

# Request for Qualifications

## Analysis for Industry Clusters & Potential Collaboration

for  
Land of Sky Regional Council,  
Area Chambers of Commerce  
& Regional Consortium of Partners

### Submit Proposals to:

Land of Sky Regional Council  
Erica Anderson  
339 New Leicester Hwy, Suite 140  
Asheville, NC 28806  
[erica@landofsky.org](mailto:erica@landofsky.org)

*A project supported by a U.S. Commerce Economic Development Administration grant to assess Industry Cluster Resiliency Analyses and Plan Concurrence for the 2021 Land of Sky Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs)*

**RFQ Submittal Deadline: 4:00 pm (EST) May 26, 2021**

## ANNOUNCEMENT

In 2021, Land of Sky Regional Council, the designated Economic Development District (EDD) for the four-county region, was awarded funding from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) for a three-year Economic Development Partnership Planning Grant. The primary project under this grant is to develop and implement the Land of Sky Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS has a goal to develop short-term and long-term economic strategies for a resilient, strong region in which to live, work, and play.

The region is experiencing unprecedented pressures from growth and the CEDS needs to identify and address economic impacts of growth for future resiliency and sustainable success. Land of Sky Regional Council, in partnership with the Region's Chambers of Commerce, is initiating this Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process for a professional consultant (the "Consultant") qualified to plan, execute, and deliver a report to identify points of collaboration of shared regional priorities from a business perspective.

The work will focus on addressing:

1. SOAR analysis and Concurrence Strategies
2. Regional Industry Clusters Analysis and Resiliency Assessment
3. Workforce Assessment on Jobs/ Workforce due to Automation

These project outcomes will allow for strategic updates to the CEDS, that will be foundational for regional economic resiliency efforts.

The Consultant must have experience and expertise with economic development strategic planning best practices. The Consultant should have a strong and demonstrable background in developing targeted cluster identification for metro- and micropolitan regions. This project also includes associated priorities such as workforce, housing, and critical infrastructure within existing and emerging industry clusters.

**Proposals must be received by: May 26, 2021, 4:00pm**

**RFQ SCHEDULE** - *This timetable is for the respondent's information. Project constraints may cause these dates to change.*

<b>RFQ Available</b>	April 30, 2021
<b>Proposal Questions/ Inquiries due</b>	May 14, 2021
<b>Proposals due</b>	May 26, 2021
<b>Consultant Selected</b>	June 25, 2021
<b>Contract Commencement</b>	July 1, 2021

**Consultant Intent** to participate in proposal process should be communicated by email by close of business on **May 14, 2021**. All questions or inquiries respondents wish to insure are answered should be transmitted in writing via email prior to **May 14, 2021**. A **Proposal Questions/ Inquiries Response Communication** will be distributed to all consultants of record on **May 19, 2021**.

## CONTACT

Questions or requests for additional information regarding this RFQ should be directed to:

**Erica Anderson, AICP**  
Director, Economic & Community Development  
Land of Sky Regional Council  
[erica@landofsky.org](mailto:erica@landofsky.org)

## PROPOSAL EVALUATION

Consultants responding to this RFQ will be evaluated on the following basis:

- 30% Technical skills and staff\team expertise.
- 30% Proposed approach and plan of work, understanding of the issues and requested elements of project scope, including desired outcomes.
- 30% Past record of performance, experience, and actual prior Strategic Economic Plan experience and Communications and Marketing consulting.
- 10% Proposed Budget.

Land of Sky Regional Council reserves the right to reject any and all proposals received as a result of this solicitation, to negotiate with any qualified source, to waive any formality and any technicalities or to cancel in part or in its entirety this RFQ if it is in the best interests of the Council. This solicitation in no way obligates the Council to award a contract. If deemed necessary, a short list of qualified consultants may be selected from those who submitted proposals for follow-up interviews. Interviews will be conducted by an evaluation committee. Interviews, if requested, will take place via video conference, during the period of June 14-23, 2021.

The Council reserves the right to seek clarification of any proposal submitted. Based on the review of the Statement of Qualifications, and the interview if applicable, the RFQ Committee will make a recommendation to the Council on a preferred consultant.

## PROJECT CONTEXT

### LAND OF SKY REGION'S BACKGROUND

Land of Sky Regional Council is a State of North Carolina regional organization representing a four-county area that includes Buncombe, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania Counties. For the purposes of this project, the region also includes Haywood County. Land of Sky Regional Council is one of 16 regional councils in the State of North Carolina and works with local governments, state, and federal agencies to meet the region's needs on a wide range of governance issues, including, local and regional land use, environmental and transportation planning, and administration, aging

and workforce services, and economic and program development.

Land of Sky Regional Council serves as the local U.S. Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) designated Economic Development District (EDD) for the four-county region. Land of Sky Regional Council provides technical assistance and eligibility support to regional jurisdictions for grants from the EDA and other federal and state sources. Land of Sky Regional Council also has the responsibility as the local EDD to create, manage and implement the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) most recently updated in 2020. Access to existing CEDS documents is available on-line at:

<https://losrc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=3db8474da7e24f36b59ea25af4b6916e>

Home to nearly 500,000 people, the Land of Sky Region is a rapidly growing area in western North Carolina. Strategic economic growth is advanced by organizations existing at individual county levels that comprise a closely interrelated network in the region. This network of private sector businesses, public, state, and municipal support has advanced the regional brand and industry recruitment with proven success on a national and international scale.

The region's strong tourism economy came to an abrupt stop in mid-March as the effects of COVID-19 began to ripple through the economy. The average unemployment rates in the region changed from 3.3% in March 2020 to a peak of 16.1% in May 2020 before gradually decreasing to approximately 5.5% in 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2020. In addition, the Chambers' regional business impact survey for Spring 2020 showed major supply chain challenges for industrial-based companies. Businesses have been impacted by COVID-19, growth pressures, housing availability, and infrastructure. We are seeking a strategic assessment of shared industry clusters, and emerging opportunities for industry workforce alignment.

## **SCOPE OF WORK OVERVIEW**

The following Scope of Work components have been prepared as a guide to help the interested respondent understand the expected product from this work engagement. Respondents are encouraged to provide suggestions to this scope that would improve the end product to enable board members, the public, and elected officials to effectively and efficiently find and evaluate the information. The outcome deliverables will inform and assist future policy options to support a more sustainable and resilient Land of Sky region.

This collaborative network illustrates the fifty-mile radius economic area that constitutes the Region as the economic and demographic influences of the Asheville, NC Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and adjacent Micropolitan Statistical area of Brevard, NC. This RFQ project shall consider and include these geographic areas in the targeted industry clusters analysis, supply chain data, and value system outputs that characterize and are inclusive of the regional business area. We request the work and deliverables address the region as a whole.

The final scope of services to be provided by the selected Consultant will be developed in partnership with Land of Sky Regional Council, Area Chambers of Commerce, and partners. The scope may include the following elements:

**Task A: Assess Regional Plan Concurrence and Priorities**

- 1) Review Plans and Strategies in the Region to identify where governmental and nongovernmental jurisdictions are most readily in concurrence.
- 2) Develop a SOAR analysis (or similar methodology) and recommend regional collaboration strategies based on concurrence and priorities and related short-term and long-term actions.

**Task B: Targeted Industry Clusters Analysis**

- 1) Determine existing clusters that aren't represented in plans or prioritize clusters in plans. Produce regional targeted industry clusters and sub-clusters summary report for the region
- 2) Provide a list of proposed action items for regional collaboration. Include these priority areas: workforce, housing availability/cost, telework (broadband), and infrastructure.

**Task C: Assess Job Opportunities and Skills for emerging industry/sectors due to Automation**

- 1) Identify potential job opportunities that will exist as a result of automation, and the skills that will be required

**The Scope of Work would be carried out in the following work phases:**

Phase 1:

- i. Startup meetings with Consultant(s)
- ii. Communications/ project stakeholder assessments
- iii. Local stakeholder engagement workshops (2)
- iv. Communication with Regional Leadership Team

Phase 2:

- i. SOAR analysis and Concurrence Strategies
- ii. Regional Industry Clusters Analysis
- iii. Workforce Assessment on Jobs due to Automation

Phase 3:

- i. Present Preliminary Findings to Stakeholders and Board
- ii. Develop communications plan for stakeholders
- iii. Acceptance of final reports
- iv. Project completion convening

## DELIVERABLES:

**Task A: SOAR Analysis and Concurrence Strategies:** The project deliverable will be a regional crosswalk highlighting shared areas of priority and short-term and long-term steps to implement.

**Task B: CEDS Industry Clusters Analysis:** The project deliverable will be a regional Industry Clusters Report for the Land of Sky CEDS utilizing specified geographic region and counties.

**Task C: Job Opportunity Skills Assessment:** The project deliverable is a report highlighting occupations with greatest opportunity for growth resulting from automation within the industry clusters update.

## CONTENTS OF RESPONSE

This engagement will be funded in part by the U.S. Commerce Economic Development Administration to support Economic Development District planning efforts. Consultant responses to the RFQ must demonstrate:

- The respondents' understanding of the plan of work, issues, and elements.
- The respondents' qualifications to address and provide the requested deliverables.
- The respondents' understanding of the Land of Sky Regional Council CEDS project objectives.

By submitting a response, respondents represent that they have thoroughly examined and become familiar with the scope of work outlined in this RFQ and are capable of performing the work to achieve the objectives. The submittal must demonstrate that the respondent has sufficient and appropriate resources to complete the project. Consultants must designate the project lead and report where his/her primary office is located. Any proposed sub-consultants must be identified. Respondents are asked to organize their responses in accordance with the following format:

1. **Cover letter.** Provide a letter of introduction with a brief description of your firm, indicating the primary office location for the performance of this project, the type of firm, areas of specialization, and the project lead. Include company name, address, contact name, title, phone number, fax number, email, and website address. Identify all sub-consultants that will be involved.
2. **Project Approach.** Provide an outline description of how you would approach the scope of services and a timeline that would include completion of all tasks by February 1, 2022.
3. **Key Personnel.** Please also include the names, qualifications, and experience of personnel to be assigned to the project during the specified project timeline and indicate what role these individuals will play in the project.
4. **References.** For the prime consultant and all sub-consultants, provide reference information and brief project descriptions for at least three (3) current clients. Reference projects should

have been completed within the last three years and *similar* in nature to those described in this RFQ. Please include the following information:

- a. Name of client
  - b. Name and title of client's primary contact.
  - c. Telephone number, fax number, email address, and mailing address of the client's primary contact.
  - d. A brief description of the types of services provided, the overall scope of the project, duration of the project and the current status of the project.
- 5. Budget.** Provide total cost estimates for scope services specified that include labor and direct costs, associated travel costs, materials and any other requirements as may be required to furnish the work. Provide a summary of cost and percentage of total project effort by proposed phases and deliverable tasks. The cost estimates are for RFQ evaluation purposes and final contract costs will be negotiable based upon final project design with selected consultant. All additional work assignments or scope additions will be specifically contracted and based on initial engagement rates of the base contract agreement.
- 6. Submittal Date.** Responses must be sealed and be received **no later than 4:00 PM EDT, May 26, 2021. Any responses received after this date and time will not be considered.** Responses should be delivered electronically to Erica Anderson, [erica@landofsky.org](mailto:erica@landofsky.org)
- 7. Number of Copies and Length of Proposal.** All electronic submissions should be clearly marked "**Resiliency Analysis for Industry Clusters & Potential Collaboration**" Your submittal is limited to 10 pages maximum, with an additional page for the cover letter and 5 pages maximum for any appendix. Please submit one digital copy of the proposal labeled as such, using a digital format such as Adobe Acrobat PDF (emailed to [erica@landofsky.org](mailto:erica@landofsky.org))

## RESPONSE DEADLINE

Responses to this Request for Qualifications ("Response") must be submitted electronically and are acceptable until **4:00 PM EDT, May 26, 2021**. Responses received after this time and date will not be considered.

Please address the Response to:

**Erica Anderson, AICP**  
Director, Economic & Community Development  
Land of Sky Regional Council  
339 New Leicester Hwy, Suite 140  
Asheville, NC 28806  
[erica@landofsky.org](mailto:erica@landofsky.org)

## **TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

### **Freedom of Information**

Respondents are advised that any and all materials submitted in response to this RFQ shall become the sole property of Land of Sky Regional Council and shall be subject to the provisions of North Carolina General Statutes, Chapter 132 (Freedom of Information).

### **Incurred Costs**

This request for qualifications does not commit Land of Sky Regional Council to award a contract or to pay any costs incurred in the preparation of a response to this request. Land of Sky Regional Council will not be liable in any way for any costs incurred by respondents in replying to this RFQ.

### **Right to Cancel**

Land of Sky Regional Council reserves the right to cancel this RFQ at any time and to decide not to consider any or all of the respondents submitting information in response to this request.

### **Severability**

If any terms or provisions of this Request for Qualification shall be found to be illegal or unenforceable, then such term or provision shall be deemed stricken and the remaining portions of this document shall remain in full force and effect.

### **Collusion**

By responding, the firm implicitly states that his/her proposal has not been made in connection with any other competing firm submitting a separate response to this RFQ; is in all respects fair; and has been submitted without collusion or fraud.

### **Oral Presentation/Interview**

Respondents who submit a proposal in response to this RFQ may be required to give an oral presentation of their proposal to Land of Sky Regional Council. This provides an opportunity for the respondent to clarify or elaborate on the proposal. These are fact-finding and explanation sessions only and do not include negotiation. Land of Sky Regional Council will schedule the time and location of these presentations. Oral presentations are an option of Land of Sky Regional Council and may or may not be conducted.

### **Affirmative Action**

Land of Sky Regional Council is an equal opportunity employer and requires an affirmative action policy from all contractors and vendors as a condition of doing business, as per Federal Order 11246. By signing the Response Page for this RFQ, all respondents agree to this condition of doing business.

### **Assigning/Transferring of Agreement**

Any successful firm is prohibited from assigning, transferring, conveying, subletting, or otherwise disposing of the resulting agreement or its rights, title, or interest therein or its power to execute such an agreement to any other person, company or corporation without prior consent and approval in writing from Land of Sky Regional Council.

### **Debarment and Suspensions (Executive Orders 12549 and 12689)**

A contract award (see 2 CFR 180.220) must not be made to parties listed on the governmentwide exclusions in the System for Award Management (SAM), in accordance with the OMB guidelines at 2 CFR 180 that implement Executive Orders 12549 (3 CFR part 1986 Comp., p. 189) and 12689 (3 CFR part 1989 Comp., p. 235)