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Request for Proposal (RFP) for   
Build Back Better Knowledge Corridor Consultant

Issue Date: November 12, 2021

Deadline for Questions: December 1, 2021, 5:00 p.m.

Response Date/Time: December 16, 2021, 5:00 p.m.

Response Location: crcog.bonfirehub.com

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# Introduction and Intent

The Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) seeks proposals from qualified and experienced firms to provide consulting services for project planning and grant writing expertise for integrated projects in Business Innovation Supports, Youth Dual Track Pipeline Development, Educational On-Ramps and development of the Parkville Innovation Hub.

CRCOG’s intent is to award and contract with one or more vendors to provide the services for the projects included in this RFP. Awards are contingent upon receiving a Phase 1 Grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA).

# Background and Overview

The Greater Hartford-Springfield region, known as the heart of the New England Knowledge Corridor, is tied together by a shared economy, history and economic and natural assets, including Bradley International Airport, multiple modes of transport, over thirty (30) post-secondary educational and training institutions and a global center of advanced manufacturing, with companies like Stanley Black & Decker, Pratt & Whitney and hundreds of companies critical to the U.S. aerospace supply chain. CRCOG is the lead institution of the Knowledge Corridor Development Coalition supporting the regional Advanced Manufacturing Cluster on behalf of a bi-state coalition comprising Capitol Workforce Partners, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, MassHire Franklin-Hampshire County Workforce Board, the City of Hartford and the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology. The coalition is supported by industry partners which support the need for enhanced innovation/technology adoption and broadened workforce pipelines.

The region also faces persistent challenges around income, educational and racial inequality. As of August 2021, the region faced an overall unemployment rate of 6.3%, a significant jump from the pre-COVID rate of 3.7%, with poverty and unemployment centered in the region’s urban centers.

As a response to the U.S. EDA Build Back Better Regional Challenge, the Knowledge Corridor Coalition has identified four integrated projects to address the challenges the region’s workforce and employers face.

We are seeking consultants with project planning and implementation experience to assist the Knowledge Corridor Coalition, lead agencies, and industry partners realize the goals of these projects.

# Scope of Services

GRANT WRITING

The U.S. EDA Build Back Better Regional challenge includes two phases. Phase 1 submissions are Concept Proposals describing the coalition’s vision, regional assets, leadership, sustainability model, and emphasis on equity. Phase 2 is only eligible to those who received Phase 1 funding. Provided we receive an award for Phase 1, we are seeking consultants with successful federal grant writing experience in assistance for preparing the Phase 2 grant application.

PROJECT PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Each of our integrated projects will require services from qualified consultants to plan, develop and provide a roadmap to implement programs. The resulting analyses and programs should identify appropriate outputs to measure the success of each program and program participants.

When preparing your proposal for how you would provide the services we are requesting, a key component for all the projects listed in the Scope of Services is equity. The Knowledge Corridor Coalition is seeking consultants with cultural competency to identify disparities between different populations, identify barriers to those populations, and develop programs that will overcome those barriers.

**Business Innovation Supports**

Entrepreneurs and small businesses face barriers to entry, including high startup costs, gaps in knowledge and workforce challenges. This project is intended to provide increased technical assistance and additional resources through the existing business development infrastructure. We are looking for assistance in analyzing existing best practices for support services based on current number of businesses assisted, geographic range, program offers and other factors. The analysis should determine not just the extent of these factors, but also the reason for that extent.

A support services plan will be developed upon the results of the above analysis. The consultant will work with the lead partners for this project to provide the framework to support and/or expand programs. The outcome of this activity is an analysis and plan for a roadmap to scaling disparate business support services into a cohesive network.

**Youth Dual Track Talent Pipeline**

While many existing local pilot programs provide training services to move young talent into the workforce pipeline, there are several gaps, including geographic and programmatic gaps. There are also issues of scale, either in the number of schools participating, the number of training or work-based slots available, or which populations have access and opportunity to participate. We are seeking assistance with studying best practices, existing system and program gaps, and identifying the needs of students and potential students. We are also looking for system needs to identify intermediary organizations, additional resources at the school level, and need for greater connectivity and coordination between programs.

An implementation plan will be developed based on the study parameters above. The plan will provide a thorough guideline for scaling up existing pilot programs to address the identified needs and gaps of participants and providers. The implementation plan will cover intermediary service provision, connecting students to work-based opportunities, expanding existing programs, expanding programs to additional schools, capital needs for classroom learning, identifying and connecting with employer partners, program marketing to students and parents, and marketing to boards of education. The outcome will be analysis and plans that provide each state with a guide to expand the reach of youth dual track programs.

**Adult/Postsecondary Contextualized Training**

We are seeking assistance with developing a needs assessment focused on best practices, system gaps, and needs. This process will start with a comprehensive inventory of current adult and postsecondary advanced manufacturing programs, ranging from entry-level credentialing programs, postsecondary degree programs and incumbent worker upskilling programs. Programs will range from entry-level credentialling programs, postsecondary degree programs, and incumbent worker upskilling programs to ensure multiple on-ramps into the sector.

The study will assess adult workforce development system gaps, if any, and then look at issues of scale and reach. The results of this study should lead to programs are that are large enough to meet the needs of employers, and broad enough to meet the needs of all potential students.

A critical need that has already been identified by stakeholders is capital purchases for existing programs, such as manufacturing labs in the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system and Massachusetts community colleges. A survey of capital needs will be performed in the planning phase to identify which programs are currently under resourced. This will focus primarily on ensuring that state of the art technology (industry 4.0) is available to existing programs.

This study will also include assessing faculty and facility capacity, as well as financial resources for students. It will also include an investigation into the possibility of developing a flexible workforce training fund. This would be a competitive fund that would be used to fulfill the expressed needs of individual companies or consortia of companies. Similar models are used in Rhode Island and Maryland.

Based on the needs assessment, an implementation plan will be developed. The implementation plan will be divided into a Connecticut section and a Massachusetts section.

**Parkville Innovation Hub**

We are seeking assistance to develop a financing and implementation plan. The first part is the financing plan, which will examine various financing models and potential public and private resources. These resources will form the basis for matching funds in Phase 2 of the project.

The second part is the final implementation plan, which will start with an assessment of existing resources in the broader region. This assessment will be coordinated with assessments being conducted in other component projects of this proposal. Where possible, existing programs will be utilized to avoid duplication of effort.

Following completion of the existing resource assessment, key details about the concept will be established. Some of the details include equipment needs, space needs, business support needs, and programming for workforce development services. These details will be developed in close coordination with existing service providers, regional stakeholders, and local stakeholders such as community groups.

# Minimum Qualifications

The following minimum qualifications must be present for a firm to be considered for award of a contract under this RFP:

1. All required licensures, registrations and certifications to do business in the State of Connecticut.
2. Experience working with public entities to provide planning and grant writing services.
3. Key personnel assigned to the contract must have more than ten (10) years’ experience in this industry.
4. Key personnel must have experience with federal grant reporting and procurement requirements.

# Budget

The expected budget for this project is as follows:

Preparation of the Phase 2 Grant Application: $25,000

Youth Dual Track Study: $55,000

Adult Contextualized Education Needs: $55,000

Business Innovation Support Services Plan: $70,000

Parkville Innovation Hub Financing and Implementation Plan: $70,000

# Preparing a Response

By submitting a response, respondents represent that they have thoroughly examined and become familiar with the scope of services outlined in this RFP and are capable of performing the work to achieve the objectives.

Proposals submitted in response to the RFP will be publicly available once a contract is executed or negotiations for the award of such contract have ended pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 1-210(b)(24). All documents that the proposer believes to be confidential trade secrets and/or commercial or financial information and except under the above statutes should be clearly marked as such to preserve the Freedom of Information Act exemption for confidential trade secrets pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (5)(A) and (5)(B).

CRCOG may provide reasonable accommodations, including the provision of informational material in an alternative format, for qualified prospective contractors with a disability. Prospective contractors requiring accommodation shall submit requests in writing, with supporting documentation justifying the accommodation, to CRCOG at the following address:

CRCOG

Re: Accommodation for RFP #2021-11-11

241 Main Street, 4th Floor

Hartford, CT 06106

Requests for accommodation must be received by the Deadline for Questions as listed on the cover page. CRCOG reserves the right to grant or reject any request for accommodation.

Respondents must submit electronic versions of all documents on CRCOG.BONFIREHUB.COM.

Electronic proposals are due **no later than the proposal due date and time listed on this coversheet. The clock which will be used for the submission deadline is the time on the Bonfire portal.**

## Questionnaire.

All vendors are required to fill out the questionnaire for this RFP. This questionnaire has 3 tabs that need to be completed:

* + Company Information.
  + Current Users and References: Submit five (5) current clients (Note: Government references are strongly preferred). If you have additional references you would like to submit, please submit it as a separate document under Relevant Experience.
  + Project Team. A list of three personnel who will be assigned to the contract. Please describe the roles and responsibilities of each team member.

## Project Understanding / Approach and Relevant Experience

This is a document the vendor should submit (pdf format, please). Describe in detail your understanding of the scope of services required and your firm's ability to provide the full spectrum of needs outlined in the Scope of Service as well as your firm’s relevant experience in fulfilling those needs. Describe in detail your approach to providing the desired services and highlight any relevant special services your firm provides that could be beneficial, particularly those that may not be offered by other firms. As part of your response, please specifically address:

* Experience in planning programs related to workforce training, program development and program implementation.
* Experience in grant writing
* what makes your firm uniquely qualified to provide the services described in this RFP.
* Include specific examples of how your firm has successfully customized similar solutions to serve the unique needs of municipalities or similar public agencies
* Please include client references for similar program planning, development, community engagement, analysis and studies for similar types of economic development/workforce development projects.

Note, if any work will be subcontracted out, please submit a **separate** document in this section that describes that work. For any subcontracting, please follow Federal requirements as detailed in CFR 200 Title 2 Part 200.

## Fee Proposal.

Respondents are required to submit an Excel spreadsheet (.xls or .xlsx). A template is not provided.

CRCOG reserves the right to negotiate fees and project scope with the successful respondent if it is deemed to be in the agency's best interest. All proposals submitted shall be considered valid for at least one hundred and twenty (120) days from the opening date.

Please note, alternate proposals will be accepted for this section.

## Insurance.

All respondents are required to submit, with their responses, a copy of the cover sheet from their insurance policy(ies) (or an equivalent piece of documentation) which demonstrates the firm’s current coverages and limits for General Liability, Automobile Liability, Professional Liability and Worker’s Compensation Insurance as appropriate for the project work required herein.

## Additional Required Data.

The vendor should also submit the following:

* + A statement accepting of all terms, conditions and requirements contained in the RFP. If you do not accept all terms, conditions and requirements, please submit a separate document that details an explanation.
  + Statement stating you are legally licensed/registered to do business in Connecticut.
  + Non-Collusion Certification: The company should certify that this RFP is being submitted without any collusion, communication or agreement as to any matter related to the RFP with any other respondent or competitor.

Responses must be submitted no later than the time and date outlined on the coversheet**.**  Responses should be submitted as outlined on the coversheet.

Any responses received after this date and time will not be considered.

# Questions

Questions shall be submitted only via CRCOG's bonfire portal at crcog.bonfirehub.com by **the time and date on the coversheet**. No oral interpretations shall be provided. Responses shall be posted as addenda at crcog.bonfirehub.com. It is the respondent’s responsibility to check the website for addenda prior to submission of any proposal.

Prospective contractors shall not attempt to communicate with, in writing, electronically or orally, any CRCOG official or employee other than the method listed in this section, above. Prospective contractors shall not contact any other CRCOG officials in an attempt to gather information regarding this RFP, or in an attempt to influence CRCOG’s consideration of its proposal. All inappropriate communications with CRCOG employees or officials will be forwarded to the proposal evaluation team. Inappropriate communications by a prospective contractor may, at the discretion of the evaluation team, constitute grounds for disqualification of that prospective contractor’s proposal. Alternatively, the evaluation team may, at its discretion, consider such inappropriate communications when evaluating and scoring proposals.

# RFP General Terms and Conditions

## Acceptance or Rejection by the Capitol Region Council of Governments

The CRCOG reserves the right to accept and or reject any or all proposals submitted for consideration or to negotiate separately in any manner necessary to serve the best interests of the CRCOG and its members. Respondents whose proposals are not accepted shall be notified in writing.

## Ownership of Proposals

All proposals submitted in response to this RFP are to be the sole property of CRCOG and shall be subject to the provisions of Section 1-210 of the Connecticut General Statutes (re: Freedom of Information).

## Changes to Proposals

No additions or changes to the original proposal will be allowed after submittal.

## Contract Requirements

A formal contractual arrangement will be entered into with the consultant, selected as per the CRCOG standard form of agreement. The contents of the proposal submitted by the successful respondent and the RFP will become part of any Contract award.

## Amending or Canceling Request

CRCOG reserves the right to amend or cancel this RFP, prior to the due date and time, if it is deemed to be in its best interest to do so.

## Waiver of Informalities

The Capitol Region Council of Governments reserves the right to accept or reject any and all responses to this Request for Proposals, or any part thereof, and to waive any informalities and/or technicalities that are deemed to be in its best interest.

## Collusion

By responding, the firm implicitly states: that his/her proposal has not been made in connection with any other competing firm submitting a separate response to this RFP; is in all respects fair; and has been submitted without collusion or fraud. It is further implied that the firm did not participate in the RFP development process, had no knowledge of the specific contents of the RFP before its issuance, and that no employee of CRCOG either directly or indirectly assisted in the vendor’s proposal preparation.

## Conflict of Interest

Each entity that enters into a contract with CRCOG is required, prior to entering into such a contract, to inform CRCOG of any real or apparent Organizational Conflict of Interest. See Exhibit A.

## Assigning/ Transferring of Agreement

Any successful firm is prohibited from assigning, transferring, conveying, subletting or otherwise disposing of the resulting agreement or its rights, title, or interest therein or its power to execute such an agreement to any other person, company or corporation without prior consent and approval in writing from CRCOG.

## Termination

CRCOG may terminate any contract(s) or any part of any contracts resulting from this process at any time for: cause, default or negligence on the part of the vendor; or if the vendor fails, in the opinion of the Agency, to meet the general terms and conditions of any resulting contract or to provide a level of service that is deemed to be in the best interest of the Agency.

## Severability

If any terms or provisions of this Request for Proposal shall be found to be illegal or unenforceable, then such term or provision shall be deemed stricken and the remaining portions of this document shall remain in full force and effect.

## Affirmative Action

The Towns participating in this RFP are equal opportunity employers and require an affirmative action policy from all contractors and vendors as a condition of doing business with the towns, as per Federal Order 11246. By signing the proposal sheet for this bid, all vendors and contractor agree to this condition of doing business with the towns and should the towns choose to audit their compliance, the vendor agrees to cooperate fully.

## Insurance Requirements

The Respondent shall, at its own expense and cost, obtain and keep in force during the entire transition and contract period the following insurance coverages covering the Respondent and all its agents, employees and sub-contractors and other providers of services, and shall name the Capitol Region Council of Governments and its employees and agents as an Additional Insured on a primary and non-contributory basis to the Respondent’s Commercial General Liability and Automobile Liability policies. These requirements shall be clearly stated in the remarks section on the Respondent’s Certificate of Insurance. In addition:

1. All policy forms shall be on the occurrence form.
2. Acceptable evidence of coverage will be on the ACORD form or a form with the same format.
3. All renewal certificates shall be furnished at least 10 days prior to policy expiration.
4. Each certificate shall contain a 30-day notice of cancellation.
5. Insurance shall be issued by an insurance company licensed to conduct business in the State of Connecticut which has at least an “A-“ policy holders rating according to Best Publications latest edition Key Rating Guide.

Required insurance coverage:

1. **Professional Liability Insurance** with limits up to $2,000,000 aggregate limit issued on claims made basis for the term of the contract and continuing for two years following the completion of the contract at the Vendor’s cost.
2. **Comprehensive General Liability Insurance:** Vendor shall, at its own cost and expense, obtain and keep in force during the Term of the Agreement general liability insurance with minimum limits of 1 million per occurrence/ 2 million aggregate and shall name the CRCOG and their respective officers, officials, employees, agents, boards, and commissions as Additional Insureds on a primary and non-contributory basis. There shall be no special limitations on the scope of protection afforded to the CRCOG. Vendor shall assume any and all deductibles in the described insurance policies and Vendor’s insurer shall have no right of recovery or subrogation against CRCOG. These requirements shall be clearly stated in the remarks section on Vendor’s Certificate of Insurance. Insurance shall be written with insurance carriers approved in the State of Connecticut and with a minimum Best’s Rating of A-and all deductibles, if any, are the sole responsibility of Vendor.
3. **Automobile Liability Insurance** including non-owned and hired vehicles in the same limits as indicated above.
4. **Workers' Compensation Insurance** at the Connecticut statutory limit including Employers' Liability with limits of $100,000 each accident, $500,000 for each disease/policy limit, and $100,000 for disease for each employee.
5. **Excess Liability Umbrella Form** over sections B, C, and D-Employers' Liability with limits up to $4,000,000.

## Hold Harmless and Indemnification

In addition to its obligation to provide insurance as specified above, the Vendor, its subcontractors, agents and assigns shall indemnify and hold harmless the Capitol Region Council of  Governments and its member municipalities, including but not limited to, its elected officials, and its  officers, from any and all claims made against the CRCOG, including but not limited to, damages, awards, costs and reasonable attorney’s fees, to the extent any such claim directly and proximately  results from the negligent acts, errors, or omissions in performance of services by the Vendor during the Vendor's performance of this Agreement or any other Agreements of the Vendor entered into by reason thereof.  CRCOG agrees to give the Vendor prompt notice of any such claim and absent a conflict of interest, an opportunity to control the defense thereof.

# RFP Evaluation and Selection Process

The following is a general description of the process by which a contractor will be selected for award of a contract to perform the services described in this RFP:

1. Request for Proposals (RFP) is released to prospective contractors.
2. All questions regarding this RFP, as well as the CRCOG's responses to the questions, will be posted as an addendum to the RFP.
3. All proposals must be received by CRCOG no later than the date and time specified on the cover sheet of this RFP. Late proposals will not be considered or reviewed.
4. Following the due date and time when proposals are due, the [submitted proposals will be downloaded from Bonfire. **The opening of the proposals is not open to prospective contractors or the public.**
5. CRCOG’s evaluation team expects to take the following actions to determine the merits of the proposals that are submitted:
   1. **Review of Proposals:** Review the proposals to determine whether they are responsive to the RFP and that they were submitted by responsible companies.
   2. **Evaluation of Proposals:** Proposals shall be evaluated by using the following criteria:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Element** | **Weighting** |
| Overall strength of proposal and experience | 10 |
| Project Understanding / Approach | 40 40 |
| Quality of References | 20 |
| Fee Proposal | 30 |
| Minimum Requirements Met | Pass/Fail |
| Non-Collusion Statement Answered as True | Pass/Fail |

* 1. **Selection:** Selection shall be made of one or more respondents deemed to be fully qualified and best suited among those submitting proposals on the basis of the evaluation factors included in the Request for Proposals.
  2. **Oral Presentation:** At the option of the evaluation team, the evaluators may request oral presentations by any number of the finalists for the purpose of clarification and amplification of the materials presented in any part of the proposal. The evaluators may also request best and final offers (BAFOs) from one or more prospective contractors. However, prospective contractors are cautioned that the evaluators are not required to invite oral presentations, request clarification, or conduct negotiations and may award a contract based on the original proposal. Therefore, all initial proposals should be complete and reflect the contractor’s most favorable terms.
  3. **Negotiation:** At the discretion of the evaluation team, negotiations shall be conducted with the respondent(s) so selected. After negotiations have been conducted with the respondent so selected, the CRCOG shall select the respondent which, in its opinion, has made the best proposal, and shall award the contract to that respondent if it so chooses.
  4. **Award or Non-Award:** Should CRCOG determine in its sole discretion that only one respondent is fully qualified, or that one respondent is clearly more highly qualified than the others under consideration, a contract may be negotiated and awarded to that respondent. The award document will be a contract incorporating by reference all the requirements, terms and conditions of the solicitation and the contractor’s proposal as negotiated. CRCOG reserves the unqualified right to reject any and all proposals when such rejection is deemed to be in its best interest.

##### **EXHIBIT A**

##### **Organizational Conflict of Interest Statement**

Each entity that enters into a contract with the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) is required, prior to entering into such contract, to inform CRCOG of any real or apparent Organizational Conflict of Interest (OCI).

An OCI exists when any of the following circumstances arise:

1. Lack of Impartiality or Impaired Objectivity. When the CONSULTANT *(proposer, bidder, etc.)* is unable, or potentially unable, to provide impartial and objective assistance or advice to CRCOG due to other activities, relationships, contracts, or circumstances.
2. Unequal Access to Information. The CONSULTANT has an unfair competitive advantage through obtaining access to nonpublic information during the performance of an earlier contract.
3. Biased Ground Rules. During the conduct of an earlier procurement, the CONSULTANT has established the ground rules for a future procurement by developing specifications, evaluation factors, or similar documents.

**Organizational Conflicts of Interest Prohibition and Non-Conflict Certification**

The CONSULTANT warrants that, to the best of his/her/its knowledge and belief, and except as otherwise disclosed, there are no relevant facts or circumstances, which could give rise to organizational conflicts of interest. The proposer agrees that, if after award, an organizational conflict of interest is discovered, an immediate and full disclosure in writing must be made to CRCOG, which must include a description of the action, which the CONSULTANT has taken or proposes to take to avoid or mitigate such conflicts. If an organizational conflict of interest is determined to exist, CRCOG may, at its discretion, cancel the contract award. In the event the CONSULTANT was aware of an organizational conflict of interest prior to the award of the contract and did not disclose the conflict to CRCOG, CRCOG may terminate the contract for default. The provisions of this clause must be included in all subcontracts for work to be performed similar to the service provided by the prime consultant, and the terms “contract” and “CONSULTANT” modified appropriately to preserve CRCOG’s rights.

**Organizational Conflict of Interest - Proposer’s Signature and Certification**

The undersigned on behalf of the CONSULTANT hereby certifies that the information contained in this certification is accurate, complete, and current.

Signature and Date

Title of Request for Qualifications

Typed or Printed Name

Title

Company Name and Address