

Request for Proposals (RFP)

For a strategic visioning and planning.

Announcement

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (“WestCOG”) and the WestCOG Foundation, Inc., have initiated a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to identify a qualified vendor to guide and execute a strategic visioning and comprehensive planning process.

Eligible respondents

WestCOG seeks a consultant who has demonstrated experience in developing motivating organizational missions/visions, developing consensus-based (and successfully implemented) strategic plans, has strong facilitation skills, has proven experience with government/non-profit strategic planning, and has a clear, pragmatic, and intimate understanding of regional governance, including purpose, structure, function, operation, and best practices/case studies/success stories.

About WestCOG

Founded in 2014, the Western Connecticut Council of Governments is one of nine regional Councils of Governments established pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes §4-124i et seq. WestCOG serves the Western Connecticut Planning Region, the second most populous and fastest growing region in Connecticut, with an estimated population of 610,000. With its location connecting New England to New York, Western Connecticut is an economically dynamic region, with strong cultural, educational, and natural amenities. As a consequence, WestCOG represents many of the most desirable communities in the United States and is a major financial contributor to the economy of the New York metro area and to the State of Connecticut.

WestCOG is governed by a board of the Chief Elected Officials (Mayors and First Selectmen) of its members, who include three principal cities (Stamford, Norwalk, and Danbury) and 15 surrounding towns (Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Sherman, Weston, Westport, and Wilton). WestCOG’s board, which meets monthly, generally operates by consensus, and is characterized by a high degree of human capital, professionalism, and mutual respect.

Connecticut’s Councils of Governments occupy a position vacated by county government, which was dissolved in Connecticut in 1960, providing a regional framework for coordination/cooperation among local governments and between the latter and state and federal agencies.

While not county governments (and not yet treated as county equivalents by the U.S. Census), Councils of Governments (COGs) in Connecticut may “accept or participate in any grant, donation or program available to any political subdivision of the state and may also accept or participate in any grant, donation or program made available to counties by any other

governmental or private entity.” Except as contrariwise provided, COGs may furthermore exercise any power that any political subdivision of the state (e.g., municipalities and school districts) do. These include but are not limited to: “(1) Engineering; (2) inspectional and planning; (3) economic development; (4) public safety; (5) emergency management; (6) animal control; (7) land use management; (8) tourism promotion; (9) social; (10) health; (11) education; (12) data management; (13) regional sewerage; (14) housing; (15) computerized mapping; (16) household hazardous waste collection; (17) recycling; (18) public facility siting; (19) coordination of master planning; (20) vocational training and development; (21) solid waste disposal; (22) fire protection; (23) regional resource protection; (24) regional impact studies; and (25) transportation.” (CGS §8-31b(b)) Which of these authorities COGs exercise, and the extent to which they do so, is the decision of their governing boards.

State policy since 2013 has been to incentivize COGs to diversify beyond their well-established roles in regional land use and transportation planning (specifically as the host agencies for the state’s Metropolitan Planning Organizations) into the regional delivery of services currently or expected to be provided by local governments, either through direct provision (‘regional services’) or through facilitating interlocal cooperation (‘shared services.’) The motivation for this policy is to encourage municipalities to work together to reduce the cost of services, generating savings that can be used to lessen the local property tax, which is of especial interest in Connecticut because:

- The property tax is the single largest tax in Connecticut.
- By some measures the state has the heaviest property tax burden of all states (for instance, see <https://statetaxindex.org/>.)
- Municipalities are more reliant on the property tax in Connecticut than in all other states but New Hampshire.
- Municipalities in Connecticut are responsible for providing services that, in other states, would be provided by county government.

WestCOG is supportive of shared services initiatives, with the following currently in progress:

- Regional transportation planning program
- Regional Local Transportation Improvement Program
- Regional Technical Advisory Group
- Regional planners group
- Regional Economic Development District
- Regional GIS Portal
- Regional Plan of Conservation and Development
- Regional hazard mitigation plan
- Regional emergency preparedness and management
- Study of modernization of selected municipal processes
- Study of sharing/consolidation of public safety facilities/services
- Study of access to federal funds

The WestCOG Foundation, Inc. is a 501(c)3 charitable organization, whose mission is to promote environmental, social, and economic vitality and sustainability through regional cooperation and

collaboration. Chief Elected Officials from the Western Connecticut Planning Region may ex officio serve on the Foundation board. At present, all WestCOG board members also serve on the Foundation.

More information on WestCOG is available at <http://westcog.org>; more on the Foundation at <http://westcog.foundation>.

Project overview

WestCOG is governed by a board of 18 Mayors and First Selectmen. The board is led by an Executive Committee of four officers and, optionally, at-large members (currently one), who provide policy direction and work closely with the Executive Director to oversee implementation. WestCOG hosts two federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), which meet jointly and whose combined boundaries are coterminous with those of the area WestCOG serves (to wit the Western Connecticut Planning Region). WestCOG also is the state-designated Economic Development District (EDD); an application for federal designation is pending.

WestCOG currently ten full-time and three part-time employees. However, staff levels can vary based on career and life choices, funding, and need. An internal survey reveals a high level of satisfaction among employees and an excellent workplace environment.

WestCOG was formed through the merger of two predecessor agencies, which had served the Stamford-Norwalk and Danbury subregions, since the 1960s. WestCOG launched its operations in January, 2015, with its current Executive Director beginning in February 2015. 2015 and 2016 were largely occupied with merger activities, including building trust, programmatic consolidation, and with addressing generational succession. Since then, operations have stabilized, and WestCOG is ready to take the next steps in its growth.

Since recent this internal re-organization, WestCOG has become a stable, high-performing organization. The WestCOG Board benefits from the support and excellent participation of very high functioning, invested members. It is also worth note that WestCOG has a history of peer exchange, having worked closely with other COGs. WestCOG and the WestCOG Foundation are not seeking mediation or internal restructuring, nor intrastate benchmarking. Any comparisons or strategies should explore strategies employed by other regional organizations outside of Connecticut.

WestCOG and the WestCOG Foundation, Inc. are seeking a consultant to assist the region in charting a bold, motivating, and implementable course into the future, through the creation of a strategic plan (including a mission/vision) through a comprehensive and participatory process.

Scope of work and deliverables

The project is expected to include the following elements:

- Project management
- Design and execution of a strategic visioning and comprehensive planning process
- Develop a mission/vision
- Develop an actionable strategic plan

- Develop recommendations for the plan’s implementation and evolution over time

These tasks may be accomplished via a variety of methods, including:

- Qualitative/qualitative research/analysis into the roles, operations, and performance of WestCOG, COGs, and regional governments (including counties and county equivalents)
- Evaluation/case studies of/benchmarking with regions/organizations comparable (e.g., in purpose, size, structure, and socioeconomic characteristics)
- Focus groups, interviews, surveys, and/or other methods to collect input from stakeholders
- Facilitate meetings/workshops with the board and staff to arrive at shared understandings, including for the mission, vision, and strategic plan

WestCOG may adjust or amend the project at its own discretion for any reason. No assumptions should be made about funding levels for this project. (Amounts are to be determined.)

Project framework

While WestCOG seeks recommendations about the best process for this project, the organization envisions the scope of work being completed in stages (below). Respondents may expand on this framework; it is acceptable to propose and explain modifications to structure, order, or content of the framework. The stages are:

1. Discovery: develop mission/vision and key goals with WestCOG board. This stage will arrive at a shared, strategic vision that is clear, compelling, durable, motivates people to act, and represents a worthwhile challenge.
2. Research and validation: undertake relevant analyses (needs assessment, gap analysis, SWOT analysis, etc. This stage will produce the substantive documentation and solutions needed for validation of the discovered vision/mission and key goals and inform the strategic planning process.
3. Identify strategic objectives and produce strategic plan. Building on the discovery and research stages, key objectives and/or strategies should be identified, and a action plan to serve as a roadmap to these objectives/strategies (and the goals they serve) and to direct the COG should be produced. The plan should be comprehensive, detailed, and include:
 - a. An executive summary
 - b. Shared mission and vision
 - c. Goals
 - d. Objectives
 - e. Strategies
 - f. Tactics
 - g. Responsible partners and their roles
 - h. Measures
 - i. Outcomes
4. Development of recommendations to implement the plan. This should include:
 - a. Specificity to permit implementation without significant further study
 - b. Budget/financial impacts of recommendations, including costs/revenues
 - c. Resource needs/demands and capacity/resource development strategies

- d. Timing, duration, and sequencing of strategies
- e. Identification and consideration of dependencies (e.g., critical path method) and methods to avoid them or mitigate their impact
- f. Analytical and practical treatment of unknowns, incognoscibles, and uncertainty (e.g., risk, likelihood of success, confidence intervals)

Expertise sought

To satisfy the proposed scope and framework, it is expected that the following knowledge, skills, and experience will be needed:

- Experience in producing consensus-based missions, visions, and strategic plans, that are completed on time, on budget, with the satisfaction of the parties involved, and that result in successful implementation
- Knowledge of collective impact or collaborative strategic initiatives
- Strong facilitation skills
- Experience at creating a neutral environment for, and soliciting input from, stakeholders, including elected officials and public leaders
- Experience at gathering and utilizing data to inform the strategic planning process
- Knowledge of financial/resource planning and budgeting
- Knowledge of marketing, communications, and branding
- Knowledge of organizational, capacity, and resource development
- Ability constructively to challenge key stakeholders
- Experience inspiring others to think creatively
- Understanding of intergovernmental relationships and regional governance
- Project management experience

Application process

Format

Each application should include the following components:

1. Cover page with project title; proposing firm; and name, telephone number, and e-mail address for the project manager.
2. Scope of work, timeline, and fee schedule. An outline of the project by task should be given. These tasks should correspond to the Project description. Timing, duration, and cost should be specified for each task.
3. Narrative. This should explain the proposer's concept of each task and plan to discharge them. Methodology, including approach, inputs, methods, and outputs should be described in sufficient detail. Changes to the framework given in this RFP should be noted.
4. Work history. Examples of similar or relevant work conducted by proposer in the past, with information on project outcomes and client references. Name, title, employer, relationship to the project, telephone number, and e-mail address should be given for each reference. Successful proposers should have demonstrated expertise in relevant areas, including evaluation of the benefits, costs, opportunities, risks, and challenges of the methods

proposed, and in the development and execution of implementation plans for said methods.

5. Statement of qualifications. Directory of, task assignments, and resumes for key staff on project. Professional licenses and certifications should be included. The total hours each staff person is expected to spend on each task should be documented.
6. Corporate background. Include the history, location(s), length of time in existence, and structure of the firm; documentation of relevant insurance coverage; and demonstration of the capacity of the firm to carry out the project.
7. Signature of a representative of the firm having legal authority to contract on behalf of the firm.
8. A completed Organizational Conflict of Interest Statement that either warrants that there are no relevant facts or circumstances that could give rise to organizational conflicts of interest, and/or, as applicable, gives a full, written disclosure of any organizational conflicts of interests, including description of the action(s) the proposer has taken or will take to avoid or mitigate such conflict.

The Narrative may not exceed 5,000 words. Other components have no word limit.

Material submitted in response to this RFP and received by WestCOG may be subject to the provisions of the Connecticut Freedom of Information law (CGS §1-200 et seq.)

How to apply

Proposals are due by the end of the application period, February 29, 2020 at 11:59 PM ET.

Submissions should be directed to: Mr. Francis R. Pickering, Executive Director at sd@westcog.org.

Submissions should be provided in PDF format, as a single file. The file may be attached to the e-mail, or, in case of a large submission (larger than 10 megabytes), linked in the e-mail. Recipients should enable delivery and read receipts in their e-mail client. No other confirmation will be given.

Review and contracting

WestCOG will evaluate proposals received after close of the application period. At this point, WestCOG may invite additional information from selected proposers, including but not necessarily limited to, samples of other work or an in-person interview.

Should WestCOG determine to proceed with a proposal, WestCOG will begin contract negotiations, including on scope and fee, with the respective proposer. Should WestCOG and the selected proposer be unable to come to an agreement, WestCOG may terminate negotiations with that firm and revisit other proposal submitted.

It is expected that proposers will be notified of decisions on their submission by April 30, 2020. WestCOG may award the project in part or in full to one or more proposers, and to cancel or to reissue this RFP. Any award will not be final until a contract has been negotiated and executed.

Communications

Location of posting

This RFP may be found online at <https://westcog.org/about/rfps-grant-opportunities/> until April 30, 2020. It is the responsibility of interested parties to retrieve and store a copy of the RFP beyond this date.

Pre-bid meeting

A pre-bid meeting will be held Tuesday, February 4 at 12:00 PM ET (noon). The meeting will be held at WestCOG's office at [1 Riverside Road, Sandy Hook, CT 06489](#) and by telephone at 605-313-5107, access code 500386#. Attendance, by phone or in person, is optional and is not required in order to respond to this RFP.

Inquiries

Proposers may submit questions on this RFP by January 31, 2020 at 11:59 PM ET. Questions should be directed to Mr. Francis R. Pickering, Executive Director at sd@westcog.org. Answers will be posted online where WestCOG posted this RFP on a rolling basis until the close of business on February 14, 2020.

No questions will be accepted by other forms of communication.

Information about WestCOG can be found at <http://westcog.org>.

Addenda and supplements

Should WestCOG amend or adjust this RFP, such changes will be posted online where WestCOG posted this RFP. It is the responsibility of proposers to check for changes to the RFP.

Conditions

Legal requirements

Contracts awarded as a result of this RFP are subject to all applicable federal and state laws, including those concerning civil rights, nondiscrimination, and equal opportunity. Any responses to this RFP, as well as any work resulting from it, are subject to freedom of information.

Insurance requirements

To be considered, proposers must maintain insurance coverage as required by federal and state law.

Consortia, joint ventures, and teams

Proposals from consortia, joint ventures, and teams ("groups") will be accepted. In such cases, a lead firm must be identified for contracting purposes. A work history and statement of qualifications (as described under *Expertise sought*, #4 and #5) must be provided for each member of the group.

In designating a lead firm, groups should consider the following:

1. The lead firm should have sufficient experience and expertise to perform or supervise all facets of the project, and must have sufficient resources to carry out the contractual responsibilities of the group.
2. The lead firm will be legally responsible to WestCOG for the performance of, and must perform at least 51% of, the total work awarded under any contract issued as a result of this RFP.
3. Firms that are subsidiaries may not rely on the experience, expertise, or resources of its parent firm to meet these requirements.

Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE)

DBE firms are encouraged to respond to this RFP.

If a DBE firm is proposed, the proposal must clearly identify the DBE firm, the role the DBE will play in the project, and the tasks assigned to the DBE. Proof of Connecticut DBE certification must be submitted with the proposal. Responses that fail to give proof of DBE certification and description of project involvement will not be identified as including DBE participation.

Nonreimbursement of proposal costs

Costs associated with responses to this RFP, including proposal development and participation in a selection process, are the sole responsibility of the respondent firms. WestCOG will not reimburse firms for such costs, nor will any selected firms be permitted to negotiate such costs as part of a contract with WestCOG.

Conflicts of interest

All relationships that may pose a conflict of interest, and actions that shall be taken to avoid or mitigate these conflicts, shall be disclosed as part of the response to this RFP.