



Request For Information (RFI) Regarding the
Design, Construction, Development, Operation, & Maintenance
of County-Wide Fiber Optic Network

RFI Date of Release:

August 15, 2022

Seward County Vision 2035

Seward County, NE is a pro-active and collaborative area with vibrant, welcoming, family-friendly, and safe communities, recognized for pillars of strength in agriculture, arts and culture, business, education, entrepreneurship, government, and healthcare.

We are a destination location for businesses, visitors, and residents within the greater metropolitan area and an active partner in the region.

Our residents enjoy picturesque and diverse neighborhoods, viable main streets, outstanding recreational opportunities, active civic life, faith-based living, and quality housing and employment choices.

The private and public sectors are united and citizens are engaged for the betterment of all Seward County.

Introduction

Seward County is undertaking significant efforts to improve bandwidth for its residents and businesses. This project will provide unique opportunities to embrace technology for the benefits of the County's citizens, anchor institutions, businesses, schools, and healthcare organizations. A broadband fiber network is a critical element of how Seward County can remain one of the top places to live, work, play, and learn in the state. The broadband network will be a foundational tool that will drive the County's competitiveness in Nebraska and beyond, and act as a platform to enable economic development, support emerging technologies, and empower local government innovation.

Broadband can enable communities otherwise at a disadvantage to participate on more equal footing in the emerging global economy. The internet can allow many businesses to locate anywhere as long as there is enough bandwidth at affordable prices. High-tech firms and other companies that rely on high-speed connections will go where they can flourish. Rental property owners understand that many of their potential customers require broadband for entertainment and to stay connected to their work. Broadband-enabled communities generally have higher property values, improved job creation and retention, and better quality of life.

The County has initiated this Request for Information (RFI) to identify one or more private sector partners ("the Partner") to build, maintain, and service high-capacity broadband services over fiber to end-users within the County limits. We are particularly interested in partners who will use the fiber to provide ultra-high-speed network access. We define ultra-high-speed as 100/20 megabits per second (Mbps) with the intent to achieve 100/100 Mbps in the future to align with ARPA funding guidelines.

Objectives

We seek to make Seward County a more desirable place for visitors, businesses, and residents by bringing them the quality-of-life benefits of broadband both directly through home connections

and through enhanced services provided by the business community and municipal operations. We recognize the need and the challenges of expanding broadband to businesses and residents in the less densely populated sections of the County. Seward County's objective for this RFI is to seek responses from interested vendors that can provide telecommunications services including but not limited to implementation, design, construction, management, and growth of a Countywide fiber network. We also seek partners who will, if necessary, consider a variety of models that share financial risk and rewards between the partners in innovative ways.

Responses to this RFI should state how the respondent's approach will further the County's goals of providing high speed network access to all of the County's facilities, businesses, and residents as well as encouraging economic development.

Overview

The intention of this RFI is to evaluate proposals for a public-private sector partnership in which the Partner maintains ownership of the fiber infrastructure and assumes all risks and responsibilities in the maintenance, operations, and expansion of the fiber-optic network. Seward County seeks to pass all of the risk to potential partners for use, maintenance, operations, and expansion of the County's fiber infrastructure. Any exceptions to this risk model or responsibilities should be explicitly stated in responses.

Though no contracts or formal relationships will be established through this RFI, it will provide valuable information about the capabilities of potential partners to service the broadband needs of Seward County. All interested partners are strongly encouraged to respond.

Project Goals

There are 3 main goals for undertaking Seward County's Fiber Infrastructure Project. Respondents to this RFI should indicate how their proposal serves these goals. These will be evaluated independently and awarded independently, although the County prefers a single vendor.

- Goal 1: Design, construction, and implementation of the proposed privately-owned underlying fiber infrastructure network*
- Goal 2: Fully maintain, operate, repair, and support the fiber infrastructure network on a 24/7 basis*
- Goal 3: Expand fiber infrastructure and broadband services to all residents, businesses, anchor institutions, and community stakeholders*

For the network to have the intended economic and quality of life impacts, we consider both cost and availability of service to be important.

RFI Response Requirements

Responses to this RFI shall be in the following format:

1. Submittal Cover - Include the RFI title, submittal due date, and the company's legal name, address, and phone number. Include the website address and the telephone number of the principal contact for this proposal.
2. Table of Contents – Include a complete and clear listing of headings and pages to allow easy reference to key information. (this page does not count towards total number of pages)
3. General Section – Include the following information—in as much detail as is practicable— from respondents.
 - a. Affirm that you are interested in this partnership and address the core policy goals and requirements listed above. If you cannot meet any of those requirements, indicate the requirements to which you take exception and provide an explanation of the exceptions.
 - b. Provide timeline, resources, and other supporting details for the implementation of each stated goal.
 - c. Provide a statement of experience in the following areas:
 - i. Fiber Network Construction, Operations, and Maintenance as stated in goals 1 and 2 above
 - ii. Provisioning fiber and wireless broadband services to businesses, anchor institutions, and residents as stated in goal 3 above
 - iii. Network operations and market growth including current and previous service areas
 - d. What value propositions do you bring to the table to meet the County's goals in each area? Identify other networks your firm has designed, built, and maintained.
 - e. Briefly describe vendor's organization and describe examples of vendor's organization working with a governmental agency to provide telecommunications solutions and services.
4. Summarize the technological and operational approach you would use for this project.
 - a. How would you use your expertise to meet the County's goals?
 - b. What approach would you use to interconnect with the internet and other public networks?
 - c. How would you prioritize fiber to the home and businesses roll out? What group would you target first? How many customers would you project in Years 1-5?
 - d. How would you perform network management?
 - e. At what sort of facility (or facilities) would you place network electronics?
5. Summarize the business approach you would use for the project. How would your business plan help meet the County's goals? What are the key assumptions? What are your main areas of risk, and how can the County help reduce the risks? What is your proposed methodology for shared risks and rewards? Do you have any exceptions to the risks proposed by this RFI?
6. Outline your approach to fiber network maintenance; describe your ability to perform maintenance on an ongoing and as-needed basis. Provide estimates of the operating cost of maintaining the fiber optic outside facility for the county's fiber network and include your main assumptions.
7. Provide a paragraph, in 150 words or less, as to why your organization is a good fit for the vision, culture, and citizens of Seward County, NE.
8. If possible, provide three (3) references, including contact information, from previous contracts or partnerships for projects similar to this scope of work.
9. The response should be no longer than fifteen (15) pages in length.

10. The respondent must have the experience, capabilities, and financial wherewithal to execute all tasks in which they are being considered. Financial statements could be requested.

This RFI does not constitute a solicitation of proposals, a commitment to conduct procurement, or an offer to execute a prospective or actual contract. Seward County will not award a contract as a result of this RFI. Seward County will not be liable for any costs incurred by respondents in the preparation and submission of information in response to this RFI.

Response Submission, Date, Time, and Location

Seward County welcomes comments and questions related to this RFI by September 23, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. (CST). Final responses must be submitted to Seward County's designated point of contact, as identified below, no later than September 30, 2022 at 5:00 p.m.

Responses can be submitted by email to the email address below. Faxed responses or verbal inquiries will not be accepted. It is not the intent of Seward County to respond to the comments or questions, but if additional information is issued relating to the RFI, it will be made available on the Seward County and Seward County Chamber & Development Partnership websites.

Designated Point of Contact

Seward County's official single point of contact for this RFI and the delivery point for all responses and correspondence is:

Seward County Chamber & Development Partnership
Attn: Jonathan Jank
jonathan@cultivatesewardcounty.com
(402) 643-4189

County's employees will not answer questions or concerns via telephone, email, neither in person and any oral answers will not be binding. Any addendum issued shall be considered a part of this RFI. Please direct all inquiries to the Designated Point of Contact.

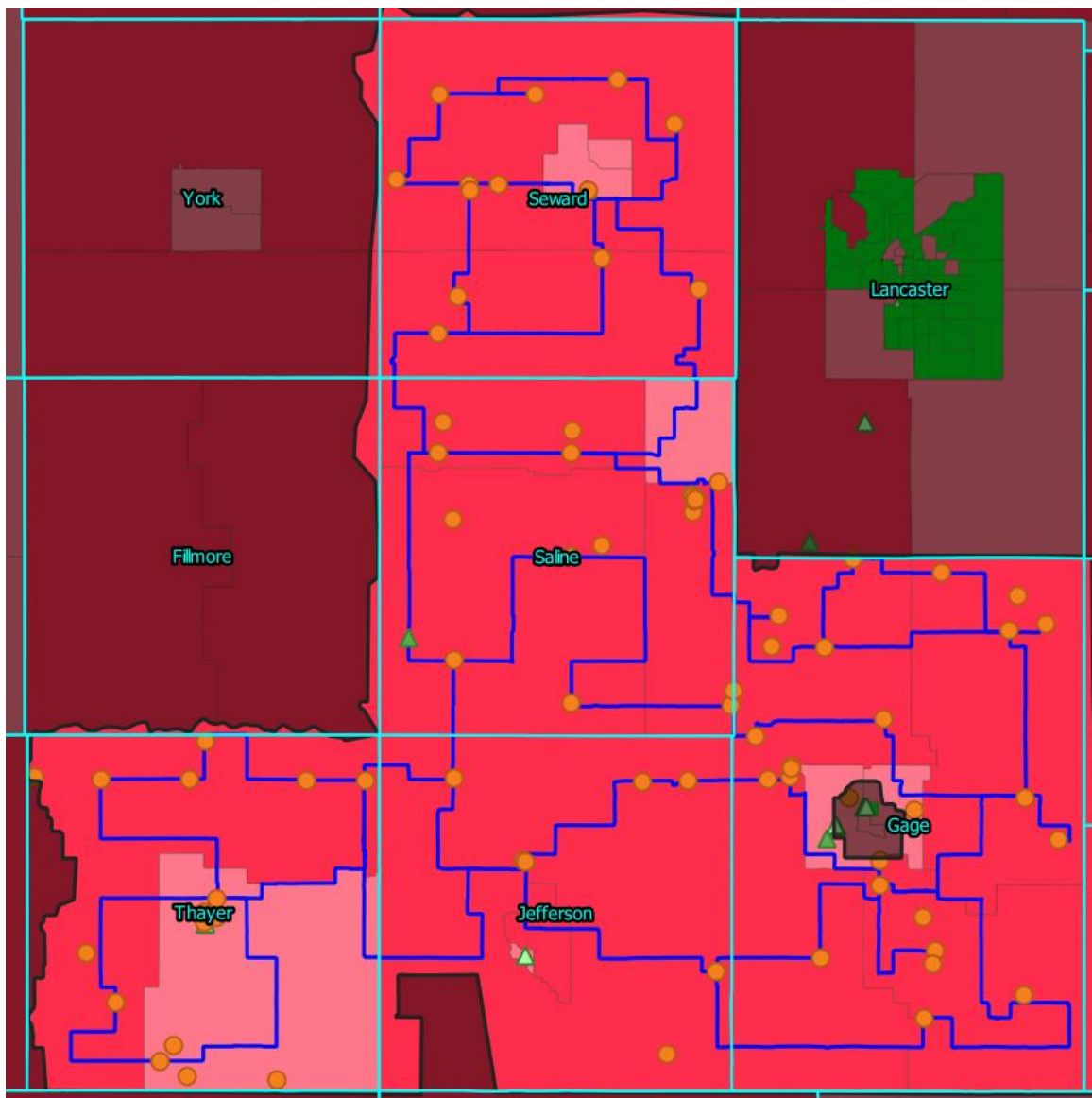
Nebraska Public Information Act

A response to the RFI is subject to public disclosure under the Nebraska Public Information Act, Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 84-712 through 84-712.09 (the Act), unless the response, or any part of the response, can be shown to fall within one or more of the Act's exceptions to required public disclosure. If a respondent believes that parts of the response are exempt from the required public disclosure, the respondent must specify those parts and the exception(s) that it believes apply, with specific detailed reasons. Seward County will process any public information request for all or part of a response in accordance with the Act's procedures. However, the final decision regarding a request for information to which a respondent asserts any exception to disclosure will be made by the Nebraska Attorney General's Office, not by Seward County. Respondents should consult the Nebraska Attorney General's website at <https://ago.nebraska.gov/> for information concerning the application of the Act's provisions to responses and potential proprietary information.

Service Map

The below map was provided by the National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative (NRTC) and is based on data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey, Ookla, Measurement Lab (M-Lab), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and Esri Business Analyst.

- Areas shaded red are deemed “unserved” and have speeds less than 25/3 Mbps.
- Areas shaded pink are deemed “underserved” and have speeds between 25/3 and 100/20 Mbps.
- Areas shaded green are deemed “served” and have speeds greater than 100/20 Mbps.
- Blue lines are proposed routes for a fiber backbone system in the counties of Seward, Saline, Thayer, Jefferson, and Gage.
- Orange dots are locations of Norris Public Power District (NPPD) distribution substations.
- Green triangles are locations of NPPD towers.



Disclaimers

This RFI is issued for the purpose of obtaining planning information regarding potential procurement approaches, specifications, and costs for consideration by Seward County in preparing the possibility of a planned RFP sometime in the future.

Responding to this RFI is not a condition for eligibility to respond to any subsequent solicitation. Responses to this RFI will not have any bearing, positive or negative, on the evaluation and respondent selection resulting from any proposals that may be received in response to any subsequent solicitation.

All information received by Seward County becomes Seward County property and will not be returned to the sender. There will be no acknowledgement by Seward County for receipt of the information. Acceptance of responses to this RFI places no obligations of any kind upon Seward County. Any information received from respondents to the RFI in any form may be used by Seward County without restriction for any purpose determined by Seward County.