City of Huntsville, AL

Request for Information (RFI)

for

Partnership for Rocket City-Gig City

40-2015-5600-2

Issued: March 18, 2015
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1. Introduction
The City of Huntsville, Alabama (“City”) seeks a partner(s) (“Partner”) to operate fast, affordable broadband Internet and data services over publicly or privately-constructed fiber optics to meet Huntsville’s broadband goals.

Huntsville is a rapidly-growing city in North Alabama, halfway between Birmingham, Alabama and Nashville, Tennessee, that spans two counties – Limestone County and Madison County. The city limits stretch as far west as I-65, a major Interstate Highway in the eastern United States, and as far south as the Tennessee River. Known as “Rocket City” for its role in the U.S. space program for more than 50 years, the city is a location for the space industry and home to a wide range of technical businesses, government agencies, and institutions. Huntsville is a “forward-looking” community thanks in large part to its highly educated, motivated, and skilled work force; the continued presence and commitment of the space and defense industry; the development of new industry, including automotive, biotech, and pharmaceutical fields; research parks that are an incubator for science and technology; and, the educational institutions in the community, including a number of public and private colleges and universities, all of which benefit from, and in some cases even demand, the provisioning of advanced communications capabilities. In part because of this synergy of talent and technology, Huntsville is consistently named as one of the best places to live and work by a variety of national publications.

Huntsville Utilities (“HU”), is a municipal utility, operating in the City of Huntsville and Madison County. HU owns the electrical system and operates three separate systems (electric, gas and water). HU owns most of the utility poles within its service area. HU has critical communications needs requiring extensive dark fiber construction and is coordinating its plans for fiber construction with this process, including both the potential selection of a private Partner(s) for some or all of its fiber infrastructure needs as well as the possibility of a public-private partnership in furtherance of the City’s broadband goals. The City, together with Huntsville Utilities, (collectively “Huntsville”) desire solutions for attaining their broadband goals. City officials have prioritized pursuing the deployment of broadband access to 1) serve the growing demands in the public and private sector for affordable, reliable, and sophisticated broadband technology, 2) to support research parks and high-tech public and private facilities, and 3) to enable infrastructure communications. As part of its coordinated response to meeting the community’s broadband needs, the City requests information from private Partners interested in deploying a network to effectively provide the following:

- Citywide broadband services, to be delivered through a fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) network serving homes and businesses
• Broadband services to large businesses and institutions, especially in research and industrial parks throughout the City
• A research backbone ring interconnecting key institutions, which may include, but not necessarily be limited to, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the U.S. Army, University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH), Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University (Alabama A&M), and HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology, as well as providing connectivity to national fiber optic peering networks, such as Internet (2).

Huntsville and selected Partner(s) will collaboratively determine the most mutually beneficial partnership structure, which may include cost-sharing, infrastructure leasing, and profit-sharing arrangements. Huntsville is prepared to consider various business models, which could include the following scenarios:

• Private construction, operation, and maintenance privately-owned fiber optic infrastructure
• Public construction and private operation and maintenance of the fiber optic infrastructure and operates the fiber optic services over the Huntsville infrastructure
• Public-private partnership that jointly builds fiber to community anchor facilities, as well as utility infrastructure and a research backbone ring
• Private provisioning of services over the infrastructure
• Publicly or privately constructed open access network that allows other qualified providers to offer service over the network

Huntsville will also consider any combination of these models as well as proposed alternative suggestions from respondents.

2. Project Background
Recent completion of a citywide fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) network in neighboring Chattanooga and Google’s announcements of plans to build citywide fiber in the Nashville, Atlanta, and Raleigh-Durham areas have highlighted how citywide fiber is now a “need” rather than a “want” for large, technologically advanced cities in the region.

2.1 Overall Broadband Needs
The Huntsville area is unique in its highly technical landscape and the strong research, development, and governmental presence here. We seek robust connectivity to enable our community to keep pace with an increasingly digital world. We are interested in connectivity to
public schools, hospitals, higher education facilities, government sites, community anchors, businesses, data centers, and commodity Internet points-of-presence.

Given the broadband landscape in the region, Huntsville recognizes a need for consistent broadband availability across the community to eliminate the current patchwork quilt of connectivity. The network should be high-capacity and scalable, with low latency to reduce the number of hops to the Internet backbone. It should also offer a wide range of performance options (including symmetrical and high-speed services), and a variety of pricing options to support affordability for all of Huntsville. It is important for broadband service to extend to new residents and businesses as Huntsville continues to grow in population and annexes additional areas, and network design and implementation should take these growth factors into consideration.

Huntsville has also identified a need for a local high-speed backbone network for internal connectivity and connectivity to Internet(2) or a similar national peering point. It is contemplated that the proposed backbone could or would link educational and research institutions that may include UAH, Alabama A&M University, HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology, NASA Marshall Space Flight Center, and the U.S. Army’s Redstone Arsenal. The City seeks the most efficient network construction to meet these needs.

Though Huntsville is willing to consider all proposals for partnership, we prefer that the Partner(s) perform network construction and installation and that required City resources be minimal. Given that we expect the Partner(s)—and potentially subcontractors—to perform construction and installation, the City will dedicate resources to support its Partner(s) through plan review, coordination and inspection services to assure an expedited approach to construction and installation in the public right-of-way and on utility poles owned by HU and will work with the Partner(s) to facilitate work.

2.2 Specific Broadband Needs
Greater than 50 (fifty) Huntsville anchor facilities require fiber connections. These include fire stations, police training centers, traffic control locations, and emergency communications circuits.

Huntsville wants to prioritize broadband connections to Huntsville City Schools (HCS) facilities. Service to these K-12 public schools may be eligible for Federal E-rate funding, which we would like the Partner(s) to pursue. There currently are 37 school locations; three are connected over HU-owned fiber, while 34 lease managed services from a range of providers. These managed services connect the individual schools to the HCS data center located at 200 White Street at speeds from 50 Mbps to 200 Mbps. The data center, in turn, connects to the Internet through
connections provided by the Alabama Supercomputer Authority (1 Gbps) and TekLinks (300 Mbps).

The many higher education institutions in Huntsville—UAH, Alabama A&M University, Oakwood University, J.F. Drake State Technical & Community College, and Calhoun Community College—would benefit from more robust connections. Fiber to these institutions would promote and support education—both within the classroom and for distance education—career programs, and training for workforce diversification.

Huntsville has been at the center of advances in aerospace propulsion, Army aviation and missile programs for decades. While it continues this legacy of excellence going back to the Space Race, the community has diversified its knowledge-based economy into a variety of complementary and new areas. Huntsville is an integral part of the national energy research community with a strong federal government presence of the Army Corps of Engineers and its work on energy conservation. Cyber security, seen for many years in the community as an enabling technology, is becoming more and more of a critical mission and this has led to the creation of Cyber Huntsville, a community-led organization to better capitalize on the intellectual capital and industry base located here. Geospatial technology is another area in which Huntsville continues to grow. Companies in geospatial technology provide expertise in disaster response, infrastructure installation, and intelligence gathering functions. Huntsville is actively contributing to the growing body of knowledge related to the continued study of the human genome and the applications for personalized treatments for such diseases as cancer, post-traumatic stress disorder and others. The work done at HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology, a unique public-private partnership that brings non-profit researchers and for-profit companies together to shorten the time it takes to bring a product from bench-side research to bedside treatment, is merging the sciences with informatics. This requires significant amounts of data to be moved from Huntsville to locations throughout the world. The City believes more robust broadband can allow for the expansion of research, development, testing, and evaluation capabilities and improved solutions in all these areas.

HU requires approximately 250 to 300 miles of fiber to connect its major locations and approximately 90 substations. This total also includes dark fiber to connect to collector locations for an advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) network to be deployed in coming years.

The research and industrial community is integral to the economy of Huntsville; providing robust connectivity to the Huntsville’s numerous research and industrial parks is one of our main goals. (See Figure 1 on page 6 for a map of research and industrial park locations.)
High-speed residential connections are also important to Huntsville. As just one example, high-speed broadband connections would support higher education faculty and the many local students who live off campus. The colleges and universities are providing increasingly media-rich curricula and remote-learning content, and students are producing video content and creating simulations. Enhanced residential connectivity will also help the increasing number of high-tech employees and stay-at-home consultants who telecommute to work. These employees work on highly sophisticated programs that have significant data needs.

2.3 Existing Broadband

The City has a number of communications service providers in the area, including AT&T, CenturyLink, Comcast, Level 3 Communications, and WOW!, which it has franchised or granted the right to use the public right-of-way to provide services.\(^1\) Indications are, however, that the local appetite and need for greater and more uniformly available broadband services both now and in the future cannot be met with current and projected service levels. In order to respond to the current needs of public institutions, Huntsville has fiber assets in place to serve some existing schools, government buildings, and public infrastructure. Indications are, however, that these assets are not adequate to serve current and future public sector needs.

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\(^1\) Communications providers pay to Huntsville compensation for the use and occupancy of its rights-of-way and utility poles, including, but not necessarily limited to, current pole attachment fees of $19 per pole, per year, and franchise fees of 5% of gross revenues.
Figure 1: Research and Industrial Park Locations (within Huntsville and local area)
3. Background on the City of Huntsville

The City of Huntsville is a center for research, engineering, computing, and other technical endeavors. According to the U.S. Census, the City has a population of 186,254 with 84,949 housing units and about 15,000 businesses.²

Huntsville is primarily located in Madison County and also extends into Limestone County. It is the seat of Madison County government and is home to several higher education institutions, including the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) and Alabama A&M University.

Known as “Rocket City,” Huntsville has been home to NASA Marshall Space Flight Center (MSFC) since 1960. MSFC (supported by many private sector contractors located in and around Huntsville) provide NASA “with mission-critical design, development and integration of the launch and space systems required for space operations, exploration, and scientific missions.”³

The largest employer in the City is the U.S. Army/Redstone Arsenal, with approximately 31,000 employees. Redstone Arsenal tenant organizations focus on R&D, engineering, logistics, materiel life-cycle management, and foreign military sales. Redstone is headquarters for the four-star Army Materiel Command, the Army Aviation and Missile Command, Army Space and Missile Defense Command, and various program executive offices. Redstone is also home to significant activities for the Missile Defense Agency, Department of Justice, and the Intelligence Community.

Other major employers within the City include the Huntsville Hospital System, Toyota, the Boeing Company, and Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC).⁴

Cummings Research Park (CRP)—the second largest R&D park in the country⁵—lies within the City of Huntsville. The park’s tenants include public entities such as UAH (a primary anchor) and numerous private companies, including Emerson, ADTRAN, and some of the world’s most recognized aerospace companies such as Raytheon, General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, and Northrop Grumman.⁶

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² “Huntsville, Alabama,” State & County QuickFacts, U.S. Census Bureau, [http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/01/0137000.html](http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/01/0137000.html)
³ “History Features,” Marshall Space Flight Center, NASA, [http://www.nasa.gov/centers/marshall/history](http://www.nasa.gov/centers/marshall/history)
In addition to the broadband needs of tenants at CRP, there is significant use of information technology by the large community of engineers, researchers, and information technology developers at small businesses throughout the City, as well as by residents.

As the City continues to grow and expand, its numerous local technical and scientific industries will likely also grow. Robust, citywide connectivity will support growth in new and burgeoning high-tech industries as well. The expertise to advance these and other industries already exists in Huntsville, and the City’s goal is to nurture an environment conducive to expansion of the many thriving industries in the City.

The educational needs of Huntsville residents—from K-12 through higher education—are also a factor in the City’s broadband goals. The Huntsville City Schools district has more than 60 pre-kindergarten programs and approximately 40 K-12 schools, and serves more than 20,000 students.\(^7\) In 2012, the Huntsville City Schools eliminated textbooks in favor of digital learning. As part of the Huntsville City Schools Digital 1:1 Initiative, each student receives either an iPad (K-2) or a laptop computer (grades 3-12). Huntsville City Schools is the largest system to go completely digital and has served as a model for other systems across the country.

### 4. Goals of this RFI

This RFI has been initiated to enable Huntsville to identify one or more Partners that will provide network services to end-users within the city limits using public or private Partner-built fiber infrastructure. Huntsville seeks input from potential Partners regarding the terms and conditions under which Partners would operate and manage Internet and other network services to homes, businesses, and institutions throughout Huntsville.

#### 4.1 Statement of Need

The City anticipates its Partner(s) will serve a broad range of customers with a variety of services ranging from dark fiber connectivity for Huntsville facilities and other key institutions and locations, to a retail offering that serves business and residential customers.

We are interested in Partners that will use the fiber to provide ultra-high-speed network access. We define ultra-high-speed as being at or above the multiple-hundred megabit-per-second range scalable to a gig and beyond.

We want to understand the Partner’s approach and past performance for kick-off, marketing, and execution in other communities, and how a Partner will tailor its prior experience to meet the City’s unique needs.

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This RFI is released for the purpose of optimizing Huntsville’s initiative and incorporating the needs and creative ideas of potential FTTP service providers. This information will assist in finalizing Huntsville’s FTTP network design planning and defining the relationship between Huntsville and its Partner(s).

- Private construction, operation, and maintenance privately-owned fiber optic infrastructure
- Public construction and private operation and maintenance of the fiber optic infrastructure and operates the fiber optic services over the Huntsville infrastructure
- Public-private partnership that jointly builds fiber to community anchor facilities, as well as utility infrastructure and a research backbone ring
- Private provisioning of services over the infrastructure
- Publicly or privately constructed open access network that allows other qualified providers to offer service over the network
- Any combination of these models as well as proposed alternative suggestions from respondents

Though no contracts or formal relationships will be established through this RFI, it will provide valuable information that will significantly influence Huntsville’s fiber project and identify a community of potential service providers for Huntsville’s homes, businesses, and institutions. It will also enable Huntsville to understand the capabilities and interests of potential Partners and determine how to best include them.

All interested service providers are strongly encouraged to respond. We welcome the response of incumbent service providers, as well as competitive providers, nonprofit organizations, public cooperatives, and entities that are not traditional Internet service providers, but are interested in offering service under innovative business models (application providers, as an example). Nontraditional providers may respond as part of a partnership with a network service provider, or may provide a separate response outlining their approach.

4.2 Goals

There are several central goals to the City’s FTTP network undertaking. Respondents to this RFI and any possible subsequent request for proposals (RFP) should indicate whether and how their proposal serves these goals:

1. Serving a wide area of the City as well as a diverse customer base with services that are reliable, scalable, and affordable.
2. Offer unique services and speeds and network performance better than that provided by the incumbent networks as advertised in Huntsville. For example, providing hundreds
of megabits or gigabit speeds, providing symmetrical services, providing services that continue operating when commercial power fails, providing service level agreements, providing services on demand, and providing direct connectivity between locations throughout Huntsville.

(3) Propose a fiber optic ring as described in Section 1 to interconnect to the noted institutions to each other and to national backbone networks.

(4) Enhance connectivity to secure cloud services and offer predictability, redundancy in broadband services.

(5) Respond to the needs of citizens of Huntsville

(6) Respond to the needs of health care providers and patients.

(7) Respond to the needs of the research and development community.

(8) Respond to the needs of K-12 and higher education institutions.

(9) Respond to the needs of the large and small businesses.

(10) Provide cost-effective services for price-sensitive customers and flexible pricing plans.

5. Contributions and Assets

Huntsville has conducted surveys and determined that Huntsville residents, businesses, and other entities desire better connectivity. Simply put, Huntsville provides a willing and ready customer base. Better connectivity is one of the most requested items on the City’s Imagine Huntsville site, a web portal for citizens to suggest ideas for the City. The desire for increased connectivity has led to the creation of a grassroots organization known as Launch Fiber. At this stage, the City itself does not wish to provide services to end-users, but will work with the Partner(s) to help facilitate broadband deployment.

5.1 Facilitating Access

Huntsville will work with the Partner(s) to facilitate the smoothest possible access in construction and installation of the network. Once we have selected our Partner(s), Huntsville is prepared to promptly move forward with the partnership. An important component of any fiber build is franchising and permitting. The City will assign a point of contact (POC) for the Partner(s) and/or its contractor(s), and commits to provide services to help prevent or lessen conflicts in the Partner’s construction schedule.
Huntsville will provide access to its GIS resources. Map layers include, but are not limited to, City utility poles, electric lines and gas, sewer, water, and storm drainage facilities.

Some new commercial developments, including Redstone Gateway near Redstone Arsenal, have comprehensive conduit banks in all streets installed by the City. The banks are under the control of the commercial developer. The Partner may approach the developers for use of the conduit in providing services. The City is committed to facilitating discussions.

5.2 Assets
Respondents should identify any existing assets they may have in the Huntsville area and how they intend to leverage those for this project.

Partners should expect to pay franchise fees to the City and pole attachment fees to Huntsville Utilities. At present, the pole attachment fee to HU-owned poles is $19 per pole, per year. The City charges a franchise fee of 5% of gross revenues for the use and occupancy of its right-of-way. Respondents should consider whether they propose to off-set the fees with in-kind contributions, including conduit and dark fiber.
6. Map and General Construction Parameters

Figure 2: Map of Huntsville, maps.huntsvilleal.gov

7. Response Requirements, Procedures, and Schedule

7.1 Requirements

Huntsville requests the following information—in as much detail as is practicable—from respondents:

1. Affirm that you are interested in this partnership and explain how you would address the core goals of serving homes, businesses, and institutional users for fiber and high-speed, affordable internet up to a gig and beyond as well as the other requirements listed herein. If you cannot meet one or more of those requirements, indicate the requirements to which you take exception and provide an explanation of the exception(s).

2. Provide a statement of experience discussing past performance, capabilities, and qualifications. Identify other networks your organization has designed, built, maintained, or
operated; include the levels of broadband speed, availability, and adoption among different categories of end-users, as well as unique capabilities or attributes. Discuss other partnerships you have undertaken with other service providers, governmental agencies, or non-profit entities. Describe the nature of the projects and your organization’s role, and the risk and investment undertaken by your firm. Explain how your organization is a suitable partner for this project.

3. At a very high level, summarize the technological and operational approach you would use for this project. What approach would you use to interconnect with the Internet and other public networks? How would you perform network management? Under what scenarios would you incorporate route diversity or other special features in the fiber? At what sort of facility (or facilities) would you place network electronics? Would you require direct, dedicated fiber connectivity to all premises or would a passive optical network be suitable in some cases? What is your technological roadmap and capability to increase the capacity of the network after it is built? Summarize the business approach you would use for the project. How would your business plan help meet Huntsville’s goals? What are the key assumptions? What are your main areas of risk, and how can Huntsville help reduce the risks?

4. What is your proposed schedule for implementing service? Offer a timeline with key milestones. Are there areas of Huntsville you would recommend be constructed first? Explain how you would determine which areas should be constructed first, and why. Describe your plan for service within constructed areas. Will you build infrastructure to pass all homes and businesses within a service area or only focus on certain types of customer (for example, residential, large businesses, or customers who make service requests)?

5. Are you proposing to construct the fiber? If so, describe your past experience in constructing networks. Provide estimates of overall and per mile costs of construction and include your main assumptions.

6. Are you proposing to purchase or lease fiber from Huntsville? If so, provide a high-level description of the architecture and coverage area of the fiber you would want built. Provide the required schedule for fiber construction. Describe the demarcation between the Huntsville’s operations and your operations. Propose the business arrangement and describe how your organization and Huntsville would share risk.
7. Describe your ability to perform network maintenance on an ongoing and as-needed basis. Provide estimates of the operating cost of maintaining the fiber optic outside plant for a Huntsville fiber network and include your main assumptions.

8. What, if any, are the financial requirements or other requirements you have of Huntsville in order to enter into a partnership on this project? If you do not address this question as to financial requirements, it will be assumed that you are interested in the partnership but have no financial requirements whatsoever of the City.

9. What service options would you plan to offer over this network (for example, data only, voice and data, a triple play of voice, data and cable television, institutional fiber services, business fiber services, dark fiber leasing, lambda services, etc.)? What download/upload or symmetrical speeds would you offer and guarantee to end-users? How will your residential and business offerings differ? What options would you offer in terms of minimum contract durations?

10. Discuss how your services can help increase the breadth of information technology services in Huntsville. For example, describe how the network will improve Huntsville residents’ and businesses’ ability to use or provide cloud, data center, and “Big Data” services. Describe whether and how your services can reduce latency of connections elsewhere on the Internet, relative to current offerings.

11. Provide a statement of how your proposed participation would help Huntsville’s economic development goals. Describe your interests and plans to hire local contractors and suppliers and use manufacturers of gear in Huntsville, and how your participation would help local job creation. Describe your current relationships with local businesses in Huntsville such as contractors and suppliers of gear. Describe your relationships with socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses in Huntsville as well as your interest and plans to engage them in this project.

12. In negotiating a franchise with the City for the use and occupancy of its rights-of-way, are there any terms that the respondent would, at this time, like to propose, including in-kind services?

13. The City is working on a Rights-of-Way Construction and Administration Ordinance, with a uniformly applied approach in order to, among other goals, manage and control the use and occupancy of the rights-of-way in order to keep them functioning and operational for their dedicated or intended purpose; maintain them in good condition, order, and repair; control the orderly flow of vehicle and pedestrian traffic; administer their use by public and
private users, including users’ facilities; preserve the public asset; and recover costs. What are elements that you would consider important in such an ordinance?

14. Please provide three (3) references, including contact information, from previous contracts or partnerships.

**7.2 Intent to Respond**

All interested respondents are asked to submit Exhibit A – Intent to Respond Form via email by **April 1, 2015** to harrison.diamond@huntsvilleal.gov or via hard copy to:

City of Huntsville  
Attn: Harrison Diamond  
City of Huntsville Alabama  
P.O. Box 308  
Huntsville, Alabama 35804

**7.3 Procedures**

Questions related to this RFI should be emailed to harrison.diamond@huntsvilleal.gov no later than 5:00 p.m. on April 1, 2015. All questions and responses to questions will be considered public and distributed to all entities that have expressed the intent to respond.

Final RFI submissions must be received by close of business on **April 24, 2015**.

Please send three (3) hard copies of the RFI response to the address above. Additionally, please email a final copy of the RFI response in PDF format to harrison.diamond@huntsvilleal.gov by April 24, 2015. Although written and PDF format are preferred, formal presentations in person or via video-conferencing will be available upon request and may be scheduled by contacting Harrison Diamond at the email address in Section 7.2.

Clearly identify and label any proprietary, competitive sensitive and/or confidential information as such. Although every effort will be made to protect any Company’s restricted information, please be aware that City of Huntsville is subject to the disclosure requirements of the Alabama Open Records Act and in certain circumstances may be compelled by applicable law and judicial authority to disclose records in its possession.
7.4 Timeline
The following is the schedule for responding to this RFI. The schedule is subject to change:

- March 18, 2015 – RFI Released
- April 1, 2015 – Deadline for Submitting Letter of Intent to Respond to RFI
- April 1, 2015 – Deadline for Submitting Questions
- FINAL DEADLINE – April 24, 2015 – RFI Responses Due

The City of Huntsville thanks you in advance for your thoughtful response.
Exhibit A – Intent to Respond Form

City of Huntsville, Alabama
Partnership for Deployment of a Citywide Fiber Optic Network
Request for Information (RFI)

Please complete and return this document by April 1, 2015 via email or hard copy to:

Harrison Diamond, Business Relations Officer
Harison.diamond@huntsvilleal.gov
PO Box 308 Huntsville, AL 35804

Schedule:

RFI Release: March 18, 2015
Intent to Respond: April 1, 2015
Respondent Questions Due: April 1, 2015
City Response to Questions: April 10, 2015
RFI Responses Due: April 24, 2015

Intent to Respond:
We intend to respond to the Huntsville RFI “Partnership for Deployment of a Citywide Fiber Optic Network”. Our contact information for the responses is:

Company Name: ______________________________________________________
Address: ____________________________________________________________
Phone: ______________________________________________________________
Contact: _____________________________________________________________
Title: ________________________________________________________________
Phone: ______________________________________________________________
Email: _______________________________________________________________

Is your response a joint proposal with other organizations or entities? ____________
If yes, with whom? (List all.)