

TRU Strategic Planning RFP 2026

Updated 9/28/26

Summary

Transportation Riders United (TRU) is a Detroit-based advocacy nonprofit that has worked since 1999 to improve and expand public transit throughout the greater Detroit area. **TRU is undertaking a strategic planning process** to strengthen organizational influence, impact, and sustainability as well as to develop a clear multi-year plan to meaningfully improve metro Detroit transit and state transportation policy.

We are seeking an experienced consultant to garner 360 degree feedback and lead us through leadership conversations to produce a new strategic plan. We have undertaken several planning efforts in years past but have grown significantly in recent years and need an updated plan to increase our power and impact.

The right consultant will have significant **experience working with advocacy nonprofits** (not just social service groups), as well as substantial interviewing, facilitation and strategic planning expertise.

While flexible, we anticipate the following work steps:

1. Co-create a feedback and planning process with TRU leadership, built off past learnings and planning efforts
2. Implement stakeholder interviews to get 360 feedback on TRU's influence and impact
3. Guide us through a series of small group and full board discussions on key questions
4. Draft a 2027-29 Strategic Plan, then edit based on TRU leader feedback

Timeline: November 2026 – March 2027

Budget: \$15-25,000

Proposals: Email TRU Director Megan Owens at Megan@DetroitTransit.org by October 21, 2026, with your relevant experience and your proposed workplan and budget.

Full Request for Proposals:

Transportation Riders United (TRU) is a Detroit-based advocacy nonprofit (5 full time staff, 3 fellows/part time staff, \$750k budget) that has worked since 1999 to improve and expand public transit throughout the greater Detroit area. TRU has grown significantly in the past few years, successfully implemented numerous strategic planning goals, expanded our partnerships, and launched a statewide coalition.

TRU's leadership has decided the time is right to undertake a strategic planning process to better understand how we are perceived by partners and decision-makers, to ensure our growth can be sustained, and to develop a 3-year strategic plan to maximize our influence and impact.

We are seeking an experienced consultant to garner 360 degree feedback and lead us through leadership conversations to produce a new strategic plan. The right consultant will have significant experience working with nonprofit advocacy groups (not just social service groups), as well as substantial interviewing, facilitation and strategic planning expertise. Knowledge of public transit and of Detroit and Michigan politics is helpful, but not essential.

Context:

After several years as an all-volunteer organization, TRU had 1-3 staff members and a \$100-250,000 budget for most of 2005-2020. TRU was successful in elevating the issue of transit, getting the Regional Transit Authority created, and defending SMART millage support and DDOT bus funding. We helped the region's transit systems weather The Great Recession, Detroit's bankruptcy, and the COVID pandemic.

Through greater partnerships and increased grant support, TRU has nearly tripled in the past few years to 5-10 staff people and a \$750,000 budget. We've been successful in expanding transit throughout all of the tri-county metro Detroit area, boosting local and state funding for transit, and launching a statewide coalition of clean transportation supporters.

Despite notable progress, metro Detroit is still far from achieving the transit improvement the region needs and TRU continues to lack the power and influence needed to truly make needed change happen at the local or state levels. We seek to change this.

One of our main strategies is to build relationships with and mobilize other organizations and institutions that agree with our transit goals. We've built many connections but need to better understand how they perceive TRU, how we can effectively maintain and expand these partnerships, and how to maximize their support for the greatest transit impact.

TRU is also increasingly reliant on a small number of foundations. While their support is enormously appreciated, we need to diversify our funding to ensure our sustainability for years to come.

Past planning efforts:

We convene board members and other leaders every year to evaluate our progress and develop priorities for the coming year. We've done multi-year strategic plans and related larger scale efforts several times over the last 15 years:

- TRU developed strategic plans for [2012-14](#) (updated for [2013-16](#) and [2014-17](#)) and [2017-2020](#) (updated for [2018-21](#)).

- In 2020-21, we undertook a [360 evaluation project](#) to understand the impact of COVID on our work and get outside perception of our strengths and weaknesses.
- TRU worked with a cohort to draft our [Theory of Change](#) in 2022 (although never finalized something that fully addressed the complexity of our issues).
- We undertook another [strategic planning process in 2023 that focused explicitly on our organizational development needs](#), and have made some [decent progress](#) in those areas.

Issues:

- TRU needs to clearly understand how partner organizations, funders, regional leaders, and transit decision-makers perceive TRU, how we can strengthen our relationships with them and how we can grow our power to be recognized as a critical stakeholder in transit decision-making.
- Following successful wage increases for bus drivers, leading to the stabilization of service, along with the successes of transit expansions in Oakland and Wayne Counties, the next campaigns we should focus on are less obvious. We will be working on statewide transportation reform, but beyond that, there are several advocacy paths we could take. We'd like to get member and rider input and build enthusiasm for what's possible for transit as part of deciding.
- We also need to be careful not to stretch ourselves too thin. Figuring out what we shouldn't do is often harder than deciding what to do, yet potentially more important.
- Our rapid growth has been based on a few grants, which makes it not terribly stable. Efforts to expand our funding base beyond grants have only met with modest success.
- We've launched and are leading a statewide coalition. While TRU has no plans to expand into a statewide organization ourselves, we need to figure out how to balance our statewide work and partnerships, while maintaining strong local Detroit advocacy work.

Expectations:

While we are flexible and look forward to consultant recommendations on how to best implement this work, we anticipate the following steps:

1. The consultant will review past TRU Strategic Plans, 360 analysis, and other recent planning and evaluation work, then meet with a team of TRU leaders to **co-create a work plan** to best achieve our goals .
2. The consultant will implement 12-15 **stakeholder interviews to get 360 feedback** on TRU's influence and impact. TRU will provide the list of relevant contacts and can make initial requests for the interviews.
3. The consultant will assist the TRU staff in developing **member, rider, and supporter surveys** to get feedback on TRU's strengths and transit opportunities.
4. The consultant will meet alternately with a small group of TRU leaders and with the full board to discuss key topics and analyze key questions

5. In consultation with the Executive Director, the consultant will **draft a strategic plan for TRU for** January of 2027 through December of 2029
 - a. This plan should articulate strategic opportunities of the organization, as well as a tangible and practical vision for organizational growth and development.
 - b. Propose a timetable with measurable benchmarks, objectives, and activities to be accomplished to achieve goals, especially related to organizational and strategic effectiveness, impact, and success.
6. Facilitate meetings and provide leadership, direction, and expert consultation and advice related to the development and implementation of an effective strategic plan.

Timeline: November 2026 - appx March 2027

Budget: \$15-25,000

TRU is willing to explore higher funding to bring an especially compelling proposal to fruition.

FYI - TRU is also seeking a [consultant to aid TRU in improving our systems and scaling up our operations](#) during the same time period as this project. Consultants can be the same or different but will likely need to coordinate at some points.

RFP Deliverables:

- To submit a proposal, please email TRU Director Megan Owens at Megan@DetroitTransit.org by October 21, 2026. Questions can also be directed to Megan.
- Proposals should include your experience with groups and situations like ours, the work you propose to do with us, and your suggested budget and timeline.
- Evaluation criteria will include:
 - Experience supporting nonprofit strategic planning
 - Experience with social-change / advocacy nonprofits (not just social service groups)
 - Experience garnering input from a variety of stakeholders in a variety of methods, including interviewing civic and political leaders
 - Facilitation experience, especially guiding meaningful decision-making
 - Understanding of our needs / Compelling proposal overall
 - Proposal cost-effectiveness
 - Experience working in southeast Michigan, especially Detroit
 - Bonus if business is owned and/or if the project is led by people of color, women, and/or Detroiters
 - Bonus for experience with and/or deep knowledge of Detroit politics, Michigan politics, and/or public transit