

# Vermont Public Service Department

## Opinion Polling Services RFP – Responses to Questions

3/14/23

1. Firms that conduct statistically valid (representative) polls are typically focused on research – getting you accurate results, and not on public relations or marketing or strategic planning. Are you interested in proposals from research firms for just the polling? Or would you prefer proposals from PR and marketing and strategic planning firms who can do community meetings and outreach? Or are you looking for a team of consultants to propose together?

*Ideally, a proposal would include both polling and engagement opportunities for the participants for what the Department is considering “Comprehensive Polling.” If applicants offer proposals for part(s) of what the Department has defined as Comprehensive Polling, those could be considered and potentially paired with other proposals that offer other aspects of the Comprehensive Polling that the Department is seeking. If a respondent were to submit a proposal that consisted of more than one firm, and together those firms could offer the full range of services sought, that may be seen as a stronger proposal.*

2. For clarity, opinion researchers would be great at conducting the items highlighted in yellow below (2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.4, 2.3.7, 2.3.8) The other items – 2.3.3, 2.3.5, and 2.3.6 seem like roles for marketing and strategic planning and energy subject matter experts. Does that make sense? Do you have ideas for these kinds of experts you would like to engage for this kind of work?

*The Department feels it is important to make subject matter experts available to polling participants that are well versed in energy issues in Vermont and New England and how those are intermingled and their impacts on our state’s energy policies. The subject matter experts should have a strong understanding of the Renewable Energy Standard and the Climate Action Plan, which drive Vermont’s renewable energy policy. They should also have a strong understanding of renewable energy programs – Net-Metering and Standard Offer – and be able to articulate the interactions between these programs and the energy and climate policies. The Department may be able to offer some further guidance but would like to maintain a neutral position in the selection of those policy experts.*

3. Although we acknowledge that probability sampling methods have been requested in the RFP, the field of survey methods has found that these methods often miss large groups of individuals, either through individuals in that target population having no chance of being selected (undercoverage) and/or through nonresponse. In addition, probability surveys are frequently costly relative to other methods, and results from the survey may not be timely enough to be actionable. Given the significantly higher cost and large issues with coverage and nonresponse, nonprobability surveys have become increasingly common as an alternative to probability surveys, and have been shown to produce similar estimates as probability surveys with appropriate targeting and post-survey adjustments. Are representative nonprobability surveys eligible as part of this RFP?

*The Department has asked for “a random and representative sample of Vermont citizens” which implies a preference for probability sampling methods. The RFP goes on to state that respondents “should propose an appropriate sample and sampling methodology that provides confidence in results” (Section*

2.3.1.). *The Department is open to the consideration of different sampling methods as a part of the engagement effort and asks that respondents provide appropriate justification for their sampling methodology in their response to the RFP.*

4. What are the specific policy, strategy, or programmatic decisions the results from this project will help inform? How does the Department anticipate the polling results will be used?

*The Department intends use the polling results when making policy recommendations for reforms to the Renewable Energy Standard to ensure that the voices of ratepayers are included when legislators consider those reforms. The results from this polling effort would also be utilized in recommendations for revisions to renewable programs, specifically Net-Metering and any potential successor program that may replace or update the Standard Offer program.*

5. Does the Department have a pre-established list of specific policy experts the consultant can use for initial outreach and recruiting?

*The Department does not have a pre-established list of policy experts but could potentially work with the selected firm(s) to generate a list that the contractor/consultant could use for outreach and recruiting.*

6. Has the Department conducted renewable energy-related polling and engagement with the public previously and, if so, is that reporting available to review?

*The Department has contracted energy-related polling that was conducted in 2007. That report is available at: <https://deliberation.stanford.edu/news/final-report-deliberative-polling-vermonts-energy-future>*

7. Has the Department worked with any Community Based Organizations or other local partners in Phase 1 of the public engagement? And, if so, which ones? Does the Department have connections with CBOs or other local partners who would be able to assist with portions of community outreach and respondent recruiting, particularly from traditionally marginalized and underrepresented communities in Vermont?

*Up to this point, the Department's work with local partners has been limited. There has been some collaboration between the Department and Vermont Energy Education Program (VEEP) a community organization whose mission is to educate the public about energy issues. Going forward, we intend to reach out to CBOs that are specifically related to impacted communities to enhance direct outreach to those communities.*

8. What schedule flexibility does the Department have in spreading out the various polling and engagement components of this project, both before and after the June timeframe outlined in the proposal?

*The results/final report dates are firm. Respondents may propose alternative interim timeframes. However, if proposing interim timeframes different from those in the RFP, the respondent should justify such timeframes, demonstrating the benefits of the adjusted timeframes and particularly, any timeframes that may shift engagement into the summer season, which the Department understands to be a less effective time to engage Vermonters.*

9. Is the primary objective to create optimal messaging to educate citizens and stakeholders on Vermont's renewable energy programs?

*The objective is not to create optimal messaging but to encourage a segment of citizens/ratepayers to engage in the development of policy related to Vermont's renewable energy programs. The educational portion of this polling effort is intended to ensure that opinions of participants resemble those opinions they may have if they were more informed on or had more interest in those issues.*

10. Is the primary objective to evaluate the current Renewable Energy Standard, Standard Offer or Net Metering programs from the perspective of citizens and stakeholders in order for the staff or legislature to craft more optimal energy programs?

*The primary objective is to use the resulting opinions coming from this effort to help shape the Department's recommendations to the legislature or renewable energy programs and policies or updates to existing programs and policies in the future. Additionally, the Department believes that showing the contrast between the outcomes of the initial and final polling results in this process will be important for making recommendations showing a difference between less and more considered opinions.*

11. Is there a requirement for a certain level of statistical precision for either of the two polls?

*There is not a requirement for a certain level of statistical precision however the Department's RFP does ask that, "Respondents to this RFP should propose an appropriate sample and sampling methodology that provides confidence in results."*

12. Will you require a data file with base weights or replicate weights?

*The Department would like copies of all raw data sets and all other relevant information for review and further analyses as future needs arise.*

13. Are there specific subgroups that will require statistical analyses from the polling data?

*No, the Department has not identified particular subgroups for statistical analyses, but proposals should discuss whether this would be of value, for which subgroups / types of subgroups, and how it might impact the sampling methods.*

14. Is there a requirement to create a panel (community) of citizens or stakeholders that will continue to participate beyond the 18-24 month project?

*The Department has not made the creation of a panel of citizens or stakeholders beyond the project a requirement of the project and did not envision the creation of such a panel. If the proposal includes the creation of a panel of some kind, and can provide justification for its creation, the Department will take that into consideration when deciding on the award of contract.*

15. To what extent will staff or their representatives of the Department of Public Service provide input into the brief referred to in 2.3.3 of the Scope of Services?

*Department staff will be reviewing the brief prior to the distribution to polling participants but should not be expected to directly provide content for the briefing materials. The contractor should expect to confer with policy experts for the development of the briefing materials as needed.*

16. Will the contract be a firm fixed price or time and materials?

*The contract will include a maximum payable dollar amount which will be fixed. The contractor is expected to provide invoices monthly that include details of the work performed, dates of service, rates of pay and hours worked and other appropriate information to substantiate the invoiced amount in that invoice period. Please see Attachment B – Payment Provisions provided on p. 24 of 25 of the RFP for further details.*

17. Are there specific populations that have traditionally been left out of Vermont’s public policy discussions that are unique to Vermont, such as specific Native American Tribes?

*There are Native American Tribes unique to Vermont that have traditionally been left out of public policy discussions. State recognized tribes include The Elnu Abenaki Tribe, The Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe, The Koasek Traditional Band of the Koas Abenaki Nation, and Abenaki Nation at Missisquoi, however this list is not necessarily exhaustive of specific populations unique to Vermont that have been left out of those discussions.*

18. What populations specifically do you consider to have “... historically been left out of the conversations and decision-making processes leading to renewable energy policy?” (pg3) or “historically marginalized communities” (pg 7, 3.3.2.2.2)

*Populations that have been traditionally left out of conversations and decision-making processes leading to renewable energy policy include Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC), individuals with low-income, and those with limited-English proficiency. The Department does not necessarily consider this to be an exhaustive list of marginalized communities.*

19. You mention “polling services **and/or** other public engagements” (pg 3), I want to confirm - is it acceptable to submit a proposal for only the polling services?

*Ideally, a proposal would include both polling and engagement opportunities for the participants for what the Department is considering “Comprehensive Polling.” If applicants offer proposals for part(s) of what the Department has defined as Comprehensive Polling those could be considered and perhaps paired with other proposals that offer other aspects of the Comprehensive Polling the Department is seeking. If a respondent were to submit a proposal that consisted of more than one firm, and together those firms could offer the full range of services sought, that may be seen as a stronger proposal.*

20. Please define what you mean when you say “polling” as opposed to “surveys”? (pg 4)

*In the context of pg. 4 of the RFP “polling” or “surveys” references options to gather opinions and data that were identified in responses to the Department’s RFI for the Public Engagement Plan or the Department’s intent to use either or both in the execution of the Plan. Typically, a poll will include a single question while a survey will include a list of questions. From the Department’s perspective, both can be effective methods for gathering opinions or data.*

21. Can you describe in further detail what you mean when you state, “participants involved in the polling process will **have the opportunity to explore their opinions and preferences and share them with other participants.**” When I consider *polling* – I am defining this as a cross-sectional survey of a random selection of Vermonters within the identified population. (pg 3)

*The Department is seeking services that will offer the opportunity for participants to engage with other participants. These engagement opportunities should allow participants to discuss and compare their opinions with other participants and have moderated debates about those opinions.*

22. Please define what you mean by “multi-stage polling”? (pg 5, 2.3.1)

*The Department is defining as “multi-stage polling” as a process where participants are recruited and asked questions about their views on a topic. Following this initial engagement, the same participants then receive information on the topic to broaden their understanding and are offered engagement opportunities to expand upon their understanding of the topic (e.g., focus groups, presentations, expert panel discussions), and finally asked for their thoughts on the topic following the briefing and engagement opportunities.*

23. You request the provider to “facilitate engagement of survey participants with policy experts on the topic(s).” Are you envisioning that if someone participates in the survey we will also be recruiting them to participate in focus groups or discussions as well? (pg 5, 2.3.6)

*The Department is envisioning a series of steps in the polling process for selected participants. Participants should be selected with the understanding that they will be included in each step of the polling process, including initial polling, engagement activities (reading the brief, focus groups, discussions, etc.), and final polling.*

24. Should the people participating in the final poll be the same people who took the first poll, received the materials, and participated in discussions? (pg 5, 2.3.7)

*Yes, the selected participants should be included in each stage of the polling process.*

25. Do the engagement sessions need to be in-person or can they be online?

*Engagement sessions can be in-person, online, or a combination of both.*

26. The brief refers to “Develop and distribute to participants a brief that offers balanced information on relevant topic(s).” Can you clarify what balanced means?

*“Balanced,” in the context of the information that should be included in the brief, would be inclusive of information that come from sources that may be opposed to one another in aspects of the topic, but would still be considered reasonable in the context of the issue.*

27. Similarly, it says “Recruit policy experts with a variety of viewpoints on Vermont’s renewable energy programs and policies...” Are there any boundaries to this variety in terms of these experts?

*Policy experts for this effort should include individuals that are well versed in energy issues in Vermont and New England and understand how those are intermingled and their impacts on our state’s energy policies. Experts should have a strong understanding of the Renewable Energy Standard and the Climate Action Plan, which drive Vermont’s renewable energy policy. They should also have a strong understanding of renewable energy programs – Net-Metering and Standard Offer – and be able to articulate the interactions between these programs and the energy and climate policies.*