



Allegheny County Department of Human Services  
**Request for Qualifications**

**Professional Report Writers**

**RFQ Posting:**

Thursday, August 24, 2023

**Questions Deadline:**

3 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, September 22, 2023

**Submission Deadline:**

3 p.m. Eastern Time on Thursday, October 5, 2023

**Estimated Decision/Notification:**

November 2023

Allegheny County Department of Human Services  
One Smithfield Street Pittsburgh, PA 15222

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# Acronyms and Definitions

Unless the context indicates otherwise, the following capitalized words are defined as follows for purposes of this RFQ:

1. Agreement: A contract negotiated between Allegheny County and the Qualified Applicant to provide the Contract Services
2. Allegheny County: A home rule county and political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
3. Applicant: The individual, non-profit organization, or for-profit organization or business submitting an Application in response to this RFQ
4. Application: A completed Response Form, with specified attachments, submitted in response to this RFQ
5. Bonfire: The County's online procurement software. Proposers must have a Bonfire account to submit a Response to this RFP.
6. Contract Services: The specific services which the Qualified Applicant agrees to provide to the County in response to this RFQ as more particularly described in the Scope of Services in the Agreement
7. DHS: [Allegheny County] Department of Human Services
8. DHS Bonfire Portal: A Bonfire webpage specific to Allegheny County Department of Human Services where Proposers can view open, past and awarded solicitations released through Bonfire
9. Qualified Applicant: The Applicant(s) qualified by the County to provide the Contract Services
10. Response Form: The Word document in which Applicants respond to requested information about this RFQ
11. RFQ: Request for Qualifications
12. RFQ Opportunity Page: The Bonfire webpage where the RFQ and all supporting documents are listed and where the RFQ submission documents must be uploaded for a Proposal to be considered for review

Other terms shall have the meaning or definition as stated in the RFQ.

# The RFQ at a Glance

## *Purpose*

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS), on behalf of Allegheny County, is seeking Applications from qualified Applicants with the skills and experience necessary to prepare high quality written reports based on a wide variety of topics relevant to DHS's work, including but not limited to internal research, program evaluation and program analysis.

## *Award Details*

DHS seeks to qualify 5-10 writers for future assignments. Qualification through this RFQ will be effective for two years with the potential for renewal. If selected for an assignment, Qualified Applicants must enter into an Agreement with Allegheny County, on behalf of DHS, under which services will be utilized and reimbursed on an hourly basis. Any resulting Agreement with Allegheny County will be for a period of up to two years, with the possibility of renewal.

## *Who can apply*

Anyone, including but not limited to non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations, small businesses and individuals, is eligible to submit an Application in response to this RFQ. Applicants do not need to have an existing contract with Allegheny County to apply, but they must meet all of Allegheny County's contractual requirements (see Section 7: Contract Requirements for Qualified Applicants) and have the programmatic, financial and staffing capabilities to provide the Contracted Services.

Applicants do not have to live in Allegheny County, although some projects will require a local presence to complete.

**Applications must be submitted electronically by logging into or creating an account on [Bonfire](#) (See Section 4: How to Submit a Proposal).**

## *What's important to us*

We are seeking Applicants with writing expertise in the style and at the level of quality required by DHS. Interest in the mission of DHS or the field of human/social services is preferred. Additionally, we are interested in Qualified Applicants flexible enough to work well in an environment where things may change frequently or stall for periods of time.

## *What we don't want*

We are not interested in bids for specific contracts but rather Applicants flexible enough to be available when needed but not dependent upon a guaranteed number of hours or assignments.

## *Timeline*

Questions Deadline	Friday, September 22 at 3 p.m. Eastern
Last Website & Q&A Update	Thursday, September 28 at 6 p.m. Eastern
Submission Deadline	Thursday, October 5 at 3 p.m. Eastern
Estimated Award Decision/Notification	November 2023

***Who we are***

DHS is the largest department of Allegheny County government and provides publicly funded services to more than 200,000 people annually, in areas including child welfare, behavioral health, aging, developmental supports, homelessness and community services.

More information about DHS is available at <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/human-services/index.aspx>.

**Section 1: Why DHS is Issuing this RFQ**

DHS is committed to transparency, quality improvement, open communication and sharing of information in order to advance the field of human services. To support this vision, DHS prepares reports on a wide variety of topics relevant to its work and publishes them electronically on its [website](#). Most of these reports are based upon internal research, program evaluation, or analysis, and are written by DHS staff.

Report types vary from narrative documents to research reports and fall within one or more of the following categories: aging; behavioral health and disabilities; children, youth and families; crime and justice; education; and innovation, reform and policy.

Based on past experience, DHS anticipates that we will continue to publish 20 to 30 reports annually.

**Section 2: What DHS is Looking For**

DHS seeks to create a pool of Qualified Applicants who may be selected to prepare or edit written reports on an as-needed basis. While qualification through this RFQ means that a Qualified Applicant is eligible to be selected for a specific assignment(s), it is not a guarantee of selection or of a specific number of hours of work. Because the need for such services varies over time, it is not possible to project how many of these reports will be assigned to Qualified Applicants. Qualified Applicants must be flexible enough to be readily available when needed but not dependent upon work from DHS as their main or primary source of income.

All writing assignments will be managed by the Office of Analytics, Technology and Planning (ATP). Specific assignments may include preparation of a written report or editing of an already-drafted report. Reports may be developed from a variety of sources (e.g., data provided by ATP, interviews, a compilation of documents, or any combination thereof). All prepared reports are subject to editing by DHS staff and will be graphically designed in accordance with DHS’s

report template. Qualified Applicants must be amenable to report edits and adjustments in accordance with DHS style and values. For certain assignments, a local presence may be important.

Qualified Applicants must be able to:

- Produce reports using quantitative and qualitative data.
- Work collaboratively with data analysts, an editor and graphic designer, and other DHS staff to gather information and work through revisions.
- Interview content experts and individuals/organizations involved in the relevant topic.
- Communicate information in an easily understandable and professional way, with culturally responsive, sensitive and person-first language.
- Be reasonably available and able to respond to both quick turnaround and long-term projects.
- Integrate data visualizations or infographics into reports.

Audiences may include DHS staff and leadership, DHS-contracted providers, others interested in the work of DHS and the general public.

### *Process for assigning writing projects*

DHS will select the most appropriate Qualified Applicant for a given project by issuing a task order that provides information about the specific assignment, including project scope and desired timeline. Selection will be based on the following criteria:

- Experience/knowledge in the specific content area
- Writing style
- Availability and ability to complete the assignment within a designated time frame.
- Projected cost based on hourly rate and an estimate of hours required.
- When applicable, previous performance with DHS
  - If selected for a specific assignment, Qualified Applicants must first enter into an Agreement with Allegheny County, on behalf of DHS, under which services will be utilized and reimbursed on an hourly basis.
  - Qualification through this RFQ will be effective for two years with the potential for renewal. Any resulting Agreement with Allegheny County will be for a period of up to two years, with the possibility of renewal.

## **Section 3: Application Requirements and Evaluation Criteria**

DHS will evaluate Applications by awarding points based on the criteria listed below. Applicants must address their qualifications in the Application by responding to the requested items or questions in the Response Form. Applicants should download and type their responses directly into the Response Form available on the Active Solicitations webpage at [www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations). The maximum score that an Application can receive is 60 points, as outlined in the following sections.

### **Examples of Work (30 pts)**

- 3 writing samples and a description of each sample, including the topic, purpose and data source(s)
  - Writing Sample 1 (10 points)
  - Writing Sample 2 (10 points)
  - Writing Sample 3 (10 points)

### **Qualifications (30 pts)**

- Experience in human services and/or writing about human services with culturally responsive, sensitive and person-first language (5 Points)
- Explanation of how the Applicant's time will be managed to ensure responsiveness and completion of projects in a timely manner; include examples if possible (5 points)
- Experience preparing reports using quantitative and/or qualitative data (5 Points)
- Experience preparing reports by conducting interviews (5 points)
- Experience and expertise integrating data visualizations or infographics into reports (5 points)
- Experience collaborating with colleagues, clients or employers to produce a writing product (5 points)

## **Section 4: How to Submit an Application**

### **4.1 Submit an Application**

- a. Applicants should take time to review and understand the RFQ in its entirety including:
  - The background (see Section 1: Why We Are Issuing this RFQ)
  - The narrative (see Section 2: What We Are Looking For)
  - The requirements (see Section 3: Application Requirements and Evaluation Criteria)
  - The evaluation process (see Section 5: How We Will Evaluate Your Application)
- b. Applicants must use the Response Form to develop your Application. Type your responses to each requested item directly into the Response Form. It is available on our [DHS Bonfire Portal](#) on the [RFQ Opportunity Page](#) and on our DHS Solicitations webpage with the RFQ announcement at [www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations).

- c. Collaborative Application
  - Collaborative Applications, in which two or more entities partner to apply together, are permitted. Collaborative Applications should include:
    - i. Lead Agency: The County can enter into a contract with only one partner of a Collaborative Application. Therefore, a Collaborative Application must identify one entity as the Lead Agency that will be the contracting party with the County. The Lead Agency should be the Applicant.
    - ii. Partners: Partners must be committed to a role in carrying out the Contract Services and will be compensated for that role. Collaborative Applications must include a signed letter of commitment from each Partner that details and agrees to their role in the Contract Services.
  - Entities may participate in more than one Collaborative Application.
- d. Applicants must submit a complete Application. The Application must include the following attachment that is available on our Active Solicitations website:
  - Response Form
- e. Applicants should not send any attachments other than the writing samples listed in Section 3, the Response form, or others listed in the Response Form.
- f. Applicants must make sure to complete each section of the Response Form and stay within specified word counts or page limits.
- g. **Applications must be submitted electronically by logging into or creating an account on Bonfire at <https://allegHENYcountyDHS.bonfirehub.com> and uploading the required submission documents to the appropriate [RFQ Opportunity Page](#) no later than 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Thursday, October 5, 2023, to be considered for review. If you are having trouble creating an account or uploading your documents, please contact Bonfire Support. You can also reach out to the DHS Procurement Team at [DHSProposals@allegHENYcounty.us](mailto:DHSProposals@allegHENYcounty.us) or (412) 350-6352. Applications must be submitted electronically to [DHSProposals@allegHENYcounty.us](mailto:DHSProposals@allegHENYcounty.us) no later than 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Thursday, October 5, 2023, to be considered for review.**
- h. All Applications must be submitted before the deadline! Once the deadline has passed, the RFQ Opportunity Page will no longer accept Applications. If an Application is late, it will be rejected and will not be presented to the Evaluation Committee (as described in Section 5 below) for review and scoring.
- i. Applicants will receive an email acknowledging receipt of their Application. If an Applicant does not receive this notification within 48 hours of submitting their Application, please contact: [DHSProposals@allegHENYcounty.us](mailto:DHSProposals@allegHENYcounty.us).

#### 4.2 How to Contact DHS about this RFQ and RFQ Communications

- a. If you have any questions about this RFQ, please use the Vendor Discussion feature through the DHS Bonfire Portal at <https://allegHENYcountyDHS.bonfirehub.com> on the RFQ Opportunity Page, or email us at [DHSProposals@allegHENYcounty.us](mailto:DHSProposals@allegHENYcounty.us).
  - a. All content-related questions must be submitted by the Questions Deadline at 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, September 22, 2023.
  - b. You may submit technical or logistical questions at any time, even after the Questions Deadline.



- b. All information about the RFQ, including answers to all content-related questions and any changes or amendments, will be posted on the Bonfire RFQ Opportunity Page and on our Active Solicitations website at [www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations). Once you have created an account and indicated you are interested in this RFQ, you will receive automatic email updates through Bonfire when any questions, changes or amendments are made available.
  - a. Please check our DHS Bonfire Portal and the website regularly for answers to questions, additional information, and changes to the RFQ or the RFQ process.
  - b. The webpage will be updated only on Thursdays, with any new information visible after 6 p.m.
  - c. The last Q&A and website update for this RFQ will be on Thursday, September 28 at 6 p.m. We will make every effort not to post any new information after this time; however, we reserve the right to post new information in emergency circumstances.

### 4.3 New Provider Requirements

Any Qualified Applicant(s) who does not have a current Allegheny County DHS contract must submit the DHS New Provider Application and its supporting documents upon Notice of Intent to Qualify. Applicants are not required to submit this documentation with their Application.

- a. The DHS New Provider Application is available at our Active Solicitations website under the “Required documents” bar at [www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations).
- b. The DHS New Provider Application asks for audited financial reports for the last three years. If an Applicant does not have audited financial reports for the last three years, then the Applicant may submit other financial documentation that attest to the financial health of your organization. Tax returns are the preferred alternative. Please note that providing adequate financial documentation is a requirement of contracting with Allegheny County.

### 4.4 Other Information

- a. **The issuance of this RFQ does not obligate the County to accept any Application, to qualify any Applicant or to enter into an Agreement with any Applicants. The County reserves the right to reject any and all Applications and not enter into an Agreement for the Contract Services.**
- b. Any Agreement originating from this RFQ is subject to all the Terms and Conditions specified in Section 7: Contract Requirements for Qualified Applicants.
- c. Applicants are responsible for all costs related to the preparation and submission of an Application.
- d. Applications become the property of the County and may become part of any subsequent Agreement between the Applicant and the County.
- e. A list of Qualified Applicant(s) will be posted online in the DHS Solicitations Archive upon the completion of the County’s internal Executive Action process.

#### **4.5 Pennsylvania’s Right-to-Know Law**

Applicants should be aware that all documents and materials submitted in response to this RFQ may be subject to requests for access to public records made pursuant to Pennsylvania’s Right-To-Know Law (RTKL). Under the RTKL, records in the possession of a public agency like the County are presumed to be public records, and the County may have to make documents and materials submitted by the Applicant available to a requestor after an award of an Agreement is made.

If the Applicant includes any information within its Application that the Applicant asserts is either a “trade secret” or “confidential proprietary information,” as defined under the RTKL, the Applicant must include a written statement, signed by an authorized representative, identifying relevant sections. The Applicant must provide contact information to enable DHS to contact the Applicant in the event that the County receives a Right-To-Know request. The Applicant will have five (5) business days from date of receipt of any notification from the County to provide a written statement signed by an authorized representative of the Applicant explaining why the Application or any portion thereof is exempt from disclosure as a trade secret, confidential proprietary information or other legal reason. The County will consider this statement and either grant or deny the request. The County will notify the Applicant of its decision whether to grant or deny the request either in whole or in part.

## **Section 5: How DHS Will Evaluate Your Application**

DHS will convene an Evaluation Committee to evaluate Applications. The Evaluation Committee will assign scores to each Application by awarding points, using the point scale listed in Section 5.1 b., based on the evaluation criteria in Section 3: Application Requirements and Evaluation Criteria,

### **5.1 Evaluation of Applications**

The evaluation process consists of the following steps:

- a. DHS will form an Evaluation Committee. The Evaluation Committee will be comprised of evaluators with expertise in the subject matter of this RFQ and may include: community members with lived experience, external subject matter experts or provider representative(s), representative(s) from key partners or funders and DHS internal staff.
- b. All Evaluation Committee members will individually review and score each Application. and award points for each response on an Applicant’s Response Form utilizing their personal expertise and best judgment of how the Application submitted meets the evaluation criteria in Section 3 using the following scale:
  - 0 – Not addressed in Application
  - 1 – Poor
  - 2 – Below expectations
  - 3 – Meets expectations
  - 4 – Exceeds expectations

## 5 – Outstanding

- c. Each 0-5 score will be multiplied by the appropriate weight for the number of possible points noted after each evaluation criterion in Section 3. For example, for a criterion worth 15 points, the 0-5 score would be multiplied by three. An “Outstanding” response would receive 15 points, while one that “Meets Expectations” would receive nine points.
- d. DHS will tally the average scores of the members of the Evaluation Committee and report a list of average scores to the entire Committee. The Committee will meet, consider the average scores, and arrive at a consensus as to which Applicant(s) can best provide the Contract Services in response to the RFQ. The Committee will have the discretion to proceed as follows: (i) to recommend to the DHS Director that a reduced number of Applications be shortlisted for more extensive review through a formal oral presentation, interview or a site visit to the Committee; or (ii) to recommend to the DHS Director which Applicants to qualify.
- e. As described in d above, DHS, on behalf of the County, shall have the exclusive discretion to shortlist a reduced number of Applications for more extensive review. In this case, DHS may request that shortlisted Applicants make a formal oral presentation to the Evaluation Committee. Each Committee member will individually score the oral presentation using the following criteria and the scale outlined in 5.1b. The maximum score that a shortlisted Applicant’s oral presentation can receive is 15 points:
  - Presentation demonstrates Applicant’s ability to effectively implement the Contract Services. (5 points)
  - Applicant’s answers to Evaluation Committee’s questions demonstrate Applicant’s ability to implement the Contract Services. (5 points)
  - Applicant’s presentation is thoughtful and well-prepared. (5 points)
- f. DHS will tally the average scores of the members of the Evaluation Committee to the shortlisted Applicants’ formal oral presentations and report a list of average scores to the entire Committee. The Committee will meet, consider the scores and arrive at a consensus about which Applicant(s) can best provide the Contract Services in response to the RFQ.
- g. The Committee will submit its recommendation for qualification to the DHS Director for approval.
- h. At any time during the evaluation process, DHS may contact an Applicant to discuss any areas of the Application needing clarification or further explanation.
- i. DHS may contact an Applicant’s references at any time during the evaluation process,
- j. As part of determining Applicants’ eligibility to enter into a contract with Allegheny County, all Applicants’ financial audits or other documentation will be reviewed by DHS fiscal analysts to ensure Applicants’ financial stability.
- k. **The County is under no obligation to award or enter into an Agreement with an Applicant as a result of this RFQ. The County reserves the right to reject any and all Applications.**
- l. All Applicants will be notified of the County’s final decision about qualification status.
- m. Applicants that are not qualified but who are interested in receiving feedback regarding their submission may request a phone call at [DHSProposals@alleghenycounty.us](mailto:DHSProposals@alleghenycounty.us).

## 5.2 Other Requirements

For an Application to be eligible for evaluation, it must be:

- a. Received by the due date/time.
- b. Properly formatted and include responses to all requested information.
- c. Complete with all required forms and attachments.

Applications which do not meet the above requirements will be automatically rejected and will not be presented to the Evaluation Committee.

## **Section 6: What Happens after an Applicant is Qualified**

Qualification is not a guarantee of selection for specific assignments. A Qualified Applicant may or may not be selected for any assignments. After qualification by DHS, Qualified Applicants may be selected on an as-needed basis. DHS may use a sole source process to select a Qualified Applicant for an assignment when appropriate or issue a request to all Qualified Applicants. If selected for a specific assignment, Qualified Applicants will be required to enter into an Agreement with Allegheny County, on behalf of DHS, under which services will be purchased and reimbursed.

## **Section 7: Contract Requirements for Qualified Applicants**

In order to enter into an Agreement with the County, Applicants must comply with all contract requirements listed below and all standard terms and conditions contained in a County contract for provision of services to DHS and its offices. In addition, Applicants must be able to meet the insurance requirements necessary to provide the Contract Services. Additional details about contracting with Allegheny County and the insurance requirements are available in the [DHS Contract Specifications Manual](#) and the [Insurance Requirements Overview](#) at [www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations) under “Required documents.”

### **7.1 Minority, Women or Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (MWDBE) Requirements**

Allegheny County has MWDBE goals of 13% participation for Minority Business Enterprises and 2% participation for Women Business Enterprises and expects that Qualified Applicants will make a “good faith effort” to assist the County in meeting these goals.

- a. All Applications must include a completed Allegheny County DHS Combined MWDBE Form and supporting documents. The Allegheny County DHS Combined MWDBE Form should be completed as follows:
  - All Applicants must complete Section 1 – Contact Information and attach their MWDBE Diversity Plan (see Section 4 – Sample Diversity Policy).

- If the Applicant is able to meet the MWDBE contract goals, they should complete Section 2 – MWDBE Participation Statement. Applicants also must attach the MWDBE certifications of the firms cited in the Participation Statement.
  - If the Applicant would like to request a waiver from participating in the MWDBE contract goals, they should complete Section 2 – MWDBE Participation Statement and Section 3 – MWDBE Participation Waiver Request Form.
- b. MWDBE forms and resources can be found at [www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations):
- [Allegheny County DHS Combined MWDBE Form](#)
  - MWDBE Resources
    - [MWDBE Contract Specifications Manual](#)
    - [MWDBE Guide for DHS Proposers](#)
- c. For more information about MWDBEs, visit the [Allegheny County Department of Equity and Inclusion website](#).

## 7.2 Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB) Requirement

Allegheny County also has a goal of 5% participation for veteran-owned small businesses (VOSB) in all contracts. The County, therefore, expects that Qualified Applicants will make a “good faith effort” to assist the County in meeting this goal.

- a. A veteran-owned small business is defined by the County as a business having 100 or fewer full-time employees and not less than 51% of which is owned by one or more veterans, or in the case of any publicly owned business, not less than 51% of the stock of which is owned by one or more veterans, and the management and daily business operations of which are controlled by one or more veterans. The VOSB vendor **MUST** provide proof of veteran ownership including percentage and name and address of business.
- For contracts under \$100,000, VOSB vendors will be exempt from all bonding requirements.
- b. All Applications must include either of the following:
- If the Applicant can meet the VOSB contract goal, a completed VOSB Participation Statement is required. You must also attach a copy of the VOSB vendor(s) DD 214 discharge form(s) that you intend to use with the Participation Statement.
  - If the Applicant requests a waiver from participating in the VOSB contract goal, a completed VOSB Participation Statement and VOSB Waiver Request are required.
- c. VOSB forms can be found at [www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations):
- [VOSB Participation Statement](#)
  - [VOSB Waiver Request](#)

## 7.3 HIPAA Compliance

DHS is a covered entity under the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Therefore, a Qualified Applicant must comply with all HIPAA requirements.

#### **7.4 Cyber Security**

- a. Qualified Applicants must meet the minimum computer specifications that begin on page 14 of the [DHS Contract Specifications Manual](http://www.allegHENYcounty.us/dhs/solicitations), available at [www.allegHENYcounty.us/dhs/solicitations](http://www.allegHENYcounty.us/dhs/solicitations).
- b. All electronic devices must have sufficient security software and settings to minimize the risk of an information breach.
- c. Qualified Applicants also must have policies in place to ensure that electronic devices are physically secure when not in use (e.g., locked in a vehicle trunk, password protected).

#### **7.5 Equal Employment Opportunity and Non-Discrimination Requirements**

By submitting an Application, an Applicant agrees to not discriminate against any employee, applicant for employment, independent contractor, client, or any other person on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, familial status, age (40 or over), or use of a guide or support animal because of blindness, deafness or physical disability.

#### **7.6 Language Diversity Requirements**

Qualified Applicant(s) must assure resources are secured and/or made available for participants/consumers/clients with limited English proficiency or other communication barriers. Such actions must include, but not be limited to, assessing the need for interpreters, evaluating the need for alternate language materials, identifying internal and external resources to meet identified needs, and accessing services contracted by DHS through their assigned contract monitor(s).