

**Great Falls, Montana
Downtown Market Demand Assessment
& Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy**

Request for Proposals

Great Falls Development Authority, Inc.

September 2, 2023

I. INTRODUCTION

The Great Falls Development Authority, Inc. (GFDA), in partnership with the Downtown Development Partnership of Great Falls (DDP), seeks proposals to conduct an assessment of the market demand in Downtown Great Falls Montana and to use the market demand assessment to develop an Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy. The purpose of the project is to determine market support for new housing, business, and commercial investment in our downtown and to develop a strategy that we can implement over the next 3-5 years to attract investment in our downtown.

Interested firms are encouraged to discuss this RFP with us, as detailed below.

II. BACKGROUND

Great Falls Development Authority
<https://growgreatfallsmontana.org>

GFDA is a regional public/private economic development organization (EDO) and certified Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) which focuses its efforts on the 13-county Great Falls Montana trade area, also known as Montana's Golden Triangle. Great Falls Montana is an MSA with 86,000 population. Our trade area extends to the Canadian border, totaling about 209,000 population. Our target industries are food/agriculture/bioscience, business services, energy, tourism, advanced manufacturing, defense, logistics, healthcare, and regional retail/services. Our EDO works on business attraction, business retention/expansion, business start-ups, downtown revitalization, workforce, and housing, amongst other things.

Downtown Development Partnership of Great Falls
<https://exploredowntowngf.com>

The Downtown Development Partnership of Great Falls (DDP) serves as the coordinating body for downtown development, including employment and physical

construction. The DDP is a fully accredited National MainStreet organization. DDP members include NeighborWorks Great Falls (NWGF), GFDA, the Great Falls Business Improvement District, the Downtown Great Falls Association, the City of Great Falls, Great Falls Public Schools, the Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, Neighborhood Council #7, the City of Great Falls Parking Advisory Commission and Historic Preservation Advisory Commission, Cascade County, and downtown advocates. Each of these organizations and leaders play a role in the development of downtown. Together, they form the DDP, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, meaning that their combined influence and planning capacity is better than would be expected from the individual parts, because the way they combine adds a different quality.

The mission of the DDP is to be the catalyst bringing together our community to revitalize Downtown Great Falls. Formed as a Montana non-profit with 501-c-3 status, the DDP works to:

- Promote, stimulate and effect community and economic development;
- Forge alliance that recruit new businesses and development;
- Provide access to financing to support development;
- Support the implementation of the City's Downtown Master Plan; and,
- Cooperate with other organizations to support Downtown development in Great Falls and throughout the State of Montana.

The DDP is organized around the principles of the National Main Street Program and has been designated as a fully accredited member, the highest level of membership in this national program. The Main Street Approach is a time-tested framework for community-driven, comprehensive revitalization. It is built on four points: Economic Vitality; Design; Promotion; and, Organization. The DDP has cost-effectively organized around these four points by utilizing the strengths of its members.

Economic Vitality

Build a diverse economic base. Catalyze smart new investment. Cultivate a strong entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The Great Falls Development Authority (GFDA) takes the lead on Economic Vitality. The GFDA leads economic development efforts downtown including its Brownfield redevelopment program, the Downtown revolving loan fund, business and entrepreneur coaching and training, and downtown business development efforts. In addition, GFDA invests \$2,500/year in the DDP and pays 25% of the direct costs of the Downtown Business Development Officer position, as well as 100% of the associated costs. The Business Improvement District pays 25% of the direct costs of the Downtown Business Development Officer and provides downtown office space. The City of Great Falls, through the Downtown Urban Renewal District tax increment financing, pays 50% of the direct costs of the Downtown Business Development Officer.

Design

Create an inviting, inclusive atmosphere. Celebrate historic character. Foster accessible, people-centered public spaces.

The Great Falls Business Improvement District (BID) takes the lead on Design. The BID leads streetscape, façade improvements, safety, banners, sidewalks, trash receptacles, pedlets, flowers and many other efforts to enhance the downtown design. In addition, the BID invests \$1,500/year in the DDP.

Promotion

Market the district's defining assets. Communicate unique features through storytelling. Support buy-local experience.

The Downtown Great Falls Association (DGFA) takes the lead on Promotion. The DGFA hosts numerous downtown promotional events throughout the year, maintains the downtown promotion website and social media sites, and many other efforts to promote Downtown Great Falls. In addition, the DGFA invests \$1,000/year in the DDP.

Organization

Build leadership and strong organizational capacity. Ensure broad community engagement. Forge partnerships across sectors.

The BID, DGFA, and GFDA are joined by City of Great Falls, NWGF, and the Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce as the key organization leaders of the DDP. NWGF and the Chamber also each invest \$1,000/year in the DDP.

All of the efforts above are approached in partnership with many additional public, private and nonprofit partners, as well as thousands of hours of volunteer time.

The cost-effective organizational structure has enabled the DDP collectively to achieve many downtown revitalization successes without the need for DDP staff. The DDP has earned recognition as one of the leading downtown revitalization efforts in Montana.

Downtown & Related Plans

The Downtown Master Plan was adopted by the City Commission in 2011.

https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_and_community_development/page/27411/dtmp_cc_public_hearing_final.pdf

The Downtown Urban Renewal Plan was adopted in 2012 and updated in 2020.

https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_and_community_development/page/27411/great_falls_downtown_access_circulation_streetscape_plan_final_low_resolution.pdf

Information on the Downtown TIF programs can be found here:

<https://greatfallsmt.net/planning/downtown-tif>

The Downtown Access, Circulation, and Streetscape Plan was adopted in 2013.

https://greatfallsmt.net/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning_and_community_development/page/27411/great_falls_downtown_access_circulation_streetscape_plan_final_low_resolution.pdf

GFDA and its partners have undertaken a deep-dive strategic planning process over the last two years. This work has produced SWOT analyses, housing market demand, childcare market demand, and other assessments that relate to downtown Great Falls. In June 2023, GFDA released a new Economic Development Strategy. These documents can be found here:

<https://greatfallsmt.net/planning/downtown-tif>

Funding

We have secured \$60,000 for this project. \$20,000 from the Montana Main Street grant program of the Montana Department of Commerce through the City of Great Falls. \$30,000 from the City of Great Falls using downtown tax increment funds. And, \$5,000 each from GFDA and NWGF.

Downtown Investment Success

Downtown Revitalization efforts over the last decade have successfully attracted significant investment in Downtown Great Falls. We are hungry for more!

III. OBJECTIVES

We seek consultant help to develop an Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy for Downtown Great Falls. This will be a two-step process beginning with a market demand assessment that will provide the foundation for the economic development plan that will guide us over 3-5 years. This project would include commercial and housing development (including renovation and new construction), start-up businesses, expansions and new businesses.

Our collective goal is to establish a flourishing downtown where people want to live, work, and play, as detailed in the goals of the Great Falls Downtown Master Plan and Urban Renewal Plan. We are proud of the progress we have made in revitalizing our downtown and attracting significant private sector investment. However, many of the economic vitality goals of the downtown plans have not yet been fully achieved.

In order to continue positive momentum, we need to attract more investment to our downtown. The best way to do is through doing a market-driven assessment and use the findings to develop an economic vitality strategy that will drive our downtown economic development efforts over the next 3-5 years. We have found that one of the most effective ways for us to attract new investment is to do the

local market research that entrepreneurs, businesses and developers often can't afford to do or will not invest in when they are just considering a downtown investment. By doing the upfront market assessment, we can attract more interest to take a closer look at downtown Great Falls.

The pandemic has accelerated many economic and societal changes, creating new opportunities to attract investment to our downtown. A market assessment will provide the data we need to understand these opportunities to develop an effective market-driven economic vitality strategy. Our efforts over the past decade have helped produce significant diverse private investment in downtown Great Falls. Many investment opportunities remain. A number of properties downtown could be revitalized to become a wide variety of both commercial and retail investment such as housing, retail, entertainment, hotels, restaurants, niche, or office uses. Startup entrepreneurs, businesses opening new locations, and real estate developers can't afford to do market analysis up front, so the data they have in this phase the more likely they are to invest here. Data is a powerful marketing tool, and with it we will be able to share the right location with the right investor to make the project happen.

True market demand studies have worked well for us. For example, in 2021 the Great Falls Development Authority, NeighborWorks Great Falls and the Great Falls Association of Realtors retained The Concord Group to conduct a housing assessment of the Great Falls MSA market. The Concord Group's scope of work included an assessment of key housing trends and demand drivers, including employment and demographic trends. We use the market assessment to target housing developers across multiple states. Since publication of the housing market assessment, we have attracted developers that have announced projects that will create over 1,000 new apartments. Results of the housing assessment continue to spur developers to select Great Falls as a place to invest in housing production.

The objectives of this RFP are:

- 1) Assess downtown market support for types of new businesses, including retail, lodging, restaurant, entertainment, office, and special use facilities;
- 2) Assess downtown market support for new affordable and market-rate housing, including rental and homeownership;
- 3) Assess downtown market demand for commercial development, including, new construction and renovation of underutilized properties.

Assessments should take into account current and projected market conditions, and underway and announced development projects.

4) Work together with the DDP to develop an Economic Vitality Transformation Strategy to guide our downtown economic development efforts over the next 3-5 years.

IV. SCOPE OF WORK

Consultants should detail their proposed scope work in their proposals. The final product should be produced in PDF format; printed copies are not required. Consultants should include at least three meetings with our project team, all of which can be held virtually if desired. The Consultant should include a final PowerPoint presentation either virtually or in person.

V. CONSULTANT QUALIFICATIONS

We seek a consultant that has extensive experience in downtown market demand assessment and downtown economic revitalization strategies. Experience should include markets similar to downtown Great Falls and experience in both commercial and housing market assessment. Experience with successful National MainStreet approach downtown revitalization efforts is preferred.

VI. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

An electronic copy of the proposal should be submitted in PDF format by email, Dropbox or other electronic file sharing method by 5:00 PM MST on Thursday, September 28, 2023 to:

Brett Doney
BDoney@GrowGreatFalls.org

We plan to distribute the proposals to our selection task group and, therefore, discourage the submittal of printed materials. We welcome inclusion of online URLs that would allow us to assess past experience in more depth.

The submittal should follow the order below and include, at a minimum the following information:

- A cover letter signed and dated by the person or an authorized representative of the organization making the submittal.
- A brief statement of your firm's understanding of the goals of this effort and of the services requested in this RFP.
- A brief statement of the history of your team, including relevant projects.
- A proposed work plan indicating how your firm proposes to perform the project as defined in your scope of work. This work plan should be detailed enough to demonstrate your familiarity with this type of project. It should include information on your firm's methodology for completing the scope of

work requirements. It should include the firms or sub-consultants and individuals that will prepare each major task or work product.

- Qualifications of key individuals to be assigned to this project, their availability during the relevant time periods, and their recent experience on similar projects.
- Examples of at least five similar downtown market demand assessments and/or downtown economic vitality strategies that your firm has completed.
- Preference will be given to consultants that provide references from at least three clients the consultant has recently provided services to.

VII. PRICE

The consultant will present lump sum budget for the work. Travel expense should be detailed and included in the budget. Note, we will provide pro bono hotel accommodations.

VIII. CONSULTANT SELECTION

Consultants that respond to this RFP will be evaluated and ranked. This evaluation will be based on the submitted proposals and, at the discretion of the Committee, on interviews with those consultants who appear to be particularly well qualified, as determined from their written proposals.

The consultants will be evaluated and ranked in accordance with the following factors, which are weighted as shown:

- The consultant's experience with similar projects (30%)
- The breadth of the consultant's experience, including the qualifications and availability of the key personnel who would be assigned (20%)
- The methodology and scope of services to be provided (30%)
- Cost (20%)

Negotiations will commence with the highest ranked consultant. Upon reaching agreement on a final work plan and price, the Great Falls Development Authority will award the contract. If agreement cannot be reached with the highest ranked consultant, negotiations may proceed with lower ranked consultant(s).

IX. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION & CONDITIONS

A. STATEMENT OF NONCOMMITMENT

Issuance of this RFP does not commit the Great Falls Development Authority, Inc. to award a contract or to pay any costs incurred in preparation of proposals responding to the RFP. The GFDA reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and re-advertise. All proposals become the property of the GFDA.

B. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Successful contract bidders must comply with provisions of all applicable federal law, Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Any subcontracting by the successful bidder subjects subcontracting firm(s) to the same provisions of federal law.

In accordance with state and federal requirements, the consultant (hereinafter referred to as "contractor") must agree as follows:

1.) COMPLIANCE WITH TITLE VI OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 FOR FEDERAL AID CONTRACTS

(a) Compliance with Regulations. The Contractor shall comply with all Regulations relative to nondiscrimination in Federally-assisted programs of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, 24 CFR Part 1, as they may be amended (hereafter referred to as the Regulations), which are incorporated by reference and made part of this Agreement.

(b) Nondiscrimination. The Contractor, with regard to the work performed by it during the Agreement, shall not discriminate on the grounds of sex, race, color or national origin in the selection and retention of subcontractors, including procurement of materials and leases of equipment. The Contractor shall not participate either directly or indirectly in the discrimination prohibited in 24CFR Part 21.

(c) Solicitations for Subcontractors, Including Procurements of Materials and Equipment. In all solicitations, whether by competitive bidding or negotiation by the Contractor for work to be performed under a subcontract, including procurements of materials or leases of equipment, any potential subcontractor or supplier shall be notified by the Contractor of the Contractor's obligations under this Agreement and the Regulations relative to nondiscrimination.

(d) Sanctions for Noncompliance. In the event of the contractor's noncompliance with the nondiscrimination provisions of this Agreement, the Department may impose sanctions as it determines appropriate, including, but not limited to withholding payments to the Contractor under the Agreement until the Contractor complies, and/or cancellation, termination or suspension of the agreement in whole or in part.

2) COMPLIANCE WITH THE MONTANA GOVERNMENTAL CODE OF FAIR PRACTICES, 49-3-207. MCA

In accordance with 49-3-207, MCA, the Contractor agrees that for this agreement all hiring will be made on the basis of merit and qualifications and that there will be no discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, political ideas, sex, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, or national origin by persons performing the Agreement.

3) COMPLIANCE WITH MINORITY & WOMEN BUSINESS ENTERPRISES

Contractor will make efforts to encourage the use of minority and women's business enterprises in connection with Agreement activities in accordance with 24 CFR Part 85.36(e) which describes the actions to ensure that minority and women's business enterprises are used when possible in the procurement of property and services.

C. VENUE

The laws of the State of Montana govern this contract. The parties agree that any litigation concerning bid, proposal, or subsequent contract must be brought in the Eighth Judicial District of Cascade County, State of Montana and each party shall pay its own costs and attorney fees. (Reference 18-1-401 MCA)

D. INSURANCE

Certificates of Insurance, indicating compliance with the required coverage, must be filed with the Great Falls Development Authority within ten (10) working days of the Notice of Award. The proof of insurance/exemption must be valid for the entire contract period.

E. RFP AUTHORITY

This RFP has been issued in accordance with Title 18, Montana Code Annotated and the Administrative Rules of Montana, Title 2, Chapter 5. The RFP process is a procurement option, allowing award to be based on stated criteria or evaluation factors. The evaluation factors to be used in this procurement have been specified in this RFP.

F. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information regarding this RFP, please contact:

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