



## **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:**

*To Update the Androscoggin Valley Economic Development District's  
Five-Year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*

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**ISSUE DATE:** July 12, 2021  
**SUBMISSION DEADLINE:** August 16, 2021

125 Manley Road | Auburn, ME 04210  
207-783-9186 | [avcog.org](http://avcog.org)

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## **INTENT**

The Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG) is soliciting proposals from qualified and experienced firms to assist with updating the region's 5-Year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The update would include a baseline assessment of existing relevant data and plans, research and analysis of market trends, engagement with stakeholders, an economic resiliency plan and a suite of recommended action items to improve the economy through the retention and creation of quality jobs, investment, and entrepreneurship in the Androscoggin Valley over the next five years.

Funding for this project is provided by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA): the final product must meet the requirements of an EDA funded CEDS.

## **BACKGROUND**

AVCOG is a regional planning agency serving the Western Maine communities of Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford Counties. The Council is a leader in the coordination and delivery of regional planning and municipal services with a \$4.2 million annual operating budget and a full-time professional staff of 14 concentrated in four targeted areas: Economic Development, Land-Use Planning, Transportation Planning and Environmental Management.

Sharing a border with New Hampshire and Quebec, the AVCOG region covers over 4,200 square miles of forested mountains and fields carved by pristine lakes and rivers. The Twin Cities of Lewiston and Auburn, located in the southern portion of the district, share a combined population of 59,282 people, making it the largest hub in the region. The remaining population of 137,383 is scattered over 75 small towns, townships, plantations, and unorganized territories. With a healthy abundance of natural resources, Western Maine is home to a transitioning manufacturing sector that includes wood, pulp and paper, electronics, plastics, and textiles. Currently, health care, telecommunications, and services are the fastest growing industries in the region. World class recreational opportunities and nationally recognized universities complement the unique quality of life.

## **PURPOSE**

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is a prerequisite for designation by EDA as an Economic Development District (EDD). In addition, regions must update their CEDS at least every five years to qualify for EDA assistance under its Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance programs, and to maintain federal designation as an Economic Development District.

Like the rest of the country, our regional economy was shaken by the COVID-19 Pandemic, which highlighted and worsened many areas of concern. It created lasting challenges for our communities, businesses, and local economies. Understanding the impacts COVID-19 has had on our region, identifying needs, and developing solutions to ensure economic recovery, growth, and continued sustainability is a critical

component of this plan and should be included in the final report as a Comprehensive Economic Resiliency Strategy.

## **WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY?**

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy contributes to effective economic development in AVCOG's towns, cities, and counties through a locally based, regionally driven economic development planning process. Economic development planning, as implemented through the CEDS, is a cornerstone of the U.S. Economic Development Administration's programs, and successfully serves to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a strategic blueprint for regional collaboration. The CEDS provides the capacity-building foundation by which the public sector, working in conjunction with other economic actors, including individuals, firms, industries, creates the environment for regional economic prosperity.

Simply put, a CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development. A CEDS is the result of a regionally owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region. It is a key component in establishing and maintaining a robust economic ecosystem by helping to build regional capacity (through hard and soft infrastructure) that contributes to individual, firm, and community success. The CEDS provides a vehicle for individuals, organizations, local governments, institutes of learning, and private industry to engage in a meaningful conversation and debate about what capacity building efforts would best serve economic development in the region.

## **SCOPE OF WORK**

The final product must meet basic [CEDS requirements](#) to include the following:

- Summary of background information
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis
- Strategic Direction/Action Plan
- Evaluation Framework
- Economic Resiliency Plan

Following is a description of project tasks to be undertaken by the chosen planning consultant:

### **1. Review existing plans and reports to identify trends and actions taken**

- Review existing reports and plans related to economic development, demographics, transportation, and other relevant topics. Examples include:
  - [AVCOG 2018-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#)
  - [Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029 A FOCUS ON TALENT AND INNOVATION](#)
  - [Blueprint for Economic Growth in the LA Metropolitan Region](#)
  - [Maine Center for Business & Economic Research](#)
  - [Regional Capital Investment Plan \(RCIP\)](#)
- Summarize key trends, goals, objectives, and actions from existing plans and reports.

## **2. Assist with updating demographic, economic, and industry analysis**

- Work with AVCOG staff to develop an updated demographic analysis for the region. This will largely be based on existing reports created for the region and online sources.
- Work with AVCOG staff to verify and update the economic trend/conditions analysis contained in the 2018-2023 AVCOG CEDS.
- Work with AVCOG staff to verify and update the industry analysis contained in the 2018-2023 AVCOG CEDS.

## **3. Perform stakeholder and public outreach**

AVCOG expects this to be a major element of the project and is open to a variety of methods. Our vision is to have a process whereby key stakeholders are brought together to discuss the issues, trends, and opportunities facing the region, and how the region's economy can be moved forward. Part of our RFP evaluation will be the strength of the stakeholder and public outreach process proposed by the respondent. Our desire is to have a robust outreach process that not only informs people of the trends shaping the region it also engages them in both crafting and advocating for the solutions. AVCOG anticipates this will involve members of the public, non-profits, governments, and the corporate sector. At a minimum, the process will involve an advisory committee, stakeholder interviews, and some form of a regional input process.

AVCOG anticipates this process will be iterative and will inform both the analysis and solution development processes.

AVCOG will maintain a website with basic information about the project and project-related events in addition to sharing event information on social media.

## **4. Situational assessment - Evaluate the region's economic conditions**

As described above, a key element of this process will be to assess the region's current situation and related opportunities. Based on data analysis and interviews with key stakeholders, the consultant will develop an assessment of who the region is, where it is headed, and what opportunities are available to improve its situation. Similar to a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, but focused on the region's context and opportunities i.e., identify infrastructure needs, evaluate local and regional labor characteristics, recommend actions to strengthen links between regional educational institutions and employment development providers.

## **5. Strategic plan development**

Based on public and stakeholder outreach, and the situational assessment described above, develop a limited number of top tier strategies for the region to pursue. These should be designed to accelerate inclusive economic growth (i.e., raising incomes across the income distribution with particular attention to opportunities for engaging those who have often been left behind). They should also be actionable, specific, and focused with an emphasis on building upon the region's assets that hold the greatest promise for long-term change. While a longer list of actions may be included, the core of the plan will be these relatively few top

tier strategies. The strategic plan should recognize the interconnected nature of the economy, the environment, social equity, the transportation system, land-use, public safety, and education. It is anticipated that these will be developed collaboratively.

- **Resiliency Plan**

The CEDS should address resiliency and recovery in the face of natural disasters and other major economic disruptions in our changing global economy. In the context of economic development, economic resilience is inclusive of three primary attributes: the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid shock altogether.

The [Economic Resiliency Plan](#) should outline ways to:

- Diversify the regional economy away from a declining sector
- Deal with the impacts of the loss of a major employer
- Position the Androscoggin Valley region to withstand and quickly recover from the effects of natural disasters, a changing climate, and other economic shocks

## 6. Evaluation framework

Reevaluate and update existing regional benchmarks to track and monitor implementation of the strategic action plan. The evaluation framework should be designed to monitor both progress in implementing each action, but also in evaluating the results of the actions. While the push is for top tier strategies that move the region forward, the evaluation metrics should be closely and realistically aligned with the actions. A broader evaluation framework will also be developed to help track the region's trajectory. A limited number of key metrics should be identified, and a baseline established.

## 7. Plan development

In partnership with AVCOG staff, develop a CEDS (print and online) that is visual, engaging, accessible, makes the case for change and outlines a clear approach to moving the needle for the region. Supplemental information providing a more detailed analysis of demographic and economic trends should be presented in an online digital dashboard that works in tandem with the selected online CEDS platform.

AVCOG has researched a variety of digital CEDS platforms and determined [ArcGIS StoryMaps](#) to be the best fit for the agency. Story Maps are online applications that can be built to share information through text, maps, photos, videos, charts, and more.

## PROPOSAL FORMAT

Respondents must submit complete responses to all the information requested. Respondents who do not respond to the entire content of the RFP may be disqualified. Proposals should identify the Consultant's economic development planning approach, public and stakeholder outreach approach, tasks, types, and sources of information to be collected, and staff expected to be involved in the work. The proposal should also

note how the plan and supporting information will be presented to AVCOG and municipal officials.

Written proposals should include, at a minimum, the following information in the order requested:

**Cover Letter.** A letter signed by an officer of the firm or individual, binding the respondent to all commitments made in the proposal. The cover letter should be addressed to Amy Landry, Executive Director, AVCOG, 125 Manley Road, Auburn, ME 04210.

**Contact Information.** The name, address and contact person of the respondent submitting the proposal. Please include telephone number, as well as email and website address.

**Statement of Qualifications and Experience.** Additional information can be in narrative form.

- Give the respondent's professional history, background, and relevant experience.
- The name(s), business address, phone number, e-mail address of firms and individuals proposed to participate in all tasks identified in the Scope of Work.
- The background, education and relevant experience of all team members proposed to participate in all tasks identified in the Scope of Work. The principal in charge and project manager shall be identified along with the roles of other significant project participants.
- Experience with economic development planning, collaborative workshops, public outreach, stakeholder outreach (including both public and private sector engagement), focus groups, and meeting moderation.

**Scope of Work.** Proposed approach to the Scope of Work with an emphasis on the respondent's approach to outreach (public and stakeholder), the situational assessment, and product development, including experience with digital tools (dashboards, StoryMaps, etc.). The statement of approach should show the consultant has experience with each task.

**Project Schedule.** Proposed project schedule in accordance with basic requirements of this RFP, as stated in the Scope of Work.

**Fee Proposal.** The fee proposal shall include costs associated with the delivery and provision of finished product(s), and costs associated with carrying out all tasks specified in Scope of Work, contained in this RFP. The fee proposal should include:

- A complete rate schedule and pricing for staff to be utilized in this project.
- Total costs per task, itemizing personnel, subcontractors, and direct expenses (such as travel, printing, etc.).
- Total costs for the project, itemizing personnel, subcontractors, and direct expenses.

**Proposed Subcontractors.** The successful respondent will assume sole responsibility for the complete project as required in this RFP. AVCOG will consider only one individual/firm/company as the sole point of contact regarding contract matters, whether or not subcontractors are used for one or more parts of this project. Respondents who intend to subcontract one or more elements of this project to other firms/individuals shall identify those work elements to be subcontracted and the firm/individual subcontractor. All subcontractors shall be included in the respondent's statement of qualifications. Subcontractors may not be substituted, nor any portions of the contract assigned to other parties, after contract award without the written consent of AVCOG.

The successful respondent may utilize the services of specialty subcontractors on those portions of the work that under normal contracting practices are performed by specialty subcontractors. The successful respondent shall be fully responsible to AVCOG for the performance, finished products, acts, and omissions of its subcontractors and persons directly or indirectly employed thereby. AVCOG will not pay an administration fee to the prime contractor for any subcontracted work.

**References.** Provide a minimum of three references for similar work, giving the name of the project, description of project, project period, and project cost and links to plan documents. Include the names of clients, primary contact person and phone number. Indicate the role of your firm in each project and each project's cost and date of completion.

## **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

The winning proposal will be determined based on several factors that work together to create the best value for AVCOG. These include quality, cost, efficiency, qualifications, and experience. Proposers are responsible for all costs of developing and submitting a proposal package, interviews or any other bidder costs associated with responding to this solicitation.

- Understanding of Scope of Work and proposed approach
- Past record of performance on similar projects
- Demonstration of knowledge of economic development principles and trends
- Qualification/experience of prime consultant with studies of similar type and size
- Qualification/experience of sub consultants with studies of similar type and size and/or special expertise beneficial to the study
- Indication of sufficient staff for all facets of the study to include experience, expertise, and qualifications of personnel to be assigned to the project
- Proposed cost of the project and demonstration of commitment for meeting the project budget and schedule
- Completeness of response to RFP

Additional criteria to be considered include the following:

- Economic development planning experience.
- Knowledge of current EDA requirements for Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies.
- Experience in leading collaborative workshops, focus groups, and outreach events.



- Knowledge of best practices in crafting strategic action plans focused on inclusive economic development.
- Experience with multidisciplinary planning that considers economics, environment, equity, transportation, land use, and education.
- Experience in working with municipal staff and elected officials, state governments, high-level employees of private sector companies, and the public.
- Other relevant factors that would have an effect on the respondent's ability to satisfactorily complete the work and secure approval and adoption of the plan within the stipulated time period including staff resources committed to the project.

A selection committee comprised of AVCOG staff and other regional representatives will review proposals, conduct interviews, and select the project consultant.

Proposals will be evaluated and scored by the Review Committee utilizing a ranking criterion that will consist of the following:

- Consultant's Qualifications & Capabilities (35 Points)
- Technical Approach (25 Points)
- Past Project Experience (15 Points)
- Cost Proposal (15 Points)
- Key Staff Assigned to Project (10 Points)

The selected Consultant will be notified of the decision by the Committee as quickly as possible. Contract negotiations will commence immediately upon notification. A negotiation period will be provided for the selected Consultant and AVCOG to finalize the Scope of Services, Contract Fee and Agreement. At the end of the negotiation period, the contract shall be awarded. If a negotiated contract cannot be mutually agreed to by both parties, AVCOG will terminate negotiation and begin negotiations with the second rated firm.

The firm awarded the contract, as a result of this RFP, must meet all municipal, state, and federal Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity practices. This will include compliance with E.O. 11246 "Equal Employment Opportunity", as amended by E.O. 11375, "Amending Executive Order 11246 Relating to Equal Employment Opportunity", and as supplemented by regulations at 41 CFR Part 60, "Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, Equal Employment Opportunity, Department of Labor".

The selected consultant will be required to prepare project documents in a timely manner and submit monthly status reports indicating work completed to date and any problems that have or could have impacted the project schedule. To that end, the Consultant will be expected to assign sufficient administrative, planning, design, and support staff to complete the Scope of Work within the established and agreed to schedule. It is expected this project will take approximately 9 months.

## PROPOSED SCHEDULE

The following schedule has been prepared for this RFP process. Note project constraints may cause the evaluation and selection related dates noted below to change.

- RFP issue date: July 12, 2021
- All interested parties should express their interest via email by July 26, 2021
- RFP Questions due to AVCOG: July 26, 2021
  - Please submit questions in writing via email to [djackson@avcog.org](mailto:djackson@avcog.org).
- Answers Posted: July 30, 2021
  - Questions, Answers and the RFP can be found here.  
<https://avcog.org/1210/Request-for-Proposals>.
- Proposals Due: August 16, 2021, by 4:30 p.m.
- Anticipated Project Completion: May 2022

After all proposals have been reviewed, interviews will be scheduled with selected respondents. Once interviews are complete, AVCOG anticipates notifying the successful respondent by mid-September.

## LEGAL MATTERS

- It is understood this RFP does not obligate AVCOG to pay any costs incurred by the applicants in the preparation and submission of a proposal or an interview.
- AVCOG reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and to negotiate the terms of the contract, including the award amount, with the selected vendor prior to entering a contract.
- As a public agency formed under Title 74, AVCOG is exempt from income and sales tax.
- AVCOG in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 78 Stat. 252, 42 U.S.C 2000d to 2000-4, hereby notifies all bidders that it will affirmatively ensure that in any contract entered into pursuant to this advertisement, Disadvantaged Business Enterprises will be afforded full opportunity to submit bids in response to this invitation and will not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, color, sex, age, national origin, disability/handicap, or income status in consideration of award.<sup>8</sup>
- Upon completion of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, all data, maps, and reports shall be the property of AVCOG.
- This is a competitive proposal. Insurance will be required.

## PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

### **SEND PROPOSALS VIA MAIL OR EMAIL TO:**

Dina Jackson  
Economic Development Specialist  
Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments  
125 Manley Road  
Auburn, Maine 04210  
207-783-9186 - [djackson@avcog.org](mailto:djackson@avcog.org)

**\*Please call to confirm receipt of your submission.**