

Request for Proposals

Alexander County Broadband Assessment and Feasibility Study

Purpose of RFP:

Alexander County, NC is requesting proposals (RFPs) from qualified professional consulting firms to conduct a comprehensive broadband assessment and feasibility study. The Study will include:

- (1) an assessment of broadband service(s) in Alexander County, NC, to identify and evaluate service and/or adoption gaps; and
- (2) a broadband strategy for Alexander 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 Alexander 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 Alexander County and its commercial partners to take advantage of these opportunities in conjunction with broadband friendly public policy development.

The successful bidder 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 and Statement of Need

Alexander County is located in Western North Carolina approximately one hour North of Charlotte, NC, and consists of a population of approximately 37,952 (NC Budget and Management - July 2015). The county is classified as a Tier 2 (average economically distressed) county by the NC Department of Commerce. The county is designated as transitional by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The county's unemployment rate was 3.2% in April 2017. For 2015-16, 54.32 percent of Alexander County Schools' students were enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program. The county is heavily dependent upon manufacturing for its economic base.

Alexander County's town seat of Taylorsville is the only incorporated town; therefore, much of the county is rural farmland. Alexander County is part of the Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The county has an area of 264 square miles.

The current need for high speed Internet is similar to the needs in many other areas. In today's world, it is essential for most businesses and entrepreneurs. Students need Internet access at home in order to accomplish many homework assignments. The local high school and two middle schools have issued Chrome books to students, but many have poor or no Internet access in the home.

Alexander County officials realize that additional access to high-speed Internet service will provide benefits and opportunities for economic development, improvement in government services, education enhancements, access to tele-healthcare and telework and increased services to senior citizens and disabled persons. The county has a Broadband Committee and contact information for members will be made available to the awarded company.

A county Broadband Survey has been completed as of June 2017. The survey, which had 1,954 respondents, provided a detailed inventory and assessment of the communications infrastructure in Alexander County. The survey estimated that 64.54% had no broadband access and 11.52% said they had only mobile access to broadband. In addition, 83.56% said they would be interested in additional broadband service options, and 49.8% said they did not have sufficient speed with their internet service. An additional factor that prohibits many families access is affordability (16.3%). A map and addresses are available.

Anticipated Timeline:

The following anticipated timeline is subject to change, at the discretion of the Alexander County Board of Commissioners.

June 23, 2017 RFP Posted

July 10, 2017 Questions from prospective applicants are due by 4:00 p.m.
Questions regarding RFP content must be submitted in writing to:

Greg Cronk
Alexander County Information Technology Director
621 Liledoun Road
Taylorsville, NC 28681
Phone: 828-632-1127
Email: gcrone@alexandercountync.gov

July 14, 2017 Written response to each question will be submitted to all known prospective applicants. If you are interested in receiving the responses to

the submitted questions, please email Greg Cronk to indicate your request.

July 24, 2017

Application submission deadline, applications are due to Alexander County no later than 5:00 PM

Return proposals to the following address:

Greg Cronk

Alexander County Information Technology Director

621 Liledoun Road

Taylorsville, NC 28681

Phone: 828-632-1127

Email: gcronk@alexandercountync.gov

Proposer Requirements:

- A. Proposer must have experience conducting community broadband feasibility studies of similar size and scope to the Alexander County project. The proposer must demonstrate its capabilities providing these services 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 have implemented and/or operated community broadband networks or demonstrate supporting experience through its proposal, citing specific networks that are currently in operation.
- E. Proposer must be able to demonstrate its ability to work quickly and thoroughly with adequate resources. Alexander County feels time is of the essence and an emphasis will be given to those who can complete this project on the shortest timeline.
- F. 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.

Scope of Work:

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. Bidder 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. Preferably a minimum 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps down.

- The evaluation should focus on geographical areas that currently lack broadband access.

- 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 Alexander 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 North Carolina's Regulatory Environment**
Analyze and report on the North Carolina's regulatory environment and the impact to Alexander 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 Alexander County, prepare a broadband strategy for Alexander County that creates the greatest opportunity to support current growth and long term community broadband needs including, as applicable, a broadband partnership solution.

Specific Deliverables: Look at Bold Points Above

Each proposal must include an overview of pricing based on the scope of work above.

APPLICATION**Application Information (Must Be Completed and Submitted by All Applicants):**

Organization Name: _____

Contact Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

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