CIRCLE

TISCH COLLEGE OF CIVIC LIFE

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Request for Proposals: Data Consultant, CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), based at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University, requests proposals from individuals interested in working as a data consultant on a new project: "Mapping Civic Deserts, Assessing Civic Homes: A Place-Based Index Validated with Young People." The role of the data consultant is to build a reproducible R pipeline for a census-tract-level "civic desert" index for youth ages 18-29, using geographically linked administrative data on associational, public, and connective civic infrastructure.

Background

CIRCLE, the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, is a non-partisan, independent research organization focused on youth civic engagement in the United States. CIRCLE conducts extensive research on youth participation, and leverages that research to improve opportunities for all young people to acquire and use the skills and knowledge they need to meaningfully participate in civic life.

CIRCLE introduced the term "civic desert" in 2017 to describe places lacking the institutions that give young people opportunities to practice civic life. That study identified who lived in civic deserts based on self-reported access, but not where those places are. This project asks where civic deserts are, and whether a civic home—youth-serving settings that support civic development—compensates for thin civic infrastructure.

The project is funded by AmeriCorps. Peter Levine (Program Director) and Sara Suzuki (Co-Program Director) lead the project.

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Phases of Work

Phase 1: Construct the index. Build a tract-level civic desert index from linked administrative data.

- Timeline: index built and robustness-checked by mid-February 2027
- Consultant role: lead, with CIRCLE

Phase 2: Validate the index. Multilevel models link each survey respondent's tract score to civic participation, and test whether civic home access moderates that link.

- Timeline: moderation analysis by March 2027
- Consultant role: support CIRCLE's modeling

Phase 3: Identify anomalous communities. County-level residuals from the validation models flag communities the index mispredicts.

- Timeline: site selection by April 2027
- Consultant role: support CIRCLE's modeling

Validation uses the NORC Civic Health & Elections Project (CHEP), a nationally representative survey of more than 85,000 respondents - at least 7,000 of them aged 18–29. The table lists the index's planned components and data sources. The funded proposal plans to measure access to associational institutions with enhanced two-step floating catchment area (E2SFCA) methods, because institutions serve people beyond the tract that contains them.

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Dimension	Planned Component	Relevant Sources	Level	Route to tract
Associational	Nonprofit density	IRS Business Master File (BMF) / NCCS	Address	Geocode
Associational	Youth-serving organizations	IRS BMF, NTEE O	Address	Geocode
Associational	Arts and culture organizations	IRS BMF, NTEE A	Address	Geocode
Associational	Religious congregations	Commercial location data + IRS BMF, NTEE X; validated against RCMS 2020	Address	Geocode
Public institutions	Public libraries	IMLS Public Libraries Survey	Outlet address; expenditure	Geocode; allocate expenditure by service area
Public institutions	Public schools	NCES Common Core of Data	Address	Geocode
Public institutions	Public colleges	IPEDS	Address	Geocode
Public institutions	Parks	TPL ParkServe	Polygon	Intersect
Connective	Broadband availability	FCC Broadband Data Collection	Location fabric	Aggregate

The specification may change after review by CIRCLE and AmeriCorps as the funder.
Focus groups in Year 2 may also identify settings the index misses, so the pipeline must make it easy to add components later.

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Scope of Work

The consultant leads construction of the index and supports CIRCLE's validation and anomaly modeling. CIRCLE invites consultants to propose their own methods, sequence, and milestones. The list below describes what the work needs to produce, not how to produce it.

- **Source data.** Reproducible R code that loads, cleans, and geocodes the public and commercial datasets the index needs.
- **The index.** Component, dimension, and index scores for every census tract, in a file that joins to CHEP survey respondents by tract.
- **Robustness.** Evidence of how much the index depends on normalization, weighting, and aggregation choices, uncertainty for tract scores, and discriminant validity tests (e.g., rurality).
- **Modeling support.** Work with CIRCLE on Phase 2 validation models and Phase 3 identification of anomalous communities, using restricted CHEP data that CIRCLE provides.
- **Interactive map.** Work with CIRCLE team members to build an R Shiny interactive map of the index.
- **Documentation.** Clear instructions for data, metadata, and workflows that integrate with CIRCLE's internal code base, so CIRCLE can rerun and extend the pipeline.
- **Revisions.** Implement changes based on feedback from CIRCLE staff and AmeriCorps as needed.

Technical Context and Considerations

- Tidyverse-first: CIRCLE's codebase is centered around tidy data structure and evaluation frameworks, and all code (within reason) will be developed using libraries such as dplyr, tidyr, rlang, purrr, and sf.
- Functional scalability: All code will be written in package-ready functions that fully parameterize inputs, allowing future CIRCLE research to build off the scaffolding of this project. Time permitting, associated unit tests will also be constructed to assist in function validation.
- CIRCLE has existing R scripts in place to process some of the required datasets for related work. The consultant would be expected to leverage/incorporate/expand these processes into the project framework.

Deliverables

- The contract runs January 4 to June 30, 2027. Propose the deliverables, milestones, and schedule that fit your approach. Your plan must fit the timeline under Phases of Work, with the index ready for CIRCLE to validate by mid-February 2027. The time after Phase 3 (May–June 2027) is for finishing the interactive map, documentation, and revisions.

CIRCLE's Role

- CIRCLE staff will oversee all aspects of project management, make decisions on specification choices, and give timely feedback. The consultant will report directly to the project's Co-Program Director and the data scientist/manager at CIRCLE.
- Access to restricted CHEP survey data for the modeling support work. Before access, the consultant must sign the required data use agreements, complete human subjects research training, and be added to the project's Tufts IRB protocol.
- A decision on any commercial data sources, based on bidders' recommendations.

Budget

- The approximate budget for consultant labor is $19,000, from January 4 to June 30, 2027.

Proposal Requirements

Proposals should include:

1. A description of your general approach to working with clients and collaborating with an in-house research team.
2. A detailed plan and timeline for your work that outlines the phases, anticipated milestones, and requirements for advancing to later stages.
3. Your proposed technical approach to building and testing the index.
4. Any recommended commercial sources, with the associated cost and license terms, including whether derived tract-level measures can be published. List any data costs separately from labor. Note: CIRCLE will cover the purchase of the commercial data.
5. The type and amount of work you suggest within the timeline and budget, with hours and rates by phase or deliverable. Note: Price the R Shiny interactive map as a separate, optional line item.
6. An R code sample, such as a GitHub link, showing package-style functions and spatial work.
7. Samples of previous work, preferably highlighting relevant experience such as composite indices, spatial access measures, or R Shiny apps.
8. Your bio or CV.
9. Your availability from January to June 2027.

After review of initial proposals, references may be requested by the CIRCLE team.

Submission Timeline

- Email proposals as a single PDF to circle@tufts.edu by 5:00 p.m. EST on **Friday, November 20, 2026**.

Action	Deadline
Proposals Due	Nov 20, 2026 (5:00 p.m. ET)
Interviews	November 30 – December 11, 2026
Notice of selection	By Dec 18, 2026
Contract start	Jan 4, 2027

Selection Criteria

The criteria for the selection of the consultant will include, but not be limited to:

- Documentation of relevant experience directly related to the scope of work in this RFP: spatial access measures, composite indicators, national-scale geospatial processing in R, R Shiny development, and multilevel modeling
- Quality of past projects, attention to detail, creativity in approach, and applicability of portfolio work, and
- Cost proposal—the best value to CIRCLE.

Change of Scope

- For any change in project scope, deliverables, or assumptions in the proposal or statement of work, the consultant will provide a written proposal or statement of work describing the deliverables, time frame, and budget of the change. Work will be performed only upon CIRCLE's written approval.

Funding Disclosure

The total amount of the project in year one is $341,600. This project is 100% funded by the federal government with a grant from AmeriCorps, with no funding from any non-governmental sources.