



Request for Information

For

The Development & Management of “Virtual Decatur”;
A Massively Multi-Player Online Virtual Environment

Release Date: Thursday, December 11th, 2008

Responses to be Received by: 3:00PM, Friday, February 13th, 2009

Return To:

Lena Stevens
City Manager's Office
City Of Decatur
509 N. McDonough Street
Decatur, GA 30031



SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS:

Due Date for Submissions: Friday, February 13th, 2009 at 3:00P.M. Eastern Time

Due Date for Questions: Wednesday, February 11th, 2009 at 3:00P.M. Eastern Time

Notification of Intent: Companies or team's interested in submitting a response to this RFI should notify the RFI Coordinator as soon as possible in order to be placed on an email distribution list.

Receipt of Response: If you do not receive an email/phone confirmation that we have received your response, please call the RFI Coordinator.

Please label all responses as "Virtual Decatur RFI Response"

Submit responses by email to:

lana.stevens@decaturga.com

Submit responses by U.S. mail or in person to:

Lena Stevens
City Manager's Office
City of Decatur
509 N. McDonough Street
Decatur, GA 30030

RFI Coordinator:

Lena Stevens
Phone: (678)553-6577
Email: lana.stevens@decaturga.com

Disclaimer:

The City of Decatur reserves the right to retain all information submitted. All submissions are public records to the extent required by the Georgia Open Records Act. The City of Decatur reserves the right to modify the services requested in this Request for Information. The City also reserves the right to negotiate with a selected vendor for service, or to issue a Request for Proposals. It is emphasized that this request is for planning and information purposes only and is not to be construed as a commitment by the City to enter into a contractual agreement, nor will the City pay for information solicited.

This document was prepared with assistance from:

Justin Hubbard
DeVry University
justinlhubbard@gmail.com

Mission Statement:

The City of Decatur wishes to harness new and innovative technology that highlights the city as a progressive, creative, and vibrant community to people around the world.

Objective of the Request for Information (RFI)

The City of Decatur, Georgia is currently evaluating the development of a massively multi-player online (MMO) virtual environment that would simulate and enhance the “real-life” Decatur experience. This project will hereafter be referred to as Virtual Decatur. The purpose of this RFI is to solicit information from organizations with expertise in creating and managing online, immersive, interactive worlds. Proper management and design will be an important aspect of this project, as users must be limited to behavior that would be considered acceptable in the actual environment of Downtown Decatur.

There are no restrictions on teaming arrangements for any submission. For the purposes of this RFI, "teaming arrangement" is defined as a partnership between two or more businesses or other groups (i.e. students, individuals, etc.)

This request does not provide a rigid set of guidelines, and as such, respondents are encouraged to take creative liberties, provided they remain aligned with the purpose and goals outlined in this RFI. The City extends an invitation to all interested and capable development companies to submit information relevant to the development of this project.

We will be particularly attentive to companies who are interested in forming a partnership with the City of Decatur. In exchange for a collaborator's willingness to minimize costs while creating and managing Virtual Decatur, the City will consider avenues for brand placement and other forms of advertisement.

Background on the City of Decatur, Georgia- “A City of Excellence”

The City of Decatur is located about 6 miles northeast of Atlanta, Georgia. Spanning 4.2 square miles, the City has a current population of approximately 20,000. The active downtown district maintains its small town character while supporting over 200 restaurants, pubs, coffee houses, shops, boutiques, galleries, and salons. Several special events are hosted in the City’s downtown area each year, which are vital components of the City’s image. Some examples include:

- **Decatur Book Festival-** This is the largest independent book festival in the country. Attendance at the most recent festival was estimated at 70,000.
- **Decatur Beach Party-** Decatur brings in 60 tons of sand and turns the downtown square into a beach for this annual event.
- **Decatur Beer Tasting Festival-** More than 100 of the finest local, American and international beers are showcased at this annual event sponsored by area distributors and Decatur’s restaurants and pubs.

The City of Decatur prides itself on providing the best possible services at the least possible costs. This means being accountable to residents, business owners and other taxpayers for providing quality services that reflect the community’s willingness to invest. It also means maintaining and supporting an organization that is dedicated to efficiency, transparency and responsiveness.

The City of Decatur is home to highly-educated, forward-thinking and technology literate citizens many of whom are professors, media personnel, lawyers and medical professionals. Fifty-five percent of City residents have a bachelor’s degree or graduate degree and sixty-six percent are under the age of forty-five. Decatur is an attractive and vibrant community that appeals to young, educated professionals while continuing to be a welcoming place for long time residents to be active and engaged.

For more information about the City of Decatur, Georgia:

City of Decatur Website: <http://www.decaturga.com/>

Decatur Business Association: <http://decaturdba.com/>

Decatur 2008 Annual Report:

http://www.decaturga.com/client_resources/cgs/citysvcs/decatgur%20annual%20report%202008.pdf

Vision Statement:

The City seeks to use Virtual Decatur to create opportunities for ‘community networking’, civic engagement and economic development. Similar to other social networking tools, Virtual Decatur will provide an environment in which residents, businesses, institutions and visitors can interact and connect around a common interest: the City of Decatur. However, it is imperative that the project go beyond the features of traditional MMOs.

The overarching purpose of this project is to allow users to interact with the City in new and innovative ways that are not possible in the real world. It is envisioned that the real world experience may be enhanced through participation in Virtual Decatur.

The City of Decatur is pursuing three major goals with this project:

1. Community Networking

One of the three overall principles of the City’s Strategic Plan is to ‘Encourage Community Interaction’. Virtual Decatur should provide numerous community networking tools for people to connect online and offline.

Key components of this goal:

- Encouraging social interaction around common interests within Virtual Decatur, which may be associated with actual City of Decatur events.
- Examples of potential community networking subgroups:

Online Subgroup	Corresponding City of Decatur Event
Book Clubs	Decatur Book Festival
Runners Club	ING Marathon
Wine Club/Beer Club	Beer Tasting Festival & Wine Tasting Festival
Artists/Art Collectors	Decatur Arts Festival
Gardeners	Decatur Garden Tour

2. Civic Engagement

Online mediums, such as MMOs, provide a new channel of communication that people can relate to, participate in, and help shape. This offers governments a potential method of encouraging more frequent and constructive interaction between citizens and their government, as well as amongst citizens themselves.

Key components of this goal:

- Gather citizen input on policies, topics of interest, city services, and prospective developments.
- Provide a Virtual City Hall Tour with multimedia capabilities.
- Streaming video of public meetings, ideally with a chat room feature that allows viewers to comment.

3. Economic Development

The City of Decatur's economic development strategy promotes balanced growth and encourages business diversity while enhancing the existing character of the commercial districts. Virtual Decatur should complement the existing efforts to support and promote Decatur businesses. Marketing downtown as a center of social and economic activity is a main objective.

Key components of this goal:

- Simulate proposed commercial development.
- Promote existing businesses.
- Market Decatur to prospective businesses.
- Provide visitor information.
- Promote city events.
- Develop opportunities to earn coupons in Virtual Decatur that can be redeemed in actual stores and restaurants.

Project Objectives

The following is a list of objectives/ideas that have arisen during the pre-planning phase of this project. Again, creativity is encouraged among respondents, and as such, there will be considerable amount of flexibility in the consideration process, provided the submission achieves the basic goals outlined in this RFI.

- **Simple User Experience**
The virtual environment should be easily accessible to users with various levels of technological experience and low end computer capabilities. Specifically, the process needs to have the following:
 - Streamlined install process
 - Small client size
 - Ability to launch the simulation from browser links
 - Simple user interface
 - Tutorial for new users
- **Avatar based**
 - Users should be able to create custom avatars
 - Users should be able to navigate and explore the City of Decatur
 - Users should be able to communicate with one another
 - Ability to distinguish between residents, non-residents, and governmental representatives
- **Showcase the City**
 - The virtual environment should mimic, though not necessarily mirror, the layout and visual aspects of the City within the defined geographic area
 - Only certain locations, such as City Hall, will be modeled on the interior

- **Fun and intuitive interface**

The virtual community must be designed in a way that attracts a variety of people and keeps them engaged for long enough to make social connections with other users. These social connections may foster a sense of ownership within the virtual community that may be later translated to the real life community.
- **Allow businesses to scout possible locations from within the virtual environment**
- **Built using proven, existing technology**
- **User generated content:**
 - Players must be able to create some level of content that remains persistent
 - The City of Decatur must have access to add/change content
- **Manage the virtual community to ensure a positive user experience**
- **System should have a built-in economy and an achievement system that allows for the issuance of coupons that can be used in real life stores for discounts on goods and services. The City of Decatur prefers that actual U.S. currency not be exchanged in Virtual Decatur.**
- **Model potential new developments within the virtual environment, allowing citizens to gain a better understanding of the look and feel of these projects.**
- **Website Integration**
 - Users must be able to have quick/easy access to the City's official website as well as driving directions, external websites for Decatur locations, weather, etc.
- **Multimedia capabilities**

The following is a list of multimedia capabilities that have been discussed during the pre-planning phase of this project:

 - Live-streaming of city commission meetings
 - Video archives of city commission meetings
 - Voice-chat
- **Coordination with city events**

As mentioned previously, city events are a critical component building positive image. If possible, certain key city events should have a presence within the virtual environment. For example, to promote the City Arts Festival, a virtual wall could be created where users are allowed to create art.
- **Bookmarking System**

Users should have a means for keeping a list of their favorite locations and people, and be able to quickly travel to the location of the bookmark.

Content Management

Responses to this RFI must include a strategy for the long-term management of Virtual Decatur. This strategy should address the following aspects of content management:

- Participation tracking
- Monitoring for inappropriate behavior
- Monitoring the quality of the user experience
- Ability to gather and respond to user comments

Geographic Scope

The jurisdiction covers 4.2 square miles, however, the intent is not to include this entire area in Virtual Decatur. Initially, it is estimated that the project will cover the downtown core business district. This estimate may be modified according to the budget. The objective is that the project covers enough area to allow for the transfer of knowledge from the simulation to the real world.

Building interiors, with a few exceptions, will not be modeled unless a particular business is willing/able to fund the work. City Hall will be one of the main hub areas, and as such, will be modeled on both the exterior and interior.

Particular attention must be paid to landmarks, statues, memorials, and architecture, since the knowledge gained in the virtual environment should be as relevant as possible to the real world. If a user knows how to find a particular location in Virtual Decatur, they should also be able to find that same location quickly and easily in real life.

Visual Considerations

Discussions have centered on using a 3-dimensional modeling technique. However, non-3D solutions may be considered provided they achieve the goals as stated in this RFI. Users must be able to get an accurate spatial feel, and major areas of interest must be recognizable as their real life counterparts. Good visual style is critical in this project, though this need not necessarily be accomplished using the latest in graphic technology.

Target Audience

Below is a list of the five primary audience groups and the project objectives for each.

- 1) **Residents of Decatur**
 - Create a new and fun tool to encourage participation in government
 - Build relationships among citizens
 - Encourage new residents to get involved in community
- 2) **Prospective Residents of Decatur**
 - Advertise the benefits of living in Decatur to prospective residents
- 3) **Visitors and Tourists of Atlanta**
 - Give visitors and tourists a tool to see all that Decatur has to offer
 - Allow users to create itineraries
 - Allow users to view business information (ex. store hours, directions)
- 4) **Existing Businesses**
 - Stimulate the local economy
 - Encourage businesses to participate in Virtual Decatur.
- 5) **Prospective Businesses**
 - Allow users to scout vacant properties
 - Attract technology-oriented businesses

Accessibility

As a public entity, the programs, services, and activities provided by the City of Decatur must be accessible to people with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Additionally, Virtual Decatur should be accessible to users with various levels of technological experience and computer capabilities.

Budget Considerations

In part, the purpose of this RFI is to determine a reasonable budget for this type of project. Consideration will be focused on companies that are willing to develop creative and effective ways of lowering costs while still meeting the goals outlined in this document.

Some of the examples of ways that businesses can work to minimize costs are included below. These are not requirements, and are included only as reference.

- Providing assistance in grant writing
- Using City staff resources when possible
- Creating a list of non-critical tasks and assets that could be accomplished by programming, game, art, and/or design students
- Working with open source and free software tools
- Proposing low cost alternative virtual environment features

Submission Requirements

All submissions must be received by 3:00 P.M Eastern Time on Friday, February 13th, 2009 to be considered. Late submissions will not be considered under any circumstances.

Submission may be submitted via email or through U.S. Mail. All proprietary information must be clearly marked in the proposals. Proprietary information will be protected to the extent possible under the Georgia Open Records Act.

There are no restrictions on the teaming arrangements for any submission.

Threshold Requirements

All submissions must demonstrate the following threshold requirements to be considered. The City will not consider any submission that does not address these requirements satisfactorily:

1. Commitment to developing a virtual environment with an outstanding user experience.
2. Demonstrated experience in the successful design and management of a virtual environment.
3. Commitment to developing creative and effective ways of lowering costs while still meeting the goals outlined in this document.
4. Commitment to collaboration.

All Submissions Must Include:

	Page Limit
1. Completed Response Checklist: Attachment A	
2. Introductory information about the company or team making the submission and the proposed project	1
3. A Statement of Qualification including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of experience in creating and managing virtual environments, including reference contact information (<i>if applicable</i>) • Description of any special qualifications 	1
4. Preliminary Project Outline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of involved technologies • Brief sample scenarios, including screenshots/illustrations if possible • Projected feature list • Cost estimates (<i>Please identify one-time and recurring costs separately</i>) 	
5. Narrative Project Description <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Must</u> include answers to the questions in Attachment B • May include any other information relevant to the project 	15



Attachment A Response Checklist

Please contact RFI Coordinator for an electronic copy of this form

Company/Team Name: _____

Response Date: _____

Contact Name:	Address:
Contact Title:	Phone Number:
	Email Address:

Are you participating in a team arrangement to respond to this RFI? If yes, please use this space to briefly explain the arrangement, and outline the responsibilities of each involved party.

** Note: For the purposes of this RFI, "teaming arrangement" is defined as a partnership between two or more businesses or other groups (i.e. students, individuals, etc.)

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS		
Question	Yes/No	If NO, Please Explain
Have you submitted the following? <i>(Outlined in Submission Requirements section, Page 10)</i>		
Introductory Information about Company/Team		
Statement of Qualification		
Preliminary Project Outline		
Narrative Description (including answers to outlined questions)		

PROJECT DETAILS		
Question	Yes/No	If NO, Please Explain
Is the proposed virtual environment built using proven, existing technology?		
Does the proposed virtual environment use customizable avatars?		
Can avatars be distinguished between residents, non-residents, and governmental representatives?		
Can users communicate with one another in the virtual environment?		
Is there a bookmarking system that would allow users to keep a list of their favorite locations and people?		
Can sub-groups be created to mirror actual city events?		
Is the install process streamlined?		
Is there a tutorial for new users?		
Does the proposed virtual environment allow for user generated content?		
Is there a built-in achievement system?		
Are you able to provide website integration so that users can easily access external websites?		
Could businesses use the proposed virtual environment to scout for possible locations within the city?		
Does your company/team have the experience and resources necessary to manage the proposed virtual environment to ensure a positive and appropriate user experience?		
Is your company/team willing to work with city staff to develop creative and effective ways of lowering/managing costs?		
Is your company/team willing to work with city staff to market and promote the virtual environment?		

Attachment B

Mandatory Questions for Narrative Project Description

1. How can Decatur use virtual world technology to build a sense of local community?
2. How will your submission help Decatur to meet the three goals as outlined on Page 5?
(Address each specifically)
 - Community Networking
 - Civic Engagement
 - Economic Development
3. How can the content of the proposed virtual environment be managed to ensure that in-game behavior is limited to what would be acceptable in the actual environment of Downtown Decatur?
4. How large is your company/team?
5. How would our project impact your company/team?
6. How many people would likely be assigned to work on this project?