State of Minnesota

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

To Provide Services to Individuals in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Date Posted: February 12, 2024

The Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) requests applications from organizations and businesses to work as a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program Community Partner providing employment services for individuals with disabilities in the Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Program. The State anticipates issuing multiple contracts for this work. This is an ongoing solicitation through July 31, 2024.

Proposals for the initial evaluation period (21-day publication) must be received by 4:30 p.m., Monday, March 4, 2024. This Request for Proposals is an ongoing solicitation through July 31, 2024. This Request for Proposals will remain open on the DEED and Department of Administration Office of State Procurement (OSP) website. RFP responses are welcome beyond the initial evaluation period and will be considered on an as needed basis.

Completed Response and Application materials must be received by 4:30 p.m., July 31, 2024.

# Minnesota’s Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

The State of Minnesota is committed to diversity and inclusion in its public procurement process. The goal is to ensure that those providing goods and services to the State are representative of our Minnesota communities and include businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans, and those with substantial physical disabilities. Creating broader opportunities for historically under-represented groups provides for additional options and greater competition in the marketplace, creates stronger relationships and engagement within our communities, and fosters economic development and equality.

To further this commitment, the Department of Administration operates a program for Minnesota-based small businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans, and those with substantial physical disabilities. For additional information on this program, or to determine eligibility, please call 651-296-2600 or go to the Office of Equity in Procurement home page, at www.mn.gov/admin/oep.

# SPECIAL NOTICE

This is a request for proposal. It does not obligate the State of Minnesota to award a contract or complete the proposed program, and the State reserves the right to cancel this solicitation (“Solicitation”) if it is considered in its best interest.

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# SECTION 1 – INSTRUCTIONS TO RESPONDERS

## Steps for Completing Your Response and Application

Follow the steps below to complete your response to this Solicitation:

* Step 1: Read the Solicitation documents and ask questions, if any.
* Step 2: Write your response and complete the application materials.
* Step 3: Submit your response and application materials.

## Incomplete Submittals

The response and application must be submitted along with any required additional documents. Incomplete responses and applications that materially deviate from the required format and content may be rejected.

## STEP 1 – READ THE SOLICITATION DOCUMENT AND ASK QUESTIONS, IF ANY

### How to Ask Questions

* The contact person for questions is Lori Thorpe (“Solicitation Administrator”): Lori.Thorpe@state.mn.us.
* Please submit questions regarding the RFP via email to Lori.Thorpe@state.mn.us.
* Please use the email subject line *“VRS RFP Question: [Organization Name].*”
* Questions submitted before 12:00 p.m. on February 20, 2024 will be answered via web posting, found under the VRS RFP section of DEED’s Competitive Grants and Contracts webpage at <https://mn.gov/deed/about/contracts/open-rfp.jsp>.
* Questions received after 12:00 p.m. on February 20, 2024 will be posted to the VRS RFP section of DEED’s Competitive Grants and Contracts webpage found at <https://mn.gov/deed/about/contracts/open-rfp.jsp> on a timely basis.
* VRS will also send an email notice to the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Community Partner email list serve when questions and answers are posted. To be added to the email list serve, please [Subscribe to the VRS Community Partner and VRS Stakeholder listserv.](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNDEED/subscriber/new?topic_id=MNDEED_447)
* DEED staff other than the Solicitation Administrator are not authorized to answer questions regarding this Solicitation.

## STEP 2 – WRITE YOUR RESPONSE AND COMPLETE YOUR APPLICATION

The Proposal Content section is in Section 4.

Prepare a written response and complete application materials using attachments noted in Section 4 and supply all requested content. The response and application must address the requested information and documents detailed in Section 4.

DO NOT INCLUDE Non-Public/Trade Secret data (as defined by Minn. Stat. § 13.37).

RFP Responses must include all required attachments listed below. The attachments are available on the Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) RFP section of DEED’s Competitive Grants and Contracts webpage found at [mn.gov/deed/about/contracts/open-rfp.jsp](https://mn.gov/deed/about/contracts/open-rfp.jsp).

Review and sign attachments for submission.

## STEP 3 –SUBMIT YOUR RESPONSE AND APPLICATION

### Instructions for the Response and Application

A complete proposal includes all Attachments A, B, C, D, and E and other documentation outlined in Attachment A.

* Attachment A: Application
* Attachment B: Responder Declarations – completed and signed
* Attachment C: Exceptions to State Terms and Conditions – completed and signed
* Attachment D: Cost Detail MUST be separate from the Attachment A
* Attachment E: Workforce and Equal Pay Declaration – completed and signed
* Other documentation required
* After completing the online web-based forms, please send an email to Lori.Thorpe@state.mn.us with the subject line: *“RFP Response and Application [Name of Organization].”*

### Deadlines

* Proposals for initial evaluation period must be received by 4:30 p.m., Monday, March 4, 2024.
* This Request for Proposals is an ongoing solicitation. This Request for Proposals will remain open on the DEED and Department of Administration Office of State Procurement (OSP) website. RFP responses are welcome beyond the initial evaluation period and will be considered on an as needed basis.

Proposals must be received by 4:30 p.m., July 31, 2024.

By submitting the response and application, the responder is making a binding legal offer for the period of time set forth below in Section 6, Conditions of Offer.

THIS IS AN ONGOING SOLICITATION. This Solicitation will remain open on the Department of Employment and Economic Development (“DEED”) and Department of Administration, Office of State Procurement (“OSP”) website. Responses received after the initial evaluation period (21-day publication) will be reviewed in accordance with the Solicitation and awarded based on the State’s needs.

All costs incurred in responding to this RFP will be borne by the Responder.

# SECTION 2 – SUMMARY OF SCOPE

## Project Overview and Goals

The Department of Employment and Economic Development (“DEED”) requests applications (“Applications”) to provide job-related services to individuals who are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services (“VRS”).

It is the goal of this project that individuals with disabilities served by VRS have available to them community resources that DEED will purchase on their behalf, so they may achieve vocational and personal independence. An important aspect of this project is to have a qualified contractor pool to provide services throughout the state of Minnesota.

Responders who are accredited through The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (“CARF”), an international accreditation body, which promotes the quality, value, and optimal outcomes of services through a consultative accreditation process and continuous improvement services, can respond under Section 4 using Application, Option 1.

Responders who are not accredited through CARF can apply as a limited use vendor (“LUV”) under Section 4 using Application, Option 2.

An executed contract awarded under this RFP is not a guarantee of any number of work authorizations and thus not a guarantee of any amount of funding. Work authorizations to a contractor are determined by the service needs of an individual in the VRS program, as assessed by the individual and VRS personnel, and by the individual’s choice of a service provider. To make an informed choice about who their service provider will be, an individual has access to the entire list of Community Partners to choose from. VRS personnel can assist individuals in making informed choices by providing individuals information about Community Partners and their service availability, geographic service area, and other pertinent factors. This informed choice process is required by federal law, federal regulation, and federal sub-regulatory guidance.

This Request for Proposals (“RFP”) will result in multiple contracts awarded to qualified Responders, also known as applicants, in order to meet the State’s needs.

## Sample Tasks and Deliverables

The successful Responder will work closely with DEED’s VRS personnel in providing services, which are part of the individual’s employment plan. For more detailed information regarding the services to be provided under each category, please review the website: Contracted Services / Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (mn.gov) (<https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/partners/guide/contracted-services/>). Please note the list of services under each category is not all encompassing but rather an example of services that may be requested.

The main tasks the successful Responder(s) (“Contractor”) will perform under the resulting contract, include but are not limited to:

* **Job-Related Services**
* *Informational Interview:* An informal conversation with someone working in a career area/job that interests the person, who will give them information and advice. It is not a job interview, and the objective is not to find job openings.
* *Job Coaching:* Employment supports/job coaching for short-term job supports, training, and consultation to the individual and the business to facilitate successful competitive-integrated employment. Job coaching services may be provided to any individual needing more intensive services.
* *Job Placement and Follow-Up Services Under a Performance Based Agreement:* Identifies and develops job opportunities, assists with creating and updating resumes, completing job applications, preparing for job interviews, completing cover and thank you letters, providing on-site job analysis, assisting employers to identify and eliminate barriers to both competitive-integrated employment and to the advancement of individuals with disabilities.
* *Job Seeking Skills Training:* Provide group or individual counseling or training or both regarding the techniques to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in, or regain competitive integrated employment.
* *Job Shadow:* Job Shadowing Opportunities for individuals to observe different jobs and ask businesses questions about the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to perform the tasks involved in the job.
* *Job Tryout:* Short-term work experience allowing an individual the opportunity to demonstrate to an employer their capacity to effectively perform job tasks within an existing position with the employer. There must be a job opening at the employer, with the possibility of being hired.
* *On-the-Job Evaluation:* Used to determine a specific job goal. On-the-Job Evaluations is a short-term work experience that provides the opportunity for the individual and VRS personnel to evaluate the suitability of a particular career or occupational area of interest.
* **Pre-Employment Transition Services**
	+ Provide experiential work activities assisting youth transitioning from high school and transition programs, and other vocational services to individuals potentially eligible and eligible with a disability.
* **Benefits Services**
	+ Benefit planning and coaching services: Identify benefit and financial concerns and assist with resolving issues.
* **Post-Secondary Supports**
	+ Assist a VRS individual who is currently enrolled or exploring possible post-secondary or training program.
* **Rehabilitation (Assistive) Technology Services**
	+ Rehabilitation (assistive) technology and training to address the use of rehabilitation technology for the individual with a disability and their support system to allow the individual to become independent and successful in a particular environment.
	+ Rehabilitation Technology Assessment/Consult accesses the individual’s unique needs for rehabilitation technology use and support that will allow an individual with a disability to perform a task in environments including education, employment, transportation, independent living, and recreation. Examples of areas that can be assessed for rehabilitation technology: transportation, handwriting, reading, written expression, communication, mobility, seating and positioning, vision, hearing, computer access, recreation, and self-care.
* **Small Business Services**
	+ Consultation on a specific topic or problem that the entrepreneur is finding. Market research, what is the competition in the area, transcribing the business plan, cost benefits analysis and (SWOT analysis). Identify the necessary startup costs for the small business including a consultation on how to complete the required financial documents.
* **Social Coaching Services**
	+ Social coaching refers to specific, time-limited training and techniques that assists individuals with social communication disorders such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, to improve their understanding of social communicating, and form stronger relationships with co-workers and others.
* **Training Services**
	+ Driver’s Training/License Preparation and Training as an Accommodation: Provide accommodations and supports to an individual to increase their success in passing the driver’s permit test or the driver’s license road test. These services are only for the additional training time or supports required by the individual due to their disability which are beyond the typical preparation and training involved in obtaining a driver’s license.
	+ Transportation Training/Public Transportation Training: Arrange and provide opportunities for exploring public transportation options and learning how to access and safely use public transportation. May include training on reading schedules, assistance filling out para-transit applications, contacting transportation providers to arrange service, and how to access disability accommodations, as well as physical skill practice time on public transportation.
	+ Employee Development Services: Individualized services designed to help a person achieve competitive, integrated employment.
* **Independent Living Services**
	+ Training services individually designed to improve or maintain the ability of individuals to live as independently as possible in the community.
* **Other Provider Services**
	+ Intake: Schedule meeting(s) with service provider, individual and VRS staff to discuss the goals and parameters of the service. VRS will complete the VRS Referral Form. Providers are expected to come prepared with their paperwork packet complete. VRS staff are present to support the individual and provide guidance and expectations for the service. VRS staff will create authorizations based on decisions made at intake for the provider.

All services performed will require report(s) to be submitted to VRS personnel, which must include at a minimum a description of services provided, and the actual dates services were provided. Depending on the services provided additional information on the final service report(s) may be required. The report process is outlined on the Billing section of the VR Program Community Partner Guide website: <https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/partners/guide/contracted-services/billing/>.

# SECTION 3 – PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## Anticipated Contract Term

The term of this contract is anticipated to be from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2026, for Limited Use Vendors (“LUVs”). For Community Rehabilitation Partners (“CRPs”), the contract may be extended for up to one (1) additional year, in increments as determined by the State, through a duly executed amendment.

This RFP does not obligate the State to award a contract or complete the project, and the State reserves the right to cancel the Solicitation if it is considered to be in its best interest.

## Question and Answer Instructions

All questions should be submitted to the Solicitation Administrator listed in Section 1, Instructions to Responders. The State is not obligated to answer questions submitted. The questions and answers will be posted to the VRS RFP section of DEED’s Competitive Grants and Contracts webpage found at <https://mn.gov/deed/about/contracts/open-rfp.jsp>.

Only personnel listed above are authorized to discuss this Solicitation with Responders. Contact regarding this Solicitation with any personnel not listed above could result in disqualification. This provision is not intended to prevent Responders from seeking guidance from state procurement assistance programs regarding general procurement questions.

If a Responder discovers any significant ambiguity, error, conflict, discrepancy, omission, or other deficiency in the Solicitation, please immediately notify the contact person detailed above in writing of such error and request modification or clarification of the document.

# SECTION 4 – PROPOSAL CONTENT AND application REQUIREMENTS

Responders must submit the following information:

* **Attachment A: Application**
	+ Submit one (1) completed and signed Application via web-based form: <https://deedmn.formstack.com/forms/vrs_community_partner_application>. All questions within a category must be answered.
	+ A current organizational chart.
	+ Select Option 1 or Option 2 below when completing the Application.
		- ***Option 1:***CARF Accreditation. If Responder is CARF Accredited proof of current CARF Accreditation should be submitted with area(s) for which accreditation is granted.
		- ***Option 2:*** Limited Use Vendor (Not CARF Accredited). The following are required:
			* **References**. Two (2) written professional letters of reference for the organization are required as outlined in the Application. Submit two (2) completed references including company name and contact information.
				+ The professional letters of recommendation should serve as evidence that your agency has experience and skills in serving individuals who experience disability.
				+ Examples of who can provide letters of recommendation include individuals served, guardians, county waiver case managers, VRS field staff your organization has worked with, professional network members, school staff, etc.
	+ **Resume (s)**. Responder should provide an outline of background and experience. Resumes or other information about personnel should not, if possible, contain personal telephone numbers, home addresses, or home email addresses. If it is necessary to include personal contact information, please clearly indicate in the response that personal contact information is being provided.
		- **Staff Resumes:** If you are applying to provide a service with a specific credentialing requirement: submit staff resumes for those staff providing the service with a credential requirement and certification documentation if noted (for CRPs and LUVs)
	+ **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.** Responder shall hire, train, and make available qualified personnel that commit to perform and administer VRS in a manner that is culturally informed and affirming of the lived experience of persons served under the awarding contract. Responder has committed to such statement in the application.
* **Attachment B: Responder Declarations, completed and signed to be emailed to Lori.Thorpe@state.mn.us.**
* **Attachment C: Exceptions to State Terms and Conditions, completed and signed to be emailed to Lori.Thorpe@state.mn.us.**
* **Attachment D: Cost Detail.** Complete and submit Attachment D, “Cost Detail,” via web-based form: <https://deedmn.formstack.com/forms/vrs_rfp_response_attachment_d_cost_detail>
	+ In addition, Responder must certify its willingness to accept the reimbursement rates for performance-based agreements found PBA Services section of the VR Program Community Partner Guide at <https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/partners/guide/contracted-services/services/pba/>.
* **Attachment E: Workforce and Equal Pay Declaration, completed and signed to be emailed to Lori.Thorpe@state.mn.us.**

DO NOT INCLUDE Non-Public/Trade Secret data (as defined by Minn. Stat. § 13.37).

# SECTION 5 – EVALUATION PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA

The State will conduct an evaluation of responses to this Solicitation. The evaluations will be conducted in three phases:

* Phase 1 - Review responses for responsiveness and pass/fail requirements
* Phase 2 - Evaluate responses
* Phase 3 - Select finalist(s)

## Phase 1 – Responsiveness and Pass/Fail Requirements

The purpose of this phase is to determine if each response complies with mandatory requirements. The State will first review each proposal for responsiveness to determine if the Responder satisfies all mandatory requirements. The State will evaluate these requirements on a pass/fail basis.

### Mandatory Requirements.

The following will be considered on a pass/fail basis:

* **Attachment A: Application Materials:**  Submit one (1) Attachment A: Application. All questions within a category must be answered for the Application to be considered complete.
* **Attachment B: Responder Declarations, completed and signed to be emailed to Lori.Thorpe@state.mn.us.**
* **Attachment C: Exceptions to State Terms and Conditions, completed and signed to be emailed to Lori.Thorpe@state.mn.us.**
* **Attachment D: Cost Detail.** Complete and submit Attachment D, “Cost Detail,” via web-based form: <https://deedmn.formstack.com/forms/vrs_rfp_response_attachment_d_cost_detail>
	+ In addition, Responder must certify its willingness to accept the reimbursement rates for performance-based agreements found PBA Services section of the VR Program Community Partner Guide at <https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/partners/guide/contracted-services/services/pba/>.
* **Attachment E: Workforce and Equal Pay Declaration, completed and signed to be Emailed**

## Phase 2 - Evaluate Responses

Only those responses found to have met Phase 1 criteria will be considered in Phase 2.

The factors and weighting on which responses will be evaluated are:

* Application
	+ Competitive Integrated Employment: 30 points
	+ Qualifications and Experience: 30 points
	+ References: 20 points
* Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: 10 points
* Cost Detail: 10 points
* Total: 100 points

## Phase 3 - Select Finalist(s)

Only those responses that have been evaluated under Phase 2 shall be eligible for Phase 3.

The State will make its selection based on best value, as determined by this evaluation process. The State reserves the right to pursue negotiations on any exception taken to the State’s standard terms and conditions. In the event that negotiated terms cannot be reached, the State reserves the right to terminate negotiations and begin negotiating with the next highest scoring Responder or take other actions as the State deems appropriate. If the State anticipates multiple awards, the State reserves the right to negotiate with more than one Responder.

# SECTION 6 – SOLICITATION TERMS

1. **Competition in Responding**
	* The State desires open and fair competition. Questions from Responders regarding any of the requirements of the Solicitation must be submitted in writing to the Solicitation Administrator listed in the Solicitation. If changes are made the State will issue an addendum.
	* Any evidence of collusion among Responders in any form designed to defeat competitive responses will be reported to the Minnesota Attorney General for investigation and appropriate action.
2. **Addenda to the Solicitation**
	* Changes to the Solicitation will be made by addendum with notification and posted in the same manner as the original Solicitation. Any addenda issued will become part of the Solicitation.
3. **Data Security - Foreign Outsourcing of Work is Prohibited**
	* All storage and processing of information shall be performed within the borders of the United States. This provision also applies to work performed by subcontractors at all levels.
4. **Joint Ventures**
	* The State allows joint ventures among groups of Responders when responding to the Solicitation. However, one Responder must submit a response on behalf of all the others in the group. The Responder that submits the response will be considered legally responsible for the response (and the contract, if awarded).
5. **Withdrawing Response**
	* A Responder may withdraw its response prior to the due date and time of the Solicitation. For Solicitations in the SWIFT Supplier Portal, a Responder may withdraw its response from the SWIFT Supplier Portal. For Solicitations done any other way, a Responder may withdraw its response by notifying the Solicitation Administrator in writing of the desire to withdraw.
	* After the due date and time of this Solicitation, a Responder may withdraw a response only upon showing that an obvious error exists in the response. The showing and request for withdrawal must be made in writing to Solicitation Administrator within a reasonable time and prior to the State’s detrimental reliance on the response.
6. **Rights Reserved**
	* The State reserves the right to:
		+ Reject any and all responses received.
		+ Waive or modify any informalities, irregularities, or inconsistencies in the responses received.
		+ Negotiate with the highest scoring Responder[s].
		+ Terminate negotiations and select the next response providing the best value for the State.
		+ Consider documented past performance resulting from a State contract may be considered in the evaluation process.
		+ Short list the highest scoring Responders.
		+ Require Responders to conduct presentations, demonstrations, or submit samples.
		+ Interview key personnel or references.
		+ Request a best and final offer from one or more Responders.
		+ The State reserves the right to request additional information.
		+ The State reserves the right to use estimated usage or scenarios for the purpose of conducting pricing evaluations. The State reserves the right to modify scenarios, and to request or add additional scenarios for the evaluation.
7. **Samples and Demonstrations**
	* Upon request, Responders are to provide samples to the State at no charge. Except for those destroyed or mutilated in testing, the State will return samples if requested and at the Responder’s expense. All costs to conduct and associated with a demonstration will be the sole responsibility of the Responder.
8. **Responses are Nonpublic during Evaluation Process**
	* All materials submitted in response to this Solicitation will become property of the State. During the evaluation process, all information concerning the responses submitted will remain private or nonpublic and will not be disclosed to anyone whose official duties do not require such knowledge. Responses are private or nonpublic data until the completion of the evaluation process as defined by Minn. Stat. § 13.591. The completion of the evaluation process is defined as the State having completed negotiating a contract with the selected Responder. The State will notify all Responders in writing of the evaluation results.
9. **Trade Secret Information**
	* Responders must not submit as part of their response trade secret material, as defined by Minn. Stat. § 13.37.
	* In the event trade secret data are submitted, Responder must defend any action seeking release of data it believes to be trade secret, and indemnify and hold harmless the State, its agents and employees, from any judgments awarded against the State in favor of the party requesting the data, and any and all costs connected with that defense.
	* The State does not consider cost or prices to be trade secret material, as defined by Minn. Stat. § 13.37.
	* A Responder may present and discuss trade secret information during an interview or demonstration with the State, if applicable.
10. **Conditions of Offer**
	* Unless otherwise approved in writing by the State, Responder’s cost proposal and all terms offered in its response that pertain to the completion of professional and technical services and general services will remain firm for 180 days, until they are accepted or rejected by the State, or they are changed by further negotiations with the State prior to contract execution.
11. **Award**
	* Any award that may result from this Solicitation will be based upon the total accumulated points as established in the Solicitation. The State reserves the right to award this Solicitation to a single Responder, or to multiple Responders, whichever is in the best interest of the State, providing each Responder is in compliance with all terms and conditions of the Solicitation. The State reserves the right to accept all or part of an offer, to reject all offers, to cancel the Solicitation, or to re-issue the Solicitation, whichever is in the best interest of the State.
12. **Requirements Prior to Contract Execution**
	* Prior to contract execution, a Responder receiving a contract award must comply with any submittal requests. A submittal request may include, but is not limited to, a Certificate of Insurance.