



**Board Report**

**File #:** 2022-0276, **File Type:** Contract

**Agenda Number:** 19.

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
SEPTEMBER 15, 2022**

**SUBJECT: COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT SERVICES BENCH**

**ACTION: AWARD CONTRACTS**

**RECOMMENDATION**

AUTHORIZE the Chief Executive Officer to:

A. AWARD sixteen (16) task order-based bench Contract Nos. PS85397000 through PS85397015, for Communications Support Services, for a not-to-exceed amount of \$32,000,000 for a four-year term, effective October 1, 2022, through September 30, 2026, subject to resolution of protest(s), if any, with the following firms:

1. Arellano Associates
2. Communications Lab
3. Community Connections
4. Costin Public Outreach Group
5. Dakota Communications
6. Del Sol Group
7. Lazar Translating & Interpreting
8. Lee Andrews Group
9. MBI Inc.
10. Murakawa Communications
11. Natively Fluent
12. Northstar Alliances
13. Pacific Graphics Inc.
14. Redwood Resources
15. The Robert Group
16. VMA Communications

B. EXECUTE Task Orders under these Contracts for communications support services not exceed \$5,000,000 each.

**ISSUE**

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With the passage of Measure M in 2016, the agency's work effort has expanded greatly. To optimize the agency's existing communications workforce and to ensure adherence to Metro's 2028 Strategic Vision, Equity Platform, CBO Partnering Strategy, and Customer Experience Plans, efforts will require a combination of agency staff and contracted services through this bench award to ensure strategic and equitable community engagement programs for Metro's projects, programs, and initiatives. In addition, numerous processes require Communication support, such as LIFE Program, and over 50 projects currently in the planning or construction phases of development. Metro's Customer Experience Department developed this bench contract concept to supplement the agency's current and future communications needs. The bench is set to augment existing and future staff on Metro operational programs and initiatives, as well as the planning, design, and construction projects as the need arises.

Staff recommends awarding contracts to 16 teams to serve this on-call bench contract under six disciplines:

1. Strategic Communications
2. Translation/Interpretation
3. Special Events and/or Digital Production
4. Professional Facilitation
5. Mailing Services
6. Technical Writing

These services will be performed on an "as-needed" basis for which task orders will be issued.

## **BACKGROUND**

In December 2017, the Metro Board of Directors approved the establishment of ten Communications Support Services Bench contracts (Bench). The Bench contracts have been in place for five (5) years and have proven to be very successful in their utilization, with 48 Task Orders awarded totaling \$21,955,568. Nine of the ten firms were awarded task orders throughout the life of the Bench. One firm did not receive a task order because it ceased business operations and was unresponsive to task order solicitations as they were released. The Bench has now exhausted the not-to-exceed value and is set to expire on December 31, 2022. Therefore, new Bench Contracts are needed to continue communications support services to Metro's multiple projects, programs, and initiatives as requested in Recommendations A and B.

## **DISCUSSION**

Metro's Customer Experience Department houses internal and external communications throughout the agency. The Customer Experience (CX) Department is comprised of Community Relations, Public Relations, Arts and Community Enrichment, Marketing, Customer Care, and Customer Experience. The Bench contracts will supplement the functions in any of these CX units. However, the bulk of the work that is expected through the Bench will support the Community Relations and Public Relations Units in executing public engagement, public information, and community outreach

activities on projects in the planning and construction phases of development.

The RFP was issued in accordance with the Small Business Enterprise (SBE) Set-Aside Program and was only open to Metro-certified SBEs. The new On-Call Communications Support Services Bench contracts seek to establish a highly qualified pool of contractors specializing in each of the six disciplines listed above (and detailed below).

### **Discipline 1 - Strategic Communications**

In the development of the discipline's approach, an emphasis was placed on selecting "teams" encouraging proposers to team with other communications professionals to broaden their scope of services, experience, and areas of discipline. Proposers were also requested to include their approach for partnering with community-based/ community-based development organizations, faith-based groups, and other non-profit organizations to support the CBO Partnering Strategy's goal. Proposers will need to identify CBO partners, as appropriate, when Task Orders are issued based on the scope of work.

Twelve (12) teams were deemed qualified to be awarded a contract under Discipline 1:

1. Arellano Associates
2. Communications Lab
3. Community Connections
4. Costin Public Outreach Group
5. Dakota Communications
6. Lee Andrews Group
7. MBI Inc.
8. Murakawa Communications
9. North Star Alliances
10. Redwood Resources
11. The Robert Group
12. VMA Communications

### **Discipline 2 - Interpretation/Translation**

Teams specializing in interpretation/translation were requested to propose their approaches to delivering these services for the required languages identified in the Title VI Limited English Proficiency Four-Factor Analysis completed by the Office of Civil Rights and Inclusion. American Sign Language and other services to accommodate stakeholders who require services per the American Disabilities Act were also requested under Discipline 2.

Two following two (2) firms are being recommended to award Bench contracts under Discipline 2:

1. Lazar Translating & Interpreting
2. Natively Fluent

These two contractors demonstrated experience in facilitating interpretation and translation services for topics including transportation, equity, race, gender identity, and/or mental health. Further, they

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demonstrated experience in facilitating meetings that include groups with participants who speak other languages (other than English), use ASL, or have other disabilities that need to be accommodated if desired.

### **Discipline 3- Special Events and/or Digital Production**

Metro requested proposals from event production experts to support virtual, live, hybrid (virtual and live) special events and programs. For live events, Contractors will be responsible for logistical planning, including rentals, refreshments, audiovisual, and jurisdictional permits, among other activities. Special events include, but are not limited to, press conferences, project milestone events, and groundbreaking/ribbon-cutting ceremonies. As part of this task, Contractors may be asked to mobilize “street teams” that staff Metro-sponsored booths at community events and festivals throughout Los Angeles County or share materials that promote Metro projects, programs, or initiatives at transit stops and stations. For virtual events, contractors will produce interactive online platforms simulating a live event or other innovative digital production to support the promoted program or initiative.

Under Discipline 3, the following five teams are being recommended a Contract award:

1. Communications Lab
2. Del Sol Group
3. Lee Andrews Group
4. North Star Alliances
5. Redwood Resources

### **Discipline 4 - Professional Facilitation**

Contractors who specialize in professional facilitation of meetings, task forces, committees, etc., were encouraged to submit proposals under this discipline. Firms responding to this discipline provided examples of up to five past facilitation engagements which demonstrated their ability to facilitate productive meetings that: value the contributions of all participants; are designed to be supportive of participants who might otherwise be uncomfortable in a potentially contentious setting; provide the ability to have a group effectively learn and assess complex information, and allow recommendations from group discussions to emerge in a limited period of time.

One firm is being recommended an award under Discipline 4:

1. Del Sol Group

### **Discipline 5 - Mailing Services**

Metro produces a variety of printed and digital materials used in its communications. Printed materials include but are not limited to pamphlets, booklets, postcards, invitations, posters, flyers, and other printed materials. Some of these materials are printed and distributed via United States Postal Service (USPS) to community members, while others are distributed digitally. Projects often arise on an “as-needed” basis and are not known or scheduled in advance. Materials are commonly

produced in relation to upcoming community events, Board directives, or agency initiatives. Discipline 5 contractors specialize in handling all logistical details in providing mailing services such as:

- Producing mailing distribution address lists.
- Picking up materials from the Metro headquarters building.
- Addressing, folding, stuffing, and delivering materials to USPS.
- Purchasing/securing and adhering postage, mailing permits for USPS delivery.
- Securing mailing certifications from USPS, as requested by Metro.

One firm is being recommended for a Bench Contract award:

1. Pacific Graphics Inc.

### **Discipline 6 - Professional Technical Writing**

Metro produces various reports for programs, initiatives, and projects. In consultation with Metro Communications staff, the recommended Contractors under Discipline 6 will develop copy, messages, and text for both print and electronic informational and outreach materials including, but not limited to:

- Technical reports and documents related to agency initiatives/programs.
- Public Relations support materials such as press release drafts, media advisories, briefing papers, key messages, talking points, and opinion editorials.
- Copywriting/editing for other materials such as fact sheets, frequently asked questions, take-ones, brochures, posters, blog posts, among other materials.
- Speech writing for Metro's Senior Leadership Team.

Under this discipline, Contractors may be tasked with developing content, editing, and delivering the final product for approval in accordance with Metro's brand guidelines and User Experience (UX) policy requirements.

Three firms are being recommended a Bench Contract award under Discipline 6:

1. Del Sol Group
2. Lee Andrews Group
3. Redwood Resources

### **DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT**

Contractors may be required to conduct tasks on Metro property where construction or operations

may be active. All safety requirements will be met with requisite training and clearance as established by Metro Safety, Construction, and Operations protocols.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

The funding for the bench contract will parallel that of the benefitting projects charged, which may include sales tax, grants, fares, and other funding sources within the agency. There is no single source that will unilaterally fund these contracts. As specific work efforts arise, task orders will be issued and funded from the corresponding project budget upon approval by the responsible project manager or relevant department.

Funding for FY23 is included in the department and cost center budgets. Each task order awarded to a Contractor will be funded with the source of funds identified for that project. Since this is a multi-year contract, the department cost center managers will be responsible for budgeting costs in future years.

### Impact to Budget

The funding for these task orders is dependent upon the specific project and could consist of federal, state, or local funds.

## **EQUITY PLATFORM**

The On-Call Communications Bench Contract awards advance Metro's commitment to equity and inclusion by ensuring communications activities provide targeted approaches to engage all stakeholders, with specific focus on marginalized and vulnerable communities across the various disciplines: strategic communications, interpretation and translation, special events, professional facilitation, mailing and writing services. Enhanced community engagement opportunities for marginalized or vulnerable groups improve equitable outcomes by capturing and elevating voices that might not otherwise be heard or included in decision-making for Metro's projects, programs, or initiatives.

Additionally, all Discipline 1 (Strategic Communications) firms will be required to follow Metro's CBO Partnering Strategy, Public Participation Plan, UX Policy and other resources to ensure best practices are utilized in developing their communications services when responding to future Task Orders. For firms awarded under Disciplines 2-6, these policies will also be required, only if applicable, because these disciplines are more specific and focus mailing on providing mailing, interpretation/translation, facilitation, writing and event/digital production services. As appropriate, the evaluation criteria for each Task Order will also include higher scoring for teams that demonstrate their commitment to partnering with CBOs and provide innovative strategies for reaching low-income individuals, Black, Indigenous and people of color, equity-focused communities and other marginalized or vulnerable populations.

The Communications Support Services Bench contracts provide business opportunities for sixteen firms that are all certified as Small Businesses Enterprises. Additionally, 12 firms (75%) are minority-

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and 13 firms (81%) are women-owned businesses. Further, of the sixteen firms, eight (or 50%) are firms that are new to Metro as prime Contractors.

To ensure maximum opportunity for participation in this contract, this solicitation was advertised through periodicals of general circulation, posted on Metro's Vendor Portal, and an e-mail notice to SBE firms with applicable NAICS codes. Ample opportunity was provided for interested firms to ask questions and receive answers. The Proposal Evaluation Team (PET) was diverse. It was comprised of different department personnel with various backgrounds to comprehensively evaluate proposers and subconsultants to determine the most qualified teams. Proposers were encouraged to form teams that included opportunities to consider a mentee-mentor program where a small firm serves as a prime with larger contractor(s) mentoring the prime.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

The recommended actions support the following goals:

- Goal 1: Provide high-quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling.
- Goal 2: Deliver outstanding trip experiences for all users of the transportation system.
- Goal 3: Enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity.
- Goal 5: Provide responsive, accountable, and trustworthy governance within the Metro organization.

A new Communications Support Services Bench will allow the agency to engage stakeholders in an authentic, meaningful, and responsive manner on all the agency's project, programs, and initiatives.

### **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

1. Pursue procurement processes and solicit proposals for each individual task when the requirement arises. This alternative is not recommended as it would place an undue burden on the small business community, requiring them to expend significant and costly resources to respond to multiple procurement processes each year. It would also require extensive staff time to develop a scope of work, internal estimate and proceed with a competitive procurement for each task. This would also delay the provision of services and prevent the opportunity to expedite services when needed. Additionally, procuring services on a per-assignment basis would impose a significant additional burden on the Customer Experience and Vendor/Contract Management departments.
2. Utilize existing Customer Experience staff to provide the required support services. If this alternative were exercised, Metro would need to hire dozens of additional staff with expertise in several disciplines to perform the desired work. Based on the magnitude of projects, programs and initiatives that require communications and community engagement programs, it is unlikely the agency can support this effort in-house.

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3. Direct departments to procure services for their own needs. This option burdens the small business community, requiring them to expend significant and costly resources to respond to multiple procurement processes each year. It also is counter to Metro's External Communications Policy, which is designed to consolidate, optimize, and strategically coordinate communications services across the agency.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Upon Board approval, staff will establish the Communications Support Services Bench contracts with each of the selected firms effective October 1, 2022. Once contracts are executed, staff will begin issuing task orders as needed.

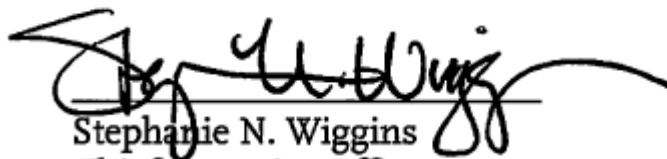
### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A - Procurement Summary

Attachment B - DEOD Summary

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