**STATE OF MAINE REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

**RFP SUBMITTED QUESTIONS & ANSWERS SUMMARY**

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| **RFP NUMBER AND TITLE:** | RFP#202411196 Economic Development Social Equity Program Establishment and Administration |
| **RFP ISSUED BY:** | Department of Economic & Community Development |
| **SUBMITTED QUESTIONS DUE DATE:** | February 13, 2025, no later than 11:59 p.m., local time |
| **QUESTION & ANSWER SUMMARY ISSUED:** | February 14, 2025 |
| **PROPOSAL DUE DATE:** | February 27, 2025, no later than 11:59 p.m., local time |
| **PROPOSALS DUE TO:** | Proposals@maine.gov |

**Provided below are submitted written questions received and the Department’s answer.**

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| **1** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I - C - p.6 | Is the budget of $300K available each state fiscal year or divided over two years? |
| **Answer** |
| Appendix F of the RFP includes a link to the statute, which clearly delineates funding for this program, broken down by fiscal year. The State’s fiscal year begins on July 1 and ends on June 30 of each year. The term of the anticipated contract, resulting from the RFP, is defined as follows: Period Start Date End Date Initial Period of Performance March 1, 2025 - February 28, 2026. |

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| **2** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II - A.2c -p.7 | How many seed grants do you anticipate awarding? |
| **Answer** |
| This will depend on the number of eligible applications received, the total dollars available for the grant program, and the specific requirements of the grant program. The grant program requirements have not yet been developed, and this development is an important task of this scope of work. |

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| **3** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II - A.2- p.8 | Is there an existing application process for the seed grants? |
| **Answer** |
| No. This is a new grant program. |

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| **4** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II - A.2- p.7 | For clarification, are the intended recipients of these seed subgrants and workforce development exclusively individuals who have been incarcerated? |
| **Answer** |
| Please refer to Appendix F, which includes a link to the statute. The statute indicates that this work includes, “3. Providing funds to members of impacted communities starting, maintaining or expanding a business.” The statute also defines impacted communities: “For purposes of this Part, "impacted community" means a racial, ethnic or tribal population that has experienced incarceration at rates disproportionate to the racial, ethnic or tribal population's rate of criminality starting in or about the year 1971 and as a result the racial, ethnic or tribal population has experienced direct or indirect discrimination in access to housing, employment and education.” We encourage bidders to read the statute to get a thorough understanding of the context for this RFP and the regulatory requirements that must be adhered to. |

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| **5** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part III – A. 2. -p. 11 | For clarification, will the Q&A be posted as late as 7 days before the proposal is due? |
| **Answer** |
| Responses to all questions will be compiled in writing and posted on the following website no later than seven (7) calendar days prior to the proposal due date[: Office of State Procurement Services RFP Page](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/rfps). It is the responsibility of all interested parties to go to this website to obtain a copy of the Question & Answer Summary. |

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| **6** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Proposal Submission requirements Page 15 | I have never seen a state of Maine RFP requiring a DUNS Business Snapshot. This creates an unnecessary burden on bidders with such a short timeline from when the RFP was announced to the due date. Not to mention that do not have a DUNS number currently ($229 fee to receive in 8 days opposed to 30, as well as the $139 cost to receive the business snapshot.) What is the reasoning behind this and is there an alternative? |
| **Answer** |
| State of Maine Procurement required this to be in the RFP. |

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| **7** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Proposal Submission Requirements Page 15  | Is there a template for Section III Proposed Services? |
| **Answer** |
| No. It is up to the bidder to develop a thoughtful, compelling, well-organized description of their proposed work plan. |

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| **8** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II -A.2. Page 7 | What is the expected budget for this program? The linked legislation references a maximum of $300,000 per biennium. Is this figure the ceiling for any services procured via this announcement? |
| **Answer** |
| Yes. This RFP is directly related to the legislation and the funds that legislature has allocated for this program. There are no other funds available for this program. As indicated on page 7 of the RFP, “The Department anticipates that the successful bidder will set aside approximately $150,000 of the $300,000 total budget for item (c) described above. The remaining $150,000 will be for the rest of the tasks.” |

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| **9** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II -A.1 -2. Page 7 | Describe the make up of the state of Maine team that will be assisting with program creation and implementation regarding this RFP. |
| **Answer** |
| This legislation allocated funding for positions at the Maine Department of Labor and the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services related to this work. However, the legislature did not provide funding for any dedicated staff within the Maine Department of Economic & Community Development for this work. One member of the Office of Business Development will be available to answer questions and manage the contract with the successful bidder. Please note that this individual already has a full-time job of other programs and tasks, so this program will need to be streamlined as efficiently as possible with existing work. Additionally, as per the requirements of the statute, the Commissioner of DECD (or his/her designee) will be in attendance at the Advisory Committee meetings. No additional support is available. |

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| **10** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II - A3. Page 8 | How will the state coordinate interaction between the contractor and required state agencies? Which state agencies are required partners in this work? |
| **Answer** |
| We encourage you to read the statute which describes in detail the specific state agencies required to participate in this work. DECD will provide the names and email addresses of the individuals within the legislature (when applicable) and the other state departments to the contractor. |

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| **11** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II – Scope of Services, Page 8 | Will the State provide the $150,000 in seed funding to the awarded bidder in advance for grant disbursement, or will the bidder need to front the funds and be reimbursed? |
| **Answer** |
| DECD will encumber a contract of $300,000 with the successful bidder. After the grant program is designed and launched, and the grantees selected, the contract can invoice DECD for the $150,000 in order to pay out the awards to the grantees. DECD does not expect the contractor to front the grant funds. |

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| **12** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I – General Provisions, Page 5 | Is it required that the awarded bidder be a business based in Maine, or are out-of-state bidders eligible to apply? |
| **Answer** |
| All State of Maine vendors must have a US Tax Identification number in order to follow federal taxation procedures. Therefore, as long as a bidder has a US TIN, they may apply. |

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| **13** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II – Scope of Services, Page 8 | Are all program services required to be in person, or are virtual and hybrid service models acceptable? |
| **Answer** |
| We anticipate that the contractor will be able to provide most services remotely. Please note that we expect contractors to have adequate internet connections, well-lit space for meetings, and be available to use both Microsoft Teams and Zoom, at the request of DECD. Two parts of this project may require in-person meetings. First, it is up to the Advisory Committee to determine the scheduling and location of their meetings. Given that the Advisory Committee includes members of the Maine legislature, these individuals may prefer the meetings to be in person in Augusta. Second, after the legislature report is prepared, a legislative committee may require a hearing about this work, in which case the contractor should plan to be available in person. If the Advisory Committee prefers all remote meetings, and no such hearing is required, there is a possibility that all of this project can occur remotely. But this is not a guarantee.  |

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| **14** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II – Scope of Services, Page 8 | If in-person services are required, what percentage of the work is expected to be conducted on-site in Maine? |
| **Answer** |
| See the answer to question 13 above. |

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| **15** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part IV – Cost Proposal, Page 18 | Are travel costs for out-of-state bidders allowable in the budget? If so, is there a cap or guideline for allowable travel expenses? |
| **Answer** |
| Any travel costs would need to be included in the $150,000 budget for program design and implementation. Travel costs may not come from the $150,000 in seed funds meant to be granted to businesses. |

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| **16** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II – Scope of Services, Page 8 | Will there be separate funds or a separate RFP for managing grant disbursement to awardees, or is the awarded bidder responsible for administering the entire grant process? |
| **Answer** |
| There are no additional funds available beyond what is described in the RFP, and in the statute. Please refer to the Answer to Question 8, above. |

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| **17** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part IV – Cost Proposal, Page 18 | Should our budget include costs for evaluating grant applicants and tracking fund distribution? |
| **Answer** |
| No. DECD will be responsible for collecting grant progress reports and final reports (if applicable) and evaluating fund distribution. The contractor will be expected to suggest a format for grant reports, however, which should be included in the grant program documents. |

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| **18** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part V – Proposal Evaluation, Page 18 | How will the 30 points for past performance be evaluated? Will preference be given to Maine-based projects, or will similar national projects be equally competitive? |
| **Answer** |
| Projects that show previous experience with economic development programs for impacted communities will be considered relevant and applicable, regardless of the State where the work was done. Few similar projects have been conducted in Maine, so experience in other States seems a highly reasonable attribute to score highly. |

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| **19** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part V – Proposal Evaluation, Page 18 | Will the 40 points for proposed services be weighted more toward program design, outreach, or fund distribution strategy? |
| **Answer** |
| Fund distribution is relatively straightforward, so the design of this is not as important as other elements of this work. Program design is very important to ensure that the statute is complied with, and the intent of the legislation is met. Similarly, outreach will be incredibly important in this effort, and DECD wants to ensure that impacted communities throughout Maine are adequately engaged and able to take advantage of this opportunity. |

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| **20** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part IV – Proposal Submission, Page 15 | Will the state consider nonprofit or university partnerships as subcontractors to enhance outreach and workforce development services? |
| **Answer** |
| Yes. |

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| **21** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II – Scope of Services, Page 8 | Are there existing relationships with community organizations that we should leverage for outreach, or is it expected that we build those partnerships from scratch? |
| **Answer** |
| DECD maintains a network of community organizations and other stakeholders who are likely interested in this work and its mission (that we can share), but we hope a contractor can suggest even more because they have existing relationships and are subject matter experts in this area. |

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| **22** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I – Introduction, Page 5 | How does the State define “impacted communities”? Are there specific geographic areas, demographics, or economic indicators we should prioritize? |
| **Answer** |
| This is defined in the statute, which is referenced in Appendix F of the RFP. |

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| **23** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II – Scope of Services, Page 8 | Can technical assistance be provided virtually, or is in-person support required? |
| **Answer** |
| DECD believes that most technical assistance can be provided virtually; however, as engagement with impacted communities begin, there may need to be adjustments to our assumptions and additional methods of communication provided. |

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| 24 | RFP Section & Page Number | Question |
| Part II – Scope of Services, Page 8 | Does the State have a preference for business training formats (e.g., workshops, one-on-one coaching, self-paced courses)? |
| Answer |
| It is up to the contractor to suggest the best formats based on their previous experience, providing business training (or their subcontractors' experience), particularly with impacted communities. Maine businesses currently rely on a diverse array of business training formats, based on what is currently provided by business advisors around the State. This includes online training, in-person workshops, one-on-one consultations, cohorts, and workshops. |

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| **25** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II – Scope of Services, Page 8 | Should the awarded bidder provide multilingual support for technical assistance and outreach materials? |
| **Answer** |
| DECD has access to a translation service for meetings and calls, which we can use to support this work. DECD will pay for these services (separate from this budget). If translation of written materials is needed, this can be estimated as a separate scope of work as well (that DECD pays for). |

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| **26** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part VI – Contract Administration, Page 20 | What specific metrics or reporting requirements will the State use to evaluate the program’s success? |
| **Answer** |
| It is up to the contractor to design the grant program, including success metrics. These metrics should meet the reporting requirements of the statute (see Appendix F of the RFP). |

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| **27** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part VI – Contract Administration, Page 20 | What specific metrics or reporting requirements will the State use to evaluate the program’s success? |
| **Answer** |
| See Answer to Question 26, above. |

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| **28** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part VI – Contract Administration, Page 20 | Will the awarded bidder be required to integrate with any existing State of Maine databases or reporting systems? |
| **Answer** |
| Not per se. DECD does not currently have a database of businesses, grant system, or reporting system that would be available for this work. The contractor is expected to be able to provide deliverables in Microsoft Word, .pdf, and Microsoft Excel. DECD will be able to design and launch a grant portal, but we anticipate that this grant program may require a more straightforward application process, perhaps accepting applications via .pdf or Word. |

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| **29** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part II – Scope of Services, Page 8 | Will the awarded bidder have access to any existing datasets or research related to impacted communities in Maine? |
| **Answer** |
| DECD is not aware of existing research in this area, but the contractor will be able to meet with the individuals specifically hired by Maine DOL and Maine DAFS, in the event that they have access to such information. |

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| **30** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part IV – Cost Proposal, Page 18 | Are indirect costs (overhead, admin fees, etc.) capped in the budget proposal? |
| **Answer** |
| No. |

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| **31** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part I – Introduction, Page 5 | Given the short turnaround between the proposal submission deadline (February 27, 2025) and the anticipated contract start date (March 1, 2025), does the Department anticipate an expedited selection process? Should bidders prepare for a quick award notification and contract finalization? |
| **Answer** |
| The State recognizes that the actual contract effective date depends upon completion of the RFP process, date of formal award notification, length of contract negotiation, and preparation and approval by the State Procurement Review Committee. DECD will work with the contractor to establish a timeline for the work, including project kick-off, once the contract is encumbered. |

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| **32** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part VI – Contract Administration, Page 20 | Will the awarded bidder be expected to begin work immediately on March 1, or is there flexibility in the onboarding process, considering administrative and contracting logistics? |
| **Answer** |
| The State recognizes that the actual contract effective date depends upon completion of the RFP process, date of formal award notification, length of contract negotiation, and preparation and approval by the State Procurement Review Committee. DECD will work with the contractor to establish a timeline for the work, including project kick-off, once the contract is encumbered. |

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| **33** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part IV – Cost Proposal, Page 18 | The Cost Proposal Form separates costs for tasks and deliverables, but some tasks (e.g., convening the Advisory Committee, technical assistance, and fund distribution) contribute to multiple deliverables. Should bidders allocate costs under the most relevant category, or can costs be distributed across multiple categories to reflect the actual work required? |
| **Answer** |
| A brief narrative can be added to the Cost Proposal Form, if desired, to detail the costs to complete each of the seven deliverables. We understand that there is substantial crossover between the Task and Deliverables. |

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| **34** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part IV – Cost Proposal, Page 18 | If a task directly supports multiple deliverables, should costs be split proportionally across those deliverables, or should the full cost be assigned to a single category for simplicity? |
| **Answer** |
| See Answer to Question 33, above. |

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| **35** | **RFP Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
| Part IV – Cost Proposal, Page 18 | Will the Department provide additional guidance or a preferred methodology for bidders to allocate costs between tasks and deliverables, especially where overlap exists? |
| **Answer** |
| No, the Department will not provide additional guidance. Please see the Answers to Questions 33 and 34 above. |