



2021 Delta Research Program: Request for Proposals (RFP) for Broadband Accessibility Data Collection and Mapping

Executive Summary

RFP Release Date: January 13, 2021

Proposal Due Date: February 10, 2021

The Delta Regional Authority (DRA) is publishing this Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit proposals from qualified researchers and consultants to: (1) identify providers and broadband infrastructure owners operating in the Delta Region; (2) collect broadband deployment and accessibility data (by technology and speed); and (3) prepare maps and data identifying broadband accessibility in the Delta Region.

The modern economy necessitates the availability of internet connectivity (speed and quality). It is well documented that rural areas are disadvantaged due to geographic disbursement and lower population densities. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has further accentuated the digital divide between rural and urban places in the Delta.

The purpose of this RFP is to expand the existing knowledge base around broadband accessibility in the Delta Region and support the development of comprehensive economic development strategies to better inform future infrastructure initiatives, investment programs, and related economic development activities.

Questions concerning this RFP must be received by email to Aury Kangelos at akangelos@dra.gov no later than 5:00 p.m. CST on February 1, 2021. DRA reserves the right to not answer questions received after that time.

**Proposals are due on or before 5:00 p.m. CST
February 10, 2021.**

www.dra.gov

A. DELTA REGIONAL AUTHORITY OVERVIEW

The Delta Regional Authority (“DRA” or “Authority”) is a regional economic development agency representing a partnership between federal, state, and local governments. Established by an act of Congress through the Delta Regional Authority Act of 2000 7 U.S.C. § 2009aa1-13, DRA makes strategic investments of federal appropriations into the physical and human infrastructure of Delta communities. DRA is composed of the governors of the eight Delta states and a federal co-chair, who is appointed by the President and approved by the Senate. Local participation is also provided through 45 multi-county local development districts. DRA serves the 10-million people residing in the 252 counties and parishes that include parts of the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee¹.

As described in the agency’s strategic plan, *Moving the Delta Forward*, DRA has identified three investment goals to advance its vision and mission and to guide its work. These goals reflect a consensus among local, state, and federal partners on the most critical investment opportunities in the Mississippi River Delta and Alabama Black Belt regions (Delta). While each of these goals provides an individual approach to advancing the Delta economy, these avenues are often complementary and cumulative, with progress in one goal area leading to advancement in another. These goals are:

- **Goal 1 - Improved Workforce Competitiveness:** Advance the productivity and economic competitiveness of the Delta workforce.
- **Goal 2 - Strengthened Infrastructure:** Strengthen the Delta’s physical, digital, and capital connections to the global economy.
- **Goal 3 - Increased Community Capacity:** Facilitate local capacity building within Delta communities, organizations, businesses, and individuals.

B. OVERVIEW OF REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Delta Regional Authority and regional leaders have recognized that enhancing regional productivity and improved workforce competitiveness requires improved accessibility to quality and affordable digital infrastructure. In fact, research has shown the COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the divergence in broadband access between urban and rural areas. In order for Delta communities, specifically rural communities, to improve their posture in a 21st-century and diversify the local and regional economy, DRA prioritizes targeting federal resources to projects and activities that strengthen the Delta’s physical, digital, and capital connections to the global economy. DRA seeks to expand and improve access to affordable digital infrastructure (e.g. broadband internet, cellular, and satellite access) across the region, especially in areas where it is currently deficient.

¹ An interactive map of the DRA region can be found [here](#).

The DRA invites proposals from qualified researchers and consultants to *survey and establish a baseline of existing broadband access, broadband speeds, and broadband providers throughout the Delta Region*. The purpose of this Request for Proposals (RFP) is to expand the existing knowledge base around broadband accessibility in the Delta Region and support the development of comprehensive economic development strategies to better inform future infrastructure initiatives, investment programs, and related economic development activities. Proposals should include a methodology for collecting broadband deployment data (by technology and speed) and prepare maps and data identifying broadband service in the eight-state, 252-county/parish Delta Region. As part of this process, a geospatial inventory of available resources and descriptive statistics should be documented and provided.

There are four key components to this research project:

- 1) Collection of broadband accessibility data (wireline, fixed wireless, cellular wireless, etc.), ideally at the location/address level, and create necessary data structures for their storage and use.
- 2) Data tables including data showing the percent of households with broadband service at various speeds (10 Mbps download / 1 Mbps upload; 25 Mbps download / 3 Mbps upload; 100 Mbps download / 20 Mbps upload; 100 Mbps symmetrical service; and 1 Gbps symmetrical service) with and without cellular mobile broadband coverage; rural household percent availability of broadband service at speeds noted above and with and without cellular mobile broadband included; availability by percent of households by county at speeds noted above with and without cellular mobile broadband included; a list of broadband providers by county and technology type (DSL, cable, fiber, fixed wireless, cellular wireless).
- 3) Creation of maps, including an interactive map searchable to the address level, showing the availability of broadband service at various download and upload speeds and technology type. Maps shall show coverage at various speeds, including: 25 Mbps download / 3 Mbps upload; 100 Mbps download / 20 Mbps upload; and 1 Gbps symmetrical service. Data shall be collected of broadband availability at various speeds. Data shall be compiled at the county and state level, and maps prepared at the county, legislative district, and state levels. The interactive map shall have the ability to show boundaries for legislative districts, Congressional districts, counties, tribal areas, electric coop districts, school districts, and townships. Capabilities should exist to prepare maps at other speeds and incorporating other data as requested, such as layers depicting location of community anchor institutions. ESRI-compatible Shapefiles and/or geodatabase files for data maps shall be included in the deliverables. Submission must include metadata and must be easily accessible to ArcGIS users.
- 4) A summary report highlighting key findings and strategic recommendations for DRA (including its state and local partners) should be developed. Resource constraints should be considered when suggesting policies, programs, etc. In addition to potential

improvements to existing policies and programs, unique and innovative recommendations are also encouraged, particularly for rural, economically distressed communities and those without adequate access to broadband already in place.

The ultimate aim of this research project is to provide an overview of broadband accessibility across the Delta, highlight areas of limited, poor quality access or exorbitant cost, and suggest ways in which DRA, and its partners, may target resources to bolster and improve economic conditions in the Region.

The final product will be a summary report of data collected, a geospatial map, and associated database submitted to DRA within 12 months of project start. Creative approaches for content and presentation are encouraged.

Both a printed and electronic copy of a final report, suitable for reproduction, should be submitted upon completion of the project. These should be accompanied by a software version of the geospatial maps and all relevant databases compiled during the study, including all raw data, edited datasets, and results of statistical analyses.

C. SCOPE OF WORK

Proposals should present an outline of the research and analysis to be conducted, a work plan, and a schedule for reports and deliverables. The scope of work requires a team of researchers and consultants with a broad set of skills to execute the project.

The scope of work would benefit from consulting with workforce practitioners, regional economists, business leaders, and other researchers to review and interpret the findings of the work, and proposals should budget accordingly for such activities. While this project will involve considerable research of academic interest, those responding to this proposal should note that the main audiences for this work are the development practitioners and communities of the Delta Region.

The report should be written for a non-technical audience with appropriately designed graphics and a narrative discussion of the findings. In addition, a final, concise executive summary should integrate and interpret the key findings of the studies and provide an analytical framework to understand the development implications, particularly those involving Delta resources. Detailed statistical data and methodological issues should be organized in appendices.

Contractor must submit one printed copy of the report and two electronic versions: a Microsoft Word file and an Adobe PDF file. Contractor must also submit a Microsoft Excel workbook, Microsoft Access, or SQL database containing all relevant data compiled during the study. Contractor will provide metadata (field name description, definition, source, sourced date, and equation if computed) for all raw and computed data fields. If geographic information system maps are developed for the project, contractor must provide map databases, map images, and map documents. DRA will provide contractors with formatting guidance documents for all reports.

Consideration should be given as to how tabular and graphic information will be integrated in the narrative structure of the report. All maps should be accompanied by well-documented supporting databases.

D. METHODOLOGY

The successful applicant will develop a detailed methodology to analyze the topics specified in the scope of work.

The methodology should include:

- Specification of datasets and methods to be used for each of the proposed analyses. Discussion of the scope, limitations, and coverage of data sources.
- Preliminary description of the methodologies for conducting each of the components proposed, and the advantages and limitations of the selected approach, given budgetary and time constraints.
- Preliminary protocols for data collection and outreach. Note that DRA will play an integral role in project outreach, and all proposals should incorporate this aspect into their protocol development.
- Other creative or innovative approaches not described here.

Proposals can offer other methodological approaches as needed. In keeping with the overall budget constraint and timing for this project, proposals may present trade-offs among tasks as long as the research design can ensure the accomplishment of the main research objectives of the project within the given time period. The selected consultant will work closely with DRA in development of this report.

E. AWARD INFORMATION

1. Availability of Funding

A total of \$150,000 has been allocated for this research endeavor. DRA will accept proposals with a total funding request exceeding this amount, but DRA will not guarantee competitive consideration. DRA reserves the right to negotiate the budget costs with the application selected to undertake this project, which may include requesting that the awardee remove or adjust certain proposed costs. DRA will not be held responsible for proposal or application preparation costs. Publication of this RFP does not obligate DRA to award any specific proposal or to obligate all or any part of available funds.

2. Period of Performance

Responses to this RFP should articulate project costs and associated benchmarks and timeframes for project completion. The timeline for completion of this report should not exceed 12 months with an anticipated start date of March 1, 2021.

F. PROPOSAL AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

1. Content and Form of the Proposal

The project proposals follow DRA's stand application policies and procedures.

Proposal narratives are limited to ten (10) double-spaced single-sided 8.5 x 11 pages with Times New Roman 12-point text font and 1-inch margins. It must be succinct, self-explanatory, and well organized so reviewers can understand the proposal.

2. Technical, Management, and Cost Proposal Contents

A. Technical Proposal

1. *Summary Abstract* (300 words)

In this section, provide a brief abstract of the proposal by summarizing the background, objectives, proposed methodologies, and expected outputs and results of the research.

2. *Methodology*

Describe the step-by-step approach or methods intended to accomplish all the tasks specified in this RFP. The proposal should provide a detailed explanation of the methodologies to be used, describe the limits of the selected methods, and justify why the methods were selected over others. The proposal should identify the points and tasks in this research project that will require participation by DRA staff. Further, the statement should identify specific information needs according to sources, procedures, and individual tasks of the research that may need to be supplied by DRA. Finally, the proposal should identify any difficulties that may be encountered in this project and propose practical and sound solutions to these problems.

3. *Project Work Plan and Milestones*

The proposal should describe the phases into which the proposed research can be logically divided and performed. Flow charts should be included as necessary. A schedule of milestones and deadlines should be specified for the completion of various work elements, including information collection, interviews, surveys, analyses, written quarterly progress reports, preliminary drafts for review, and final draft reports. Monthly call-ins with DRA staff are also required.

4. *Key Personnel*

Personnel performing the research must be described in this section in terms of numbers of people and their professional classification (e.g., project director, economist, analyst, business consultant, etc.). Brief resumes of the education and relevant experience of the principal investigator, co-investigator, and other key

personnel are required. The selected contractor will be required to furnish the services of those identified in the proposal as key personnel. Any change in key personnel is subject to approval by DRA.

B. Management Proposal

The resource capability and program management for planning and performing the research will be considered in the proposal selection process.

1. ***Business Management Organization and Personnel***

Furnish a brief narrative description of the organization, including the division or branch planned to perform the proposed effort, and the authority responsible for controlling these resources and personnel.

2. ***Staffing Plan***

A staffing plan is required that describes the contractor's proposed staff distribution to accomplish this work. The staffing plan should present a chart that partitions the time commitment of each professional staff member to the project's tasks and schedule. In addition, the proposal should include a detailed description of activities for key project-related personnel and anticipated deliverables. Finally, the proposal should identify the relationship of key project personnel to the contracting organization, including consultants and subcontractors.

3. ***Relevant Prior Experience***

The proposal must describe the qualifications and experience of the organization and the personnel to be assigned to the project. Information provided should include direct experience with the specific subject-matter area and must provide examples (via web links and/or printed materials) of the three most similar research reports undertaken by the applicant's organization and the extent to which performance goals were stated and achieved. Provide associated organization names and addresses, names of contact persons, and telephone numbers for reference.

4. ***Contract Agreement Requirements***

This section of the proposal should contain any special requirements that the contractor wants to have included in the contract.

C. Cost Proposal

Each proposal submitted must contain all cost information. The cost information should include direct labor costs (consistent with the staffing plan), labor overhead costs, transportation (if anticipated), estimated cost of any subcontracts, other direct costs (such as those for databases), indirect costs, and total cost and fee or profit.

3. Submission Dates and Times

The submission dates and times for responses to this RFP are as follows:

Application Deadline: February 10, 2021

Award Announcement: February 17, 2021

4. Application Submission Instructions

Project proposals and associated attachments are to be submitted electronically in Portable Document Format (.pdf) to akangelos@dra.gov with the subject line 'Delta Region Broadband Accessibility Data Collection and Mapping'.

After a proposal has been submitted, it undergoes a validation process during which the proposal may be accepted or rejected due to errors or omissions. Be advised that it may take several days for the validation process to be completed and that the process may not begin until after the application deadline. Proposals found to be missing required information or to containing critical errors will not be reviewed or considered.

G. PROPOSAL REVIEW INFORMATION

Proposals received under this RFP will go through an internal review by DRA staff to determine consistency with project intent and completeness.

When selecting a vendor for this project, proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- 1) Experience with broadband technology, broadband providers, software development, and data analysis. Please include as an attachment one example of a previously awarded contract or research report for broadband mapping or economic data analysis;
- 2) Experience and familiarity with the Delta region as defined by 7 U.S.C. 2009aa(2);
- 3) Experience of staff assigned to the project and their credentials. Please include as an attachment resumes of all staff and their role in the project scope; and
- 4) Completion timeframe and project cost.

DRA reserves the right to negotiate the budget costs with the selected applicant, which may include the applicant removing or adjusting certain proposed costs. DRA also reserves the right to reject a proposal where information is uncovered that raises a reasonable doubt as to the applicant's ability to successfully fulfill the objectives and terms of the agreement.

DRA, under its complete and sole discretion, reserves the right to not select for award any proposals received under this RFP. Final approval of the selected proposal and issuance of award will be made by the Authority. The award decision made by the Authority is final.

H. DRA CONTACT INFORMATION

DRA strongly encourages interested applicants to contact DRA staff with any questions regarding this RFP. Applicants may submit these questions to akangelos@dra.gov.

I. GENERAL DISCLOSURES

Publication of this RFP does not obligate DRA to award any specific proposal or cooperative agreement or to obligate all or any part of available funds. Applicants intending to sub-award with a specific individual, consulting group, or organization with DRA funding must have a competitive procurement policy in place.

This RFP does not commit DRA to award a contract, or to procure, a contract for services or supplies. Notwithstanding any other provisions of this RFP, DRA reserves the right to award contracts or cooperative agreements to vendors that best meet the requirements of the RFP, and not necessarily the lowest cost proposer. DRA solely reserves the right to accept or reject any and all responses received as a result of this request; to negotiate with all qualified sources; or to cancel in part or in its entirety this RFP if it is in the interests of the DRA to do so.

Please note that DRA will not reimburse for any other costs associated with the preparation or a response to this RFP. Any DRA contracts awarded with sub-awards provided to consultants or consulting organizations will likely be a FIRM FIXED-PRICE CONTRACT or a cooperative agreement. Consultants and consultant teams legally barred from receiving federal contracts or contract payments will not be considered under this RFP.

Data and mapping information collected under this contract are to be used only for the purposes of this contract.