

Request for Qualifications (RFQ)
City of Albany, CA



**Targeted Gas Line Decommissioning for
Equitable Electrification: Community
Outreach Services**

Release Date: May 14th, 2024

Due Date: June 14th, 2024

Introduction

Starting in 2020, the City of Albany has been developing a pilot project with the goal of electrifying all buildings on one city block and decommissioning the corresponding section of the gas pipeline. Recently, the City has received a grant from the Department of Energy's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) program to pursue this ongoing effort.

The City of Albany is requesting qualifications from consulting firms to assist with the community outreach and engagement phase of the project. The engagement work will be focused on the residents and building owners on the 12 potential project sites staff has identified. The City is seeking to do deep, targeted, and diversified engagement that connects with all stakeholders on the blocks selected in order to achieve the ultimate goal of achieving 100% community approval for at least one location.

Background

The City of Albany is a charter city with a population of approximately 21,270 located in Alameda County. The City encompasses 1.7 square miles and is bounded by the cities of El Cerrito and Richmond to the north and the City of Berkeley to the south.

Albany is a primarily residential community, consisting mostly of single-family homes and small multifamily buildings (3-7 units). Just over half of Albany's residential units are occupied by renters. Albany's population is supportive of climate action and many residents are early adopters of other climate solution technologies such as electric vehicles and solar systems. According to the Climate and Economic Screening Tool (CEJST) criteria, Albany experiences extremely high levels of unhealthy air quality, due to its lead paint exposure, proximity to traffic/waste sites and high rates of indoor natural gas combustion. Albany's Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) committed the City to reducing greenhouse gas emissions 70% by 2035 and achieving net zero emissions by 2045. In 2021, natural gas in buildings accounted for 40% of Albany's total greenhouse gas emissions. While the City has adopted policies to reduce natural gas use in new construction, eliminating gas from existing buildings will be the bulk of the work to achieve carbon neutrality.

Gas line decommissioning and zonal electrification is a promising new approach to achieving statewide climate goals. It can achieve greater efficiency and economies of scale, and also help avoid large investments in gas infrastructure with a dwindling user base. In fact, one of main goals of gas line decommissioning is to promote equity by helping low-income households electrify and at the same time preventing a rapid spike in natural gas prices.

The City of Albany began working on the pilot project in 2020, researching how targeted and zonal electrification offers promising routes towards equitable climate action. City staff have worked with PG&E staff to select potential pilot sites in Albany. Staff has identified 12 locations where the PG&E gas pipeline network comes to an end, making it hydrologically feasible to cap the pipeline without disrupting the rest of the system, and in a location where the pipeline would otherwise need to be repaired or replaced in the near future. In October 2023, the City was awarded a grant by the Department of Energy to pursue the next phase of the project. This phase will take place over two years and will include intensive community engagement with the potential project

sites, building electrification analyses, and negotiations for electrification and decommissioning, and reporting on findings and policy recommendations.

Project Scope and Overview

In order to decommission gas infrastructure, 100% of customers in the designated service area need to sign on. Otherwise, the project is in violation of section 451 of the Public Utilities Code (in California) which prohibits utility companies from denying any property owner of natural gas service unless they have expressly stated that they do not want the service.

This aspect of the project presents a unique and interesting challenge for community engagement. The engagement work will be small scale, intensive, and diverse. It will provide a close-up view of how different individuals and neighborhoods react to various engagement strategies. This pilot is also intended to be a guide for other jurisdictions as well as state and federal governments to pave the way for zonal electrification and gas line decommissioning.

A major goal of this project is to enhance equity and inclusivity within our community. Understanding the unique backgrounds and experiences of residents is crucial to our approach. This component will be prioritized in every aspect of the project, from conducting outreach to marginalized communities, to engaging with groups in an inclusive way.

The City is seeking a consultant to assist with the community outreach and engagement aspect of the project. The consultant will work with the City to assess up to 12 blocks and decide where and how to conduct outreach and engage with owners and residents. The consultant's approach can take a variety of forms and the City is open to any strategies that aid the goal of 100% acceptance from an entire block. Tasks will include:

Community Outreach Plan

The consultants will work with staff and electrification consultants to create a detailed community outreach plan including communication strategies, timelines, and events, as well as benchmark indicators. Several outreach strategies will be used and assessed to determine the most effective approach. Some methods that are anticipated include the following:

- Block parties
- Community meetings and focus groups
- Electric appliance demonstrations
- Open houses of homes with electrified appliances
- Traditional outreach formats of direct mailers, door hangers, door-to-door canvassing, and surveys.
- Social media

The plan should include strategies for engaging diverse communities, including limited english proficiency (LEP) and low-income individuals. It should also navigate ways to understand the main obstacles residents/owners foresee in electrifying. The plan will also strategize how to be tactful and sensitive with the goal of reaching 100% buy-in.

Conduct Community Outreach

Consultants will enact the outreach plan. This will likely involve:

- Planning, advertising, and hosting outreach events
- Creating and distributing outreach and educational materials
- Conducting focus groups
- Communicating with individual community members, answering questions and providing resources.
- Identifying target stakeholders and other community groups to engage with.

The project team and consultant will do deep, targeted engagement and will select potential sites to educate residents and property owners about electrification and gas line decommissioning. The goal for this stage of the project is that all households on the selected blocks will be reached by community engagement and 33% will self-report an increase in knowledge and likelihood to electrify.

Prepare for electrification assessments

The consultants will assist staff in securing permission from property owners to allow energy efficiency and electrification assessments of each building. These assessments will be conducted by a separate consultant and will be provided to building owners free of charge. Staff aims to secure agreements from all property owners on at least one block. Consultants will continue outreach and education as required to collect agreements from property owners.

Negotiations and agreements

The consultants will assist staff in engaging with the residents of selected sites, aiming to achieve 100% community buy-in for at least one location. This will entail negotiating the cost-sharing structure for the electrification work at each building and the details of the upgrades. Consultants will use insights and data from the outreach and engagement process to help overcome obstacles and identify strategies to secure agreements from all property owners on at least one block. This process should be viewed as bridging the gap from community engagement to community commitment.

Reporting

As this project is one of the first-of-its-kind, it is very important to capture the lessons learned and share this information widely for other communities' benefit. The consultants will rigorously assess the effectiveness and impact of each of the outreach activities considered and completed. Consultants will create an outreach and engagement toolkit to share with other jurisdictions considering similar projects. Consultants will provide input and assist staff with the creation of a policy recommendations report, a program design recommendations report, and a final pilot report. The consultants will draft a section of the final pilot report that summarizes the lessons learned from the outreach activities, including outlining the pros and cons and effectiveness of each outreach activity. In advance of conducting the outreach activities, the consultants will develop and, present to the City of Albany for approval, an evaluation plan including metrics that will be collected and considered. Additionally, consultants will brainstorm the most effective ways to communicate results back to the community.

Qualifications Content Requirements

The City welcomes a response to the RFQ in any format that best expresses the qualifications of the respondent. All packets should include the following minimum information:

1. **Cover Letter.** A statement or cover letter summarizing the key points of the consulting firms' interests and qualifications, pertinent areas of expertise, and the individual or individuals responsible for the work to be performed.
2. **Firm Profile.** A profile of the firm, including information regarding the key person or persons involved, detailing their qualifications, areas of expertise, past experience performing similar work, the firm's office location (if applicable), and staffing, including assignments and subconsultants (if any). Identify the individual who would be primarily responsible for day to day work with the City, including background and experience of the individual including education, professional licenses and certifications, and examples of work completed for jurisdictions in the San Francisco Bay Area.
3. **Work Approach.** A description of the firms general approach and strategies for community engagement projects. This section should demonstrate their methodology, their knowledge of community engagement principles, and the firm's ability to support diverse community members and advance equity.
4. **Experience.** A description of the consultant's pertinent project experience, including a list of recently performed relevant projects, past performance, individual or team accomplishments, and examples of similar experiences working for similar communities, including the names and contact information of references, including at least three (3) public agencies located within California. Background information on the person that will be working with City staff on a day-to-day basis should also be included.
5. **Fees.** A clear and comprehensive fee schedule, including a detailed statement of hourly rates for all positions and classifications of individuals involved, including rates for subconsultants and reimbursable expenses. The schedule should clearly explain all billable costs related to the services provided. Work progress estimation and billing methodology should also be clearly described.

Selection Criteria and Process

The City will evaluate qualifications based upon these criteria:

- Responsiveness to the RFQ.
- Experience and demonstrated success of the Respondent in planning and conducting intensive and inclusive community outreach and engagement and securing support from community members for sustainability-related projects.
- As part of this process, client references may be contacted.
- Ability to communicate effectively about the subject matter. In addition to knowledge of community outreach and engagement principles, consultants will ideally possess a basic knowledge of building electrification.
- Compensation rates.
- Evidence of the Respondent's ability to provide deliverables in a cost effective and timely manner.
- Ability to be creative both in techniques and in finding solutions.
- Sensitivity and strategic thinking. Ability to approach the community with tact and care in order to reach 100% buy-in

- Ability to support diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of the work. The ability to communicate in multiple languages (especially Spanish and Mandarin) is a plus.
- Other extraordinary elements or creative approaches to assisting staff. This particular selection criterion is intended to allow the City to expressly consider creative aspects of statements of qualifications that do not necessarily fall into other selection criteria. As a part of its evaluation, the City may request additional information or data from Respondents and may request Respondents to make in-person presentations of their qualifications to a panel of City representatives.

Registration of Intent to Submit Qualifications

Interested parties are requested to contact Michelle Plouse at mplouse@albanyca.org to register their intent to respond to the RFQ. Registration ensures that any modification to the RFQ can be transmitted as quickly as possible to all interested parties. A written confirmation of registration will be sent by email within two business days. If you do not receive written confirmation, or have any questions regarding the RFQ, please contact Michelle Plouse at mplouse@albanyca.org. It is the responsibility of the respondents, before submitting a response to the RFQ, to ascertain if the City has issued any notices, clarifications, addenda, or other communications to responders. Oral explanations or instructions from City staff shall not be considered binding on the City.

To Submit Qualifications

Please submit to:

Michelle Plouse
 City of Albany
 1000 San Pablo Avenue
 Albany, CA 94706
 Email: mplouse@albanyca.org
 Phone: 1 (510) 528-5754

Inquiries concerning this Request for Qualifications (“RFQ”) should be directed by email to Michelle Plouse, at mplouse@albanyca.org

General Conditions

The City reserves the right to:

- Waive any informalities or minor irregularities;
- Accept or reject any and all qualifications, or any items or part thereof;
- Withdraw or cancel this RFQ at any time without prior notice and the City makes no representations that any contract will be awarded to any firms responding to this RFQ;
- Reject all qualifications and seek new qualifications when it is in the best interest of the City to do so.
- Modify the RFQ as it deems necessary;
- Any information submitted to the City becomes public records and are subject to the Public Records Act;

- Seek any clarification or additional information from respondents as is deemed necessary to the evaluation of a response;
- Negotiate with the second-choice respondent if an acceptable contract is unable to be negotiated with the first-choice respondent within a reasonable period of time;
- Contract with separate entities for various components of the services.
- Judge the correctness, substance, and relevance of the respondents' written or oral representations, including seeking and evaluating independent information on any of the respondents' work cited as relevant experience.
- All expenses related to any respondents' submission or other expenses incurred during the period of time the selection process is underway, are the sole obligation and responsibility of that respondent. The City will not, directly, or indirectly, assume responsibility for such costs except as otherwise provided by written agreement.
- The consulting team selected will be required to sign the City of Albany's standard Agreement for Consultant Services and meet the City's insurance requirements, a copy of the agreement and insurance requirements are available upon request.