



Hometown Connections

Request for Proposal

For

SaaS based Customer Information System & Integrated Customer Engagement Portal

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Section 1: General Information

General Information and Background

Hometown Connections, Inc (HCI) is a national, non-profit utility services organization specializing in the unique challenges of community-owned utilities. Our team of consultants and vendor partners will help streamline business processes, enhance customer service, improve security, develop plans for the future, and much more.

We believe in preserving the benefits of living and working in communities that own and operate their own utility services.

- We focus on what can be done with your resources and can plan incremental improvements.
- We help utilities leverage in-house skills and acquire new ones.
- We design business strategies and purchasing plans that fit utility budgets.
- We provide solutions that enhance customer engagement and delivery of customer service.

- We improve cooperation between the HCI and utility organizations.
- We make sure business systems operate more efficiently and people more effectively.
- We foster strong working relationships among employees, leadership, and the governing board.
- We are a change partner, standing by community-owned utilities for the long term.

Serving community-owned utilities of every size and type, Hometown Connections provides products and services to develop all areas of your utility business, including operations, cybersecurity, business strategy, customer care, finance, workforce, and technology.

Purpose

The purpose of this Request for Proposal (RFP) is to procure a fully supported and configurable Software as a Service (SaaS) Customer Information System to meet the needs of APPA Members' needs. The goal of this procurement is to secure a proven solution with a very flexible configuration model which will minimize the need for any custom modifications for APPA members.

The CIS should encompass call customer care and utility billing capabilities to support at a minimum - electric, gas, water, sewer, stormwater, refuse, broadband, cable, telecom, and other municipal services. The CIS will provide a platform to support operations and management of all customer related utility services, which includes, but is not limited to:

- Enrolling new customers,
- Generating billing,
- Managing payments,
- Administering customer service transactions,
- Tracking meter reading and consumption,
- Generating service orders,
- Billing multiple cycles,
- Flexible and configurable rate engine to support services including electric, gas, water sewer, stormwater, refuse, broadband, cable and telecom.

- Enabling customer self -service access to a variety of customer account information as well as e-billing, payments, usage, efficiency program offerings, consumption goals, alerts and notifications to customers and more.

Flexibility regarding integration is a key requirement as it is anticipated the selected vendor application will be deployed at numerous APPA members across the country. It is imperative that the new CIS platform have well documented APIs with a proven track record of integrating with other core common utility systems including:

- ERP/Financial Systems for General Ledger & Accounts Payable
- Metering Systems
- Geographic Information Systems
- Payment Processing Partners
- Energy Assistance Providers
- Third Party Credit Service Providers
- Banking and Payment Files
- Mobile Field Service
- Work Orders & Asset Management

HCI has identified needs from our new CIS partner which include but are not limited to:

Greater transparency and visibility into the CIS system:

- User-friendly reporting tools and queries built directly from the application
- Dashboards and Key Performance Indicators specific to different users and roles (E.g. Customer Service, Cashiering, Collections, etc.)
- Flexible Rate Engine which can support Net Metering, Time of Use, and other complex rates across all service types.
- A clear audit trail which identifies all changes and updates made within the platform.
- Embedded communication tools to allow utilities to communicate directly with customers vis Email, SMS, or outbound voice on demand.
- Greater data integrity checks during meter reading, billing, collection processes
- Meter and equipment lifecycle management to improve processes across utility departments
- Flexibility in the account/customer/premises/services data model to better handle the many scenarios the community-owned utility is faced with in delivering its services to citizens.

Additional areas of improvement HCI has identified in a new solution include:

- Expect a true SaaS solution where the chosen vendor will manage all application, upgrades, environment, uptime, security, redundancy, and performance monitoring.
- All application updates to be managed by the CIS vendor with a preference towards frequent updates on at least a quarterly basis if not more frequently.
- Flexibility in the account/customer/premises/services data model to better handle the many scenarios the client is faced with in delivering its services to citizens.
- Inherent Workflow to streamline key processes such as Billing and Collections.

- Fewer work arounds and more configurable processes to meet APPA Members' different business processes
- Limited ability to generate a listing of impacted customers from a particular event (i.e., using GIS tools, lists, queries) and manage outbound communication customers through the platform.

The overall goal of this project is to enhance existing business processes through the use of modern SaaS technology and progressive vendor service delivery models. The primary objective is to procure, implement, and jointly manage with the Vendor a system that achieves the goals listed above.

General Submission Information

HCI intends to partner with a single vendor for the SaaS CIS & Customer Engagement Portal. The proposal should address the Vendor's capabilities for performing all aspects of the scope of work.

Questions

Questions regarding this proposal shall be submitted to:

Hometown Connections
Mike Mozingo – Marketing Director mmozingo@hometownconnections.com

Preparation Costs

HCI shall not be responsible for proposal preparation costs, nor for costs including attorney fees associated with any (administrative, judicial, or otherwise) challenge to the determination of the highest-ranked Proposer and/or award of contract and/or rejection of proposal. By submitting a proposal each Proposer agrees to be bound in this respect and waives all claims to such costs and fees.

Section 2: Rules Governing Competition

Examination of Proposals

Proposers should carefully examine the entire RFP, any addenda thereto, and all related materials and data referenced in the RFP. Proposers should become fully aware of the nature of the Work and the conditions likely to be encountered in performing the Work.

Proposal Acceptance Period

Award of this proposal is anticipated to be announced within **forty-five (45) calendar days**, although all offers must be completed and irrevocable for **ninety (90) days** following the submission date.

Confidentiality

The content of all proposals will be kept confidential until the selection of the Contractor is publicly announced. At that time the selected proposal is open for review. After the award of the Contract, all proposals will then become public information.

Proposal Format

Proposals are to be prepared in such a way as to provide a straightforward, concise delineation of the Proposer's capabilities to satisfy the requirements of this RFP. Emphasis should be placed on:

- Conformance to the RFP instructions
- Responsiveness to the RFP requirements
- Overall completeness and clarity of content

Signature Requirements

All proposals must be signed. An officer or other agent of a corporate vendor, if authorized to sign Contracts on its behalf; a member of a partnership; the owner of a privately owned vendor; or other agent if properly authorized by a Power of Attorney or equivalent document may sign a proposal. The name and title of the individual(s) signing the proposal must be clearly shown immediately below the signature.

Proposal Submission

One electronic copy (PDF or similar) of the proposal must be received by the HCI prior to 5:00 PM, on Friday, December 15, 2023. Submissions should be sent to:

Hometown Connections
Mike Mozingo – Marketing Director
mmozigo@hometownconnections.com

Modification/Withdrawal of Proposals

A respondent may withdraw a proposal at any time prior to the final submission date by sending written notification of its withdrawal, signed by an agent authorized to represent the agency. The respondent may thereafter submit a new or modified proposal prior to the final submission date. Modifications offered in any other manner, oral or written, will not be considered. A final proposal cannot be changed or withdrawn after the time designated for receipt, except for modifications requested by HCI after the date of receipt and following oral presentations.

Oral Change/Interpretation

No oral change or interpretation of any provision contained in this RFP is valid whether issued at a pre-proposal conference or otherwise. Written addenda will be issued when changes, clarifications, or amendments to proposal documents are deemed necessary by HCI.

Late Submissions

PROPOSALS NOT RECEIVED PRIOR TO THE DATE AND TIME SPECIFIED IN THE ADVERTISEMENT (5:00 PM, Friday, December 15, 2023, WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED AND WILL BE RETURNED UNOPENED AFTER RECOMMENDATION OF AWARD.

Rejection of Proposals

HCI reserves the right to reject any or all proposals if doing so is determined to be in the best interest of HCI.

Section 3: Scope of Work

Proposed Schedule

| Action Item | Proposed Schedule |
|--|-------------------|
| Issue RFP | November 1, 2023 |
| Pre-Bid Meeting | None |
| Deadline for submission of questions | November 10, 2023 |
| RFP Opening | December 15, 2023 |
| Shortlist Presentations (if necessary) | |
| Contract Negotiations | December 18-29 |
| Committee Approval | January 5, 2024 |
| Board Approval | January 9, 2024 |
| Contract Execution | January 12, 2024 |

***This timeline is subject to change.**

Detailed Submittal Requirements

Proposals should be prepared as simply as possible and provide a straightforward, concise description of the proposed products and services to satisfy the requirements of the RFP. Attention should be given to accuracy, completeness, relevance, and clarity of content. The proposal should be organized into the following major sections:

- A. Introduction Material and Executive Summary
- B. Company Background
- C. Proposed Solution Overview

- D. Implementation/Project Plan
- E. Technical Requirements and Security
- F. Functional Requirements
- G. Subcontractors
- H. Client References
- I. Exceptions to the RFP
- J. Price Proposal
- K. Sample Contract and Service Level Agreement Documents
- L. Value Added Services

A. Introduction Material and Executive Summary

The introductory material must include a title page with the RFP number, subject, name of the Proposer, address, telephone number, e-mail address, the date, a letter of transmittal and a table of contents. The executive summary should be limited to a brief narrative summarizing the proposal.

B. Company Background

In this section provide information about the company so that HCI can evaluate the Proposer's stability and ability to support the commitments set forth in the response to this RFP. Information in this section should contain the following:

- Company name and location of the corporate headquarters.

- The number of years the company has been in business and the number of years the company has been providing system and services to the public sector. • Include information on the company's customer base, such as the number of public sector clients the company serves, the number of local government clients, and the number of public sector clients in the state.
- Include a brief summary of the company's organizational characteristics such as the number of employees, whether the company is privately held, publicly traded, or if it is a subsidiary to a parent company.
- Describe any other business affiliations (e.g., subsidiaries, joint ventures, "soft dollar" arrangements with brokers).

C. Proposed Solution Overview

This section of the proposal should include a summary of the software modules and the overall service solution to meet HCI's requirements for this project.

D. Implementation/Project Plan

This section should describe the Proposer's implementation and methodology. Proposers should assume that HCI will contribute all necessary effort to ensure success of the project.

- Provide overview of methodology for implementation.
- Provide summary of implementation services including at a minimum:
 - Project Management
 - Software Deployment
 - Business Process Analysis
 - Organizational Change Management
 - Integration Development
 - Report and Dashboard Development
 - Configuration
 - Data Conversion
 - System Administration and End-User Training
 - Testing
 - Mock Cutover
 - Cutover
 - Post Implementation Stabilization
- Provide an estimated timeframe for implementation in the form of a Project Plan and Gantt Chart.
- Provide an overview of progress payment milestones and associated deliverables.
- Provide a summary of all project assumptions and the assumed responsibilities and roles of HCI and proposed project team.
- Provide a summary table of the proposed project team and their roles, responsibilities and estimated percent of dedicated time assigned to project.

-
- Provide a summary table of expected client project team including roles, responsibilities and estimated percent of dedicated time needed for a successful implementation.
- Provide a staffing matrix to help us visualize the effort required. Provide project team resumes for key members of the implementation team expected to be on the project.

E. Technical Requirements & Security

This section should describe the Proposer's technology architecture and approach to ongoing support and should include the following:

- Database Overview & Management
- Management of Upgrades & Enhancements
- Summary of Technology Infrastructure Services
- Approach to Backup, Recovery & Data Availability
- Data Center Overview including Security & Monitoring capabilities
- Approach to Single Sign-On
- Summary of Password & Identity Management and Authentication
- Operations & Service Delivery Management
- Approach to PCI Compliancy
- Applicable Audits & Certifications such as SOC 2
- Overview of Ongoing support including
 - Help Desk
 - Hours
 - Support Portal
 - Contact Types
 - Triage
 - Incident Prioritization and Service Levels
- Audits & Certifications such as SOC 2

F. Functional Requirements

The following will be considered: The new solution must deliver as a minimum the requirements identified below as representative of a progressive solution HCI is wishing to procure. Please see technical specifications included as Exhibit A for a more exhaustive list of requirements.

- Software as a Service
- Secure Registration & Login
- Multi-Factor Authentication
- Active Directory Integration
- Customer Care
- Premise/Meters/Equipment
- Rates
- Billing
- Collections
- Payments
- Service Orders

-
- Technical & Security
- Customer Self-Service
- Mobile Field Service
Reporting, Dashboards & Business Intelligence

G. Subcontractors

Vendor shall list all subcontractors used for this project, along with a detailed description of their contribution/responsibility towards this project.

H. Client References

HCI considers references to be an important factor in its decision to award a contract. Proposers should supply references that will be available to speak with HCI. Five references should be provided that show similar type of project deployed as Software as a Service in the past five years.

I. Exceptions to the RFP

All requested information to this RFP must be supplied as this document and subsequent proposals submitted help form the basis for a contract with the selected contractor. Proposers may take exception to certain requirements in this RFP. All exceptions shall be clearly identified in this section and written explanation shall include the scope of the exceptions, the ramifications of the exceptions for HCI and the descriptions of the advantages or disadvantages to HCI because of the exception. HCI, at its sole discretion, may reject any exceptions or specifications within the proposal.

J. Price Proposal

The price proposal cost sheeting included as part of this proposal shall be completed and returned with your response. Any additional services identified by the proposer shall be delineated separately for HCI to consider. Pricing should be summarized using the format provided in Section 6: Forms

K. Sample Contract and Service Level Agreement Documents

Proposers should include a sample Contract and Service Level Agreement.

L. Value Added Services

Please include any value-added services or additional optional products that your firm can provide in your submittal.

Section 4: Evaluation Criteria and Selection Process

HCI will conduct a comprehensive, fair, and impartial evaluation of proposals received in response to this procurement effort. All proposals will be evaluated by how well the proposal satisfies the described/stated needs, rather than how exactly the proposal matches the strictest interpretation of the terminology and design concepts stated herein. Newly emerging technologies, additional features, and the ability of the proposed solutions to adapt will be a consideration.

Evaluation Organization

- a. An Evaluation Committee will be established to score and evaluate the submitted proposals.
- b. The Evaluation Committee may include members from HCI's ownership group who have experience with these services. The Committee will be responsible for the proposal evaluation (including corporate reference checks).

Evaluation of the Proposals

HCI will evaluate the Proposers response and the extent to which it meets the requirements delineated in this RFP. All proposals submitted in response to this RFP will be scored based on the evaluation factors identified:

Evaluation Factors:

- Implementation services and strategy and Project Schedule
- Experience and references
- Cost
- Compliance with the requirements of the RFP and ability of the proposed software to satisfy requirements and specifications
- Vendor support and maintenance through implementation and after go-live

Short List

The evaluation factors will be used to assist the evaluation committee in determining a short list. Proposers will be notified by HCI if they have been selected for the short list. Please note, HCI reserves the right to not short list any and all Proposers if it is not in the best interest of HCI.

Interview

HCI reserves the right, as part of the evaluation process, to ask for additional materials, interview, or schedule site visits to any locations serviced by Proposers. Site visits may be scheduled or unscheduled as determined by HCI. If applicable, HCI shall contact Proposers to arrange a demonstration or interview.

Additional Investigations

HCI reserves the right to make such additional investigations as it deems necessary to establish the competence and financial stability of any firm submitting a proposal.

Intent to Negotiate

HCI reserves the right to invite the most qualified proposer to negotiate final terms and conditions, finalize scope clarification and confirm final pricing and payment terms. The information received from the negotiation shall be found in the final contract document. If the parties are unable to negotiate a satisfactory contract the negotiations will be terminated. HCI reserves the right to either begin negotiations with the qualified proposer that is next preferred or non-award the request for proposal.

Section 5: Forms

Pricing Proposal

Initial Project Costs

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| SaaS Fee (List by module) | \$ |
| Implementation Fees | \$ |
| Travel Costs | \$ |
| Additional Costs | \$ |
| Total Project Costs | \$ |

5 Year Total Cost of Operation

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Year 1 SaaS Fee | \$ |
| Implementation Fees | \$ |
| Travel Expenses | \$ |
| Year 2 SaaS Fee | \$ |
| Year 3 SaaS Fee | \$ |
| Year 4 SaaS Fee | \$ |
| Year 5 SaaS Fee | \$ |
| Total | \$ |

References

Reference 1

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Name: | |
| Address | |
| City, State, Zip Code | |
| Services Provided | |
| Accounts Billed | |
| Contact Person | |
| Contact Title | |
| Contact Email | |
| Contact Phone Number | |
| Go-Live Date | |
| System Replaced | |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Dates of Service | |
| # of Employees | |

Reference 2

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Name: | |
| Address | |
| City, State, Zip Code | |
| Services Provided | |
| Accounts Billed | |
| Contact Person | |
| Contact Title | |
| Contact Email | |
| Contact Phone Number | |
| Go-Live Date | |
| System Replaced | |

Reference 3

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Name: | |
| Address | |
| City, State, Zip Code | |
| Services Provided | |
| Accounts Billed | |
| Contact Person | |
| Contact Title | |
| Contact Email | |
| Contact Phone Number | |
| Go-Live Date | |
| System Replaced | |

Reference 4

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Name: | |
| Address | |
| City, State, Zip Code | |
| Services Provided | |
| Accounts Billed | |

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Contact Person | |
| Contact Title | |
| Contact Email | |
| Contact Phone Number | |
| Go-Live Date | |
| System Replaced | |

Reference 5

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Name: | |
| Address | |
| City, State, Zip Code | |
| Services Provided | |
| Accounts Billed | |
| Contact Person | |
| Contact Title | |
| Contact Email | |
| Contact Phone Number | |
| Go-Live Date | |
| System Replaced | |