

**DETERMINATION AND FINDING  
FOR A SOURCE PROCUREMENT**

**AGENCY, OFFICE:** District of Columbia Public Schools, Office of the Chief Operating Officer, Food and Nutrition Services Division  
**CAPTION:** Public Relations and Marketing Services  
**PROPOSED CONTRACTOR:** NxtGen Network  
**CONTRACT NO.** GAGA-2024-C-0112

**FINDINGS**

**1. AUTHORIZATION:**

D.C. Code 2-354.04 and 27 DCMR, Section 1304 and 1700.

**2. MINIMUM NEED:**

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), Office of Fiscal Strategy (OFS), Contracts and Acquisitions Division, on behalf of the Office of the Chief Operating Officer (OCOO), Food and Nutrition Services Division (FNS), has an immediate need to procure the services of NxtGen Network to provide a wide range of marketing, communications, and brand development activities to support DCPS FNS programs.

**3. ESTIMATED COST:**

The estimated cost for the base period is \$115,000.00 from Date of Award through September 30, 2024.

**4. FACTS THAT JUSTIFY A SOLE SOURCE PROCUREMENT:**

The Food and Nutrition Services Division recommend NxtGen Network services for school year 2023-2024.

The FNS Division is robust in its size and reach, and professional marketing and communication is critical for the division to showcase its work and effectively communicate with its stakeholders and partners. Due to the complexity of the program, the breadth of the operation, the national media exposure, the need for the highest levels of discipline and accountability, and the critical need through these channels to ensure the proper messaging to the nation is being conveyed, FNS has determined that NxtGen Network is the ideal provider for FNS' marketing and communications needs.

**5. BACKGROUND AND HISTORY:**

FNS is the single provider of meals for 115 DC Public Schools and produces approximately 9 million meals each year for over 50,000 students, and employees, a Central Office support team of 25 staff members.

The meals produced for the FNS program are often a single source of nutrition for many of our students, as over 80% of DCPS students require federal support for meals due to economic need.

The FNS team organizational structure is broken down into 4 divisions: Operations; Finance and Data Strategy; Nutrition, Compliance & Partnerships; and Self-Operation. FNS' contractual services require the oversight of 600+ Teamsters Local 639 members, top-level leadership at 2 large

organizations. Meanwhile, FNS Self-Operations is charged with directly overseeing 44 DCPS employees that provide meal service under the direct purview of FNS.

The stakes at FNS are very high and visible; and the Division is often under scrutiny by the public, the press, local politicians, and regulatory bodies as a result of the impact it has across the city. Likewise, the work of FNS is diverse and extends nationally through its innovative and cutting-edge programming, the deep engagement with stakeholders and the work of nutrition, which DCPS is a leader.

This also means that FNS must be prepared for all communications opportunities. At times, FNS has been lauded for its leadership by the US Department of Agriculture and the Secretary of Agriculture himself. On other occasions, FNS needs to clearly communicate its work to the community when it comes to public trust, such as when major systems or processes may change. FNS has historically been required to provide its own messaging and marketing, and this is no longer sustainable as FNS is vulnerable without the expertise of a marketing and communications organization. This means that the best of intentions and benefits can translate into controversy. For example, FNS just changed over its meal payment system, and through this action it was able to provide DC taxpayers with over \$72,000 in personal expense relief when it removed service charges in the new system. The message, however, became confused and distorted. Families who were unclear about the effort went to social media and news outlets to complain and thus the messaging about DCPS' benefit for families was lost.

In another example, FNS maintains a membership of almost 1,000 stakeholders, named the DCPS School Food Collaborative, that is closely tied to the work of the division. This group, which has been developed since 2016 has had a regular cadence of 2-way communication through in-person meetings, newsletters, and other events. The work of FNS has grown substantially since 2016, though the stakeholder group requires the same amount of interaction and updates in a professional manner to understand the work of food and nutrition, and how it impacts their children. FNS has been independently managing this work since 2016 and can no longer maintain this in addition to its core work stream.

DCPS is unable to focus solely on FNS' marketing and communications, and the work is specialized in the K-12 market and even more so in the respective school nutrition industry segment of the work. As a result, FNS is seeking a provider that can provide a menu of specific communications, marketing, and needs assessment options for the FNS Team.

### **The Proposed Vendor's Unique Qualifications:**

FNS has identified NxtGen Network as a unique provider based on the following features offered only to its clients in the K-12 food industry:

- “Served Digizine”: a unique approach to consumer attention allowing users to interface by watching, listening, or reading. In addition, Digizine allows the client to understand analytics, which ties to FNS' core value of data-driven work.
- “NEXT UP”: A talk show that can be delivered to K-12 food stakeholders either recorded or live, if there are events to showcase.
- First Taste TV: A televised talk show that will allow FNS to showcase its cutting-edge programs, products and technologies used in its program.
- Ignite: A networking environment that showcases through “edutainment”, demonstrations, and food sampling to bring stakeholders together. “Edutaining” networking events offer professional development, opportunities to build relationships, and opportunities to become more innovative and grow.

- NxtLevl Marketing & Design: NxtGen is a creative marketing, advertising, and production agency that is able to provide intelligence, create awareness, build audiences, produce high-quality content, manage social media, facilitate live events, and more.

NxtGen Network is a Creative Marketing Agency that covers everything from operations, to technology, to marketing. NxtGen Network’s solutions are only available from NxtGen Network and the vendor is the sole source provider of products and services licensed under NxtGen Network.

FNS sought a provider for this work and solicited its need through outreach to CBE firms and engaging with a non-CBE already under contract at DCPS. Other CBE providers were contacted with no response. Only 3 firms responded with interest, and while none of the firms had confidence in the K12 space, and all appeared to provide very generic proposals. As a result of the market survey, DCPS has identified NxtGen as a unique provider that is able to meet its needs.

In light of the above findings a sole source award is in the best interest of DCPS and would be the most efficient and cost-effective procurement method.

**6. CERTIFICATION BY PROGRAM DEPUTY CHIEF:**

I hereby certify that the above findings are correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and the anticipated prices to DCPS are fair and reasonable.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Deputy Chief, OCOO, FNS

**7. CERTIFICATION BY CONTRACT SPECIALIST:**

I hereby certify that the above findings are correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and the anticipated prices to DCPS are fair and reasonable.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Contract Specialist

**CERTIFICATION AND DETERMINATION**

Based on the above-certified findings in accordance cited authority, I hereby determine that it is not feasible or practical to invoke the competitive bidding process under Section 402 or 403 of the District of Columbia Procurement Practices Reform Act of 2010 (D.C. Law 18-371; DC Code 2-354.04 and 27 DCMR 1304 and 1702.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Contracting Officer