

Request for Proposal

Public Sentiment Analysis: Survey Question Set & Methodology Development

The Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (District) is seeking proposals from qualified consulting firms to develop a repeatable, defensible survey question set and accompanying methodology recommendations to measure public sentiment and trust in the District. This engagement will produce the research instrument and delivery guidance the District will use to competitively procure a survey vendor for administration in 2027, and again on a recurring two-year cadence thereafter.

The scope of services and requested deliverables are outlined below.

Proposals will be accepted until 4:00 p.m. CT on Friday, October 9, 2026, via email to **rfp@madsewer.org**. The subject line must clearly state "Public Sentiment Analysis RFP." Questions should be directed to Amanda Wegner at rfp@madsewer.org.

The District is federal and state tax-exempt. The District reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, waive any technicality, and accept any proposal that may, in its opinion, be advantageous to the District.

Any questions may be directed to:

Amanda Wegner
Communications & Public Affairs Manager
Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District
rfp@madsewer.org

About the District

Established in 1930 to protect the lakes and streams of the upper Yahara watershed, the District is a wastewater collection and treatment utility serving about 440,000 people in 24 Madison-area customer communities covering about 190 square miles. Organized as a municipal corporation, the District is governed by a nine-member Commission appointed by the communities we serve.

The District is a wholesale utility: it bills its 24 owner communities directly for service, not individual residents. This distinction is an important consideration for the Consultant when designing questions related to public awareness, rates, and value perception, since residents do not have a direct billing relationship with the District.

The District owns and operates 150 miles of pipe and 18 regional pumping stations that convey approximately 38 million gallons of wastewater daily to the Nine Springs Wastewater Treatment Plant. Through the treatment process, we recover valuable resources from the wastewater we receive before returning clean water to the environment.

Our mission is to protect public health and the environment. The District is dedicated to service, reliability, and sustainability, and our tradition of innovation has positioned us as a leader among clean water utilities.

Learn more at www.madsewer.org

Background

In Spring 2026, the District Commission approved an updated Strategic Plan, which includes "Public Trust" as one of four performance areas. This performance area is defined as follows:

"As a critical public service with broad reach, the District recognizes the importance of building goodwill and collaborative relationships to impact our operations and organizational effectiveness positively. For the District, this means striving for public trust and instilling confidence through customer-focused actions, transparent communications, management of high-quality and effective programs, and consistent and dependable service."

Public Trust is measured through two Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Public Sentiment Analysis (general public) and Stakeholder Satisfaction Assessment (Commission, the District's customer communities, and direct stakeholders/partners). This RFP addresses the Public Sentiment Analysis KPI only. The Stakeholder Satisfaction Assessment is being conducted separately through an internally facilitated focus group and survey effort and is not part of this scope of work.

The Public Sentiment Analysis KPI measures general public satisfaction and trust through surveys and/or other evaluative methods. It is a monitoring metric that reflects past performance, changes slowly, and is critical to stakeholder confidence. Before this KPI can be measured regularly, the District needs a standardized, repeatable set of questions. Standardized questions establish a reliable baseline, allow the District to track public trust over time, and protect the metric from bias or subjectivity that would otherwise undermine its credibility with leadership, the Commission, and the public.

The District intends to administer the Public Sentiment Analysis survey via a third-party vendor beginning in 2027, and on a recurring two-year cadence thereafter. This RFP is for the prework: developing the question set and methodology recommendations that will inform the future, separately procured vendor engagement.

Scope of Work

The Consultant's role is to design the research instrument and methodology, not to administer the survey. The District will separately and competitively procure a survey delivery vendor in 2027 using the Consultant's recommendations.

Phase I: Discovery & Literature Review

- Review the District's prior public-facing survey research, including the 2019 and 2024 Community Values Surveys (see Reference Materials below), and assess whether any existing questions have value for trend continuity. The District takes no position on this; the Consultant should make an independent, evidence-based recommendation.
- Review the 2024 Stakeholder Focus Group Findings Report for background context on how the District's public trust work has been conceptualized to date (this report informed the separate Stakeholder Satisfaction Assessment KPI and is provided for context, not duplication).
- Review the District's 2026 Strategic Plan, particularly the Public Trust performance area and its associated KPIs.
- Conduct a broader literature review of public trust, public sentiment, and satisfaction survey approaches used by peer utilities, municipal governments, and public infrastructure agencies, as well as current survey research best practices.
- A national customer survey report from an organization the District belongs to is available for reference upon request; it includes national baseline data on utility awareness, trust, and willingness to pay that may be useful for benchmarking. The Consultant should incorporate relevant benchmark questions that strengthen comparability without compromising fit for the District's needs.

Phase II: Question Set Development

- Ground the survey design in a validated instrument or a clearly articulated theoretical framework for measuring public trust and satisfaction.
- Collaborate with District staff through interviews and/or working sessions to draft, test, and refine a question set that measures:
 - General public awareness of the District and its role as a clean water utility, accounting for the District's wholesale structure (which likely suppresses baseline awareness relative to a retail utility)
 - Public trust and confidence in the District
 - General attitudes toward the District
 - Perceived value and willingness to pay for continued investment in clean water infrastructure and services, framed appropriately for a wholesale utility (i.e., not tied to a direct resident billing relationship)
 - Resident priorities, concerns, and views related to water use and wastewater treatment, where relevant
- Design the question set to be standardized and repeatable on a two-year cadence, so that results are trendable and defensible over time without survey noise skewing comparisons.
- Provide a rationale memo mapping each question to the Public Trust performance area and the Public Sentiment Analysis KPI's measurement goals. This memo should clearly identify which

underlying dimension (e.g., competence, transparency) each question is designed to capture and provide plain-language documentation of the instrument’s design logic and how it informs the District’s Public Trust KPI.

Phase III: Methodology & Delivery Recommendations

- Recommend a sampling frame and methodology that will yield results reasonably representative of residents within the District service area. Open-access, convenience-sample surveying will not be accepted.
- Recommend survey mode(s) (e.g., web, mail, phone, panel, or mixed-mode) and an appropriate sample size to achieve statistically valid, representative results.
- Provide platform-agnostic guidance and a vendor-selection checklist the District can use to competitively procure a survey delivery vendor in 2027. The Consultant is not being retained to field the survey.
- Advise on cadence and scheduling considerations to support the administration of the survey every two years going forward.

Proposers may include additional services beyond the above if they add value to this work or have proven beneficial in similar engagements. The District welcomes creative, innovative approaches to designing a durable, repeatable public sentiment measurement tool.

Deliverables

- **Discovery & Literature Review Summary:** A brief written summary of the research and prior-survey review conducted in Phase I, including a clear recommendation on what, if anything, from the 2019 and 2024 surveys should carry forward.
- **Final Public Sentiment Analysis Question Set & Rationale Memo:** The complete, repeatable question set, with a question-by-question rationale tied to the KPI's measurement goals.
- **Survey Methodology & Vendor Selection Guide:** Recommended sampling frame, mode(s), sample size, and cadence guidance, plus a vendor-evaluation checklist for the District's 2027 procurement.
- **Presentation of Recommendations:** The Consultant will present its work and recommendations to the District’s Executive Management Team at a meeting date mutually agreeable to the team and the Consultant. (This may occur in early 2027 if needed.)

Timeline

Target Date	Step	Notes
Thursday, September 11, 2026	RFP Issued	Posted to District website
Thursday, September 24, 2026 @ 4:00 p.m. CT	Deadline for Respondent Questions	Submitted via email to rfp@madsewer.org
Monday, September 28, 2026 @ 4:00 p.m. CT	Respondent Questions Answered	Responses posted on District website
Friday, October 9, 2026 @ 4:00 p.m. CT	Proposals Due	Final deadline for submission

Target Date	Step	Notes
Friday, October 16, 2026	District Review Completed	Completed by internal selection committee
Week of October 19, 2026	Interviews (if needed)	Conducted via Microsoft Teams
Friday, October 23, 2026	Selection Made & Applicant Notified	No Commission approval required (contract under \$50,000)
Week of October 26 or November 2, 2026	Engagement Begins	Upon execution of the professional services agreement
No later than Tuesday, December 22, 2026	Final Deliverables Due	Invoice must be received by December 31, 2026

The District may change the RFP timetable at any time. If interviews are not needed, the following dates may shift, but the final deliverables date stands.

Proposal Evaluation

Proposals will be evaluated by a selection committee composed of District staff and scored on a 100-point scale according to the criteria below.

Criteria Category	Points	Key Focus Areas
1. Qualifications & Experience	30	Firm's expertise in survey research design, social science methodology, and public trust/sentiment measurement; experience working with public sector or utility clients.
2. Project Approach & Methodology	35	Depth of literature review, staff collaboration approach, rigor of question-set development, and quality of sampling/methodology recommendations.
3. Schedule & Capacity	15	Demonstrated ability to realistically complete all deliverables within the 7- to 8-week window allotted.
4. Pricing & Value	20	Value relative to scope. The District anticipates a budget of \$25,000–\$30,000 for this engagement; proposals should reflect a not-to-exceed cost with a clear breakdown of hours and billable rates.

The District will not award a contract solely on price; the award will be made in the District's best interest as determined by the evaluation committee. Contract award shall be made to the best-qualified consultant upon successful negotiation of fair and reasonable compensation under a "not-to-exceed" contract structure. Because the anticipated contract value is under \$50,000, Commission approval is not required, and the District expects to move quickly from selection to engagement.

How to Apply

Proposals should be concise and limited to no more than 20 pages (excluding specific items noted below). Core narrative pages must be numbered and include all information relevant to the Proposal Evaluation matrix listed above. The evaluation team will not review proposals that exceed the page limit.

Proposals should include the following:

- **Contact information** for the primary contact.
- **Statement of Interest:** Introduce your firm or team, your interest in this project, and anything that differentiates your approach.
- **Qualifications:** Provide a brief description of the relevant experience and skills of the individual(s) to be involved (including subcontractors, if any).
- **Relevant experience:** Up to three examples of prior survey or research instrument design work, prioritizing public-sector or utility clients within the last five years, with project descriptions and, if available, sample question sets.
- **Project Approach & Schedule:** Describe how you would organize and carry out the work within the timeline above, and break the project into tasks with an estimated schedule.
- **Pricing:** Provide a not-to-exceed cost with a detailed breakdown of hours and billable rates by individual and task for the core Public Sentiment Analysis scope.
- **References:** Provide name, title, organization, phone, and email for at least two references. The District will not contact references until after selections are made.

The following materials are the only items excluded from the 15-page limit:

- Cover page and table of contents
- Team member resumes

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Reference Materials

The following materials should be used in reference to this RFP and will be provided or made available to Proposers:

- [2019 Community Values Survey](#)
- [2024 Community Values Survey Findings Report](#)
- [2024 Stakeholder Focus Group Findings Report](#) (background context only)
- [District Strategic Plan](#) (April 2026)

- National-organization benchmark survey instrument (available upon request)

Professional Services Agreement

Following the selection of a qualified firm for the work of this RFP, a signed professional services agreement will be required. The District supplies the agreement template as the basis for negotiations, which will include Terms & Conditions and the Scope of Services for performance. Proposers must notify the Project Manager of any questions or concerns about the standard Terms & Conditions during the request for proposal process.

Insurance Requirements

The District's insurance requirements are included below. A bidder may propose exceptions or modifications to the District's insurance requirements that may or may not be acceptable to the District. The District retains the right to establish the final insurance requirements during negotiations with the highest-ranked bidder based on the nature and scope of the services, potential liability exposure, involvement in design or construction, anticipated site activities, contract amount, and the availability of coverage. If the District and the highest-ranked bidder cannot reach an acceptable agreement, the District may discontinue negotiations and proceed to the next-ranked bidder. The final insurance requirements will be incorporated into the executed Agreement.

Contractor shall maintain Commercial General Liability, Automobile Liability, Workers Compensation, Professional Liability (Errors & Omissions), and Cyber Liability insurance throughout the term of the agreement. Minimum limits shall be \$1,000,000 per occurrence/ \$2,000,000 aggregate for General Liability; \$1,000,000 combined single limit for Automobile Liability; statutory Workers Compensation limits; \$1,000,000 per claim Professional Liability; and \$1,000,000 Cyber Liability. The District shall be named as an Additional Insured on the General Liability policy, and coverage shall be primary and non-contributory.

Additional Provisions

Equal Employment Opportunity Requirements

In connection with the performance of work for this project and under the related contract, the Proposer agrees not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of age, race, religion, color, disability, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other status protected by law. This provision shall include, but not be limited to, the following: employment, upgrading, demotion, or transfer; recruitment or recruitment advertising; layoff or termination; rates of pay or other forms of compensation; and selection for training, including apprenticeship.

Use, Disclosure, and Confidentiality of Information

The information supplied by a Proposer as part of an RFP response will become the property of the District. Proposals will be available to interested parties in accordance with the Wisconsin Open Records Law. None of the proposal responses will be made available to the public until after the negotiation and award of a contract or cancellation of the procurement.

To the extent allowed by law, the District will treat trade secrets as confidential (if designated as confidential and submitted separately in a sealed envelope). If a Proposer wishes for a proposal to remain confidential, the Proposer must, before submitting a proposal, establish to the District's satisfaction that the proposal be given confidential status. The District reserves the right to make any

final disclosure determinations in accordance with the law. (Note: Pricing information will not be considered confidential.)

Use of the District's Name

Upon entering an agreement, the successful Contractor agrees not to use the name of the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District in relation to the agreement in commercial advertising, trade literature, or press releases to the public without the prior written approval of the District. The District has the right to enjoin the Contractor from any such use in violation of this provision, and the Contractor shall be responsible for damages and reimbursement of actual, reasonable legal fees incurred with regard to legal evaluation and/or legal action taken by the District because of the Contractor's violation of this provision, including fees incurred to obtain an injunction.

Confidentiality

Subject to Wisconsin's Public Records law, any data or other information regarding the District's customers, operations, or methods obtained by the Contractor during the course of the project shall remain confidential and shall not be released to third parties without the express written consent of the District.

Errors in Proposals

Proposers will not be allowed to change or alter their proposals after the proposal submission deadline. The District reserves the right, however, to correct obvious errors, such as math errors in extended pricing (not unit pricing). This type of correction may only be allowed for "obvious" errors such as arithmetic, typographical, or transposition errors. Any such corrections shall be approved by the District and countersigned by the Proposer. Proposers are advised to make sure that their proposals are true and correct.

Revision to the RFP

The District may modify or amend this RFP at any time. In such an event, the submission deadline may be extended, at the option of the District, to allow Proposers the opportunity to revise their proposals accordingly.

Addendums

If it becomes necessary to materially alter the request for proposal, the Project Manager will issue an official addendum.

Sub-consultants and Third-party Payments

All sub-consultants shall be pre-approved by the District and must abide by all terms and conditions of the contract. The prime Consultant shall be responsible for all sub-consultant(s) work and payment. The District will not directly pay any sub-consultant or third parties.