

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP): STRATEGIC PLANNING CONSULTANT

Downtown Partnership of Baltimore (DPOB)

Background and Overview

[Downtown Partnership of Baltimore](#) (DPOB) is the catalyst for investment and innovation in Downtown Baltimore, providing essential services to the Downtown Management Authority benefits district. We work to enhance the quality of life for the growing number of residents, businesses, and visitors through economic development, public space management, marketing initiatives, and a range of year-round programming aimed at increasing vitality.

In recent years, Downtown Baltimore has experienced significant momentum, fueled by nearly \$7 billion in new investment between 2018 and 2028, as well as the Mayor's strategic action plan - [Downtown Rise](#) - in addition to public space projects, strategic partnerships, and initiatives such as the [BOOST](#) program and large-format signage activation. Yet, we acknowledge Downtown is in a continued period of transition, and this is a pivotal moment to align our priorities, strengthen partnerships, and build on the momentum underway.

Our current strategic plan, developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, sunsets in 2025. While it provided a roadmap to navigate the challenges of the pandemic, we are now focused on reimagining Downtown Baltimore for its next chapter. DPOB seeks a qualified firm to help us craft a **forward-thinking strategic plan** that will guide the next 3–5 years of Downtown Partnership's priorities to accelerate Downtown Baltimore's transformation.

Purpose of the RFP

DPOB is seeking proposals from qualified firms or consultants to develop a comprehensive strategic plan that engages key stakeholders to:

- 1. Defines Key Focus Areas:**
Identifies priority areas for the organization, such as addressing ground-level vacancies, enhancing public spaces, and expanding economic development programs.
- 2. Optimizes Resources:**
Evaluates the alignment of our budget, staffing, and organizational structure with strategic goals.
- 3. Guides Long-Term Growth:**
Outlines a clear direction for our work over the next 3–5 years, including recommendations for expanding or adjusting focus areas and initiatives.
- 4. Builds on Downtown Expertise and Momentum**
Recognize ongoing initiatives, partnerships, and programs already driving Downtown's revitalization and Incorporates insights and best practices from firms with experience in urban planning, downtown revitalization, and economic development.

5. Provide Actionable Recommendations:

Develop a clear, actionable roadmap for the next phase of Downtown’s transformation, including measurable success metrics.

Tentative Timeline

Milestone	Target Date
Finalize RFP Document	December 30, 2024
RFP Released	January 2, 2025
Q&A Submission Deadline	February 12, 2025
Q&A Answer Deadline	February 19, 2025
Proposal Submission Deadline	February 26, 2025
Consultant Selected	Early March, 2025
Strategic Planning Kickoff	Mid-March, 2025
Stakeholder Engagement and Assessment	March–April 2025
Planning Sessions and Drafting	May–June 2025
Presentation of Draft Plan	July 2025
Final Strategic Plan Delivered	August 31, 2025

Overall Goal: Complete the strategic plan within **6–9 months** to maintain momentum and align with operational cycles.

Please send all respondent activity to bidbers@dpob.org

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Questions and Answers

1. Priorities and Success Metrics: *How does DPOB define success for this strategic plan, and are there any key metrics or benchmarks already identified?*

- **Response:** DPOB currently has a strategic plan with identified metrics and benchmarks that we've been working toward for the past five years. The goal of the new strategic plan is to assess the current outcomes, review the effectiveness of existing metrics, and develop new key metrics and benchmarks for the upcoming strategic plan period.

2. Key Challenges: *What are the primary challenges DPOB faces in addressing ground-level vacancies and enhancing public spaces, and how can this plan address them effectively?*

- **Response:** The RFP seeks to identify a strategic planning facilitator who will help DPOB define priorities, goals, and objectives, guiding the organization's direction for the next 3-5 years. The plan should address the challenges related to vacancies and public spaces by aligning strategies with our identified priorities and resource constraints, while at the same time recommending approaches for utilizing vacant spaces that have been successfully implemented elsewhere.

3. Stakeholder Engagement Expectations: *Could you provide clarity on the level and methods of stakeholder engagement required (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups)? Are there specific stakeholder groups we should prioritize?*

- **Response:** The strategic planning process will engage members of the strategic planning committee as well as DPOB staff. Additional stakeholders will be identified throughout the process, ensuring that diverse perspectives are incorporated as we work toward the organization's goals. These may include business owners, corporate partners, residents, public officials and senior leaders of partner organizations.

4. Integration with Existing Initiatives: *How should ongoing programs such as the BOOST program and signage activation be integrated into the new strategic plan? Are there elements that should be carried forward or reevaluated?*

- **Response:** DPOB currently has several ongoing initiatives funded through various resources. These programs will continue as long as funding is available. The strategic planning process should identify the organization's priorities and direction, leading to the development of goals for all existing initiatives. The plan should also address which elements should be carried forward, which may need reevaluation, and which could possibly be discontinued without adversely affecting DPOB's core mission and services.

5. Current Organizational Structure: *Are there particular areas within the current organizational structure or resource allocation that DPOB believes need optimization to achieve the desired goals?*

- **Response:** As part of the strategic planning process, we will evaluate the current organizational structure to ensure it aligns with the identified priorities and goals. The structure should support the successful implementation of the strategic plan and help optimize resources. The selected consultant should be prepared to recommend optimal organizational structure scenarios for consideration, based on best practice approaches in other similar organizations.

6. Budget and Financial Constraints: *Could you provide guidance on the budget allocated for this project and any financial constraints that should inform the recommendations in the strategic plan?*

- **Response:** DPOB's budget is primarily funded through tax surcharge dollars from the City of Baltimore. In recent years, this revenue has declined, and we are also seeking grant funding to expand services. The strategic plan should consider various funding models to help increase the budget and meet the goals outlined in the new strategic plan.

7. Lessons from the Current Plan: *What lessons or insights have been gained from the current strategic plan developed during the COVID-19 pandemic that should inform the development of this new plan?*

- **Response:** The strategic plan developed during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for agility in responding to rapid changes. Key lessons include the importance of enhanced digital infrastructure, diversifying funding sources, and strengthening staff capacity. Moving forward, the new plan should integrate flexibility to adapt to future challenges while maintaining strong service delivery.

8. Preferred Deliverables: *What level of detail and format does DPOB expect for the actionable roadmap and success metrics? Are there specific templates or guidelines we should follow?*

- **Response:** DPOB expects the actionable roadmap to be clear and concise, with specific, measurable milestones aligned with strategic objectives. Each goal should include a timeline and well-defined success metrics. We prefer visual frameworks (e.g., Gantt charts or flow diagrams) for clarity and ease of communication.

9. Consultant Support: *What level of access will the selected consultant have to internal data, reports, and staff during the planning process? Will any resources or teams be dedicated to supporting the project?*

- **Response:** The selected consultant will have access to internal reports, data, and strategic documents. Additionally, dedicated resources from DPOB's internal teams, including the strategic planning committee and key staff, will provide input and ensure alignment with organizational goals. Regular check-ins and meetings will be scheduled to support the planning process.

10. Evaluation Criteria: *What are the most critical evaluation criteria DPOB will prioritize in selecting a consultant? Are there particular qualifications, approaches, or innovations you value most?*

- **Response:** DPOB will prioritize consultants with a proven track record in strategic planning, particularly within public or nonprofit sectors. We value innovative approaches that incorporate data analytics, stakeholder engagement, and long-term sustainability. Experience navigating complex challenges such as decreased revenue and the collateral effect of the pandemic is crucial. Additionally, we seek a consultant who demonstrates a collaborative, results-oriented approach that aligns with DPOB's organizational culture and values.

11. *Is there an approved, budget, or anticipated cost, associated with this project. If so, we'd as that this information be provided to help us scope that project appropriately.*

Response: As part of the solicitation process, we will be reviewing the proposals submitted, including the proposed costs outlined within each proposal. This will allow us to assess the financial aspects of the project and determine how to appropriately scope the work based on the submitted budget details.

12. *It appears that extensive community and stakeholder engagement took place as a part of the City's Downtown RISE strategic action plan. Would the successful bidder for this RFP be able to access that raw data and information gathered during that process?*

Response: As part of the strategic planning process, any information and data that are necessary to assist in the execution of this project will be made available to the successful bidder, provided that DPOB has access to and the authority to share that data and information.

13. *How does DPOB envision alignment with, and/or incorporation of aspects of the Downtown RISE plan with the strategic plan planning process of the organization?*

Response: The Downtown RISE plan is an initiative of DPOB that is currently funded for two years. Many of the action items under DPOB's responsibility focus on expanding services that align closely with DPOB's core functions. As such, these aspects should be reviewed as part of the strategic planning process to effectively determine priorities and future direction.

14. *Among the five factors identified as the purpose for this RFP, which is the most important factor that DPOB hopes to achieve with the strategic plan?*

Response: As part of the strategic planning process, we will be evaluating the organization holistically, considering all aspects of its operations. The goal will be to determine the key priorities and direction, with a focus on addressing the most critical factors that will guide DPOB's future growth and impact.