REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

McDowell County Water System Resiliency Improvements Project

Engineering Design Services

OWNER: McDowell County, North Carolina

PROJECT: Water System Resiliency Improvements Phase 1 - Water Storage Tank Installation & Water Line Extension

PROJECT NO.: SRF-D-HEL-0046

AGREEMENT ID: 2000088982

FUNDING SOURCE: SRF Helene (SA-HMW) Funding – DR-4827-NC

SUBMITTAL DEADLINE: 12/04/2026 at 5:00 PM EST

SEND SUBMITTALS TO:

Hand Delivery:
McDowell County
ATTN: Aikman Kazee
69 N. Main Street
Marion, NC 28752

US Postal Service:
McDowell County
25 West Fort Street
Marion, NC 28752

Email (electronic copy): aikman.kazee@mcdowellnc.gov

Any questions about the submittal process should be directed to Aikman Kazee by email aikman.kazee@mcdowellnc.gov. Subject line should state, Water Resiliency Improvements. For more information, visit: https://mcdowellnc.gov/county/bid-opportunities

1.0 PURPOSE

The Owner is issuing this Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for Engineering Services Procurement to hire an engineering consultant that will be responsible for completing all needed engineering services on the following project:

McDowell County Water System Resiliency Improvements Phase 1 – Design and construction administration for the installation of a potable water storage tank and associated water line extension to provide emergency supply redundancy and improve system resiliency for the McDowell County/Nebo Water System (PWSID NC10-56-032), following Hurricane Helene disaster impacts.

2.0 SCOPE OF SERVICES

The full range of professional services will be further defined during project development, but may include the following:

- Preliminary engineering reports and feasibility studies
- Site selection and property acquisition support
- Design of potable water storage tank (sizing, structural, mechanical, hydraulic)
- Design of water transmission line from existing system to tank location
- Water line easement identification and property acquisition support
- Geotechnical investigation coordination
- Easement/property acquisition documentation and negotiations
- Utility conflict surveys and coordination
- Construction documents and specifications
- Permit applications and regulatory coordination
- Emergency Response Plan development (EPA/AWWA frameworks)
- Bidding and construction administration
- Property surveying and boundary documentation
- Inspection and testing coordination
- Project closeout and record documentation

3.0 SELECTION PROCESS & SCHEDULE

3.1 Advertisement

This RFQ will be advertised in local media, the County website, and distributed to consulting firms expressing interest in the project. The RFQ package represents the overall expectations of the Owner. Any changes or additional information will be submitted to interested parties by addenda.

3.2 Questions and Inquiries

Questions regarding the project or these requirements shall be directed to:

Aikman Kazee
Interim Deputy County Manager
Email: aikman.kazee@mcdowellnc.gov
Phone: (828) 652-2976

Any inquiries regarding this RFQ submittal package must be submitted 10 business days prior to the submittal deadline. Clarifications and additional information will be provided to all interested parties by addenda.

3.3 Qualifications-Based Selection

Pursuant to North Carolina General Statute 143-64.31 and federal procurement guidelines (2 CFR Part 200), the Owner will utilize a qualifications-based selection process. Fee proposals will not be considered in the initial stages of selection.

3.4 Short-List Selection and Interviews

The Owner's RFQ Selection Committee will evaluate written submittals based on the criteria identified in Section 4.0 below. The Committee will:

1. Score and rank all qualified submittals
2. Invite top 2–3 firms for interview (if determined necessary)
3. Conduct reference checks with past clients
4. Develop ranked list of most qualified firms

3.5 Fee/Cost Negotiations

Once the Owner completes evaluation and ranking, they will attempt to negotiate reasonable fees with the most qualified firm. If negotiations are unsuccessful, the Owner will negotiate with the next most qualified firm and so on until an agreement is reached.

3.6 Contract Execution

Upon successful fee negotiation, a Professional Services Agreement will be executed defining scope, schedule, deliverables, and insurance requirements.

The contract awarded to the selected firm must comply with all applicable federal procurement requirements including incorporating the contract provisions required under 2 CFR Part 200,

Appendix II into the final contract awarded by the County. By completing and responding to McDowell County's RFQ, the respondent agrees to be bound by these provisions.

4.0 SELECTION CRITERIA

Firms will be evaluated on written submittal content, interview performance (if held), and reference checks. Evaluation will focus on (in order of relative importance):

Experience

- Water System Design: Previously designed potable water storage tanks (100,000+ gallon capacity) for municipal or regional water systems
- Water Transmission Lines: Design of water transmission and distribution lines; experience with water line sizing, material selection, pressure requirements, and integration with storage tanks
- Small System Experience: Minimum 5 years designing projects for systems serving fewer than 5,000 connections
- Property Acquisition: Experience assisting local governments with easement identification, negotiation, documentation, and title clearance for utility corridors and water line ROW
- Federal Funding: Prior work on federally funded projects (SRF, CDBG-DR, ARPA, etc.)
- Geographic Familiarity: Project experience in western North Carolina or similar rural Appalachian regions (preferred)
- Disaster Recovery: Prior hurricane/disaster recovery project experience (preferred)
- Hydraulic Modeling: Experience with water system hydraulic modeling and tank/line integration analysis

Work Performance

- Past projects completed on schedule
- Projects managed within budgetary constraints
- High quality of work product
- Strong client relationships and communication
- Responsive to owner needs and changes
- Experience managing projects with multiple easements and property coordination

Capacity to Perform

- Staff level and experience of key personnel
- Availability of qualified PE responsible for project direction
- Adequacy of in-house resources vs. subconsultant support
- Current workload and ability to meet project timeline
- Professional liability insurance in force and adequate limits

Technical Approach

- Clear understanding of project scope and resiliency goals
- Sound methodology for site selection and evaluation
- Water line design approach and integration with tank
- Property acquisition strategy appropriate to rural setting, including multiple easement coordination
- Permitting and regulatory coordination approach
- Realistic schedule and milestone identification

- Emergency Response Plan development approach

5.0 SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

All costs for development of the written submittal and any oral presentation are the obligation of the submitting firm and shall not be remunerated by the Owner.

North Carolina law prohibits submitting any work product such as preliminary designs, sketches, or renderings of the proposed projects in response to this RFQ (N.C.G.S. 143-64.31(f)). Submittals of prohibited work product will not be considered and may be grounds for rejection. Work product of prior completed work may be submitted but is not required beyond what is requested in this RFQ.

5.1 Format and Delivery

Paper Submittals:

- Four (4) hard copies on 8.5" × 11" paper
- Maximum 25 pages (excluding front/back covers, table of contents, cover letter, resumes, and reference letters)
- 11-point font minimum, 1-inch margins
- Number all pages
- Use staples or paperclips; no binders

Electronic Submittal:

- One (1) PDF file via email to aikman.kazee@mcdowellnc.gov
- File size limit: 50 MB
- Submit by deadline date and time

Submittal must include:

- Four copies (may be reproductions)
- Electronic copy (PDF)

5.2 Submittal Content and Organization

Follow the outline below as a template. Organize content in the sequence listed:

Cover Letter (1 page)

- Expression of interest and commitment to project
- Identification of Responsible Charge PE (name, NC PE license number)
- Firm contact information (address, phone, email)
- Signature by authorized firm representative

Executive Summary (1–2 pages)

- Overview of firm's relevant experience
- Understanding of project scope and water system resiliency challenges
- Why your firm is best suited for this project
- Proposed approach in brief

Firm History and Background (2–3 pages)

- General firm background, history, and size
- Office locations and relevant departments
- Experience working with water utilities and local governments
- Experience with federally funded projects
- NC PE licenses held (list PEs by name and license number)
- Current employees vs. proposed hires for this project

Relevant Project Experience (6–8 pages)

List minimum 4 projects, maximum 8. For each project, provide:

- Project name, location, and year completed
- Owner/client name and contact information (phone/email for reference check)
- Description of project scope (focus on water tank design, water line design/installation, site selection, property acquisition, easements, federal funding, emergency response planning, etc.)
- Your firm's specific role and responsibilities
- Key challenges encountered and solutions implemented
- Relevance to McDowell County Water System Resiliency Improvements Project
- Project budget and timeline (if available)

Prioritize projects demonstrating:

- Water storage tank design for small systems (<5,000 connections)
- Water transmission line design and construction coordination
- Water line easement acquisition and ROW management
- Site selection and feasibility analysis
- Property acquisition with multiple easements or ROW requirements
- Federally funded projects (SRF, CDBG-DR, ARPA, etc.)
- Rural water systems in North Carolina
- Hurricane or disaster recovery projects
- Emergency Response Plan development
- Hydraulic modeling of water system integration

Proposed Project Team (3–4 pages)

Responsible Charge PE:

- Name, NC PE license number, years in profession
- Years of experience with water tank design and water line design for small systems
- Specific roles and responsibilities on this project
- Brief resume (1–2 pages) as attachment

Key Project Staff:

- Project Manager: Name, title, experience summary
- Designer/Hydraulic Modeler: Name, title, tank and water line design experience
- Water Line Designer: Name, title, transmission line and easement design experience
- Property Acquisition/Easement Specialist: Name, title, water utility easement and ROW experience
- Construction Administrator: Name, title, inspection/testing experience
- Other key personnel: Name, title, responsibilities

For each staff member: provide a brief resume (1–2 pages each) as attachments identifying relevant experience.

Subcontractors (if any):

- Identify and describe role of any subconsultants
- Provide subcontractor qualifications for geotechnical, surveying, or other specialized services
- Explain why subcontracting is necessary and how coordination will occur

Staffing Plan:

- Explain how team will be organized
- Identify communication protocols (meetings, reporting, escalation)
- Describe how you will maintain quality and consistency throughout project

Technical Approach (3–4 pages)

Site Selection & Evaluation:

- Methodology for identifying potential tank sites
- Evaluation criteria (topography, access, utilities, environmental constraints, distance to existing system)
- Coordination with County GIS and property assessment records
- Number of sites to be evaluated and comparison process

Tank Design:

- Approach to tank sizing based on system demand and emergency storage needs
- Design methodology (tank type, materials, structural approach)
- Geotechnical investigation and coordination process
- Hydraulic modeling integration with existing distribution system

- Appurtenances and operational considerations
- Elevation and pressure requirements relative to system

Water Line Design:
- Approach to transmission line sizing and material selection
- Routing analysis and optimization (minimizing length and easement conflicts)
- Pipe material selection (steel, DIP, PVC, etc.) and justification
- Pressure class and safety factor considerations
- Valve locations (isolation, check valves, air release, drain provisions)
- Integration with storage tank inlet/outlet design
- Coordination with existing water line infrastructure

Property Acquisition & Easement Support:
- How you will assist in identifying land/easement requirements for tank site and water line route(s)
- Methodology for evaluating alternative routes to minimize easement acquisition challenges
- Coordination with property owners and landowners
- Title clearance and title company coordination process
- Preparation of grant deeds and easement agreements suitable for utility corridors
- Recording and legal documentation requirements
- NC law compliance (G.S. Chapter 47G, easement recording)
- Experience managing multiple easements/ROW segments

Utility Conflict Survey & Coordination:
- Process for identifying existing utilities (electric, gas, telecommunications, sewer, etc.)
- Coordination protocols with utility companies for conflicts and depth requirements
- Design adjustments to avoid or manage conflicts

Permitting & Regulatory Coordination:
- Coordination with NC Department of Environmental Quality, Division of Water Infrastructure
- NC Building Code compliance for tank and line design
- Water supply permitting
- NEPA environmental review support
- Applicable federal compliance requirements (Davis-Bacon Act prevailing wages, federal forms)

Schedule:
- Estimated timeline for major phases (Phase 1: site selection & routing analysis; Phase 2: 60% design; Phase 3: 100% design; Phase 4: construction admin)
- Major milestones and estimated durations
- Assumptions regarding County approval timing and permit timelines
- Schedule for deliverables and County review periods
- Anticipated design duration from contract execution to bid-ready documents

Quality Assurance/Quality Control:
- Approach to internal review and verification

- Plan for PE responsible charge involvement
- Coordination meetings and reporting frequency

Project References (1 page)
Provide minimum 3 references from past local government clients:

- Client name and contact person (phone/email)
- Project name and brief description
- Relevance to McDowell County project (particularly water tank and/or water line projects)
- Project completion date

References will be checked by Owner. Be prepared to discuss past projects in detail.

Conflict of Interest Statement (1 page)
Disclose any conflicts of interest, including but not limited to:

- Current or recent (past 3 years) financial interests in McDowell County, City of Marion, or county contractors/consultants
- Current or recent business relationships with potential County staff or Board members
- Any circumstances that could be perceived as conflict of interest
- Plan to mitigate or eliminate any identified conflicts

Owner reserves the right to determine whether conflicts disqualify the firm or whether mitigation plan is acceptable.

Debarment Verification (attach search results)
Certification of non-debarment: Service provider and its principals are not debarred or suspended, nor are they otherwise on the Excluded Parties List System (EPLS) in the System for Award Management (SAM).

Submit proof of SAM.gov search:

- Print screen or PDF of SAM.gov search results
- Search date must be within 30 days of submittal deadline
- Results must show firm name and principals/owners are not listed

Verification available at: www.SAM.gov

Federal Compliance Certification (attach form)
Certification that firm understands:

- Project is funded by federal SRF Helene (SA-HMW) program
- All work must comply with 2 CFR Part 200 (federal procurement regulations)
- Prevailing wage rates (Davis-Bacon Act) apply to construction contracts
- Firm will comply with all federal, state, and local laws and regulations
- Firm will maintain federal records retention requirements (6 years minimum)

6.0 MISCELLANEOUS REQUIREMENTS

6.1 Professional Insurance

During the life of any potential contract, the Owner will require the following minimum insurance coverage:

- Professional Errors & Omissions (E&O): $1,000,000 per occurrence / $3,000,000 aggregate
- Commercial General Liability: $1,000,000 per occurrence
- Automobile Liability: $1,000,000 per occurrence (if vehicle use is part of project)
- Workers' Compensation: As required by North Carolina law

Certificate of Insurance required before contract execution and maintained throughout the project term.

6.2 Additional Information

The Owner reserves the right to request additional information or clarification of information provided in the response without changing the terms of this RFQ.

6.3 Confidentiality

Documents submitted as part of the response to this RFQ may become public records and may be subject to public disclosure. However, North Carolina General Statutes Section 132-1.2 and 66-152 provide a method for protecting certain documents from public disclosure.

If the consulting firm wishes to designate a document as "CONFIDENTIAL" or "TRADE SECRET":

5. Mark the document clearly on each page that contains confidential or trade secret information
6. Provide justification for confidentiality in cover letter
7. Owner will withhold such documents from public disclosure to the extent required or permitted by applicable law

Firms should be cautious about designating materials confidential, as it may limit Owner's ability to share information with other parties.

6.4 Federal Requirements

This solicitation is for services funded by SRF Helene (SA-HMW) federal funding. Therefore:

- All contracted consultants and subconsultants must be eligible to receive federal funds as provided by 2 CFR 200
- No debarred or suspended contractors may be utilized
- Prevailing wage rates (Davis-Bacon Act) will apply to construction contracts
- Consultant must assist in compliance with federal procurement requirements
- Records must be retained for minimum 6 years

6.5 Small Business and Minority Participation

Small and minority businesses, women's business enterprises, and labor surplus area firms are encouraged to participate in this RFQ. Prime contractors selected may use subcontractors. The following affirmative steps are expected:

8. Placing qualified small and minority businesses and women's business enterprises on solicitation lists
9. Assuring that small and minority businesses and women's business enterprises are solicited whenever they are potential sources
10. Dividing requirements, when economically feasible, into smaller tasks to permit maximum participation by small and minority businesses
11. Using services of such organizations as the Small Business Administration (SBA) and Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) as appropriate

6.6 Reservation of Rights

The Owner reserves the right to:

- Reject any or all submittals if determined insufficient in quality or responsiveness
- Issue addenda to clarify or modify RFQ requirements
- Request additional information or conduct interviews with proposing firms
- Negotiate scope, schedule, and fee with selected firm
- Re-advertise the RFQ if no submittals meet minimum qualifications
- Award contract to firm other than lowest-priced bidder

7.0 TIMELINE & PROCESS SCHEDULE

RFQ Advertisement/Issuance: 11/4/2026

Deadline for Questions: 11/18/2026

RFQ Addenda Issued (if needed): 11/20/2026

SOQ Submittal Deadline: 12/4/2026 at 5:00 PM EST

Evaluation Committee Review & Scoring: 12/9/2026

Interviews (if held): 12/16/2026

Reference Checks Completed: 12/16/2026

Firm Selection & Ranking: 12/21/2026

Contract Execution and Design Work to Follow

8.0 CONTACT INFORMATION

For Questions Regarding This RFQ:

Aikman Kazee
Interim Deputy County Manager
McDowell County
60 E. Court Street
Marion, NC 28752

Phone: (828) 652-2976
Email: aikman.kazee@mcdowellnc.gov

All questions must be submitted in writing by the deadline specified in Section 7.0. Responses will be issued as written addenda to all interested parties.