



PIEDMONT TRIAD
REGIONAL COUNCIL

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

To Provide:

Regional Digital Inclusion Plan

Requested By:

Piedmont Triad Regional Council
1398 Carrollton Crossing Drive
Kernersville, NC 27284

November 9, 2023

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1. SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

The Piedmont Triad Regional Council (PTRC) is currently seeking and accepting proposals from qualified consultants to construct a comprehensive Digital Equity and Inclusion Plan for the 12-county Piedmont Triad region of North Carolina. This project is grant funded through a BAND-NC grant provided by the Institute of Emerging Issues (IEI) at North Carolina State University's "Building a New Digital Economy" (BAND-NC) program and will be administered by the PTRC. The Piedmont Triad region is a blend of rural and urban communities within the north-central portion of North Carolina, and the PTRC proudly serves the area. The PTRC provides technical assistance and facilitates collaboration among partners to implement successful strategies and achieve regional goals. As essential services and resources such as: healthcare communication, education, and workforce development training move increasing online, quality internet access and use provide a critical foundation for community wellbeing. The PTRC and this initiative is committed to bridging the digital divide within our region and ensuring equitable access to internet services and technology opportunities for all residents.

This project covers and directly engages Alamance, Caswell, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Guilford, Montgomery, Randolph, Rockingham, Stokes, Surry, and Yadkin counties. According to the North Carolina Division of Broadband and Digital Equity's Broadband Availability Index, our rural counties range as high as 33.08% of the population without high-speed internet, while our urban counties range as low as 0.02% of the population without high-speed internet. This is a significant gap among our communities. Students and adults who don't have access to internet, don't own a device, or lack necessary digital skills – for education, work, health or connection – are at an impossible disadvantage with today's environment.

The PTRC wants to ensure that the 12 counties encompassing the Piedmont Triad region are adequately represented within the Regional Digital Inclusion Plan. However, not all counties within the Piedmont Triad possess local digital inclusion plans, resources, or capacity to participate in this vital process. This proposal seeks to contract with inclusion and equity professionals that will participate within all communities and address all concerns within the Regional Digital Inclusion Plan.

2. PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

This Request for Proposal (RFP) represents the requirements for an open and competitive process. Proposals will be accepted until 5pm EST December 15th, 2023. Any proposals received after this date and time will not be considered. All proposals must be signed by an official agent or representative of the company submitting the proposal.

If the organization submitting a proposal must outsource or contract any work to meet the requirements contained herein, this must be clearly stated in the proposal. Additionally, all costs included in proposals must be all-inclusive to include any outsourced or contracted work. Any proposals which call for outsourcing or contracting work must include a name and description of the organizations being contracted.

All costs must be itemized to include an explanation of all fees and costs.

Contract terms and conditions will be negotiated upon selection of the winning bidder for this RFP. All contractual terms and conditions will be subject to review by the Piedmont Triad Regional Council and will include scope, budget, schedule, and other necessary items pertaining to the project.

The point of contact for this project is Michelle Slaton, Economic Development and Business Services Supervisor at the Piedmont Triad Regional Council. Prospective firms may make inquiries to obtain clarification of the requirements contained in this RFP. All inquiries must be submitted to and a response will typically be issued within three business days.

Final proposals should be emailed to mmlaton@ptrc.org or delivered to:

Piedmont Triad Regional Council
ATTN: Michelle Slaton
1398 Carrollton Crossing Drive
Kernersville, NC 27284

3. PROJECT SCOPE OF WORK

The scope of this project is centered on the resource creation to empower the 12-county Piedmont Triad region with objectives and strategies to enhance digital access, skills, and adoption. To achieve these goals, the PTRC recognizes the need for a well-structured Regional Digital Inclusion Plan to guide efforts over the next three to five years.

The selected bidder will be responsible for the following key tasks:

1.) Assessment and Needs Analysis:

- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of current status and resources of digital inclusion within the region and each individual county.
- Identify underserved or digitally excluded communities and address the specific challenges they face.
- Assess the availability and affordability of broadband internet services.
- Analyze digital skillsets within each community.

2.) Plan Development:

- Develop a Regional Digital Inclusion Plan that outlines strategic goals, objectives, and measurable outcomes.
- Propose recommendations to address identified digital inclusion gaps.
- Create a detailed timeline and best practices for the plan's implementation.

3.) Community Engagement:

- Engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including local government, community organizations, educational institutions, public libraries, and local businesses.
- Conduct public consultations and events to gather valuable input from residents and community residents.

4.) Communication and Reporting:

- Provide regular updates and progress reports to the PTRC and relevant stakeholders regarding project development and milestones.
- Conduct evaluations of the plan's impact and effectiveness to adapt strategies and recommendations as each county presents different strengths and challenges.

4. PROPOSAL FORMAT

Proposals should be limited to 15 numbered pages or less, including a cover letter that identifies a main point of contact and all their contact information. The following format is not required but is encouraged to provide consistency between proposals, ensuring equitable evaluation and comparison. If the format is modified, please include the following information at a minimum.

Definitions

Proposal respondents should reference and address the definitions below when developing proposals.

Digital Equity: Digital equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

Digital Inclusion: Digital Inclusion refers to the activities necessary to create opportunities for all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, to have access to and be able to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This includes five elements:

1. Affordable, robust broadband internet service;
2. Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
3. Access to digital literacy training;
4. Quality technical support; and
5. Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.

Digital Literacy: The ability to use an internet connection and technology for various functions, ranging from basic task such as searching on Google and sending emails, to more advanced functions like coding and using technical software

Digital Navigators: Digital navigators are trusted guides who assist community members with internet adoption and the use of computing devices. Digital navigation services include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device acquisition, technical skills, and application support.

Digital Connectors: Digital Connectors are trusted guides who assist residents looking for resources, skills, and support to use the internet to achieve their goals.

Project Approach

Describe your team’s mission, goals, and mindset for approaching this project and how that ensures a successful implementation. With the overarching goal of increasing digital inclusion, this RFP is also structure around addressing: Digital Access, Skills, and Adoption. Be sure to deliver details on how each task will be executed, along with recommendations to maximize efficiency and effectiveness with digital access, digital skills, and digital adoption.

When preparing your response to this RFP, it is essential to follow BAND-NC's [Digital Inclusion Planning Guide](#) as a valuable resource and best practice. The degree of alignment with this guide and adherence to its recommendations will be a pivotal factor in the evaluation process.

Relevant Project Experience

Provide a summary of your experience with similar projects, including location and client contact information. Specify the services provided and the overall support and benefits your staff members coordinated. Web or document links to recent plans and past work, if available, may be included within this section.

Project Team

Supply an organizational chart identifying all staffed projected to be assigned to the Project, including any sub-consultants, defining roles, responsibilities, and task assignments of each member for the project duration.

Professional Qualifications

Provide relevant experience, qualifications, and credentials of all personnel assigned to the Project.

Plan for Completion

Prepare an outline of the Project schedule to remain within the timeframe and proposed budget. Include project workloads, staff availability, and milestone projections for a draft and final plan.

References

List contact information for at least three references for clients or industry professionals familiar with your work.

5. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals should address all aspects of the RFP and express a clear understanding of the requirements and qualifications to conduct these services all throughout the Piedmont Triad region. Evaluation of proposals will be performed by PTRC staff. Proposals will be scored on the firm’s ability to meet all requirements of this RFP.

Evaluation criteria may include, but not limited to:

- Project approach and demonstration of understanding the goals and need for this project.
- Familiarity with the nature of and challenges specific to the Piedmont Triad region and community stakeholders.
- Creative methods and quality of deliverables that can easily be accessed and utilized across different mediums such as: hard and digital copies, outreach material for the PTRC website and social media, and formal reports encompasses current and ongoing processes.
- Credentials and availability of staff assigned to the Project.

Candidate firms may be asked to present their proposal to PTRC staff before the final selection is made. Final selection and contracting will be subject to approval by PTRC.

6. PROPOSAL TIMELINE

To ensure adequate selection, apt time for proposal review and revisions will be scheduled and included in the contractual agreement. All meeting materials (agenda, presentations, handouts, maps, etc.) will be submitted for review prior to scheduled meetings.

All proposals in response to this RFP are due no later than 5pm EST December 15th, 2023.

Evaluation of proposals will be conducted from December 17th, 2023 until January 12th, 2024. If additional information or discussions are needed with any bidders during this two-week window, the bidder(s) will be notified.

The selection decision for the winning bidder will be made no later than January 15th, 2024.

Upon notification, the contract negotiation with the winning bidder will begin immediately. Contract negotiations will be completed by February 5th, 2024.

Notifications to bidders who were not selected will be completed by February 12th, 2024.

7. PROJECT TIMELINE

Upon firm selection and signing of contractual agreement(s), a notice to proceed with the initiation phase and begin the Regional Digital Inclusion Plan project will commence.

8. BUDGET

All proposals must include costs forecasted to complete the tasks described in the scope of work. Costs should be stated as one-time or non-recurring costs (NRC) or monthly recurring costs (MRC). Pricing should be listed for each of the following items in accordance with the format below:

Project Implementation Costs Projection	NRC	MRC
Project Staffing and Planning	\$	\$
Research and Reporting Needs	\$	\$
Community Outreach and Travel	\$	\$
Program Supplies	\$	\$
Marketing Materials and Professional Services	\$	\$

*NOTE: All costs and fees must be clearly described in each proposal. Attaching additional budget items or a reformatted budget that still includes all items above is welcomed.

The Regional Digital Inclusion Plan's development is constrained by the grant award amount, and the financial guidelines for this project proposal dictate that the total expenditure must not surpass \$60,000.00.

9. PROPOSAL EVALUATION

PTRC will be evaluating consultants responding to this RFP on the following basis:

Category	Criteria	Percentage
Respondent Profile	- Overall Process and work approach. - Demonstration of experience serving and conducting outreach with underserved populations and communities. - Staff qualifications and experience delivery relevant scope of work activities.	35%
Partnership Strategy	- Demonstration of ability to collaborate with local governments, community-based organizations, and local/regional partners.	30%
Digital Connector Strategy	- Robustness of leveraging digital connectors within previous/current work and projects.	15%
Budget	- Clear and reasonable budget is presented.	10%
Timeline	- Clarity and effectiveness of projected agenda.	10%

10. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

The following administrative information should be considered and referenced upon proposal submission:

- All proposals become property of PTRC upon submission and will only be returned at PTRC's option. Any restrictions on the use of the data contained within, must be clearly stated in the proposal.
- The costs of preparing, submitting, and presenting a proposal is at the sole expense of the consulting firm. PTRC is not liable for any costs prior to issuance of a signed contract.
- PTRC reserves the right to reject any and all proposals, to consider alternatives, to wave irregularities, and to re-solicit the RFP.
- PTRC reserves the right to cancel the RFP in part or in its entirety. This solicitation of proposals in no way obligates PTRC to award a contract.
- PTRC makes no guarantee to any proposing firms until such time PTRC approves the negotiated contract.
- All proposals must be valid for a period of 90 days after the due date.
- The contents from the selected firm will become contractual obligations if a subsequent agreement is reached. Failure of the selected firm to accept these obligations may result in cancellation of the award.
- PTRC will provide information and assistance with this project where available. PTRC will be the primary point of contact with all county and municipal governments. PTRC staff will present the final plan to the Board for endorsement and approval.