

# THE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CONSORTIUM OF THE WESTERN CAROLINAS, INC.

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

### THE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CONSORTIUM OF THE WESTERN CAROLINAS AND HAYWOOD COUNTY DESIRE TO ENGAGE INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS TO PROVIDE HIGH SPEED INTERNET TO PORTIONS OF THE COUNTY

The Education and Research Consortium of the Western Carolinas, Inc (“ERC”) has received a grant in the amount of \$100,000.00 from the Appalachian Regional Commission (“ARC”) to extend broadband Internet service to residential and business customers in unserved and underserved areas of Haywood County (“Haywood” or “County”).

Various surveys identified portions of Haywood County in which residents reported inadequate broadband Internet service. These surveys determined the County has significant underserved and unserved areas in terms broadband service – specifically in the Fines Creek and Crabtree communities. Currently the ERC is looking for a partner to provide last-mile fiber to the premise or high-speed wireless suitable for broadband service to residents, businesses, and community anchor institutions in the Fines Creek and Crabtree areas of the County. For the purposes of this Request For Proposals (“RFP”), broadband is defined as terrestrially deployed internet access service with transmission speeds of at least 25 megabits per second (“Mbps”) download and at least 3 Mbps upload (25/3). Terrestrially deployed technologies include wired (fiber, cable, coax) and fixed wireless. The areas are generally displayed on the attached map (see Attachment 1).

The ERC in partnership with the County is looking for a qualified Internet Service Provider (“Partner”) with the technical expertise and capacity to make available reliable high-speed Internet services to as much of the identified underserved areas as possible. The qualified Partner would be required to design, build, operate and maintain a broadband network to provide data services. The ERC is seeking innovative business models that prepare the region for future technological growth while serving today’s needs for higher speeds, more complete coverage, and a wider range of choices for consumers. A goal of this effort is to create a competitive advantage for the County with respect to economic development, job creation, and growth opportunities.

The Partner would also be required to provide a minimum of **\$100,000** to match the ARC funds, for a project total of \$200,000 or greater. The match can be cash, contributed services, or in-kind contributions, as approved by ARC guidelines.

Also, per ARC regulations, the ERC will own all equipment purchased with grant and match funds for five years, after which time the ERC will formally request the equipment be transferred to the project Partner.

***This RFP does not commit the ERC to award a contract, to pay any costs incurred in the preparation of a response to this request, or to procure or contract for services. The ERC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals received as a result of this request, or to cancel this RFP in part or in its entirety. The ERC reserves the right to undertake such investigation as it deems necessary to verify the qualifications of the company for the project.***

## SCOPE OF SERVICES

This Request for Proposal (“RFP”) is requesting a qualified Partner design, build, and maintain broadband infrastructure that will provide service(s) to unserved and underserved areas of Haywood County with service speeds that meet at a minimum 25 Mbps download and 3 upload. The Partner will document in its RFP response the project locations are unserved/underserved by a variety of methods that could include data from the North Carolina Department of Information Technology’s Broadband Information Office (<https://www.ncbroadband.gov/>), County data, Fines Creek Association data, and direct contact with the proposed project area. The method of Internet service delivery shall be identified by the Partner in their proposal. The goal of this project is to provide affordable, reliable Internet access to as many unserved and underserved residents and businesses of Haywood County as possible. As shown in Attachment 1 the general areas requiring service are Fines Creek and Crabtree.

The selected Partner must display capacity to accomplish the following services:

1. Design a network that is cost-effective, and that provides reliability and redundancy
2. Develop environmental documents, project recommendations, and cost estimates
3. Prepare detailed design and construction plans, technical specifications, and documents
4. Act as project manager for all construction phases
5. Provide on-site construction inspections and management
6. Conduct system performance tests
7. Conduct final project inspections and prepare final construction report
8. Maintain the equipment needed to provide retail broadband services to residential and business customers
9. Providing management functions of the service provision, including sales, billing and customer service

## PROJECT SCHEDULE

RFP release	March 3, 2021
Proposal submittal deadline	March 31, 2021
Proposal review completed/Decision	April 14 2021
Contract with selected Partner	May 14 2021
Project design complete	June 28, 2021
Project construction complete	October 28, 2021
Final reporting due	November 5, 2021

## PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Proposal submissions must include:

1. Description of the company, including location, number of employees, number of years' experience providing Internet access, available resources, and other information necessary to determine to capacity of the company to properly execute the work proposed
2. Description of past company record of network reliability and customer satisfaction
3. Business and technical plan describing the method to conduct the Scope of Services above
4. Description of anticipated technology to be utilized in project
5. Anticipated service speeds provided to customers
6. Description of specific area(s) to be served
7. Commitment of matching funds for the project from a person with authority to commit them
8. Detailed timeline of project

**EVALUATION**

The following criteria and associated importance will be used to evaluate proposals and select a Partner:

<b>SCORING CRITERIA</b>	<b>POINTS</b>
Capability to perform all aspects of the project and ability to meet project schedule.	5-10
Demonstrated history of network reliability and customer satisfaction.	2-5
Service offerings to the largest number of unserved/underserved households (200 or fewer=2 points, 201-300=3 points, 301-400=4 points, 401 or greater=5 points)	2-5
Service speeds to all households (25:3=0 required minimum, 26-50 Mbps download=2 points, 51-100 Mbps download=3 points, greater than 100 Mbps download=4 points)	2-4
Relevant experience and expertise installing broadband networks with a demonstrated capacity to supply and maintain the equipment	2-4
<i>Additional</i> matching funds committed (\$100,000 required minimum, \$100,001-150,000=2, \$150,001-200,000=3, \$200,001-300,000=4, \$300,001-400,000=5, \$400,001-500,000=6, \$500,001+=7)	2-7
Demonstrated experience partnering with local governments and non-profits on broadband projects; experience with Federal grant programs	2-5
Quality of proposal and overall responsiveness to RFP requirements	2-5
<b>MAXIMUM</b>	<b>45</b>

The ERC and representatives of Haywood County will evaluate the proposals. The ERC shall award at its own discretion a contract or contracts to a Partner(s) whose responses best accommodate the various aspects of this RFP's requirements. The ERC reserves the right to negotiate partnerships and award contract(s) to more than one responder and refuse any response or contract without obligation to either the ERC or to any prospective Partner offering or submitting information. The ERC reserves the right to discontinue the selection process at any time prior to the awarding of a contract.

## PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS

Proposals must be received no later than **5:00 pm** on **March 31, 2021**. Submit proposals

to: The Education & Research Consortium of the Western Carolinas, Inc.  
c/o Hunter Goosmann  
151 Patton Ave, Box 170  
Asheville, NC 28801 hgoosmann@ercwnc.org

Proposals submitted by email are acceptable. Faxed proposals will not be accepted. Incomplete proposals will not be reviewed. Proposals received after the closing date and time will not be reviewed. The receipt of documentation is determined by the time stamp on the email or the physical delivery of the document(s) to the ERC by any company or delivery service.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Applicants may contact team members (see below) for additional information. Any question asked will be documented in a Frequently Asked Questions document (or "FAQ") and available to all interested parties.

Contact Information:

Hunter Goosmann -

hgoosman@ercwnc.org  
(828) 350-2415

Attachment 1 is the map showing general areas requiring service in Haywood County.

The ERC will utilize \$5,000.00 of the grant funds for project oversight and grant administration. Therefore, the amount of available grant funds to the awardee of the RFP is \$95,000.00.

This project is considered a **non-construction** project which means the effort does not involve any changes or improvements to real property, including facilities providing utility service.

This grant will be administered in accordance with federal regulations as promulgated by the Office of Management and Budget at Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards ([https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr200\\_main\\_02.tpl](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr200_main_02.tpl)). The RFP awardee is required to maintain accurate and complete records relating to this grant, and make these available to the ERC (and subsequently the ARC) upon request, or for audit purposes.

If any Proposal contains Trade Secrets or Personally Identifiable Information (“PII”), such Trade Secrets and PII must specifically and clearly be identified by clearly separating them from the rest of the RFP response. For hard copy documents, it must be submitted in a separate, sealed envelope, marked either “Personally Identifiable Information – Confidential” or “Trade Secret—Confidential and Proprietary Information.” The confidentiality caption stated above must appear on each page of the Trade Secret or PII materials.

Reservation of Rights:

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