

HILLYARD CREATIVE DISTRICT

Request for Qualifications: Publicly Posted, with Direct Outreach

Community Engagement Specialist for Signs and Wayfinding Project

Contracting Entity	Northeast Public Development Authority (NEPDA), a Washington public development authority formed in accordance with RCW 35.21.730 through RCW 35.21.787, and organized under IRC §701, serving as fiscal sponsor and contracting entity for the Hillyard Creative District.
Contract Period	August 4 – Oct 31, 2026 The contract term is limited to this defined project period and is contingent upon availability of grant funding. Any future continuation is subject to separate funding and is not guaranteed.
Compensation	Fixed-fee contract Budget: up to \$30,000 total — \$25,000 for core engagement/research/design scope (ARPA) plus up to \$5,000 for prototype fabrication (staged August-October, see Funding & Compensation section) Final compensation structure will be established in the contract and may be milestone-based or fixed-fee. Payment will be issued upon receipt of invoice and satisfactory completion of defined deliverables. This engagement is structured as an independent contractor agreement and does not constitute employment. Contractor is responsible for all taxes, insurance, and business expenses.
Location	Hillyard Creative District and the Hillyard neighborhood, Spokane WA (on-site required) Contractor determines work location; in-person presence will be necessary to complete community engagement deliverables to develop prototype(s) to be used for a future mock-up and final design.
Proposals Due	5:00 PM, Tuesday, August 4, 2026 (one week from posting), or upon receipt of three qualified SOW proposals, whichever occurs first.
Submit To	Darya Pilram, Hillyard Creative District (director@hillyardspokane.org)

Program Overview

The Hillyard Creative District (HCD) is Spokane's first ArtsWA-certified creative district located in the historic N. Market Street corridor in Spokane's Hillyard neighborhood. HCD is investing

ArtsWA Creative Districts Capital Project (CDCP) and ARPA funds in a signs and wayfinding project intended to strengthen district identity, connect the Children of the Sun Trail to corridor businesses, and help visitors discover and connect with the Hillyard businesses, points of interest, and stories along and around the N. Market Street corridor.

Before HCD finalizes sign design or placement, we want to ground those decisions in real input from the people who will use and be affected by the signage: corridor businesses, community members, and visitors. This RFQ is for the engagement and design-facilitation phase to inform priorities for sign fabrication and final designs.

Community-Focused Approach

We're grounding this phase in the double diamond design process so the engagement work connects clearly to where the project has been and where it's headed. This RFQ covers primarily the **Discover** and **Define** phases, with the consultant carrying the project into early **Develop** work as options take shape.

The Four Phases

1. **Discover** — Understand the real problem
 - Speak to and spend time with people affected by the issue
 - Gather insights through observation, interviews, and research
 - Avoid jumping to solutions; focus on understanding context and needs
2. **Define** — Clarify the challenge
 - Synthesize insights to identify the core challenges and opportunities
 - Map cause-and-effect relationships
 - Define the problem space and scope for the project
3. **Develop** — Generate multiple solutions
 - Brainstorm diverse, creative ideas from many perspectives
 - Co-design with stakeholders and experts from different fields
 - Explore outside-the-box inspiration to find innovative approaches
4. **Deliver** — Test, refine, and implement
 - Prototype and test solutions at small scale
 - Iterate based on feedback, rejecting non-viable ideas
 - Scale successful solutions to meet real-world needs

Key Principles

- **User-centered:** Start with people's needs and experiences
- **Collaborative:** Work with diverse stakeholders

- **Iterative:** Expect to loop back between phases as new insights emerge
- **Inclusive:** Communicate visually and inclusively to build shared understanding

Scope of Work

HCD seeks a consultant team to run a structured design process, end to end: collecting and synthesizing diverse community and business perspectives in a short timeframe, conducting user experience research, engaging experts in wayfinding and placemaking, and facilitating that process directly through to a set of prioritized recommendations. The consultant will bring recommendations to HCD's Signs & Wayfinding Advisory Committee for review and input before final handoff to the sign-design contractor. HCD reserves the right to negotiate scope, schedule, deliverables, and compensation with the selected consultant before executing a contract. The scope includes the following components:

A. Business and Property Owner Engagement Gather input from creative district corridor businesses and property owners on wayfinding needs, including what visitors struggle to discover, what businesses want highlighted, and where signage would drive foot traffic and discovery. This includes working with HCD project leads to understand available signage options and artifacts, and gathering business owner feedback and reactions to those options.

B. Community Engagement Engage Hillyard community members to ensure branding, iconography, and messaging on any future signage authentically reflect the neighborhood's values, places, and stories, not an imposed aesthetic. This also includes working with HCD project leads to understand available signage options and artifacts, and gathering community feedback and reactions to those options.

C. User Experience Testing + Expert Input Test and evaluate the current visitor experience along the corridor, including how easily people currently discover and connect with businesses, points of interest, and community information. Combine this with expert wayfinding input, to identify measurable opportunities for improvement and design options and opportunities that meet the needs and expectations of visitors, businesses, and community members.

D. Signs & Wayfinding Committee HCD's Signs & Wayfinding Advisory Committee (already convened and curated by HCD staff) is a core part of this scope. The consultant will present interim findings and recommendations to this committee and the HCD Founding Board for a formal steer at key points in the process, and will incorporate the committee's direction into the final recommendations.

Deliverables

1. Engagement/testing plan and methodology (due within 1 week of contract start)
2. Summary of business owner input findings
3. Summary of community input findings

4. User experience findings, including any before/after or comparative data supporting measurable improvement
5. Presentation of interim and final findings to HCD's Signs & Wayfinding Advisory Committee and HCD Founding Board for review and steer, including showcasing signage options and concepts at upcoming community events (e.g., August, September, October Third Thursday events, Tacos y Tequila) to gather broader public reaction
6. Final report with prioritized recommendations for sign and wayfinding design, submitted in a format usable by HCD, the Signs & Wayfinding Committee, and a future sign-design contractor. This report must include community/business feedback, concept designs, and cost estimates gathered from local sign vendors so HCD can weigh community priorities against real-world cost.
7. Participation in regular check-ins with HCD staff, plus attendance at HCD meetings as needed to report updates directly
8. A creative fabrication or prototype signage component — required, not optional, given ARPA fund use restrictions. Examples: temporary spray-paint or stencil ground markings (directional "footprints," "more this way" arrows, HCD identifiers), a temporary/pop-up wayfinding installation, physical mock-ups, or another tangible, low-cost, reversible prototype tested at at least one upcoming HCD event to gather real-time visitor feedback

All work products, engagement materials, reports, graphics, datasets, photographs, interview summaries, and related materials developed under this contract become the property of the Northeast Public Development Authority/Hillyard Creative District.

Independent Contractor Status

This engagement is structured as an independent contractor relationship. The contractor retains full discretion over methods, means, and schedule necessary to complete defined deliverables. Nothing in this RFQ or resulting agreement creates an employment, joint venture, partnership, or agency relationship between the contractor and NEPDA or the Hillyard Creative District.

This is a deliverables-based engagement: the contractor works independently, sets their own methods and schedule, and is compensated for defined outputs rather than hours supervised.

The contractor does not manage NEPDA staff, control district finances, or have signing authority over NEPDA systems. The contractor does not have authority to bind NEPDA contractually or financially.

Timeline

Milestone	Date
RFQ released	Monday, July 27, 2026
Proposals due	August 3, 2026 (one week from posting), or earlier if HCD determines sufficient qualified proposals have been received and elects to close the solicitation early.
Consultant selected	On or before August 5, 2026 (target), or sooner if three qualified proposals are received earlier
Contract execution & onboarding	Within 1 week of selection
ARPA spend-down deadline (hard)	September 30, 2026 if extension approved (anticipated)
Engagement, prototyping & iteration work	May continue through October to allow for genuine community input and iteration, independent of the spend-down deadline
Final report & recommendations delivered	No later than September 24, 2026, or later if work extends into October per above

Funding & Compensation

This project is supported by multiple grant funding sources with different eligible uses. The consultant's scope of work may be divided into phased or milestone-based components to align with applicable grant requirements and project implementation. Final compensation structure, milestone payments, and funding allocation will be established during contract negotiations.

The total contract amount shall not exceed \$30,000: \$25,000 for the core engagement, research, cost-estimating, and design-recommendation scope described in Sections 3–4, and up to \$5,000 specifically earmarked for prototype fabrication (see below). Payment will be

issued upon receipt of invoice and satisfactory completion of applicable milestone deliverables as defined in the contract.

The anticipated contract will include an initial engagement and planning phase followed by a final implementation-support phase, with each phase aligned to the applicable grant funding source.

Prototype fabrication budget (up to \$5,000): This portion is earmarked for a staged, two-part prototype. HCD anticipates an early, lower-cost test (e.g., spray-paint or stencil ground markings) deployed in time for the August Third Thursday ArtWalk to gauge initial public reaction, followed by a more developed installation (e.g., semi-permanent signage) deployed for the September Third Thursday ArtWalk — HCD's anniversary celebration. HCD anticipates continuing to build out signage and wayfinding elements through October and November, ahead of the corridor's slower winter foot-traffic season, using capital funding sources outside this contract. This should not come at the expense of thorough community and business input in the core scope.

Spend-down deadline: These funds must be fully spent and paid by **September 30, 2026**, contingent upon grant-required deadlines. HCD will finalize the exact payment structure with its fiscal sponsor to balance ARPA spend-down requirements against realistic timelines for good community input, iteration, and deliverable quality. It's likely that some or all of the contract will need to be paid within the spend-down window, while the actual engagement, prototyping, and reporting work continues through October. **Proposals should indicate flexibility on payment structure** — for example, willingness to accept full or partial payment before all deliverables are complete, or a phased/milestone structure where specific components are paid out within the ARPA window while other work continues afterward. HCD will confirm the final structure with the selected consultant during contracting.

Beyond this contract: HCD's broader signs and wayfinding work may continue through next summer. However, funds available after this contract's spend-down deadline are limited to capital build-out costs (e.g., ArtsWA Creative Districts Capital Project funds) and cannot cover additional planning or design consultant fees. Consultants should scope this engagement as a defined, complete body of work rather than anticipate a follow-on planning contract.

Required use of funds: Proposals must include a creative fabrication or prototype signage component (see Section 3.D and Section 4, Deliverable 8). This is a required use of ARPA funds, not optional.

Encouraged, not required: A modest budget line to encourage community participation is welcome but should not represent a significant share of the proposed budget. Any incentives proposed must comply with applicable grant requirements. Low-cost promotional or educational items of nominal value (generally under \$25 per item) are preferred. Consultants are encouraged to seek donated incentives, including gift cards or merchandise provided directly by corridor businesses or community partners, rather than purchasing gift cards with project funds.

Qualifications

- Demonstrated experience in community engagement, participatory design, or public input processes, ideally in a placemaking, wayfinding, or public art context
- Familiarity with or willingness to learn Hillyard's history, demographics, and community priorities
- Ability to work with small businesses and community members with varying levels of availability and comfort with formal processes
- Local or regional presence preferred
- Ability to synthesize qualitative input into clear, actionable recommendations for a design audience

Submission Requirements

This RFQ is posted publicly to satisfy ARPA public notice requirements and is also being sent directly to qualified local consultants. To keep the timeline moving, HCD will review the first three qualified proposals received, even if the full posting window has not closed. Interested consultants should submit:

1. A brief proposal (2–4 pages) describing your approach to the components above
2. A proposed timeline for the engagement phase
3. A fee proposal, including your flexibility on payment structure (e.g., willingness to accept full or partial payment before all deliverables are complete, or a phased/milestone structure — see Section 6)
4. Relevant experience or work samples
5. Two references from similar past engagements
6. A short description of at least one creative or hands-on method you'd use to gather community input beyond standard presentations or posters — for example, a prototype, pop-up installation, interactive activity, or other tangible way for people to react to real options

Proposals should be submitted to darya@hillyardspokane.org by the deadline above.

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated on:

- Relevant experience and quality of past work (25%)
- Clarity and feasibility of proposed approach (25%)
- Demonstrated understanding of Hillyard's community and context (20%)
- Creativity and hands-on quality of proposed engagement methods and prototypes (15%)
- Value and fit within available budget (15%)

Given the specialized nature of this engagement, HCD is soliciting proposals directly from qualified local consultants with demonstrated experience in community engagement, placemaking, and wayfinding while also providing public notice of the opportunity. HCD will select based on the strongest combination of these factors, not lowest cost alone.

Additional Notes

- This is a fixed-scope engagement, not an ongoing retainer.
- The selected consultant will coordinate project execution with Karyna Goldsmith, HCD Programs & Operations Lead, who will manage the contract, deliverables, and weekly check-ins.
- HCD reserves the right to award, decline all proposals, or request revisions before final award.
- This opportunity will also be noted publicly via HCD's social media channels and corridor listserv for transparency, though proposals are being solicited directly.
- Proposals submitted may be subject to disclosure under Washington's Public Records Act.

Questions? Contact director@hillyardspokane.org. Selection will be made by an impartial advisory committee composed of key members of the Hillyard community with HCD and NEPDA representation. Hillyard Creative District is committed to equitable contracting and encourages proposals from BIPOC consulting firms and those with Hillyard community connections.

Final selection and contracting are subject to City of Spokane procurement and contracting requirements as required under the ARPA-funded program administered by Washington Trust for Historic Preservation.