



## **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

“Broadband Planning Mapping Tool”

Broadband Planning in Western North Carolina

For

Land of Sky Regional Council of Government and Southwestern Commission

Submit Proposals to:

Land of Sky Regional Council

C/O Sara Nichols

339 New Leicester Hwy, Suite 140 Asheville, NC 28806

[sara@landofsky.org](mailto:sara@landofsky.org)

RFP Submittal Deadline: 5:00 pm (EST) March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022

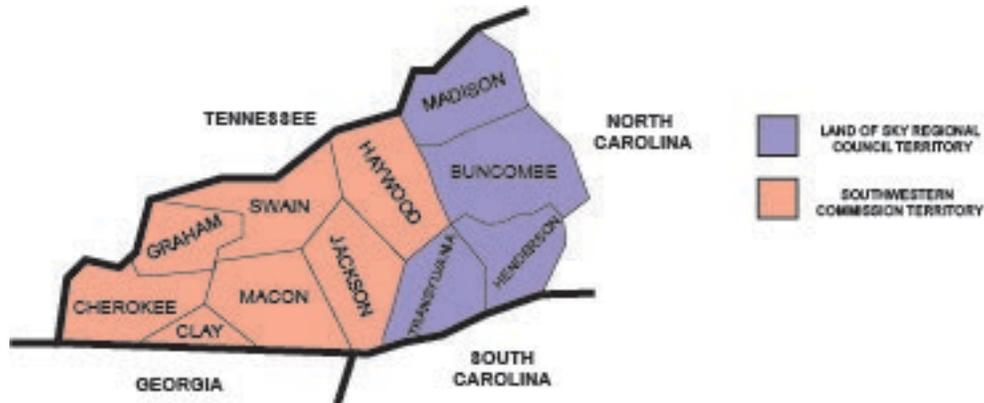
## **OVERVIEW**

Many residents of Western North Carolina (WNC) lack sufficient access to broadband resources and skills. As more services become reliant on broadband access and digital skills, the importance of broadband to residents has increased. The lack of accessibility to broadband services in WNC is widening the digital divide in the region. However, resources are becoming available to find solutions to regional broadband issues.

The Appalachian Regional Commission and Dogwood Health Trust awarded the Land of Sky Regional Council (LOSRC) and Southwestern Commission funding to develop a regional broadband planning tool for WNC.

## PROJECT CONTEXT

The LOSRC and Southwestern Commission are State of North Carolina regional organizations representing an area in Western North Carolina that includes Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, Transylvania, Haywood, Swain, Graham, Cherokee, Clay, Jackson, and Macon Counties.



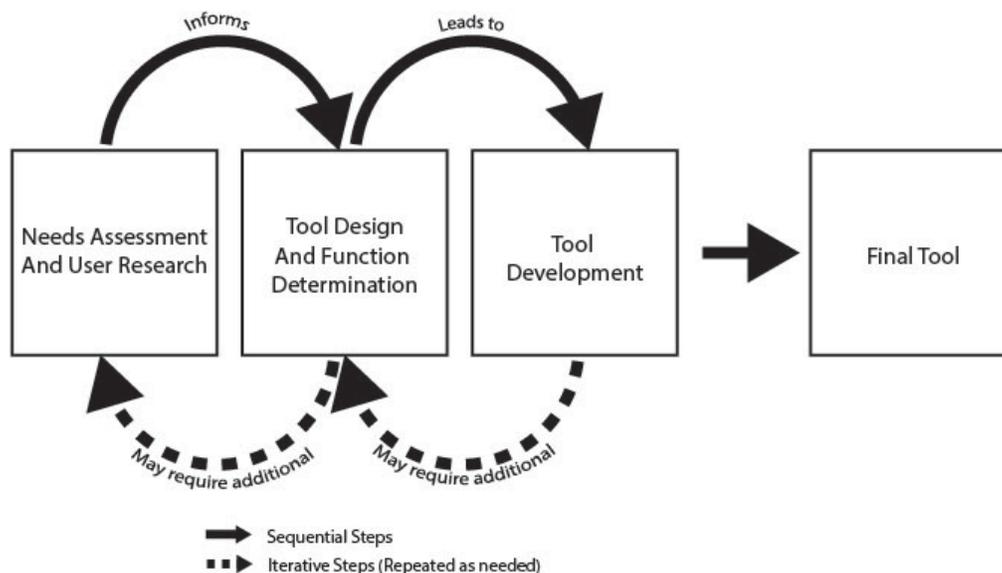
LOSRC and Southwestern Commission developed and implemented multiple projects and programs to support broadband deployment in WNC. This work included data gathering, mapping, grant support, and planning. The result of this work is that thousands of residents obtained new or received better broadband services. However, challenges remain in the region that hinder effective and efficient broadband project planning and deployment.

The planning and deployment of broadband projects often begin with a mapping exercise to identify, at the address level, what households are considered unserved/underserved by broadband. To map these projects, providers and planners have two options: they can hire a mapping service that understands GIS and can write SQL queries or they can aggregate multiple mapping software tools, each of which only solves part of the provider's needs from a mapping perspective. In addition to the complications of mapping software, planners and providers lack a complete knowledge base of the information necessary to plan and deploy broadband projects aggregated into a singular platform. The lack of a comprehensive and user-friendly knowledge base adversely impacts the ability of planners and providers to plan for and deploy broadband services.

The LORSC and Southwestern Commission need to partner with a qualified applicant to develop a novel broadband planning tool to overcome these challenges. The intended users of this tool are broadband planners and Internet Service Providers. This new tool will enable planners and providers to better plan for and execute broadband projects for various deployment technologies.

## STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

The LOSRC and Southwestern Commission are looking for a qualified consultant to develop a tool that increases the efficiency of broadband planning in the WNC region. The chosen consultant will perform a needs assessment and user research to determine what information planners and providers need to plan and execute broadband projects for various deployment technologies. Using this information, the chosen consultant will develop a digital broadband planning tool that aggregates the collective knowledge base into a singular platform. Currently, staff is aware of several data sources at the state level that the chosen consultant will need to integrate into the platform, including data from the Broadband Project Planning and NC Broadband Survey maps developed by the NC Broadband Infrastructure Office. However, staff expects the chosen consultant to integrate additional datasets into the platform based on the needs assessment and user research. Staff envisions the development of the tool following the process described below:



The chosen consultant does not necessarily need to create the tool from square one and may utilize existing software and technology available to the consultant. The consultant will determine the tool applications from the needs assessment and user research. Ultimately, staff envisions a tool capable of performing various analyses, such as scenario planning. However, any solution the chosen consultant pursues may not include datasets or software requiring subscription fees or maintenance costs. It is expected that the consultant will build the tool incrementally with new functionality being added as previous iterations are validated. Staff expects frequent communication with the consultant and to approve each milestone in the iterative design process.

Since the world of broadband evolves rapidly, the details of the tool may change over the course of the contract based on policy and funding changes. Any modifications to the tool details will be within the scope of the budget and overall goals. The expected deliverables of this project include a report on the needs assessment conducted with technical requirements for the proposed tool,

a tool that improves the planning and deployment of broadband projects, and an accompanying manual for the developed tool.

Please ensure that the response to this RFP includes the following information:

<p align="center"><b>COMPANY DESCRIPTION</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>APPROACH TO RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>TOOL BUILD AND DEVELOPMENT</b></p>
<p>Give examples of past projects and staff bios demonstrating experience in agile process software development and user engagement.</p>	<p>User research and needs assessment to determine specific needs of the tool and a solution that addresses the issues stated in the RFP</p>	<p>Based on learned information from research phase develop needed databases and aggregate existing databases into the tool.</p>
<p align="center"><b>PROJECT BUDGET</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>PROJECT TIMELINE</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>REFERENCES</b></p>
<p>Give budget breakdown including initial software build, an estimate of additional funds needed for supplemental datasets, and sustainability plan to keep tool active after build</p>	<p>Give timeline breakdown including time set aside for iterative steps</p>	<p>Provide three references of partners from previous projects</p>

**PROPOSAL EVALUATION**

Consultants responding to this RFP will be evaluated on the following basis:

- 50% Process and work approach, including proposed solution and project sustainability plan/components.
- 30% Record of performance, including references, past projects, and staff biographies, demonstrating experience in agile software development and related technical skills.
- 10% Budget
- 10% Timeline

The LOSRC reserves the right to reject any and all proposals received as a result of this solicitation, to negotiate with any qualified source, to waive any formality and any technicalities or to cancel in part or in its entirety this RFP if it is in the best interests of the Council. This solicitation in no way obligates the Council to award a contract. If deemed necessary, a short list of qualified consultants may be selected from those who submitted proposals for follow-up interviews.

The LOSRC reserves the right to seek clarification of any proposal submitted. Based on the review of the proposal, and the interview if applicable, the RFP Committee will make a recommendation to the Council on a preferred consultant.

## RFP SCHEDULE

This timetable is for the respondent's information. Project constraints may cause these dates to change.

RFP Available	March 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2022
Proposal Questions/ Inquiries Due	March 24 <sup>th</sup> , 2022
Proposals Due	March 31 <sup>st</sup> , 2022
Consultant Selected	April 21 <sup>st</sup> , 2022
Contract Closes	November 30 <sup>th</sup> , 2022

## CONTACT

Questions or requests for additional information regarding this RFP should be directed to: Sara Nichols, Regional Planner, Land of Sky Regional Council [sara@landofsky.org](mailto:sara@landofsky.org)

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS

**Freedom of Information** Respondents are advised that any and all materials submitted in response to this RFP shall become the sole property of Land of Sky Regional Council and shall be subject to the provisions of North Carolina General Statutes, Chapter 132 (Freedom of Information).

**Incurred Costs** This request for qualifications does not commit Land of Sky Regional Council to award a contract or to pay any costs incurred in the preparation of a response to this request. Land of Sky Regional Council will not be liable in any way for any costs incurred by respondents in replying to this RFP.

**Right to Cancel** Land of Sky Regional Council reserves the right to cancel this RFP at any time and to decide not to consider any or all of the respondents submitting information in response to this request.

**Severability** If any terms or provisions of this Request for Proposals shall be found to be illegal or unenforceable, then such term or provision shall be deemed stricken and the remaining portions of this document shall remain in full force and effect.

**Collusion** By responding, the firm implicitly states that his/her proposal has not been made in connection with any other competing firm submitting a separate response to this RFP; is in all respects fair; and has been submitted without collusion or fraud.

**Oral Presentation/Interview** Respondents who submit a proposal in response to this RFP may be required to give an oral presentation of their proposal to Land of Sky Regional Council. This provides an opportunity for the respondent to clarify or elaborate on the proposal. These are fact-finding and explanation sessions only and do not include negotiation. Land of Sky Regional Council will schedule the time and location of these presentations. Oral presentations are an option of Land of Sky Regional Council and may or may not be conducted.

**Affirmative Action** Land of Sky Regional Council is an equal opportunity employer and requires an affirmative action policy from all contractors and vendors as a condition of doing business, as per Federal Order 11246. By signing the Response Page for this RFP, all respondents agree to this condition of doing business.

**Assigning/Transferring of Agreement** Any successful firm is prohibited from assigning, transferring, conveying, subletting, or otherwise disposing of the resulting agreement or its rights, title, or interest therein or its power to execute such an agreement to any other person, company or corporation without prior consent and approval in writing from Land of Sky Regional Council.

**Debarment and Suspensions (Executive Orders 12549 and 12689)** A contract award (see 2 CFR 180.220) must not be made to parties listed on the governmentwide exclusions in the System for Award Management (SAM), in accordance with the OMB guidelines at 2 CFR 180 that implement Executive Orders 12549 (3 CFR part 1986 Comp., p. 189) and 12689 (3 CFR part 1989 Comp., p. 235)