REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
For Rural Leadership Development Initiatives
Curriculum Designer

Introduction
The North Carolina Rural Center (RC) seeks to retain a highly qualified curriculum designer to act as an expert advisor to RC in connection to our rural leadership development initiatives. The contractor will work with RC to update and refine the curriculum for both our state-level and regional leadership programs. This document constitutes a Request for Proposal ("RFP"). The respondents to this RFP shall provide a proposal, in accordance with the terms and conditions set forth herein, to provide all or part of services to RC as described in the scope of work.

Respondents with questions and requests for information should email Olaunda Green, Director of Leadership Training, at ogreen@ncruralcenter.org no later than September 8, 2023. Only written responses from RC will be considered official.

All proposals must be received by 5 p.m. ET on Friday, September 15, 2023. Inquiries, amendments, or submissions received after the time and date listed above shall not be considered for evaluation. All proposals should be provided in one PDF file and delivered to ogreen@ncruralcenter.org.

The RC reserves the right to reject any submissions as it deems necessary. This RFP does not obligate RC to pay any cost incurred by respondents in preparing and submitting a response, nor does it obligate RC to accept or contract for any expressed or implied services.

Rural Center Mission and Core Values
The NC Rural Center’s mission is to develop, promote, and implement sound economic strategies to improve the quality of life of rural North Carolinians. We serve the state’s 78 rural counties with a special focus on individuals with low to moderate incomes and communities with limited resources.

Our Core Values are to:

**Strive for Excellence.** By continuously learning, improving, and working collaboratively with rural and underserved communities and partners to leverage resources and develop innovative solutions, we make meaningful change.

**Practice Authentic Leadership.** By cultivating authentic leaders in and outside of the Center, we build trust, credibility, and help rural and underserved individuals take their communities to the next level.
Lead with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. By acknowledging that unjust structures and policies have resulted in historic and systemic oppression, we commit ourselves to being a more racially and economically just organization.

Deliver Meaningful and Measurable Impact. By placing our focus on the achievement of long-term and sustainable results, there is a greater chance that our activities will lead to noticeable impact within our communities.

Project Overview
Since its inception in 1987, the RC has recognized the vital importance of local leadership to the success of our state’s rural areas. Every community needs effective leadership to identify needs and propose solutions. Rural North Carolina has many people who have successfully led their communities. However, recent trends suggest that leadership in rural counties is aging as the older adult population grows and large swaths of young people move to urban areas. Retaining young people in rural communities and investing in them as leaders is vital. Therefore, as we train tomorrow’s leaders, we aim to recruit established and emerging leaders who can leverage diverse resources and drive community collaboration to successfully grow rural economies and improve the quality of life in rural areas.

The RC believes that motivated, engaged leaders are the cornerstone of rural community economic development and that successful rural leaders possess: 1) personal skills for leading and motivating others; 2) an understanding of the building blocks for community economic development and a vision for responding to the socioeconomic drivers impacting rural places; 3) a commitment to including all voices in their communities to achieve that vision; and 4) access to resources and opportunities such as people, ongoing education, and funding.

We apply a comprehensive, asset-based approach to rural community economic development. We offer training opportunities at the statewide and regional levels to support leaders as they work to ensure their communities and regions thrive. We invite leaders from various sectors and backgrounds, including government, nonprofit, business, faith, and grassroots leaders, to participate in our programs.

For additional information about our leadership development programs, please visit https://www.ncruralcenter.org/leadership/.

Scope of Work
The RC is seeking proposals from highly qualified curriculum designers to provide expert guidance on assessing and refining the content and format of our leadership programs - Rural Economic Development Institute and Homegrown Leaders. The following list is provided for guidance to respondents but does not limit the responsibilities that may be included in the contract.

- Document review:
  - Review curricula for state-level and regional programs to understand how existing programs have been structured historically.
  - Examine feedback from program participants to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences as well as areas that offer potential for enhancement.
Curriculum design:
- Recommend and create engaging and interactive content that keeps participants interested and motivated to learn.
- Conduct research on best practices for leadership and rural development and consult with subject-matter experts and other professionals to enhance curricula and learning resources around the building blocks for community economic development.
- Update and potentially rewrite learning goals and objectives for each course/curriculum session to clearly distinguish between the state-level and regional programs.
- Define topics and activities that meet identified goals and objectives under the four aspects of our training: leadership; community economic development; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and access to resources and opportunities.
- Suggest ideas for engaging training cohorts through community project development.
- Determine evaluation criteria and other formal and informal assessments or surveys to gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum.
- Create a vetting process for identifying new faculty with expertise in our program outcomes and onboarding materials to integrate them into our training approach.
- Update and rewrite portions of the existing trainer’s manual

Application and recruitment:
- Suggest marketing and communication strategies to reach diverse populations to complete the application.
- Update the application process to include: a participant selection rubric that helps us meet our identified target audience for state-level and regional programs and application questions that provide faculty and staff with a comprehensive snapshot of the applicant and their service area.

Project Timeline
The project will begin immediately upon selection. The successful respondent will enter into a contract for services with RC. The scope of work in such a contract will be based on what is presented in this RFP but may be negotiated. The initial contract duration between RC and the successful respondent is expected to begin upon the date of contract approval. The contract is intended to have an initial term of three months.

Budget
Respondents to this RFP should provide a proposed fee structure for providing services, including any pass-through costs, which should be identified as a separate line item in the budget.

Qualifications
Qualified applicants must have significant experience relevant to all the above responsibilities. The applicant’s depth of knowledge of economic development, particularly through an equity lens, in rural communities is of utmost importance. Applicants must have a license to do business in the State of North Carolina or a statement of commitment to become licensed in North Carolina within 30 calendar days of being successfully selected for this contract.
Proposal Format
Respondents must submit one electronic file in PDF format and a table of contents with corresponding page numbers for easy reference. The following information must be included in the proposal:

1. Cover Letter: Include a letter identifying the submitting organization (name, mailing address, phone number), the primary contact person for the proposal and contact information, a brief history of the organization, and a general statement of interest in the scope of work. The letter should identify the person authorized by the organization to negotiate and enter into a contract on behalf of the applicant and should be signed and dated by this person.
2. Experience: Provide a brief history of overall experience and capabilities emphasizing expertise and capabilities in developing curricula, especially in rural economic development.
3. Statement on the Approach to the Scope of Work: Provide a plan that addresses the applicant’s understanding of the purpose and mission of the RC’s statewide and regional leadership development programs and how the applicant would execute the stated scope of work.
4. Organizational References: Provide two references from people who have worked with the applicant and know their expertise. For each reference, provide a letter of recommendation and include the contact information of the person providing the reference.
5. Fee Structure: Provide a proposed fee structure for providing services, including any pass-through costs which should be identified as a separate line item in the budget. Please include the justification for the reasonableness of the fee.
6. Disclosures: Describe any conflicts of interest that may be presented by serving as a consultant for RC.

Evaluation and Selection Process
Proposals in response to this RFP will be evaluated based on a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the proposals submitted and their alignment with the stated goals for our leadership development programs. During the review process, staff may request additional clarifying information from any consultant who submits a proposal. An internal evaluation committee will review the proposals from respondents and evaluate and rank them to make a final selection. Committee members may conduct virtual interviews with the top-rated consultants before making a final decision.

Deadline
Proposals should be submitted to Olaunda Green as one electronic PDF file to ogreen@ncruralcenter.org. Complete submissions must be received by 5 p.m. ET on September 15, 2023, and will be notified of selection by October 6, 2023. Submissions or other materials received after this deadline will not be considered.

It is the intention of RC to make every effort to be equitable in its dealings with all candidates for selection. If RC should determine that none of the respondents submitting are a suitable fit, RC reserves the right to reject any submissions as it deems necessary.