

**Request for Proposals for Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD)  
 Five-Year Action Plan for Consulting Services**

*(No. 2023-MBI-07)*

Questions and Answers  
 February 22, 2023

	Question	Answer
1.	The RFP calls for respondents to provide three references for work previously performed by the respondent that is substantially similar to the Categories of Services included in the Respondent’s Application. Could a respondent with extensive subject matter expertise retained as a technical advisor on a government project of three years’ duration be considered a responsive bidder if that is the only project reference that can be provided for experience substantially similar to the Categories of Services included in the Respondent’s Application?	Respondents that submit fewer than three references for substantially similar projects will not be disqualified. However, the number and quality of references will be considered when the Application is evaluated pursuant to the criteria in Section 4.2 of the RFP.
2.	How should those interested in working as subcontractors offer their services to prime contractors responding to this RFP? Would the MBI consider developing a list of potential subcontractors and the service categories they wish to subcontract?	The list of bidders’ conference registrants is available upon written request.
3.	How much travel to Massachusetts can be expected for contractors performing only Category of Service 1?	The development of the Five-Year Action Plan will be based, in part, and will be informed by community and stakeholder engagement and input. The Respondent that is selected to perform Category of Service 1 will be expected to attend most, if not all, community/stakeholder engagement events. The exact number of events in Massachusetts that the Selected Respondent will be required to attend will be determined based on the engagement plan that is approved by MassTech.
4.	Thank you for hosting the Q/A session yesterday – it was very informative! I had one follow-up question about the participants of the broadband working group. Michael mentioned that MBI had already	The full membership of the Working Group is still being finalized and will not be released at this time.

	Question	Answer
	chosen the 30 members – are you able to share which organizations are represented?	
5.	Does MBI have a GIS mapping software platform that the Consultant would need to work with? If so, can you describe? If not, is this a requirement if this RFP?	MBI uses ArcGIS software. However, the Consultant is not required to use a specific GIS mapping software platform. Data will ideally be shared in file geodatabase or shapefile format, but may be shared using other formats that can be imported/exported using ArcGIS. MBI also has a public online mapping portal for data viewing that may contain information useful to the Consultant.
6.	Has MBI secured its Broadband Service Level Fabric Data and incorporated into a GIS or other platform?	Yes, MassTech/MBI has a User Class 2(a) license for the CostQuest Broadband Serviceable Location Fabric. This data has been used to generate FCC Bulk Fabric Challenges and Availability Challenges.
7.	Is there any requirement are the Consultant to purchase data sets that maybe required to satisfy BEAD/DEA requirements?	There are no mandatory data sets that a Selected Respondent will be required to purchase. However, Respondents are expected to specify in their proposed approach any data sets that are recommended for purchase in order to perform the services.
8.	Does the MBI or the State of Massachusetts have any authority to compel ISPs to provide service coverage and network route information?	MassTech/MBI does not have the legal authority to compel ISPs to provide service coverage and network route information. There is no other statutory or regulatory regime currently in place to compel ISPs to provide such information.
9.	Is the integration with MassBroadband 123 (MassTech Network) required or can you describe any requirements or opportunities related to it?	MassTech encourages but does not mandate that providers utilize the MassBroadband 123 middle mile network for projects within the Network’s footprint. More information about the Network can be found on the MBI’s website ( <a href="https://broadband.masstech.org/middle-mile-network">https://broadband.masstech.org/middle-mile-network</a> and <a href="https://broadband.masstech.org/map-gallery">https://broadband.masstech.org/map-gallery</a> ).
10.	Can MassTech provide the award information for RFP No. 2023-MBI-06 (“Digital Equity Plan RFP”) so coordination and cooperation under this RFP can be evaluated?	MassTech has not made an award under RFP No. 2023-MBI-06 yet.

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>
11.	Has any community and stakeholder engagement been started and documented following BEAD/DEA Guidelines?	No. However, the community/stakeholder engagement for BEAD and DEA will build upon the extensive existing relationships and outreach that MBI continues to conduct within the context of its existing programs and activities – including the Digital Equity Partnerships Program and Municipal Digital Equity Planning Program.
12.	Has MBI determined the path of coordinating community engagement at the next level? For example, regional planning and economic planning commissions?	The Respondent selected to provide Section 2.2.2 Category of Service 2: Community Engagement Activities will develop a community outreach and engagement strategy in collaboration with MBI staff that is informed by all existing outreach and engagement activities as referenced in the answer to Question #11. It is MBI’s expectation that this strategy will include collaborative with a variety of local, regional and statewide organizations, including Regional Planning Agencies to ensure the inclusion of representative geographic and covered/target populations.
13.	What is the term of the RFP?	MassTech will execute one or more services agreements with the Selected Respondent(s) that will have an end date of December 31, 2023 to allow for any support that MassTech may need after the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan is submitted in August. However, the proposed project plan and budget should only cover the period of project commencement through submission to NTIA of the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan.
14.	Does MBI require any support on speed tests? If no, do you have a speed process in place and what technology is being used?	MBI is in the process of reviewing a statewide analysis of speed test data from Ookla to identify areas of the state with disproportionately high numbers of tests below broadband speeds. MBI is complimenting that effort with a quality of service pilot program. Within the context of the BEAD requirements MBI would seek support from the Selected Respondent(s) in integrating these activities and findings into the strategic implementation plan recommendations for achieving universal high

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		speed internet across the state. MBI would like to receive a specific set of recommendations related to affordable housing connectivity.
15.	Are there any other contracted vendors from prior broadband grant and planning activities?	MassTech does not have any consultants currently under contract that have already been engaged to support any aspect of the BEAD planning activities.
16.	On Page 2, under 2.1, the RFP states that “[t]he BEAD Five-Year Action Plan has a two-hundred seventy-day timeframe for completion, inclusive of the <i>required</i> [emphasis added] public comment period.” On page 4, the RFP also states that the Action Plan will be released for public comment no later than June 30, 2023. The BEAD NOFO does not require the Action Plan to be made available for public review and comment, only that it is informed by public outreach and coordination with key stakeholder groups. Can the state clarify what it requires for public comment, including the consultant’s duration and expectations regarding the public comment period?	Given the timeline to develop a BEAD Five-Year Action Plan that will be informed by robust community/stakeholder engagement, MassTech will not require a public comment period. An addendum to the RFP will be issued to clarify this point.
17.	On Page 6, scope item 2.2.1 IV. BEAD Digital Equity Analysis, many of the subtasks listed appear to be duplicative of work underway as part of the Statewide Digital Equity Plan. Can the state clarify how the BEAD Digital Equity Analysis will interact with the Statewide Digital Equity planning effort? Specifically, whether the state expects different “vision[s] for digital equity” as part of the BEAD Action Plan and the Digital Equity Plan.	MassTech will issue an addendum to the RFP to clarify the Selected Respondent’s responsibility for certain tasks in Section 2.2.1 Category of Service 1: BEAD Five-Year Action Plan Activities. The clarification will identify tasks where the Selected Respondent’s primary responsibility is to integrate work products that will be developed through the Digital Equity Act statewide planning process.
18.	On Page 7, scope item 2.2.3, the RFP asks for a Digital Equity Working Group addressing the needs of covered populations as defined by the Digital Equity Act. As with scope item 2.2.1 IV, this task overlaps with work likely underway for the statewide Digital Equity Plan. Can the state clarify how this Digital Equity Working Group will support or coordinate with the current Digital Equity Planning efforts?	MassTech is responsible for establishing the membership of the Working Group and will coordinate meetings of the Working Group. The Selected Respondent for Section 2.2.3 Category of Service 3: Broadband and Digital Working Group will coordinate with MBI and the consultant selected under RFP No. 2023-MBI-06. The Selected Respondent will support the development of materials for Working Group

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		agenda items that relate to the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan.
19.	Under application requirements, there is a request to “[p]lease provide specific examples and links to any published materials along with references to project clients.” Later, the RFP asks for three references for work previously performed. Can the state clarify its expectations regarding references in these two instances?	The requirement to “[p]lease provide specific examples and links to any published materials along with references to project clients” is intended to have Respondents provide (1) links to similar materials that the Respondent has prepared for other clients; and (2) to identify the client for which the materials were developed. Respondents do not need to provide client contact information to satisfy this submission requirement. Respondents are only required to provide client contact information for the three references included in the Respondent’s Application.
20.	Regarding the cost proposal, can the state confirm that the total not-to-exceed cost provided for each Category of service includes all anticipated travel and other direct costs (including facility rental, materials, and other costs associated with outreach activities)?	Yes, that is correct. Please note that Respondents should include expenses associated with convening events under “Other Direct Costs”.
21.	What is the period of performance for the contract? The Action Plan has a clear deadline but the Digital Equity Working Group is more open-ended – can you clarify how long support for the working group is expected to continue?	Please see answer to Question #13.
22.	Given the accelerated timeline to produce the BEAD Action Plan, how many engagement meetings does the State expect the consultant to hold?	Please see answer to Question #12. The proposed approach to community/stakeholder engagement should balance the timeframe for performance with the need for robust engagement.
23.	Does the State expect weekly meetings with the consultant team? What level of direct engagement with the consultant team does the State expect?	MassTech will work with the Selected Respondent(s) to establish a meeting cadence that ensures a high level of collaboration with discrete and strategic review points of content and process at pre-established milestone points. MassTech will also work with the Selected Respondent(s) to establish a detailed work plan at the outset of the project that will inform the meeting cadence. To the extent that it is

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		feasible and appropriate, MassTech will work with the Selected Respondent(s) to establish asynchronous communication channels to facilitate streamlined discussion and decision making.
24.	Beyond delivering an implementable BEAD Action Plan, how does the State define success for this project?	<p>MassTech’s other goals for the BEAD planning activities includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased community/stakeholder awareness and engagement;</li> <li>• establishing a sound framework to develop the Initial and Final BEAD Proposals for submission to NTIA;</li> <li>• establishing a framework that maximizes the impact of all sources of federal broadband funding, including the ARPA Capital Projects Fund;</li> <li>• supporting MBI with recommendations relative to the capacity needed and actions to be undertaken to successfully implement the BEAD program with the greatest impact; and</li> <li>• developing specific analysis and recommendations that account for the disproportionate impact the digital divide has on people of color, immigrants and non-English speakers, and other marginalized communities across the Commonwealth.</li> </ul>
25.	Can you confirm that fixed-price bids will not be accepted as stated in the bidders webinar on 2/14/23? This contract type places upon the contractor maximum risk and full responsibility for all costs and resulting profit or loss compared to a time and material contract type where there’s a higher administrative burden upon the contracting parties to track and manage associated cost. The instructions in the RFP conflict with the verbal instruction as the RFP does not specifically prohibit firm-fixed-price (FFP) price proposals and this new restriction was not included the previous Broadband RFP for State Digital Equity Act Consulting Services.	Section 3.1 of the RFP states: “The total not-to-exceed costs for completing the work and providing the deliverables for the activities and tasks included in each Category of Service in the Respondent’s Application. Cost proposals must be submitted in the Budget Template (Attachment C) which includes an excel tab for each Category of Service. These costs should be based on projected hours, proposed hourly rates, as well as any other appropriate and reasonable direct costs.” The RFP requirements and budget template reflect a time and

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		materials approach and is consistent with the guidance provided at the bidders' conference.
26.	There seems to be some overlap between the scope of services in this RFP and the previously released State Digital Equity Act Consulting Services RFP. Does MassTech still intend to award the previously released RFP?	Please see answer to Question #17.
27.	Given the breadth and depth of the tasks covered under this solicitation, we believe MassTech would benefit from allowing Offerors to propose team bundles using weekly rates. The team bundle offerings are a cost-effective solution to delivering an integrated set of resources, including a core working team; committed leadership; and an undefined, uncapped amount of content experts, research, and administrative support. In addition to the hourly rates requested for the RFP-provided labor categories, will MassTech allow Offerors to propose weekly rates for team bundles?	MassTech is willing to consider a time and materials costs proposal that, in addition to hourly rates proposal, includes an option for weekly rates for team bundles for applicable portions of the work to the extent it would have a cost benefit to MassTech. The proposal would still be a time and materials basis but some of the time could be proposed as a daily or weekly rate, team bundle basis provided that the pricing proposal shows the costs benefits of the alternate option.
28.	Do you expect BOTH a DUNS # and a UEI # in Attach A or will either/or suffice?	Respondents that have both a DUNS# and a UEI# should provide them in Attachment A. Otherwise, the Respondent should list the number that it has.
29.	Understanding that MBI is responsible for MA's broadband mapping and the FCC challenge process, what will be the access to broadband mapping information, including two-way interaction?	Access to certain broadband mapping information will be addressed as needed with the Selected Respondent(s) and may require Non-Disclosure Agreements between MassTech and the Selected Respondent(s). Secure cloud-based data sharing platforms may be used as needed. MBI also has a public online mapping portal for data viewing that may contain information useful to the Selected Respondent(s).
30.	As MA has already contracted with a firm to support Digital Equity planning, to what degree has or will that Firm define two components of MA's Digital Equity Plan: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Description of MA's plans to collaborate with key stakeholders</li> <li>2. MA's Digital Equity coordination and outreach strategy</li> </ol>	The Digital Equity Act and BEAD Five-Year Action Plans will require separate community-stakeholder engagement plans. However, MassTech expects that the Digital Equity Act consultant(s) and the BEAD consultant(s) will coordinate on the development of their respective plans to maximize synergies.

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>
	To what extent will the two firms cooperate and coordinate on those “cross-over” deliverables? How do you envision the two firms teaming on the planning and implementation of meetings of a Broadband and Digital Equity Working Group and related events?	With regard to the Working Group, please see the answer to Question #18. MBI will coordinate the need for Digital Equity Act and BEAD consultant(s) to support the development of materials that relate to relevant Working Group agenda items in their respective contractual scopes of service.
31.	Please disclose the firm selected to provide MA’s Statewide Digital Equity Planning Consulting Services through RFP No.2023-MBI-06.	Please see answer to Question #10.
32.	Per Section 4.2, MassTech denotes a list of criteria of which the order “does not generally denote relative importance”. Is MassTech willing to elaborate on the weighting of the criteria and any related scoring rubrics?	MassTech’s evaluation criteria will be applied in a manner that advances the objective of selecting and entering into an Agreement with the Respondent(s) that will provide the best value for the Services to achieve MassTech’s goals.
33.	We understand that through RFP No.2023-MBI-06 (“Digital Equity Plan RFP”) MassTech will be receiving support for community engagement activities and meetings of the Broadband Digital Equity Working Group. MassTech has indicated that Respondents for this RFP and RFP No.2023-MBI-06 will be required to cooperate and coordinate. Does MassTech expect Respondents for this RFP and RFP No.2023-MBI-06 will be jointly responsible for the planning and implementation of meetings for a single Broadband Digital Equity Working Group, or will there be two separate working groups, one for DEA and another for BEAD?	Please see answers to Questions #18 and #30.
34.	Is it accurate to assume that the selected bidder’s work will conclude after submitting the final version of the 5-year action plan on August 30, 2023, or is MassTech looking to engage the selected bidder for a longer period (i.e. to provide support in addressing NTIA comments on the plan)?	Please see answer to Question #13.
35.	Which consultants won previous broadband contracts?	Please see answers to Questions #10 and #15.
36.	Task 7 on page 18 states: The engagement required must be undertaken both during the development of the Five-Year Action Plan itself and following submission of the plan, reflecting ongoing collaboration throughout the BEAD Program. Is the contractor being requested to execute engagement	No. Please see answer to Question #13.



	<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>
	throughout the five-years of the BEAD or only this planning phase?	
37.	Is the contractor responsible for submitting and presenting the plan to any legislative body for approval?	No.
38.	With the Digital Equity award outstanding, do you have a sense of when that will be awarded or will that be awarded when BEAD is awarded?	The current expectation is that the both awards will be made in March.
39.	Could the same firm be awarded consulting contracts under both the Digital Equity Act and BEAD RFPs.	Yes.
40.	If the answer to the prior question is Yes, does MassTech have a preference for having separate firms conduct the Digital Equity Act and BEAD planning work?	No, MassTech will make awards under each RFP based on obtaining the best value for the Commonwealth.
41.	Given the tight timeline how quickly after the submission deadline do you expect to make an award under the BEAD RFP?	Please see answer to Question #38.
42.	Are there any required specifications for the survey portion of the work that we should keep in mind while we are creating that portion of our proposal?	No. Respondents should address the approach to this work in their Application.
43.	Should Attachment C be included in the technical proposal or submitted separately?	The Attachment C budget should be submitted separately.
44.	Is MassTech expecting a firm fixed fee price proposal?	Please see answer to Question #25.
45.	Do MWBE firms require specific certifications?	MWBE certifications vary by state. Respondents should refer to the requirements in the state where your principal place of business is located.