

## **Request for Proposals**

### **RISE-WA Grant**

#### **Introduction**

The Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) was awarded Small Business Innovation Funding (SBIF) through the Washington State Department of Commerce to develop RISE-WA (Rural Investment for Small-business Empowerment in Washington State). The goal of the project is to bring solution providers together with rural Small, Women, and Black, Indigenous, People of Color-owned businesses (S/W/BIPOC) in Washington State to utilize innovation and technology of the urban tech and business sectors to improve pandemic resilience and business recovery.

RISE-WA will facilitate new business relationships between solution providers and S/W/BIPOC businesses to provide mentorship and industry expertise to accelerate the post-pandemic recovery in these under-resourced businesses and communities. By connecting S/W/BIPOC with solution providers, this project will help address some key challenges that small businesses are facing. This will help to increase revenue and jobs for participating small businesses and increase tax revenue in rural areas. The grant funds will directly benefit the small businesses in rural Washington through compensation for their participation in the accelerator programming, as well as through direct distribution of funding to facilitate solutions for their small business needs. Our goal with this funding is to help accelerate and grow the small businesses in rural Washington counties through pilot project partnerships.

#### **Overall Project Purpose**

The RISE-WA program is well-suited to bring economic benefit to S/W/BIPOC in rural communities through our partner-based approach to relationship building. RISE-WA will identify and connect these businesses through the accelerator program to solution providers. The primary focus will be to support recovery in rural communities by focusing on rural S/W/BIPOC businesses for the core of the program. As we bring the innovation and technology of the urban areas to the small businesses in rural communities, both sides will benefit. Our accelerator curriculum directly supports businesses to improve competitiveness, business operations, financial health, sourcing and applying for capital, and positioning for growth.

#### **Project Assistance**

PNWER is looking for qualified consultants to serve in a project coordination role. The consultant shall have experience working with S/W/BIPOC business in urban and/or rural communities, have technical knowledge of the innovation economy, experience in the

corporate innovation space, and experience working with the government to implement innovative solutions.

The consultant will focus generally on the following areas.

- Assist with recruiting and selection of participating small businesses (up to ten).
- Assist in identifying several unique business needs or challenges that each participating business is facing.
- Help identify and evaluate potential technical solutions providers to assist the unique needs of the participating small businesses.
- Work closely with PNWER staff to plan and conduct a series of training webinars over the course of eight weeks based on the business concerns identified by the small businesses participating.
- Work closely with the participating small businesses to ensure they are receiving value and stay engaged throughout the cohort.
- Assist with writing reports based on the activities and provide assistance in outreach to the partners in the project.

**Project Activities/Deliverables:**

**Timeline: (This timeline could be extended if approval is granted by WA Department of Commerce)**

| TASKS   | START          | END            |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| <b><u>Phase 1.1:</u> Onboarding to Program-Solution Provider Identification, and Identification of S/W/BIPOC Businesses</b>   | <b>3/27/23</b> | <b>5/31/23</b> |
| <b><u>Phase 1.2:</u> Accelerator Program Implementation for 8 sessions</b>  | <b>3/27/23</b> | <b>5/31/23</b> |
| <b><u>Phase 1.3:</u> Accelerator Programming, Mentor Workshops, and Matching Solution Providers with S/W/BIPOC Businesses</b> | <b>4/14/23</b> | <b>5/31/23</b> |
| <b><u>Phase 1.4:</u> Manage Business to Business Activities and start Pilot Projects with Solution Providers</b>              | <b>4/21/23</b> | <b>5/31/23</b> |
| <b><u>Phase 1.5:</u> Mid-Accelerator Programming Reporting</b>  | <b>4/21/23</b> | <b>5/31/23</b> |

|   |                |                |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| <b><u>Phase 1.6:</u> Final Programmatic Updates and Reporting Based on Stakeholder Feedback</b> | <b>5/22/23</b> | <b>5/31/23</b> |
| <b><u>Phase 1.7:</u> Program Closeout Businesses on Program Evaluation</b>                      | <b>5/22/23</b> | <b>5/31/23</b> |

**Submission Materials**

Please submit your responses typed, using standard fonts no smaller than 12 point, with 1-inch margins.

**Introductory letter of intent (one page)**

**Proposal Narrative (5 pages max)**

Detailed description of how you plan to deliver the activities, benchmarks, and deliverables described in the RFP. Include some background of your organization’s experience in this capacity, and/or your experience with incubators or accelerator programs.

Describe how your organization has worked with Women and BIPOC rural small businesses to accelerate and scale solutions, and your plan to engage solution providers as mentors.

Project contractor will be responsible for:

- Phase 1.1: Identification and Onboarding Program-Solution Providers, and collaborating with Advisory Committee and project team. The contractor will facilitate the collaboration meetings with the Program Team and initiate the accelerator program
- Phase 1.2: Accelerator Program Training Implementation for 8 sessions (via webinar). Each session will require speaker(s) communications with solution providers, mentors and S/W/BIPOC Businesses.
- Phase 1.3: Accelerator Programming, Mentor Workshops, and Matching Solution Providers with S/W/BIPOC Businesses. While undertaking the accelerator program facilitate the Business to Business solutions that the S/W/BIPOC business identify.
- Phase 1.4: Manage Business to Business Activities and start Pilot Projects with Solution Providers and partnership with project team
- Phase 1.5: Mid-Accelerator Programming Reporting. Conduct interviews and survey of accelerator participants for reporting to PNWER
- Phase 1.6: Final Programmatic Updates and Reporting Based on Stakeholder Feedback
- Phase 1.7: Program Closeout Businesses on Program Evaluation

The success of this program will be measured by several criteria in which the successful applicant will be asked to track and include in the final report. Criteria include, but are not limited to;

1. Successful grant applicants cohort companies
2. Number of solution providers assisting rural businesses

**Budget and Budget Narrative not to exceed \$75,000 (3 pages)**

Basic budget narrative identifying personnel and any subscriptions, tools, platforms you are proposing to utilize to accomplish the tasks outlined in your proposal. Include project rates sheet for budget, identifying members of project team hourly rates, including fringe benefits and indirect/overhead or provide rates in the narrative. Include travel, equipment, software, telecommunications, and any other costs required to deliver the project.

**References (1 page)**

Please provide:

- At least three references from past projects
- Resumes of each member of the project team outlining experience on similar projects (no page limit)

**Qualification Evaluation and Scoring**

Each applicant has a total possible score of 130 points with the points assigned as follows:

| Proposal Evaluation Criteria   | Points |
|--|--------|
| Overall qualifications and relevant experience related to the needs of the project.  | 50     |
| Demonstrated relevant experience working with key partners. Demonstrated knowledge of and/or experience working with local government and industry partners. | 30     |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Overall competitiveness of hourly costs.   | <b>20</b>  |
| <b>Total Possible Written</b>  | <b>100</b> |
| Oral Interview Criteria (if required)  |            |
| Demonstrates knowledge and understanding in approach to accomplish work and address issues. Ability to elaborate on proposed project approach and respond to questions about potential aspects of the project. | <b>20</b>  |
| Ability to clearly communicate orally and respond appropriately to questions. Level of knowledge about the topic.  | <b>10</b>  |
| <b>Total Evaluation (Written and Oral)</b>   | <b>130</b> |

**Deadline**

Submissions will be accepted until **March 20 at 11:59pm Pacific Time**. Proposals will only be accepted by email. Late submissions will not be accepted. Please send proposals by email to Steve Myers, Senior Program Manager at [Steve.Myers@pnwer.org](mailto:Steve.Myers@pnwer.org).

Questions should be submitted by **March 10** in writing to Steve Myers, Senior Program Manager at [Steve.Myers@pnwer.org](mailto:Steve.Myers@pnwer.org). All interested consultants may obtain a copy of the questions and responses by submitting a written request by email.

**PNWER is an equal opportunity employer and will not discriminate against any employee or applicant on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any classification protected by federal, state, or local law.**

**Background**

## PNWER's Scope of Work and Deliverables

PNWER will facilitate new business relationships between technical assistance solution providers and small under-resourced businesses to provide direct financial support, mentorship, and industry expertise to small business owners and entrepreneurs and accelerate the post-pandemic recovery in these under-resourced businesses and communities. Connecting S/W/BIPOC businesses with technology and technical assistance providers based on their needs will help to increase revenue and jobs for participating small businesses and increase tax revenue in rural areas.

- PNWER will develop a recruitment strategy and an advisory team that will identify rural S/W/BIPOC businesses and solutions providers for the accelerator project. Consultants will be selected to help with this effort.
- PNWER will hold virtual and in-person events to promote the program and answer any questions about the accelerator project and follow-on pilot projects. PNWER will work with the Washington State Department of Commerce and consultants to market the program to S/W/BIPOC businesses in rural areas of the state.
- PNWER will select the cohort of rural S/W/BIPOC businesses for the project based on a scoring criteria with input from the advisory and consultant team.
- PNWER will host those selected S/W/BIPOC businesses in an 8-week accelerator program focused on how to best utilize innovation and technology for business growth and pandemic recovery efforts. Contractor support will be used to execute the accelerator and start the initial work for developing pilot projects for the S/W/BIPOC businesses with solutions providers.
- PNWER will facilitate and support the pilot projects between the S/W/BIPOC businesses and solutions providers.
- PNWER will develop a report with lessons learned and actions the state could adopt to promote S/W/BIPOC businesses.
- PNWER will follow the criteria below for the project reporting related to S/W/BIPOC businesses:
  - Number of Small Businesses Served (RCW 39.26.010 (22))
    - Less than 50 employees OR less than \$7M in gross revenue annually
  - Jobs Created
  - Jobs Retained (Sole proprietorship included)
  - Women small businesses
  - Number of S/W/BIPOC Businesses served (Self Select and OMWBE certified)
  - Location of serviced S/W/BIPOC business by county
  - Served industry sector (NAICS) code

PNWER will utilize an extensive network of legislators, business owners, community leaders, and corporate partners to identify and connect with rural S/W/BIPOC businesses across Washington. The funding awarded will directly benefit the small businesses in these rural areas through participation in the accelerator programming, as well as through direct distribution of funding to facilitate pilot projects with the entrepreneurs in the Congregate network. PNWER's goal with this funding is to help accelerate and grow the small businesses in the travel, tourism, and hospitality industries in rural Washington counties through pilot project partnerships. This work would lead to increased revenue and growth outcomes for both the technology entrepreneurs as well as the S/W/BIPOC businesses in rural communities.

PNWER will make available statewide an application process for rural S/W/BIPOC businesses to apply for RISE-WA funding. Successful applicants will be interviewed and scored to assess their particular needs and seek a match with the other solution providers. Up to \$10K per company will be granted for their time and participation in a pilot with up to \$20K in support from solutions providers to the S/W/BIPOC businesses.