**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**

**NCSER Crowdsourcing Campaign Support**

May 16, 2024

**General Information**

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) is the independent and non-partisan statistics, research, and evaluation arm of the U.S. Department of Education. Its mission is to provide scientific evidence on which to ground education practice and policy and to share this information in formats that are useful and accessible to educators, parents, policymakers, researchers and the public. Evidence on improving academic achievement is of particular interest to IES.

The U.S. is quickly approaching the 50-year anniversary of the first federal legislation to protect the education of students with disabilities (Public Law 94-142). It is long past time to take stock of how well special education is serving the needs of students with disabilities and their families. While we have some information about the challenges faced by these populations, the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) at IES seeks support for a crowdsourcing campaign to collect data, at a national level, on the current status of special education in this country. We seek to more fully understand how individuals with disabilities and their families have experienced special education, and their perspective on the pressing problems facing special education today. Answering such questions will provide essential information to NCSER as we examine the success of our funding to date and establish priorities for the Center moving forward. We also seek Contractor support to design and implement a challenge through Challenge.gov for the analysis of the information received through the crowdsourcing campaign using traditional qualitative methods or using more recent advances in machine learning such as natural language processing. An ancillary goal of this effort will be to raise the profile of almost 20 years of NCSER-funded research.

Only one order is anticipated to result from this RFQ, however, the Government reserves the right to modify or eliminate various aspects of the requirement determined to be too costly or impractical prior to award. The Government also reserves the right to withdraw this solicitation and make no award if it’s deemed in the best interest of the agency. The Government reserves the right to award without discussions.

**Period of Performance and Contract Type**

This is a combined synopsis/solicitation for commercial items and services prepared in accordance with the format in Subpart 12.6, as supplemented with additional information included in this notice. This announcement constitutes the only solicitation; proposals are being requested and a written solicitation will not be issued. The solicitation is being issued as a Request for Proposal. This notice and the incorporated provisions and clauses are those in effect through the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR).

The estimated period of performance for this order is from the time of award until September 30th, 2025. The anticipated date of award is June 30, 2024, with performance on the order to start no later than June 30, 2024. It is anticipated that this order shall be awarded as a performance-based firm fixed price contract.

**Specific Requirements**

Performance requirements for this task order are provided in the Performance Work Statement (PWS) attached to this RFP.

**Submission Instructions to Vendors**

The vendor is expected to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the proposed tasks and the existing resources, as specified in the Performance Work Statement (PWS). The proposal should address the requirements in the PWS, not simply repeat the language. The proposal should be written in enough detail so that a review panel can adequately judge its full merits.

Although the intent of each task is spelled out in the scope of work, it is up to the vendor to propose the most effective method for carrying out the tasks and the most feasible timeline and dates for all key activities. The vendor is encouraged to exercise independent judgment with respect to the best methods of attainingthe objectives of this task order. The proposal should address the requirements in the PWS, not simply repeat the language.

The vendor shall submit a single technical proposal that addresses the PWS. The technical proposal must be limited to a total of 25 double spaced pages. Any pages over 25 shall not be forwarded to the TEP for evaluation. The page limit excludes the cover page; table of contents; resumes (Appendix 1); and letters of commitment from subcontractors, partners, and key personnel (Appendix 2), if any. Contents of files must print on Letter 8 ½” by 11”. The technical proposal shall be submitted in MS Word or searchable PDF format. The proposal should be written in no smaller than 12-point font for text, 10-point font or larger for tables, and 10-point font or larger for graphics. Margins should be no smaller than 1 inch on all sides.

In Appendix 1, the vendor shall include resumes for all key personnel, including key personnel from subcontractors. Resumes should document directly related technical skills, educational background, professional certifications, positions held (dates), relevant work experience, and security clearance level (if applicable). Each resume must be limited to two (2) pages. The appendices may use any format and are not limited by the font and spacing restrictions of the technical proposal. If key personnel are unknown at the time of submission, a position description (including job duties, qualifications required, and selection criteria) shall be substituted for resumes and may be included in Appendix 1. The Project Director key personnel candidate must be known and submitted with the proposal. Appendix 2 should include letters of commitment from all proposed subcontractors, consultants, and key personnel not employed currently by the vendor. Letters of commitment must be signed by the submitted personnel. Letters from personnel not yet employed by the contractor must state that the personnel shall accept the position should the vendor be granted an award, and that all matters of salary and benefits have been negotiated and agreed upon prior to this submittal. By listing key personnel as part of the proposal, the Vendor is making a firm commitment to use said personnel to carry out the activities in the PWS.

No additional appendices are allowable. With the exception of experience and skills detailed in resumes, vendors shall not put substantive materials in the appendix in order to subvert the page limit.

The business proposal, which also includes the Conflict of Interest Plan, has no page limit. Price information must be submitted in MS Excel or a combination of MS Excel and MS Word/searchable PDF format. All mathematical/computational sections (proposed price/CLIN structure) of the business proposal shall be submitted in MS Excel. MS Excel files must print on either Letter 8 ½”by 11” or Legal size 8 ½” by 14”. Other pertinent information, including assumptions/contingencies utilized in developing pricing, basis of estimate narrative, terms and conditions, small business size status information, and conflict of interest plan, may be submitted in MS Word or a searchable PDF format, using the same formatting restrictions as the technical proposal.

The technical and business proposals shall be submitted as separate volumes. The technical and business proposal must be received at or before **10:00 AM EST on June 17, 2024**. Proposals received after the specified submission date and time will not be considered for award. Proposals shall be submitted electronically to the Points of Contact listed below:

* David Yadeta, Contract Specialist (David.Yadeta@ed.gov:)
* Tracey Perry, Contracting Officer (Tracey.Perry@ed.gov:)

The Department’s email system cannot handle emails larger than 20MB. Submissions should be broken up into separate emails if necessary. Electronic file names must not contain special characters (e.g. #, \*, ?, (, ), {, }, %, >, <, /, \, $, |). Quotations will not be accepted past the deadline if they are bounced back for surpassing the size limitation, so please allow enough time for submissions. A confirmation receipt will be sent from the Contract Specialist when the quotation is received.

All questions in response to this solicitation must be received at or before **10:00am EST on May 23, 2024,** questions submitted after this date and time will not be accepted. Questions shall be submitted electronically to the Points of Contact listed below:

* David Yadeta, Contract Specialist (David.Yadeta@ed.gov:)
* Tracey Perry, Contracting Officer (Tracey.Perry@ed.gov:)

Vendors shall submit questions in an MS Excel file following a format similar to the table below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Questions Format | | | |
| Question No. | Reference | Question Category | Question |
| *#* | *RFQ, PWS, or attachments, and Section* | *Contract or Technical* | *Question* |

Answers to submitted questions will be submitted to all vendors who were sent the solicitation via an RFQ amendment.

Failure to comply with the RFP requirements may result in the vendor being removed from the competition as the Department reserves the right to eliminate proposals that do not conform. Any exceptions to the solicitation’s terms and conditions must be fully explained and justified. Not all of the requirements identified in the solicitation will be evaluated as evaluation factors; however, the vendor’s entire proposal will be evaluated to ensure that all of the terms and conditions are met.

The proposal shall be submitted in the following volumes:

Volume I: Technical Approach

Volume II: Pricing

Each volume must be separate and complete in itself so that evaluation of one may be accomplished independently of the other. Price information must be restricted to the Price volume, and other volumes must not contain references to specific costs.

**Volume I: Technical Approach**

The technical proposal shall illustrate the vendor’s approach for satisfying the requirements contained in this solicitation. The technical proposal must be clear, coherent, and prepared in sufficient detail for effective evaluation of the vendor's quotation against the technical evaluation criteria. Proposals must clearly demonstrate how the vendor intends to accomplish the requirements and must include convincing rationale and substantiation of all claims. Vendors should not expect the technical evaluation panel to make assumptions or guesses; quotations must be detailed and not vague. The technical proposal must disclose the vendor’s technical approach in sufficient detail to provide a clear and concise presentation that includes, but is not limited to, the requirements outlined below.

Vendors shall follow the format and content requirements detailed below in preparing their technical proposals. The technical proposal shall consist of the sections outlined below.

**1. Table of Contents**

The proposal should include a Table of Contents as a means of quickly accessing important points of discussion in the proposal and identifying the authors of each section. This section does not count towards the page limit.

**2. Introduction**

The Introduction should briefly describe the vendor’s overall plan for achieving the objectives of this contract, the scope of work, intended products, and the applicability of these products to the objectives. Additionally, the introduction shall include a short summary of the vendor’s qualifications and unique strengths relevant to this activity. This section counts toward the page limit.

**3.** **Technical Approach**

The proposal shall demonstrate the Vendor’s understanding of all tasks to be performed in the Performance Work Statement (PWS), as well as the technical methodology that will be utilized in accomplishing any resultant award. The Vendor shall describe, in detail, its technical methodology and overall ability to perform the work of this order. This description shall identify potential and/or anticipated problems and risks and suggest proposed mitigation strategies or variations in the design of the work. The vendor should demonstrate a practical and clearly articulated approach that will ensure that the goals, objectives and requirements of the PWS will be successfully achieved.

Vendors are encouraged to suggest better, more efficient or more innovative ways to conduct this work than have been outlined in the PWS. Alternate approaches are welcomed and will be considered where they are determined to be advantageous to the government by increasing quality or reducing cost. Proposed approaches should ensure optional functionality, performance and reliability to enhance user experience.

The Vendor shall fully describe and justify significant differences from the approach suggested in the PWS and alternative strategies from those listed in the PWS. At the sole discretion of the Government, the Vendor’s proposed approach may be included in the contract. This section counts toward the page limit.

**4.** **Staffing Plan and Key Personnel**

The proposal shall describe the Vendor’s staffing approach for providing a team with the necessary expertise and experience to accomplish the PWS requirements. If applicable, the vendor may refine the function of a labor category to include specific skills needed to accomplish the PWS requirements.

The proposal shall describe the qualifications of key personnel, detailing their education, competencies, knowledge and experience in performing work that is similar to that outlined in the PWS, and describing their role in the project. The resumes and letters of commitment shall also support the description of the staffing plan and key personnel. If key personnel are unknown at the time of submission, a position description (including job duties, qualifications required, and selection criteria) should be substituted for resumes. The Project Director key personnel candidate must be known and submitted with the proposal. The Department reserves the right to review the resumes of key personnel to verify that they have sufficient expertise and qualifications for the work of the position. Instructions for submitting resumes and letters of commitment are listed under the “Submission Instructions to Vendors” section.

For this order, specific experience, skills and attributes include ability to support Federal challenges and demonstrates clear understanding of:

* Developing a problem statement and challenge design in collaboration with a Federal program office
* Conducting a landscape analysis to inform the challenge design
* Working with the Federal program office to develop challenge eligibility criteria, project criteria, and rules, terms, and conditions for publication in Challenge.gov
* Identifying appropriate subject matter experts as judges and avoiding conflict of interest with potential applicants. Subject matter experts serving as judges should have expertise in research as well as special education.
* Preparing the criteria and rules, terms, and conditions, and other challenge materials, for reviews by the Program Office.
* Developing and executing a communications plan to maximize the quantity and quality of challenge submissions.
* Managing the application process and review process including assisting applicants, screening for ineligible applications, and managing judging stage(s)
* Managing the award process including making recommendations to Federal program office of challenge winner(s), announcing challenge winner(s), and awarding prize(s) consistent with Federal requirements

The Vendor shall include specifics about the level of effort invested in the order by all key personnel proposed for this order. The vendor’s staffing approach should provide a clear indication that all tasks can be completed on time, and with a high level of quality. The staffing approach section shall not include any pricing information.

**Volume II: Price**

Offerors shall fill out and submit the attached Volume II - Price Template. In this worksheet, Contractors shall only input Price (column E) for each CLIN. All totals will be automatically calculated.

In addition to submitting the attached Volume II – Price Template, the contractor shall submit detailed pricing in the form of an Excel workbook. The detailed pricing must show the details of the prices proposed in the Volume II – Price Template and shall include individual labor rates, estimated labor hours, and associated PWS requirement(s) for each proposed employee. Detailed pricing shall also be provided for any partners or subcontractors. Partners and subcontractors may submit detailed pricing directly to the Contract Administrator and Contract Officer to avoid releasing proprietary pricing information.

The Government intends to award a contract without conducting discussions. Contractors are therefore encouraged to propose their best and final offer with their initial proposal. The Government reserves the right to conduct discussions after receipt of proposals if determined to be in the best interest of the Government.

**PROPOSAL SELECTION FACTORS/CRITERIA**

The Government intends to award a contract in response to the proposal that represents the best value to the Government.

**ATTACHMENTS**

**Attachment A – Performance Work Statement (PWS)**

**Attachment B – Price Template**

**Attachment C – Provisions and Clauses**