



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

**RESTORING
DIGNITY**

**OMAHA'S REFUGEE
HOUSING PLANNING STUDY**



Restoring Dignity is seeking **proposals** from planning firms capable of conducting a **research study** examining the **unique needs of housing** for the **refugee community** in Omaha, Nebraska, as outlined in this Request for Proposal.

A black and white photograph of a woman wearing a knit hat and a young child in a room. In the background, there are several large, stacked bags, likely containing supplies or belongings. The woman is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression, while the child is looking slightly to the side.

CURRENT SITUATION

Omaha is a dynamic and growing city that draws several thousand refugees each year, via international resettlement and secondary migration from other cities. The city's strong job market, overall affordability of living, and vibrant and diverse communities are all factors that make Omaha a welcoming home for thousands of people fleeing genocide, persecution and war. It is estimated that close to **40,000 individuals with refugee status currently live in the Greater Omaha area.**

Affordable housing is a particularly significant issue within the refugee community, as families are brought from overseas and have an **immediate need for permanent lodging** upon arrival in Omaha. Resettlement agencies in Omaha regularly have to place newly arriving refugees in hotels and AirBnBs due to difficulty in acquiring housing.

Refugee resettlement in the U.S. is historically a challenging system, in which **refugees are only given 90 days of federal government support** before being expected to be completely self-sufficient.

Local resettlement agencies work tirelessly to provide quality support to newly arrived refugees, but can only provide a certain amount of services in this three month window. For decades, caseworkers and community members have watched refugee families go through an **unnecessarily difficult and traumatizing cycle**, where they are forced to swim against the current, trying to get a footing as they create their new life.

A large part of this suffering involves housing, with many refugees having no choice but to be placed in housing conditions that are substandard, due to the reality of the resettlement process. When resettling refugees, caseworkers often are notified of a family's housing needs within two weeks of their arrival. In addition to a very short turnaround time, refugees arrive with no SSN, no job, no income and no references, all of which are mandatory for most landlords.

Thus, the pool of landlords willing to rent to refugees is exceedingly small and the rental units that are available have **historically been ones with high vacancy rates, often due to subpar residential conditions.** Substandard apartments and rental homes often end up negatively affecting the family's physical, financial, mental and emotional health. Outside of the resettlement process, some refugee families who seek their own housing (through secondary migration or after having lived in Omaha for a period of time) have experienced significant housing instability, with one example being a large apartment complex that was deemed uninhabitable due to more than 2,000 code violations, displacing over 500 refugees in 2018.



CURRENT SITUATION CON'T

The specific experience of refugees and housing is layered into a context in which the community of Omaha has recognized as a **significant affordable housing crisis**.

In 2021, a group of philanthropists recognized the growing need for affordable and safe housing in Omaha, and commissioned a housing affordability study. This study, *"Housing Affordability in the Omaha and Council Bluffs Area"* (2021) found that 98,500 households in Omaha need affordable housing, and there are only 20,000 units available. Since the publication of this report, **the philanthropic community, developers and non profit agencies have been catalyzed to action.**

Refugee serving agencies have seen the need for better housing solutions for the refugee community but have not had the resources nor the capacity to address the issue.

Each year, between 1,000 to 2,000 refugees will be resettled in Omaha or will come via secondary migration, all of whom will need housing that is safe and economical.

The specific needs of refugees are generally not being addressed by the affordable housing development community, in large part because those needs are not clearly understood or articulated, as a refugee specific study on affordable housing has not been conducted locally, or to our knowledge, nationally.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND



Restoring Dignity (RD) is fully invested in **building a better future** for the thousands of Omaha's resettled refugees, many of whom are currently living in substandard housing. Our organization started in 2012 as a home makeover for a widowed South Sudanese mother after the death of her child.

Today, the primary focus at RD is providing programming that supports safe and adequate housing for refugee families. Since 2018, we have served **over 21,000 refugees in the Omaha area**. Every program we provide works to enhance living conditions for refugees, whether through home acclimation classes, providing furniture to families who have none, installing window air conditioning units, or providing housing advocacy for those struggling to get repairs made in their rental homes.



Our vision is to build an empowered, thriving community where refugees have access to the tools and skills they need to flourish in safe and healthy homes.

RD assists refugees in **properly acclimating to their new life** in Omaha and provides three core services for Omaha refugees: action, education, and advocacy, through our unique staff team, of whom 72% are former refugees. RD has significant experience working with families who have an area median income of less than 120%. The majority of the refugee families we serve fall into this category.



RD has formed a **collaborative partnership** with **Hoppe Development** to analyze potential interventions that serve this community. The goal of this collaboration is to ensure that any specific interventions identified provide sufficient guidance such that they can be implemented through widely utilized conventional and affordable housing programs. Hoppe Development is a real estate development firm that focuses on affordable housing solutions in partnership with communities and supportive service providers. Their role in this study is that of an advisor.

STUDY GOALS

1

Illustrate the distinct housing needs of the refugee population

2

Examine models that support successful interventions in other communities

3

Present the social and economic justification for addressing this need

The goal of this collaborative planning study is to **increase local capacity and understanding of refugee housing needs** (both upon resettlement and post resettlement), and **provide the local housing and supportive service community a pathway forward to create successful housing interventions** in the Omaha community, whether via specific development projects or other interventions that address refugee housing challenges.

This study will illustrate:

- (1) the distinct housing needs of the refugee population
- (2) articulate models that support successful interventions in other communities
- (3) present the social and economic justification for addressing this need.

We hope to have possible housing solutions identified for local refugees both during and after resettlement, which can be accomplished through interviews, surveys and research. We aim to learn what the affordable housing crisis looks like in the refugee community, and to find **community driven solutions** to solve it.



STUDY GOALS CON'T

When looking at housing, we must also consider **additional factors that can be impacted by housing**, or can impact housing. We want this study to **look holistically at the process of refugee resettlement** in Omaha via multiple lenses:



Housing Availability and Limited Choice

Resettlement caseworkers receive very little notice of a refugee family's arrival. A best case scenario is a few weeks' notice, but less than one week's notice does occur. Upon airport arrival, families are taken to a rental house or apartment they did not choose (or to a hotel if no housing can be identified), due to the nature of the current federal resettlement program. Further, without a SSN, rental history, or income, they are limited to landlords willing to work around traditional application processes. Oftentimes, these housing conditions are substandard.



Loss of Connectivity

Families are often transitioning from countries with a communal culture and interdependence to being isolated in an apartment or house in Omaha. Some end up at apartment complexes or neighborhoods where they are the only people who speak their language. Isolation is a major concern, particularly among women who often are not working outside the home during their first years in the U.S, due to cultural differences.



Unit & Community Design

Refugees often arrive with an experience of communal housing, where extended family members live together and share bedrooms. Additionally, many refugees from rural environments partook in farming on a daily basis. Moving to an urban environment with little to no access to grow food has presented mental and emotional health difficulties and further exacerbation of culture shock.



Post-Resettlement Needs & Opportunities

Post-resettlement, many refugee families' housing needs and preferences change, or the initial housing is determined to be inadequate to meet their needs for all of the reasons described above. Navigating a move can present challenges. The act of terminating a lease, securing a new apartment, and moving all presents friction and potential cost and conflict. Further, in many cases, refugees wish to purchase a home. This study desires to better understand how to support refugee families as they navigate the post-resettlement continuum of housing.



Rental Cost and Fee Structure

Refugees arrive with a one time stipend of \$1,275 per individual, which is the only funding available until employment is secured. Apartment owners typically charge a deposit and first month's rent to secure a unit, and sometimes charge additional fees for applications. If a refugee needs to stay in a hotel while searching for permanent housing, these funds are used up prior to finding a home. Housing options must fit within the financial model of the refugee family.



Supportive Services

Quality refugee resettlement involves more than finding housing and employment. Refugees must be properly integrated into their new environment, which includes:

- (1) Transportation (public, ride sharing and private)
- (2) Mental health (managing trauma that is unique to the refugee experience)
- (3) ESL (learning English)
- (4) Cultural integration
- (5) Casework
- (6) Support beyond the first 90 days



SCOPE OF SERVICES



We are seeking professionals who:

- Have the capacity to understand the **unique housing needs of a specific diverse community**, with a preference towards those with an understanding of the refugee resettlement process, through either lived experience or via work, volunteer or other experience
- Are **innovative problem solvers** who seek solutions that are driven by the needs of the community that is being studied
- Have demonstrated the ability to conduct this assessment in a **culturally responsive** and **trauma informed** manner, collaborating with others as necessary
- Have the capacity to **prioritize this assessment** within the timeline
- Understand and have experience carrying out **complex assessments** of specific housing needs and/or community housing assessments
- Commit to a **personal relationship** with their clients

SCOPE OF SERVICES CON'T

We are seeking the following services:

1

Research

- **Characterization of current housing needs** among Omaha's diverse refugee communities, including housing conditions families have experienced or are currently experiencing
- **Examination of the number of refugees** anticipated to be resettled, family size, post-arrival economic situation (e.g. how many were employed, typically 2 wage earners or 1, what types of jobs, etc.), and other housing related demographic and socioeconomic information
- **Review of previous refugee housing studies** (national and if needed, international)
- **Secondary research** on refugee resettlement, to clearly articulate the general refugee resettlement process

2

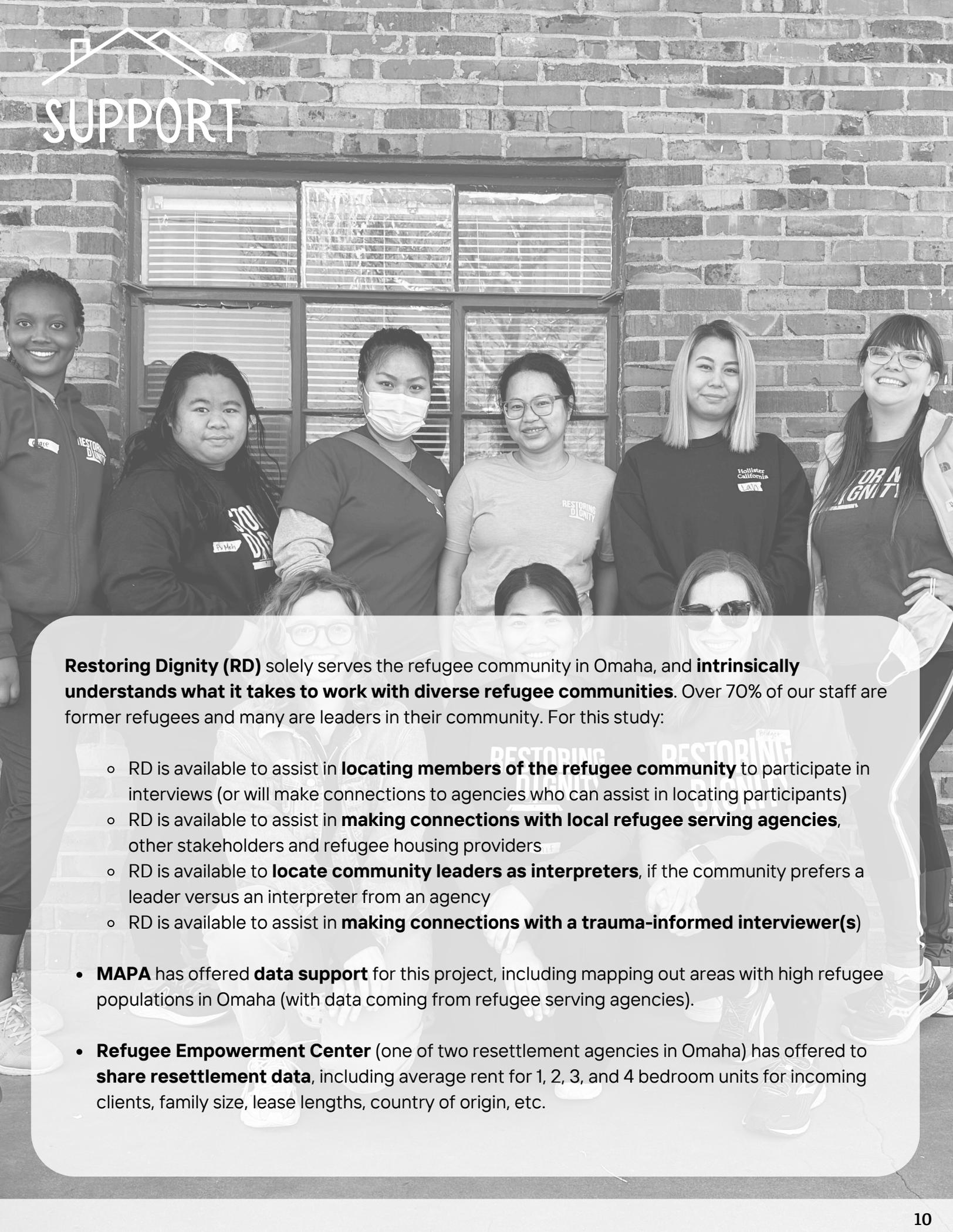
Community Input

- **Refugee Community Interviews**
 - Mixture of 1:1 interviews and group listening sessions with the local refugee populations in Omaha (seven major refugee groups and 18+ distinct ethnic groups within these seven groups)
 - Participation stipends for refugees
 - Interpretation during interviews and listening sessions (please see "support" section)
 - Trauma informed interviewer(s)
- **Refugee Serving Stakeholder Interviews**
 - Targeted interviews with approximately 15 to 20 agencies, with another 10 to 15 external stakeholder interviews/surveys
- **Refugee Housing Provider Interviews**
 - Interviews/surveys with approximately 4 to 6 organizations that currently provide refugee housing (rent and homeownership agencies and businesses)

3

Analysis

- **Analysis of housing resources** that exist and are accessible to the refugee community
- **Examination of approximately 6-8 case studies** of diverse corollary models that address refugee housing needs to articulate the operating model and best practices learned by other communities (national and if needed, international)
- **Recommendations** of possible housing solutions/combined housing and social service models



SUPPORT

Restoring Dignity (RD) solely serves the refugee community in Omaha, and **intrinsically understands what it takes to work with diverse refugee communities**. Over 70% of our staff are former refugees and many are leaders in their community. For this study:

- RD is available to assist in **locating members of the refugee community** to participate in interviews (or will make connections to agencies who can assist in locating participants)
 - RD is available to assist in **making connections with local refugee serving agencies**, other stakeholders and refugee housing providers
 - RD is available to **locate community leaders as interpreters**, if the community prefers a leader versus an interpreter from an agency
 - RD is available to assist in **making connections with a trauma-informed interviewer(s)**
- **MAPA** has offered **data support** for this project, including mapping out areas with high refugee populations in Omaha (with data coming from refugee serving agencies).
 - **Refugee Empowerment Center** (one of two resettlement agencies in Omaha) has offered to **share resettlement data**, including average rent for 1, 2, 3, and 4 bedroom units for incoming clients, family size, lease lengths, country of origin, etc.



DELIVERABLES

The expected deliverables from this scope of work include, but are not limited to the following. The final deliverables are not required to follow this exact structure, but can be left up to the creative discretion of the selected planning firm.

1. Analysis and Final Report of Research Findings

a. Final report

- i. Executive summary, including articulation of the refugee resettlement process in the U.S., demographics, etc.
- ii. Narrative
- iii. Data depictions that are appropriate to what is stated in the Scope of Services

b. Refugee community results

- i. Executive summary
- ii. Narrative
- iii. Charts depicting overall results of the interviews and surveys

c. Refugee supportive service and stakeholder results

- i. Executive summary
- ii. Narrative
- iii. Charts depicting overall results of the interviews and surveys

d. Housing providers results

- i. Executive summary
- ii. Narrative
- iii. Charts depicting overall results of the interviews and surveys

e. Analysis of past studies

- i. Executive summary
- ii. Narrative

f. Analysis of successful housing models that exist

- i. Executive summary
- ii. Summary case study of each housing model, including information on how it was financed, services provided, how operating costs are funded, housing typology, context and amenities
- iii. Charts depicting overall results of the interviews and surveys

g. Housing resources analysis

- i. List of available housing resources with descriptions of services provided, including if interpretation is provided
- ii. Map of available housing resources
- iii. Analysis of gaps and/or duplication of services

h. Recommendations

- i. Community driven solutions
- ii. Housing model possibilities
- iii. Housing program possibilities
- iv. Funding mechanisms

2. One facilitated workshop in English to review the data and provide a list of recommendations on the results of the report, and recorded via Zoom for external dissemination

3. Seven facilitated workshops in seven major languages, presented to the refugee communities that participated in the interviews, and recorded via Zoom for external dissemination



SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

Letter of Intent

Due: July 21st, 2023 by 5:00pm

email to: housing@rdomaha.org

- 1 page maximum
- Name of organization
- Name of contact person
- Contact information (telephone and email)
- Short statement of interest in this project



SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS CON'T

Proposal

Due: August 25th, 2023 by 5:00pm

Email to: housing@rdomaha.org

Proposers shall submit a signed, digital copy, by sending one email to housing@rdomaha.org. Each submittal shall be presented in 10+ font and in digital format, with a maximum of 30 pages for response, including exhibits.

Content of Submittal

1. Cover letter:

- a. Contact information including name, address, phone and fax numbers, and email and web addresses.
- b. A statement regarding the applicant's legal structure, federal tax identification number, and principal place of business.
- c. An overview of your approach to research
- d. A description of how you would approach the achievement of the deliverables listed above including the regular inclusion of project stakeholders, research project management, and the use of research products generated from this contract.

1. Part I – Proposal:

- a. Describe your process that will answer each bullet point outlined in the Scope of Services. Summarize the services you will provide. Discuss your approach to the project with specific references to the services stated in the Scope of Services section, including:
 - i. Data sources and methods to gather data / information, highlighting creative data collection methods
 - ii. Key deliverables
 - iii. Project timeline
 - iv. Highlight any tasks that you have added or omitted and provide a brief explanation justifying the changes
 - v. Identify the key employees (principals, project manager, and team members) who are likely to be assigned to this contract if your proposal is selected (or who will need to be hired to complete this project).
 - vi. Identify any subcontractors or partners you anticipate including in the work and their scope of work, including any unidentified subcontractors or partners
 - vii. Describe how you will perform culturally sensitive, trauma informed interviews

Part II – Experience

Provide a narrative of your firm's experience in conducting community and/or housing studies, and include a list of such projects completed in the past five years.

Please provide a reference of up to two of the most relevant or comparable projects completed by your business / firm during the past 5 years. For each listed project provide:

- Final deliverables
- Scope of services provided
- Dollar amount of the contract
- Articulate any change in contract cost over the life of the contract
- Contracting entity's contact person, e-mail address, and telephone number

Part III – Budget

Submit one budget organized by task. The budget should be for the entire project and include a budget narrative to accompany the budget. The budget narrative should supplement the information provided in the budget spreadsheet by justifying the cost of the proposed research and clearly reference the work performed as described in Part I – Proposal. Please include the following additional information in your budget:

- Participation stipends for refugees
- Interpretation costs

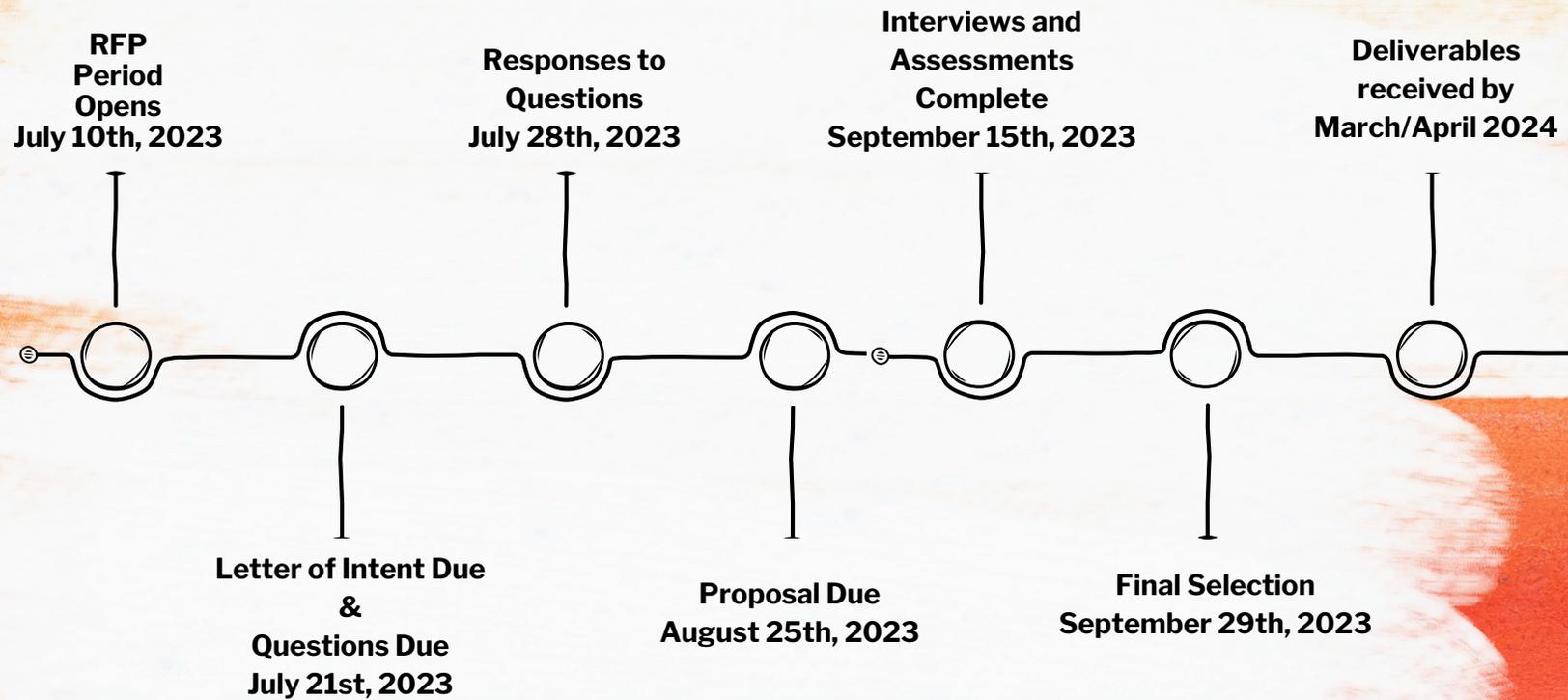


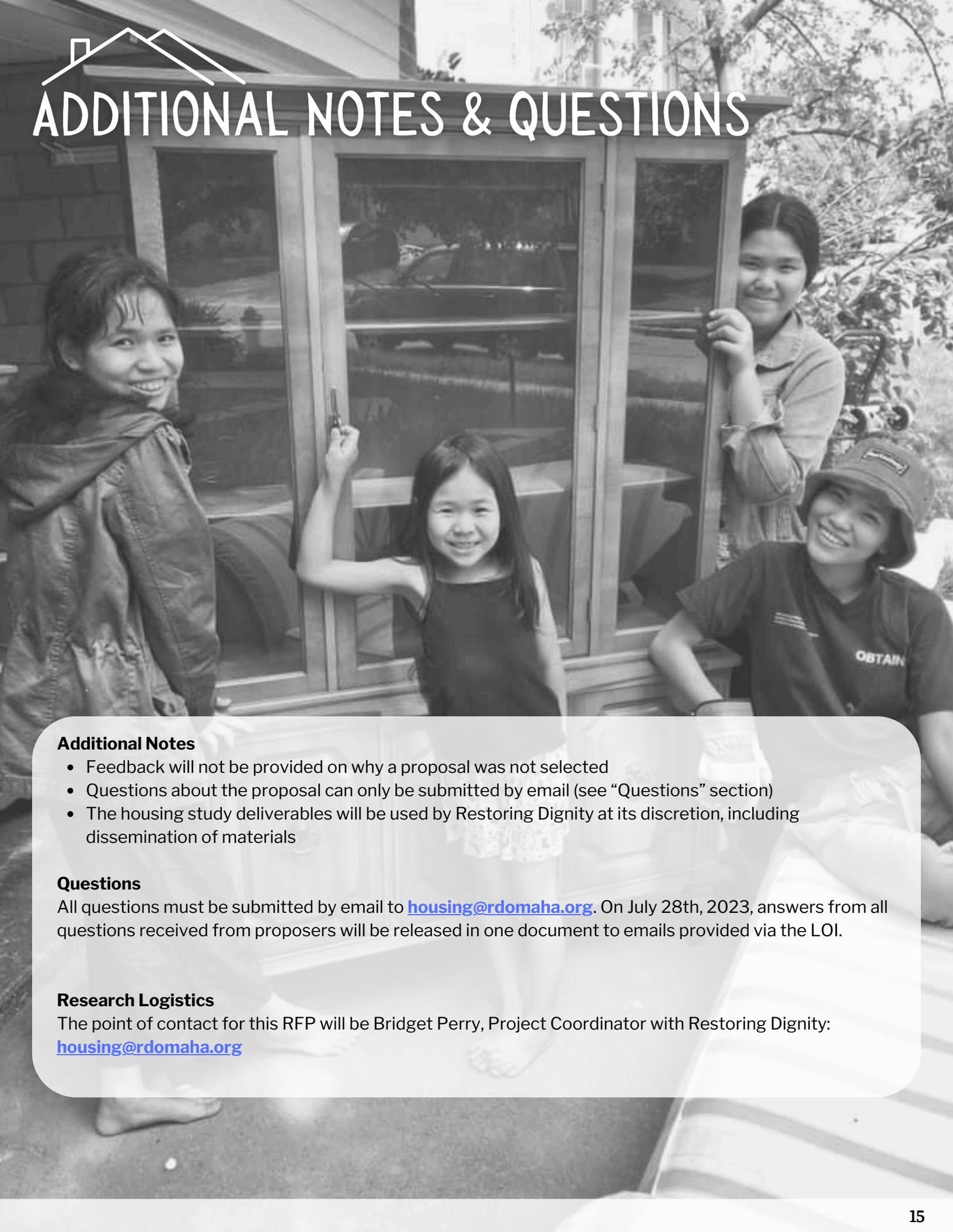
BUDGET & TIMELINE

Budget

A budget will be negotiated based on an assessment of costs associated with the deliverables.

Timeline





ADDITIONAL NOTES & QUESTIONS

Additional Notes

- Feedback will not be provided on why a proposal was not selected
- Questions about the proposal can only be submitted by email (see “Questions” section)
- The housing study deliverables will be used by Restoring Dignity at its discretion, including dissemination of materials

Questions

All questions must be submitted by email to housing@rdomaha.org. On July 28th, 2023, answers from all questions received from proposers will be released in one document to emails provided via the LOI.

Research Logistics

The point of contact for this RFP will be Bridget Perry, Project Coordinator with Restoring Dignity: housing@rdomaha.org



RESTORING DIGNITY

Thank you for joining Restoring Dignity on our journey to build an empowered, thriving community where refugees have access to the tools and skills they need to flourish in safe and healthy homes!