

The following questions and answers are provided in the order in which the questions were received.

**1. What is the driving force behind issuing this RFP?**

The Johnson County Board of Supervisors has a strategic priority to help create more affordable housing in Johnson County. There also are housing goals in the Comprehensive Plan and its recent update, including an action step to complete a study. (These plans are linked in the RFP.) The first step is to assess where we are, what we might be able to do and then see if we can get needs addressed.

**2. What is the source of the budget? Is it related to the funding program the City of Iowa City is using for its study?**

This study will be funded by the County's budget (taxpayer dollars). The funding is not related to funding the City of Iowa City has received.

**3. How much communication has there already been with the municipalities that would be part of the study?**

They are aware of this study but there has not been a lot of communication. These cities can participate if they want but if they don't, that will be honored.

**4. Is there a steering committee and/or will this be led by staff?**

Basically, this will be staff led. The goal is to get non-staff input through the focus groups and other engagement.

**5. How much interest have you had?**

As of Nov. 15, 2024, five companies had contacted the County with questions or expressed interest.

**6. Did you look at applying for the Empower Rural Iowa (ERI) Rural Housing Assessment Grant?**

The County itself is not eligible for this grant due to its population size. The County considered assisting the small towns to apply for this grant program; however, the direct funding approach (budgeting) was deemed more time-efficient and effective, and the County wanted an assessment that is more detailed than those supported by the ERI grant.

**Study Objectives and Scope**

**7. Can you elaborate on any specific equity indicators you would like to see in the assessment, particularly those related to economic security and inclusion?**

Data related to unemployment rates and labor force participation will be important. The report should also consider indicators that relate to service access, services such as quality childcare, that enable a person to seek and maintain employment. Indicators relating to access to quality housing and quality infrastructure (road network, water, sewer) should also be considered. This list is not exhaustive as all equity indicators tend to be related and affect one another.

**8. Are there specific population segments or geographic areas within the unincorporated area or small cities that require particular focus?**

As indicated in the RFP, special focus should be given to the historic villages and to the senior populations of the small cities. The needs of people living in Manufactured Home Parks, or with desire to live in these areas, are also important. As the study is underway, public input and research by the selected consultant may indicate groups or areas that warrant more attention.

**9. How do you envision our team integrating or distinguishing our analysis from the forthcoming Iowa City study?**

We can't really answer this question since we don't know exactly what the City of Iowa City report will show. The general expectation is that since Iowa City's study will be completed by June 2025, the selected consultant for our (County) study can read the findings and incorporate them as needed into the public engagement and other discussions with County staff and elected officials that will be part of the County study process. We would expect the selected consultant to consider how the Iowa City study findings inform, challenge, etc. what is discovered or recommended for the County's area of study.

**10. Are there any recent regional studies or reports that would be particularly beneficial to incorporate beyond those listed?**

The Iowa Finance Authority, we have learned since the publishing of the RFP, may have some relevant research and will be doing gap analysis for homelessness and potentially other studies. We are otherwise relying on the selected consultant to discover any gaps in our background preparation, bring such studies or reports to our attention, and incorporate them, as appropriate, into the assessment for the County.

**11. Could you share any particular challenges or successes you've faced in affordable housing initiatives that might inform our approach?**

Counties have jurisdiction over unincorporated areas, which are typically not the first choice for placing affordable housing initiatives due to transportation issues, where jobs are concentrated and other factors. Counties of Johnson County's size, or the very small cities in counties of our size, often do not qualify for state-level programs related to housing (see question #6). The County does not have planning staff devoted to housing as it has staff devoted to land use and sustainability.

**Forecasting and Data Needs**

**12. How detailed would you like the forecasting model to be in terms of demographic granularity (e.g., household size, age distribution, economic background)?**

We seek the selected consultant's explanations of what type of forecasting might be best for us in terms of accuracy and specificity.

**13. Are there any data limitations or gaps that Johnson County has encountered in previous assessments, and how can we proactively address these?**

The Johnson County PDS Department has not conducted previous housing assessments. We reference in the RFP an analysis conducted by the County's Social Services Department. You may find information in there useful. Other reports referenced in the RFP specify data limitations.

**14. To what extent should our forecasting take into account potential population shifts from Iowa City's metro area to surrounding small cities?**

If the selected consultant finds that potential population shifts from Iowa City's metro area to surrounding small cities are meaningful, then these shifts should be taken into account.

**Public Engagement Strategy**

**15. What tools or methods have been effective for community engagement in Johnson County in past studies?**

Plans referenced in the RFP, such as the 2024 update to the County's 2018 Comprehensive Plan as well as the County's 2022 Economic Development Plan for the Unincorporated Area and Smaller Towns refer to tools and methods used and metrics (e.g. number of survey responses). In general, we sometimes have had high engagement at in-person events and for surveys, and sometimes the opposite has been true. The effectiveness of engagement is very location- and topic-dependent even if the same tools are used for similar events.

**16. How would Johnson County prefer we approach focus groups or interviews with underrepresented community members, especially in rural areas, to ensure inclusive participation?**

We believe the selected consultant should make their best determination of how to approach this and propose an approach in their response to the RFP. See Question 17 below as well.

**17. Is there an appetite for exploring creative engagement techniques (e.g., virtual town halls, mobile survey stations) in this study?**

Mobile survey stations may be appropriate. Virtual town halls may be acceptable if they augment in-person sessions and/or include people who otherwise would not be able to participate. Due to potential broadband issues (which we are separately trying to ameliorate in our communities) and the partly limited nature of virtual meetings for public input, we do not want a strong reliance on virtual meetings. We believe the selected consultant should make their best determination of how to approach this and propose as appropriate in their response to the RFP.

**18. Would it be beneficial to include visual storytelling or digital storytelling in engagement sessions to convey housing needs and potential solutions?**

If a consultant believes this would be helpful and will meet the other expectations of the RFP within budget, they may propose it. We believe it is important to talk directly with people and learn what impedes their ability to secure housing; however, the selected consultant should be

mindful that recommendations cannot rely on anecdote. We will need recommendations driven by verifiable quantitative and qualitative data.

## **Recommendations and Implementation**

### **19. Are there preferred formats for presenting recommendations to elected officials that have resonated in the past (e.g., visual summaries, interactive reports)?**

Recommendations are usually presented in a PowerPoint presentation at a public work session. The presentation should be prepared in advance (approximately one week prior) for inclusion in the meeting packet. The elected officials then typically ask questions and make suggestions at the meeting. The input on the recommendations can then be incorporated into the final report.

### **20. What types of partnerships (e.g., with non-profits, local businesses) do you see as underutilized or particularly promising for housing initiatives in Johnson County?**

This is a good question, but we believe the selected consultant should find answers to this question during the study process. We do not want to pre-empt the assessment input process.

### **21. Is there an interest in exploring emerging financing models or non-traditional funding sources that could support affordable housing in the county?**

The County will be open to all potential funding ideas.

### **22. *Is there a completion date in mind for this project? And, is the County study dependent on the Iowa City study to the degree that the project must wait to commence till the given June 2025 date?***

We have no specific completion date. We expect the study to be timely and of high quality. Please refer to the RFP.

### **23. *Does the County have any staff that may be able to help proofread the Arabic, French, and Mandarin Chinese surveys requested in the proposal?***

We do not have staff who can provide this proofreading.

### **24. Does the existing information in the Downtown Walkaround Reports created by the Iowa Economic Development Authority include lists of vacant or blighted properties in the small cities that can be used as a baseline?**

These reports do not include detailed lists.

### **25. Can the County clarify what suffices as proof that the firm has adequate liability insurance?**

We typically seek a PDF of "Certificate of Liability Insurance" showing that professional liability insurance for all coverages, limits and endorsements are in full force and will be maintained during the course of the project.

### **26. If meetings with elected officials do not coordinate within consecutive days that can be grouped to save cost on travel, would virtual meetings be acceptable with some of these city councils?**

We would potentially be open to that if budget and officials' time constraints absolutely require it, but we prefer in-person.

**27. The following questions relate to the City of Iowa City's Five-Year Consolidated Plan, Fair Housing Study, and a Regional Housing Needs Analysis referenced.**

- a. Is there an expectation that we will be using information from that study/analysis as a basis for this project? If so, can we see the RFP and proposal so we can adjust the scope accordingly?**

Information from Iowa City's plans, studies and analysis can inform the Johnson County study but we would not say they are the sole "basis." The PDF at the link provided includes (in this order) the City of Iowa City's agreement with their selected consultant, the [City of Iowa's RFP and their selected consultant's proposal](#).

- b. Is there an expectation that that the city project would not consider manufactured housing? If this is the case, are you expecting us to assume incorporation of that analysis in our scope/budget or would we identify that as a potential add-on?**

As stated in the RFP, the manufactured / mobile home parks within the metro area should also be included in the County's study only if they are not sufficiently analyzed in other recent studies or the housing assessment study that the City of Iowa City is expected to complete by spring 2025. This additional work could be negotiated with the selected consultant prior to study commencement. The cost can be identified as a possible add-on.

- c. Should regulatory solutions and funding sources be focused on addressing county issues not addressed in that analysis?**

Yes, although if in the course of the selected consultant's work for us, the firm finds something useful for the City of Iowa City, we would appreciate it being mentioned.

- d. Is there an expectation that we would engage with that team before they complete their study?**

No, there is no expectation of this. The City of Iowa City study should be referenced, but we are not wanting the city's consultants or staff to be unduly engaged. Our study is a County-driven project.

**28. An additional question is about the selection process. It is mentioned that one criteria is the location of the consultants proposing. Could you expand on what that criteria means for this process? We have successfully completed projects with similar proximities but recognize that communities' may have a preference for firms in the immediate vicinity.**

The County would like to maximize its budget and have as many in-person meetings as possible. We would have some concerns about a budget where significant funds have to be set aside for travel by the consulting team and/or there is a risk of too many meetings defaulting to virtual due to travel issues, which we realize are sometimes beyond anyone's control.