



# Request for Proposals (RFP): PulseNet Quality Consultant

**RFP Post Date: April 1, 2020**

**Responses Due: April 29, 2020**

**Submissions due to Jennifer Adams** ([Jennifer.Adams@aphl.org](mailto:Jennifer.Adams@aphl.org))

via: The Association of Public Health Laboratories, Inc.  
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Silver Spring, MD 20910

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## Background

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The Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), in cooperation with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Enteric Diseases Laboratory Branch (EDLB) is seeking applicants to evaluate PulseNet whole genome sequence (WGS) certification and proficiency tests submitted to CDC by participating PulseNet laboratories. Funding will be awarded via a contract with APHL.

## Summary

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An estimated 48 million foodborne illnesses occur in the U.S. annually resulting in 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. In order to address this significant public health problem, improvements must be made in a variety of areas but particularly in the quality and efficiency of laboratory-based surveillance for the detection of clusters of foodborne illnesses. For over two decades, PulseNet has detected thousands of local and multi-state outbreaks, leading to the implementations of numerous preventative measures and significant improvements to food safety as a whole. APHL and CDC are committed to assisting all PulseNet laboratories in achieving the highest quality of whole genome sequencing (WGS) data to submit to the PulseNet databases. Analyzing certification and proficiency tests ensures faster, more reliable cluster detection and investigation. During the process, providing feedback to the PulseNet participants regarding the quality of their work aids in improving the overall data in the national databases.

Through this Request for Proposals (RFP), APHL seeks to identify an individual with the following experience:

- Bachelor's degree in life science, or health/laboratory field; master's degree in life science or health/laboratory field preferred;
- Minimum of fifteen (15) years of PulseNet related work experience;
- Working knowledge and experience using BioNumerics v7 software;
- Working knowledge and experience using CLC Bio Genomics Workbench software;
- Working knowledge and experience using the PulseNet WGS protocols for certification and proficiency testing.

## Eligibility

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Interested parties must submit a proposal to APHL that provides all of the information specified in the [Response Submission](#) section below. In order to be considered, an applicant must ensure APHL has a complete response no later than the Response Due Date specified in the Anticipated RFP Schedule section below.

## Anticipated RFP Schedule

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Applications are due to the individual specified in the Final Response section of this **RFP by 5:00 pm Eastern Standard Time (EST) on April 29, 2020**. APHL anticipates the following schedule for the entire competitive bidding process:

April 1, 2020	RFP issued
April 15, 2020	Letter of Intent Due to APHL by 5:00pm (EST)
<b>April 29, 2020</b>	<b>RFP responses due</b>
May 1, 2020	Proposal review completed
May 4, 2020	Final review completed and PulseNet Quality Consultant selected
June 26, 2020	Contract finalized
<b>July 1, 2020</b>	<b>PulseNet Quality Consultancy begins</b>

#### Response Submittal Confirmation of Intent to Respond

APHL requires that prospective applicants submit a brief email statement indicating intent to submit a proposal by **no later than 5:00 PM EST on April 15, 2020**. Interested parties should email the letter of intent to [jennifer.adams@aphl.org](mailto:jennifer.adams@aphl.org). **A letter of intent is required for consideration of application.** While the letter of intent is not binding and does not enter into the review of the RFP, the information that it contains allows APHL's evaluation team to plan the contract development and review process. Potential applicants must include the name of the organization or individual that will submit the response in their email.

#### Final Response

APHL must receive a complete response by no later than **5:00 PM EST on April 29, 2020**. Applicants may send responses by the following methods:

Via email to [Jennifer.adams@aphl.org](mailto:Jennifer.adams@aphl.org); or

Via certified, registered or express mail through the postal service or via trackable mail delivery services provided by DHL, FedEx, and UPS, addressed to:

**c/o Jennifer Adams**  
The Association of Public Health Laboratories, Inc.  
8515 Georgia Avenue, Suite 700  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

APHL will send an email acknowledging the receipt of your application. If you do not receive an acknowledgement within 48 hours, please email the points of contact below to confirm receipt.

Regardless of the delivery method, APHL must receive all responses by 5:00 PM EST. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that APHL received the proposal by this deadline.

APHL may terminate or modify the RFP process at any time during the response period.

## Questions

Please direct all questions regarding this RFP or its application requirements via email to Jennifer Adams at [jennifer.adams@aphl.org](mailto:jennifer.adams@aphl.org).

A member of APHL's Food Safety staff will respond directly to the questions on an individual basis as questions are received. While APHL will endeavour to answer questions within one business day of receipt, additional time may be needed depending on the issue raised.

*APHL should receive all questions by 5:00 pm EST on April 15, 2020.* APHL is unlikely to answer any question received after this deadline, but it will have discretion to do so if APHL's Food Safety staff reasonably feel that the question raises a substantial issue that could affect multiple applicants, and may be answered without impacting the application submission and review process. Should APHL opt to answer any late questions, APHL will post the question and answer to APHL's procurement website and will not respond directly to the sender.

## Project Term and Award

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The PulseNet Quality Consultant will be awarded an initial contract from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. APHL anticipates the potential for renewals for a period of up to four (4) additional years (with each additional funding year running from July 1 to June 30) for a total of five (5) years. Each potential annual renewal will depend on the funding received by APHL and by CDC programmatic needs in that funding year.

APHL anticipates distributing funds via the payment terms specified in the written contract between APHL and the selected organization or individual. The selected applicant will perform the duties described in [Appendix A – Services to be Provided by the PulseNet Quality Consultant](#) and specified in the contract with APHL. APHL will award funding on a sliding scale based on the qualifications and years of experience possessed by an organization's staff or an individual applicant, with minimum potential compensation in the initial contract period of \$80,000 and a maximum potential compensation capped at \$150,000 during this period. The organization or individual selected as the PulseNet Quality Consultant will receive a notice of award from APHL.

## Response Submission Guidelines and Required Information

To apply for the PulseNet Quality Consultant position, please respond to the following questions. Responses should be limited to no more than two (2) single spaced pages (font size ≥11 pt. and page margins ≥.5 inches).

1. Describe the nature and extent of any experience with whole genome sequencing (WGS).
  - a. Include information on what protocols you or your staff have used and any trainings and certifications you have received.
2. Describe the nature and extent of any experience with BioNumerics v7.
  - a. Include information on what protocols you or your staff have used, any trainings you have received, what PulseNet databases you have worked in.

3. Describe the nature and any experience evaluating certification and/or proficiency tests.
  - a. Include information regarding record keeping and tracking of reports and any work completed.
4. Describe the nature and extent of any experience with CLC Bio Genomics Workbench.
5. Describe your ability to troubleshoot WGS and WGS analyses.
  - a. Include information on your experience communicating and interacting with laboratorians either in-person, over the phone or in writing.
6. Describe your experience using Microsoft Office, Excel, Access, and SharePoint.

## Evaluation

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### Initial Review

APHL staff members will conduct an initial review of all proposals for completeness on the proposal due date specified in the Anticipated RFP Schedule section above. Incomplete proposals will not receive a formal evaluation.

### Evaluation Process

APHL will conduct reviews via a combination of teleconference and email communications between the evaluation team described below. APHL's Lead Specialist, PulseNet QA will coordinate the review process and the evaluation sessions.

The reviewers may request follow-up interviews with all or some of the applicants and, following these interviews, may request supplemental information on an applicant's proposal. These interviews and any supplemental information will clarify an applicant's capacity or experience in one or more of the evaluation criteria, or will help to explain other information contained in an applicant's proposal.

### Evaluation Team

An evaluation team will be assembled to evaluate competitive proposals and then assess their relative qualities based on the Evaluation Criteria outlined below. This evaluation team will consist of three APHL staff.

### Conflicts of Interest

APHL will ask potential reviewers to complete and sign APHL's **Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement** in order to disclose any real or perceived conflict of interest prior to the start of the evaluation process and to affirm that they have no conflict of interest that would preclude an unbiased and objective review of the proposals received. APHL will not select reviewers with a perceived or potential conflict of interest.

## Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on responses to the questions above and will receive a numeric score of up to 100 maximum points based on the scorecard template in [Appendix B](#). Applicants will be given preference based on more extensive experience and subject matter expertise.

Some of the ranking categories listed on the scorecard template in Appendix B require no explanation (such as “no experience”). The remaining ranking categories noted on the scorecard template have the following meaning:

- “Excellent” – The applicant exceeds expectations and has extensive experience performing the tasks described.
- “High” – The applicant meets or exceeds expectations for capacity and has extensive experience performing the tasks similar to the ones described and would easily be able to translate that experience to this project.
- “Moderate” – The applicant has some experience with the tasks described.
- “Low” – The applicant may not have sufficient experience with the tasks described.

## Post Evaluation Procedures

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APHL staff will notify the selected course programmer(s) within ten (10) business days of completion of the evaluation. Unsuccessful applicants will receive notification of these results by e-mail or by U.S. mail within 30 days of the date that the winning/successful vendor is selected. *Note: Once selected, the applicant must be approved by the federal funding agency.*

All applicants will be entitled to utilize APHL’s Appeals Process to formulate a protest regarding alleged irregularities or improprieties during the procurement process. Specific details of the policy are listed on the procurement website.

## Conditions of Award Acceptance

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The eligible applicants must be able to contract directly with APHL or have an existing relationship with a third party organization that can contract directly with APHL on behalf of the applicant. Applicants must agree to comply with expectations outlined in the appendices.

## General Considerations

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This RFP is neither an agreement nor an offer to enter into an agreement with any respondent. Once application evaluation is complete, APHL may choose to enter into a definitive contract with the selected applicant(s) or it may decline to do so.

APHL must ensure that the selected respondent is neither suspended nor debarred from receiving federal funds and that the respondent meets any other funding eligibility requirement imposed by the

Cooperative Agreement. APHL's determination of whether the respondent is eligible to receive Cooperative Agreement funding will be definitive and may not be appealed. In the event that APHL determines that the selected respondent is ineligible to receive Cooperative Agreement funding, APHL will nullify the contract or will cease negotiation of contract terms.

Each respondent will bear its own costs associated with or relating to the preparation and submission of its application. These costs and expenses will remain with the respondent, and APHL will not be liable for these or for any other costs or other expenses incurred by a respondent in preparation or submission of its application, regardless of the conduct or outcome of the response period or the selection process.

## Appendix A – Services to be Provided by the PulseNet Quality Consultant

- Under the direction of the Lead Specialist, PulseNet QA and in collaboration with CDC/EDLB, maintain BioNumerics PulseNet WGS databases to assist with certification evaluations for *Salmonella*, *Escherichia*, *Campylobacter*, *Listeria* and *Vibrio*. Using the existing record keeping system, analyze submitted certification files within 3 weeks of receipt in the PulseNet inbox. Keep detailed records of work completed, including date of submission and date of evaluation for each person who submits certification results. Records will be kept in the certification databases on the PulseNet network drive at CDC. Using existing report templates maintain records and submit reports to appropriate CDC staff for review. It is essential for APHL members to meet all the requirements of the certification process if they are to fully participate in PulseNet sequencing activities.
- Using existing report templates, analyze WGS proficiency sets (*Salmonella*, *Escherichia*, *Campylobacter*, *Listeria* and/or *Vibrio*) that have been submitted to PulseNet by state and local public health laboratories and by international and federal agency PulseNet Laboratories. Create reports on the analysis of the above submissions and keep detailed records of work completed on the PulseNet network drive. Records will be kept on the PulseNet network drive at CDC. Proficiency testing is the way in which APHL members maintain their access the PulseNet national databases. It is essential for all PulseNet participating laboratories to meet all the requirements associated with this process if they are to maintain access to the national database.
- Under the direction of the Lead Specialist, PulseNet QA and in collaboration with the CDC Database Team, interact with PulseNet laboratorians to resolve problems and/or improve quality of database submissions, when appropriate.
- As requested by the CDC/EDLB Chief, PulseNet Outbreak Detection and Surveillance Unit, become proficient in the use of tools used by PulseNet for characterization and subtyping of isolates using whole genome sequencing data.
- The Contractor will maintain data security as directed by APHL and CDC/EDLB.
- The Contractor will provide bi-weekly reports to the Lead Specialist, PulseNet QA, the Chief, PulseNet Outbreak Detection and Surveillance Unit and the Team Lead, PulseNet Reference Outbreak Surveillance Unit via e-mail using an Excel-based progress report template.

## Appendix B – PulseNet Quality Consultant RFP Scorecard

The following table is a copy of the scorecard that will be used to evaluate RFP responses.

Category	Maximum Value	Score	Comments
<p>1. Does the applicant have sufficient experience with WGS? Consider experience with described method(s), any trainings received or taught and any certifications.</p> <p>Excellent = 16-20; High = 11-15; Moderate = 6-10; Low = 1-5; No experience = 0</p>	20		
<p>2. Does the applicant have sufficient experience with BioNumerics v7? Consider experience with described method(s), any trainings received or taught and any certifications.</p> <p>Excellent = 16-20; High = 11-15; Moderate = 6-10; Low = 1-5; No experience = 0</p>	20		
<p>3. Does the applicant have sufficient experience with evaluating certifications and/or proficiency tests? Consider all aspects of the process including record keeping and organization of reports.</p> <p>Excellent = 16-20; High = 11-15; Moderate = 6-10; Low = 1-5; No experience = 0</p>	20		
<p>4. Does the applicant have sufficient experience analyzing fastq files using CLC Bio Genomics Workbench? Consider a high or excellent score if applicant has used this software to process certification and/or proficiency testing records.</p> <p>Excellent = 9-10; High = 7-8 Moderate = 4-6; Low = 1-3; No experience = 0</p>			

	10		
5. Does the applicant have sufficient experience troubleshooting WGS and WGS analysis? Consider the communication aspect.  Excellent = 16-20; High = 11-15; Moderate = 6-10; Low = 1-5; No experience = 0	20		
6. Does the applicant have working knowledge using Microsoft Office products such as Excel, Access and SharePoint?  Excellent = 9-10; High = 7-8 Moderate = 4-6; Low = 1-3; No experience = 0	10		
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>	<b>100</b>		