

COUNTY OF SUSSEX, VIRGINIA

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS #2017-03 BROADBAND ASSESSMENT AND FEASIBILITY STUDY

RFP PURPOSE

The County of Sussex, Virginia is hereby soliciting proposals from qualified firms to conduct a comprehensive broadband assessment and feasibility study. Proposals will be received until 2:00 p.m., July 28, 2017, at the Sussex County Administration Office, 20135 Princeton Road, P.O. Box 1397, Sussex, Virginia, 23884.

The Study will include:

- (1) An assessment of broadband service(s) in Sussex County, Virginia to identify and evaluate service and/or gaps in coverage; and
- (2) A broadband strategy for Sussex County that creates the greatest opportunity to support current growth and long term community broadband needs including, as applicable, a broadband partnership solution.

The Study should provide a reasonable assessment of the needs and opportunities in Sussex County. Additionally, the Study should document opportunities to expand last mile coverage as well as express opinions of the sustainability of the expansion including potential one-time and/or recurring third-party funding sources, and a deployment plan that will enable Sussex County and its commercial partners to take advantage of these opportunities in conjunction with broadband friendly public policy development.

The successful consultant will demonstrate their ability to utilize research methodologies such as public surveys, market analysis, business plan development, regulatory analysis, and operational best practice scenarios.

BACKGROUND

Sussex County is located in the south central region of Virginia and has a population of approximately 12,087 (of which approximately 2,000 are inmates in Sussex I and II state correctional facilities). The County is 45 miles southeast of the capital city Richmond, 25 miles from the tri-cities area that includes Petersburg and Hopewell. Washington D.C. and Baltimore are within a few hours drive, while Boston and Atlanta are both within a day's drive. Sussex County encompasses 317,400 acre or 496 square miles. The county

lies in the Coastal Plain region on level to slightly rolling terrain. Elevations range from 50 to 250 feet above sea level. Drainage in the area is provided by the Nottoway River, Blackwater River and Stony Creek. Sussex County is strategically centered between Richmond, Hampton Roads, and Southern Virginia along the I-95 and US-460 corridors.

The local economy is based on agricultural and agricultural-related manufacturing. Agriculture accounts for over one-half of the county's basic employment and more than a quarter of its total employment. Other basic industries include manufacturing, peanut shelling, tourism and non-local government.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

Your proposal must address the following pieces of work, including how you intend to carry out the various tasks, and your experience in performing these tasks. In total, this narrative section should be no longer than ten (10) single-spaced pages in length.

1. CONDUCT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Gather, evaluate, and analyze broadband information and broadband dependent needs from users (i.e. residents, businesses, library, public safety, and educational institutions) such as affordability of services and as applicable, Internet-enabled devices, digital literacy levels, perceived value to users, etc., via industry accepted evaluation methods. The needs assessment should include current and future needs of these users. Develop a communications and outreach strategy to engage stakeholders, disseminate information and provide opportunities for inclusion in the process. Consultant must clearly define their stakeholder evaluation process including their recommended participant level in order to reach statistically reliable results.

Broadband standards should be compared to those provided by the FCC.

2. CONDUCT LOCAL BROADBAND MARKET ASSESSMENT

Identify existing broadband options and costs across the community, particularly those for users identified in the Needs Assessment. Provide an assessment of the broadband environment detailing the types of services, pricing, availability and limitations and compare to Target Broadband Standards. Identify potential areas for partnership between the County and incumbent/competitive providers.

3. EVALUATE THE COUNTY'S CURRENT BROADBAND NETWORK CAPABILITIES

Perform a technical evaluation of the County's existing fiber-optic network resources (public & private) and its ability to become "fiber ready" and support commercial broadband expansion to users identified in the Needs Assessment. The evaluation should include documentation of existing conduit, fiber-optic cable, vaults, boxes and related outside plant infrastructure as well as capacity and usability. To the extent possible, compare the County's existing fiber-optic network with incumbent providers' networks for possible synergies and/or gaps.

- o The evaluation should focus on geographical areas that currently lack broadband access.
- o The evaluation should include opportunities throughout the County to increase broadband access as well as upload and download speeds to achieve greater opportunities for economic development activity.

4. Provide a GIS-Based Analysis for the Project

Build a comprehensive database utilizing ArcGIS to facilitate analysis of the County's broadband environment, including: current broadband infrastructure, penetration and usage of broadband services, service territories, backhaul routes, capacity, providers and other relevant information for the project.

5. Perform a Gap Analysis of the Current Broadband Environment

Evaluate the current environment against the current and future needs of Sussex County, including all stakeholders defined in the project. The Gap Analysis should include an evaluation of key issues limiting broadband expansion, access, and/or uptake. And take into consideration geographic areas in item number 3.

6. Assess Virginia's Regulatory Environment

Analyze and report on the Virginia's regulatory environment and the impact to Sussex County in developing its network for potential broadband services. Consultant must have proven telecommunications regulatory experience working with communities on municipal broadband issues. Please state experience working with other communities or alternative satisfactory experience in the municipal regulatory environment.

7. Development of Market-Driven Demand Planning Tools

Develop a GIS-based demand planning tool that identifies customer segments across the community and estimates demand for services. The tool(s) should identify physical locations of all customers across multiple segments and identify the potential volume and demand that will be utilized to forecast the feasibility of building into different areas of the County.

8. Recommended Broadband Strategy

Based on consultant's analysis in steps 1-7 and feedback from Sussex County, prepare a broadband strategy for Sussex County that creates the greatest opportunity to support current growth and long term community broadband needs including, as applicable, a broadband partnership solution.

OTHER RELATED SERVICES, AS NEEDED.

The County reserves the right to utilize the selected consultant for other consulting services related to broadband services for the Fiscal Year of 2018 (July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018) if both parties can agree to a mutually acceptable agreement that is based on the hourly labor rate stated in the selected vendor's proposal. The County reserves the right to extend the contract for Broadband Consulting Services for up to four one-year additional terms, if agreed upon by both parties.

SELECTION PROCESS

- A. Proposer must have experience conducting community broadband feasibility studies of similar size and scope to the Sussex County project. The proposer must demonstrate its capabilities providing these services to similarly sized counties and its ability to work creatively with incumbent providers and other key stakeholders.
- B. Proposer's organization must have been in business providing community broadband planning services for a minimum of 4 years. Proposer must have conducted broadband planning projects with other communities and demonstrate this through its proposal.
- C. Direct industry experience is a fundamental requirement of the consultant to ensure business viability of the proposed strategies. Proposer must have direct past experience working within the telecommunications or broadband industry (carrier or Internet service provider) in a network planning, engineering and business development capacity. This experience must be documented specifically in the proposal with references.

D. Proposer must be able to demonstrate its ability to work quickly and thoroughly with adequate resources. Sussex County feels time is of the essence and an emphasis will be given to those who can complete this project on the shortest timeline.

E. If Proposer intends to use any subcontractors, the response must demonstrate the applicable experience of subcontractor(s) per above. The Proposer is responsible for Liability Insurance for anyone performing work

A County committee will review and evaluate all proposals that are submitted base on the criteria listed above. The proposals will be ranked and the County may ask the top firms to attend a presentation/ interview as part of the evaluation process.

Each submittal will be reviewed according to its:

Experience with engineering wireless telecommunication and broadband systems (especially for local governments), understanding of the work to be performed, estimated timeline to complete work, examples of similar studies/plans, references, past performance, overall strength of the proposal, and oral presentation (if applicable) will be used as evaluation criteria.

Capability of proposed personnel assigned to the work

The selected vendor must be determined to be a responsible and responsive bidder by the County.

At the conclusion of the evaluation process the firms will be ranked in priority order with the top ranked firms selected for interviews. Proposed budgets will be requested to be submitted prior to interviews. After the interviews, one respondent will be selected to negotiate a contract with the County. If a contract satisfactory to both parties cannot be negotiated, the County will enter into negotiations with next highest-ranking firm, and so on until an agreement is reached.

The County reserves the right to reject all proposals received, and to re-advertise the project.

Community Engagement

The selected firm/consultant team will be expected to develop and implement the assistance of County staff a community engagement program that includes, but is not limited to a community survey, one or several public input sessions, and meetings with the County staff, Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors, corporate entities and any other related interested parties.

Deliverables

The following deliverables are essential to the broadband assessment and feasibility study:

1. Twenty-five (25) copies of the final assessment and study.
2. The final assessment and feasibility study shall also be delivered to the County in Adobe Acrobat and Microsoft Word formats to be uploaded to the County's website for public review and comment.
3. Any maps shall also be delivered in a digital format for use with Esri ArcGIS/Map (version 10.5).

Proposal Requirements

1. A cover letter introducing the firm/consultant team;
2. A more complete description of the firm/consultant team – range of professional services, years in business, location, staff size, etc.;
3. A list of broadband studies in which the firm has been involved to include a list of references with contact information ;
4. Resumes of all personnel to be assigned to the project;

Proposal Submission

Six (6) copies of the proposal must be received by Sussex County by 2:00 p.m., July 28, 2017. Bids must be hand-delivered or mailed to the address listed below clearly marked "County of Sussex Broadband Assessment and Feasibility Study."

Questions regarding this request for proposals should be addressed to:

Mrs. Shilton R. Butts
Assistant to the County Administrator
Sussex County Administration
20135 Princeton Road
P.O. Box 1397
Sussex, VA 23884