

Request for Interest (RFI)

COVID-19 Equitable Economic Recovery: Small Business and Entrepreneur Support

July 27, 2021

Background

Throughout the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency and corresponding economic downturn, Washington County responded with a range of small business support programs. Since early 2020, the County has allocated millions in Federal CARES Act and other funds for small businesses, either directly or through partnerships with a variety of entities—cities, community based-organizations (CBOs), and others.

As a cornerstone of Washington County's response, four Business Recovery Centers (BRCs) have led ongoing efforts to support small businesses through the worst of the pandemic. The BRCs have helped small businesses access free Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and acted as a one-stop triage unit where small businesses could get select business assistance services or referrals to other specialized business support organizations. To date, the BRCs have successfully helped hundreds of small businesses in Washington County.

Now, during the Summer of 2021, we are at a turning point in the pandemic. The number of vaccinations is rising, and the economy is reopening. However, the economic impacts of the pandemic have not been distributed equally through the business community, which has hampered the ability for some small businesses to rebound from the downturn—especially for those in underserved communities.

In recognition of the disparate economic impacts of the economic downturn, the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) gave direction for County staff to provide additional support services to small businesses and entrepreneurs during the reopening phase. An allocation of \$250,000 has been made available for enhanced business support services tailored to communities with unequal access to resources and support.

Submission Requirements

The County recognizes that it can best achieve its goals of sustaining our diverse business community through partnerships with Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), and others. These organizations are mission driven and they possess the technical expertise, community relationships, and other assets that can play a prominent role in this effort.

The County seeks expressions of interest from CBOs, CDFIs, and others who are willing to partner with the County in this mission of assisting our diverse business community in economic recovery from the pandemic. In this way, the County is open to receiving novel and community-grounded ideas about how to support small businesses—generally, those with fewer than 50 employees—during this recovery period.

Organizations are encouraged to provide the following information no later than Thursday August 12, 2021 to Matt Craigie, Economic Development Manager for Washington County (contact information below). The requested information:

- Sponsoring Entity
- Contact Person: name, title, email address, phone number
- Description of the organization: mission statement, primary activities, staff overview, annual budget, the organization's accomplishments, and commitments related to DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion).
- Description of the services that the organization proposes to provide in partnership with the County, such as business outreach, coaching, access to capital, training, or business technical assistance (e.g. digital marketing, legal support, business plan development, etc.) (NOTE: Funds cannot be used to assist a single business; they must be made broadly available)
- Budget, timeline, and schedule—how long the organization proposes to provide these services; monthly and total budget; intended completion date (note that the County is looking for services to be provided through June 2022)
- Description of how the organization will engage with and benefit businesses from traditionally disadvantaged communities located within Washington County—outreach approach, multi-lingual services, focus on services of particular interest to targeted communities, etc.

The County requests that submissions be limited to six pages in length (not including resumes and any other relevant background materials). Please submit your expression of interest via email to: matt_craigie@co.washington.or.us.

Award Process

The County will accept submissions until 5:00 p.m. August 12, 2021. Submissions will be reviewed by County staff, at which point one of the following options will be exercised by the County:

- (1) If County staff finds the submissions from qualified applicants to be well-aligned with the stated criteria, and there are sufficient funds to fund all qualified applicants, County staff will move to a scoping and contracting phase with those applicants.
- (2) If the total amount of proposed program dollars from qualified applicants exceeds the total funding available, the County may elect to have qualified applicants move to a Request for Proposals (RFP) phase. The RFP phase will require more detailed submissions from applicants that will be competitively awarded. Alternatively, the County may elect to negotiate reduced funding and reduced scope in the event that the program is over-subscribed.
- The County reserves the right to reject submissions from applicants that the County deems in its sole discretion to be insufficiently responsive to the County's objectives with this program (see Award Criteria below).

Award Criteria

The County will use the following criteria in determining which organizations move forward:

- Proposer's presence and demonstrated track record of working effectively with underserved business communities in Washington County.
- Organizational diversity—board and staff—including race/ethnicity/languages spoken as compares to community/communities this organization proposes to serve; organizational equity statement.
- Proposer's demonstrated ability to quickly set up a program or ability to build capacity of already established programs.
- Services targeted to small businesses that have experienced a negative economic impact from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Primary tailored services to traditionally underserved communities in Washington County including but not limited to:
 - Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), Latina/Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander, Veterans, Women, and communities within Washington County's urban unincorporated areas (i.e. areas outside of city limits).
- Comply with requirements of the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF) of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).
- Ability to track service recipients by race/ethnicity and language, as well as other demographic elements.

Award Timeline

- Request for Interest (RFI) Open Window
 - Through 5:00 p.m. August 12, 2021
- Scoping/Contracting Phase, or Request for Proposal (RFP) Open Window (*if deemed necessary by the County*)
 - August 23 to September 10, 2021
- Notice of Awards (*Tentative*)
 - September 20, 2021
- Contracts anticipated to start October 1, 2021
 - Contracts run through June 2022 (*or earlier if an awardee has a more limited timeline in their scope of work*)

Additional Information

- Beneficiaries of the funds may not use awarded funds to offset costs that have already been *reimbursed* by other federal funds. The County will accept submissions for use of this funding from CBOs, CDFIs, and service providers that primarily serve businesses from traditionally disadvantaged communities.

- The County favors projects that leverage matching funds from other sources. Awardees agree to comply with strict County and Federal reporting requirements for both scope level and financial reporting regulations. The County reserves the right to require a return of funds for underperforming organizations and/or for un-spent or mis-spent funds.
- The County anticipates making \$250,000 available for *qualified* responses to this request. However, the County has other potential uses for available funds, and reserves the right to ultimately deploy less–or more–than \$250,000 for proposals. There is no cap for any single request.
- Questions about this RFI should be directed in writing to Matt Craigie, Economic Development Manager for Washington County (matt_craigie@co.washington.or.us).