



Request for Proposals Call Center Support Services

INTRODUCTION

Through this Request for Proposals (“RFP”), the Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation (“RIHousing”) seeks proposals from qualified firms to provide call center support services for the federal Emergency Rental Assistance program, Rent Relief RI. The program is targeted to be up and running in mid-March of 2021 and will provide customer support, language assistance, application assistance, application processing and other services as needed to Rhode Island residents seeking assistance through the program.

Rent Relief RI will offer rental assistance to applicants with household incomes at or below 80% of AMI. Applicants must have had income reduced, significant costs, or other financial hardship due to COVID-19 OR qualified for unemployment benefits between March 13, 2020 and the date of application. Applicants must also show they are at risk for becoming homeless or loss of housing.

As a state housing finance agency and public housing authority, RIHousing operates a variety of federally assisted rental subsidy, emergency housing, and foreclosure prevention programs, including HUD and Treasury initiatives as follows: Housing Choice Voucher Program, Project Based Voucher Program, Project Based Rental Assistance, Hardest Hit Fund RI (HHFRI), Housing Counseling and other rental assistance programs as needed. On an annual basis, RIHousing provides rental assistance to almost 20,000 households across the state.

INSTRUCTIONS

Proposal should be submitted via email to: **Deborah Devine** at ddevine@rihousing.com. Proposals should be concise and include all attachments.

Proposals must be received no later than 3:00 EST p.m. on Thursday, February 25, 2021. Responses received after this date and time shall not be accepted. Respondents are advised that all submissions (including those not selected for engagement) may be made available to the public on request upon completion of the process and award of a contract(s).

SCOPE OF WORK

Please see the Scope of Work provided at Attachment A.

ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED WITH YOUR PROPOSAL

Submission
Check List

Please note that failure to provide any information, certification, or document requested in this RFP may cause your submission not to be scored. The following information may be supplied in a formally written, RIHousing specific proposal **OR** through a packaging of existing marketing materials, presentations, price sheets, draft contracts, etc. that furnishes all requested information. **A signed copy of the certification letter is required.**

A. General Firm Information

1. Provide a brief description of your firm, including but not limited to the following:
 - a. Name of the principal(s) of the firm.
 - b. Name, telephone number and email address of a representative of the firm authorized to discuss your proposal.

B. Experience and Resources

1. Describe your firm and its capabilities supporting your capacity to perform the Scope of Work.
2. Provide references, including a contact name and telephone number for organizations or businesses for whom you have performed similar work.

C. Fee Structure

The cost of services is one of the factors that will be considered in awarding this contract. The information requested in this section is required to support the reasonableness of your fees.

Please provide a cost proposal for providing the Scope of Work at Attachment A.

- D. Affirmative Action Plan and Minority Owned Business/Women Owned Business
RIHousing encourages the participation of persons of color, women, persons with disabilities and members of other federally and State-protected classes. Describe your firm's affirmative action program and activities. Include the number and percentage of members of federally and State-protected classes who are either principals or senior managers in your firm, the number and percentage of members of federally and State-protected classes in your firm who will work on RIHousing's engagement and, if applicable, a copy of your Minority- or Women-Owned Business Enterprise state certification.

E. Certifications

All applicants must respond to and provide documentation as outlined in the Submission Certifications document included at the end of this RFP.



EVALUATION AND SELECTION

A selection committee consisting of RIHousing employees (the “Committee”) will review all proposals and make a determination based on the following factors:

- Professional capacity to undertake the Scope of Work
- Proposed fee structure
- Ability to perform within time and budget constraints
- Evaluation of potential work plans
- Previous work experience and performance with RIHousing and/or similar organizations
- Firm minority status and affirmative action program or activities
- Timing of implementation
- Other pertinent information submitted.

RIHousing may invite one or more finalists to make presentations.

In its sole discretion, RIHousing may negotiate with one or more firms who have submitted qualifications to submit more detailed proposals on specific projects as they arise.

By this Request for Proposals, RIHousing has not committed itself to undertake the work set forth. RIHousing reserves the right to reject any and all proposals, to rebid the original or amended scope of services and to enter into negotiations with one or more respondents. RIHousing reserves the right to make those decisions after receipt of responses. RIHousing’s decision on these matters is final.

For additional information contact:

Deborah Devine

ddevine@rihousing.com

Revised: June 2020



Attachment A Scope of Work

RIHousing seeks to engage a firm to provide call center support services to RIHousing for the federal Emergency Rental Assistance program, Rent Relief RI. The program is targeted to be up and running in mid-March of 2021 and will provide customer support, language assistance, application assistance, application processing and other services as needed to Rhode Island residents seeking assistance through the program.

The Vendor will provide staff to respond to inquiries using a toll free number (e.g.1-800 number) that will route calls and messages to customer service representatives working at remote locations. The Vendor will hire representatives, at minimum, that speak English, Spanish, and shall have a plan for providing translation services for inquiries in other languages where staff are not available. The Vendor shall maintain a subcontract with language translation services to ensure adequate coverage and to provide for other languages not listed here.

The Vendor will hire and train staff to serve as Customer Service Representatives to: receive calls to the toll free number; answer basic questions from callers; follow up on inquiries using outbound calls, texts or email using Frequently Asked Questions, call scripts and following procedures to be developed by the Vendor in consultation with RIHousing; assist applicants in completing the application and uploading documents; receive and upload W-9 and W-8 forms, as applicable, from landlords; and refer applicants to partners. The Vendor will be required to utilize the platform chosen by RIHousing for processing applications. RIHousing has a strong preference that the Vendor hire Rhode Island residents to the extent possible.

The Call Center will operate and receive calls both during the application period as well as throughout the application review and appeals process. The Call Center may be required to be open 7 days per week depending on call volume with hours to be determined. The Call Center's primary objective will be to ensure a fully accessible opportunity for all potentially eligible applicants to seek assistance, including those with limited technology access, non-English speaking applicants, those with hearing, speech and vision disabilities, and other vulnerable populations. The Vendor shall provide for TTY or other technology to assist people who are hearing impaired.

Customer Service staff shall be accessible through a toll-free number and shall be operational from 8 am-7 pm ET Monday through Saturday, except State and federal holidays, during the application period; Hours may shift to Monday through Friday after the initial application period and may be shifted again at RIHousing's discretion depending on call volume and the need for outgoing calls. The Vendor will schedule staff sufficiently to ensure adequate phone coverage to meet Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) at all times



to comply with the KPIs listed in this scope of work. RIHousing reserves the right to require staffing on Sundays and holidays as well as extended hours on other days if necessary. Staff hours will be staggered to ensure sufficient coverage at all times while avoiding overtime if possible. Customer Service staff shall be accessible by phone and email for follow up with callers.

RIHousing is not prescribing minimum staffing levels and it is not possible to estimate call volume at this time. The Vendor will propose for various staffing levels for the Call Center indicated in their cost proposal and make recommendations as to appropriate levels of staffing based on population, income distribution, and the vendor's previous experience. After the initial staff up, the volume of calls and inquiries, as well as the flow of applications, is expected to vary greatly and is hard to predict. The Vendor will assess staffing levels daily and will make recommendations to add or subtract staff as necessary based on the desired KPIs.

The Vendor will provide a Training Plan acceptable to RIHousing for all Vendors and any assigned State Staff working in the Call Center. This plan will include:

- Call Scripts for Frequently Asked Questions.
- Instructions for using the phone system as directed by RIHousing.
- Instructions for using the Vendor's Call Center's technology solution.
- A review of the requirements to allow Call Center staff to take applications over the phone.
- Data security and confidentiality.
- Best practices for managing difficult customers, resolving disputes, etc.
- Procedures to access applicant data, check applicant status and upload documents.
- Confidentiality rules for disclosing applicant data.
- A plan for ongoing training and staff communication to identify vulnerabilities, apply lessons learned, update staff on policy changes, and promote best practices.
- The Vendor shall provide sensitivity training to all staff interacting with the public to prepare them for appropriate communication with customers from different and diverse backgrounds.

The Vendor will produce daily metrics reports that will, at minimum, include updates on all Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and other required fields such as:

- # of calls received in the Call Center
- # average hold/wait times broken down for English, Spanish and other languages/ASAs/CAR
- # categories of calls received/disposition
- Breakdown of calls requiring translation



- # of calls awaiting call-backs
- Other categories as requested by RIHousing
- # of calls requiring referral to other agencies and/or resources

The Vendor shall develop a Customer Service Plan that includes, but is not limited to, the Call Center model, channels of support, service level agreements (SLA) and key performance indicators (KPI), roles and responsibilities, monitoring and reporting, and continuous improvement. The Vendor shall define KPI targets as discussed with and approved by RIHousing, including but not limited to Average Speed of Answer (ASA) and Call Abandonment Rate (CAR).

RFP/RFQ Title: _____

Respondent Name: _____



RIHousing
Requests for Proposals/Requests for Qualifications
Submission Certifications

Please respond to all items below, include any additional information in the space provided or as an attachment as needed, and return along with your RFP submission. Ensure any additional pages refer to the appropriate item by name (ie. "Conflict of Interest," "Major State Decision Maker," etc).

EXPERIENCE AND RESOURCES

1. Identify any conflict of interest that may arise as a result of business activities or ventures by your firm and associates of your firm, employees, or subcontractors as a result of any individual's status as a member of the board of directors of any organization likely to interact with RIHousing. **If none, check below.**

None

Describe how your firm will handle actual and or potential conflicts of interest.

2. Identify any material litigation, administrative proceedings or investigations in which your firm is currently involved. Identify any material litigation, administrative proceedings or investigations, to which your firm or any of its principals, partners, associates, subcontractors or support staff was a party, that has been finally adjudicated or settled within the past two (2) years. **If none, check below.**

None

CERTIFICATIONS

1. RIHousing insists upon full compliance with Chapter 27 of Title 17 of the Rhode Island General Laws, Reporting of Political Contributions by State Vendors. This law requires State Vendors entering into contracts to provide services to an agency such as RIHousing, for the aggregate sum of \$5,000 or more, to file an affidavit with the State Board of Elections concerning reportable political contributions. The affidavit must state whether the State Vendor (and any related parties as defined in the law) has, within 24 months preceding the date of the contract, contributed an aggregate amount in excess of \$250 within a calendar year to any general officer, any candidate for general office, or any political party. **Please acknowledge your understanding of this in your RFP response.**
2. Does any Rhode Island "Major State Decision-maker," as defined below, or the spouse or dependent child of such person, hold (i) a ten percent or greater equity interest, or (ii) a Five Thousand Dollar or greater cash interest in this business?

RFP/RFQ Title: _____
Respondent Name: _____

For purposes of this question, "Major State Decision-maker" means:

(i) All general officers; and all executive or administrative head or heads of any state executive agency enumerated in § 42-6-1 as well as the executive or administrative head or heads of state quasi-public corporations, whether appointed or serving as an employee. The phrase "executive or administrative head or heads" shall include anyone serving in the positions of director, executive director, deputy director, assistant director, executive counsel or chief of staff;

(ii) All members of the general assembly and the executive or administrative head or heads of a state legislative agency, whether appointed or serving as an employee. The phrase "executive or administrative head or heads" shall include anyone serving in the positions of director, executive director, deputy director, assistant director, executive counsel or chief of staff;

(iii) All members of the state judiciary and all state magistrates and the executive or administrative head or heads of a state judicial agency, whether appointed or serving as an employee. The phrase "executive or administrative head or heads" shall include anyone serving in the positions of director, executive director, deputy director, assistant director, executive counsel, chief of staff or state court administrator.

If your answer is "Yes," please identify the Major State Decision-maker, specify the nature of their ownership interest, and provide a copy of the annual financial disclosure required to be filed with the Rhode Island Ethics Commission pursuant to R.I.G.L. §§36-14-16, 17 and 18. If your answer is "No," check the box below.

Yes (provide additional information as noted above)

No

3. In the course of providing goods or services to RIHousing, the selected respondent may receive certain personal information specific to RIHousing customer(s) including, without limitation, customer names and addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses, dates of birth, loan numbers, account numbers, social security numbers, driver's license or identification card numbers, employment and income information, photographic likenesses, tax returns, or other personal or financial information (hereinafter collectively referred to as the "Personal Information"). The maintenance of the Personal Information in strict confidence and the confinement of its use to RIHousing are of vital importance to RIHousing. **Please certify below that in the event your firm is selected:**

(i) any Personal Information disclosed to your firm by RIHousing or which your firm acquires as a result of its services hereunder will be regarded by your firm as confidential, and shall not be copied or disclosed to any third party, unless RIHousing has given its prior written consent thereto; and

RFP/RFQ Title: _____
Respondent Name: _____

(ii) your firm agrees to take all reasonable measures to (a) ensure the security and confidentiality of the Personal Information, (b) protect against any anticipated threats or hazards to the security or integrity of the Personal Information, and (c) maintain reasonable security procedures and practices appropriate to your firm's size, the nature of the Personal Information, and the purpose for which the Personal Information was collected in order to protect the Personal Information from unauthorized access, use, modification, destruction or disclosure; and

(iii) when discarding the Personal Information, destroying it in a commercially reasonable manner such that no third party can view or recreate the information, electronically or otherwise.

These provisions, which implement the requirements of the Rhode Island Identity Theft Protection Act, R.I.G.L. § 11-49.2 et seq., will also be incorporated into the final contract with the selected respondent(s). In addition, if selected, your firm may be requested to provide a copy of its information security plan.

I certify that in the event our firm is selected, we will comply with the Personal Information and Security guidelines noted above.

4. **Certification from your president, chairman or CEO** certifying that (i) no member of your firm has made inquiries or contacts with respect to this Request for Proposals other than in an email or written communication to Debbie Devine, Executive Assistant, RIHousing (ddevine@rihousing.com) seeking clarification on the Scope of Work set forth in this proposal, from the date of this RFP through the date of your proposal, (ii) no member of your firm will make any such inquiry or contact until after February 25, 2021, (iii) all information in your proposal is true and correct to the best of her/his knowledge, (iv) no member of your firm gave anything of monetary value or promise of future employment to a RIHousing employee or Commissioner, or a relative of the same, based on any understanding that such person's action or judgment will be influenced and (v) your firm is in full compliance with Chapter 27 of Title 17 of the Rhode Island General Laws, Reporting of Political Contributions by State Vendors.

I certify that no member of our firm has made any such inquiries or contacts.

President, Chairman or CEO (*print*): _____

Signature: _____

Company Name: _____

Complete Form, Print, Sign and Include any attachments as necessary.