

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Regional Broadband Implementation Blueprint

Southern Colorado Economic Development District (SCEDD) is requesting proposals from qualified vendors or individuals to assist SCEDD staff in the development of a Regional Broadband Implementation Blueprint for a thirteen-county area, which consists of Baca, Bent, Chaffee, Crowley, Custer, Fremont, Huerfano, Kiowa, Lake, Las Animas, Otero, Prowers, and Pueblo Counties, and related communities.

This implementation plan is intended to guide SCEDD's work over the next several years on middle mile, and there is an immediate need to plan for hitting the federal and state funding cycles that begin in the fall of 2022.

This project is supported in part by an Economic Development Administration (EDA) planning grant. Proposals will be accepted until **AUGUST 15, 2022**. Proposals may be delivered via mail, in person, or via e-mail:

SCEDD
Attn: Leslie Mastroianni, Interim Executive Director
121 W City Center Dr Ste 200, Rm 200B, Pueblo, Colorado 81003
leslie@scedd.com

If sent via email, include as subject line: ***SCEDD Middle Mile Broadband Implementation Blueprint Response.***

Only proposals received (not postmarked) by the deadline will be accepted. No proposals which are received after the time and date stated above will be considered, and any proposals so received after the scheduled closing time and date mentioned above shall be returned to the submitting vendor unopened. Hand carried proposals must be delivered to the SCEDD at the street address shown above.

The contract will be made with SCEDD and SCEDD will award the contract based on the evaluation criteria contained in the RFP. SCEDD reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals, to waive informalities and to reserve any RFP's. SCEDD also reserves the right to award the contract as it deems will best serve its interests.

REQUIREMENTS

RFP Name: SCEDD Implementation Blueprint for Middle Mile Broadband

TERMS: The following terms will apply to this RFP and to any subsequent contract. Submission of a proposal in response to this RFP indicates acceptance of all the following terms:

- a. "Contract" means the written agreement resulting from this RFP executed SCEDD.
- b. "Consultant" means the successful Applicant to this RFP who executes a written Contract with SCEDD."SCEDD" means Southern Colorado Economic Development District.
- c. "Region" means the geographic area that encompasses SCEDD, including the counties of Baca, Bent, Chaffee, Crowley, Custer, Fremont, Huerfano, Kiowa, Lake, Las Animas, Otero, Prowers, and Pueblo Counties of Colorado.
- d. "Firm", "Proposer", "Vendor", or "Bidder" means an individual or a company that submits, or intends to submit, a proposal in response to this "RFP".

GENERAL CONDITIONS

1. Services shall be provided as requested by SCEDD in compliance with the SCEDD is looking for a Contractor to assist SCEDD staff in developing a thirteen-county Implementation Action Plan for middle mile broadband. The participating jurisdictions include:

1) All of the SCEDD members, which include the counties of Baca, Bent, Chaffee, Crowley, Custer, Fremont, Huerfano, Kiowa, Lake, Las Animas, Otero, Prowers, and Pueblo counties of Colorado.

2. The Provider shall maintain such records as are deemed necessary pursuant to the EDA grant and SCEDD requirements to assure a proper accounting for all costs and funds collected. These records shall be submitted for audit purposes to SCEDD. The Provider shall submit financial, program progress and other reports as requested by SCEDD.

3. Information provided by SCEDD shall be used only for purposes intended and in accordance with federal and state laws and regulations.

SERVICE DESCRIPTION

The shared goal of our region is to provide abundant, redundant, and affordable Internet service to our citizens, businesses and visitors. Participating jurisdictions in the Region and the Councils of Government in the Region have engaged in various planning and implementation activities, including numerous sub-regional strategic plans.

For your background, these planning documents are provided. Since these planning efforts, there has been little systematic efforts at private/public partnerships and most efforts to deploy broadband, with a few exceptions, have been undertaken by ISPs. In 2020, SCEDD began discussions with the Colorado Broadband Office, DOLA, Region 10, and ISPs to get SCEDD to take a more active effort at coordinating and promoting regional efforts. With passage of the American Rescue Planning Act, SCEDD secured a financial commitment from

10 of 13 counties for 1.5 percent of their ARPA money to support broadband planning efforts. Colorado Trust has added \$300k and this EDA grant behind the RFP is to help prepare an implementation blueprint for middle mile. (NOTE: Federal ARPA money is NOT part of this RFP or grant with EDA.)

The services proposed by the Contractor shall be sufficient to bring each participating jurisdiction in the Region to a consistent level of preparedness to allow the Region to move into a final design and construction phase upon completion of the plan. The plan will primarily address broadband connectivity through both terrestrial and wireless technologies, and include phone services, emergency management communications systems, and other connectivity content. The development of an implementation plan shall address the need to coordinate multiple private and public efforts towards a common goal of improving broadband capability within the region. All stakeholders, including both public and private, shall be invited to participate in the project.

The creation of the plan should contemplate significant involvement from, and work provided by participating jurisdictions with direction, guidance, technical expertise, facilitation and document creation provided by the Contractor in Collaboration with SCEDD.

Specifically, the plan should address (1) Stakeholder engagement and asset mapping, (2) a funding plan with some guidance on cost estimating, (3) gap analysis, (4) financial sustainability and business planning, and (5) outreach and consensus-building.

IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

This RFP contemplates a collaboration between SCEDD and the chosen Consultant, with a flexible division of labor. For that reason, it is vital that potential bidders understand the strengths and weaknesses of the SCEDD staff and the identify what work has been completed to date.

For those reasons, it is vital that all prospective bidders read Appendix A very carefully, as it contains important detail that will affect the emphasis and pricing of your response.

RFP REQUIREMENTS

Vendor must respond to the following:

1. A cover letter outlining the understanding of this project that includes the name, address and telephone number of the proposing Vendor. This letter must bear the signature of the person having the authority to make the proposal for the vendor.

2. Individual or Company Overview:

- * A descriptive background/history.
- * State principal business location and any other service locations.
- * What is your primary line of business?
- * How long have you been providing services?
- * State how many locations where your services are now in use.
- * Are you a single source provider, or will subcontractors also be used?

3. **Qualifications/Professional Competence/Training:** Vendor must provide qualifications as well as experience information on key personnel. Vendor should list any similar projects, including work with public/private partnerships. Vendor must submit a list of all employees that will be associated with the contract for exercise program for the Region. The list must include the employees' full name and resume. Vendor must describe training provided to all personnel and/or subcontractors.

4. Vendor will provide an outline for the approach to the project, with a related timeline of project milestones, draft presentation, and final deliverables.

5. **References:** Vendor must provide the names and telephone numbers of at least three references, with indication of project performed for each reference.

6. **Cost of Services:** Vendor will provide cost of service. The program has a committed dollar amount to be spent on the plan. The Vendor should detail and itemize, as much as possible, costs for each part of the plan that he/she is proposing. All costs for travel time, meetings, mailings, printing or any reimbursable or time/ material accruals should be clearly identified on a per unit and aggregate basis. Proposal award will not be based solely on low price, but the overall best value to the Region in conjunction with all evaluation criteria.

INNOVATION AND COMMENT

Vendor may include any other information that is believed to be relevant but is not specifically asked for in this RFP. Vendor may explain in detail any innovation, alternatives, or more cost-effective approaches available in any area of the RFP. Vendor may provide suggestions of other products or services available that may assist the Region.

PAYMENT

SCEDD will approve all payments of funds for this project upon receipt of invoices. Chosen Contractor will invoice the SCEDD every 30 days for work completed to date until completion of contract, subject to allowable withholding to be paid upon final project deliverables. The SCEDD shall not be billed for, and reimbursement shall not be made for, time involved in activities outside of those defined in the Cost per Service.

KEY TARGET DATES

Listed below are the key target dates associated with the project described in this RFP.

Dates are approximate and may vary:

July 22, 2022--Issue Date of RFP

July 29, 2022—Written receipt of questions due

August 5, 2022--Questions received during the question period will be emailed to all respondents, along with the answers

August 15, 2022--RFP Due Date must be received by 5:00 p.m. MST

August 19, 2022-- Vendor Finalist Selection

VENDOR QUALIFICATIONS

Proposals will be considered only from Vendors who have experienced personnel and necessary equipment to provide the required services. The SCEDD may request information substantiating the requirements. Failure to provide this information may result in a Vendor's proposal being declared non-responsive.

WRITTEN AGREEMENT

The selected Vendor shall be required to enter into a written agreement with SCEDD. Signature on the Proposal Cover Sheet shall serve as an acknowledgement that the Vendor is willing to enter into an agreement with the SCEDD if their proposal is accepted.

EVALUATION AND CONTRACT AWARD

The SCEDD shall evaluate and select a Vendor to provide the required services based on the completed proposal responses. The SCEDD shall be the sole judge in determining how the evaluation process shall be conducted and what Vendor shall be considered for award as deemed to be in the best interest of the Region.

PREPARATION OF PROPOSALS

The proposal must be signed by a company representative authorized to bind the Vendor contractually. Failure to read the RFP and these instructions will be at the Vendor's own risk. Corrections and/or modifications received after the closing time specified will not be accepted. Vendor should include acknowledgement of receipt of addendums issued after the initial release date.

All information submitted in response to this REP is public after the award and/or contract has been executed with the successful Vendor. If Vendor includes as part of the response to the REP any information that the Vendor believes to be a trade secret or other privileged or confidential data, the Vendor must supply under separate cover and identify as confidential. Statements that the entire proposal is confidential will not be honored. SCEDD will endeavor to keep that information confidential, separate and apart from the proposal subject to the provisions of the Colorado Open Records Act or order of court.

OMISSIONS

Should SCEDD omit information from this RFP that is necessary for a clear understanding of the work, or should it appear that various instructions are in conflict, then the

Vendor shall secure written instructions from the SCEDD at least seventy-two (72) hours prior to the time and date of the proposal opening.

DEBARMENT

By submitting this proposal, the Vendor certifies that neither the company nor its principals is presently debarred, suspended, in the process of debarment, declared ineligible or voluntarily excluded from participation in this transaction by any federal state department or agency.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The SCEDD adheres to a policy of equal opportunity and non-discrimination and will ensure that all Vendors will be treated fairly and equitably throughout the bidding process, including the advertisement, evaluation and selection stages.

COST OF DEVELOPING PROPOSALS

All costs related to the preparation of the proposals and any related activities are the sole responsibility of the Vendor. The SCEDD assumes no liability for any costs incurred by Vendors throughout the entire selection process.

PROPOSAL OWNERSHIP

All proposals, including attachments, supplementary materials, addenda, etc. shall become the property of the SCEDD and participating members and will not be returned to the Vendor.

ADDITIONAL GENERAL INFORMATION & CLARIFICATION

For additional information or clarification concerning the services specified in this RFP under Scope of Work, interested parties must submit their questions or comments, in writing via email, to Leslie Mastroianni, leslie@scedd.com. Questions will be received, answered in writing, and sent via e-mail to all vendors who received the RFP or expressed interest in accordance with the dates designated in the "KEY TARGET DATES" section of this RFP. Only one copy of the proposal should be submitted.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Late Proposals will not be accepted or considered. It is the responsibility of the vendor to ensure that his/her Proposal is properly delivered to the required authority at the time and place designated in this RFP. SCEDD will notify unsuccessful vendors in writing or by telephone within approximately ten (10) days following the closing date for receiving Proposals. The SCEDD's silence does not imply any acceptance or rejection of any quotation offer. Issuance of this RFP does not constitute a commitment by SCEDD to award a contract.

SCEDD reserves the right to reject any or all Proposals received in response to this REP, to waive minor irregularities and informalities in Proposals received, or to cancel this REP if it is in the best interest of the SCEDD or Region to do so.

The Vendor agrees, if his/her Proposal is accepted by SCEDD, to furnish supplies and/or services in strict accordance with the Proposal specifications and at those prices set forth for each item in said Proposal. The SCEDD is exempt from federal tax and Colorado sales tax.

SCOPE OF SERVICES AND DRAFT TIMELINE

When reviewing this scope of services, please be aware that the timeline will need to be flexible. While SCEDD wishes to be deliberate, funding deadlines and grant requirements will likely alter the sequencing of this project. It is possible that SCEDD will be placed in the position of meeting funding deadlines before the plan is fully complete. While "ready, fire, aim" is not optimal, SCEDD will strive to be nimble in this unprecedented circumstance and expects its consultant to be the same.

PLEASE READ APPENDIX A IN CONJUNCTION WITH YOUR REVIEW OF THE SCOPE OF SERVICES.

Week 1: Planning

Planning sessions between Consultant and SCEDD Executive Director, Broadband Project Manager, and Grant Administrator

Weeks 2-5: Stakeholder engagement and asset mapping

Needs assessment, including map of existing fiber, conduit, anchor tenants, and other assets. Work collaboratively with SCEDD Project Manager to prepare and/or update asset map that delineates.

Outreach is expected to be done at the regional and sub-regional level. As part of this process, Consultant and Project Manager will meet with area stakeholders to assess how middle mile gaps affect them.

Please see Appendix A for a detailed list of project deliverables and responsible party (Consultant/Project Manager).

Weeks 2-5: Funding (Preliminary)

Research funding opportunities for middle-mile broadband plan execution. Deliverable is a Preliminary Grant and Funding Plan

Week 6-9—Gap Analysis

Define, identify, map, characterize, and report on a variety of middle mile options, with particular attention to potential projects identified the region's ISPs. The economic development planning structure, the terrain, and ISP territories lend themselves to viewing the SCEDD region in four distinct subgroups: Upper Arkansas, South Central, Southeast Plains, and the city and county of Pueblo. Identify the middle mile projects and propose an order of priority based upon (in rough order of priority) geographic diversity, strengthening middle mile network, fundability, and increasing access to underserved populations.

Weeks 10-13—Funding (Preliminary Cost Estimates)

Prepare Preliminary Cost Estimates to a level that will satisfy funder requirements for state, federal, and foundation funding. Identify local match requirements and potential sources for meeting match. Assess opportunities for collaboration and propose timing.

Weeks 14-21—Business Planning

SCEDD's broadband planning effort is funded by a mixture of federal ARPA funds, a foundation grant, commitment from ten counties, and the EDA Planning Grant. To continue its efforts, SCEDD needs a viable business case for sustainability and scalability. Consultant will assess the business opportunity using objective, fact-based analysis, and research that can be shaped and modified with changing assumptions. Consultant shall design a public/private partnership strategy that can include a range of options, including, but not limited to, managing a middle mile network, grant writing and grant administration fees, public commitments, and continued foundation funding. Deliverable is a written master plan for various financing models, addressing sustainability scalability, affordability, maintenance, and other business planning considerations.

Weeks 22-29 Board Acceptance and approval of a middle mile blueprint

Consultation with board and stakeholders, presentation, and consultation with SCEDD Board, county governments, ISPs, and regional and local stakeholders

Appendix A

The EDA broadband planning grant that SCEDD received envisions a collaborative process involving the SCEDD-employed Broadband Project Manager, the SCEDD grant planner, and the selected consultant. The scope of work outlined in this RFP does not have a sharp delineation of duties between staff and consultant. Part of this was intentional. The scope of work draws upon several skill sets, including

- (1) Technical expertise, including needs assessments, asset mapping, and gap analysis.
- (2) Planning and funding expertise, including knowledge of state and federal funding opportunities.
- (3) Collaborative and organizing expertise, including outreach to stakeholders, and elected officials; and
- (4) Business expertise, including the ability to imagine, evaluate, and recommend a sustainable broadband business model for SCEDD

This Appendix clarifies the expertise and activities of SCEDD staff:

Technical expertise—**Gilbert Armendariz** is our Broadband Project Manager, and he has a career of experience in network engineering for the Bell System.

In anticipation of this RFP, **Gilbert Armendariz** has concentrated on a few areas, including needs assessment, and identifying existing anchor tenant locations and mapping existing fiber and right of way. **Gilbert** has a working knowledge of the potential availability of leased fiber to complete the middle mile project.

The state provided maps showing the current fiber installations via the Colorado fiber Network are being used as a baseline for existing usable fiber in the SCEDD region. The state maps do reflect key areas in the SCEDD 13 County region that fit the criteria for middle mile projects. For validation maps provided by the FCC that indicate upload speeds that satisfy the baseline 100/100 speed minimums are being reviewed to further document key areas for middle mile fiber deployment. It is noted due to the terrain and mileage involved, the right of way easements that are located in our SCEDD counties, will be of great importance to facilitate this fiber build-out.

The Broadband Manager is far along in providing accurate mapping of all these assets in the region. **Consultant** expertise is sought to supplement this knowledge. We anticipate that the **Consultant** will work collaboratively to finish the asset mapping, but this will not be a cold start from zero; much work has been done.

Planning and funding expertise-- **Leslie Mastroianni** is a grant planner with 30 years of experience in non-profit management. As a grant planner, she has worked with a wide variety of federal and state grants, with a specialty in infrastructure. SCEDD has capacity to write grants and administer them, but **Consultant** help is needed to pin down and organize the SCEDD response to securing middle mile funding. **Consultants** with a particular expertise in funding should be aware that SCEDD is open to a continuing relationship in this area that is beyond the scope of this EDA planning grant.

Gilbert and Leslie have been studying the released grants from the Colorado Broadband Office, DOLA, and the NTIA. SCEDD has a working knowledge of grant dates for application, funding rates, and other qualifying factors. That knowledge is not exhaustive, and **Consultant** help is sought to create a funding implementation plan.

The rating scale for the evaluation of his RFP gives considerable weight to knowledge of federal and state resources for broadband.

Collaborative and organizing expertise—**Mastroianni** is currently Interim Executive Director for SCEDD and will be directing this contract and working with our Broadband Project Manager, **Gilbert Armendariz**, and the chosen **Consultant**. This project will be one of her main focuses.

Consultant’s help will be especially valuable in serving as the outside expert, and the ability to emphasize that regions that collaborate will be in the best position to secure funding. The **Consultant** can help overcome the lack of a rich tradition of collaborating beyond local or county borders.

SCEDD has made a strategic decision to organize broadband around some natural economic development boundaries—the three Councils of Governments and the city/county of Pueblo. Upper Arkansas (Lake, Chaffee, Fremont, and Custer), Southeastern Plains (Crowley, Bent, Otero, Kiowa, Prowers, and Baca), South Central (Huerfano and Las Animas) have separate economic development organizations that SCEDD routinely collaborates with.

Business expertise—SCEDD does not have experience in conceptualizing or managing a middle mile network and is open to a variety of models that create a sustainable broadband functionality within the organization. SCEDD will be particularly interested in the **Consultant’s** experience and expertise in pushing a non-profit to financial viability beyond grant cycles and using program revenues.

SCOPE OF WORK

	SCEDD STAFF	CONSULTANT
Task: Series of Stakeholder meetings in each of the four sub-regions and/or specific counties if needed.	X	X
<i>Deliverables:</i>		
Needs Assessment chapter for Broadband Plan		X
Map of existing stakeholder and anchor tenant locations (by sub-region and overall)	X	X
Map of existing fiber, conduit, and other assets (by sub-region and overall)	X	X
Map of critical facilities (by county and overall)		X
Task: Assets (developed in conjunction with stakeholders)		X
<i>Deliverables:</i>		
Asset map – Conduit		X
Asset Map – Right-of-way		X
Asset Map – Easements		X

Asset Map – Pole Attachments		X
Asset Map – Towers		
Task: Gap Analysis (developed in conjunction with stakeholders)		X
<i>Deliverables:</i>		
Identify underserved areas		X
Identify critical services (schools, hospitals, emergency shelters, etc.) with unreliable internet		X
Identify potential middle mile projects, including cost estimates		X
Task: Funding Opportunities	X	X
<i>Deliverables:</i>		
Develop a funding plan		X
Identify funding resources	X	X
Identify priorities	X	X
Task: Financial Sustainability, Scalability, Maintenance, and Business Planning	X	X
<i>Deliverables:</i>		
Design a public/private partnership strategy and recommendations for SCEDD board approval		X
Identify and inventory design and engineering teams available for work in the region		X
Written Master Plan for various financial models, addressing sustainability, scalability, affordability, maintenance, and other business planning considerations.	X	X
Task: Review and Adoption of Plan	X	X
<i>Deliverables:</i>		
Present final draft of plan to county commissioners	X	X
Present final draft of plan to community stakeholders	X	X
Present final plan to SCEDD Board of Directors	X	X