

Official Request for Proposal (RFP) Advertisement

**North Florida Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) Broadband
Feasibility and Sustainability Study**

Sponsoring Agency:

North Florida Economic Development Partnership

RFP NO. 1-2009

**North Florida Economic Development Partnership * 325 John Knox Road * Building 300 *
Tallahassee, FL 32303**

North Florida Economic Development Partnership

RFP NO. 1-2009

North Florida Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) Broadband Feasibility and Sustainability Study

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North Florida Economic Development Partnership

Advertisement for Request for Proposals


RFP No. 1-2009

North Florida Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) Broadband Feasibility and Sustainability Study

Proposals for a **North Florida Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) Broadband Feasibility and Sustainability Study** (hereafter referred to as “**Broadband Study**”) will be received by the North Florida Economic Development Partnership (NFEDP) at the office located at 325 John Knox Road, Building 300, Tallahassee, Florida 32303, until Close of Business (5:00 p.m.) on **Thursday, July 16, 2009**. Any proposal received after **Thursday, July 16, 2009** whether by mail or otherwise, will be returned unopened. Proposers are responsible for insuring that their proposal is stamped by official NFEDP personnel by the deadline indicated. **Electronic submittals are not permitted.**

The NFEDP is soliciting Requests for Proposals (RFP) for a consultant to conduct an assessment, evaluation, feasibility, management and implementation, and business case and sustainability plan for broadband development and/or enhancement in North Central Florida. The geographic area for the study covers the 14-County RACEC covering Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union Counties, Florida.

An original and five (5) copies of the proposal shall be submitted in sealed envelopes/packages addressed to Jeff Hendry, Executive Director, North Florida Economic Development Partnership, and marked “**RFP NO. 1-2009- Broadband Study**”.



Jeff Hendry

Executive Director

North Florida Economic Development Partnership

Dated: July 2, 2009

North Florida Economic Development Partnership

RFP No. 1-2009

North Florida Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) Broadband Feasibility and Sustainability Study

PART I

PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

1-1 Introduction: The North Florida Economic Development Partnership (NFEDP) is soliciting Requests for Proposals (RFP) for a consultant(s) to provide a **North Florida Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC) Broadband Feasibility and Sustainability Study** that can be used by the NFEDP.

1-2 Project Overview, General Description, and Proposed Time Schedule

The project is a feasibility study to evaluate the benefits that would be derived from high-speed Internet access in the economically distressed region of the North Central Florida Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern and how best to implement it. This region covers fourteen (14) rural counties including, Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union.

Availability and access to reliable, high-speed Internet and other network connectivity is no longer a luxury but a critical infrastructure to attract new business and industry into a region and to insure existing firms are competitive in today's state, national, and in fact, global business and industrial environments. Expanding broadband infrastructure in this region will also benefit and enhance many existing public sector services and facilities including education (i.e., K-12 and higher education), health care (rural hospitals, health care clinics), libraries and state and local government services and facilities. Access and availability to this necessary technology infrastructure will also enhance training and education opportunities and the day to day quality of life for residents who live in this region. In short, pursuing and securing technological advances is a major requirement for sustainable economic development opportunities and providing citizens with the means to improve the quality of their lives.

This feasibility study will determine if high-speed Internet access can be successfully deployed throughout the region and recommend the best and most economical means of expanding high-speed Internet access throughout the North Central Florida region. The study should consist, at a minimum, of an evaluation of existing studies for high-speed access in rural areas, assessment of current broadband infrastructure (fiber and wireless), access and availability, and current connectivity speeds for private and public businesses and facilities within the region. The study will identify locations, private (and public) providers of high speed Internet and network connectivity, availability and pricing (by county) of existing Internet access systems, and identify alternative options, requirements and estimated costs for expanding high speed connectivity throughout the region. The study should also provide a business case model for sustainability of broadband expansion throughout the region. The results of the study are also expected to be used in numerous grant applications targeting future funding for broadband infrastructure in the region.

Proposed Project Schedule

| <u>Task</u> | <u>Time Frame</u> |
|--|--------------------------|
| Prepare documents for RFP, advertise, evaluate and award | 07/03/09 – 08/03/09 |
| Negotiate a contract with the successful submitter | 08/03/09 – 08/12/09 |
| Contractor to gather data for feasibility study | 08/17/09 – 09/30/09 |
| Data analysis and report preparation and formal presentations to NFEDP Board and Community Outreach meetings | 10/01/09 – 11/16/09 |
| Communication and dissemination of study results throughout the region. | Ongoing |

Important Note: It is anticipated that the time frame above could be shortened (or expedited) and that the actual study could begin significantly sooner than outlined above. The timeline above is a **maximum timeframe.**

1-3 Proposal Submission and Withdrawal: The NFEDP must receive all proposals by Close of Business (5:00 p.m.) on Thursday, July 16, 2009. The proposals shall be submitted at the following address:

North Florida Economic Development Partnership
Attention: Jeff Hendry
325 John Knox Road, Building 300
Tallahassee, FL 32303

To facilitate processing, please clearly mark the outside of the proposal package as follows: **RFP No. 1-2009- Broadband Study.** This package shall also include the Proposer's return address.

Proposers may withdraw their proposals by notifying the NFEDP in writing at any time prior to the deadline for proposal submittal. After the deadline, the proposal will constitute an irrevocable offer, for a period of six (6) months. Once opened, proposals become a record of the NFEDP and will not be returned to the Proposer.

The NFEDP cautions Proposers to assure actual delivery of mailed or hand-delivered proposals directly to the NFEDP at 325 John Knox Road, Building 300, Tallahassee, FL 32303 prior to the deadline set for receiving proposals. Telephone confirmation of timely receipt of the proposal may be made by calling Jeff Hendry at (850) 487-1870, before proposal closing time. Any proposal

received after the established deadline **will not** be considered and will be returned unopened to the Proposer(s).

1-4 Number of Copies: Proposers shall submit an **original and five (5) copies** of the proposal in a sealed package/envelope marked as noted above. The Proposer will be responsible for timely delivery, whether by personal delivery, US Mail or any other delivery medium.

1-5 Development Costs: Neither the NFEDP nor its representatives shall be liable for any expenses incurred in connection with preparation of a response to this Request for Proposal. Proposers should prepare their proposals simply and economically, providing a straightforward and concise description of the Proposer's ability to meet the requirements of the RFP.

1-6 Inquiries: Interested Proposers may contact Jeff Hendry, Executive Director, NFEDP regarding questions about the proposal by telephone at (850) 487-1870 or by facsimile at (850) 487-0041.

The NFEDP will receive written requests for clarification concerning the meaning or interpretations of the RFP. NFEDP personnel are authorized **only** to direct the attention of prospective Proposers to various portions of the RFP so that they may read and interpret such for themselves.

No employee or official of the NFEDP is authorized to interpret any portion of this RFP or give information as to the requirements of the RFP in addition to what is contained in the written RFP document.

1-7 Addendum: Proposers shall contact the NFEDP to ascertain whether any addenda have been issued. Failure to do so could result in an unresponsive proposal. Any oral explanation given before the RFP opening will not be binding.

All Proposers are expected to carefully examine the proposal documents. Any ambiguities or inconsistencies should be brought to the attention of the NFEDP through written communication prior to the opening of the proposals.

1-8 Contract Awards: The NFEDP anticipates entering into an Agreement with the Proposer who submits the proposal determined by the NFEDP to best serve the interests of the NFEDP.

The NFEDP reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals, with or without cause, to waive technicalities or to accept the proposal which, in its sole judgment, best serves the interest of the NFEDP, or to award a contract to the next most qualified proposal if the initial successful proposal does not execute a contract within thirty (30) days after the award of the proposal.

The Proposer understands that this RFP does not constitute an offer or an Agreement with the Proposer. An offer or Agreement shall not be deemed to exist and is not binding until proposals are reviewed, accepted by appointed staff, the recommended proposal has been identified, approved by the appropriate level of authority of the NFEDP and executed by all parties.

Any proposal may be withdrawn until the date and time set above for the submission of the proposals. Any proposal not so withdrawn shall constitute an irrevocable offer for a period of six (6) months to provide to the NFEDP the services set forth in this Request for Proposal(s).

The NFEDP reserves the right to reject all proposals, to abandon the project and/or to solicit and re-advertise for other proposals.

1-9 Contractual Agreement: This RFP shall be included and incorporated in the final award. The order of contractual precedence will be the Contract or Price Agreement document, original Terms and Conditions, and contractor response. Any and all legal action necessary to enforce the award will be held in the NFEDP office and the contractual obligations will be interpreted according to the laws of Florida. **Any additional contract or agreement requested for consideration by the Proposer must be attached and enclosed as part of the proposal.**

1-10 Selection Process: A Selection Committee comprised of members appointed by the Chairman of the NFEDP and Executive Committee, will review, evaluate and recommend a preferred, second, and third proposal for negotiation and contracting. **The members include three (3) representatives from the NFEDP Executive Committee and two outside subject matter representatives.**

The NFEDP reserves the right to further negotiate any proposal, including price, with the preferred, second, or third recommended Proposer. If an agreement cannot be reached with the preferred Proposer, the NFEDP reserves the right to negotiate and recommend award to the second recommended Proposer or subsequent Proposers until an agreement is reached.

1-11 Public Records: Upon award recommendation or ten (10) days after opening, whichever occurs first, proposals become “public records” and shall be subject to public disclosure consistent with Chapter 119 Florida Statutes. Proposers must invoke the exemptions to disclosure provided by law in the response to the RFP, must identify the data or other materials to be protected, and must state the reasons why such exclusion from public disclosure is necessary. Document files may be examined, during normal working hours.

1-12 Public Entity Crimes: Award will not be made to any person or affiliate identified on the Department of Management Services’ “Convicted Vendor List”. This list is defined as consisting of persons and affiliates who are disqualified from public contracting and purchasing process because they have been found guilty of a public entity crime. No public entity shall award any contract to, or transact any business in excess of the threshold amount provided in Section 287.017 Florida Statutes for Category Two (currently \$25,000.00) with any person or affiliated on the “Convicted Vendor List” for a period of thirty-six (36) months from the date that person or affiliate was placed on the “Convicted Vendor List” unless that person or affiliate has been removed from the list. By signing and submitting the RFP proposal forms, Proposer attests that they have not been placed on the “Convicted Vendor List”.

1-13 Code of Ethics: If any Proposer violates or is a party to a violation of the code of ethics of the NFEDP or the State of Florida with respect to this proposal, such Proposer may be disqualified from performing the work described in this proposal or from furnishing the goods or services for which the proposal is submitted and shall be further disqualified from submitting any future proposals for work, goods or services for the NFEDP.

1-14 Rights and Privileges: Rights and privileges granted by the NFEDP shall not be assigned or transferred in any manner whatsoever without written approval of the NFEDP. At all times during the term of the contract the Contractor shall act as an independent contractor and at no time shall the Contractor be considered an agent or partner of the NFEDP. The Contractor shall obtain and pay for all permits, licenses, Federal, State and Local taxes chargeable to its operation.

1-15 Lobbying Prohibited: Proposers are not to contact or lobby any NFEDP personnel of official related or involved with this Request for Proposals. Any violation of this condition may result in rejection and/or disqualification of the Proposer.

1-16 Disclosure and Disclaimer: Any action taken by the NFEDP in response to proposals made pursuant to this RFP or in making any award or failure or refusal to make any award pursuant to such proposals, or in any cancellation of award, or in any withdrawal or cancellation of this RFP, either before or after issuance of an award, shall be without any liability or obligation on the part of the NFEDP or their advisors.

In its sole discretion, the NFEDP may withdraw this RFP either before or after receiving proposals, may accept or reject proposals, and may accept proposals which deviate from the RFP. In its sole discretion, the NFEDP may determine the qualifications and acceptability of any party or parties submitting proposals in response to this RFP (each such party being hereinafter a “Proposer”).

Following submission of a proposal, the Proposer agrees to promptly deliver such further details, information and assurances, including, but not limited to, financial and disclosure data, relating to the proposal and/or the Proposer, including the Proposer’s affiliates, officers, directors, shareholders, partners and employees, as requested by the NFEDP.

The information contained herein is provided solely for the convenience of proposers. It is the responsibility of a Proposer to assure itself that information contained herein is accurate and complete. Any reliance on communications with NFEDP representatives or advisors, shall be at each proposer’s own risk. Proposers should rely exclusively on their own investigations, interpretations and analyses in connection with this matter. No warranty or representation is made by the NFEDP that any proposal conforming to these requirements will be selected for consideration, negotiation or approval.

The NFEDP and its representatives shall have no obligation or liability with respect to this RFP, or the selection and award process contemplated hereunder. Neither the NFEDP nor its representatives warrant or represent that any award or recommendation will be made as a result of the issuance of this RFP. All costs incurred by a Proposer in preparing and responding to this RFP are the sole responsibility of the Proposer. Any recipient of this RFP who responds hereto fully acknowledges all the provisions of this Disclosure and Disclaimer and agrees to be bound by the terms hereof. Any proposal submitted pursuant to this RFP is at the sole risk and responsibility of the party submitting such proposal.

This RFP is made subject to correction of errors, omissions, or withdrawal without notice. Information contained in the RFP is for guidance only and each recipient hereof is cautioned and advised to independently verify all of such information. In the event of any differences between this Disclosure and Disclaimer and the balance of the RFP, the provisions of this Disclosure and Disclaimer shall govern.

1-17 Proposal Contents: All material submitted becomes the property of the NFEDP. Selection or rejection of proposal does not affect this provision.

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PART II

NATURE OF SERVICES REQUIRED

2-1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF WORK

The purpose of the RFP is for a consultant(s), on behalf of and in cooperation with the NFEDP, to produce a comprehensive study focused on:

- a. Assessing the need for new or expansion of existing broadband infrastructure (private and/or public) in the 14-County North Florida Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC). Mapping capacity and data, as well as expertise in analyzing such data, related to this assessment is recommended.
- b. Evaluating the feasibility of developing new and/or expanding current broadband capacity for the purpose of enhancing high speed connectivity and network operability throughout the region; the feasibility analysis could include an assumption of Federal Stimulus funds, state funding sources, local and private sources. However, these resources are not required to be part of any feasibility assessment and analysis.
- c. If determined feasible, articulating and quantifying the anticipated economic, socio-economic, and other community benefits and value anticipated to be derived from new or enhanced broadband capacity and deployment in the region.
- d. If determined feasible, describe or provide a business case and sustainability model for deployment, governance and oversight, operational management and implementation, and long-term financial viability of such an initiative.

2-2 METHODOLOGY

Proposers should provide a description of their methodology or methodologies for conducting various elements of the study.

2-3 PROJECT EXPERTISE

While all firms/organizations/entities are encouraged to apply for this RFP, it is anticipated that a variety of skills, expertise, and experience will be required to implement the requirements and produce the results targeted for this Broadband Study. Generally, proposer(s) will need to possess and demonstrate broadband and technology network

knowledge and expertise, operations and management experience, business and financial analysis skills, and policy and regulatory expertise.

More specifically, proposer(s) should **possess and demonstrate**:

- a. Thorough understanding of a variety of broadband technologies and their possible deployment including but not limited to fiber optics, metro and long haul networks, and wireless.
- b. Experience in understanding, developing, and executing business plans and the sustainability of such plans. This might include identifying and understanding potential value and risk factors to success; projecting likely outcomes for a given business plan; modeling cash flows and management; recommended governance, transparency, and accountability considerations; regulatory frameworks and their implications; and other factors that might affect the viability, feasibility, and sustainability of a business plan.
- c. Experience in initiating, managing and implementing technology and communications networks in new or emerging markets.

2-4 RFP and CONTRACT COORDINATOR

Jeff Hendry, Executive Director

North Florida Economic Development Partnership

325 John Knox Rd., Building 300

Tallahassee, Florida 32303

(850) 487-1870

Facsimile: (850) 487-0041

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PART III

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

3-1 RULES FOR PROPOSALS

Proposer shall submit one (1) original and five (5) copies in a clear, concise format, on 8 ½ "x 11" paper. The proposal shall contain tabbed sets of the information required herein to be considered for award. Omission of required data may be cause for disqualification. Any other information thought to be relevant, but not applicable to the enumerated sections, should be provided as an appendix to the proposal. If publications are supplied by a Proposer to respond to a requirement, the response should include reference to the document number and page number. Proposals not providing this reference will be considered to have to reference materials included in the additional documents.

Proposals must be properly signed in ink by the owner/principal having the authority to bind the proposer to this agreement.

The proposal must name all persons or entities associated with and anticipated to work on the project should their proposal be selected. The proposal must declare that it is made without collusion with any other person or entity submitting a proposal pursuant to this RFP.

3-2 SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

An **original copy** (so marked) and **five (5) copies** to include the following shall be submitted for a proposal to be considered:

1. **Title Page.** Title page shall provide the request for proposals' subject, the firm/company/organization's name, the name, address and telephone number of contact person, and the name, address, principal place of business and telephone number of legal entity with whom the contract is to be written.
2. **Table of Contents.** The table of contents of the proposal should include a clear and complete identification of the materials submitted by section and page number.
3. **Transmittal Letter.** This letter will summarize in a brief and concise manner the Proposer understands the work to be performed, the commitment to perform the work within the anticipated time period, a statement why the proposer believes it to be best qualified to provide the services, and a statement that the proposal remains in effect for ninety (90) days. An authorized agent of the Proposer must sign the Letter of Transmittal indicating the agent's title of authority.
4. **Detailed Technical Proposal.** The detailed proposal should follow the order set forth in this Request for Proposal.

Proposals must be submitted in a sealed envelope/package clearly marked with the name of the proposing entity and the following: **“RFP No. 1-2009- Broadband Study”**.

3-3 PROPOSAL PURPOSE

General Requirements – The purpose of the proposal is to demonstrate the qualifications, competence, capacity and methodology of the proposers seeking to provide the services in conformity with the requirements of this Request for Proposal. As such, the substance of proposals will carry more weight than their form or manner of presentation. The technical proposal should demonstrate the combined qualifications of the proposer and of the particular staff to be assigned to this engagement. It should also specify an approach that will meet the Request for Proposal requirements.

The proposal should address all of the points outlined in the Request for Proposal. The proposal should be prepared simply and economically, providing a straightforward, concise description of the proposer’s capabilities to satisfy the requirements of the Request for Proposal. While additional data may be presented, the following subjects must be included.

Section 1: INTRODUCTION LETTER

An introduction letter introducing the ENTITY shall include the corporate name (if applicable), address and telephone number of principal office, number of years in business and size of staff. Include a reproduction of Corporate Charter Registration, if applicable. Indicate the primary person responsible for this project. Introduction shall be signed by an individual authorized to bind the firm. Briefly state that the Proposer understands the work to be done and make a positive commitment to perform and complete the project.

Section 2: APPROACH TO THE PROJECT

The proposal shall include a description of the proposed service, with any exhibits of documentation deemed essential, addressing the following phases of the proposed service:

- Overall approach and methods used to provide a professional assessment methodology;
- Methodology intended to implement and accomplish mission;
- Submit a scope of services for the purpose of entering into a formal contract. Scope of services and pricing shall be negotiated and decided prior to award of contract and become part of the contract document at award.
- All fees and charges.

Please provide us with any innovative strategies as to recommendations to provide the service or any additional services that may be beneficial, if any.

Section 3: PAST EXPERIENCE

The proposal shall include past performance, including the total number of similar locations successfully operated. Provide a minimum of three (3) references for which you provided a similar service within the past five (5) years of the scope and nature required by this RFP similar in size to this project. These references must include, as a minimum, the name of company, contact person, address, and telephone number. References shall include the general description of the project, the dates, and whether time lines were met. Letters of Commendations or Recommendation may be included in this section.

Section 4: OPERATIONAL INFORMATION

Proposers shall submit the following information as described in the sections below:

- A) Hours of operation;
- B) Proposed staffing levels;
- C) Provide resumes of all persons who will be involved in the Proposer's provision of services.

Section 5: COST DETAIL

Propose in writing, a fee schedule for your services and schedule of any additional costs to the NFEDP.

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PART IV

EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

4-1 EVALUATION AND AWARD – The NFEDP will select proposals deemed most qualified based on the submittal criteria. The Selection Committee will review and evaluate those Proposers whose proposals are deemed most qualified.

The NFEDP reserves the right to select the proposal which in the opinion and sole discretion of the NFEDP will be in the best interest of and/or provide the most value to the NFEDP. The NFEDP reserves the right to waive any irregularities and technicalities and may at its discretion request re-submittal of proposals.

4-2 SELECTION COMMITTEE – A Selection Committee comprised of members appointed by the Chairman of the NFEDP and Executive Committee, will review, evaluate and recommend a preferred, second, and third proposal for negotiation and contracting.

The NFEDP reserves the right to further negotiate any proposal, including price, with the preferred, second, or third recommended Proposer. If an agreement cannot be reached with the preferred Proposer, the NFEDP reserves the right to negotiate and recommend award to the second recommended Proposer or subsequent Proposers until an agreement is reached.

4-3 EVALUATION CRITERIA – The criteria shown herein shall be utilized in the evaluation of the proposals. The Selection Committee will evaluate all responsive written proposals to determine which proposals best meet the needs of the NFEDP, based on the evaluation criteria. It is expected that a contract will be executed between both parties for the services as may be necessary. The evaluation criteria will be based on Qualifications and Experience, Quality of Services, Approach to the Project, Innovative Strategies and Solutions, Operational information, financial information and Cost Detail, as well as other criteria generally covered or specifically referenced in this RFP.

4-4 INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS – Any innovative concepts and recommendations for expansion of services or to enhance the quality of services to the NFEDP that the Proposer considers pertinent for consideration should be included in the proposal.

4-5 ORAL PRESENTATIONS – Upon completion of the evaluation of all written proposals, the Selection Committee may determine the need for oral presentations from multiple proposers. Finalists requested for oral presentations (if desired) will be informed as to the purpose and intent of said presentations.

4-6 FINAL SELECTION –The NFEDP will select the proposer that meets and serves the best interests of the NFEDP. The NFEDP shall be the sole judge of its own best interests, the proposals, and the resulting negotiated agreement. The NFEDP's decisions will be final.

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EVALUATION CRITERIA

| Criteria | Weight |
|--|--------|
| <u>Qualifications and Experience / Ability of Professional Personnel / Financial</u> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expertise of human resources.• Qualifications & experience of the firm and its sub-contractors (if any noted) relevant to the Scope of Work.• Availability of qualified personnel.• Ability to meet set standards. Experience with county and city governments in Florida, special consideration may be given to firms with experience in working with governments in the 14-County North Florida RACEC region.• Previous experience in Broadband service delivery alternatives. | 25% |
| <u>Quality of Services</u> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conveyance of a willingness to work with NFEDP staff to maximize Resources, results and services associated with this RFP.• The ability to satisfactorily convey, via the completeness and clarity of their Proposal, a depth of understanding of the Scope of Work and the proposer's capacity to accomplish it successfully.• Diversity and depth of services provided. | 25% |
| <u>Technical Approach to the Project/Scope of Work</u> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding of NFEDP needs and results from project.• Approach to the Project and Methodology.• Technical Soundness of the proposal.• Applicability of the services offered.• Innovative Strategies and Recommendations. | 25% |

Fee

- Pricing Structure 15%
- Fee Schedule work sheet
- Other Costs

Other

- Overall completeness, clarity and quality of proposal 10%
- Location of firm
- Time frames and delivery dates / Project Schedule