

**Great Falls Public School Districts 1 & A a.k.a. Great Falls Public Schools**

1100 4th Street South

Great Falls, MT 59405

Funding Year (FY) 2025-2026 E-rate RFP for Internal Connections and/ or Basic Maintenance of Internal Connections (BMIC)

SLD Billed Entity Number: 134857

Applicant Form 470 Identifier: Great Falls Public School Districts 1 & A a.k.a. Great Falls Public Schools\_ 2025 \_ Cat 2 \_ Form 470 D, Replacement

**Contact Information**

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## Overview

Great Falls Public School Districts 1 & A a.k.a. Great Falls Public Schools (hereafter collectively referred to as, "District") seeks Request for Proposals (RFP) for Managed Internal Broadband Services (MIBS), Internal Connections, and Basic Maintenance of Internal Connections (BMIC), if needed for the Internal Connections.

The objective of this RFP is to accomplish a fair, open, and competitive procurement. The RFP is accessible electronically at [www.usac.org](http://www.usac.org) on the "Tools" webpage:

<https://www.usac.org/e-rate/resources/tools/#FCC-Form-470-Tools> or by emailing Nicole Jones at [njirwj@midrivers.com](mailto:njirwj@midrivers.com) and requesting a copy of the RFP and related documents.

Service providers may bid on one, all, or any number of requested bid options with the requested services and terms.

The District is not entertaining site visits.

Contacting District employees, board members, or other individuals outside the guidance of this RFP may be deemed as trying to circumvent the open and fair competitive bidding process and be grounds for bid dismissal.

Service providers must be capable of providing telecommunication services under the Universal Service Support Mechanism (i.e. greenlight status), be a registered vendor with USAC, and have a USAC issued 498 ID (formerly Service Provider Identification Number-SPIN) by the close of the RFP competitive bidding process.

Failure to follow the guidance of this RFP or other associated documents may be grounds for bid dismissal.

## Requested Services

### **Internal Connections/ Basic Maintenance of Internal Connections (BMIC)/ Managed Internal Broadband Services (MIBS):**

It is requested that the bid is broken out by line item with each different piece of equipment as a standalone line item and installation as a separate line item versus bidding a total lump sum project cost.

#### **Firewall:**

Requesting bids for approximately 1 +/- Firewall with the specifications as noted below. This is a request for bids for equipment/ services with installation. This is a request for District-owned equipment. The District is not accepting bids for leased equipment options.

District currently has nearly 11,000 students and at least one third to half that many staff. The District currently has 10 Gbps fiber internet connection, however, that may change depending upon District's needs within the useful life of the proposed solution.

- 10G SFP+ WAN interfaces for high-speed connectivity
- 1G/10G fiber Uplink and copper interfaces for flexible LAN connectivity
- Stateful firewall throughput: minimum 10 Gbps
- Redundant power supplies and fans
- Recommended maximum clients: 10,000 Cloud-based centralized management
- Managed centrally over the Web
- Classifies applications, users and devices Networking and security
- Stateful firewall
- VPN™ (site-to-site)
- SD-WAN capabilities
- Active Directory integration
- Identity-based policies
- Client VPN (IPsec, SSL)
- Smart link bonding Traffic shaping and application management
- Layer 7 application visibility and traffic shaping
- Application prioritization
- Web caching
- Choose WAN uplink based on traffic type Additional security services
- Content filtering
- Google SafeSearch and YouTube for Schools
- Intrusion detection & prevention (IDS/IPS)
- Advanced Malware Protection (AMP)
- Spam Filtering
- Deep packet inspection(SSL Inspection)
- Live Log Monitor/Viewer
- User reports for up to 3 months
- Daily reports
- Domain and URL filtering
- HA capable
- Single Sign On for Windows, Chrome, Mobile devices
- Authenticate with AD, Radius, Captive portal
- Real Time ID tracking

The District currently has a Sophos XG75TCHUS or equivalent firewall. Proposed solutions must be compatible with existing Ruckus or equivalent or Brocade or equivalent switch and/ or WAP systems. Proposed solutions should provide data sheets to show proposed solutions compatibility with existing systems. Looking for service provider recommendation. If uncertain, bid recommended option or all options and let the District determine what is needed.

Portion of firewall that is not eligible for erate must be cost allocated as required by E-Rate program rules. Please provide 3<sup>rd</sup> party verification from the manufacturer to verify portion

that is ineligible and portion that is eligible for the E-Rate program. Failure to provide this information may be grounds for bid dismissal.

Bids should be all inclusive, including any possible mounting kits, power cords, fan modules, transceivers, SFP modules, POE injectors, licensing, etc. that may be needed for a turn-key installation of proposed unit. Requesting approx. 5 +/- antennas, connectors, and related components per unit on form 470 to meet this need. Looking for service provider recommendations, if uncertain, make recommendation and let district decide.

Requesting licensing as 1 license per eligible switch as both Basic Maintenance and Internal Connections (listed as duplicate equipment in Form 470 table) to meet licensing needs. If bidding licensing as internal connections, then will accept bids for 1, 3, and 5-year terms of services. If bidding licensing as basic maintenance, then will accept bids for 1-year terms of services with the option of up to 4 1-year voluntary extensions at the same price in which services are billed when services are actually provided. Bid should confirm acceptance of this request.

#### *Training:*

The District is seeking training on the proposed equipment to be included as part of the bid, regardless of what bid option the vendor is bidding. Training must be in-person and within 2-weeks of installation of proposed solution. Not accepting bids for solutions that are not in-person trainings such as on-line or virtual training.

#### *Basic Maintenance of Internal Connections (BMIC):*

The District is seeking bids for BMIC if needed for basic maintenance and technical support appropriate to maintain reliable operation when provided for eligible broadband internal connections. Please see attached list of eligible equipment purchased with E-rate. Bids may include the following basic maintenance services that are eligible for E-rate:

- Repair and upkeep of eligible hardware.
- Wire and cable maintenance.
- Configuration changes.
- Basic technical support including online and telephone-based technical support.
- Software upgrades and patches including bug fixes and security patches.

Bids will be accepted for 1-year terms of services with the option of up to 4 1-year voluntary extensions at the same price in which services are billed when services are actually provided. Bid should confirm acceptance of this terms of services request.

Bids should confirm acceptance that invoices will indicate logged hours of technical support, configuration changes, or other BMIC services or if services are one-time costs such as access to software upgrades, security patches, bug fixes, etc.

For any hourly work by service providers, there are nearly 9,000 hours in a year so on the Form 470 for BMIC on each piece of equipment, the District is requesting 9,000 hours assuming one individual for BMIC services on most equipment whereas cabling/ connectors may have a team for certain BMIC services (i.e. configuration changes, etc.) so have requested more quantity to accommodate more time/ hours.

For manufacturers that offer software updates, security patches, bug fixes, technical support, etc., bids should indicate that the cost is a one-time cost versus a monthly cost for work performed.

## Other Requirements

### Questions:

As this is the 2nd time an RFP and Form 470 has been posted requesting bids for these types of services, the District will include all previous RFP documents including the previous questions and answers. Responding service providers may request clarifications regarding specifications outlined in this RFP within the first 14 days after certification of Form 470. After the first 14 days, the District will enter into a quiet period for the remainder of the bidding period.

Clarifying questions should be emailed to Nicole Jones at [njirwj@midrivers.com](mailto:njirwj@midrivers.com). Contacting District employees, board members, or other individuals outside of this RFP contact list may be deemed as trying to circumvent the open and fair competitive bidding process and be grounds for bid dismissal.

Relevant questions not addressed in the RFP or on the Form 470 and are not considered a cardinal rule change will be posted as an amendment to the RFP. It is the responsibility of service providers to monitor RFP amendments and/ or newly posted Form 470s.

The district reserves the right not to respond to inquiries that may be deemed a cardinal rule change, not relevant to the requested equipment and/ or services on the posted Form 470, or are already addressed in the posted documents.

No customized service provider forms will be completed during the competitive bidding period.

It is the responsibility of the service providers to adhere to all applicable laws, licensing, permits, insurances, etc. (District, local, state, and/ or federal) as may be required for such a project and may be required to readily verify documentation at request of District.

The winning bidder may be required to adhere additional policies and/ or procedures, rules, regulations, etc. as required by District (i.e., installation after school hours or during vacation months, background checks, etc.) that may or may not be listed in this RFP document.

### Bidding:

Bids will be accepted until the Allowable Contract Date as stated on the associated Form 470. Bids received in response to the first Form 470 that meet the criteria of this Form 470 and associated RFP documents will be considered for evaluation. If a service provider wishes to resubmit a bid or submit new bids, the District will accept all bids that meets the criteria for requested services associated with this form 470 and RFP documents.

If a service provider has already submitted a bid, it is the responsibility of the service provider to submit a new bid within the scope and competitive bidding period of the latest posted Form 470.

Bids may be emailed to Jeff Williams at [jeff\\_williams@gfps.k12.mt.us](mailto:jeff_williams@gfps.k12.mt.us) and Nicole Jones at [njirwj@midrivers.com](mailto:njirwj@midrivers.com).

Bids may also be mailed to the ATTN: Jeff Williams at the Great Falls Public School Districts 1 & A a.k.a. Great Falls Public Schools at 1100 4th Street South, Great Falls, MT 59405. The District assumes no responsibility for delays caused by the U.S. Postal Service or any other delivery service.

Bids submitted by other means including but not limited to texting, links embedded in an email, etc. may not be considered. No customized service provider forms will be completed during the competitive bidding period.

Failure to follow this RFP guidance may be deemed as trying to circumvent the open and fair competitive bidding process and may be grounds for bid dismissal.

The District reserves the right to cancel the procurement or accept or reject any or all bids in whole or part including late bids in accordance with MCA 18-4-303.

Bids from service providers without an E-Rate Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN) at the close of the competitive bidding period will be disqualified.

Actual quantities may vary from initial estimates. It is anticipated the District will only be billed for services and/ or equipment actually provided. Preference may be given to bids that specify acceptance of this condition.

Bids are expected to be all inclusive. Service providers that impose additional costs after bid submittal and/ or acceptance may be grounds for bid dismissal.

Quantities are estimates and looking for service provider recommendations. If the service provider is uncertain, please make a recommendation based upon the information provided, expertise, industry standard, or bid all applicable recommended options and let the District decide the most cost-effective solution.

If applicable, proposed solutions should provide options for make and models of equipment that are scalable for future proofing as well as a minimum life expectancy of 5 years.

The District is not entertaining demos, test packs, webinars, SPAM, marketing inquiries, etc.

The District is not responsible for late bids. The District reserves the right to accept or reject any and/ or all bids and/ or parts of any one bid including late bids.

The District reserves the right to dismiss bids that present equipment or services that may be deemed a “cardinal rule change” according to the eligible services list, erate program rules, or other regulatory sources.

Preference may be given to bids that include at least 3 references from similar sized schools in Montana.

Equipment must be from an Erate eligible manufacturer. Bids that include equipment from companies listed on the FCC’s National Security Threat List may be dismissed in whole or in part. Bids should include a statement confirming equipment is not from a company that is listed as a National Security Threat. Failure to make note of the manufacturing company may be grounds for bid dismissal.

If installation is required, facilities must be returned to pre-installation condition once installation and/ or any work is complete. Bids should acknowledge this requirement.

Service provider will be overall responsible for any alterations or damages caused to other systems (fire alarm/phone/security/cameras/etc.) during project.

If installation is required, it is the responsibility of the service providers to have all required equipment including any type of lift/ ladders, garbage disposal, clean-up, that may be required for a full-service bid.

**Bid Security:**

Bid security will not be required as part of the bid submittal process for this project.

**Service provider E-Rate Compliance:**

It is the responsibility of the service provider/ bidder to know, understand, and act within the guidance of this RFP and the E-Rate program rules.

Responses not in compliance with the RFP, RFP Amendments, and/ or Form 470, incomplete responses, and/ or responses received after the allowable contract date may be deemed non-compliant with this RFP and at the District’s discretion may be accepted or rejected.

Preference may be given to service providers submitting proposals under this RFP that provide a written statement that they agree to meet the following conditions relating to the E-rate program:

#### *Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN) and FCC Registration Number (FCCRN)*

The service provider shall provide a valid E-rate SPIN number (Service Provider Identification Number), in the Proposal submitted in response to this bid opportunity. The SPIN must be recognized by the SLD and FCC as an eligible telecommunications provider and therefore qualified to receive discounts under the Telecommunications Services bucket of the program. The Service provider also shall provide the company's FCC Registration Number.

#### *Green Light Status*

Service providers should provide proof of "Green Light Status." The service provider should provide proof as a printout from the FCC website of status as an addendum to the Proposal submitted in response to this bid opportunity.

#### *Service Provider Annual Certification Form*

The Service provider agrees to timely submit to the SLD a completed Form 473, Service Provider Annual Certification form, which provides updated contact information to the SLD for the Service provider.

#### *The Method of Invoicing*

The District has the option to choose which method of invoicing best meets the District's technology goals (i.e., BEAR – Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement versus SPI – Service Provider Invoicing). If the SPI of invoicing is chosen, the service provider agrees to provide reimbursements to the District for discounts on eligible services received on or after the effective date of discounts and already paid for by the District. If not, no late charges may be billed.

#### *Cooperation with District's Preparation of E-rate Applications*

The service provider agrees to provide information on a timely basis that the District requests for the District to timely apply for E-rate applications.

The service provider must agree to respond in a timely manner (within assigned deadlines) to any requests for information from District, USAC, FCC, State Agencies, or other agencies as needed and related to the E-Rate Program.

*Separate Itemization of E-rate Eligible and Ineligible Products and Services* The service provider shall separately itemize the cost of E-rate eligible and ineligible products and separate installation costs, if any. To determine what items are eligible, visit the E-rate Eligible Services List at <https://www.usac.org/e-rate/applicant-process/before-you-begin/eligible-services-list/> or call the SLD at 888-203-8100.

#### *Compliance with E-rate Contract Signing Rules*

The service provider must acknowledge in its proposal that the service provider will make every effort to have any contract addendums that may arise from this RFP signed in accordance with the E-rate contract signing rules. Further, the Service provider must acknowledge in its proposal that if the contract or addendum is signed outside of the E-Rate



contract signing window, the service provider will disclose to the District, before soliciting the District's execution of the contract, that the contract is not eligible for E-rate funding.

#### *Non-Collusion Affidavit*

At the District's discretion, the service provider may be required to execute an Affidavit of Non-Collusion to confirm that the service provider is not in violation of the anti-bid rigging state law provisions of the state procurement law, or in violation of the Federal Communication Commission's Fifth Report and Order, as codified in 47 C.F.R.

#### *Guarantee to Meet Service Start Date*

The service provider must be prepared to provide service starting July 1, 2025, or as soon as feasible after receipt of Funding Commitment Decision Letter (FCDL). If Service provider does not meet the agreed upon service start date due to the service provider's negligence, the service provider should provide guarantees to cover the loss of E-rate funding for the total discount that would have otherwise been received from the current provider during the interim period until Service provider is able to provide service. This statement does not apply to circumstances beyond the service provider's control such as manufacturer delays.

#### *Required Notice to Proceed and Funding Availability*

Acceptance of winning bid is contingent on E-Rate, District Approval, and/ or Board's Approval. The District reserves the right to allow the contract to expire without implementation.

The District will follow the purchasing policies of the Great Falls Public School Districts 1 & A a.k.a. Great Falls Public Schools' Board requirements and procedures of the FCC's E-rate program as administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) to be eligible for all available funding.

The implementation of any associated contracts resulting from this competitive bid process will be dependent on the District's issuance of a written Notice to Proceed. E-rate funding notification alone will not signify Notice to Proceed. It is expected that the service provider will only move forward once received written notification from District to proceed with the project.

#### *Document Retention Requirements*

The service provider agrees to retain documents as required by the E-Rate Program Rules, for 10 years from the last date of services for each FRN for each funding year.

#### **Contracts/ Service Agreements:**

Any required contracts, including any addendums, master service agreements, etc., for services are required by E-Rate rules to be signed prior to certification of Form 471. Thus, preference may be given to bids that include - a letter of intent or service agreement, including all terms and conditions associated with acceptance of bid, and that is signed by the service provider, ready to be accepted and signed by the District. Failure to include with the

bid may result in bid dismissal. It is anticipated that by requesting this, the service agreement/ contract will be included in the bid submission to appropriately meet all deadlines.

Service providers that add/ change terms and conditions after bid submittal and/ or bid acceptance may be grounds for bid dismissal.

Bids are expected to be all inclusive. Service providers that impose additional costs after bid submittal and/ or acceptance may be grounds for bid dismissal.

It is the responsibility of the service providers to adhere to all applicable laws, licensing, permits, insurances, etc. (District, local, state, and/ or federal) as may be required for such a project and may be required to readily verify documentation at request of District.

This request for proposal (RFP) does not commit the District to enter into any agreement, or to pay any expenses incurred in the preparation of any response to this request, or to ultimately procure any contract for the provision of these services.

An approved E-Rate funding notification letter alone is not grounds for moving forward with the project. Acceptance of winning bid is contingent on E-Rate, Board Approval, and/ or District's Approval. At the District's discretion, it may choose not to move forward with the project in whole or in part and/ or may allow agreement to expire. It is expected that vendor will only move forward once receive written notification from District to proceed with the project.

Preference may be given to providers that offer flexible invoicing, including SPI where the discounts are applied to the bills with no restrictions. Bids should include whether or not a vendor will honor a flexible invoicing arrangement.

Invoicing specifically for MIBS services is expected to be monthly in which the District receives monthly invoicing. The District may or may not at it's discretion entertain solutions in which the full cost for the entire year of MIBS services is billed up front.

Preference may be given to bidders that can honor their pricing until receipt of a funding commitment decision letter.

### **Evaluation of Bids:**

The board and/ or District is overall responsible for the process of evaluating bids and selecting the service provider that can provide the most cost-effective solution to meet the District's needs and intent regarding services. The mandatory factors listed below will be considered as well as a combination of Optional Factors.

Responses not in compliance with the RFP, RFP Amendments, and/ or Form 470, incomplete responses, and/ or responses received after the allowable contract date may be deemed non-compliant with this RFP and at the District's discretion may be accepted or rejected.

The District reserves the right to waive any formalities without cause and without explanation to any bidders. As Erate Program rules allow, the District reserves the right to solicit bids if one or no bids are received during the bidding window.

The District reserves the right to award on a service-by-service basis, or as a whole, to the best advantage of the District, to the responsive and responsible vendor in accordance with the specifications set forth in this request for quote.

The following evaluation criteria will be used to evaluate bids:

Weighted Factors:

The contract will be awarded based on best-value to the District and its constituent Districts, as well as evaluation criteria set forth in this document. Weighted factors contributing to the award are included in the following breakdown:

Weighted Factor Breakdown:

| <b>Mandatory Factors:</b>                       | <b>Points Available</b> |
|---|-------------------------|
| Price of the eligible products and services     | 30                      |
| Positive Prior experience with service provider | 10-20                   |
| Ability to Meet Requirements of RFP             | 10-20                   |
| Terms & Conditions including flexible invoicing | 10-20                   |
| Price of ineligible products and services       | 10-20                   |
| <br><b>Optional Factors:</b>                    |                         |
| Contingent on E-Rate Funding                    | 5-20                    |
| Clear and Complete Bid                          | 5-20                    |
| Risk for the District                           | 5-20                    |
| Scalable Solution                               | 5-20                    |
| Service Reliability                             | 5-20                    |
| Ability to meet district's services start date  | 5-20                    |
| Compatibility with existing systems             | 5-20                    |
| References                                      | 5-20                    |

Points awarded for Cost of Services will not be subjective but will be based on a fixed formula. The formula for awarding points for the factor of cost will be:

*Lowest priced service*

*provider = LPV Each*

*Responding service*

*provider = RV*

***Each Service provider's Cost of Services points awarded = 30 \* LPV / RV***

Therefore, the lowest priced service provider will be awarded 30 points for the Cost of Services factor. All other service providers will be awarded points based on their proximity in price to the lowest priced service provider. Example: A service provider with a bid twice as expensive as the lowest priced service provider will mathematically receive 15 points.