th 18th focused on Municipal Digital Equity?	The Digital Equity Capacity Building Workshop is an optional workshop available for public sector planning staff to learn more about digital equity planning and implementation.
22.	Since most municipalities in our commonwealth already have some infrastructure in place with an incumbent provider or municipal network, do you see the needs assessments will trend more towards connecting people with existing services through subsidies of devices or access fees and education? Or do you know that there are significant pockets of unserved areas that need infrastructure builds? Or is determining this part of the task at hand?	MBI does not view this municipal planning process as a way to identify the remaining unserved locations or underserved locations in the Commonwealth relative to broadband access. MBI is undertaking a statewide mapping process in alignment with the process and timing of the FCC's release of their new Broadband Data Act maps. MBI expects to address gaps in infrastructure through other federally-funded grant programs that will be launched in the future, such as the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment program under IJA.
23.	How do you envision proposed digital equity solutions utilizing and optimizing state-owned assets such as the MB123 network?	To the extent that assets like the MassBroadband 123 Network can be leveraged for digital equity projects, MBI would encourage that. However, MBI's middle mile network does not cover the entire state so it may only be relevant in a discrete portion of the Commonwealth.
24.	Has there been any initial outreach to towns to understand if there are preferences on their part for charrette versus master plan?	There has been no formal outreach to municipalities to gauge preference on the two service options.
25.	Could a consultant be a part of multiple applications (as lead or sub consultant) for pre-qualification if the consultant teams serve different geographic areas?	Yes
26.	If selected as prequalified consultants, is it appropriate for consultants to actively market to municipalities vs. other prequalified consultants?	Prequalified consultants, as they do in other areas, should feel free to market their services to municipalities in an appropriate manner.
27.	How long do you plan to keep the list of prequalified consultants live?	The period of performance required by the federal funding under ARPA, states that funds must be committed by the end of 2024 and expended by the end of 2026. The consultants selected are expected to remain prequalified for the duration of the program subject to

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		<p>acceptable performance of work assigned. Based on the ARPA period of performance, no new projects will be awarded after December 31, 2024.</p>
28.	<p>Do you have a vision for this effort</p>	<p>As stated in the solicitation, the goals of this program are: Guide municipal decision-making related to services and infrastructure that will increase access, adoption and usage of the internet for the populations most impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic.</p> <p>And</p> <p>Prepare municipalities to submit grant proposals to existing or forthcoming state or federal programs to support digital equity activities.</p>
29.	<p>When do you anticipate the work will begin with cities?</p>	<p>MBI currently anticipates opening an online application portal for municipalities during Fall 2022, subject to having a sufficient number of consultants prequalified under this process. Based upon this timeline, we would expect the initial work would be assigned during Q1 of 2023.</p>
30.	<p>Approximately how many consultants do you envision being on the prequalified list?</p>	<p>There is no pre-determined number of consultants MBI expects to prequalify.</p>
31.	<p>Is there guidance regarding the response length expected for the RFQ for Municipal Digital Equity Planning Services: RFQ No. 2023-MBI-03? The document has clear instructions about the questions the team would like applicants to answer but not parameters regarding response length. <i>See page 6 under Application Process.</i></p>	<p>There is no minimum or maximum page limit for responses to this application. Respondents should provide sufficient information that they feel best represents their proposed approaches, qualifications, and staff experience relevant to the criteria outlined in the RFQ.</p>

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32.	<p>Can applicants include sub-contractors, without naming specific organization(s), and provide an estimated budget allocation for the same for their services to assist with either a charrette or plan? The idea would be to include a sub-contractor who has expertise with broadband technology (Existing Conditions Analysis) and/or a second sub-contractor that may have more robust/established relationships with underserved communities (Community Engagement / Stakeholder Outreach). We would like to include either or both without deciding upfront who these sub-contractors are and then offer our RPA as providing management and oversight to one or both. Alternatively, do we need to have pre-identified sub-contractors and include their qualifications and experience to show why they were selected?</p>	<p>Applicants can list subcontractors by the services they will provide and the estimated rate per hour in their proposal budget. Once an applicant is selected and prior to work being authorized, the contractor will need to be identified and qualifications provided. To the extent the applicant’s qualifications and experience do not provide a sufficient level of expertise in the proposed project area, a pre-determined subcontractor with relevant qualifications that has agreed to provide support on the proposal can strengthen the application. Gaps in any proposed applicant team may materially impact the likelihood that the Respondent will be prequalified by MBI. Respondents with an incomplete team that are not selected for prequalification in a particular round can reapply in a subsequent round when their team is complete.</p>
33.	<p>It seems unlikely that consulting firms will have complete in-house staff to cover all needs that arise around digital equity charettes and planning. Consultants will need to find subcontractors to fill those needs such as GIS mapping, data aggregation, survey marketing and distribution, and other special skill sets that may not be able to be identified in advance. Would it be possible for MBI to collect and distribute a list of firms/individuals with specialized skill sets who are interested in working as subcontractors with the main consultants?</p>	<p>It will be the responsibility of any interested applicant to assemble a project team that can effectively meet the requirements outlined in the RFQ. MBI will not collect or distribute a list of firms/individuals with specialized skill sets who are interested in working as subcontractors with the lead consultants.</p>
34.	<p>One risk I see in this model is many different contractors “recreating the wheel” with each project and each municipality. Best practices and innovative, viable solutions may emerge but will be stuck in information silos with each consultant. Is there any way we can develop a shared knowledge base for digital equity process planning in a state-wide way? For example, can we set up a way for consultants to share what they have learned with each other or for MBI to collect this information and distribute it amongst consultants on a regular basis?</p>	<p>MBI intends to work with prequalified consultants to create such a community of practice around the digital equity planning field. All planning work deliverables are public records under Massachusetts law.</p>

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35.	<p>Once municipal plans are completed, who is anticipated to implement the recommendations/needs identified?</p> <p>Often individual rural communities do not have capacity at the local level for project implementation and are reliant on regional organizations that require grant funds to provide services and meet these needs.</p>	<p>MBI expects that consultants will provide a clear set of implementation strategies that align with the availability and capacity of local and regional stakeholders. The exact stakeholders involved in the recommended implementation strategy will likely vary between communities, therefore, a critical function of the planning consultant will be to clearly identify those local entities as well as stating any identified capacity gaps.</p>
36.	<p>Will there be future funding programs that can be applied to recommendations/needs identified?</p>	<p>As outlined in the RFQ, MBI expects that recommendations should align with existing or forthcoming state or federal funding opportunities. MBI will ensure that pre-qualified planning consultants have access to relevant information regarding those state and federal funding sources as that information becomes available.</p>
37.	<p>Will selected partners for the Digital Equity Partnership (DEP) Program be responsible for implementation of municipal plan recommendations? And if so, will they be responsible for all recommendations or only for recommendations that match the DEP topic areas they agreed to provide?</p>	<p>To the extent that the roles and initiative areas of selected Partners under the MBI Digital Equity Partnership program (RFP NO 2023-MBI-04) align with recommendations from a municipal plan it would be expected that consultants include reference to those partners and their role.</p>
38.	<p>Will only one partner be selected for the Digital Equity Partnership (DEP) Program for a geographic area?</p>	<p>The selection of Partners under RFP No. 2023-MBI-04 will include, but not be limited to factors, such as geographic coverage, based on the nature of the initiative(s) that the potential Partner proposes to implement.</p>
39.	<p>What will the contract end date be for contractors selected to provide Municipal Digital Equity Planning Services?</p>	<p>Consistent with Treasury Guidance, the contract end date for this program will be no later than December 31, 2026 but individual work orders for specific municipal digital equity plans will have separate dates.</p>

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40.	What is the final due date for when contractors must submit Municipal Plans to the MBI?	The work order for each planning project will include a project schedule that incorporates deliverable due dates.
41.	It says in Section 2.1 that municipalities will apply for municipal planning services in Fall 2022. Will this be a single application round or will it be rolling?	MBI will accept municipal applications for planning support on a rolling basis.
42.	Section 2.1 mentions “populations most impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic”. Will documentation be required to demonstrate if a population meets this criteria?	Municipalities will be asked to provide some baseline information regarding the numbers of impacted and disproportionately impacted households in the community as defined by US Treasury in their ARPA SLRF Guidance (see pages 17 and 18). https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLRF-Final-Rule-Overview.pdf
43.	Will the MBI provide information about “existing or forthcoming state or federal programs to support digital equity activities” (from Section 2.1) for use by the contracting entity to present to the municipalities?	See answer to question #35.
44.	In Section 2.2, it says that a municipal contact must be designated and is to be either a municipal employee or elected official. Could the municipality choose another type of designee, such as a non-elected municipal official or a community volunteer? For example many previously unserved, Last Mile Program communities have active broadband committees made up of volunteers or Municipal Light Plant commissions who are volunteers or are appointed.	To ensure an equitable and transparent process as well as consistency of leadership MBI will require a municipality to designate an employee or elected official to be the lead municipal contact. That individual can work in close coordination with any volunteer/community/committee members that would be relevant for that municipality.

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45.	<p>Aside from information from the online mapping tool, will there be other resources provided to contractors? For example, will information about the number (and, preferably, location) of current subscribers be available from broadband service providers already serving the community?</p>	<p>MBI will work to make relevant non-confidential data that it has access to available to prequalified consultants. Information regarding current broadband subscribers is not available from any current public source – however, consultants could reference cable provider Form 500 information to gather an estimate of market share for any cable internet service provider in a community. Consultants will be expected to conduct on the ground data research via survey or other community engagement methods as outlined in the RFQ.</p>
46.	<p>Reference has been made to use of the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) Five-year Estimate data to understand current broadband-related conditions in towns and cities. As the current ACS covers the time period of 2016 to 2020, this data is problematic as it does not reflect current conditions, since many of the Last Mile Program towns did not have operational networks until 2019, 2020 or 2021. Will there be more time or resources available to conduct surveys or take on other tasks to validate data, if found necessary?</p>	<p>MBI expects consultants to conduct surveys or other data validation measures as needed and requested by a community and in alignment with the activities outlined under Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 of the RFQ.</p>
47.	<p>Attachment C includes a budget line for travel and direct costs. Are the following direct costs allowed expenses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Advertising costs to promote public meetings (i.e. newspaper ads, social media boosts, etc.) b. Purchase of food and non-alcoholic beverages to be served at public meetings c. Printing/copying costs for handouts at public meetings 	<p>All of those costs listed would be eligible expenses as direct costs. All costs should be incurred in a cost conscious and reasonable manner deemed necessary to effectuate the work.</p>

	Question	Answer
	d. Meeting space rental and/or equipment fees	
48.	Can you give examples of how a respondent could satisfactorily build the skill set to become proficient in the broadband planning/digital equity topic area?	Respondents should document any specific workshops, webinars, or training sessions they have or plan to attend that would build proficiency in digital equity planning. Respondents should indicate how they will invest in staff time and technical resources and how they will engage with any current national or local digital equity practitioners to learn about the practice and successful approaches to planning activities.
49.	Will there be subject matter experts contractors can access to clarify key technical questions that may come up? Or should each contractor budget for this potential need for a Subcontractor or Additional Staffing Cost?	Contractors should budget for this potential need under either subcontractors or additional staffing costs.
50.	What is the total amount of funding budgeted specifically for the Municipal Digital Equity Planning Services program?	This program, as well as the Digital Equity Partnerships Program, is funded through a \$50M legislative allocation of Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery funds under ARPA.
51.	For sole proprietorship consultants who apply for pre-qualification for the Charrette model, is there a way for MBI to share their information with firms or organizations applying for the more robust planning process but who have yet to identify sub-contractors? The assumption here is that the skills a sole proprietor consultant might be helpful to these firms/ organizations, esp. if the consultant has expertise in digital equity planning.	See response to question #32
52.	Regarding the charrette model, the RFQ assumes 8 hours for the actual meeting component. Having participated in the MVP charette planning process	For purposes of the base case budget, please assume 8 hours. Please indicate any foreseeable variable costs implications, such as a shorter

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	<p>and knowing the constraints of volunteers and staff in small towns, I do not think this assumption is particularly accurate. If the municipality wants to have a shorter time for a charrette for practical purposes, this will effect the base rate in comparison to what a consultant proposes. How might this be addressed by MBI in developing a contract</p>	<p>timeframe for a charrette, within the variable costs section of the Attachment C budget template.</p>
53.	<p>Will an entity who is selected through this RFQ, whether as prime contractor or subcontractor, be eligible to win future broadband or digital equity-related solicitations for Massachusetts Technology Collaborative?</p>	<p>Yes</p>