

Request for Qualifications (RFQ)

Facilitation Services: Regional Career & Technical Education (CTE) Strategic Planning Initiative
Issuing Organization: Northeast Service Cooperative (NESC) Career & Technical Education Advisory Council
RFQ Issued: September 2026 | Anticipated Project Period: October 2026 – March 2027

1. Project Background & Overview

Northeast Minnesota aims to become Minnesota’s leading example of regional collaboration in Career & Technical Education (CTE). Pressing regional challenges—including workforce shortages, shifting labor market demands, teacher recruitment and retention, student engagement, and evolving industry needs—cannot be solved by any single institution acting in isolation.

The Northeast Service Cooperative (NESC) CTE Advisory Council is issuing this Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to identify and engage an experienced, highly skilled external facilitator or consulting team. The selected partner will design and lead a collaborative, regional strategic planning process to establish a unified vision and actionable collaboration framework across Northeast Minnesota.

Regional Ecosystem & Key Partners

The strategic planning process will engage a multi-sector ecosystem, including:

- **Educational Entities:** Northeast Service Cooperative (NESC), True North Stars Perkins Consortium, Lake Superior Perkins Consortium, Minnesota North College, Lake Superior College, and local school districts and charter schools.
- **Workforce & Economic Partners:** Business and industry partners, regional workforce development agencies, and economic development organizations.
- **State & Regional Initiatives:** Minnesota Department of Education initiatives, including FutureForward™ and the Northeast Regional STEM Network.

Strategic Philosophy

This initiative is **not** intended to replace or override the governance, strategic plans, or core missions of participating organizations. Each partner retains its operational autonomy. Instead, this process establishes a voluntary **Regional Collaboration Framework** addressing the central question: *"What can we accomplish together that none of us can accomplish alone?"*

2. Project Goals & Guiding Principles

Core Project Goals

Pillar	Objectives & Focus Areas
Develop	A shared regional vision, common guiding principles, key regional priorities, and a sustained culture of regional collaboration.
Identify	Strategic partnership opportunities, emerging labor market trends, regional educational gaps, resource efficiencies, and shared assets.
Align	Regional initiatives, capital and programmatic investments, employer engagement strategies, postsecondary pathways, and unified messaging.
Recommend	A practical, voluntary implementation framework that respects individual institutional identities while maximizing collective regional impact.

Guiding Principles

- **Student-centered & Employer-informed:** Rooted in real learner needs and regional labor market demands.
- **Collaborative, Inclusive, & Transparent:** Broad engagement across all geographic and sector lines.
- **Data-informed & Future-focused:** Driven by regional labor statistics, demographic data, and educational outcomes.
- **Innovative & Action-oriented:** Focused on practical execution rather than high-level theory.
- **Respectful of Local Decision-Making:** Honoring the unique missions and autonomy of individual school boards and institutions.

3. Scope of Work (SOW) & Facilitator Responsibilities

The selected facilitator will be responsible for end-to-end process design, stakeholder engagement, consensus building, synthesis, and drafting final strategic deliverables.

Key Tasks & Responsibilities

1. **Initiation & Process Design:** Partner with the NESC CTE Advisory Council Steering Committee to finalize engagement protocols, schedules, and stakeholder mapping.
2. **Comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement:** Design and conduct multi-channel feedback sessions, including:
 - Steering Committee and Advisory Council meetings
 - Focus groups and interactive planning workshops
 - Employer roundtables and business leader sessions
 - Student voice forums and educator listening sessions
 - Postsecondary alignment discussions
 - Community/regional surveys
3. **Consensus Building & Synthesis:** Facilitate multi-party discussions to resolve differing perspectives constructively and synthesize qualitative and quantitative inputs into core priority areas.
4. **Plan Development & Refinement:** Draft, iterate, and finalize the complete Regional Strategic Framework in collaboration with the Steering Committee.

4. Required Deliverables

The project deliverables must include the following components:

1. **Regional Vision Statement:** A concise, compelling statement capturing the long-term collective vision for CTE across Northeast Minnesota.
2. **Strategic Priorities Document:** Detailed recommendations across 5–7 key priority areas, including:
 - Career Pathways & Work-Based Learning
 - Business & Industry Partnerships
 - Teacher Recruitment and Retention
 - Middle School Career Exploration & Awareness
 - Postsecondary Alignment & Workforce Development
 - Regional Marketing, Communications, & Shared Professional Development
3. **Regional Action Framework:** Clear, operationalized strategies for each priority area, specifying goals, concrete action steps, lead entities, partner responsibilities, timelines, and measurable KPIs.
4. **Partnership & Governance Framework:** Recommendations for ongoing regional communication, shared decision-making models, organizational roles, and sustained cross-sector coordination.
5. **Implementation Roadmap:** Phased execution timelines structured across:
 - **First 6 Months:** Immediate momentum and quick wins
 - **Year 1:** Short-term implementation
 - **Years 2–5:** Long-term strategic integration

5. Timeline & Milestones

Phase & Timeline	Key Activities & Milestones
October 2026 — Selection, Contracting & Project Launch	Complete RFQ review and selection process; negotiate final scope, schedule, and compensation; execute agreement; convene facilitator and Steering Committee; confirm project goals, engagement strategy, stakeholder groups, communication protocols, and overall work plan.
November 2026 — Discovery & Stakeholder Engagement	Conduct environmental scan and review relevant regional data and existing plans; launch regional survey; begin stakeholder interviews, focus groups, educator/student listening sessions, employer conversations, and postsecondary discussions.
December 2026 — Continued Engagement & Preliminary Synthesis	Complete priority stakeholder engagement; summarize survey and qualitative findings; identify recurring themes, opportunities, gaps, and areas requiring additional discussion. Steering Committee reviews preliminary findings and prepares for regional strategic planning sessions.
January 2027 — Regional Visioning & Priority Development	Conduct facilitated strategic planning and regional visioning sessions; establish shared guiding principles; identify and refine 5–7 regional strategic priorities; begin developing goals and potential collaborative strategies for each priority area.
February 2027 — Framework Development & Partner Review	Draft the Regional Strategic/Collaboration Framework, including vision, strategic priorities, action strategies, roles, timelines, and measurable outcomes. Conduct Steering Committee review and targeted partner feedback sessions; revise framework based on feedback.
March 2027 — Finalization & Implementation Launch	Finalize the Regional Strategic Framework, Partnership & Governance Framework, and Implementation Roadmap; present findings and recommendations to the NESC CTE Advisory Council and key regional partners; establish initial implementation responsibilities, first-year priorities, and next steps.

6. Qualifications Submission & Evaluation Requirements

Submission Structure

Interested consultants or firms should submit a Statement of Qualifications (SOQ) containing the following sections:

1. Firm/Consultant Qualifications & Experience:

- Demonstrated track record in regional, public-sector, or multi-institutional strategic planning, with particular relevance to CTE, workforce development, K-12 education, postsecondary education, or cross-sector regional collaboration.
- Key personnel bios highlighting expertise in strategic planning, cross-sector facilitation, stakeholder engagement, and consensus building.

2. Relevant Project Experience:

- Brief descriptions of three to five comparable engagements completed within the past five years, including the client or region served, nature of the engagement, facilitator role, stakeholder groups involved, and key

outcomes or deliverables.

- Identify experience facilitating complex initiatives involving multiple independent organizations while respecting local governance and institutional autonomy.
3. **Facilitation Approach, Capacity & Availability:**
- Provide a concise description of the consultant's facilitation philosophy, stakeholder engagement methods, consensus-building approach, and capacity and availability to complete the work within the project timeline. A detailed project plan or full methodology is not required at the qualifications stage.
4. **Proposed Fee / Cost:**
- Provide a proposed project fee or not-to-exceed cost for the services described in this RFQ. Respondents may identify assumptions that materially affect the proposed cost and may recommend modifications to the scope that would improve efficiency or project outcomes.
 - NESC recognizes that the final scope, schedule, and compensation may be refined through negotiation with the selected respondent prior to execution of a final agreement.
5. **References:**
- Provide a minimum of three (3) professional references from comparable regional, educational, workforce, public-sector, or multi-institutional strategic planning engagements completed within the past five years.

Selection Process

The Selection Committee may shortlist the most qualified respondents for interviews or follow-up discussions. NESC may request additional information from shortlisted respondents as needed to clarify qualifications, availability, or the proposed facilitation approach.

Following identification of the preferred respondent, NESC intends to confirm the final scope of services, schedule, and compensation through negotiation. If mutually acceptable terms cannot be reached, NESC may discontinue negotiations and proceed to another qualified respondent.

Evaluation Criteria

Statements of Qualifications will be evaluated by the NESC CTE Advisory Council Selection Committee using the following weighting:

Criteria	Weight
Relevant Qualifications & Track Record: Demonstrated success in regional, public-sector, educational, workforce, or multi-party strategic planning and facilitation.	35%
Relevant Project Experience & Facilitation Approach: Strength and relevance of comparable engagements, stakeholder-engagement experience, and demonstrated consensus-building methods.	25%
Key Personnel, Capacity & Availability: Qualifications of proposed personnel and demonstrated capacity to complete the engagement within the stated timeline.	20%
References & Past Performance: Client feedback on facilitation skill, collaboration, timeliness, responsiveness, and quality of final deliverables.	10%
Proposed Fee & Overall Value: Reasonableness of the proposed project fee or not-to-exceed cost in relation to the scope of services, qualifications, and anticipated project outcomes.	10%