

Request for Proposals

Haywood County Broadband Assessment and Feasibility Study

Purpose of RFP:

The Haywood Advancement Foundation, Inc. (HAF), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is requesting proposals (RFP's) 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 Haywood County, NC, to identify and evaluate service and/or adoption gaps; and
- (2) a broadband strategy for Haywood 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 Haywood 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 Haywood 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

Haywood County is located in Western North Carolina just west of Asheville, and consists of a population of approximately 60,176 (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 5% in March 2016. During 2015, approximately fifty-four percent (54.48%) of Haywood County Schools' students were enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program. The economic challenges faced by Haywood County are numerous.

Haywood County's town seat of Waynesville is located closer to two state capitals –Atlanta, GA and Columbia, SC; than to Raleigh, which is over 275 miles away. As a result, a geographic as well as cultural and economic separation from much of the rest of the state is created. The steep mountainous terrain and lack of flat land have hindered economic, educational and cultural growth opportunities, leaving Haywood County as rural area. The Pigeon River originates in Haywood

County. It is the only county in North Carolina that all water flows out while none flows into it. Haywood County is believed to be the highest county (by mean elevation) east of the Mississippi River with a mean elevation of 3600 feet and more mountains over 6,000 feet. Haywood County's opportunities for economic development are limited by the amount of its taxable land.

The current need for high speed Internet is similar to the need for electricity many years ago. It is essential for most businesses and entrepreneurs. Students need internet access at home in order to accomplish many homework assignments. Haywood County profits greatly from visitors and second homeowners to the area and most need to stay connected in order to visit here for any length of time. Many will not even consider purchasing a home here without adequate internet speeds.

Haywood 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 Haywood County Broadband Survey completed in February 2015 provided a detailed inventory and assessment of the communications infrastructure in Haywood County. The survey estimated that 22% had no broadband access and 31% said they had only mobile access to broadband. In addition, 97% said they would be interested in additional broadband service options and 83% said they did not have sufficient speed with their internet service. An additional factor that prohibits many families access is affordability. Considering the rate of poverty in Haywood County, many of the citizens will simply choose not to sign up due to the expense of the service. A map and addresses are available.

Anticipated Timeline:

The following anticipated timeline is subject to change, at the discretion of the Haywood Advancement Foundation (HAF).

May 19, 2016 RFP Posted

June 10, 2016 Questions from perspective applicants are due by 4:00 PM.
Questions regarding RFP content must be submitted in writing to:

Mark B. Clasby
Haywood Advancement Foundation, Inc.
28 Walnut St., 4
Waynesville, NC 28786
Phone: 828.456.3737
Email: mclasby@haywoodchamber.com

June 24, 2016 HAF's 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 Mark B. Clasby to indicate your request.

July 15, 2016

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

Return proposals to the following address:

Attn: Mark B. Clasby

Haywood Advancement Foundation, Inc.

28 Walnut St., Ste. 4

Waynesville, NC 28786

Phone: 828.456.3737

Email: mclasby@haywoodchamber.com

Proposer Requirements:

- **Please note that funds are not appropriated through grants, rather these are foundation funds**
- A. Proposer must have experience conducting community broadband feasibility studies of similar size and scope to the Haywood 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. HAF believes that 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.
- D. Proposer must have implemented and/or operated community broadband networks and demonstrate such 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. HAF feels time is of 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, 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 "Google 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. Minimum 25 mps down and 3 mps down.

- The evaluation should focus on geographical areas that currently lack broadband access (portions of Jonathan Creek Valley, Crabtree, Fines Creek, Bethel and Cruso)

- 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 Haywood 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 Haywood 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 Haywood County, prepare a broadband strategy for Haywood 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

APPLICATION

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

Organization Name: _____

Contact Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

1: Please fill out the attached excel worksheet