

Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) is requesting responses to this RFP from qualified firms to provide 24/7/365 Network Operations Services and Support for the Project THOR Network.

**Proposals will be accepted until 5 PM MT on Friday, April 24, 2025.**

**Questions will be accepted until close of business April 21, 2025, by 5 PM MT.**

Proposals will be sent via email.

**Nate Walowitz, Regional Broadband Director**

[nwalowitz@nwccog.org](mailto:nwalowitz@nwccog.org)

Only proposals received via email by the deadline will be accepted. No proposals which are received after the time and date stated above will be

NWCCOG will conduct an objective evaluation process based on the stated criteria. NWCCOG reserves final discretion in awarding the contract based on the best interests of the project.

We recognize the challenge of providing a complete response for rural Colorado to all our requirements by a single vendor contained in this RFP. While our desire is for a full response, we will accept and consider partial bid responses. When providing a partial bid response, please clearly indicate which portions of this opportunity your proposal addresses up front. NWCCOG will also consider full solution responses that include sub-contractors, so long as this relationship and qualifications of all organizations in the response are included.

## **REGIONAL BROADBAND PROJECT OVERVIEW**

In 2019 NWCCOG launched Project THOR (Network) to deliver affordable, accessible, reliable middle mile broadband to communities across Northwest Colorado and other regions statewide. The Network provides support for state, regional and local government agencies, public safety agencies (including 911 services), educational institutions, businesses, ISPs, and wireless carriers.

Project THOR is operated as a cooperative comprised of local governments, Rural Electric Cooperatives, hospital districts and county school systems. The network has 22 points of presence from simple optical drops to DWDM and Ethernet Meet Me Centers (MMC) in local communities. Each MMC has a minimum of fully resilient 100 gigabytes to terabytes of lit and dark fiber available capabilities

The Network provides resilient broadband transport, IP services, network management and maintenance for our network equipment, leased and lit fiber infrastructure. The Network Operator should be able to demonstrate core telecommunications competency, history of successful network operations for government and/or commercial organizations as well as ability to support the unique requirements of Project THOR.

Network nodes or Meet Me Centers (MMC) and small Meet Points are established at government and community anchor data center locations. Additional Meet Me Centers will be developed as needed to serve expanding participant needs. See the map in Exhibit A for a visual depiction of the network architecture.

NWCCOG reserves the right to refine and/or clarify the scope of work described in this Scope of Work based on bidder questions. This information will be sent to all potential bidders if they register their interest in responding to this RFP by sending an email to [nwalowitz@nwccog.org](mailto:nwalowitz@nwccog.org).

NWCCOG also reserves the right to request Best and Final Offers (BAFO) from Network Operators during a down selecting process to negotiate final pricing with the selected vendor(s). Contract terms and conditions will be provided to the awarded vendor only.

All responses are confidential and NWCCOG does not consider the selection process to be open to public disclosure or review.

### **Scope of Work**

The purpose of this RFP is to find a qualified and experienced Network Operator, regional smart hands, and IT support to help us continue to support the Project THOR network.

- 1) The Network Operator will be responsible for continuous 24/7/365 monitoring and management of the Network.
- 2) Smart hands resources will need to be available to respond on site in the region within 5 hours of report outage and resource need determination.
- 3) IT and network security support for network software servers, firewalls, and software

The Network Operator will monitor and manage the Project THOR network on behalf of governments, IP, and last mile providers acquire connectivity on the Network between the Meet me Centers, Meet Points, and their points of presence on an as needed basis. The primary roles of the Network Operator are to operate, monitor, and manage the Network. This includes configuration and maintenance of network components, fiber optic network components and ports, capture and report network outages and anomalies including traffic throughput issues and assist NWCCOG in managing projects for the continued enhancement of the network as required.

The smart hands provider will provide network routing/switching and DWDM optical network equipment installation, repair replacement of full chassis, SFPs, power supply and fan modules, network equipment cards in

rack mounted chassis and troubleshooting assistance. In addition, fiber optic cross connection, fiber and port cleaning, fiber connection repair/replacement and fiber optic connection troubleshooting skills will be required. The provider will supply all necessary equipment to accomplish these tasks.

The IT support provider will monitor and manage Project THOR network operations servers, network IP addressing, Microsoft Server software environment, network equipment management software, Sophos Firewalls and hardware to support the noted software environments.

## **Requirements**

### **1. Network Operator**

**1.1 Monitoring and management of the Network:** The Network Operator should have capabilities for 24/7 monitoring and develop a plan for inspection of network equipment, cabling and any Network Operator owned or contracted infrastructure and maintenance of the Network to prevent down-time and minimize the likelihood of network outages; Network performance and outage reports will be sent to the Network Administrator. The Network is comprised of a total of 15 Ekinops DWDM devices and 23 Extreme Networks devices for a total of 39 devices. The Project THOR network utilizes dark fiber from a number of CDOT and rural electric cooperatives and lit circuits from Lumen.

- a. Remotely manage and monitor physical equipment and Meet Me Center facilities in partnership with Meet Me Center owners/operators
  - a. Troubleshoot issues/outages and initially determine potential cause for failures/issues
  - b. Coordinate access control
  - c. Monitor power supplies (AC, DC, Battery) and backup generator availability and maintenance
  - d. Rack space available and Cross Connect and customer connection accurate documentation
- b. Create and manage issue/outages through use of a trouble ticketing system
- c. Provide timely issue/outage advisories to Network Stakeholders and customers
- d. If necessary, escalate and communicate issues with appropriate vendors
- e. Communicate issue resolution and/or issue/service restoration
- f. Create and send After Action Review that includes issue/outage details, times, impacts, resolution steps taken and root cause analysis
- g. Provide notification to Network users of maintenance and emergency issues in compliance with the terms and conditions of the Network Operator Agreement
- h. Keep a regular weekday schedule and provide a plan for off-hour 24-hour service as needed for network support and emergencies
- i. Other support activities as needed

### **1.2 Technical Network Provisioning and Support**

The Network Operator should have capabilities, either directly or through the Network Operator, to connect Meet Me Center users on the Network, have capabilities to troubleshoot network connectivity issues, and provision network electronics. The Network Operator should specify relevant certifications, qualifications, and awards.

- a. Maintain an inventory of fiber and Network assets and fiber that may be available to be leased through IRUs

- b. Operate DWDM equipment from Ekinops and network switch/routing equipment from Extreme Network using their native network management tools
- c. Perform network monitoring and moves, adds, and changes using network management tools from Ekinops and Extreme Networks
- d. The Network Operator will work with NWCCOG to ensure that the Network map and inventory of all assets and ports in use is accurate at all times
- e. Perform on-site emergency and planning network management activities. This may be performed by respondents personnel or subcontracted personnel
- f. Coordinate, schedule, track and document smart hands resources
  - a. Dispatch and coordinate either staff, MMC owners, or contracted smart hands resources to resolve emergency and non-emergency issues
- g. Onboarding and offboarding of new connection additions and subtractions
- h. Port, routing and services reconfiguration
- i. Other support activities as needed

### **1.3 Physical and Network Routing and Equipment Maintenance**

The Network Operator will be responsible for coordinating locates, physical maintenance, as well as Ekinops and Extreme Networks equipment maintenance and upgrades of the Network.

- b. Immediately receive, communicate network issues, work with equipment and underlying fiber network providers, equipment vendors,
- c. track issues and work to resolve emergency issues
- d. Scheduled network equipment maintenance and upgrade management
- e. Configuration management
- f. Upgrades
- g. Patches
- h. Reports
- i. Warranty Service Compliance
- j. Other support activities as needed

### **1.4 Reports and Meetings**

- a. NWCCOG will work with the Network Operator to specify required reports and reporting intervals. Minimally, reporting will include overall network traffic, traffic by network destination, network traffic by port, including moves, adds, change reporting, network uptime and network link or equipment outage reporting (including length of outage, customers affected, cause of outage and resolution).
- b. The Network Operator will be available to strategize network design with NWCCOG (Network Owner). They will also be available to meet and participate with Project THOR Stakeholder group reporting during meetings and helping with innovation and future planning of the network. The Network Operator will partner with NWCCOG to communicate network challenges, outages, and opportunities.

## **2.0 Smart Hands On Site Installation, Troubleshooting, and Maintenance**

Vendors should provide pricing for optional Smart Hands services, including but not limited to emergency on-site support, equipment installations, network expansions, and troubleshooting. Pricing should indicate availability (e.g., 24/7, business hours only?) and response time guarantees. Response times with a maximum site arrival time of 5 hours or less is desired.

- a. Perform on-site equipment and fiber maintenance as needed
- b. Coordinate on-site equipment installation, commissioning, and service order management
- c. Port connection and fiber patch support for network reconfiguration, moves, adds, and changes based on connection requests
- d. Other support activities as needed
- e. Provide equipment needed to perform the above services

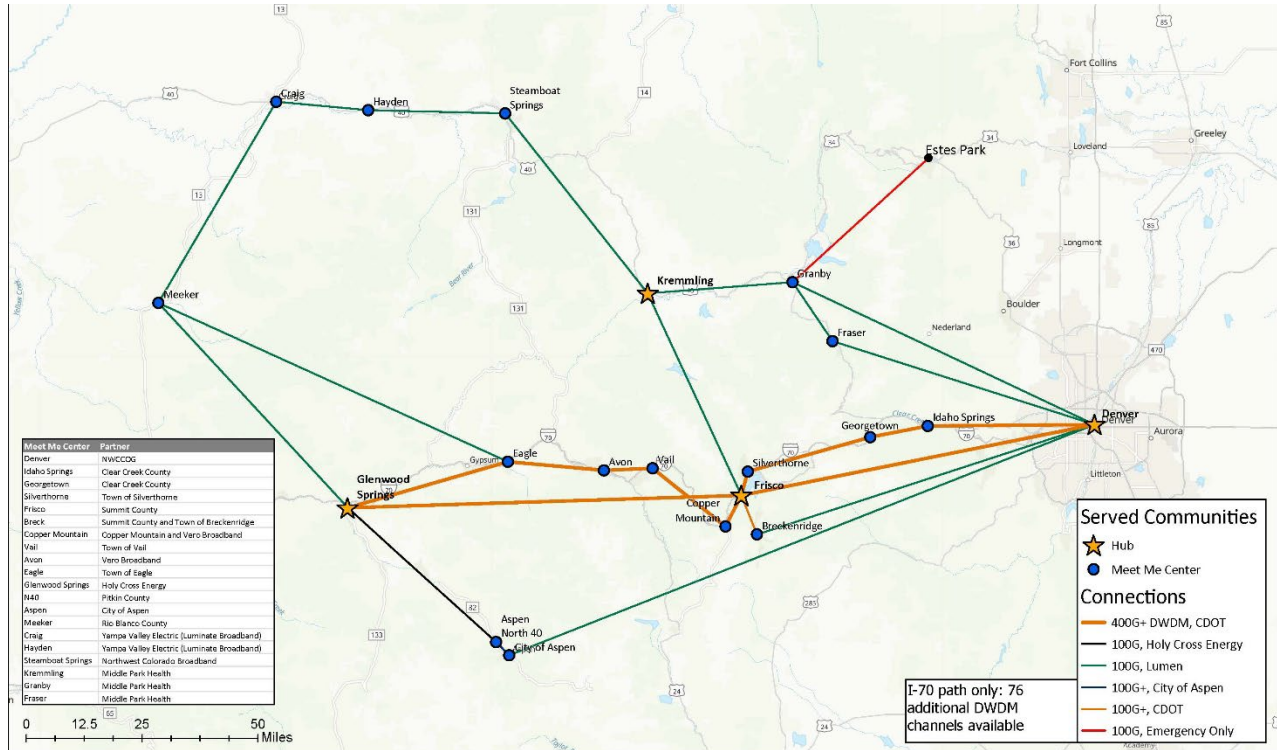
### **3.0 IT Support and Network Management Security**

The IT support provider will monitor and manage the Project THOR network operations servers in Denver, instituting and managing a Network Security Plan (including an annual security audit) and developing a process for secure third parties to securely access network equipment support resources when appropriate

- a. Manage network IP addressing for equipment and network operations
- b. Manage Microsoft Server servers and software environment,
- c. Network equipment management server software,
- d. Sophos Firewalls and hardware to support the noted software environments
- e. Scheduled network equipment maintenance and upgrade management
- f. Configuration management
- g. Upgrades
- h. Patches
- i. Reports
- j. Warranty Service Compliance
- k. Firewall management and configuration
- l. Security management and patching
- m. Intrusion detection
- n. Other support activities as needed

# EXHIBIT A

## PROJECT THOR NETWORK ARCHITECTURE

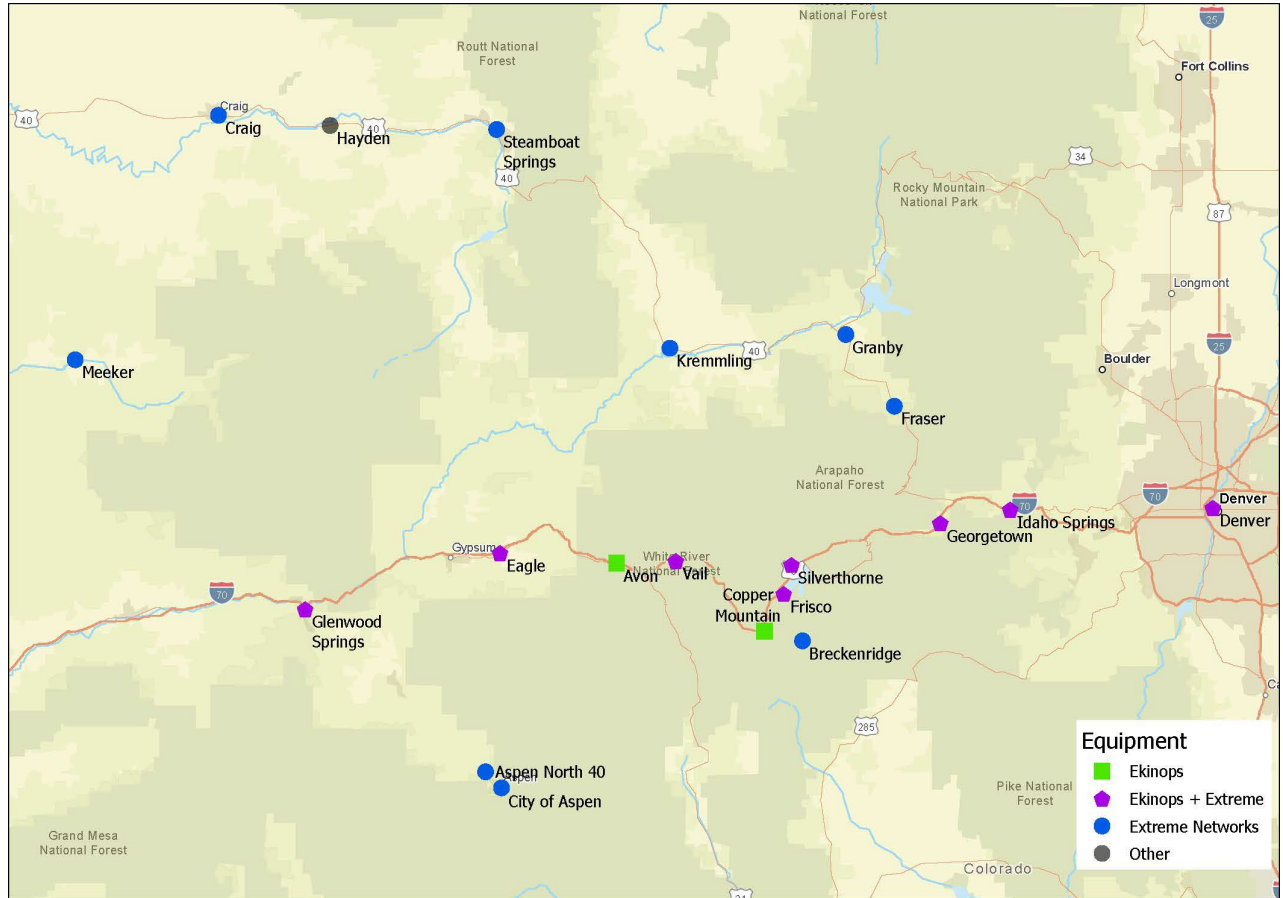


Project THOR Network Map

Date Exported: January 24, 2025

# EXHIBIT B

## Project THOR Network Equipment Location Map



# Project THOR Equipment Map

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Date Exported: January 24, 2025

## Service Level Requirements Request

Trouble	Severity	Time to Respond	Target Resolution Deadline
Public Safety Agency Services affected (except Add/Change request)	Critical+	30 minutes	1 Hour or As Soon As Practical
Service not available (all services and functions unavailable)	Critical	1 hour	2 Hours
Significant degradation of service (>5 subscribers or business critical functions affected)	High	1 hour	4 Hours
Limited degradation of service <5 subscribers or functions affected, business process can continue)	Medium	4 hours	8 hours
Small service degradation (business process can continue, one subscriber affected) or Add/Change request	Low	8 hours	48 hours



## Response Requirements

Respondents must provide the following information along with their response:

A cover letter stating the name, address and telephone number of the proposing Vendor. This letter must bear the signature of the person who has the authority to make the proposal for the firm.

Individual or Company Overview: A descriptive background/history.

State principal business location and any other service locations. What is your primary line of business?

How long have you been providing network operator services?

State how many locations where your services are now in use.

Are you a single source provider, or will subcontractors also be used to support Project THOR?

### 1. Statement of relevant qualifications and experience.

**2. Project approach:** Network Operators must address each task described in the Scope. Describe your approach, methods, tools, and how these requirements will be met. Additional and alternative approaches may be included including items not listed in the scope.

**3. SLA Plan and NOC Services:** Network Operators must propose recommendations for providing services that will meet quality of service and carrier-standard service level agreements (SLA's). Specifically include a Mean-Time-To-Repair, emergency and non-emergency response time. Network Operators must also include detailed information regarding Network Operation Center (NOC) services.

**4. Project team:** Include a statement that your response includes the expert technical capability to provide the services, the manpower to execute the services either on-site or remotely. Include resume(s) or bios of individual(s) who will be performing the work. Network Operators must include certifications.

**5. Subcontractor plan:** Network Operators must identify subcontractors, provide company information and clearly identify those tasks that the subcontractors will be responsible for. Also indicate if you have worked with these subcontractors before and at what capacity.

**6. References:** Please provide a minimum of three (3) references where your firm and/or your proposed project team have deployed a similar service. Please include client's name, address, phone number, e-mail address, and description of work.

**7. Financial statements:** Include information relevant to your financial stability: financial statements, revenues over the past three (3) years, any pending lawsuits or legal actions against your company, and contact information for your financial institution. Include your coverage for general liability, workers comp, professional liability and errors & omissions insurances.

**8. Pricing:** Proposal must include an annual price for services. NWCCOG is open to considering optional services proposed in addition to the services described in this RFP.

## INNOVATION & COMMENT

Network Operator may include any other information that is believed to be relevant but is not specifically asked for in this RFP. Vendor may explain in detail any innovation, alternatives, or more cost-effective approaches available in any area of the RFP. Network Operator may provide suggestions of other products or services available that may assist the Region.

## **LOCAL PREFERENCE**

Preference will be given to Colorado companies, and companies with Colorado local resources or Colorado partners to support the objectives of this RFP.

## **CONTRACT**

NWCCOG anticipates awarding a 3-year contract, subject to performance reviews, with possible additional option years. Split awards will be issued as appropriate.

## **KEY TARGET DATES**

Written questions will be addressed until 4/21/2025 at 5 PM MT

Written responses due via email 4/24/2025 by 5 PM MT

## **NETWORK OPERATOR QUALIFICATIONS**

Proposals will be considered only from Network Operators who have experienced personnel and necessary facilities to provide the required services. The NWCCOG may request information substantiating the information provided. Previous and current experience with the current Project THOR network hardware will be preferred. Failure to provide this information may result in respondent's proposal being declared non-responsive.

## **SMART HANDS QUALIFICATIONS**

Proposals will be considered only from organizations who have experienced personnel and necessary facilities to provide the required services. The NWCCOG may request information substantiating the information provided. Previous and current experience with the current Project THOR network hardware will be preferred. Failure to provide this information may result in respondent's proposal being declared non-responsive.

## **IT SUPPORT AND SECURITY QUALIFICATIONS**

Proposals will be considered only from IT and Security organizations who have experienced personnel and necessary facilities to provide the required services. The NWCCOG may request information substantiating the information provided. Previous and current experience with the current Project THOR network hardware and/or NWCCOG IT equipment will be preferred. Failure to provide this information may result in respondent's proposal being declared non-responsive.

## **WRITTEN AGREEMENT**

The selected Network Operator shall be required to enter into a written agreement with the NWCCOG. Signature on the Proposal Cover Sheet shall serve as an acknowledgement that the Network Operator is willing to enter into an agreement with the NWCCOG if their proposal is accepted.

## **Evaluation AND CONTRACT AWARD**

The NWCCOG shall evaluate and select a Network Operator to provide the required services based on the completed proposal responses. The NWCCOG shall be the sole judge in deciding how the evaluation process shall be conducted and what Vendor shall be considered for award as deemed to be in the best interest of the NWCCOG.

## **PREPARATION OF PROPOSALS**

The proposal must be signed by a company representative authorized to bind the Network Operator contractually. Failure to read the RFP and these instructions will be at the Network Operator's own risk.

Corrections and/or modifications received after the closing time specified will not be accepted.

All information submitted in response to this RFP is public after the award and/or contract has been executed with the successful Vendor. If Vendor includes as part of the response to the RFP any information that the Vendor believes to be a trade secret or other privileged or confidential data, the Vendor must supply under separate cover and identify as confidential. Statements that the entire proposal is confidential will not be honored. NWCCOG will endeavor to keep that information confidential, separate and apart from the proposal subject to the provisions of the Colorado Open Records Act or order of court.

#### **OMISSIONS**

Should the NWCCOG omit information from this RFP that is necessary for a clear understanding of the work, or should it appear that various instructions are in conflict, then the Vendor shall secure written instructions from the NWCCOG at least seventy-two (72) hours prior to the time and date of the proposal opening.

#### **DEBARMENT**

By submitting this proposal, the Vendor certifies that neither the company nor its principals is presently debarred, suspended, in the process of debarment, declared ineligible or voluntarily excluded from participation in this transaction by any federal state department or agency.

#### **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY**

The NWCCOG adheres to a policy of equal opportunity and non-discrimination and will ensure that all Vendors will be treated fairly and equitably throughout the bidding process, including the advertisement, evaluation and selection stages.

#### **COST OF DEVELOPING PROPOSALS**

All costs related to the preparation of the proposals and any related activities are the sole responsibility of the Network Operator. The NWCCOG assumes no liability for any costs incurred by Vendors throughout the entire selection process.

#### **PROPOSAL OWNERSHIP**

All proposals, including attachments, supplementary materials, addenda, etc. shall become the property of the NWCCOG and will not be returned to the Network Operator.

#### **ADDITIONAL GENERAL INFORMATION & CLARIFICATION**

For additional information or clarification concerning the services specified in this RFP under Scope of Work, interested parties must submit their questions or comments, in writing via e-mail, to Nate Walowitz, [nwalowitz@nwccog.org](mailto:nwalowitz@nwccog.org). Questions will be received, answered in writing, and sent via e-mail to all firms who received the RFP or expressed interest in accordance with the dates designated in this RFP.

Only one copy of the proposal should be submitted.

## **TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

Late Proposals will not be accepted or considered. It is the responsibility of the RFP bidders to ensure that their Proposal is properly delivered to the required authority at the time and place designated in this RFP.

NWCCOG will notify the unsuccessful bidders via email within approximately fifteen (15) days following the closing date for receiving Proposals. The NWCCOG's silence does not imply any acceptance or rejection of any quotation offer.

Issuance of this RFP does not constitute a commitment by NWCCOG to award a contract. NWCCOG reserves the right to reject any or all Proposals received in response to this RFP, to waive minor irregularities and informalities in Proposals received, or to cancel this RFP if it is in the best interest of the NWCCOG or Region to do so. The Network Operator agrees, if his/her Proposal is accepted by NWCCOG, to furnish supplies and/or services in strict accordance with the proposal specifications and at those prices set forth for each item in said Proposal.

The NWCCOG is exempt from federal tax (84-0639906), Colorado sales tax (State sales tax exempt no. 98-01956).

## **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

The NWCCOG will analyze information provided by all Network Operator RFPs. Criteria considered by NWCCOG in ranking proposals will be as follows:

Company Overview - 5 Points

Capabilities and NWCCOG Requirements - 30 Points

Qualifications/Professional – 20 Points

Competence/Training 20 Points

References 5 Points

Total Cost for Services 20 Points

TOTAL 100 Points

## **AWARD CRITERIA**

NWCCOG will make this award based on the best qualified solution.