Request for Information (RFI-0425-25)

Development of Next-Generation GIS-Based Software Platform for Affordable Housing Listings and Data Exchange Hub in Massachusetts

Date Issued: March 24, 2025

Date Due: April 25, 2025

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

Late proposals cannot be accepted. Bidders are prohibited from contact related to this procurement with any Housing Navigator MA employee other than the designated contacts listed below.

Designated Contacts for this RFI:

Primary Contact: Grace Mitchell, Product Manager

Secondary Contact: April Ognibene, Chief Operating Officer

Introduction

Housing Navigator Massachusetts, Inc. (HNMI) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to creating high-quality, actionable listings for affordable (income-restricted) rental properties throughout the state of Massachusetts. Our mission is to connect people to places to call home. As the primary gateway to affordable housing in Massachusetts, we prioritize fairness, accessibility, and equity in both housing and technology. HNMI collaborates with public sector entities, housing owners and managers, and housing advocates to achieve its goals. We have developed a renter-centered housing search tool, tailored specifically for the income-restricted market, similar to platforms like Zillow or Apartments.com.

HNMI is the #1 affordable housing search engine in Massachusetts, serving over 35,000 monthly users and generating more than 400,000 unique users annually. HNMI maintains an extensive database of over 215,562 affordable units across 291 communities. We are committed to enhancing transparency regarding housing availability and the broader state housing inventory, while simultaneously advancing racial and economic equity. The data we collect and disseminate can inform funders and policymakers, influencing the production of affordable housing across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Overview

Housing Navigator MA is committed to promoting housing equity through the development of technology solutions that enhance transparency in the affordable housing market. We are seeking development partner(s) to assist in the creation of the next-generation mobile-friendly GIS-based software platform for managing affordable housing listings across Massachusetts. This platform will include enhanced AI-powered search capabilities, customizable data dashboards and visualizations, and a new robust data exchange hub.

This Request for Information (RFI) is intended to gather information from qualified vendors who can provide technology solutions that meet the outlined needs. Responses will help us determine the most suitable partners for a future Request for Proposal (RFP) and ultimately guide the development of our platform.

Previous Work

HNMI released its affordable housing search tool in 2021. In 2023, HNMI released a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the continued development of the affordable housing search platform. The selected firm successfully completed the latest release of this platform. The future Designated Provider will have full access to the existing platform, which includes architectural designs, documentation, wireframes, and feature mapping diagrams.

The Designated Provider may be engaged for ongoing development and maintenance work for our existing product or for new products and services. The provider is expected to engage with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to review the current requirements and roadmap, and determine which elements of the existing platform remain relevant to the new solution. This process will

involve updating the requirements as necessary to align with future goals. We will continue to provide our current search solutions in Massachusetts, with managed hosting provided by a select provider.

Project Objectives

The primary objectives for this project are as follows:

I. **Development of a GIS-based Housing Listing Platform**: The system should provide a comprehensive, user-friendly housing directory both accessible via web and scalable to mobile devices. It should enable renters to search, view, and manage listings of affordable housing across Massachusetts using a GIS-based interface.

II. **AI-Powered Search Capabilities**: Integration of advanced AI search capabilities to deliver tailored results for renters based on their needs (e.g., location, transit, budget, housing type, etc.). The AI should continuously improve based on user interactions and data trends.

III. **Customizable Data Dashboards & Visualization Tools**: The platform should allow for the creation of custom data dashboards and visualization tools to help track housing data, housing needs and market trends, and other key performance indicators (KPIs).

IV. **Data Exchange Hub**: The platform should include a data exchange hub, facilitating seamless sharing and integration of housing data between agencies, developers, and other stakeholders. The hub should support secure and transparent data exchange for all parties.

V. **Common Application Integration:** The state plans on developing a new application system that streamlines the application intake process for affordable rental homes and makes it more convenient and simpler. The goal is to develop a more user-friendly and responsive application process based on valuable feedback from stakeholders. The system will connect qualified applicants and property owners and leverage the Housing Navigator platform and existing users.

Scope of Work

We invite responses that cover any number of the following key areas:

Affordable Housing Platform Development:

- Design and develop a scalable, responsive, and mobile-friendly platform.

- GIS-based interactive mapping features for renters to easily search and filter available affordable housing listings.

- Integration of location-based services and geospatial data.

- Role-based access controls for different types of users (e.g., property owners and managers, admins, etc.).

Renter Assessment & Match Tool

- Develop a renter assessment and matching tool designed to connect individuals with suitable affordable housing options. This tool should assess renter preferences and budget affordability and use data-driven algorithms to match them with available housing that best fits their criteria, ensuring a seamless and efficient process for both renters and property owners and managers.

AI Search Capabilities:

- Implement AI algorithms for advanced search functionality, including natural language processing (NLP) and predictive analytics.

- Implement machine learning techniques for refining search results based on historical data.

Data Dashboards & Visualizations:

- Design customizable dashboards that allow visualization of key metrics.

- Implement interactive charts and dynamic graphs for real-time data visualization.

- Include role-based access controls for different types of users (e.g., property owners and managers, admins, etc.).

Affordable Housing Data Exchange Hub:

- Design and develop an Affordable Housing Data Exchange Hub. The Data Exchange Hub will facilitate the seamless sharing of housing-related information, data quality, and standardization among various stakeholders. This includes information such as available lottery rental units, first-come, first-served rentals, short waiting lists, occupancy rates, affordability criteria, income levels, and demographic data. The hub will ensure that all parties involved have access to accurate and up-to-date data, promoting collaboration, transparency, and informed decision-making.

- Allow secure data-sharing mechanisms, including data encryption, and compliance with privacy regulations.

API Integration Services:

- Develop HNMI API(s) and interface to the data exchange hub and other systems.

- Integrate with existing systems (e.g., housing databases, other third-party platforms).

- Provide API support for data exchange and external system integration.

Common Application

- Integration of Housing Navigator with future statewide common application for affordable housing.

Vendor Qualifications

In your response, please provide the following information:

A. **Company Overview**: Brief description of your company, including relevant experience, qualifications, and expertise in developing GIS-based platforms, AI-driven solutions, and data visualization tools. Please highlight any tech for good or civtech experience, specifically experience with public-facing tools, as well as your experience designing deliverables that are accessible to people with disabilities.

B. **Previous Projects.** Provide up to two examples of similar projects completed for clients in the public or private sector. Include relevant details such as the scope, technology stack used, and outcomes. Specifically note how these examples relate to the aspects of the scope of work you are interested in.

C. **Team Composition**: List the key personnel who may be involved in the project(s), along with their roles, relevant qualifications, and experience. Please describe how or if you use subcontractors.

D. Highlight whether you are interested in any specific component within the scope of work. We are open to vendors who may be able to approach the entirety of the scope of work or specific pieces. For each component of the scope of work in which you are interested, provide the following:

    A. **Technical Approach**: Outline a summary of proposed technical approach for developing the affordable housing platform, including system architecture, AI capabilities, GIS tools, and user interface (UI) and experience (UX) design considerations.

    B. **Estimated Timeline & Budget**: Provide a detailed estimate of the development timeline and budget range for delivering each component of the scope of work above, along with billing rates of key staff. Please follow this template.

E. **References** Provide at least two references from past clients who can speak to your ability to deliver complex software solutions on time and within budget. Please note the project(s) you worked on together.

Submission Guidelines

Please submit your response to this RFI by **Friday, April 25th, 2025, by 2:00 p.m.** via email to procurement@housingnavigatorma.org.

Responses should be in PDF format and include all required information outlined above.

Deadline for Questions

The deadline to submit questions is **April 8th, 2025, by 12:00 p.m**. If you have any questions regarding this RFI, please send questions to procurement@housingnavigatorma.org. Answers will be circulated by **EOD Friday, April 11th, 2025.**

Next Steps

Following the review of responses to this RFI, HNMI will invite a select number of vendors to participate in the next phase, which may include an RFP or further discussions. Ultimately, the Designated Provider for the scope of work described here will be selected via RFP.

We look forward to reviewing your response and exploring the potential for collaboration in this important initiative to enhance housing equity in Massachusetts.

Appendix

A. [Budget Calculation Spreadsheet](#)