

State of Nebraska
REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

RETURN TO:

Nebraska Department of Education
500 S. 84th Street
2nd Floor
Lincoln, NE 68510-2295
Phone: (402) 471-3644

SOLICITATION NUMBER	RELEASE DATE
RFI NDERFI230816	8/31/2023
OPENING DATE AND TIME	PROCUREMENT CONTACT
9/29/2023, 2:00 p.m. Central Time	Lindy Foley

This form is part of the specification package and must be signed in ink and returned, along with information documents, by the opening date and time specified.

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY!

SCOPE OF SERVICE

The State of Nebraska (State), Nebraska Department of Education, Vocational Rehabilitation (Nebraska VR) is issuing this Request for Information (RFI) NDERFI230816 for the purpose of gathering information to complete Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation's (VR) comprehensive statewide needs assessment. The CSNA is designed to satisfy requirements in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and produce useful and timely information.

Written questions are due no later than September 11, 2023, and should be submitted via e-mail to nde.procurement@nebraska.gov. Email is to be titled: "NDERFI230816". Written questions may also be sent by email to: nde.procurement@nebraska.gov

Vendor should electronically submit one (1) original of the entire proposal (in PDF format) to nde.procurement@nebraska.gov. RFI responses should be submitted by the proposal due date and time

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I. SCOPE OF THE REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

The State of Nebraska, Department of Education (NDE) Vocational Rehabilitation (Nebraska VR), is issuing this Request for Information, NDERFI230816 for the purpose of gathering information to completion of a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). The CSNA is designed to satisfy requirements in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and produce useful and timely information. A detailed description of CSNA and its requirements by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) can be found at the following website [VR Needs Assessment Guide](#).

ALL INFORMATION PERTINENT TO THIS REQUEST FOR INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND ON THE INTERNET AT: <http://das.nebraska.gov/materiel/purchasing.html>

A. SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

The State expects to adhere to the tentative procurement schedule shown below. It should be noted, however, that some dates are approximate and subject to change.

	ACTIVITY	DATE/TIME
1	Release Request for Information	08/31/2023
2	Last day to submit written questions	9/11/2023
3	State responds to written questions through Request for Information "Addendum" and/or "Amendment" to be posted to the internet at: http://das.nebraska.gov/materiel/purchasing.html	9/18/2023
4	RFI opening call Zoom link: https://educationne.zoom.us/j/98926423590	9/29/2023 2:00 PM Central Time
5	Conduct oral interviews/presentations and/or demonstrations (if required)	To be Determined

II. RFI RESPONSE PROCEDURES

A. OFFICE AND CONTACT PERSON

Responsibilities related to this Request for Information reside with the State Purchasing Bureau. The point of contact for the RFI is as follows:

Name: Lindy Foley
Agency: Nebraska Dept of Education, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
Address: 500 South 84th, 2nd Floor (physical address)
Lincoln, NE 68510-2611

Telephone: 402-471-3644
E-Mail: NDE.Procurement@Nebraska.gov

B. GENERAL INFORMATION

A subsequent Request for Proposal (RFP) may not be issued as a result of this RFI. There will not be a contract as a result of this RFI and the State is not liable for any cost incurred by vendors in replying to this RFI. If an RFP is issued, the information provided will assist the State of Nebraska in developing the Request for Proposal. This RFI does not obligate the State to reply to the RFI responses, to issue an RFP, or to include any RFI provisions or responses provided by vendors in any RFP.

C. COMMUNICATION WITH STATE STAFF

From the date the Request for Information is issued and until RFI opening (as shown in the Schedule of Events), contact regarding this RFI between potential vendors and individuals employed by the State should be restricted to written communication with the staff designated above as the point of contact for this Request for Information.

The following exceptions to these restrictions are permitted:

1. Written communication with the person(s) designated as the point(s) of contact for this Request for Information;
2. contacts made pursuant to any pre-existing contracts or obligations; and
3. State-requested presentations, key personnel interviews, clarification sessions, or discussions.

Violations of these conditions may be considered sufficient cause to reject a vendor's response to the RFI. No individual member of the State, employee of the State, or member of the Interview Committee is empowered to make binding statements regarding this RFI. The State of Nebraska will issue any clarifications or opinions regarding this RFI in writing.

D. WRITTEN QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Any explanation desired by a vendor regarding the meaning or interpretation of any Request for Information provision should be submitted in writing to the Nebraska Department of Education – Vocational Rehabilitation and clearly marked "RFI Number NDERFI230816; Nebraska VR Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment Questions". It is preferred that questions be sent via e-mail to NDE.Procurement@Nebraska.gov.

It is recommended that Bidders submit questions sequentially numbered, include the RFI reference and page number using the following format.

<u>Question Number</u>	<u>RFI Section Reference</u>	<u>RFI Page Number</u>	<u>Question</u>

Written answers will be provided through an addendum to be posted on the Internet at <http://das.nebraska.gov/materiel/purchasing.html> on or before the date shown in the Schedule of Events.

E. ORAL INTERVIEWS/PRESENTATIONS AND/OR DEMONSTRATIONS

The Review Committee(s) may conclude that oral interviews/presentations and/or demonstrations are required. All vendors may not have an opportunity to interview/present and/or give demonstrations. The presentation process will allow the vendors to demonstrate their RFI offering, explaining and/or clarifying any unusual or significant elements related to their response.

Any cost incidental to the oral interviews/presentations and/or demonstrations shall be borne entirely by the vendor and will not be compensated by the State.

F. SUBMISSION OF RESPONSE

The following describes the requirements related to the RFI submission, handling, and review by the State.

To facilitate the response review process, one (1) original of the entire RFI response should be submitted. RFI responses should be submitted by the RFI due date and time.

A separate sheet must be provided that clearly states which sections have been submitted as proprietary or have copyrighted materials. RFI responses should reference the request for information number and be sent to the specified address. Please note that the address label should appear as specified on the face of each container. If a recipient phone number is required for delivery purposes, 402-471-3644 should be used. The Request for Information number must be included in all correspondence.

G. PROPRIETARY INFORMATION

Data contained in the response and all documentation provided therein, become the property of the State of Nebraska and the data become public information upon opening the response. If the vendor wishes to have any information withheld from the public, such information must fall within the definition of proprietary information contained within Nebraska's public record statutes. All proprietary information the vendor wishes the state to withhold must be submitted in a sealed package, which is separate from the remainder of the response. The separate package must be clearly marked PROPRIETARY on the outside of the package. Vendor may not mark their entire Request for Information as proprietary. Failure of the vendor to follow the instructions for submitting proprietary and copyrighted information may result in the information being viewed by other vendors and the public. Proprietary information is defined as trade secrets, academic and scientific research work which is in progress and unpublished, and other information which if released would give advantage to business competitors and serve no public purpose (see Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-712.05(3)). In accordance with Attorney General Opinions 92068 and 97033, vendors submitting information as proprietary may be required to prove specific, named competitor(s) who would be advantaged by release of the information and the specific advantage the competitor(s) would receive. Although every effort will be made to withhold information that is properly submitted as proprietary and meets the State's definition of proprietary information, the State is under no obligation to maintain the confidentiality of proprietary information and accepts no liability for the release of such information.

H. REQUEST FOR INFORMATION OPENING

The sealed responses will be publicly opened and the responding entities announced on the date, time, and location shown in the Schedule of Events. Responses will be available for viewing by those present after the opening. Vendors may also contact the state to schedule an appointment for viewing RFI responses.

III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND SCOPE OF WORK

The bidder should provide the following information in response to this Request for Information.

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation (Nebraska VR) requests proposals for the completion of a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA). The CSNA is designed to satisfy requirements in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and produce useful and timely information. A detailed description of CSNA and its requirements by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) can be found at the following website: [VR Needs Assessment Guide](#).

The objectives of Nebraska VR are:

- Complete a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) for Nebraska VR;
- Ensure the Needs Assessment follows all relevant federal guidelines ([34 CFR Parts 361-397](#)), specifically [34 CFR Part 361.29](#);
- Have preliminary data from the CSNA 2023 to Nebraska VR by November 30, 2023. The final report is due December 15, 2023.

The CSNA will require analytical fact finding and the understanding of services provided to individuals who experience a disability. The CSNA will be available to all agencies, agency partners, and the general public. The work will include the total geographic area of the State of Nebraska. This 2023 assessment will assist Nebraska VR in evaluating its priorities and establishing an action plan to guide future rehabilitation program development including the development of the Combined State Plan for Nebraska's Workforce System.

The contractor will use existing survey questions to collect perceptual data from the following groups: students with disabilities and their families, providers, VR clients, staff, and stakeholders.

B. CURRENT BUSINESS PRACTICES

The last CSNA was completed in 2019. Nebraska VR studied the findings with its internal and external stakeholders to develop goals and strategies included in the state's [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) 2020-2024 combined state plan.

C. CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

Since the 2019 needs assessment Nebraska VR has eliminated the wait list for services and questions related to Order of Selection and wait list management are no longer applicable. The agency no longer has a hiring freeze in place and has made significant investments in filling vacant positions throughout the state. As a result, it is anticipated the results of this assessment will lead to forward-looking innovations to further enhance VR services in Nebraska.

D. SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Nebraska VR is an employment program for people who experience a disability. Everything Nebraska VR does and all of the services it provides are for the purpose of helping people with disabilities prepare for, find and/or keep a job. The program is voluntary and the services provided will be specific to an individual's needs. Nebraska VR serves all disability groups with the exception of those who are blind or visually impaired. These individuals are served by

the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Nebraska VR is a state-federal vocational rehabilitation program that operates in all 50 states. Each year, Nebraska VR works with more than 6,000 of Nebraska residents with disabilities, and, last year, 1887 of those residents successfully entered the workforce.

Adults with Disabilities

To qualify for VR services an individual must demonstrate:

- Impairment: there must be a diagnosed impairment. Another word for this is disability. This could be some type of physical, mental, emotional or learning disability.
- Impediment to employment: VR must be able to show that the impairment has caused the individual some problems in past employment, current employment or would cause some problems preparing for and getting employment in the future.
- Benefit: VR must be able to show that VR services would help the individual obtain successful employment.
- Required services: VR services must be needed for the potential client to reach successful employment.

Eligibility requirements are applied without regard to gender, race, age, color, or national origin. There is no upper or lower age limit for any person who otherwise meets the basic eligibility criteria. A prospective client must be present in the State of Nebraska and be one of the following:

- a US citizen
- a permanent resident that possesses an Alien Registration Card (Green Card)
- a non-citizen who is authorized to work by the US Department of Homeland Security.

Once eligibility has been determined, VR helps its clients explore work interests, work values, work preferences, work considerations, education and training, job skills, job history and support network to help determine an appropriate job goal and plan to reach that goal.

Students with Disabilities and their Families

Nebraska VR has staff who work with all high schools throughout the state. The agency has a strong commitment to partner with education officials to serve students with disabilities and their families. To meet the employment needs of students with disabilities, Nebraska VR provides pre-employment transition services which include:

- Job Exploration Counseling
- Workplace Readiness Training
- Work-Based Learning Experiences
- Counseling on Comprehensive Transition or Post-Secondary Educational Programs
- Instruction in Self-Advocacy

Students meet individually and/or in groups with a Nebraska VR Pre-Employment Transition Services Coordinator throughout the school year. To learn about the world of work, students may participate in:

- Career exploration
- Exploring work accommodations
- Post-secondary planning
- Job search skill building
- Work-based learning experiences
 - Job fairs

- Informational interviews
- Job shadows
- Business tours
- Work experiences
- Participation in Project SEARCH

Partnering with Businesses

Nebraska VR has dedicated staff who work directly with businesses in order to find skilled and qualified individuals to fill vacancies. VR recommends candidates for open positions, can offer disability-related training, and extends support to help businesses retain and advance their workforce. VR has partnerships with businesses across the state.

Providers and Stakeholders

Through strong and meaningful partnerships, a network of services and supports provide opportunities for people with disabilities to succeed. Nebraska VR works with partners and stakeholders to achieve its mission to help people with disabilities prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment while helping businesses recruit, train, and retain employees with disabilities. Learn more about Nebraska VR's partnerships [here](#).

E. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

1. Executive Summary:

Provide a summary and overview of the services being offered including all of the following information:

- Statement that demonstrates the Applicant has read and understands the terms and conditions of the RFI;
- An overview of the Applicant's plans for complying with the specifications of the RFI;
- Statement assuring compliance with the Standard Addenda to NDE Contract (attached);
- Statement assuring documents produced under the RFI will incorporate all requirements and components of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended); and
- Any other summary information the Applicant deems to be pertinent.

2. Experience:

Include a brief overview of the organization and the experience and qualifications of key personnel involved in the activity or service(s).

The Applicant must provide the following information regarding its experience:

- Number of years in business;

- Number of years of experience with providing the types of services sought by the RFI;
- The level of technical experience in providing the types of services sought by the RFI;
- A list of all goods and/or services similar to those sought by this RFI that the Applicant has provided to other businesses or governmental entities; and
- Letters of reference from three (3) previous or current customers or clients knowledgeable of the Applicant's performance in providing goods and/or services similar to the goods and/or services described in this RFI and a contact person and telephone number for each reference.

3. **Work Plan:**

Describe how the CSNA will meet the requirements of [34 CFR 361.29](#).

- Describe how the Applicant will provide information about individuals with disabilities particularly in the following areas:
 1. What are the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities, particularly the vocational rehabilitation service needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities including their need for supported employment services?
 2. What are the vocational rehabilitation service needs of minorities?
 3. What are the vocational rehabilitation service needs of individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program?
 4. What are the vocational rehabilitation service needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system?
 5. What are the vocational rehabilitation service needs for youth with disabilities, and students with disabilities, including their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services?
 6. What is the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state?
- Describe the information and reports that will be available with the completed CSNA;
- Describe how the Applicant will be able to review interactions with agency, agency partners, individuals with disabilities, and education partners;
- Describe how the respondent can include the whole geographic area of the State of Nebraska;
- Describe how the respondent will ensure the assessment is comprehensive in nature;
- Describe how the Applicant will analyze data and provide projections;
- Describe how the Applicant will focus on identifying deficiencies in rehabilitation services delivery;
- Describe how the Applicant will provide recommendations for improving program performance;
- Describe how the Applicant will review the current state of previously identified priorities; and
- Provide an example of the final format.

4. **Research:**

- Provide a list of data resources the Applicant would require from Nebraska VR;
- Describe how the Applicant would gather additional data required to complete the CSNA;
- Describe the research methods that will be used to gather data; and
- Describe how data gathered will be safeguarded by the Applicant.

5. **Analysis and Reporting:**

- Describe how analysis will be provided to the agency;
- Describe how the Applicant will ensure all final reporting can be understood by a variety of internal and external audiences;
- Describe how feedback will be gathered from any participants; and
- Describe how often progress reports will be provided to the Agency.

6. Implementation Plan:

- Describe recommended implementation strategy including on-site coordination and support services;
- Identify any third parties involved in the Applicant's implementation strategy and describe these relationships;
- Provide an estimate of State of Nebraska staff time required to complete the CSNA; and
- Provide an implementation schedule based on weekly milestones (not dates).

7. Evaluation:

Describe the measures to be used to track and evaluate whether the proposed goal and objectives were met.

8. Budget:

Provide a detailed line item budget and budget narrative describing an appropriate and realistic budget for all activities. Include clear and concise justifications for expenses for the full time period of the proposal.

Form A

Vendor Contact Sheet

Request for Information Number NDERFI230816

Form A should be completed and submitted with each response to this solicitation document. This is intended to provide the State with information on the vendor's name and address, and the specific persons who are responsible for preparation of the vendor's response.

Preparation of Response Contact Information	
Vendor Name:	
Vendor Address:	
Contact Person & Title:	
E-mail Address:	
Telephone Number (Office):	
Telephone Number (Cellular):	
Fax Number:	

Each vendor shall also designate a specific contact person who will be responsible for responding to the State if any clarifications of the vendor's response should become necessary. This will also be the person who the State contacts to set up a presentation/demonstration, if required.

Communication with the State Contact Information	
Vendor Name:	
Vendor Address:	
Contact Person & Title:	
E-mail Address:	
Telephone Number (Office):	
Telephone Number (Cellular):	
Fax Number:	