



OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

(309) 888-5110 FAX: (309) 888-5111

115 E Washington St, Room 401, Bloomington, IL 61701

To: Chair Johnston and Honorable Members of the Executive Committee

From: Cassy Taylor, County Administrator

Re: Strategic Planning Services Contract

Date: July 7, 2025

The selection of Mejorando Group to provide professional strategic planning services to the County is respectfully recommended to the Executive Committee for approval. This recommendation follows a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process, through which nine firms submitted proposals.

A review committee comprised of three County Board members and one County Administrator evaluated all submissions based on qualifications, methodology, experience, references, and cost. The committee unanimously agreed that Mejorando Group submitted the most responsive proposal. Their approach demonstrates a strong understanding of the County's needs, a proven facilitation track record, and experience working with public-sector organizations on transformational planning initiatives.

The selected consultant will be expected to:

- Guide the board through a credible and modern process necessary to execute an effective and sustainable strategic plan.
- Obtain input from key stakeholders on challenges facing the County and potential strategies to effectively address them.
- Facilitate the development of Vision, Mission, Core Values, Strategic Focus Areas, Goals, Performance Measures and an Implementation Plan
- Synthesize inputs into a "living" Strategic Plan which serves as a roadmap for success and a tool used for future budgeting and policy; and
- Develop a framework for communicating goals and progress county-wide

This effort represents a critical step in aligning the County's resources, priorities, and operations to achieve long-term, measurable outcomes.

MCLEAN COUNTY
CONTRACT SERVICES AGREEMENT FOR
STRATEGIC PLANNING SERVICES

This Contract Services Agreement (“Agreement”) is made and entered into this __17th_ day of July __ 2025, by and between the McLean County, a _____ corporation (“County”), and Patrick Ibarra, dba The Mejorando Group, a sole proprietorship (“Consultant”). The term Consultant includes professionals performing in a consulting capacity. The parties hereto agree as follows:

1.0 SERVICES OF CONSULTANT

1.1 Scope of Services. In compliance with all terms and conditions of this Agreement, Consultant shall provide the work and services specified in the “Scope of Services” attached hereto as *Exhibit “A”* and incorporated herein by this reference. Consultant warrants that all work or services set forth in the Scope of Services will be performed in a competent, professional and satisfactory manner.

1.2 Consultant’s Proposal. The Scope of Services shall include the Consultant’s proposal or bid which shall be incorporated herein by this reference as though fully set forth herein. In the event of any inconsistency between the terms of such proposal and this Agreement, the terms of this Agreement shall govern.

1.3 Compliance with Law. All work and services rendered hereunder shall be provided in accordance with all ordinances, resolutions, statutes, rules, and regulations of the County and any Federal, State or local governmental agency having jurisdiction.

1.4 Licenses, Permits, Fees and Assessments. Consultant shall obtain at its sole cost and expense, such licenses, permits and approvals as may be required by law for the performance of the services required by this Agreement. Consultant shall have the sole obligation to pay for any fees, assessments, taxes, including applicable penalties and interest, which may be imposed by law and arise from or are necessary for the Consultant’s performance of the services required by this Agreement; and shall indemnify, defend and hold harmless the County against any claim for such fees, assessments, taxes, penalties or interest levied, assessed or imposed against County hereunder.

1.5 Familiarity with Work. By executing this Agreement, Consultant warrants that Consultant (a) has thoroughly investigated and considered the scope of services to be performed, (b) has carefully considered how the work and services should be performed, and (c) fully understands the facilities, difficulties and restrictions attending performance of the services under this Agreement.

1.6 Additional Services. The County shall have the right at any time during the performance of the services, without invalidating this Agreement, to order extra work beyond that specified in the Scope of Services or make changes by altering, adding to or deducting from said work. No such extra work may be undertaken unless a written order is first given by the Contract Officer to the Consultant, incorporating therein any adjustment in (i) the Contract Sum, and/or (ii) the time to perform this Agreement, which said adjustments are subject to the written approval of the Consultant. Any increase in compensation must be approved by the County Board. It is expressly understood by

consultant that the provisions of this Section shall not apply to services specifically set forth in the Scope of Services or reasonably contemplated therein. Consultant hereby acknowledges that it accepts the risk that the services provided pursuant to the Scope of Services may be more costly or time-consuming than Consultant anticipates and that Consultant shall not be entitled to additional compensation, therefore.

1.7 Special Requirements. Additional terms and conditions of this Agreement, if any, which are made a part hereof are set forth in the “Special Requirements” attached hereto as *Exhibit “B”* and incorporated herein by this reference. In the event of a conflict between the provisions of *Exhibit “B”* and any other provisions of this Agreement, the provisions of *Exhibit “B”* shall govern.

1.8 Environmental Laws. Consultant shall comply with all applicable environmental laws, ordinances, codes and regulations of Federal, State, and local governments. Consultant shall also comply with all applicable mandatory standards and policies relating to energy efficiency.

2.0 COMPENSATION

2.1 Contract Sum. For the services rendered pursuant to this Agreement, Consultant shall be compensated in accordance with the “Schedule of Compensation” attached hereto as *Exhibit “C”* and incorporated herein by this reference, but not exceeding the maximum contract amount of Sixty-Five Thousand dollars (\$65,000.00) (“Contract Sum”), except as provided in Section 1.6. The method of compensation may include: (i) a lump sum payment upon completion, (ii) payment in accordance with the percentage of completion of the services, (iii) payment for time and materials based upon the Consultant’s rates as specified in the Schedule of Compensation, but not exceeding the Contract Sum or (iv) such other methods as may be specified in the Schedule of Compensation. Compensation may include reimbursement for actual and necessary expenditures approved by the Contract Officer in advance if specified in the Schedule of Compensation. The Contract Sum shall include the attendance of Consultant at all project meetings reasonably deemed necessary by the County.

Consultant agrees that if Consultant becomes aware of any facts, circumstances, techniques, or events that may or will materially increase or decrease the cost of the work or services or, if Consultant is providing design services, the cost of the project being designed, Consultant shall promptly notify the Contract Officer of said fact, circumstance, technique or event and the estimated increased or decreased cost related thereto and, if Consultant is providing design services, the estimated increased or decreased cost estimate for the project being designed.

2.2 Method of Payment. Unless some other method of payment is specified in the Schedule of Compensation, in any month in which Consultant wishes to receive payment, no later than the first (1st) working day of such month Consultant shall submit to the County, in a form approved by the County’s Auditor, an invoice for services rendered prior to the date of the invoice. Except as provided in Section 7.2, The County shall pay Consultant for all expenses stated thereon which are approved by The County pursuant to this Agreement within thirty (30) days of approval, per Illinois Local Government Prompt Payment Act.

2.3 Availability of Funds. It is mutually understood between the parties that this Agreement is valid and enforceable only if sufficient funds are made available by the County Board of the County for the purposes of this Agreement. The availability of funding is affected by matters outside the County’s control, including other governmental entities. Accordingly, the County has the

option to terminate the whole Agreement upon giving notice, or to amend the Agreement to reflect an unanticipated reduction in funding for any reason.

3.0 PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

3.1 Schedule of Performance. Consultant shall commence the services pursuant to this Agreement upon receipt of a written notice to proceed and shall perform all services within the time period(s) established in the “Schedule of Performance” attached hereto as *Exhibit “D”*, if any, and incorporated herein by this reference. When requested by the Consultant, extensions to the time period(s) specified in the Schedule of Performance may be approved in writing by the Contract Officer but not exceeding one hundred eighty (180) days cumulatively.

3.2 Force Majeure. The time period(s) specified in the Schedule of Performance for performance of the services rendered pursuant to this Agreement shall be extended because of any delays due to unforeseeable causes beyond the control and without the fault or negligence of the Consultant, including, but not restricted to, acts of God or of the public enemy, unusually severe weather, fires, earthquakes, floods, epidemics, quarantine restrictions, riots, strikes, freight embargoes, wars, litigation, and/or acts of any governmental agency, including the County, if the Consultant shall, within ten (10) days of the commencement of such delay, notify the Contract Officer in writing of the causes of the delay. The Contract Officer shall ascertain the facts and the extent of delay and extend the time for performing the services for the period of the enforced delay when and if, in the judgment of the Contract Officer, such a delay is justified. The Contract Officer’s determination shall be final and conclusive upon the parties to this Agreement. In no event shall Consultant be entitled to recover damages against the County for any delay in the performance of this Agreement, however caused; Consultant’s sole remedy being extension of the Agreement pursuant to this Section.

3.3 Term. Unless earlier terminated in accordance with Section 7.4 below, this Agreement shall continue in full force and effect until completion of the services no later than May 30, 2026.

4.0 COORDINATION OF WORK

4.1 Representative of Consultant. Patrick Ibarra is hereby designated as the representative of Consultant authorized to act on its behalf with respect to the work or services specified herein and to make all decisions in connection therewith.

It is expressly understood that the experience, knowledge, capability and reputation of the representative was a substantial inducement for The County to enter into this Agreement. Therefore, the representative shall be responsible during the term of this Agreement for directing all activities of Consultant and devoting sufficient time to personally supervise the services hereunder. For purposes of this Agreement, the representative may not be replaced, nor may his responsibilities be substantially reduced by Consultant without the express written approval of The County.

4.2 Contract Officer. The County Administrator is hereby designated as the representative of the County authorized to act on its behalf with respect to the day-to-day work and services and to make all decisions in connection therewith (“Contract Officer”). It shall be the Consultant’s responsibility to assure that the Contract Officer is kept informed of the progress of the performance of the services and the Consultant shall refer any decisions which must be made by County to the Contract Officer. Substantial alterations to the work and services to be done may require County

Board approval. The County may designate another Contract Officer by providing written notice to Consultant.

4.3 Independent Contractor. Neither the County nor any of its employees shall have any control over the manner or means by which the Consultant or employees, perform the services required herein, except as otherwise set forth herein. Consultant shall perform all services required herein as an independent contractor of County and shall remain under only such obligations as are consistent with that role. Consultant represents and warrants that the personnel used to provide services to the County pursuant to this Agreement are classified by Consultant as employees. The consultant shall not at any time or in any manner represent that it or any of its employees are employees of the County. The County shall not in any way or for any purpose become or be deemed to be a partner of Consultant in its business or otherwise a joint venture or a member of any joint enterprise with Consultant. In the event that Consultant or any employee of Consultant providing services under this Agreement claims or is determined by a federal or state agency, a court of competent jurisdiction, or the Illinois Public Employees' Retirement System to be classified as other than an independent contractor for the County, then Consultant shall indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the County for the payment of any and all assessed fines, penalties, judgments, employee and/or employer contributions, and any other damages and costs assessed to the County as a consequence of, or in any way attributable to, the assertion that Consultant or any staff Consultant used to provide services under this Agreement are employees of the City.

5.0 INSURANCE AND INDEMNIFICATION

5.1 Insurance. Consultant shall procure and maintain, at its sole cost and expense, in a form and content satisfactory to the County, during the entire term of this Agreement including any extension thereof, the following policies of insurance:

(a) Commercial General Liability Insurance. A policy of comprehensive general liability insurance with limits of no less than \$1,000,000.00 per occurrence. Coverage for the County as an additional insured shall not be limited to its vicarious liability. The policy shall provide that costs of defense of claims against the County are payable in addition to, and do not deplete, the limits of liability.

(b) Workers' Compensation Insurance. A policy of workers' compensation insurance in accordance with Illinois law.

(c) Professional Liability or Error and Omissions Insurance. A policy of professional liability insurance in an amount not less than \$1,000,000.00 per claim with respect to loss arising from the actions of Consultant performing professional services hereunder on behalf of the County.

All of the above policies of insurance shall be primary insurance. The general liability policy shall name the County, its officers, employees and agents ("County Parties") as additional insureds and shall waive all rights of subrogation and contribution it may have against the County and the County's Parties and their respective insurers. Moreover, where the primary insured does not satisfy the self-insured retention, the insurance policy must specify that any additional insured may satisfy the self-insured retention. All of the said policies of insurance shall also provide that said insurance may not be cancelled without providing ten (10) days prior written notice by registered mail to the County. In the event any of said policies of insurance are cancelled or amended, Consultant shall, prior to the

cancellation or amendment date, submit new evidence of insurance in conformance with this Section 5.1 to the Contract Officer. No work or services under this Agreement shall commence until Consultant has provided the County with Certificates of Insurance or appropriate insurance binders evidencing the above insurance coverages and said Certificates of Insurance or binders are approved by County.

Consultant agrees that the provisions of this Section 5.1 shall not be construed as limiting in any way the extent to which Consultant may be held responsible for the payment of damages to any persons or property resulting from Consultant's activities or the activities of any person or persons for which Consultant is otherwise responsible.

The insurance required by this Agreement shall be satisfactory only if issued by companies qualified to do business in Illinois, rated "A" or better in the most recent edition of Best Rating Guide or The Key Rating Guide, and only if they are of a financial category Class VII or better, unless such requirements are waived by the Risk Manager of the County due to unique circumstances.

In the event that the Consultant is authorized to subcontract any portion of the work or services provided pursuant to this Agreement, the contract between the Consultant and such subcontractor shall require the subcontractor to maintain the same policies of insurance that the Consultant is required to maintain pursuant to this Section 5.1.

5.2 Indemnification.

(a) Indemnity for Design Professional Liability. When the law establishes a professional standard of care for Consultant's services, to the fullest extent permitted by law, and except for the statutory limits set forth under Illinois law applicable to services provided by a "design professional", Consultant shall indemnify, defend and hold harmless County and the County's Parties from and against any and all losses, liabilities, damages, costs and expenses, including attorneys' fees and costs to the extent same are caused in whole or in part by any negligent or wrongful act, error or omission of Consultant, its officers, agents, employees or subcontractors (or any entity or individual for which Consultant shall bear legal liability) in the performance of professional services under this Agreement.

(b) Indemnity for Other Than Design Professional Liability. Other than in the performance of design professional services and to the full extent permitted by law, Consultant shall indemnify, defend and hold harmless the County and County's Parties from and against any liability (including liability for claims, suits, actions, losses, expenses or costs of any kind, whether actual, alleged or threatened, including attorneys' fees and costs, court costs, defense costs and expert witness fees), where the same arise out of, are a consequence of, or are in any way attributable to, in whole or in part, the performance of this Agreement by Consultant or by any individual or entity for which Consultant is legally liable, including but not limited to officers, agents, employees or subcontractors of Consultant.

6.0 RECORDS AND REPORTS

6.1 Reports. Consultant shall periodically prepare and submit to the Contract Officer such reports concerning the performance of the services required by this Agreement when requested by the Contract Officer.

6.2 Records. Consultant shall keep, and require subcontractors to keep, such books and records as shall be necessary to perform the services required by this Agreement and enable the Contract Officer to evaluate the performance of such services. The Contract Officer shall have full and free access to such books and records at all times during normal business hours in the County, including the right to inspect, copy, audit and make records and transcripts from such records. Such records shall be maintained for a period of two (2) years following completion of the services hereunder, and the County shall have access to such records in the event any audit is required.

6.3 Ownership of Documents. All drawings, specifications, reports, records, documents and other materials prepared by Consultant, its employees, subcontractors and agents in the performance of this Agreement shall be the property of the County and shall be delivered to the County upon request of the Contract Officer or upon the termination of this Agreement and Consultant shall have no claim for further employment or additional compensation as a result of the exercise by County of its full rights of ownership of such documents and materials. Consultant may retain copies of such documents for its own use and Consultant shall have an unrestricted right to use the concepts embodied therein. Any use of such completed documents by the County for other projects and/or use of uncompleted documents without specific written authorization by the Consultant will be at the County's sole risk and without liability to Consultant and the County shall indemnify the Consultant for all damages resulting therefrom. All subcontractors shall provide for assignment to the County of any documents or materials prepared by them, and in the event, Consultant fails to secure such assignment, Consultant shall indemnify County for all damages resulting therefrom.

7.0 ENFORCEMENT OF AGREEMENT

7.1 Illinois Law. This Agreement shall be construed and interpreted both as to validity and to performance of the parties in accordance with the laws of the State of Illinois. Legal actions concerning any dispute, claim or matter arising out of or in relation to this Agreement shall be instituted in the McLean County, Illinois, and Consultant agrees to submit to the personal jurisdiction of such court in the event of such action.

7.2 Retention of Funds. Consultant hereby authorizes the County to deduct from any amount payable to Consultant (whether or not arising out of this Agreement) (i) any amounts the payment of which may be in dispute hereunder or which are necessary to compensate County for any losses, costs, liabilities, or damages suffered by the County, and (ii) all amounts for which County may be liable to third parties, by reason of Consultant's acts or omissions in performing or failing to perform Consultant's obligation under this Agreement. In the event that any claim is made by a third party, the amount or validity of which is disputed by Consultant, the County may withhold any payment due, without liability for interest because of such withholding, an amount sufficient to cover such claim. The failure of the County to exercise such a right to deduct or to withhold shall not, however, affect the obligations of the Consultant to insure, indemnify, and protect the County as elsewhere provided herein.

7.3 Waiver. No delay or omission in the exercise of any right or remedy by a non-defaulting party or any default shall impair such right or remedy or be construed as a waiver. A party's consent to or approval of any act by the other party requiring the party's consent or approval shall not be deemed to waive or render unnecessary the other party's consent to or approval of any subsequent act. Any waiver by either party of any default must be in writing and shall not be a waiver of any other default concerning the same or any other provision of this Agreement.

7.4 Termination Prior to Expiration of Term. Either party may terminate this Agreement at any time, with or without cause, upon thirty (30) days' written notice to the other party. Upon receipt of any notice of termination, Consultant shall immediately cease all work or services hereunder except such as may be specifically approved by the Contract Officer. Consultant shall be entitled to compensation for the reasonable value of the work product actually produced prior to the effective date of the notice of termination and for any services authorized by the Contract Officer thereafter in accordance with the Schedule of Compensation and the County shall be entitled to reimbursement for any compensation paid in excess of the services rendered.

7.5 Completion of Work After Termination for Default of Consultant. If termination is due to the failure of the Consultant to fulfill its obligations under this Agreement, the County may, after compliance with the provisions of Section 7.2, take over the work and prosecute the same to completion by contract or otherwise, and the Consultant shall be liable to the extent that the total cost for completion of the services required hereunder exceeds the compensation herein stipulated (provided that the County shall use reasonable efforts to mitigate such damages), and the County may withhold any payments to the Consultant for the purpose of set-off or partial payment of the amounts owed the County as previously stated.

7.6 Attorneys' Fees. If either party to this Agreement is required to initiate or defend or made a party to any action or proceeding in any way connected with this Agreement, the prevailing party in such action or proceeding, in addition to any other relief which may be granted, shall be entitled to reasonable attorneys' fees, whether or not the matter proceeds to judgment, and to all other reasonable costs for investigating such action, taking depositions and discovery, including all other necessary costs the court allows which are incurred in such litigation.

8.0 COUNTY OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES: NON-DISCRIMINATION

8.1 Non-liability of County Officers and Employees. No officer or employee of the County shall be personally liable to the Consultant, or any successor in interest, in the event of any default or breach by the County or for any amount which may become due to the Consultant or to its successor, or for breach of any obligation of the terms of this Agreement.

8.2 Conflict of Interest; County. No officer or employee of the County shall have any financial interest in this Agreement, nor shall any such officer or employee participate in any decision relating to the Agreement which affects his or her financial interest or the financial interest of any corporation, partnership or association in which he or she is interested, in violation of any State statute or regulation.

8.3 Conflicts of Interest; Consultant. Consultant agrees that it will not engage in any transaction, activity or conduct that would result in a conflict of interest under this Agreement. During the term of this Agreement, Consultant shall not hire personnel currently employed by the County to perform any work under this Agreement. Consultant shall promptly inform the County of any contract, arrangement, or interest that Consultant may enter into or have during the performance of this Agreement that might appear to conflict with the County's interests. This includes contracts and arrangements with manufacturers, suppliers, contractors or other clients whose interests might be served by the work performed under this Agreement. Consultant shall take such measures as are necessary in the performance of this Agreement to prevent actual conflicts of interest. The County, in its sole discretion, shall determine the existence of a conflict of interest and may terminate this

Agreement in the event such a conflict of interest exists upon sending Consultant written notice describing the conflict.

8.4 Covenant Against Discrimination. Consultant covenants that, by and for itself, its executors, assigns, and all persons claiming under or through them, that there shall be no discrimination against or segregation of, any person or group of persons on account of race, color, creed, religion, sex, marital status, national origin, ancestry, or any other class protected by State or Federal law in the performance of this Agreement. Consultant shall take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed and that employees are treated during employment without regard to their race, color, creed, religion, sex, marital status, national origin or ancestry.

9.0 MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

9.1 Notice. Any notice or other communication either party desires or is required to give to the other party or any other person shall be in writing and either served personally or sent by prepaid, first-class mail, in the case of the County, to the County Administrator and to the First Civil Assistant State's Attorney, both at the address McLean County Administration, 115 E. Washington Street, Room 401, Bloomington, IL 61701, and in the case of the Consultant, to the person at the address designated on the execution page of this Agreement. Either party may change its address by notifying the other party of the change of address in writing. Notice shall be deemed communicated at the time personally delivered or in seventy-two (72) hours from the time of mailing if mailed as provided in this Section.

9.2 Interpretation. The terms of this Agreement shall be construed in accordance with the meaning of the language used and shall not be construed for or against either party by reason of the authorship of this Agreement or any other rule of construction which might otherwise apply.

9.3 Integration; Amendment. It is understood that there are no oral agreements between the parties hereto affecting this Agreement and this Agreement supersedes and cancels any and all previous negotiations, agreements and understandings, if any, between the parties, and none shall be used to interpret this Agreement. This Agreement may be amended at any time by an instrument in writing signed by both parties.

9.4 Severability. Should a portion of this Agreement be declared invalid or unenforceable by a judgment or decree of a court of competent jurisdiction, such invalidity or unenforceability shall not affect any of the remaining portions of this Agreement which are hereby declared as severable and shall be interpreted to carry out the intent of the parties unless the invalid provision is so material that its invalidity deprives either party of the basic benefit of their bargain or renders this Agreement meaningless.

9.5 Corporate Authority. The persons executing this Agreement on behalf of the parties hereto warrants that (i) such party is duly organized and existing, (ii) they are duly authorized to execute and deliver this Agreement on behalf of said party, (iii) by so executing this Agreement, such party is formally bound to the provisions of this Agreement, and (iv) the entering into this Agreement does not violate any provision of any other Agreement to which said party is bound.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have executed and entered into this Agreement as of the date first written above.

**COUNTY of McLEAN, ILLINOIS
a body politic and corporate**

By: _____
Elizabeth Johnston, County Board Chair

ATTEST:

Clerk

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

By: _____
First Assistant State's Attorney Civil Division

CONSULTANT:

Patrick Ibarra
Dba The Mejorando Group, a sole proprietorship
By:

Name: Patrick Ibarra
Title: Owner
Address: 13 Muirfield Road
Cumberland, ME 04021

EXHIBIT “A”
SCOPE OF SERVICES

Our approach and accompanying work plan in developing the strategic plan satisfies the criteria by which successful strategic planning efforts are evaluated, and the County is seeking:

- Evaluates current conditions to identify opportunities to maximize and potential issues to mitigate.
- Leads to action that is both innovative and effective.
- It is an inclusive, participatory process in which elected officials and County staff take on a shared ownership role.
- Creates a compelling Vision and action-oriented Mission.
- Goals for the time frame identified.
- Measurable objectives for each goal.
- Implementation plan that includes timelines and group or individual assignments.

A number of deliverables will be generated throughout the Strategic Planning process including periodic updates, a clear description of the organization’s internal capacities (strengths and weaknesses) and of the external forces that will likely have an impact on their ability to seize future opportunities, Vision, Mission and Values, Strategic Focus Areas, Goals, Objectives, and Performance Metrics. There is also a built-in mechanism to periodically assess the plan’s effectiveness and a method to integrate flexible innovation into the plan.

1. Engage – Initiate Process

The purpose is to address several critical questions prior to launching the process including:

a) **Initiate Project:** The Mejorando Group will begin with a meeting with the County Administrator to ensure that we have a clear understanding of the objectives. During this meeting the scope of services, work plan and schedule will be finalized along with a discussion about the process to ensure that it is transparent, inclusive and mindful of the organization’s capacity and resources.

b) **Role of the Mejorando Group.** We are experts at striking a healthy balance between our two roles: content and process. Based on our in-depth experience in local

government and our extensive record of consulting with governments we will provide substantive content to County leaders as they seek practical and imaginative solutions (i.e., content) to embed in the Strategic Plan. In regard to the process, we are well-versed in all facets of strategic planning including effective ways to guide groups through the various phases and facilitating meetings of both internal and external stakeholders and preparing summaries for review leading to the adoption of an overall Strategic Plan.

Based on the scope of work, a high-quality team of seasoned consultants would be assembled. This team will be led by Patrick Ibarra and include Kim Newcomer of Slate Communications. Kim combines a deep background in local government communications and marketing with expertise in designing contemporary approaches to strategic planning for municipalities.

Each of our team members possesses significant local government experience, serving in senior leadership and management positions, and we blend this with excellent client-relations skills, strong analytical capabilities, being well-versed in offering leading edge solutions, and effective communication techniques which results in helping our clients move forward in all directions. Patrick will be the project manager and be responsible for actively participating in all facets of the project and Kim will focus her efforts primarily on creating and implementing the Community Outreach efforts.

c) Creation of Steering Committee. Discuss the benefits associated with assembling a Steering Committee to oversee the process (optional).

2. Enlist - Obtain Input

Essential to ensure the content of the Strategic Planning process is aligned with the expectations of County Board members, individual interviews will be held with each member as well as other directly elected officials. Prior to the interview, and as per the RFP, a survey will be distributed to those elected officials to gain insight into the challenges and opportunities facing their respective department, and the County at large. While survey results provided breadth, interviews offer depth to further explore themes which emerged. The purpose of each one-on-one meeting is to elicit their perspectives about a variety of issues that will/may serve as the focus of the strategic planning process, specifically their expectations and opinions about what he/she would like to be accomplished.

Specific questions may include:

- What are the desired outcomes from pursuing the creation of a Strategic Plan?
- What are the Strengths and Opportunities for improvement?
- What community-related topics/subjects need to be addressed in the near, short- and long-term?
- How will success of this process affect the organization and community?
- What do you want to achieve the end of the advance/retreat?

Relying on the “participation breeds commitment” approach the intent is for each elected official to “have skin in the game” about the success of the actual strategic planning process.

The same process, a survey/questionnaire distributed followed up by individual interviews/meetings will be replicated with the County Administrator and department directors (to include members of their respective management teams) in order to obtain their perspective about a variety of issues that will/may serve as the focus of the strategic planning process. Interviews with key stakeholders will reveal opinions, facts, experiences, beliefs, history, and more. Most important, interviews reveal what members are concerned about. Evoking, addressing, and highlighting these concerns is a requirement for strategic planning to be effective.

Community involvement and stakeholder engagement are critical to developing an effective Strategic Plan. An understanding of community priorities, challenges, needs, and concerns provides the necessary foundation to ensure all segments of the County are working toward the same goals.

Successful engagement must be designed to meet the needs of the community. We will invest the time to understand what has been successful in McLean County in the past and then add our own experience and best practices to the plan. Three principles guide our efforts:

- Meet people where they are – both online and in-person – to make engagement easy and accessible.
- Segment and target outreach to ensure that we gather a wide variety of perspectives from across the community. This requires using various tools from social media and digital platforms to print collateral and in-person discussions.
- Consistent communication and progress reports help build buy-in to the plan document and the work needed to implement.

Consequently, we will partner with County staff members assigned to Public Information and social media to craft a Communications/Community Outreach Plan. The Communication Plan developed will enlist as many residents and other external stakeholders as possible and obtain significant input from these same sources. The Mejorando Group is recommending the inclusion of a segment on the County’s website and a web page devoted exclusively to the Strategic Planning process. The use of social media is becoming increasingly important for local governments to establish and reinforce their “social currency” with citizens. Either in-person or held virtually, we have experience facilitating in both formats, “Community Conversations” in which members of the community are invited to attend and participate in focus group meetings will also be scheduled. A great advantage of strategic planning is that it can be used to engage the entire community and create enthusiasm for the future.

An online questionnaire will also be administered to obtain community input. Please refer to a strategic planning process we completed in 2022 with the City of Bartlesville, Oklahoma to review our approach in particular to the Community survey of residents. The effort included extensive community outreach including a branding process to distinguish the approach:

3. Examine the Present and Future by conducting a Situation Analysis

The intent of Phase 3 is to examine the potential impact resulting from emerging trends on the County and the County organization. While trends can't be fixed per se, it's vital to acknowledge their possible influence. In particular, it will help make the distinction between problems that can be fixed and those which can only be addressed.

There are two aspects of the Situation Analysis - an Environmental Scan and SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges) determination.

A. Environmental Scan: An environmental scan is an inventory of the political, technological, social, legal, socio-cultural and economic forces that influence the way the County operates. It will include an analysis of the current environment and the trends that may affect it. In examining various trends, at least three categories will be explored: Emerging Trends, Existing Trends and Disappearing Trends. Some examples of trends and forces to assess may include:

- ✓ What are the relevant population trends for the next two to five years? Five to ten years?
- ✓ What is our direction and response to these shifts?
- ✓ How can we be responsive and proactive?
- ✓ How will we enlist residents on our journey? What is our interpretation of the feedback received via the community meetings and social media?
- ✓ What types of services will residents require in the future that are not already provided? What might be required to fund and staff these services?
- ✓ How will we describe our desired results in measurable terms?
- ✓ What types of infrastructure additions or expansions will be required to handle our anticipated growth? What financial resources are required to fund this work?
- ✓ How reliable are funding sources?

B. SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges) Analysis: After thoroughly analyzing the environment, Board members will undertake a SWOC Analysis. The SWOC technique, a simple and effective tool for collecting information, helps focus the process by dividing it into four broad categories:

S - Determine the organization's internal Strengths to include identification of the County's distinctive competencies (those abilities that enable the County to perform well against key performance indicators).

W - Identify and describe the organization's internal Weaknesses and options to minimize or overcome each.

O - Identify and describe the organization's Opportunities and options to take advantage of each.

C - Identify and describe the organization's Challenges and options to overcome each.

The end product of these discussion will result in the identification of strategic issues – the fundamental challenges that affect County mandates, its mission and values, its service level and mix, its costs, its financing, its structure, its processes and its management.

The process recommended to conduct the Situation Analysis is:

1. Obtain input via interviews of key stakeholders and community conversations. .
2. Convene the Board and consider including executives from various departments to review an aggregated summary prepared by the Mejorando Group of input gathered.

Subsequent to session, a Deliverable will be prepared - a clear description of the organization's internal capacities (strengths and weaknesses) and of the external forces that will likely have an impact on its ability to seize future opportunities – as a written summary and will be provided to the governing body and the executive leadership team (i.e. County Administrator and department directors). The results of the Situation Analysis completed are the backdrop for the next Phase of the Strategic Planning process.

4. Explore – Create Components of the Strategic Plan
 - A. Create Values, Vision and Mission

The outcome of the Situation Analysis provides the context necessary for creating a set of Values, Vision and Mission statement(s). This Phase will be completed by the Board, County Administrator's office and Department Directors participating in a session facilitated by Patrick Ibarra of the Mejorando Group.

Step 1. Adopt Core Values

The inherent values of the community and the county organization will provide the foundation on which the strategic plan is constructed. They are the basis for all decisions and actions. Most likely, the Board is not aware of its inherent or collective values. Not all members will have the same core values, either. One person may have a strong sense that those in need should be cared for by the community at any cost, while others may believe strongly that programs should be reduced to ensure that no new taxes are needed.

The focus of the Board will be to craft a set of collective values and standards of behavior which will affect the manner in which programs are defined and resources allocated.

Often the values of local jurisdictions are similar even though the jurisdictions vary in their populations, locations, and other defining characteristics. This reflects the fact that most people seek and want to enjoy a similar high quality of life.

Step 2. Create the Vision Statement

Vision statements reflect the collective understanding of the ideal situation. They may reflect a certain standard of living, the pleasantness of the environment, or the general vibrancy of the community. In local government strategic plans, the vision statement typically represents a view of the ideal community toward which the group is working.

The vision is a description of McLean County's "desired future". In other words, where do the stakeholders believe the community will be in five to ten years? The emphasis is on the future as it describes the organization as the stakeholders would like it to become – in the future.

The entire strategic plan starts with and must consistently relate to the vision statement. The ideal view of McLean County sets the tone for the process and plan. It is important to recognize that because the vision reflects an ideal, it is unlikely that it will ever be fully and definitely achieved. The best vision statements for communities are broad without being so broad as to be common and are expressive of the ideal without being inane.

Step 3. Create the Mission Statement

The mission statement identifies the role of the County in pursuing the vision. In short, the vision is where you are going, and the mission is how you will get there. Based on the vision creation that occurred in the previous step the intent here is to create a mission statement. Other questions which will be answered that will help modify the existing mission statement are:

- What are the needs and wants of citizens?
- What challenges exist the mission must address?
- What are the needs and wants of business owners?
- What is the role of the County in mitigating risk and optimizing opportunity?

The basic question to address in the mission statement will be, "What is the business of McLean County and who do we serve?" An accurate description of the organization's purpose will drive the strategic plan. It will embody in a few words or sentences what McLean County is. Why does it exist at all? What is its function? Who does it serve (customers or stakeholders)? The mission statement shall be crafted so it's clear, credible and understandable, flexible but focused, and brief.

A well-worked-out mission statement provides everyone involved with a sense of purpose, direction, significance, and achievement. It will communicate the purpose of the McLean County organization to the community.

Based on our experience, there is a "process" benefit to hashing over the mission statement. During discussion and debate, members are introduced to nuances of the organization's mission and changes in the environment, while other members refresh their understanding of both. As a result, the group will have confidence that the mission statement which emerges is genuinely an articulation of commonly held ideas.

Ongoing Communication and Validation

Subsequent to the adoption of the Mission and Vision statement(s) we recommend they be shared with the various stakeholders as a means to obtain feedback. Concise summaries, social media outreach, and updates online will all play an essential role to ensure credibility, throughout the entire process.

B. Setting Strategic Initiatives and Developing Goals and Objectives

The outcome of adopting a Mission, Vision and Values provides the context necessary for creating Strategic Initiatives, Goals and Objectives along with Action Plans enabling their achievement. This segment will be completed by the Board, County Administrator's office and Department Directors participating in a session facilitated by Patrick Ibarra of the Mejorando Group.

In counties of any size, there are dozens or hundreds of competing and often conflicting priorities. The discipline of honing priorities down to a handful can force leaders to surface, discuss, and make a call on the most consequential trade-offs the organization faces in the next few years. When leaders make hard calls and communicate them, they provide clear guidance on the contentious issues likely to arise when executing strategy. But making trade-offs among competing priorities is difficult — they are dubbed “tough calls” for a reason.

This phase encourages Board members to expand their imaginations and envision a wider range of possible futures and consequently, be much better positioned to take advantage of the unexpected opportunities that will come along. Discussions about the various ways the County's potential can be realized will include a blend of practicality and imagination. In particular for each Strategic Area of Focus the various goals, department action plans and desired schedule for progress and/or completion as determined by Board members.

The Board will evaluate the master list of strategic issues created earlier this process and explore the role of the County in addressing them. In these discussions, they will:

- ✓ Describe why each subject is an issue and how it relates to organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges, mission and mandates.
- ✓ Compare and contrast issues as operational versus strategic.
- ✓ Identify consequences of not addressing the issue.

The adoption of Strategic Initiatives accompanied by Goals will allow the County to accomplish the mission and advance the vision. Essentially, the setting of Goals and Objectives will serve to manage the gap between the present and desired future (i.e., Vision) by defining where the County wants to be and establishing the steps needed for the desired outcome.

Strategic Initiatives are typically in place for several years. What differs from year to year are specific objectives which support the successful execution of the strategic initiatives.

Goals usually address near, short and long-term areas. Goals, then, are generalized statements of where the County wants to be at some point in the future.

The number of goals the Board determines cannot be predicted. Strategic plans may concentrate on four or five goals, or they may list dozens of areas that will component parts of the focus for the County during the next several years. The plan must consist of what the Board feels comfortable with and believes the County can implement over time.

Each of the goal statements in the strategic plan will be followed by one or more objectives. There is no set number of objectives that are appropriate for each goal. Some goal statements may have few objectives attached to them, while some goal statements could have 10 or more objectives.

Operationalizing the Goals into action through objectives, accompanied by various performance measures will be addressed by the Board with assistance from County staff. Performance management in the public sector is an ongoing, systematic approach to improving results through evidence-based decision making, continuous organizational learning, and a focus on accountability for performance. Performance management is integrated into all aspects of an organization's management and policy-making processes, transforming an organization's practices so it is focused on achieving improved results for the public. Better information enables elected officials and managers to recognize success, identify problem areas, and respond with appropriate actions – to learn from experience and apply that knowledge to better serve the public.

Factoring in the notion that this undertaking is the County's inaugural Strategic Plan, it is essential to recognize that adopting performance measures will likely be an iterative process that may require a few years of implementing the goals. Our past experience with other local governments has revealed that a level of staff proficiency is necessary to adopt and execute meaningful performance measures.

Our role during this segment, as has been through all phases, is to facilitate thoughtful and productive discussions grounded in reality and pragmatism mixed with offering content from our experience partnering with local governments around the nation and how they are addressing similar issues. Far from a "cut and paste" approach, we respect the heritage and history of McLean County and tailor our approach to ensure it's compatible with your preferences.

C. Prepare Draft Strategic Plan

A Draft Strategic Plan (deliverable) will be created and include:

- Results of the Situation Analysis SWOC Analysis and Environmental Scan
- Vision Statement
- Mission Statement
- Strategic Priorities
- Goals and Objectives
- Performance Measures
- Re-planning/Revision schedule

Throughout the entire project, written summaries/project updates will be prepared by the Mejorando Group. These should be provided for interested stakeholders so as to keep them apprised.

5. Execute the Strategic Plan

The Mejorando Group in consultation with the County Administrator will convene to review comments/feedback from the governing body and collaborate on making any revisions and adjustments to the Draft Report and culminate in adopting the Final version of the Strategic Plan (deliverable).

Sharing the final results of the Strategic Planning process is an opportunity for elected officials, County staff, residents, businesses, community leaders and stakeholders to celebrate the effort and set sight on the future. Creative design of the Strategic Plan, animated explanatory videos, and an overall presentation that matches the McLean County brand (i.e. reputation) can help the community quickly understand the final product.

Reporting on progress in implementing the strategic plan is a key element. As part of the process, a reporting structure and timeline is created. It can range from a quarterly update of each goal and strategy, to a semi-annual review, once as part of the budget process and again in six months, with adjustments made to reflect changing conditions and accomplishments. Overall, the strategic planning process will be a disciplined effort by Board members that produces goals, mission, processes, and actions that will enhance the present and future operations of McLean County, specifically, and in general, the community. The Mejorando Group's approach is focused on achieving the outcomes expected by the Board to create a strategic plan that enables decision-making to be consistent with desired outcomes. With a long-term planning process in place, fact-based, future-driven strategic decision making will become institutionalized within the organization and McLean County will be poised for success, now and in the future.

EXHIBIT "B"
SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

No special requirements are associated with this agreement/contract.

EXHIBIT “C”
COMPENSATION

Date	Activity	Fee
July	1. Engage – Initiate the Process	\$ 3,500
August/ September	2. Enlist – Conduct interviews, gather community input and hold launch/kick-off meeting.	\$13,000
October/ November	3. Examine – Design and facilitate with Steering Committee to complete Situational Analysis.	\$11,100 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hourly services = \$6,000 • Full-day session = \$5,100
December/ January	4. Explore –Design and facilitate sessions with Steering Committee to: a. Create Mission, Vision and Values b. Develop Goals, Objectives and Implementation Schedule Present Draft Strategic Plan Prepare a draft of the Strategic Plan and present it to the Mayor and Board at a work session for their review and discussion.	\$19,000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hourly services = \$8,800 • Two full-day sessions = \$10,200
February/ March	Review of Draft Strategic Plan and comments submitted to finalize Strategic Plan.	\$8,600
March	5. Execute: Board adopts the Strategic Plan and implementation begins.	
	Total Fee	\$55,200

One invoice will be submitted at the conclusion of the project for the entire amount for the fee and travel reimbursement.

EXHIBIT “D”
SCHEDULE

Date	Activity
July	Engage – Initiate the Process
August/ September	Enlist – Conduct interviews, gather community input and hold launch/kick-off meeting.
October/ November	Examine – Design and facilitate with Steering Committee to complete Situational Analysis.
December/ January	<p>Explore –Design and facilitate sessions with Steering Committee to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Create Mission, Vision and Values b. Develop Goals, Objectives and Implementation Schedule <p>Present Draft Strategic Plan Prepare a draft of the Strategic Plan and present it to the Mayor and Board at a work session for their review and discussion.</p>
February/ March	Review of Draft Strategic Plan and comments submitted to finalize Strategic Plan.
March	Execute: Board adopts the Strategic Plan and implementation begins.