Great Falls Public Schools a.k.a. Great Falls School District 1&A
1100 4TH ST S
REAT FALLS, MT 59405

Funding Year (FY) 2026-2027 E-rate RFP for Category 1 _ Networking/ Modulating Equipment
SLD Billed Entity Number: 134909
Applicant Form 470 Identifier: Great Falls Public Schools a.k.a. Great Falls School District 1&A _ 2026 _ Cat 1 _ Form 470

Contact Information
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Overview
Great Falls Public Schools a.k.a. Great Falls School District 1&A (hereafter collectively referred to as, "District") seeks Request for Proposals (RFP) for Category 1 Networking/ Modulating Equipment according to the definition of the latest published Eligible Services List and/ or the Glossary of Terms on the USAC website.

The objective of this RFP is to accomplish a fair, open, and competitive procurement. The RFP is accessible electronically at 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 njjrwj@midrivers.com and requesting a copy of the RFP and related documents.

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

Not entertaining physical on-site or virtual 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, 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.

The District reserves the right to waive any formalities without cause and without explanation to any bidders.

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

Requested Services
The District is requesting bids for necessary network or modulating equipment to light an existing dark fiber WAN. Requesting bids to include equipment, software and/ or licensing, if applicable, installation and configuration, shipping, if applicable, and taxes, if applicable.

1. The District is requesting bids for 24+/- Cisco Catalyst 9,000 Series or equivalent or better, routers to replace the existing 24 Cisco ASR 920 Layer 3 Edge routers, or equivalent.

2. The District is requesting bids for 46 +/- Core Optics, SFP Modules including the following:
    - 42 +/- Core Optics LR, or equivalent, to replace the existing SFP Modules SFP-10G-LR

or equivalent; and

- 4+/- Core Optics ER or equivalent to replace the existing SFP Modules SFP-10G-ER or equivalent.

Network/ modulating equipment should include the equipment make and model and sku, if available from Manufacturer prior to ordering services, installation and configuration, software or licensing for a term of up to 5 years.

Service providers should assume that will need all components for a fully functioning turnkey system and provide any recommended connectors, components, etc. to make functional. Looking for service provider recommendations, if uncertain, make recommendation and let District decide.

"To safeguard the security and integrity of the nation's communications networks, the Commission has barred use of the Universal Service Fund (USF) to purchase equipment and services from companies that pose a national security threat. To inform future actions to address national security threats to USF-funded networks, the Commission is collecting information to determine the extent to which equipment and services, including software, produced, or provided by Huawei or ZTE, along with their subsidiaries, parents, and/or affiliates, exist in our communications networks." (Source: Federal Communications Commission, OMB Control Number 3060-1270, https://www.fcc.gov/supplychain.)

Bids should be all inclusive including all components needed for the proposed solution, regardless of the existing 10 Gbps that is currently in place. The District is looking for service provider recommendations. If uncertain, then please make a recommendation or bid all options.

According to USAC guidance and FCC established E-Rate program rules, "The FCC Form 470 and RFP should provide enough information to request comprehensive proposals with line-item cost details from service providers, but not so much information that the applicant states a preference for a particular connectivity solution, a particular construction route, or particular method of construction."

Furthermore, "the FCC adopted a technology-neutral competitive bidding standard for self-provisioned networks – service provided over third-party networks."

"If an applicant specifies a requested bandwidth that other providers can provide, the technology-neutral competitive bidding standard expands the competitive bidding pool."

Stating a preference to a specific topology can influence the choice of connectivity solutions, can impact the physical layout of the network, and can suggest different methods for network construction.

Stating a preference to a specific topology can also violate the FCC's "technology-neutral competitive bidding standards."

Therefore, to maintain eligibility for the requested services in the E-Rate program, the District will refrain from answering any questions regarding a preference to the WAN topology if needed for the proposed networking solution.

Eligible Costs

Networking or Modulating Equipment
Bids for Network or Modulating Equipment may be accepted for purchasing District-owned equipment. Bids solutions for leased equipment options will not be considered. Right to Use licensing or software for such equipment is also eligible as category 1 and should be included in the bid, only if it is required to make the networking/ modulating equipment functional. Not accepting bids for additional features such as stand-alone warranty, features that would qualify as BMIC, or features beyond the scope of basic functionality.

Bids should include the cost of the equipment as a separately identifiable cost from other line items such as licensing, software, installation and configuration, etc.

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.

Preference may be given to bids that are all inclusive for a turn-key service in which the District has no additional costs to initiate service beyond what is in bid. This includes estimated applicable installation, Federal, State, and/ or local taxes, fees, surcharges, non-recurring charges, networking equipment, etc. It is anticipated these will be estimated for the current quarter or the latest publicly available announcement for applicable adjusted taxes, fees, etc. Service providers that impose additional costs after bid submittal may be grounds for bid dismissal.

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

Non-Reccurring Costs/ Special Construction Costs
Note: The term "special construction" <u>does not</u> include network equipment necessary to activate solutions such as light fiber for example, nor the services necessary to maintain the network. Charges for network equipment and network maintenance are eligible for Category One support as separate services, but not as special construction.

In E-Rate terminology, **special construction** refers to the upfront, non-recurring costs associated with the installation of new infrastructure to or between eligible entities. If no new infrastructure is being installed, then any installation costs are considered standard **non-recurring costs (NRC).**

Installation
Installation of services should be a solution providing a link into the network closet. Bringing solution to the property line is not sufficient to meet District needs and may be grounds for bid dismissal.

The service providers should specify required demarcation setup included in base fees, e.g. wall mounted CPE, Cat 6 or 6a, or SFP+ modules as a handoff, rack mount patch panel, etc. Service providers should assume that the current handoff is not sufficient to handle the proposed solution. Service providers should follow the guidance in the Networking or Modulating Equipment section of this RFP on how to bid networking or modulating equipment, connectors, other components, software, or licensing or the USAC website. If there is a discrepancy in the methodology of how to bid networking or modulating equipment, the guidance of the USAC website will be the final decision. Each piece of equipment should be bid as a separate line item including make, model, and sku (if available) to determine eligibility.

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. Facilities must be returned to pre-install condition once installation and/ or any work is complete. Bids should acknowledge this requirement.

Estimated service start date is 7/1/2026 or as soon as feasible after receipt of an approved funding commitment decision letter (FCDL) or upon written notice to proceed from the District, if ordered prior to a FCDL.

Taxes, Surcharges, and Misc Fees
Bids should include estimated Applicable Taxes (Federal and State) as separate line items from monthly recurring costs.

Contracts/ Service Agreements
Requesting incremental pricing options for services with a Month-to-Month (MTM), 1-year, 2-year, and/ or 3-year terms of service. At its discretion, the District shall have the option to extend for an additional two (2) one (1) - year terms. The service provider should state the charges for an additional year if different from the base year. Bids should confirm agreement with this request.

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.

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.

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.

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 or 28 days after the latest posted RFP Amendment, whichever is later. If there are no RFP amendments, then the bid due date is 28 days after the certification date or the Allowable Contract Date (ACD) as noted on Form 470.

Bids may be emailed to Luke Diekhans at Luke_Diekhans@gfps.k12.mt.us; Jeff Williams at jeff_williams@gfps.k12.mt.us; and Nicole Jones at njjrwj@midrivers.com.

Bids may also be mailed to the ATTN: Luke Diekhans at the Great Falls Public Schools a.k.a. Great Falls School District 1&A at 1100 4TH ST S; GREAT FALLS, MT 59405. The District assumes no responsibility for delays caused by the U.S. Postal Service or any other delivery service.

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.

Questions

Responding service providers may request clarifications regarding specifications outlined in this RFP. Clarifying questions should be emailed to Nicole Jones at njjrwj@midrivers.com or call 406-934-6668.

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.

The District will post an amendment to the RFP for relevant questions not addressed in the RFP or on the Form 470 as long as the E-Rate program rules do not consider the response a cardinal rule change. Please note, the District considers any RFP document upload to the Form 470 to be an RFP regardless of whether it specifies "RFP Amendment."

The District reserves the right not to respond to inquiries that are not relevant to the requested equipment and/ or services on the posted Form 470 or the posted documents already address the requested information.

The District reserves the right not to respond to questions that may be deemed a cardinal rule change. An example may be questions in which would narrow the requested specifications or add to the requested specifications. In these instances, the District respectfully requests Service Providers to bid according to the specifications of the publicly available information. If not certain, then make a recommendation for an equivalent or better solution or multiple recommendations for an equivalent or better solution and provide a written explanation for the recommendation(s).

It is the responsibility of service providers to monitor RFP amendments and/ or newly posted Form 470s.

As an educational institution, there may be questions that the District does not have the expertise answer. In these cases, please refer to the information in the publicly available Form 470 and associated RFP documents. It is requested that vendors make a recommendation. If uncertain, bid recommended option, multiple recommended options, or bid all options and let the District determine what is needed.

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.

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, 2026, 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, the service provider must guarantee 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.

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, if Erate funding does not become available.

The District will follow the purchasing policies of the Great Falls Public Schools a.k.a. Great Falls School District 1&A Board's as well as the 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.

It is expected that the service provider will only move forward once received written notification of an approved funding commitment decision letter of from District to proceed with the project, if prior to a funding commitment decision letter.

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.

References
The service provider should provide a minimum of three (3) client references, preferably located in Montana. References shall include successful implementation(s) of a similar scale and complex venue.

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 the program rules allow, the District reserves the right to solicit bids if one or no bids are received during the bidding window or bids received are deemed to be not cost effective.

The District reserves the right to award on an item-by-item basis, or as 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 proposals.

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:

Mandatory Factors (30 points available):
Price of the eligible products and services

Optional Factors (5-20 points available for each factor):
Positive Prior experience with service provider
Ability to Meet Requirements of RFP
Terms & Conditions including flexible invoicing

Clear and Complete Bid
Risk for the District
Scalable Solution
Service Reliability
Ability to meet District's services start date
Compatibility with existing systems
References
Meeting Technical Specifications
Vendor experience and qualifications
Provided desired options and features
Ineligible Costs (higher points = lower percentage of ineligible cost)
Local Vendor within 90 minutes of District
Quantity of Certified Technicians
Design capability, including suitability for District
Public Schools, ease of use, ease of initial integration, performance and manageability
Training and product certification provided
Price of operation of eligible products and services over useful life

The evaluation of price and the formula that is used will be according to the State Procurement Guidelines.