

City of Ottawa, Illinois - Request for Qualifications

North Central Area Transit Strategic Plan Development

The City of Ottawa, Illinois requests statements of qualifications from qualified firms to provide professional planning services for the development of a strategic plan for County's public transit provider, North Central Area Transit (NCAT). Submittals to this Statement of Qualifications will be accepted until 11:00 am CST June 18, 2024. Submittals received after that date and time will not be considered.

Background

The City of Ottawa operates NCAT which provided just over 71,000 rides in 2023, a 38% increase from the previous year. Operating up to 21 demand-response routes throughout rural LaSalle County daily, NCAT allows individuals access to medical, educational, employment, recreational, and social services, as well as many other opportunities. NCAT's fleet is comprised of 34 light-duty and medium-duty cutaway buses and raised roof vans, all equipped with a wheelchair lift.

Located in north central Illinois, LaSalle County is a total 1,148 square miles (mi²) of which 1,135 mi² are land and 13 mi² are water with a population of 108,078 (2022 estimate, U.S. Census). Two major interstates intersect at the heart of the County and there are 363.46 miles of county highway running throughout. The County has three (3) large towns, and two (2) state parks that draw a significant number of tourists. Mostly rural farmland with corn and soybean fields, LaSalle County is nestled within nine (9) other rural counties and is about 80 miles from the city of Chicago.

Administrative offices are located in Ottawa, IL with a satellite location in Peru, IL.

The City of Ottawa applied for and has received \$275,000 in Illinois Department of Transportation SPR funds for the development of a strategic plan.

Purpose

City of Ottawa is seeking consulting and professional services needed to perform a comprehensive transit analysis and development of a strategic transit plan for the County's public transit provider, North Central Area Transit.

A comprehensive transit analysis has never been done for the transportation program, therefore NCAT is looking to get baseline data and a better understanding of current service level, gaps and challenges, areas of growth and improvement, and to identify opportunities for partnership and additional sustainable funding streams. Based on the transit analysis, NCAT is looking for service recommendations and to develop short, intermediate, and long-term strategies for transit improvement, growth, and future projects.

Scope of Services

The selected consultant will work closely with the existing NCAT Advisory Group by having regularly scheduled meetings to keep them advised of the progress of the project.

The selected consultant shall host a kickoff meeting with NCAT. The consultant shall review this study's overall objectives, scope of services, coordination and communication protocols, timetable, data requests, and other necessary items to begin the study process. The study kickoff shall include a discussion about the extent and methods of public involvement.

The consultant shall also help NCAT host kickoff meetings to introduce the project to NCAT's transit employees, the City of Ottawa and the general public. The kickoff meeting with the City of Ottawa can take the form of a presentation about this study at one of the city council meetings.

These public meetings will be separate from focus group meetings the consultant will hold with identified groups.

The selected consultant will work with NCAT to identify opportunities and constraints within a 7 – 10 year planning horizon. This comprehensive analysis will identify both a long-term vision and a short-term strategic process to move forward to implementation. The strategic component should encompass considerations of sustainability and hybrid or alternative fuels as well as hardening of infrastructure to manage against future natural events. High occupancy transit opportunities as well as potential transit-oriented development opportunities may also be included.

This phase forms NCAT's strategic service initiatives and goals and is the backbone of the development and prioritization of future service projects based upon market, need, ridership and funding potential.

NCAT's traditional funding mechanisms include local, state, and federal grants, passenger fares, special services revenue, and program revenue. NCAT wishes to carefully consider long-term projection of the agency's operating revenues, funding, operating expenses, capital expenditures, and debt obligations. The organization wants to demonstrate the financial capacity to achieve its strategic priorities over the next 7 – 10 years through coverage ratios to specify the long-term financial health of the agency.

In addition to revenue enhancing strategies, the selected consultant shall consider new, nontraditional service delivery methods that decrease operating costs and have been successful or proposed at other transit agencies. Express commuter bus options, in addition to traditional fixed route and paratransit services should be reflected in the opportunities assessment. In addition, transportation incorporating recently identified passenger rail stations should be included in the assessment.

The consultant must have intention to identify projects and opportunities within the planning horizon of 2024-2035, the plan shall consider planning prep work, feasibility studies and other activities that support efforts beyond the horizon limits since significant projects often requires years of activities leading to their success.

Community Engagement is a most essential element in developing successful plans and implementation strategies, NCAT seeks a strong and innovative approach to reaching all parts of the community.

At a minimum, the following community engagement tasks are required:

1. Organize, publicize, and coordinate, in partnership with NCAT staff and leadership, three rounds of public meetings. Each round will further include a minimum of four meetings at locations that will be determined. The three rounds will include a series associated with 1) project kickoff, 2) mid-project review and 3) recommendations.
2. Effort is to be taken to encourage deep coordination with all ongoing planning efforts of NCAT, the municipalities in LaSalle County as well as the entities that utilize NCAT services and IDOT.
3. The NCAT Advisory Group will receive briefings in advance of the rounds of meeting to allow for meaningful input from the group.
4. Specific approaches to bring underrepresented voices to the plan conversation is essential.
5. Develop a public survey to obtain public input from both passengers that utilize the system and the public that has not used the system. A proper distribution system for the survey shall be developed to get the appropriate number of responses to make the data results valid.

The selected consultant shall develop a methodology for determining whether a deviated fixed route or deviated point system is feasible in LaSalle County, especially in regard to Streator, LaSalle/Peru and Ottawa, and review the methodology with its staff, the Advisory Group, and other affected stakeholders.

Using the methodology derived from the task above the consultant shall analyze whether a deviated fixed route or a deviated point system is feasible in LaSalle County, especially in regards to Streator, LaSalle/Peru and Ottawa; discuss the advantages and disadvantages compared to the existing system; recommend modifications to existing dispatching and operations; estimate the labor, capital and operating costs associated with these transit improvement, and identify additional funding streams.

The consultant will develop a comprehensive list of funding and financing options on the federal, state, regional, local and project specific levels available matched to identifiable transit projects. In developing the list, considerations will include availability, modal eligibility, revenue potential, and nexus with beneficiaries, equity, stability/predictability, legal/institutional barriers, administrative ease, and political support. Deliverables will include a summary of immediate, intermediate, and mid to long term priorities and strategies, an operating and capital cash flow model, review of potential funding sources, scenarios and

strategies and implementation strategy. This step will be highly interactive between NCAT, the selected consultant and those participating throughout. Further, it is NCAT's clear direction and expectation that highly creative thinking to bring forward original ideas for consideration is necessary.

Deliverables

A completed strategic plan covering LaSalle County and NCAT that addresses public transportation community needs, service gaps, and other public transit opportunities, partnerships, and resources to develop an action plan aimed at providing equitable, accessible and improved public transit services for residents and guests.

The consultant shall create a Draft Report and a Final Report that incorporates the information from the Scope of Services. The consultant shall present this to the Advisory Group, share the Draft Report with its members and incorporate their relevant comments.

The consultant shall also provide an editable copy of the Draft Report in Microsoft Word format (.docx) to NCAT. The consultant shall review and incorporate relevant comments into the Final Report and shall submit two (2) paper copies and electronic (.pdf and .docx formats) copies of the Final Report to NCAT.

Moreover, the consultant shall review and present this report's finding to the City of Ottawa and NCAT for the city's approval and adoption.

The selected consultant shall submit Progress Reports with each quarterly invoice. These Progress Reports shall take the form of written materials emailed to the NCAT director with a virtual presentation to the Advisory Group that summarizes the written Progress Reports. The selected consultant shall aim for these quarterly virtual meetings to be one hour long. Invoices shall be submitted monthly.

Submittal Contents

An experienced sole project manager for the consultant team shall be designated to serve as a single point of contact for NCAT. Responses to this RFQ shall include the resumes of key personnel who will be actively involved in this project and supply an organizational staffing plan for the personnel who will be managing the project and performing services outlined in the Request of Qualifications. Each Team member's specific roles and responsibilities shall be described and indicate the percentage of total contract hours that each member will spend on the contract and any other assurance as to their ability to provide the requested services in a responsive and timely manner. The project manager or any key personnel will require written permission from NCAT for any changes. NCAT must approve any suggested replacements that may result from employment changes of any key personnel. The consultant team project manager shall be responsible for all coordination and communication within the consultant team as well as with NCAT.

NCAT will only consider submissions limited to 50 pages (not including resumes) and containing the following:

- Name, address, telephone number, email, and website of firm;

- A Statement of Qualifications of:
 - The firm and any subcontractors (if any);
 - The lead team member; and
 - The individuals to be assigned to the project;
- At least three (3) examples of similar projects the firm has completed in the last 5 years;
- Business references from these projects, including client's name and telephone number shall be included; and
- Identification of any potential subcontracted services as necessary.

A narrative describing the consultant approach, project plan, methodology to achieve project objectives and a statement indicating the extent to which the consultant would expect the NCAT personnel to contribute to the work effort, if any.

Proposers may submit with their Proposal other information that they feel is pertinent to demonstrate qualifications and expertise to perform the services being requested.

Please submit four (4) physical copies and one (1) digital PDF with all submittals. All submittals shall be sealed and identified as City of Ottawa - NCAT Strategic Plan and addressed to:

Kim Zimmerman, Transit Director
 C/O City Clerk Shelly Munks
 City of Ottawa
 301 W Madison St.
 Ottawa, IL 61350

Proposals will be publicly opened at 11:00 am CST on June 18, 2024, in Council Chambers, City Hall, 301 W. Madison St. Ottawa, IL 61350. Proposals received after the deadline will not be considered.

Questions

NCAT staff will answer all questions related to this RFQ until 11:59 pm CST, May 29, 2024. All questions and answers will be posted publicly on NCAT's website as addenda by end of business June 7, 2024. Questions should be addressed to:

Kim Zimmerman, Transit Director at kzimmerman@ridencat.com.

Selection Process

NCAT reserves the right to accept or reject any or all requests for qualifications. All submittals become the property of NCAT upon receipt. NCAT will evaluate each request for qualifications according to the following factors and 100-point scale:

1. **(25 points) Experience and Technical Competency**
The consultant's response should reflect qualifications and experience necessary to successfully develop and execute the Scope of Services. Reviewers will also assess the applicability and relevance of the consultant's experience and previous projects.
2. **(25 points) Familiarity with Project Type**
The consultant's response must demonstrate a level of familiarity with the proposed project and an understanding of the planning challenges posed by the project.
3. **(25 points) Record of Success**
The consultant's response should demonstrate success on similar projects and provide examples of similar work.
4. **(15 points) Local Knowledge**
The consultant should demonstrate familiarity with the NCAT service area in their response.
5. **(10 points) References**
The consultant's response should include at least 3 references, with contact information.

All submittals will be reviewed by NCAT. All requests for qualifications will be scored and ranked; however, NCAT is NOT bound to select the highest-scoring submittal. NCAT may decide to interview some, all, or none of the firms. NCAT reserves the sole right to invite one firm to the contract development stage or to reject all candidates that submit.

Project Schedule

- **May 11, 2024** – Request for Qualifications is announced.
- **May 29, 2024** – Deadline for questions.
- **June 18, 2024** – Deadline for submittal of statement of qualifications.
- **June 18 – June 21, 2024** – NCAT will evaluate responses and select consultant(s) for interviews to be held if desired.
- **June 24, 2024** – Selected proposal submitted City of Ottawa for approval This could take up to four (4) weeks for award.
- Work shall commence within 30 days of contract execution. Contract will be executed with the City of Ottawa.
- All project work is completed within 13 months of contract execution.

Contract Development

North Central Area Transit will enter into a contract for professional consulting services based on a fixed-price to the selected consultant for a Scope of Services to be negotiated and finalized once the consultant is chosen. Incremental payments to the consultant will be made at the completion of major tasks with a “not to exceed” contract amount. Ten (10) percent of the contract price will be held as final payment upon delivery of the final products. The exact payment schedule will be negotiated and determined as part of the contract.

NCAT is not liable for any costs incurred by a consultant in responding to this Request for Qualifications or for any costs associated with discussions required for clarification of items related to this RFQ.

The contract shall not be considered executed unless signed by the authorizing representative of NCAT.

Compliance with Laws

The selected firm agrees to be bound by all applicable Federal, State, and Local laws, regulations, and directives as they pertain to the performance of the contract.