REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL IN RESPECT OF THE PROVISION OF THE AERC NETWORK ATTACHED STORAGE (NAS) SOLUTION

1.0 Introduction

The African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) is a premier capacity building institution in the advancement of research and training to inform economic policies in Sub-Saharan Africa. Established in 1988 as a not-for-profit organization, the AERC's fundamental goal is to strengthen local capacity for independent, rigorous inquiry into problems pertinent to the management of African economies, through a programme combining economic research with postgraduate training in economics and agricultural/applied economics, supported by an interactive communications and policy outreach programme.

African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) wishes to appoint a vendor to supply, install, configure a Network Attached (NAS) Storage solution with a strong emphasis on upward and downward compatibility and interoperability. The NAS system will serve as a centralized and scalable data storage and sharing platform within the organization, ensuring seamless integration with the existing IT ecosystem and accommodating future growth. The vendor is required to provide a Proof of Concept (POC) to demonstrate the proposed solution's capabilities and compatibility before full deployment.

2.0 Project Objectives

2.1: Primary Objectives:

- Provide a reliable, high-performance, and scalable storage solution to meet current and future data demands.
- Enable secure, efficient, and controlled data sharing and collaboration across authorized users and departments.
- Ensure seamless compatibility and interoperability with the existing IT ecosystem, minimizing disruption during deployment and future upgrades.
- Facilitate future expansion and upgrades with minimal downtime and without major system overhauls.

- Conduct a successful POC to validate the proposed solution's functionality, performance, and compatibility within the organization's environment.

2.2: Secondary Objectives:

- Enhance data protection and disaster recovery capabilities through robust backup and redundancy features.
- Optimize storage utilization and reduce administrative overhead through intelligent storage management tools.
- Improve overall productivity and workflow efficiency by providing fast and reliable access to data.

3.0 Scope of Work

The areas of focus on this exercise include but are not limited to:

3.1 Pre-Sales:
- Thorough assessment of the organization's current IT infrastructure, storage needs, and future growth projections.
- Consultation and design of a NAS solution that aligns with the outlined objectives and technical specifications.
- Preparation of a detailed proposal outlining the solution, implementation plan, and associated costs.

3.2 Deployment:
- Supply, delivery, and installation of the NAS hardware and software components.
- Configuration and optimization of the NAS system for optimal performance and security.
- Data migration from existing storage systems (if applicable), ensuring data integrity and minimal disruption.
- Integration with existing network infrastructure, directory services, and security protocols.

3.3 Post-Deployment:
- Comprehensive user training on NAS operation, data management, and security best practices.
- Ongoing technical support and maintenance services, including troubleshooting, updates, and upgrades.

- Proactive monitoring and performance tuning to ensure optimal system health and efficiency.
- Provision of comprehensive training programs for IT staff on NAS administration, management, and troubleshooting.
- Facilitation of certification exams for IT staff to validate their expertise on the NAS system.

4.0 Technical Specifications

4.1 Hardware

- The solution should be preferably from HPE, Dell EMC, IBM or NetApp.
- Processor: High-performance multi-core processor with at least 3.0 GHz base clock speed.
- Memory: Minimum 16 GB DDR4 ECC registered DIMMs, expandable up to 128 GB or higher.
- Storage:
  - Support for at least 12 hot-swappable 3.5" or 2.5" SATA/SAS HDD/SSD drive bays, expandable up to 24 or more bays, with 20TB drives already installed.
  - Compatibility with high-capacity enterprise-grade hard drives (10 TB or higher) and SSDs.
  - Support for NVMe SSDs for cache acceleration or tiered storage.
- Network:
  - Quad 10 Gigabit Ethernet ports with support for link aggregation and failover.
  - Dual Gigabit Ethernet ports with link aggregation support.
  - Optional support for 25 Gigabit Ethernet or Fibre Channel connectivity for high-bandwidth applications.
- Expansion:
  - Multiple PCIe expansion slots for future upgrades and add-on cards (e.g., network adapters, HBA).
  - At least two USB 3.0 ports for additional storage or peripheral connectivity.

4.2 Software

- Operating System:
  - Robust and secure NAS-optimized OS with a user-friendly web-based management interface.

- Support for both block-level (iSCSI) and file-level (SMB/CIFS, NFS, AFP, FTP) protocols.
- Built-in RAID support (RAID 0, 1, 5, 6, 10) for data redundancy and fault tolerance.
- Active Directory integration for centralized user authentication and access control.
- Role-based access control (RBAC) for granular permissions management.
- Support for snapshots, replication, and remote backup for enhanced data protection.
- Built-in antivirus and anti-malware protection.
- Optional support for cloud storage gateways and synchronization.
- Compatibility with virtualization platforms (VMware, Hyper-V) for virtual machine storage.

4.3 Compatibility and Interoperability

- File Systems: Support for a wide range of file systems, including NTFS, FAT32, ext4, HFS+, and ZFS.
- Open Standards: Adherence to open industry standards for seamless integration with third-party applications and services.
- API Support: Provision of a comprehensive API for integration with custom applications and automation scripts.
- Backward and Forward Compatibility:
  - Ability to integrate with existing storage infrastructure and legacy systems.
  - Support for future hardware and software upgrades without requiring major system replacements.

5.0 Evaluation Criteria

The vendor proposals will be evaluated based on the following weighted criteria:

- **Technical Compliance (40%):**
  - Meeting or exceeding the technical specifications outlined in this document.

- Demonstrated performance benchmarks for data access, transfer speeds, and IOPS.
- Proven track record of reliability, stability, and uptime.

- **Scalability and Futureproofing (20%):**
  - Ability to scale storage capacity, performance, and functionality to meet future demands.
  - Support for emerging technologies and industry trends.
  - Flexibility to adapt to changing business needs and IT environments.

- **Security and Data Protection (20%):**
  - Robust security features, including data encryption, access control, and intrusion detection.
  - Comprehensive data protection capabilities, including snapshots, replication, and backup.
  - Compliance with relevant data privacy regulations and industry standards.

- **Vendor Support and Services (10%):**
  - Quality and responsiveness of technical support and maintenance services.
  - Availability of training resources and documentation.
  - Vendor's reputation and financial stability.
  - The vendor should be a platinum or Gold partner of the Solution proposed.

- **Cost and Total Cost of Ownership (10%):**
  - Competitive pricing for both hardware and software components.
  - Consideration of long-term costs, including maintenance, upgrades, and energy consumption.

AERC will undertake a due diligence assessment and screening of the preferred Bidder to include reference checks.

AERC reserves the right to proceed or reject Bidder(s) depending on the outcome of this assessment and consider the next ranked bidder. The findings of this assessment will be kept confidential and used internally for the purposes of this evaluation.

6.0 Requirements

AERC is inviting proposals from suitably qualified consultants/consultancy firms.

6.0.1 Project Schedule

Provide a detailed schedule showing your work breakdown, activity sequence, key milestones, and confirmation of your ability to meet the milestones.

6.0.2 Project Cost

An itemized project cost that references each identified activity/milestone and its associated costs. The budget should cover professional and reimbursable fees, fee rates, number of days and a breakdown of the expenses.

6.0.3 Experience

Provide a company profile detailing firm's registration, tax compliance and other statutory information.

Reference to at least three corporate clients who have successfully undergone a similar assignment - submit contract/Local Service Order/Letter of Award. Please share recommendation letters from these clients as well as evidence of work done in the past 24 months. The proposal should contain detailed CVs of at least three members of the team who will undertake the solution deployment and user training. The team members should possess at least three (3) years' experience in deploying storage solutions.

Mandatory requirements
A well-established technology firm with a good track record of working on providing Network Attached Storage (NAS) and integration services in Kenya and the wider region
Solid knowledge and demonstrated experience in Network Attached Storage (NAS) Solution implementation and integration.
Ability to turn around the assignment and deliver within the set deadlines
Delivery of the solution should be within 4-6 weeks upon win of tender.
Engineers implementing the solution, should have solution Certifications with implementation experience of at least three (3) years.

7.0 Submission of Documents

Technical and Financial proposals should be sent in **two separate files** and in an easily accessible format (WORD, PDF, etc), by **5:00 pm, December 4, 2024**, to procurement@aercafrica.org addressed to:

Executive Director
African Economic Research Consortium
3rd Floor, Mebank Towers, Jakaya Kikwete Road
PO Box 62882-00200
Nairobi.

If responding as a firm, ensure the proposed consultant(s) possess the above qualifications.

Any questions or clarifications must be sent to AERC before the deadline indicated above.