



REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS (RFQ)

Connecting Highland: Access, Neighborhood Growth,
Engagement

Project CHANGE Feasibility and Connectivity Study

Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP)
Grant Funded Project

Issue Date: June 1, 2026

Statement of Qualifications Due by 2:00 PM July 31, 2026

Submit to:

Mrs. Randi Gates, Director of Transportation
150 S. York Street
P.O. Box 1748
Gastonia, NC 28053

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1. Notice to Consultants

The City of Gastonia invites qualified multidisciplinary consulting firms or consultant teams to submit Statements of Qualifications (SOQs) for professional planning, engineering, public engagement, and related consulting services for Project CHANGE, funded through the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program.

The selected consultant/team will assist the City in leading a community-informed planning process that incorporates public input to evaluate infrastructure needs and barriers, inform City decision-making on reconnecting neighborhoods, improving multimodal mobility, and addressing equity concerns, while supporting the development of implementation strategies consistent with federal grant requirements.

2. Project Overview and Background

Project CHANGE (Connecting Highland: Access, Neighborhood Growth, Engagement) is a transformative Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Grant-funded feasibility and connectivity study led by the City of Gastonia, North Carolina, that seeks to address historic transportation barriers that have divided the Highland community from Downtown Gastonia. Through this study, the City will evaluate the feasibility of capping the existing Norfolk Southern railroad ditch and improving NC Highway 7 (Airline/Long Avenue) and US 74 (Franklin Boulevard) to restore multimodal connectivity, improve access and safety, and expand equitable access to opportunity.

Historically, Gastonia's Highland community was a thriving center of minority-owned businesses, civic institutions, and cultural identity, often referred to as the city's "Black Wall Street." However, major urban renewal projects—including the Grade Crossing Elimination Project, relocation of the railroad corridor, and widening of NC Highway 7—resulted in widespread displacement of homes and businesses while creating lasting physical and economic barriers between Highland and Downtown. These infrastructure decisions disproportionately impacted minority and low-income residents, resulting in disinvestment, reduced mobility, and persistent social and economic inequities that continue today. Once home to vibrant neighborhood-serving businesses and essential services, Highland is now considered a food desert, with limited nearby access to fresh, affordable groceries and healthy food options—further compounding long-standing disparities in health, economic opportunity, and quality of life.

Project CHANGE is an opportunity to examine technical, environmental, financial, and community-based strategies to transform these barriers into opportunities for reconnection and revitalization. The study will assess capping alternatives for the railroad ditch, multimodal safety and Complete Streets improvements along NC Highway 7 and US 74, redevelopment opportunities, environmental justice considerations, and long-term funding strategies. Particular emphasis will be placed on improving access to jobs, healthcare, education, public transit, grocery access, and other essential services for zero-vehicle households, mobility-impaired residents, and historically underserved populations.

Through robust public engagement and close coordination with the Highland Neighborhood Association, Norfolk Southern, and regional stakeholders, Project CHANGE is intended to serve as a community-driven roadmap for equitable and intentional redevelopment. By integrating transportation, land use, environmental resilience, food access, and economic opportunity, this study will position Gastonia to pursue future

implementation funding while addressing historic injustices and building a more connected, inclusive, and resilient future for the Highland community and the City as a whole.

3. Funding Source and Federal Requirements

This project is funded in part through the USDOT Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program and is subject to all applicable federal requirements, including but not limited to:

- Uniform Administrative Requirements (2 CFR Part 200)
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) requirements
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
- Buy America / Build America, Buy America requirements (if applicable)
- FHWA and/or USDOT procurement standards
- Davis-Bacon Act (if applicable)
- Federal lobbying restrictions
- Debarment and suspension certification

Consultants must demonstrate familiarity with federally funded transportation planning and infrastructure projects. Procurement of professional services under this RFQ will be conducted in accordance with Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS) requirements consistent with the Brooks Act.

4. Project Goals and Objectives

The selected consultant shall support the City in achieving the following:

- Reconnect historically divided neighborhoods
- Improve mobility, accessibility, and safety
- Enhance economic opportunity
- Promote equitable development
- Evaluate multimodal transportation solutions
- Conduct robust public and stakeholder engagement
- Develop implementable strategies for future capital improvements
- Position the City for future implementation funding opportunities

5. Scope of Services

The selected consultant team shall provide comprehensive planning, engineering, public engagement, environmental screening, financial analysis, and implementation strategy services necessary to complete the Project CHANGE Feasibility and Connectivity Study. The consultant team shall, at a minimum, address the following tasks:

TASK 1: PLANNING & PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The consultant shall provide overall project administration, coordination, and management, including:

- Development of a Project Management Plan
- Establishment and facilitation of a Steering Committee and Technical Advisory Committee
- Development of a detailed project schedule with milestones

TASK 2: EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS

Conduct a comprehensive assessment of baseline conditions, including:

- Land use, zoning, parcel ownership, and development patterns
- Physical and structural conditions of the railroad ditch
- Utilities mapping and right-of-way constraints

TASK 3: PEER REVIEW OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PROJECTS

Perform comparative analysis of similar capping and reconnection initiatives, including:

- Engineering strategies
- Governance structures
- Funding mechanisms
- Community engagement best practices
- Cost ranges and phasing approaches
- Lessons learned

TASK 4: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT & COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PLAN

Develop and implement a robust public outreach strategy, including:

- Community Participation Plan (CPP)
- Public workshops, charrettes, and stakeholder interviews
- Digital engagement platforms

TASK 5: TECHNICAL ANALYSIS & FEASIBILITY – RAILROAD DITCH CAP

Evaluate opportunities, constraints, and preliminary engineering feasibility associated with the potential capping of the railroad ditch and related project improvements, including:

- Capping alternatives and structural concepts
- Rail coordination and operational constraints
- Physical constraints, utility conflicts, and environmental considerations
- Stormwater, drainage, and mitigation concepts
- Multimodal safety and accessibility improvements, including potential conversion of existing one-way pairs in the vicinity
- Redevelopment, civic space, and placemaking opportunities
- Construction phasing and staging strategies
- Preliminary cost estimates

TASK 6: ACCESS ANALYSIS & CONNECTIVITY STUDY

Evaluate corridor improvements with emphasis on safety and connectivity, including:

- Access to essential services

- Potential walking and biking routes between:
 - Highland Neighborhood and Downtown
 - Historic District south of US 74 and Downtown
 - Design options to reduce community isolation
 - Potential conversion of existing one-way pairs in the vicinity
-

TASK 7: DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO ANALYSIS

Evaluate redevelopment opportunities, including:

- Market analysis and economic feasibility
 - Mixed-use, residential, civic, and commercial concepts
 - Redevelopment opportunities on and around the cap and corridor
 - Economic impact projections
 - Development opportunities that consider potential rail transit options in the future through this corridor
-

TASK 8: FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY & FUNDING STRATEGY

Develop a comprehensive financial feasibility framework and implementation funding strategy to advance project alternatives, including:

- Capital, operations, maintenance, and lifecycle cost estimates
 - Public-private partnership opportunities and return-on-investment analysis
 - Federal, state, local, and private funding opportunities
 - Alignment with discretionary grant programs and competitive positioning strategies
 - Phasing, local match strategies, and multi-year implementation roadmap
-

TASK 9: FINAL FEASIBILITY & CONNECTIVITY STUDY REPORT

Prepare a final comprehensive study document that includes:

- Preferred alternative(s) with a clear matrix of pros and cons for each alternative considered
- Conceptual engineering drawings
- Preliminary cost estimates
- Access and connectivity recommendations
- Development scenarios
- Funding and implementation strategy
- Full public engagement documentation

6. Deliverables

At a minimum, the consultant shall provide:

- Project Management Plan
- Existing Conditions Report
- Peer Review Memorandum (National/Regional Best Practices)
- Community Participation Plan
- Railroad Coordination Documentation
- Environmental & NEPA Screening Memorandum
- Technical Feasibility Analysis (Railroad Ditch Cap)

- Access & Connectivity Study (including Corridor Analysis)
- Development and Financial Feasibility Analyses
- Funding Strategy
- Draft Final Report
- Final Feasibility & Connectivity Study Report

7. Minimum Consultant Qualifications

Interested firms should demonstrate:

- Experience with federally funded transportation projects
- Experience with neighborhood connectivity or corridor studies
- Urban planning expertise
- Transportation engineering expertise
- Public engagement expertise
- NEPA/environmental knowledge
- Equity and Title VI expertise
- Economic and market analysis related to redevelopment and land use
- Experience with funding strategy, discretionary grant programs, and implementation planning
- Grant compliance management
- Urban design and placemaking expertise
- Successful completion of similar projects
- Preferred: Experience coordinating with Class I railroads, including familiarity with Norfolk Southern Railway's coordination processes, right-of-entry requirements, and railroad engineering review procedures

Firms that do not have direct experience working with Class I railroads are strongly encouraged to include a subconsultant with demonstrated railroad coordination and engineering experience as part of their project team to ensure successful delivery of all project components.

8. Submission Requirements

Firms responding to this RFQ shall submit ten (10) bound copies of the Statement of Qualifications and one (1) electronic PDF copy on a USB flash drive.

Proposals must be received at the address below by 2:00 pm **July 31, 2026**. Late proposals will not be accepted.

Attention: Randi Gates, Director of Transportation
 City of Gastonia
 150 S. York Street (physical)
 P.O. Box 1748 (mailing)
 Gastonia, NC 28053

Statements of Qualifications shall be limited to twenty (20) pages, excluding the cover letter, key personnel resumes, DBE / MWBE Participation Plan, and required attachments. All submissions shall be prepared using a minimum 12-point font. Proposals shall remain valid for a period of 90 days from the submission deadline.

Proposers shall disclose any potential conflicts of interest, including relationships with Norfolk Southern Railway or other stakeholders involved in the project.

Statements of Qualifications should include:

A. Cover Letter

- Firm/team introduction
- Understanding of project
- Primary contact information

B. Team Composition

- Prime consultant
- Subconsultants
- Organizational chart
- Identification of key personnel, including, but not limited to the Project Manager (resumes shall be included as an attachment and will not count toward the 20-page limit)
- Roles and responsibilities

C. Relevant Experience

- Similar projects
- Client references
- Experience with federally funded projects
- Experience with funding strategy and discretionary grant programs

D. Technical Approach

- Project understanding
- Proposed methodology, including a clear, step-by-step approach to completing each major task, key analytical methods, decision-making processes, and integration of technical, equity, and public engagement components
- Project management approach (schedule, coordination, QA/QC)
- Public engagement strategy, including outreach to underserved communities
- Approach to railroad coordination
- Approach to federal compliance (NEPA, Title VI, DBE, etc.)
- Innovation, including creative or enhanced approaches to technical analysis, public engagement, equity outcomes, and implementation strategies that improve project outcomes

E. DBE / MWBE Participation Plan

The City encourages participation by Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) and Minority/Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBE). While no specific participation goal is established for this contract, proposers shall demonstrate good faith efforts to include DBE/MWBE firms in accordance with 2 CFR 200.321.

Proposers shall submit a DBE/MWBE Participation Plan that includes, at a minimum:

- Identification of proposed DBE/MWBE firms, including firm name, role, and area of expertise
- Description of the specific work tasks or services to be performed by each DBE/MWBE firm
- Estimated percentage of total contract value to be performed by DBE/MWBE firms (if applicable)
- Description of outreach efforts undertaken to identify and engage DBE/MWBE firms
- Explanation of how DBE/MWBE firms will be meaningfully integrated into the project team (not limited to administrative or ancillary roles)
- Description of the proposer’s past performance and experience utilizing DBE/MWBE firms on similar projects

If the proposer does not include DBE/MWBE firms as part of their team, the proposer shall provide a written explanation of the good faith efforts made to identify and solicit DBE/MWBE participation.

The City will evaluate the quality, feasibility, and level of commitment reflected in the DBE/MWBE Participation Plan as part of the overall proposal evaluation.

G. Required Certifications

Proposers shall include all required certifications and forms as identified in Section 14 – Required Attachments. Failure to submit required certifications may result in disqualification of the proposal.

H. Project Schedule & Availability

- Proposed schedule and timeline for the project
- Current workload and capacity to perform

9. Evaluation Criteria

SOQs will be evaluated based on:

Criteria	Weight
Project Understanding	15%
Relevant Experience (including similar projects and funding strategy experience)	20%
Technical & Management Approach (including methodology, project management, and railroad coordination)	20%
Public Engagement Approach	15%
Equity / Community Reconnection Experience	10%
Project Team Qualifications	10%
DBE / MWBE Participation <i>DBE/MWBE participation will be evaluated based on the level of participation, quality of integration, and demonstrated good faith efforts</i>	5%
Federal Compliance Capacity	5%

10. Selection Process and Schedule

Anticipated Schedule:

- RFQ Issued: June 1, 2026
- Questions Due: June 30, 2026 by 2:00 PM
- Responses Issued: No later than 2:00 PM July 10, 2026
- SOQ Deadline: July 31, 2026 by 2:00 PM
- Evaluation Period: August 1-31, 2026
- Interviews (if applicable*): September 7-18, 2026
- Selection Notification: October 1, 2026
- Contract Negotiation: October – November 2026
- Notice to Proceed: December 2026

*The City may shortlist respective firms for interviews. Interviews, if conducted, will be evaluated based on project understanding, team qualifications, and ability to deliver the project.

11. Contract Terms and Conditions

The selected consultant will be required to execute a professional services agreement, maintain all required insurance coverage, comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, meet all grant reporting requirements, coordinate with relevant agencies, and maintain records necessary for audit purposes. Federal contract provisions included in Exhibit B will be incorporated into the final Professional Services Agreement.

12. Reservations / Rights of the City

The City reserves the right to reject any or all submissions, request additional information from any respondent, cancel or modify this RFQ at any time, negotiate with one or more firms, and issue subsequent solicitations as deemed necessary.

13. Written Questions

Written questions should include the individual's name, address and must reference this RFQ. Questions should be sent by e-mail to Randi Gates at randi.gates@gastonianc.gov. Any question received after 2:00 PM on June 30, 2026 will receive no response. Questions via phone will not be responded to.

Responses will be issued in the form of an addendum available to all interested parties. Interested parties should also send a request, by email only, to the person listed above to be placed on a public correspondence list to ensure future updates regarding the RFQ or other project information can be conveyed. Questions must be

submitted to the person listed above no later than 2:00 PM June 30, 2026. The last addendum will be issued no later than July 10, 2026.

14. Required Attachments

Proposers shall complete and include all required certifications and forms listed below with their Statement of Qualifications. Failure to include all required attachments may result in disqualification of the proposal.

- **Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and Other Responsibility Matters**
(Certification that the proposer is not debarred or suspended from participation in federally funded projects)

- **Title VI Assurance**
(Certification of compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related nondiscrimination requirements)

- **DBE / MWBE Participation Plan**
(As required in Section 8F, demonstrating good faith efforts in accordance with 2 CFR 200.321)

- **Proof of Insurance or Statement of Ability to Obtain Required Coverage**
(Documentation demonstrating current coverage or ability to meet City insurance requirements upon contract award)

The City of Gastonia requires a minimum of \$1 million of general liability coverage during the contract period.

EXHIBIT A – PROJECT AREA MAP



EXHIBIT B – FEDERAL CONTRACT CLAUSES

This contract is funded in whole or in part with federal financial assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) under the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program. The Consultant agrees to comply with all applicable federal laws, regulations, and requirements, including but not limited to those set forth below.

1. Compliance with Federal Requirements

The Consultant shall comply with all applicable federal statutes, regulations, executive orders, and policies, including but not limited to **2 CFR Part 200 (Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards)** and all applicable USDOT and FHWA requirements.

2. Civil Rights and Nondiscrimination (Title VI)

The Consultant shall comply with **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq.)**, and all related statutes and regulations, including 49 CFR Part 21. The Consultant shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, or income status in the performance of this contract.

3. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Consultant shall comply with the **Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.)** and all applicable implementing regulations.

4. Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) / Small Business Participation

The Consultant shall take all necessary and reasonable steps in accordance with **2 CFR 200.321** to ensure that small businesses, minority-owned firms, women’s business enterprises, and labor surplus area firms are used when possible.

The Consultant shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, or sex in the performance of this contract and shall carry out applicable requirements of USDOT regulations.

5. Debarment and Suspension

The Consultant certifies that it and its principals are not presently debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, declared ineligible, or voluntarily excluded from participation in federally funded transactions, as required by **2 CFR Part 180**.

6. Byrd Anti-Lobbying Amendment

In accordance with **31 U.S.C. § 1352**, the Consultant shall not use federal funds to pay any person or organization for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any federal agency or Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any federal contract, grant, or loan. If applicable, the Consultant shall complete and submit the required lobbying disclosure forms.

7. Access to Records and Audit

The Consultant shall provide access to all records, documents, and papers related to this contract to the City, USDOT, FHWA, the Comptroller General of the United States, and any of their authorized representatives for the purpose of audit, examination, excerpt, and transcription.

8. Record Retention

The Consultant shall retain all records related to this contract for a period of not less than **three (3) years after final payment and project closeout**, or longer if required by applicable law or if any litigation, claim, or audit is initiated.

9. Contract Work Hours and Safety Standards (If Applicable)

If applicable, the Consultant shall comply with the Contract Work Hours and Safety Standards Act (40 U.S.C. §§ 3701–3708).

10. Prohibition on Certain Telecommunications and Video Surveillance Services or Equipment

The Consultant shall comply with **2 CFR 200.216** and shall not procure or use covered telecommunications equipment or services as prohibited by federal law.

11. Changes and Modifications

This contract may be modified only in writing and in accordance with applicable federal requirements. Any modification must be consistent with the approved scope of work and funding requirements.

12. Termination

This contract may be terminated by the City for cause or convenience in accordance with applicable federal regulations and contract provisions.

13. Remedies

The City shall have all rights and remedies available under applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations in the event of the Consultant's failure to comply with the terms of this contract.

14. Incorporation of Federal Terms

The Consultant acknowledges that this contract is subject to all applicable federal requirements associated with the funding source. The Consultant agrees to comply with any additional federal requirements that may arise during the performance of this contract.

EXHIBIT C – DBE / MWBE PARTICIPATION PLAN TEMPLATE

Project Name:

Project CHANGE – Feasibility and Connectivity Study

Prime Consultant:

Contact Person:

Email / Phone:

1. DBE / MWBE Team Members

List all proposed DBE/MWBE firms to be included on the project team.

Firm Name DBE / MWBE Status Role / Discipline Scope of Work Estimated % of Contract

2. Description of Work by DBE / MWBE Firms

Provide a brief description of the specific tasks and responsibilities assigned to each DBE/MWBE firm.

3. Meaningful Integration

Describe how DBE/MWBE firms will be meaningfully integrated into the project team (e.g., technical roles, leadership roles, decision-making responsibilities).

4. Outreach Efforts

Describe efforts undertaken to identify and solicit DBE/MWBE participation.

- Direct outreach to certified firms
- Use of DBE directories
- Coordination with local/business organizations
- Other (describe): _____

Additional details:

5. Past Performance

Describe the firm’s past experience utilizing DBE/MWBE firms on similar projects.

6. If No DBE/MWBE Participation is Proposed

If no DBE/MWBE firms are included, provide a detailed explanation of good faith efforts made to identify and engage DBE/MWBE firms.

Certification

The undersigned certifies that the information provided above is accurate and reflects good faith efforts to include DBE/MWBE participation in accordance with 2 CFR 200.321.

Authorized Signature: _____

Name / Title: _____

Date: _____

EXHIBIT D – TITLE VI CERTIFICATION FORM

Project Name:

Project CHANGE – Feasibility and Connectivity Study

Consultant Firm Name:

Address:

Contact Person:

Certification Statement

The Consultant hereby certifies that:

1. The firm will comply with **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq.)** and all applicable implementing regulations, including 49 CFR Part 21.
 2. The firm will not discriminate on the basis of **race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, or income status** in the performance of this contract.
 3. The firm will ensure that all subconsultants and subcontractors also comply with applicable Title VI requirements.
 4. The firm agrees to cooperate with the City of Gastonia and federal agencies in the implementation of Title VI requirements, including providing documentation and access to records as requested.
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Certification

I certify that I am authorized to make this certification on behalf of the firm and that the information provided is true and correct.

Authorized Signature: _____

Name / Title: _____

Date: _____