

Minnesota Learning, aka Northstar
SOLE SOURCE JUSTIFICATION

Specific Problem or Need

- What is the business need or problem that requires this contract?

There is a need for individuals to get digital literacy skills beyond employment goals, i.e., based on literacy standards rather than employment standards. We wish to take it out of the workplace context that has a narrow requirement and open it up making it more accessible for the multitude of other use cases for skill development. The rapidly developing world of digital software solutions addressing a wide range of human needs has left a solution to address these needs not available. This void affects both business and personal fields. A solution is sought. The libraries of Washington state are positioned to deal with this void.

Sole Source Criteria

- Is the agency proposing this sole source contract because of unavoidable, critical time delays or issues that prevented the agency from completing this acquisition using a competitive process? If so, please describe. For example, if time constraints are applicable, identify when the agency was on notice of the need for the goods and/or service, the entity that imposed the constraints, explain the authority of that entity to impose them, and provide the timelines within which work must be accomplished.

Time is not an issue.

- Is the agency proposing this sole source contract because of a geographic limitation? If the proposed contractor is the only source available in the geographical area, state the basis for this conclusion and the rationale for limiting the size of the geographical area selected.

Geography is not an issue.

- What are the consequences of not having this sole source filing approved? Describe in detail the impact to the agency and to services it provides if this sole source filing is not approved.

If this sole source approval is not met, citizens of Washington state will not get broadened skill development to be more competitive in entering the job market or improving job opportunities.

- What considerations were given to providing opportunities in this contract for small business, including but not limited to unbundling the goods and/or services acquired.

Any business was welcome regardless of the size.

- Describe the unique features, qualifications, abilities or expertise of the contractor proposed for this sole source contract.

Northstar is a digital literacy training system designed for libraries and community-based organizations and was providing products that were quite good in tackling the key areas of need. From our research, Northstar appeared unique in providing this service and matched the state library role on behalf of libraries across the state in making their offerings more available to the public.

- What kind of market research did the agency conduct to conclude that alternative sources were inappropriate or unavailable?

The Washington State Library (WSL) performed a search for opportunities to solve the defined need. In May 2022, the Washington State Library released an RFI via WEBS to 1472 vendors. (RFI 22-02 posted April 29, 2022 in WEBS and OSOS' web site).to test if other firms had previously unknown learning platforms that could reasonably substitute for Northstar as a digital literacy training system for libraries and community-based organizations in the state.

- Provide a detailed and compelling description of the costs and risks mitigated by contracting with this contractor (i.e., learning curve, follow-up nature).

Not only is Northstar unique in its offering and its foundation in quality standards, but its single-minded focus on digital equity allows for “just right” pricing. The few other products that offer any digital equity training provide less content (based on lesser or no standards) and the bulk of these offerings are unnecessary to the mission of WSL.

- Is the agency proposing this sole source contract because of special circumstances such as confidential investigations, copyright restrictions, etc.? If so, please describe.

These special situations are not applicable.

Sole Source Posting

- Provide the date in which the sole source posting was published in WEBS.

April 29, 2022 RFI 22-02 was posted to 1472 vendors. An additional posting was made May 4, 2023 to the same vendor pool.

Reasonableness of Cost

- Since competition was not used as the means for procurement, how did the agency conclude that the costs, fees, or rates negotiated are fair and reasonable? Please make a comparison with comparable contracts, use the results of a market survey, or employ some other appropriate means calculated to make such a determination.

WSL is highly experienced with providing statewide access to electronic content products. Northstar comes in much lower than traditional content sources in other topic areas. In addition, training platforms that provide any digital literacy training (smaller offerings with lesser or no foundations in accepted standards) would cost 5-20 X more than Northstar.