

March 18, 2024
Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Solicitation Number: **RFP-2331**
ADDENDUM NO. 1
Questions & Answers

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RHODE ISLAND FOOD BRANDS
THROUGH MARKET RESEARCH AND BRAND PROMOTION TO LOCAL AND
REGIONAL MARKETS

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation ("Corporation") is seeking proposals from qualified firms to conduct a comprehensive economic impact assessment and a marketing research study for the recently-launched, State-led food brands: "R.I. Grown" and "R.I. Seafood." The primary objective of this study is to gain a deep understanding of local food brands by analyzing their economic impact on the local economy and researching the most effective marketing strategies to increase brand awareness and consumer participation. The Corporation and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management ("RIDEM") are committed to gaining valuable insights into the performance of the food brands and leveraging the findings to enhance their impact on the local community.

Question #1: What is the incidence of current purchasers (i.e., past 1 month purchasers) of RI Grown and RI Seafood among Rhode Island households/consumers? Any approximate estimate of incidence would be helpful.

Answer #1: The incidence of current purchases of RI Grown and RI Seafood among Rhode Island consumers is not known. There has been no baseline economic impact assessment of these brands to date.

Question #2: How many current users of RI Grown and RI Seafood brands are there in each of the key segments of interest - farmers, fishers and shell fishers, and retailers? An approximate estimate would be helpful.

Answer #2: RIDEM is not currently tracking RI Grown brand users. It is estimated that approximately 25 farms have used materials throughout this past agricultural season. There are currently 89 registered businesses and over 100 locations using the RI Seafood brands.

Question #3: When was the previous research - the University of Rhode Island research and the RI Seafood Marketing Collaborative research - conducted? What information was NOT captured in that

research that must be included in this project? Are there any other issues/concerns with the existing research that should be addressed in this work?

Answer #3: Nicole L. Richard and Lori F. Pivarnick of University of Rhode Island published “Rhode Island branding program for local seafood: Consumer perceptions, awareness, and willingness-to-pay” in January 2020. The RI Seafood Marketing Collaborative was established by the RI state legislature (Rhode Island General Laws 20-38,) and has been conducting marketing campaigns over the last several years. For the purposes of this research, the Corporation is seeking to understand the economic impact of RI Seafood and RI Grown on the businesses using the brands and participating in the marketing activities. No perception, awareness, and willingness to pay research has been conducted on the RI Grown brand.

Question #4: Are all OOP (Travel costs particularly) to come from the total \$140K allocated budget for this project? If so, can you provide any context on the anticipated required number of in-person events or meetings for this project.

Answer #4: Travel is allowable within the proposed budget. Over the three years that this market research and testing is conducted, the awardee should expect to attend at least 2 in-person Advisory Board meetings per year in Providence, RI. Any in-person events related to the economic impact and market research study should be determined by the Proposer such as in-person events to inform the study (e.g. focus groups, interviews or meetings with local producers or retailer partners) or brand promotion events (e.g. retail tasting events, etc). A Local Food Marketing Research Coordinator will be on staff at the Corporation to support the Proposer with in-person events to test marketing strategies as needed in years 2 and 3 of the grant (anticipated to hire by May 2024). All other in-person meetings should be determined as needed by the Proposer to accomplish the study outcomes.

Question#5: Regarding the section that highlights TOOLKITS: is there already existing creative/marketing materials that will be utilized for this or is it a start from scratch in building these out. Any additional specifics on the deliverables for this would be greatly appreciated.

Answer #5: The RI Seafood Marketing Collaborative has pre-existing marketing materials from the recent update of the RI Seafood brand including use of the logo and where to find RI seafood. [See here for more information](#). RI Grown also has a pre-existing toolkit and promotional marketing materials with the logo, [see here for grower resources](#). For the purposes of this study, the toolkit will build upon existing toolkits for the RI Grown and RI Seafood programs to help farmers, fishers and food producers understand the economic benefit of using the brands and to strengthen brand recognition among consumers. The toolkits should also be used to encourage food buyers, such as retailers and institutions, to use the brand based on the recommended strategies from the study.

Question #6: Could you let us know if you have a local preference or are you open to a Canadian agency that has done similar work with clients across the United States, with some currently being the States of California, Colorado and Wyoming?

Answer #6: This RFP does not preclude international proposers. The services being procured by the RFP is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Federal State Marketing Improvement Program and any proposer must be compliant with all federal grant regulations and policies. Additionally, the Corporation will be evaluating proposals by the Overall Experience of Company and Demonstrated Results (see page 5 of RFP) which includes the relevance of past work, references, and related items.

Additionally (see page 6 of RFP), the proposals will be evaluated by the assessment of the proposers understanding of Rhode Island's food ecosystem and the relevant work.

Question #7: Does DEM have a baseline and ongoing data collection of data that tracks the purchasing of RI Grown products in the market where that campaign was delivered?

Answer #7: RIDEM has some data systems tracking the distribution of RI Grown materials.

Question #8: Should the consultant also look at other efforts to support local purchasing that have occurred in recent years such as the Shop Local RI pandemic-era born effort that includes food related products?

Answer #8: Recent COVID-related campaigns have been instrumental in supporting Rhode Island food producers. For the purposes of this project, Rhode Island Commerce would be most interested in understanding lessons learned and how to strengthen the buy local brands, RI Seafood and RI Grown post-COVID. However, if there are successful examples of state "buy local" food campaigns to learn from this would be encouraged.

Question #9: Does the budget limit of \$140,000 include travel and administration costs? It was not clear in the formatting if "total budget" should include the 'in addition items' noted below that line.

Answer #9: The total budget must not exceed \$140,000, including travel and administration costs. This project is funded through the USDA's Federal State Marketing Improvement Program and will adhere to all USDA federal grant regulations and policies.

Question #10: Have you already convened an advisory board for the project or will the consultant team be responsible for guiding this process?

Answer #10: A project team comprised of individuals from the Corporation, RIDEM, and the Rhode Island Food Policy Council convened to submit the application to receive funds for this project from the USDA. An initial advisory board has been imagined in the grant application but has not yet fully been activated. It will not be a primary responsibility of the consultant to guide this process, but recommendations by the consultant will be considered by the project team.

Question #11: Have you determined the amount of RIFCP equity stipends available for this project?

Answer #11: The equity stipends have been budgeted through the USDA's grant application process and are not included in the allocation for contracting a consultant.

Question #12: Have you or RIFCP developed any of the stipend process, including promoting the use of stipends and distributing them? To what extent will the consultant be involved in developing and/or executing any of this process?

Answer #12: The respondent is asked to incorporate and employ strategies that will engage and benefit food producers from historically marginalized and underserved communities. The RI Food Policy Council

will be distributing stipends through the guidance of the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation. The consultant is not expected to be involved in the stipend dispersion.

Question #13: Will preference be given to firms bidding individually or are you equally open to receiving proposals developed by partnering firms? If the later, can you provide a list of interested firms based on at least those that asked questions?

Answer #13: The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation is open to receiving proposals submitted on behalf of partnering firms. No list of interested firms can be provided.

Question #14: Will you be able to share data/surveys used in previous research (done by Rhode Island University & RI Seafood Collective)

Answer #14: The RI Seafood Marketing Collaborative, as part of this effort's project team, will be able to share data to inform the market research performed. The University of Rhode Island's research was published in 2020, "Rhode Island branding program for local seafood: Consumer perceptions, awareness, and willingness-to-pay."

Question #15: Will you be able to provide contacts to member companies and, if so, how many?

Answer #15: RIDEM is not currently tracking RI Grown brand users but is tracking users of the RI Seafood logo. RIDEM and the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation will be able to provide connections and contact information for important stakeholders and RI food producers where necessary.

Question #16: Will the promotions (RI Grown and/or RI Seafood) be seen in neighboring states/areas (i.e., CT, MA)?

Answer #16: The project partners are interested in seeing more consumption within Rhode Island and neighboring New England state of Rhode Island grown, raised, harvested, and caught foods under the RI Grown and RI Seafood brand.

Question #17: Given the overall budget for this exercise, we assume that the economic impact report would be fairly high level, focusing on employment, revenue generation/increase in labor income, local taxes, and similar data points, as opposed to an in-depth modelling exercise, which would require multiple field visits, travel, and extensive regression analysis. Can the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation please confirm?

Answer #17: Yes, the economic impact of the two brands, RI Seafood and RI Grown, should be high level including existing data on employment, revenue generation for businesses, local taxes, and impacts on the local food economy. The brand awareness may require some market research surveys or focus groups to understand consumer awareness of the brands.

***End of Addendum ***