PENDLETON COUNTY BROADBAND FEASIBILITY STUDY REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

INTRODUCTION

Pendleton County, WV is seeking proposals for a broadband feasibility/engineering study with the overall goal of ensuring that all county residents, businesses, and institutions who desire broadband internet connectivity have that connectivity available to them.

The County recognizes reaching our goal may require a mix of technologies and phased build-out plans. Flexibility, ingenuity, and innovation along with a cohesiveness in design will be necessary to reach the ultimate goal of digitally connecting the County's entities through a world-class, next generation network.

Our vision:
> *All Pendleton County residents will be able to use convenient, affordable world-class broadband networks that enable us to survive and thrive in our communities and across the globe.*

To achieve this vision, we seek the best path to a ubiquitous broadband network that is ultimately scalable to one Gigabit to homes, businesses and anchor institutions recognizing that this may require a multi-Gigabit backbone.   We recognize that there are a variety of models that could be used to achieve our vision and we are open to all of them, including incenting private sector investment, engaging in a public-private partnership, forming a new cooperative, or operating as a government utility.

We expect this to be highly interactive and iterative process, with excellent and ongoing communications between the selected vendor and the steering committee so that at the end of the study process, the committee clearly understands the best alternatives for moving forward to achieve the vision.

DESCRIPTION OF PENDLETON COUNTY

Key geographic and demographic information: Pendleton County is the fifth largest county in West Virginia. It is home to Spruce Knob, the highest point in West Virginia and located in the Alleghenies, its elevation being 4,863 feet. Parts of Monongahela and George Washington National Forests are also located in Pendleton. Pendleton County is located entirely within the United States National Radio Quiet Zone. Sugar Grove Station is also a National Security Agency (NSA) communications site located near Sugar Grove, Pendleton County. Any wireless solutions will be required to be approved by both, NSA and NRAO.   The total vertical relief of 3,708 feet, the distance from the highest to lowest points, is the greatest of West Virginia

Counties. Pendleton County is the third least populous county in West Virginia. Pendleton County has a population of 6,143 people based on the April 1, 2020, US Census: 4.6% under 5 years; 18.2% under 18 years; 49.7% under 65 years; 28.2% over 65 years.

Land area in square miles: 696.05 (2010 US Census).

Average population density: 11.1 average population per square mile (2010 US Census).

Average rural population density: See above.

A map of the county is attached.

COUNTY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FEASIBILITY STUDY PROJECT

To support the selected vendor, the county will, at a minimum, provide the following:

- Recruitment of a project steering team
- Recruitment of focus group participants
- Access to County GIS data
- Access to historical County Permit Data
- Other public information as needed

SCOPE OF WORK/REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

This section outlines the study and report requirements.

Section A – Current assessment and market demand

- Review of the competitive environment
    - Complete an inventory of existing fiber networks within the county, including ownership and availability for use by other network providers.
    - Provide an overview of current broadband providers' services, pricing strategies and coverage area. To the extent possible, determine and analyze the investment and deployment plans of incumbent providers.
    - Map existing the location of existing fiber and broadband-related electronics and available broadband speeds available by provider. This information should be provided in a format usable by the County GIS systems.
    - Provide an assessment of the services available to our existing and prospective businesses and how that impacts our economic development efforts.

- Provide a market study to establish a likely market penetration rate and clarify which benefits from a new countywide network might be most important to the residents and businesses. Include information from the following sources
    - Available market and census data
    - Local random sample countywide survey of residents and businesses
    - Focus groups of key constituencies

- o Include a sample survey your firm has used for similar project and the resulting report as an appendix of your proposal

Section B – Technology options

- Determine the best technology path for our county
  - o What are the broadband capacities and considerations that are necessary now and in the future that will enable our county to be economically competitive? What technologies can provide broadband services at those speeds?
  - o What are the technologies best suited to the various areas of the County based on geography and demographics?
  - o What opportunities exist to provide a protected-ring fiber network that would connect businesses and anchor institutions such as schools, libraries, hospitals, public safety, cities, institutions of higher education and community support organizations?
- **Options for services provision to include:**
  - o Mix of technologies and phased build out plans with multiple platforms scalable to 1 gigabit and include wireless, fiber, ARMER towers, cable, etc.
  - o Options should include scenarios using what already exists within the County, with a minimum service level of 25/3.
  - o Business models and pro forma to be analyzed to include but not be limited to:

    Build on existing networks: Options to combine or collaborate with existing providers to provide middle and last mile coverage to the underserved and unserved.

    Create new networks:

    1. Open Access: The County would finance and contract to build the network and invite other service providers to contract to deliver services over the network.
    2. Proprietary Network:
       i. The County would build and operate the network, with or without private sector operating partners
       ii. The County would incent a private sector partner, including existing cooperatives, the creation of a new cooperative, or other entity to invest, build and operate a network by using development powers as necessary.
    3. Other options that might involve multiple local entities or other scenarios as contractor sees appropriate.

- Conduct pre-engineering study(s) at sufficient depth to estimate costs and approximate implementation timeframes for full network implementation.
    - This evaluation should include an assessment of all available mainstream high-speed technologies either alone or in combination and include an assessment and consideration of both Fiber to the Premise (FTTP) and wireless technologies. All parts, materials, and service proposed must be currently available on the market and in continuing production (no discontinued manufacturers or parts).
    - Assessment of primary and redundant backhaul connection options between local network and the Internet.
    - Define the proposed service area and create a conceptual fiber route and high-level design to provide the greatest coverage, showing businesses, residences, and publicly owned facilities passed on both sides of the fiber route.
    - Use algorithmic tools to combine the map data with historical cost data to provide an estimated cost to offer scalable broadband service for all options identified. Costs will be calculated by service area and anticipated route miles to determine capital costs for fiber optic mainline, access equipment, cell tower backhaul, routers, and switches. Costs should be all inclusive of any design, initial configuration, and installation costs.

Section C – Partnership options

- Provide examples of who might be a prospective partner with a summary of how each relationship would function.
- What sectors, groups and individuals may help our county achieve the broadband goals? Please identify synergies and sharing opportunities that exist with providers and customers to include but not limited to:
    - ISP Providers, Telecoms, Cooperatives, Statewide telecom networks, Government entities, NGO's, K-12 and higher education, including library systems, healthcare providers and the industry and business community

Section D – Financing and Legal Considerations

- Provide financing options to include, but not limited to general obligation bonds, revenue bond, public/private partnerships, USDA RUS, other state and federal funding and others where appropriate.
- Provide an assessment of legal requirements, risks, and regulations relevant to the building or operation of a network and partnership arrangements.
- Prepare financial projections for at least two project scenarios as selected by the project steering team:
    - Options Identified
    - Operational Cash flow for expenditures
    - One Time and Recurring Capital Expenses

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o   Business and technical expertise needed
o   Organizational support
o   Community Support

PROPOSED SCHEDULE

- <mark>All proposals due at 4:00 pm EST on October 19, 2021.</mark>
- Project implementation schedule and phasing - Please provide an estimated project timeline. Timeline should include:

    o   Estimated project start and end dates.
    o   Proposed date(s) for pre-project meeting with County's feasibility study project committee.
    o   Proposed dates for conducting a community presentation to collect public input and review preliminary findings.
- Proposed date for presentation to County Board.
- Consultant will provide biweekly updates on progress during the work period, via either email, or phone calls, to the designated County Representative and/or steering committee.
- Consultant will provide fifteen copies of final feasibility study along with a digital copy

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The following will be considered minimal contents of the proposal. Limit proposal to 10 pages.

1. Provide a restatement of the goals, objectives, and project tasks to demonstrate the responder's view of the project and your approach to this project. Please reference the **Study/Report Requirements: Sections A – D** in your responses.

2. Provide on your background and experience in the following areas:
    a. Network: Outline the direct knowledge and experience your company has regarding broadband solutions.
    b. Financial: Describe direct experience and knowledge your company has creating and analyzing financial plans and models including capital requirements, operational pro formas, and financing options.
    c. Regulatory/Legal: Describe any direct experience and knowledge your company has in analyzing and interpreting the regulatory and legal landscape and providing analysis and guidance on these issues as they pertain to the various options contained in the proposal.
    d. Services: Describe any direct experience and knowledge your company has in providing community and business community analysis and guidance surrounding broadband services.

     e. Project Management: Outline your company's direct knowledge and experience with structured project management.

     f. Partnerships: Share your company's experience in working with state and local governments and public-private sector collaborations.

3. Conflicts of Interest: Provide any information on prospective conflicts of interests, including existing or financial relations with equipment vendors, ISPs or other firms.

4. References: Include at least three references from previous similar projects. Identify key personnel who will conduct the project and provide detail of their training and work experience. No change in key personnel assigned to the project will be allowed without the approval of the local project team. Address experience in working with rural communities, schools, and townships in regard to this type of study.

    Note: Subcontractors working for the contractor must meet all the requirements of the Request for Proposal (RFP) and any contract between the contractor and the subcontractor must include all contract terms agreed to between the County and the successful contractor.

5. Detailed work plan to include:

     a. Tasks to be accomplished and the budget hours to be expended for each task and subtask. (This will be used as a work plan and managing tool for basis of invoicing.)

     b. Identify project timeline with deliverables and key milestones.

     c. Provide detail regarding local involvement and services expected to complete the project. A minimum of 3 status meetings are to be contained in the work plan in addition to any data collection or input/review meetings.

     d. Outline the project management approach that your company will employ to execute this project and identify individual(s) responsible for the various areas in the outline.

     e. Identify areas of risk for the project based on the contractors detailed work plan and schedule for all aspects of the project including but not limited to financial, construction, legal, product availability, environmental and archaeological.

     f. Provide detailed cost estimate of the study, including known project expenses, professional hourly rates and multipliers and estimated service/task hours with a "Not to Exceed" cap. Other ancillary expenses related to the completion of the study will be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

     g. Commit to working closely with Steering Committee and County Board

     h. Provide an RFP in a format that is "release ready" for the purpose of soliciting ISP proposals.

    i. Commit to providing technical support to the county for the development of grant application(s) related to the broadband expansion project.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The local project team will evaluate all proposals using the following criteria to conduct a best value evaluation:

- Experience and qualifications of the vendor and personnel assigned to this project
- Clear understanding of this project
- Clear technical proficiency for the mix of technologies and cohesiveness of the network proposed
- Project work plan and timeline
- Work experience in small and rural communities including counties, cities and townships
- Pricing

After evaluating all proposals, the local project team may choose to interview the top candidates. After making a selection, the review team will submit their recommendation to the county board for final approval to pursue a professional services agreement with the chosen candidate.

SELECTION

Selection of the consultant for this project will be based on the criteria noted above. Upon approval from the board, the county will enter into negotiations with the selected consultant to develop a Professional Services Agreement and finalize the work plan including budget hours. Should the county and the selected consultant fail to satisfactorily reach agreement to the work plan, including budget, the county may enter into negotiations with the respondent judged second in the evaluation process, or the county may re-advertise for proposals.

The county reserves the right to reject any and all proposals regardless of merit.

RFP TIMELINE

Release RFP	Day 1 (September 2, 2021)
Questions due to Laura Brown	Day 21 (September 23, 2021
Pendleton County responses provided	Day 30 (October 4, 2021)
Proposals due	Day 45 (October 19, 2021)
Interviews	Day 60 (November 30, 2021)
Approval of contract by county board	Day 75 (December 15,2021)

Any proposal related questions should be emailed to Laura Brown at
edadirector@pendletoncounty.com

The above dates are subject to change at the discretion of Pendleton County.

Please mail 5 copies of your proposal to Angie Curl, Region 8 PDC, 131 Providence Lane, Petersburg, WV 26847. Generic marketing or advertising materials not specific to your bid should not be included with your proposal.

PRIMARY CONTACTS OF FIRM

Name

Title

Address

Phone

Email