Executive Briefing: City of Owosso Community Engagement Platform RFP

1.0 Strategic Opportunity Analysis

The City of Owosso's Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Community Engagement Platform represents a significant strategic opportunity for a qualified vendor. This initiative is not merely a technology procurement; it is a core component of the City's plan to modernize its governance and foster a more inclusive relationship with its residents. A successful proposal will demonstrate a deep understanding of the City's objectives and articulate a clear vision for how the proposed platform can serve as the digital foundation for this transformation.

The City of Owosso, a community of approximately 14,500 residents, is seeking a cloud-based Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) solution to fundamentally enhance public participation. The core mission is to move beyond the limitations of traditional engagement methods like in-person meetings and standard social media outreach. The City aims to implement a platform that can systematically collect, analyze, and report on public input regarding key civic issues, from infrastructure projects to new policy development, ensuring the process is equitable, transparent, and user-friendly for all residents.

Project Goals

The RFP outlines four primary goals that a prospective platform must achieve. Understanding the strategic implication of each goal is critical to crafting a competitive response.

• **Broaden opportunities for resident participation beyond in-person meetings and social media.**

    ◦ *Implication:* The City seeks to overcome the chronic challenges of low turnout at public meetings and the unrepresentative nature of social media feedback. A winning platform must offer a low-barrier, accessible digital venue for civic discourse that engages the "silent majority" of residents who are otherwise not heard.

• **Provide data-driven insights into community sentiment.**

    ◦ *Implication:* This signals a strategic shift from anecdotal feedback to empirical evidence. The City requires quantifiable data to support council decisions, measure shifts in public opinion over time, and defend policy choices with a clear understanding of community priorities.

• **Ensure equitable engagement with underrepresented populations.**

    ◦ *Implication:* This is a critical governance objective tied to social equity and potentially to grant funding requirements. The platform must be a tool for identifying and closing participation gaps, ensuring that City policies and services do not disproportionately affect certain demographics.

• **Increase transparency through public-facing dashboards.**

    ◦ *Implication:* This goal is central to building public trust and demonstrating accountability. The City needs to "close the loop" with residents by showing how their input directly informs project outcomes, which is a core function of modern, transparent governance.

To meet these goals, the City has specified a detailed set of functional and technical capabilities that the platform must deliver.

2.0 Critical Platform Requirements

This section dissects the City's specific technical and functional needs as outlined in the RFP. A compliant proposal must, at a minimum, address all mandatory requirements. The inclusion of desired features, however, will be a key competitive differentiator, demonstrating a more comprehensive and forward-thinking solution.

2.1 Mandatory Functional Capabilities

The platform must provide a comprehensive suite of tools designed for modern civic engagement, security, and accessibility.

• **Engagement Tools:** Support for online surveys with customizable question types, digital polling and voting tools for quick feedback, and the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the data gathering and analysis process.

• **Equity & Accessibility:** Full compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 standards, along with built-in multilingual support.

• **Analytics & Reporting:** Provision of real-time analytics dashboards, demographic tracking of respondents (age, zip code, etc.), sentiment analysis of open-text responses, and the ability to export all data to common formats like Excel, CSV, or PDF.

• **Transparency & Public Access:** Public-facing dashboards displaying aggregated, anonymized results, and a feature allowing residents to track project updates and view the outcomes of their feedback.

• **Security & Privacy:** End-to-end data encryption (both in transit and at rest), role-based access controls for City staff to manage permissions, and compliance with modern data privacy regulations.

• **Integration & Workflow:** Seamless integration with the City's website, social media platforms, Laserfiche document management system, and video streaming services.

2.2 Desired Functional Enhancements

Beyond the mandatory baseline, the City has expressed interest in several advanced features that would enhance the platform's value. These include an interactive mapping tool for location-based feedback, the ability for residents to submit input via SMS/text message, comparison of respondent demographics against census data to gauge representativeness, an email notification system for project updates, and tools for anonymizing sensitive resident data. Proposals that include these capabilities as part of their core offering or as well-defined add-ons will stand out.

2.3 Core Technical Specifications

The RFP specifies a set of non-negotiable technical requirements that define the platform's architecture and operational standards.

• Cloud-based Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) solution.

• Vendor-managed hosting, patching, and system upgrades.

• A guaranteed service level agreement (SLA) of 99.9% uptime.

• Seamless operation on iOS and Android mobile devices without requiring any client-side software installations.

• Support for concurrent logins across multiple City departments.

These requirements clarify *what* the platform must do; the City's evaluation criteria define *how* it will judge the proposals that aim to deliver it.

3.0 Evaluation Criteria & Proposal Strategy

A successful proposal strategy must be built around the City's explicit evaluation criteria. The narrative, evidence, and pricing must directly align with the four pillars upon which all submissions will be judged, demonstrating a clear understanding of the City's priorities.

1. **Responsiveness to RFP**

    ◦ The City's focus on clarity, completeness, and adherence to the nine-part structure is a direct test of a vendor's attention to detail. A meticulously organized submission serves as a proxy for the quality of partnership and execution the City can expect throughout the contract lifecycle.

2. **Ability to Perform**

    ◦ Demonstrating direct experience with municipalities is paramount. The request for a list of Michigan clients suggests a preference for a vendor familiar with the state's public sector landscape. A strategic response will go beyond a simple list and include a detailed case study of a similar Michigan implementation, focusing on adoption metrics and return on investment.

3. **References**

    ◦ The City is conducting deep due diligence on vendor stability and project history. The requirement for a minimum of three references *and* a list of all municipal projects from the last five years indicates that they are scrutinizing long-term performance and project completion rates, not just a few hand-picked success stories.

4. **Cost Proposal**

    ◦ The evaluation prioritizes overall value, not the lowest price. A winning proposal will articulate a clear value proposition, justifying the three-year total cost of ownership by directly tying platform features and services back to the City's core strategic goals (e.g., "The multilingual support module directly addresses the goal of equitable engagement and is priced at X.").

This evaluation framework provides a clear roadmap for structuring a competitive bid, leading directly to the procedural deadlines for submission.

4.0 Key Dates & Submission Protocol

Strict adherence to the official RFP schedule and submission protocols is mandatory for a proposal to be considered. All deadlines are firm.

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| Milestone | Deadline |
| RFP Issued | September 11, 2025 |
| Deadline for Written Questions | September 26, 2025 |
| Responses to Questions Issued | October 3, 2025 |
| **Proposals Due** | **October 7, 2025 @ 3:00 PM** |
| Vendor Selection & Council Approval | October 20, 2025 |

4.1 Point of Contact

All correspondence and questions regarding this RFP must be directed to the official RFP Coordinator.

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