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SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

Alaska Mariculture Cluster Grant Market Research

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

RFQ #2023-02

EDA Project Number 07-79-07902

Date of Issue: July 17, 2023

Summary:

Southeast Conference (SEC) is inviting qualified agencies to provide market research services for the mariculture industry in Alaska. The research will provide resources that inform product development efforts by various industry players as well as guide industry-wide mariculture marketing program development. The overall goal of the Alaska Mariculture Cluster's marketing component project is to unlock industry growth potential through increased demand for Alaska mariculture products. The market research contractor(s) selected will work with Alaska Mariculture Cluster marketing stakeholders to prioritize and conduct market research projects. Multiple contractors may be selected to ensure the ability to engage in a broad range of projects. Currently, Alaska's mariculture production is dominated by oysters and kelp sold into food-related markets and to a lesser extent cosmetics and other markets.

Background:

Southeast Conference, a state and federally recognized economic development organization for Southeast Alaska, is the lead institution administering a recent federal grant received in September of 2022 from the United States Economic Development Administration (EDA) to grow Alaska's mariculture industry through the Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBBRC) program. The Alaska Mariculture Cluster (AMC) coalition includes a diverse group of stakeholders including Alaska state regulatory agencies, Alaska's university system, Economic Development Districts (EDDs), trade organizations and more. A Governance Body, composed of AMC coalition leads as well as tribal

representatives from each of the project region, will guide the work and equity metrics of the overall grant. The Alaska Mariculture Cluster has an overall equity goal that applies to all projects. Specifically, 25% of AMC program impacts and investments are targeted to rural underserved communities and 25% to Alaska native entities and individuals. The AMC grant is composed of seven component projects (listed below), which have been purposely designed to be complementary to address barriers to growth and break out of the “chicken or egg” cycle of industry development:

- Revolving Loan Fund
- Governance, Coordination and Outreach
- Workforce Development
- Research and Development
- **Market Development**
- Green Energy
- Equipment and Technology

The full project period for the AMC BBBRC project is October 1, 2022 – September 30th, 2026. More information on the Alaska Mariculture Cluster (AMC) is available at www.alaskamariculturecluster.org, including the Overarching Narrative, which explains how the seven components work together to grow the mariculture industry in an equitable and environmentally responsible manner.

The AMC marketing component project – of which this market research is a part – includes an additional \$700K in funding for development and implementation of a marketing program supporting Alaska’s mariculture industry (guided in part by the example of the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute). A marketing plan will be developed that includes strategies for reaching business to business (B2B) and business to consumer (B2C) buyers and stakeholders with promotions and programs that support the value of Alaska’s mariculture products. Either subsequently or iteratively with plan development, marketing programs prioritized in the plan will be implemented such as development and distribution of marketing assets (such as product fact sheets, talking points, and buyer’s guides); development of a digital media library and online presence; in-store and restaurant demos and promotions; trade show participation; support for certifications and brand development;

etc. The procurement of market planning and implementation services will occur through RFPs and/or RFQs released in Q4 2023 and into 2024 and 2025.

Scope of Work:

Currently, Alaska's mariculture production is dominated by oysters and kelp sold into food-related markets and to a lesser extent cosmetics and other markets. The market research projects funded through this RFQ should generally align with these current market priorities, though consideration will be given to projects and expertise related to other market segments.

The services procured under this RFQ include:

Task 1: Consulting services to guide development of priorities for the AMC market research program. Consultant will work with SEC staff, Alaska mariculture farmers and processors, and an AMC marketing stakeholder group to develop a research agenda that maximizes the impact of AMC market research investments. *Schedule: Work will primarily be completed in Q3 and Q4 2023, but interaction with stakeholder committee and refinement of research agenda will be ongoing through 2024 and 2025.*

Task 2: Completion of market research projects identified by SEC staff, the AMC marketing stakeholder committee, and the work of the contractor through Task 1. *Schedule: It is anticipated that each project funded will be completed in 3-9 months, though some may require a different schedule. Selected market research projects will start to kick off in Q4 2023 or as soon as possible following the completion of Task 1 work.*

Initial market research project types identified in the AMC grant include those listed below though additional project types are expected to be identified and the examples listed below are subject to refinement or removal based on research agenda developed in Task 1.

- Identifying consumer buyer profiles for kelp and oyster products.
- Identification of market gaps that could be served by Alaska mariculture products.

- Establishment of key metrics to guide and track the effectiveness of subsequent marketing programs, including seaweed and shellfish awareness, perceptions, and usage/purchasing.
- Analysis of available trade and market data including size and growth rate according to channel.
- Studies on consumer behavior/perceptions and marketing methods that support repeat purchasing of Alaska mariculture (or comparable) products.

Respondents may propose to provide services related to one or both tasks listed above. If proposing work on Task 2, proposers should identify and describe 1-3 projects for consideration that respond to the goals identified for the AMC market research program and for which the proposer has the expertise to successfully complete. It is likely that more than one contractor will be procured for work under Task 2.

All products produced under this RFQ will become publicly available on completion. Specific deliverables, deadlines, and projects will be identified in collaboration with selected contractor(s).

Funding Available:

Funding is secured through the AMC grant and up to \$350,000 is budgeted for the market research services procured through this RFQ. If the need for additional related services arises, additional scope and budget may be added to this contract on mutual agreement. Additional RFPs or RFQs related to market research services may be issued during the AMC grant period to fill gaps or address emerging priorities.

General Requirements:

Single Point of Contact. The consultant will designate one person as the project manager and point of contact with SEC. In the case of multiple investigators, one shall be designated as the lead to serve as the project manager and point of contact.

Progress Reports. Updates will be submitted to SEC monthly, detailing progress to date, any difficulties encountered in accomplishing the work, and next steps planned.

Disbarment. Applicants must have or acquire an active SAM.gov registration prior to award finalization. Applicants must not be disbarred from receiving federal funds.

Proposal Contents:

Proposals are expected to be no more than 12 pages in length, excluding resumes which may be attached.

Proposals should include the following components:

- **Introduction and Understanding of the Project.** Include the RFQ title, discussion of project context and importance, and an overview of the project team and approach.
- **Methodology.** Discuss proposed approach to accomplishing the scope of work listed, including proposed deliverables and timeline. Respondents may propose to provide services related to one or both of the tasks listed above. If proposing work on Task 2, proposers should identify and describe 2-3 projects for consideration that respond to the goals identified for the AMC market research program and for which the proposer has the expertise to successfully complete. Consultants may include additional recommendations that would benefit the project based on their professional expertise.
- **Experience and Qualifications.** Describe relevant experience of the firm and key team members, including any subcontractors if part of your team. Relevant experience includes projects with related content as well as project experience working with rural, coastal, and/or indigenous stakeholders.
- **Management Plan.** Briefly describe how the work will be managed including the role of each key individual/subcontractor expected to be involved in the work and their availability to complete the work.
- **Costs.** Provide a list of the key individuals/subcontractors expected to work on this project and the fully loaded rates charged per individual. For projects identified for consideration under Task 2, please provide an estimated budget range for the work proposed. Final budgets will be negotiated when research projects are selected and assigned to specific contractors.

Proposal Submission Process:

Deadline. Submit proposals in pdf format by August 17th, 5pm AST via email to procurement officer Alan Sorum at alan@seconference.org and project manager Dan Lesh at dan@seconference.org.

- Proposals received after the deadline may be considered but only if they can be accommodated by SEC's review process. Additional information provided after the deadline may also be considered but only if such information can be accommodated by the review process.

Public Information: Proposals and work plans may be distributed throughout the organization for review and comment. Proprietary information should not be submitted in any proposal. SEC will not knowingly reveal the contents of a proposal that is not subsequently accepted for contract; however, SEC accepts no liability should such contents inadvertently be revealed to third parties.

Changes. Any changes or addendum will be posted on the Alaska Mariculture Cluster website and sent directly to respondents who have specifically requested notification.

Preparation Costs. SEC is not liable for any costs incurred by the proposer during the proposal preparation.

Questions. Inquiries regarding this request for qualifications shall be directed to procurement officer Alan Sorum at alan@seconference.org and project manager Dan Lesh at dan@seconference.org.

Evaluation Criteria and Award Process:

Criteria for evaluating proposals is as follows:

- Demonstration of knowledge and understanding of the project (20%)
- Past experience on relevant or similar projects (40%)
- Demonstration of capacity to complete deliverables successfully and within a reasonable timeline (20%)
- Costs are reasonable and fall within available/projected funding levels (20%).

Scoring of each proposal against the criteria listed above will be conducted by an RFQ review

committee. SEC reserves the right to reject any and all of the proposals received. If necessary, SEC may select the proposal or proposals that, in its sole view, most nearly conform to its needs as outlined in this RFQ and then negotiate directly with that consultant to refine the proposal to achieve a contract that fully satisfies SEC needs.

A notice of intent to award is expected to be announced by September 1, 2023.

[About Southeast Conference:](#)

As the state and federally designated regional economic development organization for Southeast Alaska, Southeast Conference serves as the collective voice for advancing the region's economy. Southeast Conference has over 200 member organizations representing 1,200 people from 32 regional communities and 19 Tribes. The mission of Southeast Conference is to undertake and support activities that promote strong economies, healthy communities, and a quality environment in Southeast Alaska. Southeast Conference formed in 1958 with a group of people supporting the establishment of a regional transportation system in Southeast Alaska, which led to the formation of the Alaska Marine Highway System. After that success Southeast Conference stayed together through more than a half-century to focus on concerns unique to the region, including transportation, maritime, tourism, seafood, natural resources, health care, government, and overall quality of life.