Request for Information (RFI-0425-25)

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

Questions and Answers

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

1. Do you require that the selected firm be based in Massachusetts?

No, there is no requirement that the selected firm be based in Massachusetts.

2. Are there any contractual requirements from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that may influence which firm you select?

The Next Generation GIS-Based Software Platform will be required to integrate with the state's future Common Application. However, there are no contractual requirements at the time of this RFI.

3. Will this project ultimately be bid through COMMBUYS, as was, for example, the Common Application discovery project in summer of 2024?

There is no statewide contracting purchasing requirement.

4. What technologies does the existing housing search tool use?

Ruby on Rails backend, Single Page App React frontend, GraphQL API, with assets served via Cloudfront and a Postgres database.

5. Which features in this RFI would you want developed as part of your existing search tool vs as a separate application?

We are open to exploring optimal solutions, both within the existing search tool and through separate applications (such as plugins), to enhance the platform's functionality.

6. It appears that there may be overlap between this RFI and RFQ-0415 (Website Development and Hosting for Housing Navigator Massachusetts). Are there sections of this RFI that might be covered or shared by a vendor selected for the RFQ?

No, the two projects are separate. The other RFQ refers specifically to <u>our organizational website</u>, while this RFI refers to our <u>search tool</u>. There may be integration or a link from the website to the search tool.

7. Can you give us a rough estimate of your timeline and budget for the various items listed in the RFI?

Our timeline and budget expectations are flexible at this point.

8. Regarding AI capabilities, can you share the size of the database in which it is going to look for the best options for renters? Also how frequent is this database updated?

Our database is 4.8.GB and is updated multiple times per day.

9. Do you have any preference in using AI models as a SaaS over running an AI model in a proprietary server (The main differences are regarding costs and how the database is accessed)

We are open to both AI models, but looking for the most cost effective, secure, and sustainable approach.

10. Are you open to using an integrated KPI and dashboard tools instead of developing them inside the platform?

We are open to integrated KPI and dashboard tools that meet the requirements of the RFI.

11. How many integrations with 3rd parties have the platform?

Our platform is not currently integrated with any third parties.

12. Could you provide more details on the primary users of the platform (renters, property owners, administrators)? How will the user journey differ for each group?

Our platform serves multiple user groups. The frontend search tool is used by renters and service providers to find rental units. The backend is used by property owners and administrators to enter details about the properties (thus populating the database).

13. Do you have any design guidelines or preferences for the platform's UX/UI, especially for accessibility purposes? Should the platform adhere to WCAG guidelines for users with disabilities?

The platform should adhere to the latest WCAG guidelines.

14. How should renter preferences be captured in the assessment tool? Should it include a questionnaire, or will preferences be derived through behavior on the platform?

The assessment tool should be based on user answers to basic questions such as household size and income.

15. How would you like the match results to be presented to renters (e.g., ranked listings, visual maps, alerts)?

We are open to ideas on how match results should be presented.

16. On the RFI, you mention "mobile-friendly GIS-based software platform." What types of devices does this solution need to support? Web/Web-responsive/Mobile native?

We are most interested in a web-responsive solution.

17. Are there specific features that are essential for mobile users (e.g., push notifications, geolocation features)?

We are open to solutions that will improve the user experience.

18. What specific GIS features are most critical for the platform (e.g., search filters, property boundaries, proximity to public transport)? Are there any preferred GIS technologies or services you would like us to use?

We are currently using Google Maps.

19. Can you provide more information about what kind of AI algorithms or models you envision (e.g., recommendation systems, predictive modeling)?

This is a new area of exploration, and we are open to identifying the most cost-effective and optimal approach.

20. How much and what data will be available for training the AI search capabilities initially, and will the platform need to support real-time learning based on user interactions? AI hosting-wise, do you have a preferred cloud solution or prefer hosting on-premises?

This is a new area of exploration, and we are open to identifying the most cost-effective and optimal approach..

21. Can you clarify what existing systems and technologies (e.g., databases, applications) the platform needs to be integrated with? Are there specific third-party platforms or APIs you currently use, or will they be developed as part of this project?

Please see response to Question 4 for our current technology stack.

22. Is there already any specific platform that you have selected as the Data Exchange Bus we need to adhere to?

This is a new area of exploration, and we are open to identifying the most cost-effective and optimal approach.

23. Who are the specific stakeholders that will need access to this hub (e.g., public agencies, housing developers, landlords)?

This will be a service model designed to provide data access to various stakeholders.

24. Are there any specific data standards or formats (e.g., open data standards, CSV, JSON) that the data exchange hub should adhere to?

This is a new area of exploration, and we are open to identifying the most cost-effective and optimal approach.

25. What privacy regulations and compliance standards should the platform adhere to (e.g., HIPAA, GDPR, CCPA)?

The standard privacy regulations and compliance standards apply.

26. Are there any additional security measures required for the data exchange hub and user data storage (e.g., data encryption, multi-factor authentication)?

The standard security measures apply.

27. Can you provide any details on the expected traffic growth for the platform (e.g., user numbers, number of listings) over the next few years? This will help in planning for scalability and performance optimization.

This information can be found in theIntroduction section of the RFI. We expect this to continuously grow about 20% over the next three years.

28. What is the expected timeline for the platform's full development and launch? Are there any specific milestones or phases to be aware of (e.g., MVP launch, user testing)?

We expect this to be a 12-month development cycle to include MVP, User Testing, and launch.

29. Are there any fixed deadlines or constraints for particular features (e.g., the Common Application Integration)?

We expect this to be a 12-month development cycle to include MVP, User Testing, and launch.

30. Will the development of the common application be concurrent with or independent from the housing listing platform?

The development of the common application and housing search tool are separate tools that will be integrated. The development may occur concurrently or independently, depending on factors that are unknown at the time of this RFI.

31. Can you provide any guidelines or constraints around the budget for this project? Are there specific cost expectations for certain features (e.g., AI search, data exchange hub)?

Please see response to Question 7.

32. What's the expected frequency and depth of collaboration between the selected vendor and your internal subject matter experts (SMEs)?

The selected vendor and internal SMEs will collaborate closely, with a business analyst assigned to work on the requirements, user journey, and deliverables.

33. How do you envision the handover of knowledge and materials from your current vendor to the new partner?

There will be a transition period followed by the complete transfer of platform access to the selected vendor.

34. Do you anticipate ongoing vendor support and maintenance beyond initial development, and how will this be structured?

We anticipate the need for development and maintenance support.

35. Are there any resource location restrictions to be aware of?

We will consider this as part of our review process.

36. Beyond the initial scope, what future capabilities or expansions might you be considering (e.g., additional states, enhanced data analytics)?

This development project is to support the state of Massachusetts.

37. How do you feel about leveraging a low-code application development platform to build and deliver this solution?

This is a new area of exploration, and we are open to identifying the fastest and most cost-effective approach.

38. For the data exchange hub, the platform shall connect to an actual user directory or the users and roles are expected to be created within the platform?

The user roles may differ from those in the search listing and data exchange hub.

39. This is going to be a cloud based platform? Is there any restriction on which cloud provider is being used?

This will be a cloud based platform. We are open to exploring the most secure and cost effective cloud provider.

40. The platform is expected to be used from a pc browser only or should support mobile browsers and/or mobile app as well?

Please see response to question 16.

41. I would like to understand the scope of the data exchange hub. Is it a place where some users post information for a specific housing and others are able to download it? Or is it more like a peer to peer communication in which users share information directly between them?

The data exchange hub will function as a secure network, enabling the sharing of data from the search tool with third-party partners.

42. For the existing solution, aside from the functions listed for adding to the solution, have functional pain points been identified that deserve particular attention?

The major needs of this project were outlined in the RFI. Other priorities may be identified as discovery progresses with the selected vendor.

43. Of the functional pain points that need attention, and the items mentioned in the Scope of Work, is there a prioritization for the order in which you would like items addressed?

All items in the scope will need to be addressed. There is no priority order to them at this time.

44. Can we receive a demonstration of the current platform capabilities?

You can see our public facing search tool at search.housingnavigatorma.org.

45. Is there an allocated budget range or any budget expectations associated with the product?

Please see response to Question 7.