

Request for Proposals (RFP)

For a regional broadband study and plan.

Announcement

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (“WestCOG”) has initiated a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to identify and procure a qualified vendor to create a broadband strategy for Western Connecticut.

Eligible respondents

WestCOG seeks a consultant who has demonstrated experience in comprehensive studies of and development of successfully implemented plans for local/regional governments in the area of broadband infrastructure.

About WestCOG

Founded in 2014, the Western Connecticut Council of Governments is one of nine regional Councils of Governments established pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes §4-124i et seq. WestCOG serves the Western Connecticut Planning Region, the second most populous and fastest growing region in Connecticut, with an estimated population of 610,000. With its location connecting New England to New York, Western Connecticut is an economically dynamic region, with strong cultural, educational, and natural amenities.

WestCOG is governed the Chief Elected Officials (Mayors and First Selectmen) of its members, comprising three principal cities (Stamford, Norwalk, and Danbury) and fifteen surrounding towns (Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Sherman, Weston, Westport, and Wilton).

Connecticut’s Councils of Governments (COGs), which are in the process of being recognized as county equivalents, provide a regional framework for cooperation among local governments and between the latter and state and federal agencies. COGs may “accept or participate in any grant, donation or program available to any political subdivision of the state and may also accept or participate in any grant, donation or program made available to counties by any other governmental or private entity.” COGs may furthermore exercise any power that any political subdivision of the state (e.g., municipalities and school districts) do¹. Which authorities COGs exercise, and the extent to which they do so, is the decision of their governing boards.

¹ These include but are not limited to: (1) Engineering; (2) inspectional and planning; (3) economic development; (4) public safety; (5) emergency management; (6) animal control; (7) land use management; (8) tourism promotion; (9) social; (10) health; (11) education; (12) data management; (13) regional sewerage; (14) housing; (15) computerized mapping; (16) household hazardous waste collection; (17) recycling; (18) public facility siting; (19) coordination of master planning; (20) vocational training and development; (21) solid waste disposal; (22)

WestCOG is associated with the WestCOG Foundation, Inc. a 501(c)3 charitable organization, whose mission is to promote environmental, social, and economic vitality and sustainability through regional cooperation and collaboration.

More information on WestCOG is available at <http://westcog.org>; more on the Foundation at <http://westcog.foundation>.

Project background

Better connectivity has been a longstanding priority of the region. The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the urgency of this need by accelerating the migration of work, education, and play online, increasing network demands, without producing commensurate network improvements.

Consequently, there appears to be a widespread sentiment that existing infrastructure and services no longer meet current needs and may limit, rather than support, desired future growth. Regional dissatisfaction with existing network infrastructure may relate to:

- Speed,
- Reliability,
- Operational resilience,
- Subscriber cost, and
- Availability of service.

It is not clear that these concerns will be addressed without municipal or regional intervention, given a lack of higher-level leadership, and a potential market failure, in this area until now. WestCOG understands that local governments in other jurisdictions have been able to effect network improvements and is looking potentially to adapt successful models, with the goal of providing fast, reliable, cost-effective Internet access to the region's residents and businesses.

In 2020, WestCOG received a state award for the *Final Recommendations Report* produced by its *Land Use Planning for Wireless Telecommunications Task Force*, which focused on the deployment of 5th generation wireless technology (5G) networks.

Scope of work

The project is expected to follow the analytical framework below, although respondents may propose and explain modifications to structure, order, or content of the analysis.

Analytical framework

1. Inventory existing and foreseeably planned infrastructure and services, including infrastructure/service specifications (see below) and uptake/subscription level and costs, to the extent such information is cognoscible, and identification of areas or populations that meet federal definitions of un- or underserved
2. Identify and quantify needs. Components:
 - a. Use cases by residential, business, and, as applicable, public customers, including:

fire protection; (23) regional resource protection; (24) regional impact studies; and (25) transportation.” (CGS §8-31b(b))

- i. Ongoing and growing uses
- ii. Projected future uses
- iii. Aspirational and transformative uses

The use cases should refer to corresponding minimum and desired specifications (see item c in this list, below) and identify the expected timeframe for such needs/use cases to become viable or prevalent.

- b. Populations and sectors of special concern, such as:
 - i. Data-dependent businesses and professions
 - ii. Maleficiaries of the digital divide
 - c. Infrastructure/service specifications corresponding to needs and use cases
 - i. Network technology (wired, wireless) and design
 - ii. Bandwidth/throughput, latency, jitter requirements
 - iii. Capacity, including acceptable contention and oversubscription levels
 - iv. Level of reliability, redundancy, and resilience
 - v. Upgrade/expansion pathway to add speed and capacity as needed
 - vi. Acceptable costs
 - d. (Mis)match between existing/foreseeably planned infrastructure and services and use cases and associated infrastructure/service specifications
3. Scenario development
- a. Investment scenarios
 - i. Disinvestment
 - ii. Business as usual
 - iii. Expanded investment
 - 1. Fiber to the node in selected or all areas and/or
 - 2. Fiber to the premises in selected or all areas and/or
 - 3. High-speed wireless (5G) in selected areas
 - b. Aspects of investment scenarios
 - i. Capital, operational, and maintenance costs and revenues
 - ii. Funding and financial mechanisms, including, where applicable funding under federal or state programs
 - iii. Minimum subscription/adoption rate for sustainability, as well as probable subscription/adoption rate
 - iv. Technical
 - v. Contractual, including agreements with partners and connecting networks (backbone, middle mile, and/or last mile) as applicable
 - vi. Legal
 - vii. Process, critical path, and timeline (investment should be timed to support and not limit probable/desired needs and use cases)
 - viii. Probability of success

The analysis should clearly explain the methodology, including what assumptions were made, how projections were arrived at, confidence intervals for estimates, and sensitivity of projections to violations of assumptions or inaccuracy of estimates. An interactive model that municipalities can play with to test scenarios preferred.

- c. Economic impact of investment scenarios
 - i. Individual and/or household incomes
 - ii. Business revenues
 - iii. Job numbers and types
 - iv. Property values
 - v. State and local tax payments

Deliverables

The project should include reports of:

- Existing and future conditions
- Potential investment scenarios, including economic impact
- Implementation plan for preferred investment scenario(s)

The reports may be shared with a nontechnical audience, including state and local decisionmakers, so all technical responses should include a plain English explanation.

The analysis may consider a variety of ownership/operational models in scenario development, including public, private, and mixed (formal and informal public-private partnership) systems. Given that fully new builds (from backbone down to last mile) are unlikely to be cost-effective, it is expected that scenarios may leverage and connect to existing public and/or private backbone and middle mile infrastructure.

Expertise sought

To satisfy the proposed scope and framework, it is expected that the following knowledge, skills, and experience will be needed:

- Track record of comparable infrastructure projects that go to implementation and becoming self-sustaining, with few to no surprises and a long service life
- Expertise in broadband network design, development, and operation
- Expertise in governance and financial models
- Expertise in customer/subscriber attraction and retention
- Experience with public and private partnerships, including with state/local governments, incumbents, and startups
- Experience with economic analysis
- Ability to deliver on time and within budget
- Ability to research, analyze, and provide solutions to complex questions
- Ability to communicate specialized technical, financial, and legal matters to and make them understandable by elected officials, civil servants, and to the public
- Ability to facilitate groups and lead them to actionable consensus
- Understanding of intergovernmental relationships and regional governance
- Expertise in marketing and communication during all project development phases
- Project management experience

Application process

Format

Each application should include the following components:

1. Cover page with project title; proposing firm; and name, telephone number, and e-mail address for the project manager.
2. Scope of work, timeline, and fee schedule. An outline of the project by task should be given. These tasks should correspond to the Project description. Timing, duration, and cost should be specified for each task.
3. Narrative. This should explain the proposer's concept of each task and plan to discharge them. Methodology, including approach, inputs, methods, and outputs should be described in sufficient detail. Changes to the framework given in this RFP should be noted.
4. Work history. Examples of similar or relevant work conducted by proposer in the past, with information on project outcomes and client references. Name, title, employer, relationship to the project, telephone number, and e-mail address should be given for each reference. Successful proposers should have demonstrated expertise in relevant areas, including evaluation of the benefits, costs, opportunities, risks, and challenges of the methods proposed, and in the development and execution of implementation plans for said methods.
5. Statement of qualifications. Directory of, task assignments, and resumes for key staff on project. Professional licenses and certifications should be included. The total hours each staff person is expected to spend on each task should be documented.
6. Corporate background. Include the history, location(s), length of time in existence, and structure of the firm; documentation of relevant insurance coverage; and demonstration of the capacity of the firm to carry out the project.
7. If a joint venture is proposed, provide the number of projects that have been conducted under previous joint ventures with the designated firm and the success of those joint ventures as measured by on time, and under budget performance and customer satisfaction with the performance of the work.
8. Signature of a representative of the firm having legal authority to contract on behalf of the firm.
9. A completed Organizational Conflict of Interest Statement that either warrants that there are no relevant facts or circumstances that could give rise to organizational conflicts of interest, and/or, as applicable, gives a full, written disclosure of any organizational conflicts of interests, including description of the action(s) the proposer has taken or will take to avoid or mitigate such conflict.

The Narrative may not exceed 5,000 words. Other components have no word limit.

Material submitted in response to this RFP and received by WestCOG may be subject to the provisions of the Connecticut Freedom of Information law (CGS §1-200 et seq.)

How to apply

Proposals are due by the end of the application period, December 19, 2021 at 11:59 PM ET. Submissions should be directed to: Mr. Francis R. Pickering, Executive Director at ccarpenter@westcog.org.

Submissions should be provided in PDF format, as a single file. The file may be attached to the e-mail, or, in case of a large submission (larger than 10 megabytes), linked in the e-mail. Recipients should enable delivery and read receipts in their e-mail client. No other confirmation will be given.

Review and contracting

WestCOG will evaluate proposals received after close of the application period. At this point, WestCOG may invite additional information from selected proposers, including but not necessarily limited to, samples of other work or an in-person interview.

Should WestCOG determine to proceed with a proposal, WestCOG will begin contract negotiations, including on scope and fee, with the respective proposer. Should WestCOG and the selected proposer be unable to come to an agreement, WestCOG may terminate negotiations with that firm and revisit other proposal submitted.

It is expected that proposers will be notified of decisions on their submission by January 30, 2022. WestCOG may award the project in part or in full to one or more proposers, and to cancel or to reissue this RFP. Any award will not be final until a contract has been negotiated and executed.

Communications

Location of posting

This RFP may be found online at <https://westcog.org/about/rfps-grant-opportunities/> until February 28, 2022. It is the responsibility of interested parties to retrieve and store a copy of the RFP beyond this date.

Pre-bid meeting

A pre-bid meeting will be held Wednesday, December 1 at 11:00 AM ET. The meeting will be held by videoconference. Parties interested in attending should e-mail ccarpenter@westcog.org for an invitation link. Attendance, by phone or in person, is optional and is not required in order to respond to this RFP.

Inquiries

Proposers may submit questions on this RFP by Sunday, December 4 at 11:59 PM ET. Questions should be directed to Mr. Francis R. Pickering, Executive Director at ccarpenter@westcog.org. Answers will be posted online where WestCOG posted this RFP on a rolling basis until the close of business on December 10.

No questions will be accepted by other forms of communication.

Information about WestCOG can be found at <http://westcog.org>.

Addenda and supplements

Should WestCOG amend or adjust this RFP, such changes will be posted online where WestCOG posted this RFP. It is the responsibility of proposers to check for changes to the RFP.

Conditions

Legal requirements

Contracts awarded as a result of this RFP are subject to all applicable federal and state laws, including those concerning civil rights, nondiscrimination, and equal opportunity. Any responses to this RFP, as well as any work resulting from it, are subject to freedom of information.

Insurance requirements

To be considered, proposers must maintain insurance coverage as required by federal and state law.

Consortia, joint ventures, and teams

Proposals from consortia, joint ventures, and teams (“groups”) will be accepted. In such cases, a lead firm must be identified for contracting purposes. A work history and statement of qualifications (as described under *Expertise sought*, #4 and #5) must be provided for each member of the group.

In designating a lead firm, groups should consider the following:

1. The lead firm should have sufficient experience and expertise to perform or supervise all facets of the project, and must have sufficient resources to carry out the contractual responsibilities of the group.
2. The lead firm will be legally responsible to WestCOG for the performance of, and must perform at least 51% of, the total work awarded under any contract issued as a result of this RFP.
3. Firms that are subsidiaries may not rely on the experience, expertise, or resources of its parent firm to meet these requirements.

Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE)

DBE firms are encouraged to respond to this RFP.

If a DBE firm is proposed, the proposal must clearly identify the DBE firm, the role the DBE will play in the project, and the tasks assigned to the DBE. Proof of Connecticut DBE certification must be submitted with the proposal. Responses that fail to give proof of DBE certification and description of project involvement will not be identified as including DBE participation.

Nonreimbursement of proposal costs

Costs associated with responses to this RFP, including proposal development and participation in a selection process, are the sole responsibility of the respondent firms. WestCOG will not reimburse firms for such costs, nor will any selected firms be permitted to negotiate such costs as part of a contract with WestCOG.

Conflicts of interest

All relationships that may pose a conflict of interest, and actions that shall be taken to avoid or mitigate these conflicts, shall be disclosed as part of the response to this RFP.