STATE OF NORTH DAKOTA
INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION
600 EAST BOULEVARD AVE, BISMARCK ND 58505

Request For Information (RFI)

Solicitation Number: 405-0224-001

Date of Issue: February 16, 2024

RFI Title: Grant Management Software

Purpose of RFI: Acquisition of software to assist in the management of seven (7) grant programs, act as a portal for submittal of grant applications, collection of application fees, provide real-time status and financial reporting, and provide a project management dashboard, with the ability to restrict access to confidential data

SECTION ONE
INTRODUCTION AND INSTRUCTIONS

1.01 Purpose of the RFI

The state of North Dakota, acting through its Industrial Commission (STATE) is soliciting information from potential bidders for grant management software*.*

The information, data, comments, or reactions obtained may be used as research for a future solicitation. This RFI does not constitute an Invitation for Bid, Request for Proposal, or Informal Request for Bid or Proposal and is not to be construed as a commitment by STATE.

1.02 Contact and Response Information

The procurement officer is the point of contact for this RFI. Please submit responses to the procurement officer by the deadline specified in the RFI Schedule. Please reference the Solicitation Number and Title.   You may submit your response by email to the procurement officer at:

Address: North Dakota Industrial Commission
              Attention: Brenna Jessen
              405-0224-001: Grant Management Software
              600 East Boulevard Ave, Dept. 405
              Bismarck, ND 58505

Email: ndicgrants@nd.gov

1.03 Assistance to Individuals with a Disability

Contact the procurement officer, as soon as possible, if an individual with a disability needs assistance with the RFI, including any events in the RFI Schedule, so reasonable accommodations can be made.

1.04 RFI Schedule

EVENT	DATE
RFI issued	February 16th, 2024
Deadline for Submission of Questions and Requests for Clarification by 5:00 PM, C.T.	February 23rd, 2024
Amendment with Responses to Questions and Requests for Clarification issued approximately (if required)	March 1st, 2024
Deadline for Submission of Responses by 5:00 PM, C.T.	March 15th, 2024

1.05 Questions and Requests for Clarification

Please submit any questions or requests for clarifications about this RFI in writing to the procurement officer by the deadline for submission of questions and requests for clarification identified in the RFI Schedule.   Preferred method of submission is email.

Two types of questions generally arise. One type of question may be answered by directing the

questioner to a specific section of the RFI, and the procurement officer may answer these questions over the telephone. The other type of question may be more complex and may require a written amendment to the RFI. The procurement officer will make that decision.

1.06 Notice Provided – State Procurement Website

This RFP and any related amendments and notices will be posted on the North Dakota OMB website using SPO Online at: https://apps.nd.gov/csd/spo/services/bidder/main.htm

Notices related to this RFI will be sent to the Bidders List for the needed commodity or service and other known potential vendors.

Additionally, vendors may request to receive notices related to this RFI by contacting the procurement officer in writing with the following information: RFI title, business name, contact person, mailing address, telephone number, and email address.

1.07 Respondents Responsible for All Preparation Costs

Respondents are responsible for all costs associated with the preparation, submittal, and presentation of their response to this RFI.

1.08 Bidders List Registration

If a competitive solicitation is issued, notice will be sent to approved bidders on the Bidders List and other known potential bidders. Individuals or business entities desiring to be notified of bidding opportunities may apply to be placed on the Bidders List. (N.D.C.C. § 54-44.4-09) Placement on the Bidders List does not guarantee a vendor will receive notice of every solicitation (N.D.A.C. § 4-12-05-01)

Visit the OMB website for instructions and the online Bidders List Application:

Bidders List Registration Website

For assistance with Bidders List Registration, contact State Procurement Help Desk at 701-328-1728 or infospo@nd.gov.

1.09 Disclosure of Information and Compliance with North Dakota Open Records Laws

The state of North Dakota has broad open records laws. All information submitted become the property of STATE and may be returned only at STATE's option. All information is subject to North Dakota Open Records Laws. Records are closed or confidential only if specifically stated in law.

Respondents may make a written request to hold confidential any trade secrets and other proprietary data contained in its response. Respondent must clearly identify the material considered confidential and explain why the material is confidential. See the North Dakota See the North Dakota Office of the Attorney General website for additional information at https://www.legis.nd.gov/cencode/t44c04.pdf and https://attorneygeneral.nd.gov/open-records-meetings

If STATE receives a request for public information, the procurement officer, in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, shall determine whether the information is an exception to the North Dakota open records laws, and the information shall be processed accordingly.

SECTION TWO
GOAL AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.01 Goal and Background Information

The North Dakota Industrial Commission is requesting information to procure grants management software.

The following background information is intended to help respondents understand the needs of the STATE.

2.01.01 Grant Programs

The Industrial Commission currently has seven research and grant programs specially funded by oil and gas taxes; each program having unique requirements set by the Legislature and ND Century Code. The programs include: Clean Sustainable Energy Program, Lignite Research Program, Oil & Gas Research Program, Outdoor Heritage Fund, Renewable Energy Program, IIJA Grid Resilience, and legislative-directed projects through the State Energy Research Center.

2.01.02 Grant Applications and Collection of Fees

The programs' grant applications are currently in a link on the Industrial Commission's website – either in word or pdf format. Grant applications are accepted up to the closing date of a grant round. Grant applications, once completed, are submitted to a designated email at the Industrial Commission. An application fee of $100 is mailed directly to the Industrial Commission office; these payments must be reconciled with the electronic applications. The Industrial Commission would like the grant management software to serve as a **user-friendly online portal** for applicants to submit applications, along with the ability to electronically accept payment of the application fee. Additionally, the Commission would like the ability to require payment of the fee automatically prior to the system accepting an application. The Commission will also need to retain the flexibility to change the application fee or waive it for certain programs.

Applications are reviewed by the Industrial Commission grant staff to confirm eligibility requirements have been met and the applications are complete. The grants management software must have the ability to flag missing information for applicants and reject submittal of applications if required information is missing. The software must also provide applicants with a status update of where their application is during the review and approval process.

2.01.03 Independent Technical Reviews

Applications meeting eligibility and completion requirements are submitted to peer reviewers for an independent technical review process. The independent technical reviewers are selected by the Industrial Commission as authorities in the field. The identities of these peer reviewers are confidential. The summarized comments of these anonymous reviewers are provided to the Advisory Board. The grants management system must allow the Commission the flexibility to provide reviewers access to certain information, and only Commission staff shall have access to their identities. The independent technical reviewers must have the ability to access the software to conduct reviews.

2.01.04 Technical Review Committees

Certain programs have separate Technical Review Committees which act as a level of approval prior to applications making an Advisory Board meeting docket. All Technical Review Committee members must have access to the application portal, and the software must allow the Commission to reject applications which do not receive a favorable vote.

2.01.05 Advisory Board Members

Each grant program has an Advisory board and a defined program schedule. Each advisory board member (88 members currently) must have access to applications as well as a project management dashboard which would provide real-time progress and financial reports of projects under the members' respective programs.

2.01.06 Industrial Commission Members

The North Dakota Industrial Commission, consisting of the Governor, Attorney General, and Agricultural Commissioner, approve all projects which receive a favorable recommendation from its Advisory Boards. The Commission members must have access to only those applications which receive a favorable recommendation from its Advisory Boards. Additionally, their staff must have access to all applications as well as the project management dashboard.

2.01.07 Contracting

Approved projects require a contract, which must be reviewed and approved by the Attorney General's Office. Contracts are drafted with project-specific requirements depending on conditions include in the motions made by the Advisory Boards and the Industrial Commission. The software must have the ability to provide both applicants and Commission staff with a progress update for contracting progress, must have the ability to host contract files associated with each project, and must provide the flexibility to adjust requirements on a project-by-project basis.

2.01.08 Progress and Expense Reports

These grant programs are reimbursable grants in which the amount is awarded by the Industrial Commission, however the funds are not released until contract deliverables have been met. The recipient must expend their funds and submit receipts and reports confirming the contract deliverable has been completed to the Industrial Commission grant staff for reimbursement. Upon receipt, the grant staff validates the expenses and supporting reports against the contract. Once validated, the reimbursement is submitted for approval to payout requested amount of grant award funds to recipient. For most projects, progress and expense reports are submitted on a quarterly basis.

The grant management software must provide grant applicants with a portal for submitting progress and expense reports. The portal must require that applicants validate their project task expenses and require them to submit supporting receipts and invoices for each expense prior to submittal. The portal must also send notifications to applicants when due dates are approaching and must be able to provide applicants with a status update of report approval progress.

The software shall also provide Commission staff with a dashboard showing a "to-do" list of requests submitted but pending review and approval, an indication (i.e., project font red in color)

of projects with overdue deliverables, and a progress tab showing percent spend vs. percent of deliverables complete. The system must allow the Commission to hold back 10% of an award until a final deliverable is approved, and must flag for Commission staff when spend rate, cost-share rate, or percent complete are not on task.

Each program has differing cost-share and eligibility requirements, the software must allow the Commission the flexibility to adjust requirements for each program.

2.01.09 Confidential Information

Documents and status reports received for the grant programs may contain confidential information (trade secrets, financial information, etc.). **By state law the Industrial Commission is required to keep this information confidential**. The submitter will provide two reports – a Public report and a Confidential Report. The confidential report is used by the Industrial Commission and its Advisory Boards as part of their consideration, however, must be kept confidential with restricted access. The grants management software must have the capability to restrict access to certain information and must have the flexibility to provide different access to different users.

2.01.10 Levels of Access

Different levels of access to the grant programs must be provided for the following:
- Industrial Commission staff – full access with ability to customize as needed, and ability to set up multiple staff approval levels
- Industrial Commission members – access to all programs and visibility to only applications with favorable advisory board recommendations
- Advisory Board members – access to specific grant program they are associated with and visibility to submitted applications, documentation and technical reviewers' comments, and a project progress dashboard

2.01.11 Payment of Funds

Allowing for the integration with PeopleSoft, the State's current payroll accounting system, will provide the Commission staff with a simplified workflow process and will reduce manual processing. Software solutions must have the ability to integrate with PeopleSoft.

2.02 Information Requesting

STATE is requesting information to acquire a grant management software, specifically the ability of the software to either meet the following needs out of the box, or a user-friendly, customizable solution which can, at a minimum:
1. Serve as a user-friendly application portal and electronically collect application fees
2. Provide status updates to applicants and board members
3. Provide varying degrees of access for reviewers, board members and staff
4. Provide flexibility to adjust for program-specific and project-specific requirements
5. Provide a project management dashboard with real-time tracking of financials, spend rates, remaining funds (both for each project and for each program as a whole), and progress of deliverable submittals
6. Serve as a user-friendly portal for applicants to submit expense and progress reports, specifically requiring the applicant to validate and submit documentation supporting expenses

7. Provide a "to-do" list of pending requests for Commission staff, and provide notifications for overdue deliverables
8. Provide applicants with status updates for their pending reports
9. Provide the ability to restrict access to confidential information
10. Provide the flexibility to provide varying degrees of access across users
11. Allow for integration with PeopleSoft

SECTION THREE
RESPONSE FORMAT AND CONTENT

3.01 Response Preparation Instructions

Respondents are asked to provide a response in the following format:

A. Introduction

Please provide:
1. Contact name, phone number, and email
2. Business name, address, and phone number

B. Technical Response

Respondents are asked to provide the following information:

1. Ability of software solution to meet the following requirements:
   a. Serve as a user-friendly application portal and electronically collect application fees
   b. Provide status updates to applicants and board members
   c. Provide varying degrees of access for reviewers, board members and staff
   d. Provide flexibility to adjust for program-specific and project-specific requirements
   e. Provide a project management dashboard with real-time tracking of financials, spend rates, remaining funds (both for each project and for each program as a whole), and progress of deliverable submittals
   f. Serve as a user-friendly portal for applicants to submit expense and progress reports, specifically requiring the applicant to validate and submit documentation supporting expenses
   g. Provide a "to-do" list of pending requests for Commission staff, and provide notifications for overdue deliverables
   h. Provide applicants with status updates for their pending reports
   i. Provide the ability to restrict access to confidential information
   j. Provide the flexibility to provide varying degrees of access across users
   k. Allow for integration with PeopleSoft
2. Estimated schedule/timeframe for design and implementation across 7 programs and 535 cumulative projects
3. Any other vendor recommendations

C. Cost Estimate

Respondents are asked to provide estimated costs to help STATE understand acquisition and on-going costs.

Any cost estimates requested are for budgeting purposes only. Responders will not be held to price estimates provided as part of the RFI should STATE later decide to issue a competitive solicitation.