

OGLETHORPE COUNTY REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS (RFQ) FOR THE DESIGN,
CONSTRUCTION, DEVELOPMENT, OPERATION & MAINTENANCE OF COUNTY WIDE
BROADBAND NETWORK.

Statement of Purpose

Oglethorpe County, Georgia (Client) solicits interest from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) with expertise in providing internet services to rural customers. Oglethorpe County is seeking qualification statements from partners with experience providing reliable, affordable broadband services to both residential and business customers in a rural setting. Oglethorpe County has dedicated an initial funding of \$350,000 to assist a provider in establishing an initial pilot project to serve no fewer than 1000 households with fast, affordable and reliable internet service. We specifically seek partners who will share the financial risk and rewards with the County.

Background

Broadband Committee. Lack of access to affordable, reliable and fast internet has been a common complaint among citizens in Oglethorpe County for the last several years. In March of 2018, the Economic Development Authority (EDA) of Oglethorpe County formed a sub-committee to focus on broadband access. The committee convened periodically to develop and implement a strategic action plan to assess the scope of internet shortfall and develop solutions.

Committee members spoke with broadband to share concerns and roadblocks to access. As a result of these discussions, committee members elected to conduct a community survey to help to better understand the scope of the problem in Oglethorpe County.

The Oglethorpe Community Broadband survey was distributed on October 2, 2018 and closed December 4, 2018. Effort was made to solicit responses from all residents, including those without internet access. There were 733 complete, individual responses. Of those, 74 were completed on paper with the remainder completed through an online link. There are 5,642 households in Oglethorpe County according to the 2017 American Community Survey estimates. The survey sample represents 12.9% of households. The survey included 10 questions meant to determine availability of internet access, provider data, satisfaction with current provider and financial interest in improved access. Location information was also requested.

Extrapolating the results, it was determined that 80% of Oglethorpe households are dissatisfied with their internet service. Cost, reliability and speed were noted in more than half of the responses for dissatisfaction, with speed being the primary complaint. Respondents with internet were asked to share their current provider. 70% of respondents utilized Windstream, the incumbent local provider for most of Oglethorpe County. AT&T and Charter both share about 7% of the local market and other providers such as cellular services (Verizon, AT&T) at about 10% and satellite providers (Viasat, HughesNet) at 7%. The dissatisfaction rate was fairly consistent among AT&T, Windstream and satellite providers at between 85 - 90%. Charter customers were significantly more satisfied, with an overall dissatisfaction rate at only 20%. Wireless customers also reported a slightly better dissatisfaction rate than Windstream, AT&T and satellite with only 67% reporting dissatisfaction with their current service. All respondents were asked about willingness to pay for uncapped 25 mb speed internet that would allow them to stream video without buffering. 43% stated a willingness to pay \$50/month for such a service,

29% stated a willingness to pay \$75/month and 16% stated a willingness to pay \$100/month. Overall, that is 88% of respondents willing to pay \$50 or more for 25 mb speeds.

Respondents were also asked to provide their address data. This data was compiled and converted to longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates and input into a geographic map. The response level based on this geographic data closely aligns with current population density.

County Challenges. Oglethorpe County is 99% rural, with 5,600 households spread across 441 square miles. There are over 500 miles of road in the county, many of which are unpaved. There is significant distance between homes, which increases the cost to serve those homes with hardline solutions.

Whereas lack of density presents a cost challenge to traditional hardwire installation, tree cover and undulating topography can present a significant challenge to transmittal of broadcast signals for wireless solutions. The County contains thousands of acres of forest. It is critical that a potential partner has experience and creative solutions to overcome these challenges.

Objectives

Oglethorpe County's objective for this RFQ is to seek responses from qualified vendors for a Public-Private-Partnership that will provide telecommunications services including, but not limited to, implementation, design, construction, management and growth of a network to serve currently underserved households and businesses in Oglethorpe County. We specifically seek partners who will share the financial risk and rewards with the County and who have creative solutions for transmittal of service to low residential density areas with topography and tree cover challenges.

Qualification Statements

Qualified Providers must provide an option of 25 mb download and 3 mb upload speeds at a cost to a residential consumer of not more than \$75 a month, exclusive of any hardware or initial installation cost. Qualified Providers should be able to demonstrate the capability to provide service to a minimum of 1,000 households in an initial "pilot" phase and the capability to provide service to 90% of Oglethorpe County residents and business through subsequent phases of build-out. Qualified Providers should have a track record of providing reliable, affordable and fast internet in a rural setting.

Interested parties are responsible for monitoring the website for information concerning the RFQ and any addenda issued on Oglethorpe County's website (www.oglethorpecountyga.gov)

Questions regarding this Request for Qualifications should be directed to Josh Hawkins, County Administrator via email at jhawkins@oglethorpecountyga.gov

Oglethorpe County reserves the sole right to terminate this process, to not award a contract, and to cancel or modify this solicitation process at any time. In no event will the County or any of their respective agents, representatives, consultants, directors, officers, or employees be liable for, or otherwise obligated to reimburse, the costs incurred in preparation of this RFQ, or any related costs. The prospective consultant teams shall wholly absorb all costs incurred in the preparation and presentation of the submittals. The RFQ Submittals will become the property of Oglethorpe County.

Interested firms shall submit a Statement of Qualification that contains the following:

1.1 Cover Letter.

2.1 Qualifications.

2.1.1 Project Team. Provide an organizational chart of the proposed implementation team and a short resume of all key people listed on the chart, including their availability to perform this work.

2.1.2 Statement of Experience. Provide a written statement, not to exceed 1,500 words, describing your firm's experience delivering reliable internet service to rural areas.

2.1.3 Service Plans. Provide a list of your service plans that includes dedicated service speeds and costs to customers. Include any installation costs paid by the customer.

2.1.4 Phased Estimated Costs. Provide your firm's estimated costs to deliver reliable internet to 1,000 households within a period not to exceed 2 years and costs to deliver reliable internet to 5,310 households within 5 years.

3.1 References. Provide a list of relevant experience and reference contacts.

The Statement of Qualification submittal shall be a maximum of 12 pages (not including the cover page) and one original and seven copies will be submitted.

RFQ SUBMITTAL DEADLINE AND DELIVERY LOCATION

All responses shall be made in writing (responses by FAX will not be accepted). Sealed responses will be received by the County Administrator up to the hour of **3:00 p.m., Friday, September 6, 2019.**

Responses delivered later will not be accepted. Oglethorpe County is not responsible for delays in delivery. All responses to this request that are mailed through the United States Postal Service shall be addressed to:

Oglethorpe County Board of Commissioners

ATTN: Josh Hawkins

P.O. Box 261

Lexington, Georgia 30648

Hand-delivered responses, or responses not set through the USPS, shall be delivered to the same address as identified above. All responses shall be placed in a sealed envelope, which is clearly marked "Oglethorpe County Broadband Provider RFQ".

Oglethorpe County will evaluate and select the consultant based on the submitted Statement of Qualifications. The County reserves the right to utilize any additional evaluation criteria it so chooses in order to make a final decision on the selection of the consultant. The County may conduct interviews in order to make a final decision.

The County will execute a master agreement with the selected consultant. The term of this master agreement is yet to be determined

Oglethorpe County in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 78 Stat. 252, 42 U.S.C. 2000d to 2000d-4 and Title 49, Code of Federal Regulations, Department of Transportation, Subtitle A, Office of the Secretary, Part 21, nondiscrimination in federally-assisted programs of the Department of Transportation issued pursuant to such Act, hereby notifies all firms that it will affirmatively ensure that pursuant to this advertisement, disadvantaged business enterprises as defined in 49 CFR Part 26 will be

afforded full opportunity to submit responses to this invitation and will not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, color, national origin or sex in consideration for an award.

A response to the RFI is subject to public disclosure under the Georgia Public Information Act, Georgia Government Code, Chapter 552 (the Act), unless the response, or any part of the response, can be shown to fall within one or more of the Act's exceptions to required public disclosure. If a respondent believes that parts of the response are exempt from the required public disclosure the respondent must specify those parts and the exception(s) that it believes apply, with specific detailed reasons. Oglethorpe County will process any public information request for all or part of a response in accordance with the Act's procedures. However, the final decision regarding a request for information to which a Respondent asserts any exception to disclosure will be made by the Georgia Attorney General's Office, not by Oglethorpe County. Respondents should consult the Georgia Attorney General's web site at www.oag.state.tx.us for information concerning the application of the Act's provisions to responses and potentially proprietary information.