



MEMORANDUM

To: CMAP Board

From: Bill Barnes, Deputy of Regional Plan Implementation

Date: November 1, 2024

Subject: Authorization to enter into contract C25-0077 with M. Harris & Co. as a result of RFP 334 for strategic planning and engagement integration for a term up to 36-months with two, one-year optional renewals, in an amount not to exceed \$2,420,000

Action Requested: Approval

Purpose

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is seeking to enter into a contract with a consultant to support pre-planning activities for the communications and engagement elements of an innovative Regional Vision.

Background

The purpose of this project, together with other aspects of the Regional Vision, is to develop a trailblazing, multi-year campaign that changes the trajectory of public policy in northeastern Illinois. These pre-planning activities are critical to CMAP's execution of a new, untried approach to inspire and organize widespread action on issues of regional significance. Together, they should help the agency produce a consensus-based, visionary plan to achieve northeastern Illinois' macro-level goals and aspirations as the region moves toward the year 2060.

Externally, it should drive strategic awareness and engagement that mobilizes stakeholders for action around difficult-but-important policy priorities, while meeting the highest standards of equitable outreach and engagement. Internally, it should support a clear understanding about the regional planning process, CMAP's new approach, and the opportunities for greater alignment and leadership.

CMAP seeks to enter a contract with a consultant qualified and experienced in leading strategic communications and engagement on public issues of regional concern. This includes a combination of content and strategic key messaging, in-person workshop facilitation (with key stakeholders including CMAP boards and committees), visual design and branding integration, special event planning, and the development of multiple, coordinated deliverables like a

communications and engagement strategy, stakeholder management process, and operations of an extensive regionwide public engagement campaign in summer 2026.

Procurement process

A Request for Proposals (RFP) was circulated and posted on the CMAP website, CMAP hosted a non-mandatory virtual pre-bid meeting to provide an overview of and answer consultant questions.

The key dates were as follows:

RFP Advertisement/Release	Wednesday, September 18, 2024
Pre-bid Meeting (optional)	Wednesday, September 25, 2024, at 1:30pm Central Time
Deadline for Questions	Wednesday, October 2, 2024, by 3:00pm Central Time
Submission deadline	Wednesday, October 16, 2024, by 3:00pm Central Time

There were 21 attendees that joined the pre-bid meeting, representing 17 unique consulting firms and CMAP received thirteen 13 submissions. Of these submissions, CMAP deemed 12 proposals to be valid and complete for review.

Proposals were reviewed by CMAP staff, who scored each proposal independently based on the evaluation criteria included in **Attachment 1**. Following consideration of the proposals, the evaluation panel determined that five proposers should both be interviewed. Interviews were conducted on October 25, 2024 with proposers making a presentation of their proposal and responded to previously provided questions submitted by the evaluation panel. The evaluation panel used the information from the interview to finalize their scoresheets.

Evaluation

The evaluation scores for each proposal are included in **Attachment 2**. RFP 334 set forth certain core activities (Tasks 0-4) expected of the selected consultant as part of the Regional Vision process. To support a cohesive approach, this scope of services also identified additional optional tasks (Options A-C) on which the respondents could bid. Respondents to this RFP were strongly encouraged to consider and respond to all aspects of the project scope. The listed price proposal amounts reflect only the proposed activities included in each bid.

Following consideration of the proposals, the evaluation panel determined that M. Harris & Co. represented the strongest overall submittal based on the evaluation criteria. The approach proposed by M. Harris & Co. (in partnership with MSB Policy Consulting) reflected a high level of project understanding, with an emphasis on bringing design-thinking techniques and strategic messaging to give the Regional Vision a creative, clear, different, and unforgettable voice. M. Harris & Co. also demonstrated strong qualifications and significant experience in facilitating strategic planning as well as stakeholder management to support regional public issues campaigns. M. Harris & Co.'s proposal includes a highly qualified team with a proven ability to create and execute innovative ideas to promote the regional planning process with the public, stakeholders, leaders, and other partners.

Besides M. Harris & Co., the evaluation panel interviewed four additional proposal teams:

- a5 Branding & Digital (in partnership with COLLABO)
- Avoq (in partnership with Stanhope Consulting)
- Rudd Resources (in partnership with All Together, Herrera Strategy, Span Studio)
- WSP

Each of these proposal teams demonstrated a considerable level of project understanding and thoughtful approaches to address the tasks identified in the RFP. However, the evaluation panel ultimately determined M. Harris & Co. has the particular expertise and experience with strategic planning, engagement integration, and large public issue campaigns most closely aligned with the needs of the project.

Five firms were not selected for an interview with the evaluation panel:

- Finlay House Global
- Images, Inc. (in partnership with Underthink)
- Resolute Public Affairs
- Jasculca Terman Strategic Communications
- Morreale Communications (in partnership with High Street Consulting Group, LLC and CDM Smith)
- CS-Effect (in partnership with Bionic Content and Nexxos)
- EcoHealth Strategies (in partnership with Meadows Eastside Community Resource Organization)

The proposed activities provided by these firms generally did not demonstrate a satisfactory level of project understanding. Additionally, evidence of firm expertise and project experience did not clearly demonstrate familiarity and capability with the activities anticipated for the project.

Recommendation for contractor selection

The evaluation panel recommends entering into a contract with M. Harris & Co. for a term of up to 36-months, with two one-year renewal options in an amount not to exceed \$2,420,000, being the price proposal rounded to the nearest thousand. This includes \$1,490,000 in total fees to M. Harris & Co. (in partnership with MSB Policy Consulting) as well as \$710,000 in related expenses (printing, swag, advertising) for a large-scale public engagement campaign in spring/summer 2026. The latter may be excluded from the contract with M. Harris & Co. and procured separately pending final negotiations. The board authorization request includes an additional 10% increase for a total authorization of \$2,420,000.

Attachment 1: Evaluation criteria

Attachment 2: Evaluation scores