

## Submitted Questions and Answers Regarding the

### RFP FOR PROVIDING AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN VERMONT

Issued June 30, 2020

#### Response to submitted questions

The following responses are based on the questions submitted within the submission time period. As we all are aware, these are unusual times. The Covid-19 Pandemic has already affected the study and RFP process as well as the higher education system itself, and we expect it will impact the respondents as well. It has increased the urgency of the analysis in that system change is underway as we all adapt to the new situation. The Pandemic also creates uncertainty regarding future higher ed offerings and difficulties in contract design and performance. As we evaluate proposals, we will consider the bidder's flexibility and capacity to move forward in such a changing environment.

#### Questions submitted as of 3:00 p.m. ET on July 10, 2020 – the close of question period.

1. *What are expectations regarding contractor presence at Committee and Steering Committee meetings?*
  - a. *At all meetings?*
  - b. *In person? Or can participation be accomplished electronically?*

The Steering Group will decide how frequently the contractor should attend Committee and Steering Group meetings. The Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) anticipates that participation will be expected at many if not all meetings and that participation can be accomplished electronically.

2. *What will be the role of the contractor at those meetings?*
  - a. *Presenter of materials/results of analyses?*
  - b. *"Expert Witness"?*
  - c. *Facilitator?*

The Steering Group will determine the role of the contractor at Committee and Steering Group meetings and will be guided, in part, by the bid responses it receives. JFO expects that the contractor will present materials and results of analyses, act as "expert witness" on occasion, and possibly help to organize the meetings.

3. *What is the expected role of the contractor in outreach to stakeholders?*
  - a. *Observer?*
  - b. *Presenter of background information?*
  - c. *Facilitator?*

JFO expects that the contractor will be involved in some outreach to stakeholders, but the extent of this work will depend on the contractor and the Steering Group.

4. *Please elaborate on the role that NEBHE staff will play in the project.*

The study language provides that NEBHE shall provide project management support to the Committee. Specifics as to the level of their involvement remain to be determined.

5. *Process for acquiring data from VSCS and UVM—will JFO serve as intermediary or will we have to work directly with institutions?*

To the extent possible, the consultant will work directly with the public higher education institutions. JFO will provide contact information at VSCS and UVM and assist as necessary.

6. *Is there a “do not exceed” amount for the contract? What is the budget for the project?*

There is no “do not exceed” amount for the contract. The proposed price relative to the quality and value of the proposed work will be among the considerations in choosing the winning bid. The overall budget for the project will be based on the bid chosen, the contributions of NEBHE, and the project demands once the Steering Committee is put in place.

7. *Will VSC have an institutional researcher (IR) point person available to pull together and provide non-public data for fast facts?*

We assume that the VSC and UVM will provide support to this effort. The specifics of that support will be up to the institutions. The Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) will also provide a point person to assist with data acquisition, and NEBHE will offer contact information at the state and national level as well.

8. *Will VSC facilitate consultant engagement with key admin officials (e.g. Presidents, Provosts, Vice Provosts, Deans, Career Service/Workforce Development Directors, Community/Employer Partnership Directors) to gather and compile qualitative information?*

JFO expects that VSC, UVM and state agencies such as the Agency for Commerce and Community Development will cooperate fully with the contractor to provide contact information and access to key administrative officials. NEBHE will assist with contact information at the state and national level as well.

9. *What level of geographic or institution specific breakout analyses are required for this project? In other words, does the vendor need to provide analysis and recommendations specific to each VSC institution or just institution-wide analysis and recommendations?*

As stated in the RFP, the scope of work includes “Fiscal analysis related to VSC, the public higher education structure, and the constituent institutions.” The reports therefore should include analysis specific to each VSC institution.

10. *For the current RFP, does it require or even assume that the consultant is implicitly an expert in the Vermont higher education system?*

No. The RFP assumes that the consultant be experienced in higher education structure and research and will quickly develop an understanding of the Vermont higher education system, its issues, and future policy directions which are at the core of the contract's purpose. We would expect that the consultant will explain their experience and appropriateness to manage a contract designed around the goals to "assist the State of Vermont in addressing the urgent needs of the Vermont State Colleges (VSC) and develop an integrated vision and plan for a high-quality, affordable, and workforce-connected future for public higher education in the State."

11. *Is there a single source for data on payroll, enrollment, classes, student tuition, scholarships, student outcomes, and facilities for all Vermont public institutions (VSC institutions and UVM)? Or would the consultant need to collect the data separately from each institution?*

Data files are available from many sources, and we expect the bidder to be familiar with these resources. Respondents should address their understanding of data availability and describe relevant experience in the submitted proposal. To the extent that analysis requires institution-specific data, data for the member institutions of the Vermont State Colleges system are available from the Chancellor's office. Data for UVM will come from UVM. We expect that the Joint Fiscal Office and NEBHE will help the consultants with data needs.

12. *Given current Covid-19 circumstances, to what extent do you anticipate the contractor working and conducting meetings on-site throughout the course of this project?*

At this time much of the work will likely be done remotely, but the contractor may decide that some on-site time is helpful as well. As time goes by, we would expect some flexibility depending on the status of the Pandemic and related state guidelines.

13. **Page 2, BACKGROUND:** *We understand considerable work has been done on this issue by the VSCS Forward Task Force, the NVU Strong Advisory Committee, and the VTC Transition Advisory Task Force. Were any consultants involved in work completed by these committees that relates to the scope of this proposal? If so, could you identify the consulting firm(s) that were used? Will the firm(s) previously used be allowed to bid on this current proposal?*

JFO is not aware of consultants used by the three groups mentioned here.

14. **Page 2, 1.2 CONTRACT PERIOD:** *To what extent is the timing of the project flexible? For example, would the state consider an accelerated timeline such that the final report is completed by a date that would allow implementation to begin before Fall 2022? An accelerated timeline would likely ensure there is sufficient momentum and urgency across institutions to more effectively execute on the results of this engagement.*

The State is considering a faster timeline and would welcome suggestions from the bidder along those lines. In proposals, we would also ask the bidders to consider an

accelerated timeline and address the impact on financing and structure of their proposal. A possible accelerated timeline may be negotiated with the successful bidder.

**15. Page 3, 2.2 SCOPE OF WORK:** *The RFP mentions, "The contractor will work directly with the Steering Group, the Select Committee, the Agency of Education, the Joint Fiscal Office, and other contractors as needed."*

- a. *Can you describe the governance structure to support this project, including the number of constituents and the role each is expected to play?*

The Steering Group will direct the consultant's work, but the specific management structure is not yet in place. In the interim, the Joint Fiscal Office with support of NEBHE and in discussions with the Legislative leadership is playing an interim role (see also Question 2). As the project gets underway, the management structure will be refined and NEBHE, the Joint Fiscal Office and Agency of Education will provide assistance where needed.

- b. *Do you anticipate this project being completed by multiple contractors? If so, how do you envision this work will be divided across contractors?*

While some bidders may wish to include subcontractors, others may not. The prime contractor will decide how the work is divided. There is no current plan to involve multiple contractors

We expect that the contractor will submit a proposal to meet the needs of the RFP including any subcontractors it thinks are needed within its overall proposal cost. The State will retain the option to hire other contractors. The decision to do so will depend on the accepted proposal and the desire to do what makes sense to achieve a successful outcome for this study.

**16. Page 3, 2.2 SCOPE OF WORK:** *The RFP lists the University of Vermont as a member of the Select Committee (Page 6, Sec. A. 10) and as a focus of the project within the description of project staffing (Page 5, 4.4 PROJECT STAFFING), while the scope of work indicates the analysis includes only the Vermont State Colleges System (Page 3, 2.2 SCOPE OF WORK). Could you specify which Vermont higher education institutions will be assessed throughout this engagement? In particular, is the University of Vermont included within the scope of this project, or is it only part of the Select Committee?*

Background item (2) on page 2 of the RFP clearly states that the Committee will examine the structure of public higher education in Vermont and its ability to promote student success, and that structure includes UVM. The same is true for Background items (3) and (4) on page 3 of the RFP.

**17. Page 3, 3.1 EVALUATION CRITERIA AND CONSULTANT INDEPENDENCE:** *We understand proposals will be evaluated for their responsiveness to the scope of work and contractor's demonstrated independence from public higher education interest or advocacy groups. Could you provide additional information on what, if any, other*

*criteria will be considered for evaluation (e.g., price, relevant experience) and how those criteria will be weighted?*

As this study is part of Act 120, signed on June 30<sup>th</sup>, the formation of the Steering Group as dictated by the legislation is still underway. That Group will decide on specific criteria and the weighting.

18. **Page 3-4, 3.2 CONFIDENTIALITY:** *With regards to the publication of successful responses, should contractors plan to submit two versions of the proposal, one complete version and one redacted to exclude proprietary information? Will the contractor have the opportunity to review proposals before they are published to ensure no confidential information is included?*

The contractor will have an opportunity to specify which items should be redacted before any proposal is made public.

19. **Page 5, 4 BIDDER RESPONSE CONTENT AND FORMAT:** *Is there a suggested or required page limit for proposal submissions?*

There is no page limit. However, the audience for this work is state decision makers, those involved in the higher education community, and the public. Proposals reflect the ability of the proposer to communicate clearly, and this will be considered in proposal review.

20. **Page 5, 4.4 PROJECT STAFFING:** *The RFP requires the qualifications of key personnel and role each is expected to play on this project. Given the fluid nature of our business, and fluctuating demands for our human resources, it is often difficult to accurately project the availability of specific team members. The engagement Partner will be listed and will not change. However, would it be sufficient to provide a representative sample of the additional team members who could deliver the work for this project?*

Yes, please list those people most likely to work on the project, and, where possible, where you expect flexibility depending on availability. We understand that staffing assignments can change over time.

21. **Page 6, SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS:** *Should final submissions be emailed to Joyce Manchester at [JFORFP@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:JFORFP@leg.state.vt.us), or is there an online portal through which contractors should submit all proposal documents?*

Please email submissions to [JFORFP@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:JFORFP@leg.state.vt.us).

22. *What is the level of effort expected of the consultant for this project?*

Please see Question 6.

23. *What is the level of collaboration expected between the consultant and the VSCS Forward Task Force, the NVU Strong Advisory Committee, and the VTC Transition Advisory Task Force? Should the consultant play the role of connector by regularly coordinating with the other task forces and sharing information, or of observer by following the work of each and understanding the points of intersection?*

Much of this is to be determined. To the extent that cooperation and sharing of information can strengthen the potential for development of a successful change strategy, such interchange will be encouraged. Proposals might speak to this.

24. *Will there be any additional steps in the selection process, such as interviews with finalists?*

The process is still being developed and will be clearer once the Steering Group is in place.

25. *Will the Select Committee meetings be held in open session, and if so, will the consultant be responsible for providing the technical support to facilitate open meetings virtually?*

Most of the work of the Select Committee will be conducted in open sessions. The State or NEBHE will likely provide much of the support to facilitate those sessions.

26. *Should completed proposals be sent to this email address ([JFORFP@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:JFORFP@leg.state.vt.us)) as well?*

Yes.

27. *Has the State of Vermont identified a single lead contract/project manager for Vermont to manage the work of the consultant? How will this person interact with the Steering Group?*

At this stage, the Joint Fiscal Office will assist the Steering Group in aiding and guidance to the contractor. The final contract may vary the lead role.

28. *To what extent should the University of Vermont be included in this study?*

See Question 16. The University of Vermont is part of the structure of public higher education in Vermont and thus should be included when analyzing how and whether the public higher education system meets the needs of the State.

29. *Given the current pandemic, is there an openness to completing this work virtually at least initially? Will the consultant be allowed to attend meetings and conduct data collection remotely?*

Much of the work may need to be completed remotely. Also see Questions 1 and 12.

30. *Is programming related to continuing education and professional education included in the scope of this study?*

Yes, the RFP asks the Committee to examine how public higher education in Vermont can better meet the needs of the State. Those needs likely include continuing education, early college, and professional education among other areas of consideration as the higher education system transitions into the future.

31. *What are the time expectations and anticipated duties of both the Committee and the Steering Group to support this work?*

Please see question 6.

32. *Is it anticipated that the consultant would work directly with the New England Board of Higher Education? If so, in what capacity?*

Please see Question 4.

33. *What is the responsibility of the consultant in creating the Action Plan?*

The consultant will assist the Steering Group and Committee in creating the Action Plan.

34. *Is the State of Vermont open to a shorter timeline? For example, the final report submitted by June 2021.*

Please see Question 14.

35. *How does the Committee see the fiscal analysis in the first report differing from other financial reports that have been recently conducted (i.e., Report on Funding for the Vermont State Colleges System, FY 2020, FY 2021 and Treasurer's Vermont State Colleges Final Report)?*

The fiscal analysis required in the first report is intended to set up a long-term, sustainable financial future for the VSCS. The two reports cited in the question looked primarily at FY 2020 and FY 2021.