

ATLANTIC FIRST NATIONS WATER AUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS (RFQ)



Information Technology
(IT) Consulting Services for
AFNWA

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CLOSING DATE: September 7, 2023

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REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

Information Technology (IT)
Consulting Services for
AFNWA

1. PURPOSE

The Atlantic First Nations Water Authority Inc. (AFNWA) is a First Nations owned non-profit organization incorporated under the Canada Not-for-Profit Corporations Act on July 18, 2018. AFNWA is positioned to provide drinking water and wastewater services for its participating communities.

This Request for Qualifications (RFQ) is an invitation by AFNWA to prospective Proponents to express an interest and demonstrate capabilities in providing several aspects of Information Technology (IT) services within the AFNWA. Based on the review of the RFQ submissions, AFNWA intends to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to qualified and short-listed Proponents for the submission of proposals for the provision of services as generally described within this document and further detailed in the future RFP.

2. BACKGROUND

Delivered by a regional water authority and owned and operated by First Nations, AFNWA is a progressive, innovative, and long-term solution for water and wastewater management for Atlantic First Nations communities.

With the inclusion of traditional knowledge and culture, environmental stewardship, the spiritual aspects of water and Two-Eyed Seeing, the AFNWA provides safe, clean drinking water and wastewater for participating First Nations communities in Atlantic Canada. There are currently twelve (12) communities under AFNWA operational control with the potential to increase within the next year or two.

AFNWA is structured with a core of centralized corporate services, however, the primary utility operations are decentralized for operational efficiency and flexibility using the concept of a Hub and Spoke model. The AFNWA has 50 staff serving a current population of 9511 with an annual operating budget of approximately \$12,500,000.00.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND DELIVERABLES

The AFNWA seeks Information Technology (IT) consulting services for the development of a corporate IT Strategic Plan and support for the subsequent planning and implementation of one or more of the priority projects/applications as defined within the IT Strategic Plan.

The existing IT Environment within the AFNWA is comprised of a series of new enterprise-wide applications working with a series of legacy tools and business processes as further described within Appendix A.

3.1 Deliverables

The contemplated deliverables from an external IT consultant include:

- Development of an IT Strategic Plan, and
- Planning and implementation of prioritized projects and applications.

3.2 The IT Strategic Plan

The IT Strategic Plan is envisioned as a comprehensive document that outlines the overall IT goals, required strategies, and tactics to support those IT goals in alignment with the organization's overall business objectives. The priority is around creating new systems, processes, capabilities, and capacity that are going to work for AFNWA and all its stakeholders today and into the future. The IT strategic plan should provide an implementation plan encapsulating a roadmap for a 3–5-year time span.

The Plan should consider and address technology typical of utilities and municipal government agencies. The specific range of technology issues and opportunities that may be relevant to the AFNWA Strategic Plan include but are not limited to:

- Technology Architecture
- Enterprise Business Systems
- Geographic Information Systems
- Collaboration and Document Management
- Data Silos
- Mobility and Field Force Automation
- Computerized Maintenance Management
- Cyber Security
- System Resiliency, Reliability and Recovery

The IT strategic plan will focus on the core business processes of AFNWA. AFNWA recently complete a SCADA Master Plan which gives direction and guidance on the industrial controls/process control side of the water and wastewater business. Thus, the IT strategic plan should acknowledge and align with the SCADA Master Plan, but not provide core technical direction for that side of the organization.

3.3 Project Planning and Implementation

The Project Planning and Implementation services would include the IT consultant working with AFNWA staff and other consultants and/or vendors to provide to provide a series of task in the overall development and delivery of prioritized projects from the IT Strategic Plan. Activities may include but not limited to:

- Project management and administration,

- Project Scoping,
- Management of procurement and delivery of contracted work,
- Business process review and enhancement,
- Tracking and reporting on overall IT Strategic Plan progress
- Training, and
- Change management.

4. CRITERIA SELECTION COMMITTEE

The AFNWA will have a select group of experienced individuals participate on the RFQ evaluation committee.

5. REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS PROCESS

5.1 Submission Format

All responses should be submitted in alignment with the information requested and the evaluation criteria. The consultant should limit the formal response to ten pages. A limited amount of supplemental material may be provided for background information.

5.2 Closing Date

Each submission must be received no later than 4:00 pm on September 7, 2023. Submissions may be sent by e-mail or hard copy (mail or courier).

Submissions by mail must also be submitted with one electronic copy (Word or PDF Format).

If delivery is made by courier service, the proposal must be received at the correct location by the time and date specified. It is the responsibility of the Proponent to see that the delivery is made as required in this RFQ.

The following email address shall be used for submission of the electronic copy of proposals: procurement@afnwa.ca

The following address shall be used for submission of the hard copy of proposals:

Atlantic First Nations Water Authority Inc.
13 Treaty Trail
Millbrook, NS, B6L 1W1
Attention: Trevor Martin, IT Coordinator
Email: trevor.martin@afnwa.ca

Receipt of submissions will be acknowledged via e-mail upon receipt, provided a valid e-mail accompanies the submission.

Proponents will be responsible to check the AFNWA website for addenda or notifications about the RFQ process.

5.3 Late Submissions

Late submissions will not be accepted and will be returned to the Proponent.

5.4 Evaluation and Selection

In recognition of the importance of the procedure by which the submissions will be evaluated, the following criteria outline the primary considerations to be used in the evaluation and scoring.

The submission evaluation will be based on the following criteria and any other relevant information provided by the proponent in the submission. The AFNWA reserves the right to prioritize and weigh the importance of each sub-criterion within the identified technical criteria confidentially.

The AFNWA reserves the right to reject any or all submissions. The AFNWA also reserves the right to waive informality or technicality in any proposal.

The Selection Committee will evaluate each submission. The AFNWA will be solely responsible for deciding which consultants may be invited to participate in the subsequent RFP.

5.5 Evaluation Criteria

The submissions will be evaluated based on the following criteria, whereas scoring is based on the maximum values totaling 100%.

- Qualifications and Demonstrated Experience – 75%
- Understanding of AFNWA Deliverables – 25%

The evaluation committee will score the submissions based on their perception of its clarity, completeness, and presentation. This criterion is not used to rate colour, graphics, or other

visual techniques but only for content.

5.5.1 Qualifications and Demonstrated Experience

The submission shall describe the consultant's resources and organizational structure with respect to the technical assignments and previously completed projects that are related in size and scope to this project. Describe the scope and value of the previous projects and a brief narrative of the successes encountered. Address how the experience demonstrates your capabilities with respect to the AFNWA deliverables. Provide references for each project.

The submission shall identify responsible professionals, managers, technical experts, and others that may be available to the AFNWA project. This should include staff in-house and those who are sub-consultants. Identify any distinct and substantive qualifications for undertaking the proposed work.

While the focus of the required experience relates to IT initiatives within utilizes and public agencies, the consultant is encouraged to outline past or present relationships with indigenous staff, communities, and businesses that may benefit subsequent project delivery.

5.5.2 Understanding of AFNWA Deliverables

The submission shall describe the consultant's understanding of AFNWA and its current IT needs. Provide a general overview and methodology to accomplish the proposed work including any unique approaches or concepts relevant to the required expectations.

6. DEBRIEFING

At the conclusion of the RFQ process, the successful consultants will be notified. A debriefing of unsuccessful submissions will be provided if requested.

7. ESTIMATED TIME FRAMES AND PROCESS

The following timetable outlines the anticipated schedule for the RFQ process. The timing and the sequence of events resulting from the RFQ may vary and shall ultimately be determined by AFNWA and the Criteria Selection Committee.

Request for Qualifications issued: August 10, 2023

Request for Qualifications closes: September 7, 2023

8. REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS PREPARATION

8.1 Signed Submissions

Each Proponent must ensure that the submission is signed by a person authorized to sign on behalf

of the company/institution in response to this RFQ.

8.2 Notification and Correspondence

For questions and clarification about the RFQ, the Proponent can contact Trevor Martin, IT Coordinator. Trevor Martin can be reached by email (trevor.martin@afnwa.ca) or phone (902-603-0312). However, in the interest of fairness, all questions will be answered in writing and sent to all via addenda.

8.3 Changes to Submission Wording

The Proponent will not change the wording of its submission after closing and no words or comments will be added to the submission unless requested by the AFNWA for purposes of clarification.

8.4 Working Language of the AFNWA

The working language for the purposes of this RFQ is English and all responses to the RFQ must be in English.

8.5 Proponents' Expenses

Proponents are solely responsible for their own expenses in preparing a submission. If AFNWA elects not to proceed past the RFQ stage, AFNWA will not be liable to any Proponent or its team for any claims, whether for costs or damages incurred by the Proponent in preparing the submission, loss of anticipated profit in connection with any final contract, or any other matter whatsoever.

9. LIABILITY FOR ERRORS

While the AFNWA has used considerable efforts to ensure an accurate representation of information in this RFQ, the information contained in this RFQ is supplied solely as a guideline for Proponent. The information is not guaranteed or warranted to be accurate by AFNWA, nor is it necessarily comprehensive or exhaustive. Nothing in this RFQ is intended to relieve Proponents from forming their own opinions and conclusions with respect to the matters addressed in this RFQ.

10. MODIFICATION OF TERMS

The AFNWA reserves the right to modify the terms of this RFQ at any time in its sole direction. This includes the right to cancel this RFQ, or the future RFP, at any time prior to entering into a contract with a proponent.

11. OWNERSHIP AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

All documents, including submissions, submitted to the AFNWA, become the property of AFNWA. They will be received and held in confidence by AFNWA.

12. USE OF REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

This document, or any portion thereof, may not be used for any purpose other than the submission of qualifications.

13. CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION

Information pertaining to the AFNWA obtained by the Proponent, because of participation in this project, is confidential and must not be disclosed without written authorization from the AFNWA. The successful consultant will be requested to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement and comply with OCAP (Ownership Control Access and Possession) requirements.

Appendix A

Preamble:

Technology has become an integral part of business operations, helping to streamline processes, manage data, and improve efficiency. A Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) software and Asset Management (AM) software would benefit Atlantic First Nations Water Authority (AFNWA) greatly. As a water utility we have many serviceable assets that require maintenance spread out across multiple communities within different Provinces. Currently all this data is being tracked with excel spreadsheets, which do not notify when end of life or regulatory maintenance is required. It is important to do preventive/regulatory maintenance to prolong the life of assets. This document consists of the responses to questions pertaining AFNWA's IT (Information Technology) strategy. Atlantic First Nations Water Authority Engineering, Operations, and Corporate Services departments came together to formulate necessities and gaps within our current processes.

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Question 1: IT Applications

In addition to **ArcGIS** for mapping, data analytics and mapping; **Microsoft Azure** for the cloud-based business applications; and **VTScada** for the Industrial Control side of the business, please list the structured (example: 3rd party software applications) or unstructured (example: work process within an EXCEL document) IT applications or tools that you, or others, are utilizing to support a reoccurring business process.

Responses:

Structured

- Power Bi – Database.
- QuickBooks Time – Timesheets.
- Access database – Asset Analysis Sheets.
- Asset Condition Reporting System (ARCS) ACRS is the primary inspection tool used by ISC to monitor First Nations O&M performance objectives and provides a process that identifies asset deficiencies levels, implemented in 1990-1991.
- Integrated Capital Management System (ICMS) – ICMS Database.
- USEPANET for hydraulic modeling.

Unstructured

- Excel – Inventory, Contact payments, pivot tables, Stats analysis, Capital budgets and Asset inventory.
- Word – RFx documents.
- Coordinating water and wastewater is sampling is done through spreadsheets and ad-hoc calendar applications.
- Approvals for sole sourcing, invoices and purchase orders are common.
- Service Connection form to be rolled out with appropriate web-based application.
- Asset Inventory sheets and Asset data-projects.

Question 2: IT Application Pros & Cons

As a follow up to the above, describe the pros or cons of any current IT application that you are utilizing within AFNWA.

Responses:

Pros

- WaterTrax and ERRIS are applications paid by others, so leveraging them more would be ideal.
- Leverage current ArcGIS solution and an attached work management solution a recommendation has been made to review ArcGIS current data accessibility and structure.
- Hydraulic Modelling software is free.

Cons

- QuickBooks app needs to setup a process for engineering and operations staff working on capital projects, Excluding Senior Management Team.
- W&WW sampling separate operations and compliance samples
- Lack of a process driven approach
- Hydraulic modelling software takes a lot of personnel time to set up for each community and is clunky.
- Excel does not allow tracking of work done to update/repair the assets.
- Current process is slow and unreliable

Question 3: IT Tool Solutions

List any current business processes or utility activities that you feel would be more efficient with an IT type tool to help support and manage.

Responses:

- Managing procurement, inventory, and RFX documents
- Application to manage water and wastewater database.
- Field site assessment and incident reporting forms to evaluate safety risks.
- Track operations maintenance activities or work orders and capital projects costs
- Map out core processes and their CTQ's.
- Consider full lifecycles of infrastructure assets -The right IT tool can help provide evidence-based needs for capital, operations, and maintenance. Having the right business process and tool(s) to raise and capture defects, manage, and track our scheduled work, capture/build work/asset history.
- Platforms available for managing asset inventory and condition, although some may be overkill.

Question 4: Issues managing, analyzing, and reporting.

List or describe any corporate data sets that are currently hard to manage, analyze or report on.

Responses:

- Managing Procurement and keeping track of inventory is currently done using Excel. Each department is keeping track of their own inventory on Excel spreadsheets which does not provide an accurate picture of what assets we have and where these assets are located.
- There is no process when it comes to RFX documents. I suggest Bonfire, which is built to support our organization's policies, regulations, and compliance requirements at every step. It can manage and document your approvals workflows, and collect conflict-of-interest declarations, non-disclosure declarations, and mandatory evaluator comments within the platform to ensure complete audit trails.
- Database for Water and Wastewater sampling for ease of analysis and presentation.
- Separate operations and compliance sample results
- Date formats are inconsistent the proposed standard is YYYY-MM-DD

Question 5: Current IT Management/Support

Describe the current IT management/support system within AFNWA with respect to security, reliability, in-service time, hardware/software support, training etc. IE: Of our existing software and systems, how reliable or secure do you think it is? Do you feel adequately trained? Etc.

Responses:

- Reliability and consistency have been great. Targeted training for power bi/excel would be beneficial.
- Improve on formal communication through email – no texts/phone calls.
- Intentionally train operations staff on the use of computers to communicate and monitor systems.
- Training on truck monitoring system and regular automatic reporting of data.
- Features in current software are not being fully utilized.
- Security is kind of unknown, Installation on software can be tedious at times.

Question 6: Needs from IT

Your biggest near term IT need and/or what about our datasets and current IT applications keeps you awake at night?

Responses:

- Managing procurement and keeping track of inventory.
- RFX documentation is not standardized, bonfire has been suggested to fill that gap.
- CMMS software that is cloud based.
- Application to manage water and wastewater (Klir is on the radar for this).
- Ensure mains and service connections are constructed and inspected for conformance to standards.
- Tracking costs for individual wells and septic systems.
- COTs solutions- No one has the skill set and/or maintenance fees may become unaffordable as processes change.
- The ability to access SCADA information externally through identified defined data sets and building a business process to both help key stakeholders better understand things pertaining to flow & level (normal/wet weather trends), equipment run time hours (duty/standby), event and deficiency logging.
- Better interruption of true levels of service risks and improving equipment and process reliability.
- Better understanding of the community's design capacity vs actual capacity.

Other Considerations

- Compliance sampling database should integrate with other platforms such as GIS, CMMS, and AM.
- Includes asset inventory with attribute data.
- The CMMS should have fire hydrant and valve inspection forms.
- Review ArcGIS current data accessibility and structure.
- ArcGIS needs improvement via a GIS specialist.
- Annual costs and initialization cost & is the annual cost set to increase?
- Technical support is essential, with 24/7 being ideal.