

# Business Item

Community Development Committee



**Committee Meeting Date:** August 04, 2025

**For the Metropolitan Council:** August 13, 2025

## Business Item: 2025-182

2026 Regional Parks and Trails Visitor Study - Contract No. 25P041

<b>District(s), Member(s):</b>	All
<b>Policy/Legal Reference:</b>	FM 14-2 – Expenditures for the Procurement of Goods and Services Policy; Minn. Stat. §§ 85.53, subd. 3 and 473.351, subd. 3; <i>2050 Regional Parks Policy Plan</i>
<b>Staff Prepared/Presented:</b>	Ismael Ramirez, Principal Researcher (651-602-1831)
<b>Division/Department:</b>	Community Development / Regional Planning

### Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council authorize the Regional Administrator to negotiate and execute Contract No. 25P041 with Wilder Research to conduct the 2026 Parks and Trails Visitor Study, in an amount not to exceed \$1,000,000.

### Background

A request for proposals was issued on April 16, 2025 to select a consultant to perform the 2026 Parks and Trails Visitor study. A pre-proposal meeting was hosted by Council staff that outlined the solicitation requirements, discussed project specifications, and responded to plan holder inquiries. There were twenty-eight registered plan-holders, sixteen prime contractors, ten sub-contractors, two plan-rooms, and fourteen plan-holders identified as minority, woman, veteran, small, or disadvantaged business enterprises. On May 21, 2025, the Council received six proposals to be evaluated for the consideration of the award.

Proposals were evaluated using the following criteria: proposal quality, proposer qualifications, the service delivery plan, key personnel, the qualifications and experience of the proposed sub-consultant(s), and price. The evaluation panel consisted of Council staff and implementing agency representatives. Wilder Research's proposal was determined to best meet the study's objectives and was deemed the proposal most likely to succeed, offering methodological rigor, stakeholder engagement, and a strong plan for equity-focused data collection and analysis.

The Parks and Trails Visitor Study, conducted every five years, provides critical information on park and trail usage across the regional system. The study provides data on both local and non-local visitation, which is required for funding allocations under Minnesota Statutes § 85.53 and § 473.351. The results inform planning, equity analyses, funding distribution, and park usage with park implementing agencies. The most recent study was conducted in 2021.

### Rationale

The execution of contracts for professional services in excess of \$500,000 requires Council approval.

### **Imagine 2050 Lens Analysis**

The Parks and Trails Visitor Study advances the Imagine 2050 core values of equity, accountability, and stewardship by improving understanding of who uses the regional park system, when, where, and how, and ensuring equitable access to regional parks and trails system.

### **Funding**

This contract is funded through the Council's authorized Community Development budget for 2025–2026.

### **Small Business Inclusion**

The Office of Equity and Equal Opportunity (OEEO) assigned a Metropolitan Council Underutilized Business (MCUB) goal of 10% for this solicitation. OEEO determined that Wilder Research has met the MCUB requirements of this contract.



# Evaluation Panel Report of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

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**June 25, 2025**

**Project Name: 2026 Park Visitor Study**

**Metropolitan Council Contract: 25P041**

## Background

This contract is for 25P041 – 2026 Park Visitor Study. The total value of the contract will be \$1,000,000 over a one year period.

### A summary of the solicitation process includes:

- A formal, advertised Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued April 16, 2025.
- The pre-proposal meeting was held on April 30, 2025.
- Two addenda were issued.
- There were 28 registered document holders for this project.
- Proposals were received on May 21, 2025.
- 5 proposals were received and evaluated:
  - Acet, Inc.
  - RRC Associates
  - RSG
  - The Improve Group
  - Wilder Research
- The evaluation panel training was held on May 19, 2025.
- The consensus meeting(s) was held on June 17, 2025.

## Proposal Evaluation Process

The Evaluation Panel (EP) membership included:

1. Ismael Ramirez, Principal Researcher, Community Development (Project Manager)
2. Kevin Phan, Planner-AFS, Community Development
3. Jonathan Ehrlich, Senior Manager, Metropolitan Transportation Services
4. Darcie Vandegrift, Manager, Community Development
5. Thony Thao, Recreation Services Supervisor, Ramsey County (external stakeholder)
6. Beth Landahl, Visitor Service Manager, Dakota County (external stakeholder)

Steven Kensinger served as the Contract Administrator and Facilitator. The evaluation panel was trained on the evaluation process prior to receiving the proposals.

In the review of the proposals, four criteria were used in descending order of importance: 1) Quality of the Proposal, 2) Qualifications of the Proposer, 3) Experience of the Proposer, and 4) The Price of the

Proposal. Price was approximately equal in importance to a combination of all other criteria shown above.

The evaluation process included an independent reading and evaluation of the proposals by each panel member followed by a meeting of the group to discuss the proposals. At the evaluation panel meeting on June 17, 2025, the group reached consensus that the proposal submitted by Wilder Research is most advantageous to the Council.

**DBE/MBCUB GOALS:** The Office of Equity and Equal Opportunity (OEEO) assigned a Metropolitan Council Underutilized Business (MCUB) goal commitment of 10% for this project. OEEO has determined that the recommended proposer met the Council's MCUB requirements.

## **Evaluation Panel Findings and Conclusions**

The findings and conclusions below are a summary of the information recorded on evaluation panel member's individual evaluator worksheets, completed as part of their independent review, and discussion notes taken during the evaluation panel consensus meeting(s). The following selected strengths and weaknesses were noted by the evaluation panel members.

### **Wilder Research**

#### ***Overall Proposal Rating: Excellent -***

#### **Strengths:**

- The proposal was complete, clearly addressed all tasks and requirements outlined in the RFP with clear timelines, deliverables, and a demonstrated an excellent understanding of the project scope, specifically as it relates to the importance of equity and representative sampling.
- The service delivery plan included detailed quality assurance measures such as GPS verification, on-site monitoring, and scheduled data checks.
- The proposed team is locally based and available for coordination with the Council project team throughout the duration of the project.
- The price proposal was within the Council's budget and was supported by a clear cost breakdown and reflects an appropriate level of staffing and services to successfully complete the work requested.
- The proposed subconsultant has significant experience with outreach and engagement to historically underrepresented communities.
- The key personnel identified in the proposal are well qualified and appropriately assigned.
- The proposer has experience with similar projects at other agencies of comparable size to the Council.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- The coordination plan between the proposer and their sub-consultant did not provide enough detail.
- The proposed subconsultant has limited experience with survey methodologies, data analysis, and reporting.

#### **Price:**

- \$885,785.00

### **Acet Inc.**

#### ***Overall Proposal Rating: Very Good***

#### **Strengths:**

- Proposal incorporated innovative technologies and a culturally responsive equity framework. Specifically, their use of Community Cultural Liaisons, integration of Smartsheet and Connecteam for project coordination, and a team of 11 local staff and 20 contract surveyors demonstrated their capacity to perform the work and the level of responsiveness the Council could expect from this proposer.
- The proposer has experience conducting intercept surveys and leading focus groups with exceptionally high response rates in past projects.
- The staffing plan included innovative ideas to recruit and mentor staff in culturally responsive ways.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- The proposed cost significantly exceeded the Council's budget.
- The company's small size raised concerns about scaling up and hiring an appropriate amount of staff to successfully carry out the work, especially considering they did not propose a subconsultant.
- The proposer does not have experience conducting a survey on the scale of the Park Visitor Study which raised concerns about their capacity to successfully complete the work.

#### **Price:**

- \$1,255,202.00

### **The Improve Group**

#### ***Overall Proposal Rating: Very Good -***

#### **Strengths:**

- The proposed workplan included a mid-summer recalibration plan to account for lessons learned up to that point in the survey, and allowed for adjustments to be made to the workplan to keep the survey on track.
- The proposal included demonstrated experience with reducing non-response biases in survey implementation.
- The proposed workplan included significant collaboration with Council staff.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- The proposed cost significantly exceeded the Council's budget.
- The proposer has limited experience with conducting intercept surveys, and the proposal was particularly deficient in terms of articulating the specific staffing challenges related to in-person intercept surveys.
- The proposal lacked detail in terms of quality assurance processes and there were no formal contingency plans or escalation processes included.

**Price:**

- \$1,155,263.00

**RSG**

***Overall Proposal Rating: Good +***

**Strengths:**

- The proposal included comprehensive quality assurance, quality control, and contingency plans.
- The proposal included thoughtful strategies to address sampling bias in survey implementation.

**Weaknesses:**

- The proposer is not locally based and their proposal relied heavily on multiple subconsultants to perform the majority of the work related to survey implementation.
- The proposer did not include detailed information related to the qualifications of their subconsultants.
- The proposed cost came in significantly under the project's budget, which raised concerns about the proposer's overall understanding of the project needs and level of effort needed to complete the survey.
- The proposal did not include a detailed staffing plan which raised concerns considering the lack of staff with local knowledge or experience and over-reliance on subconsultants.
- Some of the costs were presented as optional despite being necessary elements of the project such as oversampling, custom questions for participating agencies, and postcard distribution. Also, some of the budget line items were unreasonable, such as \$35,738.35 for postcard distribution and tabling.

**Price:**

- \$534,667.01

**RRC Associates**

***Overall Proposal Rating: Good***

**Strengths:**

- The proposer has experience conducting intercept surveys of similar scale for other park agencies, including the United States National Park Service.

**Weaknesses:**

- The proposal overall lacked sufficient detail and did not seem tailored to the Council's specific needs, specifically, the proposal did not address non-response biases, sampling strategies, and training plans.
- The proposer is not locally based and none of the key personnel are designated to be in the region during the survey.

- The proposal lacked detail around the focus group task, specifically it failed to address how data would be collected and how populations would be selected for participation.
- The proposal referenced utilizing a trauma informed engagement model, but failed to articulate why or how that specific model relates to the Council's Park Survey.
- The proposal did not include any evidence of specific staff experience related to intercept surveys despite the organization having general experience running intercept surveys.
- The time allotted to some tasks within the proposal did not align with Council expectations of the effort required to complete those tasks. For example, only 3,000 hours were allotted for survey administration, which was noted by the committee as being low.

**Price:**

- \$583,310.00

## Evaluation Panel Conclusions




A summary of the consensus ranking of the proposals by the Evaluation Panel is as follows:

Ranking	Proposers	Overall Rating	Price (with additional task)
1	Wilder Research	Excellent -	\$885,785
2	Acet, Inc.	Very Good	\$1,255,202
3	The Improve Group	Very Good -	\$1,155,263
4	RSG	Good +	\$534,667
5	RRC Associates	Good	\$583,310


The evaluation panel reached consensus that the proposal submitted by Wilder Research represents the best value to the Council.

## Recommendation

The Evaluation Panel recommends the Governing body of the Metropolitan Council authorize the negotiation and execution of a contract with Wilder Reserach as the proposer with the proposal most advantageous to the Council.


Ismael Ramirez	Signature <u></u> <a href="#">Ismael Ramirez (Jul 7, 2025 19:26 CDT)</a>	Date <u>07/07/2025</u>
Jonathan Ehrlich	Signature <u></u> <a href="#">Jonathan Ehrlich (Jul 7, 2025 23:13 CDT)</a>	Date <u>07/07/2025</u>
Darcie Vandegrift	Signature <u></u> <a href="#">Darcie Vandegrift (Jul 9, 2025 08:50 CDT)</a>	Date <u>09/07/2025</u>

Thony Thao

Signature   
Thony Thao (Jul 9, 2025 09:01 CDT)

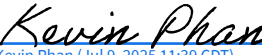
Date 09/07/2025

Beth Landahl

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Beth Landahl (Jul 9, 2025 10:11 CDT)

Date 09/07/2025

Kevin Phan

Signature   
Kevin Phan (Jul 9, 2025 11:39 CDT)

Date 09/07/2025












# 25P041 - Evaluation Panel Recommendation Report


Final Audit Report

2025-07-09

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-  Steven Kensinger (Steven.Kensinger@metc.state.mn.us) replaced signer Thony Thao (thony.thao@co.ramsey.mn.us) with Thony Thao (thony.thao@metc.state.mn.us)  
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## Internal Memorandum

**DATE:** June 25, 2025

**TO:** Jody Jacoby, Chief Procurement Officer, Procurement

**FROM:** Ashanti Payne, Assistant Director, Office of Equity & Equal Opportunity

**SUBJECT:** MCUB Evaluation of Proposals – 25P041 – 2026 Park Visitor Study

This memo is to advise you that the Office of Equity & Equal Opportunity (OEEO) has reviewed the Metropolitan Council Underutilized Business (MCUB) goal commitments for the Park Visitor Study contract. The MCUB goal on the project is **10%**.

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation is the selected proposer on the project referenced above. The selected proposer passes the MCUB evaluation by meeting the numeric goal as established. MCUB participation commitment details are listed below.

Selected Proposer	Total Proposal Amount \$	MCUB Commitment \$	MCUB Commitment %
Amherst H. Wilder Foundation	\$885,785	\$90,000	10.1%

The Selected Proposer's MCUB Commitment at time of proposal is as follows:

MCUB Firm	MCUB Performing As	Scope of Work	Contract Value \$	Contract Value for MCUB Credit \$	MCUB % of Total Contract
NewPublica, LLC	Subcontractor	Hiring, Focus Groups	\$90,000	\$90,000	10.1%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$90,000</b>	<b>\$90,000</b>	<b>10.1%</b>

OEE0 verified the eligibility of the listed MCUB firms and their commitment to subcontract to the Selected Proposer for the stated contract value. **The Selected Proposer passes the evaluation by meeting the MCUB goal as established. The firm's MCUB commitment at time of evaluation is 10.1%.**

*Ashanti Payne*

Ashanti Payne (Jul 1, 2025 14:22 CDT)