Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Investigation of the Future of Public Radio Content Distribution

NPR
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Washington DC, 20002

Point of Contact
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Release Date: April 10, 2023

The information contained in this Request for Proposal shall not be used, reproduced or disclosed to third parties without the prior written authorization of NPR.

NPR acknowledges and will respect the confidential and sensitive nature of information provided by respondents to this RFP. All trademarks used in this RFP are the property of their respective holders.

This RFP seeks to obtain proposals regarding services and solutions that could be offered by prospective consultants and should not be construed as an intent, a commitment, or a promise to acquire any offered services or solutions. For more information, see the “Legal” section of this RFP.
April 10, 2023

To: All Interested Parties
Re: Request for Proposal

The Public Radio Satellite System® (PRSS®), operated by the Distribution division of National Public Radio, Inc. (NPR), requests all interested parties to submit a written response to this Request for Proposal (RFP) to provide a plan for the future distribution system for public radio content and the PRSS.

The objective of this RFP is for NPR to select a consultant to solicit information, analyze data, and create recommendations about the future for public radio content distribution. The consultant selected by NPR will examine current operations and services and understand how the PRSS may best serve public radio as technology evolves to provide continued world-class service in an IP-first/digital distribution landscape. NPR currently manages a hybrid satellite/terrestrial content distribution system for the 400 public radio stations that are interconnected to the Public Radio Satellite System (PRSS).

This RFP is intended to identify a consultant who can provide research, analytics and a comprehensive assessment of business needs and technical needs, and conduct a comprehensive terrestrial connectivity study, then provide realistic, actionable recommendations that may be used to develop and implement a roadmap for content distribution for public radio for FY 2025 and beyond.

This RFP should not be construed as intent, commitment, or promise to acquire services, supplies, or solutions offered by any consultant.

All qualifying consultants should also be prepared to provide detailed business information including financial records for the past two years.

Any contract between NPR and the selected consultant will be subject to the availability of requisite funding and the consultant’s ability to meet the requirements set out in this RFP.

Information submitted in response to this RFP will become the property of NPR. NPR will not pay a consultant for any information gathered or provided as part of its response to this RFP or be responsible for its costs for preparing its response.
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Introduction

NPR seeks a consultant to provide recommendations for the next generation of the PRSS. This Request for Proposal (RFP) is an invitation to companies to submit information to identify the business needs, document the technical landscape and needs, and identify a process for implementation of a next-generation content distribution system serving about 400 interconnected stations that serve more than 1,200 public radio stations that serve the American public nationwide, including those stations in Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam.

Responding consultants that are selected for further consideration will be requested to make presentations about their proposals.

The anticipated dates for the evaluation and selection process are:

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NPR maintains the option to extend the dates.

All questions and inquiries regarding this RFP should be directed to:
Michael Beach, Vice President of Distribution; email: FutureRadioRFP@npr.org

A Word document (and any related documents such as an Excel spreadsheet) or PDF of the consultant’s response should be directed to:
Michael Beach, Vice President of Distribution; email: FutureRadioRFP@npr.org

Responses received after the proposal submission due date indicated above will be considered at the discretion of NPR.

Background

NPR, headquartered in Washington, DC, manages and operates the Public Radio Satellite System, the distribution network through which thousands of hours of news, music, and specialized audience programming are delivered every year to public radio stations throughout the United States. The PRSS is a unique, cooperative enterprise in which each participating station is a stakeholder in the collective assets of, and services provided by, the system.
NPR has a decades-long record of providing an available, reliable and affordable system for public radio and boasts system uptime of 99.99% and a customer approval rating of 9 on a scale of 1 to 10. The technical and operational foundation of the public radio interconnection system is ContentDepot®, a proprietary content distribution, broadcast automation, and network control system and marketplace through which stations and producers can upload, test, select and download programming-related content for airing to their listeners and viewers. The business-to-business system uses a combination of satellite, internet, software and hardware technologies to provide secure and automated content-delivery services to local public radio stations and content producers and enables the issuing of emergency alerts.

The PRSS’s satellite transponder capacity, as well as the national operating system equipment located in Washington, D.C., is owned by The Public Radio Satellite Interconnection System Charitable Trust, whose beneficiaries are the system’s interconnected stations. The PRSS, which operates 24 hours a day, includes almost 400 downlinks, more than 900 satellite/terrestrial receivers, and about 100 program producers and distributors, including NPR, American Public Media and PRX/PRI. In addition to serving and supporting more than 1,200 urban and rural stations nationwide, the PRSS serves a variety of state and regional radio networks.

The PRSS’s satellite transponder capacity, as well as the national operating system equipment located in Washington, D.C., is owned by The Public Radio Satellite Interconnection System Charitable Trust, whose beneficiaries are the system’s interconnected stations. These stations and radio networks receive programming sent over the satellite through local connections with downlink stations or internet or through a proprietary software system, ContentDepot, which enables stations to subscribe to, manage and schedule programming. Producers deliver their programming to ContentDepot, and stations use ContentDepot to audition, select and subscribe to live streams and file-based (pre-recorded) programs. Stations are also able to automate delivery to enable playout based on their individual programming schedules. ContentDepot also enables network communications between stations, producers and the system headend in Washington, D.C, and enables billing for acquisition and distribution of content.

The PRSS’s Network Operations Center (NOC), located at NPR headquarters, is a state-of-the-art system that employs ContentDepot to control and route audio and data transmissions and serves as the master uplink for PRSS programming. A complete backup transmission center (BuNOC) is located in St. Paul, Minnesota. Interconnected stations own and operate their own downlink equipment. PRSS replaced its head-end system in 2021 and continues improving its operations with regularly scheduled updates. The 2021 replacement included improvements to ContentDepot.

The objective of this RFP is to select a consultant to solicit information from system stakeholders as well as public and private terrestrial connectivity providers, analyze data, and create recommendations about the future of public radio content distribution. NPR seeks to examine current operations and services and understand how the PRSS may best serve public radio as
technology evolves to provide continued world-class service in an IP-first/digital distribution landscape. NPR also seeks to understand areas of technical duplication between the public radio distribution system and the public television distribution system, the feasibility and potential for converging some technical parts of the two distribution systems, and the potential costs of undertaking feasible convergence projects. NPR expects that the consultant will include in its response to the RFP a detailed narrative and supporting documentation summarizing its ability to conduct research, provide analysis, present data, recommendations and plans, and explain its methodologies, for addressing each of the topics in the proposal scope described in the following section.

For the next two years, NPR will provide continuity by keeping the system running with added innovations supported by a separate project grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). Findings from the engagement of a consultant from this RFP will help inform a plan for the future, ideally for any system changes and operations starting with NPR’s fiscal year 2025, which begins on October 1, 2024.

Proposal Scope

1. **Business needs:** An assessment of the public radio system’s current and future business needs including all public radio stations and content producers. This includes review and analysis of the current and ongoing development and operations of the PRSS and its network, as well as the business needs of public radio stations, state and regional networks, joint licensees (combined public radio and public television operations), and content producers. Examination of current and potential viable revenue streams, including reliable sources and any suggested changes, and financial evaluation will be part of the data gathering and analysis. Evaluation of the planning process for the technical system development is expected. In gathering data, consideration should be given to organizations of all sizes, formats, and resources (i.e., audience, revenue, broadcast geographic area, revenues, staff sizes and capabilities) and include systemwide discussions with a representative group of stakeholders. Identification should be made of any Congressional action or FCC policies that are needed to address or mitigate any issues facing stations or the public radio system. The work is expected to include data gathering and other multiple layers of engagement with a representative group of stakeholders and leaders in public media (at least 40 individuals or groups, or a suggested minimum that the consultant believes is representative of system stakeholders). NPR will assist with identifying potential stakeholders. The work is expected to provide examples or use cases that address the business needs and detail them in a business requirements document.

2. **Technical assessment:** An assessment of the current and future technology needs of the public radio system, stations and producers across all platforms critical to the system. This includes assessing the current PRSS network content-delivery operations and the
technologies used, a thorough review and analysis of viable connectivity solutions (described below in “Connectivity study”), an assessment of emergency alerting and possible ways to support it, and an assessment and forecast of near-term and longer-term technologies that would be accessible for all PRSS members and be employed affordably, reliably and securely for all customers. The assessment would include a high-level timeline for any proposed distribution network or station change(s). The assessment should address which network and station technologies and processes should be kept, enhanced, or eliminated. Efforts or partnerships should include evaluating areas of technical coordination or duplication between the public radio, public television, and stakeholders’ online digital distribution systems. The analysis should assess whether and/or how the public radio system could eliminate technical duplication with the television interconnection system (sIX), which PBS manages. The analysis should identify the potential technical and business benefits and requirements as well as the costs and the reasoning for any possible changes or actions. The assessment should include comparison with other distribution methodologies employed by other commercial and non-commercial media networks. This technical assessment is expected to include data gathering and engagement with a representative group of stakeholders and leaders in public media (at least 40 individuals or groups, or a suggested minimum that the consultant believes is representative of system stakeholders) and multiple layers of engagement with them. NPR will assist with identifying potential stakeholders. The work is expected to provide examples or use cases that address and detail the needs in a technical requirements document.

3. **Connectivity study**: An assessment of public and private broadband availability across the United States and terrestrial and mobile broadband bandwidth or other affordable alternatives available at each current station location and any backup facility. This connectivity study will include the number of providers, the available inbound and outbound data rates each offers, the cost per Mbps including all applicable taxes and tariffs, risks and any additional observations. In addition, it’s expected that the assessment will include evaluating and listing each local redundancy option for the approximately interconnected 400 sites, i.e., where dual and diverse routes are available to provide backup connectivity and who the solution providers are in each location. The sites are located in all 50 U.S. states, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NPR will provide a list of the interconnected stations and where they are located. The evaluation will include an assessment of all network and last-mile options.

4. **Implementation and iteration recommendations**: Analysis of existing infrastructure, software, processes, and recommendations for viable strategies and tactics for improving the planning and design process for the system, including those that could provide more efficient timelines, flexibility and advantages in terms of capital and operating costs. The expectation is that the system remains as or more reliable, affordable, and available – and adaptable – for all users compared to the current system. The current system is expected
to remain fully functioning 24x7 throughout any upgrades or switchovers to a new system. Risks and the likelihood of any issues should be noted. Please note: The implementation plan and its execution are out of the scope for this proposal. The technical design, plan and implementation are expected to be part of a subsequent RFP.

5. **Estimated costs of recommendations:** An assessment of the total and specific estimated costs for each recommendation made to address the business needs and the technical requirements. This includes outlining the expenses as well as recommendations for the sources of funding those expenses.

6. **Cost of consultant engagement:** The consultant’s cost for this work, including research, analysis, stakeholder interactions, travel, presentations, and reports.

NPR will request that the consultant’s data gathering, review and analysis consider a review of prior findings by NPR staff, consultants engaged by NPR and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), and feedback from stakeholders.

**Deliverables**

The deliverables shall include four reports and a presentation discussing the data, analysis and findings/recommendations:

- Report 1: Key findings and recommendations
- Report 2: Business needs
- Report 3: Technical assessment
- Report 4: Connectivity study
- Presentations of results, including opportunity for questions and answers

The reports should be supported with any additional media as required (e.g., spreadsheets, graphics, diagrams, audio, video, etc.). Responding consultants should provide sufficient details to support the narrative in their reports. The consultant’s response should provide these details in a separate appendix.

The consultant is expected to schedule periodic updates on its progress with NPR and will outline expectations for its interaction with NPR throughout the engagement.

These four reports will be used to inform a subsequent technical design and implementation plan, which will be part of a future RFP.
Required Proposal Contents

NPR seeks consultants that have the experience and qualifications to engage deeply with stakeholders, understand and analyze the PRSS’s business needs, assess the technical management and operations that are required to provide network services to the PRSS to fulfill its mission in providing services to the public radio stations and producers and serve the American public.

A. Consultant Profile

Please answer the following questions in the order shown and using the section numbers provided. The consultant shall:

1. Identify its company name, address and telephone number.

2. Identify the primary contact person’s name, title, address, phone number and e-mail address for its response to this RFP.

3. Provide an overview of the consultant’s company, including the number of years in business, number of employees, nature of business and description of clients.

4. If selected for consideration and upon request, provide sufficient financial information to support its continuing financial viability during the engagement period.

5. Identify any parent corporation and/or subsidiaries, as appropriate.

6. Provide a summary of the consultant’s short-term and long-term goals and strategic vision, including its evidence of diversity, equity and inclusion policies and its profile showing staff diversity. NPR is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion in our workplace, as well as in our journalism. We act to create an inclusive environment in which every person feels valued, respected and a sense of belonging. At NPR, diversity is not a program or initiative. It is an inextricable part of our mission to serve the American public.

7. Provide a list of three references for whom the consultant has worked. Provide information regarding the consultant’s or the consultant’s previous engagement(s) with any public media entity within the past eight years.

8. Provide a list of staff expected to be involved in the engagement and their qualifications.
B. Proposal Narrative

The proposal must include a narrative describing the consultant’s approach to fulfilling the requirements of this RFP, the consultant’s experience, detailed cost information, and a timeline for the work. In its proposal the consultant shall demonstrate:

1. Its understanding of the needs of stations, producers and networks, including the ability to deliver both real-time (live) and file-based (recorded) content, including audio, text, graphics, video and associated metadata, internal program-related messaging and emergency communications to/from individual sites (such as stations and producers) and networks via emerging audio platforms and visual/video platforms. Consideration should be given to experience working with third-party providers.

2. Its understanding of terrestrial, digital, satellite and other infrastructure technologies. Ideally, the consultant will have expertise in evaluating content delivery systems for national media organizations using satellite and private and public terrestrial networks.

3. Its knowledge and understanding of a range of resilient services related to distribution operations, including customer relations management solutions, business intelligence software, data analytics and data security, as well as an understanding of how to adapt and integrate those platforms for organizations of varying sizes and skill sets.

4. How it executes a process for discovery among multiple, diverse stakeholders, including current or potential customers and trade and industry leaders who represent technology and business interests. This includes how it analyzes and presents data from the stakeholders, including current and future system members (stations, producers, networks), trade groups, industry, etc.

5. How it identifies and forecasts future needs and recommendations for improving services to meet the needs of customers (stations and producers) stakeholders, and how it ensures that those findings create realistic and actionable recommendations that can demonstrate improvements that are more effective in terms of cost, flexibility, performance, reliability, scalability, additional services and other factors.

6. How it will design, gather and analyze data, specifically data about content delivery via various platforms and services, including terrestrial, mobile, satellite, and cloud services. Specifically, how the consultant has worked with stakeholders, including conducting communications with them and its approach to identifying and assessing stakeholder feedback.
7. Its prowess in analyzing current systems and comparing and contrasting them with practical and achievable proposed solutions for the technical infrastructure and integration, technical operations and change management.

8. Its experience in creating realistic and actionable plans that are cost-effective, affordable, and can be implemented in parallel without disrupting ongoing services. This should include high-level roadmap planning for large-scale technical projects that require integration between many operators.

9. Its ability to define risks and rewards of alternative approaches through viable recommendations that can be implemented.

10. Its ability to communicate strategic initiatives and projects to various audiences, some without deep technical background.

11. Its ability to provide financial analysis and budget forecasting and planning.

12. Its ability to provide effective and efficient project management and to identify projected timelines for the implementation of changes.

13. Its work with or knowledge of the public media system, the system’s technical and management operations, station and producer dynamics and operations and/or experience managing cooperatives or similar national media or communications companies.

The consultant should provide the name of any partner or subcontractor that will be involved in this engagement and include a description of the work to be performed by that third party.

The consultant should provide its success metrics in delivering analysis to at least three customers who were able to implement its recommendations. Providing those references with context and contact information (names, titles, email and phone contacts) is expected.

C. Cost Proposal for Engagement

The consultant’s cost proposal should consist of a narrative and an Excel spreadsheet with separate tabs for each of the following categories:

- **Staff costs**: Hourly and total rates for consultant personnel required for the engagement

- **Subcontractor costs**: Identification and details of work to be conducted by a subcontractor or other consultant. This information should include the number of hours, the hourly rate and the total for each subcontractor or other consultant.
• **Travel costs:** Expected travel costs, with details including transportation, hotel, and meals identified. Personal care and entertainment expenses will not be covered as part of this engagement.

• **Other costs:** Any additional costs, with details about why these costs are required for this engagement.

**Criteria for Evaluation of Responses**

NPR will evaluate the responses to this RFP applying the following criteria:

• **Experience:** The consultant’s ability to meet the requirements of the RFP (and qualifications of any proposed subcontractor or other consultant), including the ability to address the various topics and demonstrate business and technical acumen as well as the quality and experience of the proposed staff.

• **Client success:** The reports from clients on the success of their engagements with the consultant.

• **Communications and Project Management:** The quality and effectiveness of the response, including the clarity of writing and ability to meet deadlines.

• **Cost:** How reasonable the consultant’s fees are.

**Timeline**

The engagement is expected to begin no later than July 2023. Consultants should provide an estimate of the expected length of the engagement, including describing any constituent phases. The following dates are set out for the issuance of the RFP, questions, submissions and selection of a consultant.

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The duration of the engagement may be extended at NPR’s discretion.
Proposal Delivery

The consultant’s response to this RFP must follow the format outlined in this RFP or it may be rejected as being non-responsive. By applying this restricted format, NPR seeks to provide its reviewing team with a common format for evaluation, and to minimize effort in responding to this RFP to avoid placing any undue burden on qualified respondents.

Note: If a particular section of this RFP is not applicable to the consultant’s offering, please keep the same response format (including Section PART and title) but mark that section as NOT APPLICABLE.

The consultant will provide an overview of its organization, and identify any team members who have participated in responding to this RFP, or who are expected to participate in the project. The consultant will also identify one primary point of contact within the consultant’s organization responsible for all communications with NPR regarding its response to this RFP.

In this section, the consultant shall provide a statement confirming the consultant’s understanding and compliance to the RFP process and the terms and conditions that apply to the contemplated engagement. If there are any exceptions, the consultant shall provide a summary referring to applicable sections.

Responses to this RFP shall be submitted electronically as a Word or PDF document – with Excel or other documents as needed – by email to FutureRadioRFP@npr.org no later than midnight (EST) on May 22, 2023. The Word or PDF file name should be NPR-FutureSystem_Consultantcompanyname-yourdate where “Consultantcompanyname” and “Consultantdate” uniquely identify the consultant and the date of the consultant’s submission, respectively.

Questions about this RFP

If a consultant has questions about the RFP, it may send an email to Michael Beach at FutureRadioRFP@npr.org with the question(s) and the questioner’s name and email address to which a reply can be sent. Responses to all questions will be posted at www.nprdistribution.org/RFPresponses on May 8, 2023 (6 weeks after RFP issued)

Legal

This RFP does not constitute an offer by NPR to enter into an agreement with any person or entity. Consultants that submit responses do so at their own risk and expense.

NPR reserves the right in its sole discretion to reject any or all responses to this RFP, for any reason, at any point prior to NPR entering into a written agreement relating to the subject of this
possible engagement. NPR reserves the right to negotiate an agreement pertaining to the subject matter of this RFP with any entity submitting a proposal hereunder, or with any other person or entity, that, in NPR’s sole judgment, best serves its needs and the needs of the PRSS and its stations. NPR reserves the right to select either a single consultant to meet all requirements or multiple consultants that collectively meet all requirements, and reserves the right to reschedule the performance period of any agreement in its discretion. NPR may seek additional information from any submitter or other possible supplier at any time, and reserves the right to publish updates or clarifications of this RFP to all or less than all of those persons and entities responding to this request and to provide to any other or all potential respondents the same information that is provided in response to an individual person or entity contacting NPR with questions.

No contract or other legally enforceable rights shall exist with respect to the subject of the engagement described in this RFP unless and until a written agreement is signed by an authorized signatory of NPR. Any response to this RFP shall disclose all material terms that a prospective consultant would like to govern any proposed relationship with NPR. Any restrictions on the use of data contained within the response must be clearly stated in the response itself.

Any agreement to acquire services or supplies proposed in any response to this RFP is contingent upon satisfaction of various conditions, including acceptance by the consultant of NPR standard contractual provisions, such as provisions addressing ownership by NPR of deliverables, code escrow, indemnification, and insurance. The consultant shall agree that it and its subcontractors (if any) will keep books, records and accounts relating to this engagement and their work hereunder to enable the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), which is funding this grant, to verify all direct costs, overhead and administrative allocations, and allow CPB, by examination of the consultant’s general ledger and other records, to account for the consultant’s activities in sufficient detail to enable an audit to verify the investment of the CPB funds in the approved expenses for the engagement.

Any publicity with regard to this RFP, the RFP process, any responses hereto, future contract negotiations and/or subsequent installation, whether in the form of brochures, releases or verbal announcement, may be made only with the express prior written consent of NPR. Recipients of this RFP and those participating in the RFP process defined herein are not authorized to use NPR’s name, logos, or any information about NPR in their advertising or promotional materials, including but not limited to customer lists and website case studies, unless expressly agreed by NPR in writing.

Any materials submitted in response to this RFP process shall be retained by NPR. NPR has no obligation to return submitted materials to the submitter, and the submitter warrants that it has retained copies of the submitted material necessary to reproduce the submitted material without
NPR’s assistance. Neither this RFP nor any responses hereto shall be construed to transfer or assign any intellectual property between any parties.

NPR makes no warranties with respect to this RFP, any subsequent RFP documents or the information contained therein, including but not limited to warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose, non-infringement, or that the documents or information contained therein are accurate or error-free. NPR reserves the right to make modifications or corrections to this or any other document provided as part of the RFP process at any time.

All persons or entities responding in any manner to this request, irrespective of whether they submit a proposal, shall be deemed to have agreed to the foregoing terms.