

**July 21, 2023**  
**Rhode Island Commerce Corporation**  
**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

Solicitation Number: **RFP-2313**  
ADDENDUM NO. 1

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

**GENERAL SUPPORT FOR BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE AND DIGITAL EQUITY INVESTMENT**

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation (Corporation) seeks proposals from one or more qualified firms to (1) draft and implement a statewide broadband infrastructure and digital equity investment and grant program, called ConnectRI; this will consist primarily of drafting and implementing an integrated plan for maximizing the benefits of all relevant federal broadband subsidy programs in Rhode Island; (2) draft and implement all aspects of a Digital Equity Plan; (3) draft and implement all aspects of the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Five-Year Action Plan, the BEAD Initial Proposal, and the BEAD Final Proposal, all in service of the ConnectRI investment program; and (4) design and implement a process for supervising grant completion for all recipients of grant funds awarded pursuant to the BEAD, the Digital Equity Act (DEA), and the US Treasury's Capital Projects Fund (CPF) program. All work will be performed in close consultation with and subject to final review and approval by the Corporation.

**Prospective Proposers and all concerned are hereby notified of the following amendments regarding the Request for Proposals document for the above-listed RFP. These amendments shall be incorporated in and shall become an integral part of the RFP documents.**

1. Subtask 3B: Design and Implement BEAD State-Administered Challenge Process is amended by adding the following sentence at the end of the second bullet point:

“Proposers addressing sub-task 3B should include two proposals for that work: one which assumes that Rhode Island will adopt a BEAD Model Challenge process similar to the one issued by NTIA and a second which assumes Rhode Island will not adopt such a model.”

2. The note in the Proposal Submission section that states “No telephone calls will be accepted and responses received via electronic submission only will be disqualified” is deleted and replaced with the following:

“No telephone calls or late responses will be accepted.”

**Prospective Proposers and all concerned are hereby notified of the following questions and answers regarding the Request for Proposals document for the above-listed RFP. These questions and answers shall be incorporated in and shall become an integral part of the RFP documents.**

**Question #1:** Please share the list of bidders to the initial RFP-2309. Share the list of RIVIP-registered vendors to RFP-2313.

**Answer #1:** These are not questions that pertain to the substantive terms of the RFP and will not be answered at this time.

**Question #2:** Clarify if the answers provided to questions in the previous RFP 2309's Q&A Addendum 1 are still relevant, specifically questions 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 30, 31, 33, 36, 37, 38.

**Answer #2:** The answers provided to questions 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 31, 33, 36, 37, and 38 in Addendum 1 to RFP-2309 are still valid. The Corporation has, however, requested a 45-day extension to the Five-Year Action Plan deadline, which was originally August 15, 2023.

**Question #3:** Assuming the answer to Question 4 in RFP-2309's Q&A is still valid, confirm that the request for alternative approaches based on differing circumstances for Task 3B would also be valid for Tasks 3C and 4, if the proposer chose to describe as such.

**Answer #3:** Alternative approaches and/or methodologies to accomplish the desired or intended results of this procurement are solicited. However, proposals that depart from or materially alter the terms, requirements, or scope of work defined by this RFP will be rejected as being non-responsive. Two proposals are specifically requested for Sub-Task 3B because the NTIA has expressly stated that states can either use a state challenge process that is aligned with NTIA's Model State Challenge Process or it can develop its own state challenge process.

**Question #4:** What date should we assume for project start following the July 26<sup>th</sup> proposal deadline: July 31<sup>st</sup> or August 7<sup>th</sup>?

**Answer #4:** Proposers should assume a mid-August project start.

**Question #5:** Will the RICC need to obtain Board approval for vendor selection, and if so, when is the next scheduled or planned Board meeting?

**Answer #5:** The Corporation is required to get board approval for all contracts over \$20,000. The next scheduled Board meeting is August 8, 2023.

**Question #6:** The Rhode Island Broadband and Digital Equity Strategic Plan (DRAFT) looks to meet many of the requirements of the NTIA's Digital Equity plan. Is it expected that a finalized version of this plan will be submitted to the NTIA or is the consultant expected to start from scratch and incorporate elements of this plan in the plan that Rhode Island expects to send to the NTIA

**Answer #6:** The Corporation expects any selected vendor to build upon work already done by the Corporation and by those within state. However, the Rhode Island Digital Equity Plan must

comply with all NTIA Guidance and requirements and incorporate new learnings and feedback from stakeholders learned since the Broadband and Digital Equity Strategic Plan was published.

**Question #7:** The Integrated Plan required looks like an extension of the current Rhode Island Broadband and Digital Equity Strategic Plan (DRAFT). Is it intended that this phase of work is a finalization of this plan or a radically different plan be prepared

**Answer #7:** The Corporation expects any selected vendor to build upon work already done by the Corporation and by those within state. The Integrated Plan should provide an action plan for the Corporation to successfully implement all requirements of our CPF and BEAD and DEA programs.

**Question #8:** NTIA gives Broadband Offices the ability to submit one Action Plan which includes the Digital Equity Plan or to present two documents, one being the Action Plan and the other being the Digital Equity Plan. Does Rhode Island have any preference?

**Answer #8:** The Corporation views digital equity and broadband infrastructure as intractably linked. As much as possible, our planning and implementation for our broadband infrastructure and digital equity efforts should be integrated. However, two discrete plans are required by the NTIA.

**Question #9:** Does Rhode Island have a preference towards fiber or are they open to other alternatives e.g. FWA to cover the population

**Answer #9:** The Corporation is open to all technologies that fit the parameters of the Capital Projects Fund and Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program. However, as stated in the State's Broadband Strategic Plan, we do understand the importance of fiber networks. One goal in the Strategic Plan is to expand fiber infrastructure in the state.

**Question #10:** Has the NTIA released any guidance to Rhode Island on the nature of the contents of the Initial and Final Proposal? If so, what are some of the key elements that must be included in these proposals?

**Answer #10:** Rhode Island will follow the NTIA's Initial and Final Proposal guidance, which is available on NTIA's website.

**Question #11:** Three stages require the drafting and implementing of documents. What is meant by implementation? Does implementation mean finalizing the plans or does it mean actually executing the plans?

**Answer #11:** For Task 1 and Task 3, implementation means executing the plans. For Task 2, implementation means finalizing the plan.

**Question #12:** What external engagement has already been done in the development of the Rhode Island Broadband and Digital Equity Strategic Plan (DRAFT)? Will the consultant have access and can use this when completing the external engagement process in 3a. What additional consultation is anticipated as being required by Rhode Island?

**Answer #12:** The Corporation has hired a Community Outreach Coordinator to assist with broadband program stakeholder engagement. Additionally, the Corporation has begun a

statewide broadband mapping analysis, outreach to stakeholders in the State, a broadband access survey, a Digital Equity Asset Mapping survey, and cosponsored a statewide stakeholder engagement event on June 1.

**Question #13:** What are the expectations of verification. Is it expected a monthly, quarterly, annual audit etc.? What specifically is Rhode Island intending for the winner to field verify?

**Answer #13:** Verification expectations are quarterly, at a minimum. The entity selected to engage in field verification will need to ensure that work has been completed as necessary, including verifying construction, performance measures, and review of final expenditures and matching funds.

**Question #14:** Will Rhode Island be seeking to/ is open to forming public private partnerships to further expand the funding it has alongside BEAD?

**Answer #14:** The Corporation expects to require a match as part of our ConnectRI effort and is open to forming public private partnerships.

**Question #15:** What portion of fundings e.g. \$506k for developing State Digital Equity plan have been allocated by NTIA to this activity?

**Answer #15:** The State received \$506,100 for State Digital Equity Planning. All of those funds will support this activity. However, the Corporation has the right to reserve some of these funds for internal operations and Corporation-led efforts in service of this plan.

**Question #16:** Is the winner of the tender expected to run the challenge system? What is the interaction expected with the winner of the Mapping RFP? Assume that previous vendor is responsible for updating the maps

**Answer #16:** Task 3b requests responses to develop and administer a state challenge process. The Corporation expects the selected vendor(s) to RFP-2313 to work collaboratively with the selected vendor for RFP-2309.

**Question #17:** How is Rhode Island running the challenge process. Is it in alignment with the BEAD process for states or is a process unique to Rhode Island

**Answer #17:** Proposers who are bidding on Task 3 are required to design and administer a state challenge process. The Corporation is in the preliminary stage of designing such a challenge process but expects the selected Proposer to take the lead in such design as specified in Task 3b. The Corporation's challenge process must be in line with NTIA requirements. See also the amendment to Task 3b above.

**Question #18:** The Rhode Island travel policy seems to be written from the perspective of a company based in Rhode Island traveling out of state. Are there any travel policy specifications for a company which is based out of state travelling to Rhode Island to complete the work?

**Answer #18:** To the extent that the Proposer intends to incur travel costs, those costs should be included in the Proposal.

**Question #19:** Our firm has the ability to conduct advanced analytics. What data e.g. speed test data can Rhode Island make available to bidders?

**Answer #19:** The Corporation cannot make any of our internal or proprietary data available to bidders. Bidders may use any data they have access to and/or publicly available data for analyses as part of their responses.

**Question #20:** What elements of creativity has the Broadband Office noted have been used by other states in developing and implementing their broadband plans. What would examples of creativity be for Rhode Island?

**Answer #20:** The ConnectRI program is seeking to leverage both BEAD and CFP funding to increase access, improve service, and increase affordability for all Rhode Islanders. Each state is unique and solutions that speak directly to the needs of Rhode Island and provide strategies on how funds can best be leveraged holistically to reach all goals set forth in the State Broadband Strategic Plan will receive additional points under the “Creativity” criteria.

**Question #21:** Based on prior email correspondence we understood that there would be two tenders created, one for business plan and also one for technical analysis [sic]. Is this the case?

**Answer #21:** As written in RFP-2313, the Corporation will review and score each Task individually. Contracts will be awarded based on scores of individual Tasks.