

Request for Qualifications Strategic Planning Services

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Responses Due: July 20, 2022

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INTRODUCTION & INFORMATION

The Austin DMO, Inc. d/b/a Downtown Austin Alliance in Austin, Travis County, Texas requests the submission of responses to the following Request for Qualifications (RFQ) from qualified firms or firm teams for strategic planning services (the “Project”).

The selected firm(s) would help the Downtown Austin Alliance and the Downtown Austin Alliance Foundation develop our joint 5-year strategic plan (2023-2028), working closely with the organization’s boards and staff. Consultants should have a good understanding of nonprofit governance and operations, strong process and facilitation skills, and proven success in strategic planning. Experience working with downtowns is encouraged but not required.

ABOUT THE DOWNTOWN AUSTIN ALLIANCE

The Downtown Austin Alliance is a partnership of downtown property owners, individuals, and businesses in Austin, Texas devoted to creating, preserving and enhancing the value and vitality of downtown Austin. The Downtown Austin Alliance manages the Downtown Public Improvement District (PID), which was formed in 1993 and has been subsequently reauthorized several times. The Downtown Austin Alliance leads and participates in a broad range of programs and initiatives that advance our collective vision for downtown Austin. More information on the Downtown Austin Alliance can be found at downtownaustin.com.

ABOUT THE DOWNTOWN AUSTIN ALLIANCE FOUNDATION

The Downtown Austin Alliance Foundation was established in 2019 as the 501(c)(3) nonprofit extension of the Downtown Austin Alliance. The Foundation’s mission is to ignite the potential of downtown—through art and creative spaces that capture the spirit of Austin—by and for everyone.

The Foundation is charged with implementing key projects that support the Downtown Alliance’s vision. That includes holding the management contract to operate, program and fund Republic Square, as well as leading place-based activations and initiatives downtown as outlined in the [Roadmap to Recovery and Resilience](#). More information on the Foundation can be found at <https://downtownaustin.com/foundation>.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Like many of our peers, the Downtown Austin Alliance (Downtown Alliance) was created in a time when downtowns were struggling. In the early 90s downtown Austin consisted of the University of Texas and state office buildings, with little retail or residential. At that time, the focus of the organization was making downtown “clean and safe” and attracting development and investment in downtown. In the decades since, we have expanded our role to focus on specific places and priorities (such as Congress Avenue and Republic Square), and we have grown our role in place making and place management. The

Downtown Alliance continues to be the full-time champion for a now thriving downtown Austin.

The primary funding source for the Downtown Alliance is the Downtown PID, which was recently renewed for a 10-year term through a process of petitioning 900+ members and receiving approval by Austin City Council.

In 2017-2018, we developed the Downtown Austin Vision, with extensive engagement from Austinites all over the city. The Downtown Vision has priorities organized under four pillars: Thriving Center, Welcoming Places, Growing Neighborhoods and Leading Mobility. This community developed vision served as the framework for our last strategic plan, and we anticipate that to continue as we move forward.

In 2019, Downtown Austin Alliance Foundation was established and charged with implementing key projects that support the Downtown Vision. The Foundation's mission is to ignite the potential of downtown—through art and creative spaces that capture the spirit of Austin—by and for everyone. That includes holding the management contract to operate, program and fund Republic Square, as well as leading cultural programming and initiatives downtown.

Additionally, the organization added “Inclusive” as a core value in 2021, leading to an ongoing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) strategy and a review of the organization's governance and bylaws.

The Downtown Alliance conducts strategic planning every five years to inform areas where the organization can best advance progress toward the Downtown Vision and directly serve the downtown community, framing all work in categories of where we lead, where we partner, and where we advocate. The current strategic plan has guided the organization well for the last five years, with minor additions due to the unexpected nature of a global pandemic.

While we do not expect to radically deviate from the priorities in the last strategic plan, the next strategic plan could be improved upon by identifying and elevating areas where we are truly the leader and prioritizing areas where we can have the most impact on a transforming downtown. The organization expects operating expenses to grow from approximately \$13M - \$18M over the next five-year period.

Downtown Austin Alliance Guiding Documents

- [Downtown Austin Vision](#)
- [Current Strategic Plan](#)
- [Annual Report 2021-2022](#)

ANTICIPATED NEEDS

The Downtown Alliance is seeking a consultant to work in close collaboration with the project team to scope and facilitate a strategic planning process with the final goal of delivering a five-year strategic plan. We anticipate this to include:

- Review of current guiding strategic documents: strategic plan, brand strategy, downtown vision, and other strategy documents
- Revisit and potentially update organization's mission
- Develop organizational priorities, goals and strategies that align with organization's core values, DEI strategy and governance work currently in progress

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Deliver an ambitious and achievable strategic plan for the Downtown Austin Alliance and Downtown Austin Alliance Foundation that:

- Unites a team of Downtown Austin Alliance staff and board champions to work toward the community's vision and our organization's mission and goals.
- Sets forth clarity of role and sets realistic objectives for the next five years, including better defining where the organization must lead and can singularly effect change and what the organization is a partner on.
- Recognizes the collective strength of the Downtown Austin Alliance family of brands, including the Downtown Austin Alliance, Downtown Austin Alliance Foundation, and Republic Square, leverages their unique contributions to realize the community's Downtown Vision and rallies the Austin community together to support downtown's growth.
- Building on recent governance and DEI work:
 - Center repairing relations and building trust in the community with the goal of the Downtown Austin Alliance becoming recognized as the representative, dynamic face of an inclusive and welcoming downtown Austin.
 - Better understand the benefits and impacts of a growing and wealthy downtown, focusing on the importance of affordability and preservation.
 - Sets up our advocacy efforts to result in efficient, effective policies that produce community benefit outcomes like increased tax base, private/public partnerships, permanent supportive housing, district plans and codes that balance preservation, density and use of publicly-owned property in a sustainable, resilient, healthy urban environment.

ANTICIPATED BUDGET

The budget for this project is not to exceed \$40,000.

ANTICIPATED DELIVERABLES

Once a consultant is selected, the Downtown Austin Alliance will work collaboratively with the consultant to develop a detailed scope of work and define deliverables. Below is a preliminary list of the anticipated project needs.

1. In collaboration with project team, analyze and identify strategic planning needs to refine consultant scope of work.
2. Design and facilitate a process to deliver on those needs, including an engagement strategy that appropriately involves board and staff. We anticipate at least one staff retreat and one board retreat in the September-November timeframe. The process could also include surveys, small focus groups or other targeted engagements, if needed.
3. Generate a draft and final 2023-2028 Strategic Plan and recommendations for implementation.

Note: There is a potential contract extension for development of a management plan for implementation not included in this scope, timeline and budget.

ANTICIPATED SCHEDULE

We anticipate entering the contract by August 2022 and would like the final 2023-2028 Strategic Plan to be delivered by December 2022.

DATE AVAILABILITY AND OTHER ASSUMPTIONS

Selected consultant will be expected to facilitate in-person meetings with key stakeholders. Downtown Austin Alliance will assume responsibility for scheduling, meeting logistics, sending invitations, etc. (including costs for venues and food).

Selected consultant should anticipate an in-person kickoff meeting with the project team.

Regular coordination calls will be required to ensure deliverables align with expectations and meet the timeline.

SUBMITTAL INSTRUCTIONS

Please include the following components in the RFQ Submittal.

- Letter of interest. Include basic background of firm(s), such as name, address, phone number and URL. Letter of interest should state any intent to perform as a WBE/MBE/DBE firm and/or describe commitment to inclusive practices.
- Summary of team qualifications. Include similar projects and clients and highlight successful implementation results, where applicable. Feature graphics where relevant.
- Brief biographies of key personnel that will be assigned to the project. Indicate roles and identify the project manager.
- Proposed process. Include a schedule that identifies proposed meetings, time frames for major work elements, target dates for key milestones, and overall date for completion of the project.
- Proposed budget for the scope of work. Budget should include estimated cost, fees, billing rate for each activity and/or project milestone and anticipated payment schedule and method.
- References. Include contact information for up to four (4) references for clients for which the prime contractor has recently provided similar services.
- If applicable, provide a statement concerning conflict of interest, including those interests of the firm that would impede with or interfere in the carrying out project.

SELECTION & AWARD

EVALUATION OF RESPONSES

Firms/teams will be evaluated based on the following parameters:

- A. Experience with similar projects: proven experience in strategic planning for non-profits and/or similar organizations. Experience working with downtown organizations and (PIDs/BIDS), and experience with organizational governance best practices is a plus.
- B. Qualifications of the firm(s): ability to facilitate large groups and breakout sessions simultaneously and engage multidisciplinary stakeholders in civic dialogue.
- C. Project approach: clear understanding of schedule constraints and solutions for delivering the scope of work. Preference will be given to firm(s) that demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equitable and inclusive practices.
- D. Professional qualifications of the staff assigned to the project: based on expertise and experience working on projects of similar size/scope, including experience of identified project manager and team members.
- E. Firm references: References including the names and contact information for four (4) references for clients for which you have recently provided similar services.

DEADLINE TO SUBMIT

Please submit responses electronically by Wednesday, **July 20, 5:00 p.m. CST.**

Short listed firms/teams will be requested to participate in a virtual interviews on July 27 and 28, 2022.

CONTACT / SUBMIT TO

Applicants may submit a completed proposal and letter of interest in PDF format to:

Melissa Barry, Vice President, Planning
Downtown Austin Alliance
mbarry@downtownaustin.com

DISCLAIMERS

ANTIDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

The Downtown Austin Alliance does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), sexual orientation, military status, or disability.

MINORITY OWNED, WOMEN OWNED AND DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS ENTERPRISES

MBEs/WBEs/DBEs are encouraged to participate as prime contractors, subcontractors, or joint ventures. A list of currently certified MBEs, WBEs, and DBEs in various professional fields is available on the City of Austin [Finance Online website](#). The Downtown Austin Alliance does not maintain a separate list of certified firms.

Vendors are not required to be a certified MBE/WBE/DBE with the City of Austin to be considered for this project opportunity.

RESERVATION OF RIGHTS

The Downtown Austin Alliance with its partners reserves the right to reject any and all proposals received in response to this RFP and reserves the right to short list respondents and base final selection rankings on personal interviews.

Fees provided for in contracts or agreements shall be reasonable. Downtown Austin Alliance with its partners shall consider fees to be reasonable if they are not in excess of those ordinarily charged by the profession as a whole for similar work. Downtown Austin Alliance with its partners will negotiate for procurement of professional services, whereby competitors' qualifications are evaluated, and the most qualified competitor is selected, subject to negotiations of fair and reasonable compensation.

Downtown Austin Alliance with its partners is not obligated to award a contract solely based on this request or to otherwise pay for information solicited.