



## **Request for Information (RFI)**

**Release Date:** March 23, 2017

**RFI No.:** VIP-2017-01, “Market analysis for transfer of Voting Information Project”

**Topic:** Request for information regarding considerations in conducting a market analysis of a civic data project for potential spin-off to another organization

**Key Dates:** March 31, 2017: Deadline to submit expressions of interest and any questions regarding this RFI, in accordance with the instructions below.  
April 11, 2017: Deadline to submit a response to this RFI, in accordance with the instructions below.

### **Introduction**

The Pew Charitable Trusts (“Pew”) is a non-profit research and policy organization, focused on improving public policy, informing the public, and invigorating civic life. For more information about Pew, please see [www.pewtrusts.org](http://www.pewtrusts.org). For more than a decade, Pew’s Election Initiatives program has supported innovative research and partnerships to achieve the highest standards of accuracy, cost-effectiveness, convenience, and security in America’s system of election administration. One of the signature initiatives established by Pew as part of this portfolio is the Voting Information Project (VIP.) Pew has dedicated nine years to funding and development of VIP. Additional details are available on the VIP website: <https://www.votinginfoproject.org/>.

As Pew is winding down its Election Initiatives program over the next year – a typical practice for mature Pew programs – Pew is interested in ensuring that VIP continues to serve the American public. Specifically, Pew is interested in transferring VIP to another entity for future stewardship.

The purpose of this RFI is to help Pew determine the feasibility of creating a value proposition for VIP, as part of the planning for the eventual transfer of VIP to another entity. Via this RFI, Pew would like to collect information to inform decision-making related to Pew’s ability to:

- (1) Determine that VIP generates sufficient value to the field to ensure its long-term viability, and
- (2) Understand how the field – i.e., VIP’s data providers and users – might react and adjust to potential future adaptations of VIP’s model.

### **Background**

VIP works with state election officials to aggregate information that voters need to cast a ballot, including “where is my polling place?”, “is early voting available to me?” and “what’s on my

ballot?” VIP makes this key information available across the web, to any user who enters an address.

State election officials make VIP possible by providing official information linking street segments to polling places. VIP, through a partnership with Google, provides quality assurance and testing of the data, and places this information into the Google Civic Information API. The Google Civic Information API is open-source, and thus available for developers to build on. In 2016, entities ranging from social media giants to presidential campaigns built tools from this data. Additionally, Pew has created three easy-to-use tools, which allow users to directly retrieve VIP’s election information. These include the GetToThePolls.com website, an embeddable Voting Information Tool that can be customized and placed on any website, and an SMS tool that allows voters to retrieve voting information by texting VOTE to GO VOTE (short code 468-683).

States provide various kinds of files to VIP. Some states use the VIP 5.1 specification to appropriately format their data and share it through a dashboard. Others provide non-standard files of various kinds. VIP provides in-kind staff assistance to states as needed, pulling them along the spectrum toward increased quality and automation of their feeds. For the general election in 2016, forty-four (44) states plus the District of Columbia provided official information to VIP.

End users across the country drove 123 million impressions of VIP data in 2016. Some organizations built tools directly, devoting developer resources toward creative uses of VIP’s data. Others used Pew’s tools, which are free to anyone. In many cases, state and local governments are end users, making use of these free tools to serve their voters. Many election-focused entities use the data and the tools regularly, including the DNC and RNC, RockTheVote, VotoLatino and others. Additionally, in advance of high profile general elections, social media companies and corporations with a strong web presence either build their own tools using VIP data (Twitter, Foursquare, Tumblr), or point to GetToThePolls.com from their platforms (Facebook, Etsy, Firefox/Mozilla.) VIP does not charge any fees for use of the tools, or for queries of the API.

Pew will consider varied approaches to successful spin-off of the Voting Information Project (VIP), but this requires a complete understanding of the potential for VIP to deliver continuing value to the field, and explore models that include self-sustaining revenue.

### **RFI Goals**

Via this RFI, Pew seeks to explore the possibility of engaging with an organization to produce a “market analysis,” in the form of a written report, which includes the following:

- (1) An assessment of the role of VIP in the election information ecosystem – historically, currently, and projected into the next five to ten years.
- (2) An assessment of the core characteristics of VIP which are crucial to long-term, widespread participation and use.

- (3) Identification and assessment of a range of models that would position VIP to generate a portion of its own budget, including endeavors not currently a part of core VIP functions.
- (4) An assessment of the value of VIP, described in quantitative terms.
- (5) An assessment of the ancillary benefits of VIP participation to state elections offices, in qualitative or quantitative terms.

### **Instructions for Responses to this RFI**

Organizations interested in contracting with Pew to carry out this analysis are encouraged (but not required) to submit a response to this RFI, **no longer than five (5) pages**, that contains brief responses to the following questions:

- (1) What qualifications does your organization have to accomplish this research?
  - Which staff members would lead the project?
  - Does your organization have any experience analyzing the value of, and future sustainability of, non-profit programs?
  - Does your organization have experience analyzing civic data projects?
- (2) What approaches would your organization use to conduct the analysis?
  - How would you weigh whether the project's current model ought to be codified vs. modified, to maximize VIP's sustainability?
  - How would you assess the opportunities and limitations of a data project built on a voluntary and cooperative culture?
  - How would you diagnose the sensitivities surrounding change in a project with extremely varied stakeholders?
  - How might you research analogous efforts that would inform Pew's thinking for VIP?
- (3) What other considerations would you recommend Pew take into account when thinking about the value proposition of this project?
- (4) What is the estimated length of time, in months, needed to accomplish the activities laid out in your response? (Please note that a detailed work plan is not requested at this time, and that respondents may indicate a high-level timeline.)
- (5) What is an approximate total budget needed for the work proposed? (Please note that a detailed budget is not requested at this time, and that respondents may indicate an approximate budget range.)

Responses to this RFI are limited to a **maximum of five (5) pages** (8.5" x 11"). Responses must be submitted in PDF or Microsoft Office format. There are no additional requirements regarding

format (margins, font size, etc.) governing responses to this RFI. Cover letters, CVs, and letters of recommendation should not be included in any RFI response.

### **Timeline and Process**

*Expressions of interest.* Any organization interested in responding to this RFI is requested to submit an expression of interest via email by 5:00PM ET on March 31, 2017 to Jasen Andersen (jandersen@pewtrusts.org). Pew will only distribute additional clarifications and answers to questions to those entities that have submitted an expression of interest. Any expression of interest must include the entity's legal name and point of contact details, including name, phone number, and email address.

*Questions and requests for clarification:* Questions or requests for clarification regarding the RFI must be submitted no later than 5:00PM ET on March 31, 2017. Questions must be submitted in writing via email to Jasen Andersen (jandersen@pewtrusts.org); phone calls will not be accepted. Questions and requests for clarification—and the responses thereto—that Pew believes may be of interest to other potential respondents will be circulated to all RFI recipients who have expressed interest. Pew will aggregate and anonymize the questions and issue a document containing answers to all questions submitted by potential respondents.

*Submission of RFI response:* If your organization is interested in responding to this RFI, please submit a response in accordance with the instructions above to Jasen Andersen (jandersen@pewtrusts.org) by 5:00PM ET on April 11, 2017. Respondents must ensure that their RFI response clearly articulates responses to the questions above and directly responds to this RFI.

Following review of the RFI responses, Pew may release a full, follow-on Request for Proposals (RFP) to collect more detailed proposals and budgets to conduct the market analysis. Participation in this RFI is not required in order to be eligible to participate in the RFP. Further details regarding the contracting process and Pew's standard terms and conditions would be included in the RFP at that time.

This is a request for information only. Issuance of this RFI does not in any way obligate Pew to issue any award or follow-on RFP. Pew is not financially or otherwise liable for any costs associated with the preparation, submission, or presentation of any information in response to this RFI. Pew also retains the right to modify or cancel this RFI at any time at its sole discretion.