

PINE COUNTY REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL FOR BROADBAND CONSULTANT

INTRODUCTION

Pine County is seeking proposals from qualified firms to assist the county in implementing the county's vision for broadband: All residents have access to adequate and affordable broadband.

The purpose of this engagement is to provide Pine County with the information needed to analyze, select, and implement the best solutions to improve broadband connectivity across our entire county. Pine County recognizes reaching our goal may require a mix of technologies and phased build-out plans, partnerships with providers, public investment and flexibility, ingenuity, and innovation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Pine County is approximately 1,400 square miles with 30,000 residents. The county is located along Interstate 35 between the Twin Cities and Duluth. Pine County is ranked 84th worst of the 87 counties in Minnesota for broadband access of 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up.

Pine County has recently completed the Blandin Foundation's Community Broadband Resources: *Accelerate* program and desires to turn the momentum generated in that effort into better broadband access for the community.

Pine County is served by a variety of fiber to the premise, fixed wireless, satellite and cellular internet providers. Areas within city limits of Pine City, Hinckley, Sandstone, Askov, Willow River and Sturgeon Lake generally have satisfactory service while the areas just outside of the incorporated areas and the very small cities of Henriette, Beroun, Brook Park, Cloverdale, Finlayson, Rutledge, Denham, Bruno, Kerrick, Duquette and Nickerson have generally poor or non-existent service. Cellular service is nearly non-existent in the far eastern portions of the county where the Nemadji, Saint Croix and Chengwatana state parks and forests draw recreational enthusiasts.

PROJECT GOAL

Assist Pine County to develop a Strategic Broadband Plan that facilitates partnerships with providers to improve and extend broadband access in the county.

SCOPE OF WORK

Section A – Current assessment and market demand.

- A1 Review of the competitive environment
 - a. Complete an inventory of existing fiber networks within the county, including ownership and availability for use by other network providers.
 - b. Provide an overview of current broadband providers' services, pricing strategies and coverage area.

- c. To the best extent possible, determine and analyze the investment and deployment plans of incumbent providers.
 - d. Map the location of existing fiber and broadband-related electronics and available broadband speeds by provider. This information should be provided as a GIS layer that can be integrated into the county mapping.
- A2 Conduct a statistically valid survey to determine the public’s knowledge on their internet provider/technology/cost/speed/satisfaction, etc.
- A3 Conduct outreach to existing businesses to determine their internet provider/technology/cost/speed and issues. Determine actual broadband speeds delivered to residents and businesses in the county and create a map of broadband speeds and providers as a GIS layer that can be integrated into the county mapping.

Section B – Technology

- B1 Review existing and potential technology for improved and expanded service. Identify and review existing and emerging technology for suitability for Pine County based on need, topography, density, cost, reliability, speed, etc. Evaluation should include technologies available to providers serving Pine County and/or the region.
- B2 Develop options and recommendations for deploying suitable cost-effective technology. Include information on phasing and scaling to 1 gigabit. Options should include scenarios using what already exists within the county, with a minimum service level of, 100/100 (wireline) 25/3 wireless.
- B3 Conduct pre-engineering study at enough depth to estimate costs (broken down into logical project areas) and approximate implementation timeframes for full network implementation of the above recommendations.

Section C – Partnership and Funding Options

- C1 Provide examples of who might be a prospective partner with a summary of how each relationship would function.
- a. What sectors, groups and individuals may help our county achieve the broadband goals and how could the county engage them to become partners?
 - b. 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, non-governmental organizations, K-12 and higher education, including library systems, healthcare providers and the industry and business community.
- C2 Provide examples of where and how the county and providers could leverage additional funds to accomplish the conceptual plans.

- a. What information and data should the county be aware of that will assist in applications to other funding sources?
- b. What initiatives should the county continue or investigate to remain competitive in attaining state, federal and private funding for future projects?

Section D – American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Grant Program

- D1 Develop a grant program for existing providers that will make use of ARPA funds available to the county for the construction and expansion of broadband to serve county residents, businesses, and institutions. Key elements of the grant program will include:
- ✓ ARPA qualified project
 - ✓ 100/100 symmetrical speeds
 - ✓ Service to unserved and underserved areas
 - ✓ Preference for affordability
 - ✓ Preference for reliability
 - ✓ Preference for customer service
 - ✓ Preference for wireline fiber
 - ✓ Preference for equity participation by provider
 - ✓ Preference for leverage of other funds
- D2 Assist the county with the review, ranking, and award of grants.
- D3 Assist the county with oversight of winning grant projects.

Section E – Consultant Recommended Items

In your proposal you may include optional scope of work items that you believe would be beneficial and support the county’s goal.

Other Deliverables and Expectations:

1. 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.
2. Final work product for all work will be provided in one (1) hard copy and one (1) digital copy or as otherwise mutually agree to.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

The following will be considered minimal contents of the proposal. Proposals shall not exceed 15 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.

2. Provide information on background and experience in the following areas:
 - a. Size of the firm (# of employees)
 - b. Location of principal office and satellite offices
 - c. History of firm and scope of work
 - d. Names and information on principals and primary team members and roles of those who will primarily work with Pine County

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 five references from previous similar projects. Include Minnesota Municipal projects if possible.

5. Identify any subcontractors you would likely use on the project.

6. Detailed work plan to include:
 - a. Project implementation schedule and phasing - Please provide an estimated project timeline. Timeline should include:
 - ✓ Estimated duration and phasing by section (i.e. Section A, Section B,) with milestones and deliverables.
 - ✓ Estimated pricing by subsection. (i.e. Section A1, Section A2, etc.). The pricing shall be by hours and rate and show similar to:

A1: (description of work)			
Principal	3 hours	Rate	Total
GIS Tech.	2 hours	Rate	Total
Reimbursable expenses for Section A1			Total
Section A1			Total
 - b. Outline of local involvement and services expected to complete the project. A minimum of three status meetings are to be contained in the work plan in addition to any data collection or input/review meetings.
 - c. 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.
 - d. The county would like flexibility to work with the winning vendor to develop the final scope of work by using the above framework as a guide.

PRE-SUBMISSION MEETING

The county will host a pre-submission meeting at 9 a.m. on June 30, 2021 via video conference. At this pre-submission meeting the county will provide an overview of the project and answer questions.

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 the project
- Clear understanding of the project
- Clear technical proficiency for the mix of technologies and cohesiveness of the proposal
- Project work plan and timeline
- Demonstrated ability to complete the work in a timely manner
- Work experience in small and rural communities
- Pricing

After evaluating all proposals, the county may elect to interview one or more firms in person and/or via video conference.

The county reserves the right to make the final selection at its sole discretion based on its assessment of how the vendor best meets the needs of the county.

It is anticipated that the total project cost will range between \$20,000-\$50,000. Proposals that are outside of this range will be considered, but should include detailed justification within the proposal.

SELECTION

It is anticipated that the county will select the winning vendor within 30 days of the submission deadline. Upon selection, the winning vendor will have not more than 30 days to enter into a professional services agreement with the county and begin the project.

PRIMARY CONTACTS

The contact for all inquiries is:

Lezlie Sauter, Economic Development Coordinator

Lezlie.Sauter@co.pine.mn.us

320-591-1619

All proposals are due by **4:00 p.m., July 12, 2021** local time and shall not exceed 15 pages. Proposals may be submitted electronically to Lezlie.Sauter@co.pine.mn.us or mailed to her attention at 635 Northridge Dr., Ste. 200, Pine City, MN 55063.