



WEDC REQUEST FOR BIDS: RURAL BROADBAND EXPANSION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT

NOVEMBER 11, 2024

Issued by: Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC)

Introduction: The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) is inviting bids from vendors to provide technical assistance consulting services to support regional planners in expanding broadband access in rural and tribal areas of Wisconsin. This initiative aims to address the challenges of broadband access and affordability, digital literacy, and economic development opportunities in these regions.

Problem Statement: Economic development in rural Wisconsin requires a comprehensive approach that includes workforce development, business support, infrastructure investment, community engagement, and public-private partnerships. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort to build a robust broadband infrastructure, attract investments, and foster a collaborative environment among all stakeholders. By doing so, rural Wisconsin can enhance its economic resilience and ensure sustainable growth.

Rural and tribal areas in Wisconsin face significant broadband access challenges, hindering economic development and community growth. With historic Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program funding, Wisconsin will receive substantial investment in broadband expansion. However, the state lacks a strategic plan for tech-based economic development in rural communities and tribal nations. To prepare for digital economic expansion, it is crucial to understand the current state of tech assets and identify opportunities for growth.

Despite existing policies and funding programs, gaps in infrastructure, financial investments, and technical expertise persist. The broadband ecosystem includes ISPs, local governments, state and federal agencies, regional planners, community organizations, and residents.

LOOK FORWARD ►

Limited broadband access restricts business opportunities, reduces educational effectiveness, and hampers healthcare services, exacerbating broader economic development challenges. Additionally, a lack of collaboration and alignment of regional priorities further complicates efforts to enhance broadband access and utilization, highlighting the need for coordinated strategies and unified goals among all stakeholders.

Goals:

1. **Evaluate the Impact of Broadband:** Assess how broadband expansion and affordability contribute to tech-based economic development in rural and tribal Wisconsin.
2. **Conduct Comprehensive Analysis:** Identify and evaluate regional assets and opportunities to develop effective strategies for tech-based economic development.
3. **Facilitate Stakeholder Alignment:** Organize regional strategy sessions to align goals and streamline decision-making processes.
4. **Build Collaborative Foundations:** Establish a collaborative foundation to advance rural broadband expansion initiatives and support community growth

Scope of Work:**A. Statewide Tech-Based Economic Development Analysis**

The statewide tech-based economic development analysis identifying and evaluating regional assets and opportunities to formulate effective strategies for tech-based economic development. The findings will directly shape the structure and content of stakeholder alignment and strategy workshops, ensuring that the developed strategies are actionable.

The statewide tech-based economic development analysis comprehensive will include:

- Quantitative and qualitative research, stakeholder interviews, and detailed asset and gap analyses.
- Comprehensive report on the current broadband access landscape and pinpoint areas for growth and improvement, ultimately driving successful tech-based economic development across Wisconsin.

- Complete the analysis by Monday March 31, 2025.

B. Stakeholder Alignment and Strategy Workshop Facilitation

- Facilitate at least four in-person geographically disbursed workshops before May 2025 with the Office of Rural Prosperity [ORP] and WEDC's regional economic development partners. The selected vendor will work with ORP staff to coordinate workshop dates and locations.
- Develop a shared strategy and aligned goals for rural broadband expansion and tech based economic growth.
- Include an overview of the current national and regional broadband landscape, focusing on rural areas.
- Present and distribute the completed statewide tech-based economic development analysis.
- Provide a comprehensive orientation to the funding landscape, highlighting available resources to support rural broadband expansion.
- Complete all work and invoicing by Friday May 30, 2025.

C. Report on Tech Based Economic Development Opportunities in Rural Wisconsin

- Create final report on tech based economic development opportunities in rural Wisconsin that includes:
 - The statewide tech-based economic development analysis identifying and evaluating regional assets and opportunities to formulate effective strategies for tech-based economic development.
 - Shared strategy and aligned goals for rural broadband expansion and tech based economic growth identified by WEDC's regional economic development partners and the Office of Rural Prosperity.
- Complete all work and invoicing by Friday June 13, 2025.

Confidentiality: Vendors must maintain confidentiality regarding WEDC and employee information.

Submission Requirements: Proposals should include the vendor's qualifications, a detailed work plan, a timeline, and a budget. Vendors interested in providing services to WEDC should submit a bid by the close of business on **Friday, December 6th** to Delia Kovac, Rural Initiatives Senior Manager at delia.kovac@wedc.org.

Evaluation Criteria:

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Vendor's Experience and Capability:

- a. Ability to provide the outlined services.
- b. Relevant experience in conducting similar assessments.
- c. Demonstrated capability to deliver a well-aligned, actionable strategy supported by a strong foundation of collaboration and shared vision.
- d. Specific experience with rural broadband expansion, regional economic development agencies, and federal funding for broadband infrastructure, including BEAD funding.

2. Approach and Methodology:

- a. Detailed outline of the approach, methodology, and work plan.
- b. Clear and measurable deliverables to complete this contract.

3. Cost of Services:

- a. Project fixed cost basis, broken down by task.
- b. Hourly rates for participating staff, where relevant.

4. Qualifications and Certifications:

- a. Qualifications and certifications of all participating staff or subcontractors.

5. References:

- a. References from clients to whom the vendor has provided similar services.

6. Required Documentation:

- a. Signed W9.

- b. Completed Demographic Attestation Self-Reporting Form (attached to this request).
- c. Draft copy of the contract if the vendor has preferred contract language to be considered.

7. WEDC strongly encourages Diverse and/or Wisconsin Based Businesses to submit proposals.

- a. WEDC is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion, therefore, proposals from Diverse Businesses will receive a Five Percent (5%) preference during the proposal scoring process.
- b. In addition, WEDC values maximizing opportunities in Wisconsin for businesses, therefore a Five Percent (5%) bid preference will be given to proposers that are located in Wisconsin (Ten Percent (10%) cumulative if the proposer is diverse and located in Wisconsin).

Selection will be granted to the vendor that provides the best value to WEDC, based on their ability to meet the above-stated requirements.

Questions concerning this request for bids should be directed to Delia Kovac at delia.kovac@wedc.org.