Request for Proposals - Request for Proposals - NYS Division of Minority and Women's Business Development (DMWBD) - Cloud-Based Software Solution for NYS Certification and Business Development - Addendum # 1 - Questions & Answers

---

Release Date: October 22, 2021

The following is a list of responses to questions submitted by prospective respondents ("Respondents") to the Request for Proposals - Request for Proposals - NYS Division of Minority and Women's Business Development (DMWBD) - Cloud-Based Software Solution for NYS Certification and Business Development

Addendum # 1 -   Responses to Questions

#	Question	Answer
1	Do you have any mock-ups/wireframes that illustrate what you're looking for?	This will be a new platform and currently is under development. Our goal is to reimagine existing workflow processes and the output will be informed by the discovery process. We are looking for a dynamic and interactive workflow process.
2	Are you looking for a reactive/responsive web application and a native mobile application (or PWA)? Or are you just looking for a reactive/responsive web application? If you are looking for both, please specify how these apps would differ in terms of features/functionality.	We are looking for both a reactive/responsive web application and a native mobile application. The native mobile app would have less functionality than a desktop app, but it would have key features that will be identified during the discovery/development process.
3	For the scope of the MWBE system, how will this product development journey be phased? (i.e. MVP vs future state). Can you put the list of features into prioritized order? (necessary for MVP vs. nice to have)	It will be both. Please refer to the RFP.

4	Enable electronic document intake, storage, retrieval, analysis, searchability and visualization to process and review applications for MWBE certification and/or removal of certification Question: What kind of analysis/visualization are you looking for? Are you looking for this to be built into/within the application, itself, or are you looking to integrate with an external tool (e.g. Tableau)?	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.
5	Create and maintain "MWBE Data Retrieval Tool" to facilitate document requests, retrieval, verification, and analysis from State agencies, such as the NYS Department of Taxation and Finance, and alert applicants when such data is requested and accessed Question: Does this mean that the customer is going to be accessing your site and looking for this documentation? Please provide a use case that illustrates what this means.	For the data retrieval tool, the customer would be uploading own documentation and would then be able to indicate their consent to have documentation verified by third parties, such as NYS Department of Taxation.
6	Enable State Ag/Au submission of certification expedite requests for pending applications Question: Can you clarify what this requirement means? Are you saying that there are certain submissions that will be flagged/expedited? Is this something that your internal team would need to be able to do, or would external	NYS Ag/Au must be able to submit expedite requests for pending vendor certification applications. The request would need to meet certain requirements before the certification application is flagged as an expedited request. The application would need to be routed to specific system bins for expedited review while still being recorded as normal through the lifecycle of the application to either approval or denial.

	parties be deciding what needs to be flagged?	
7	Retrieve application documents as an export or batch download Question: Is this for internal or external retrieval (i.e. will this be an internal resource retrieving documents, or an external party such as a customer)?	Internal as well as external – an applicant should be able to download a copy set of its own application documents.
8	Make preliminary or predictive determinations as to whether applicant satisfies eligibility requirements for certification Question: Can we assert that business rules can be used for this requirement (e.g. if answer #1 and answer #2 are both "No", then the customer doesn't satisfy preliminary requirements and should receive an alert that they don't qualify)? Or is there truly some predictive nature to this?	As some aspects of eligibility require more review and analysis than a simple 'yes' or 'no' response, AI could be utilized to provide predicative determinations. Please refer to the self-assessment tool as a use case. https://esd.ny.gov/doing-business-ny/mwbe/mwbe-certification-assessment

| 9 | Two-way electronic communication capability to interface with applicants to request information/documents, transmit information or documents and provide status updates Question: Is this integrating with email? Or are you looking for a "chat" feature built into the application? If it is a built-in "chat" feature, would users receive an alert (in the form of a push notification, etc.) as messages come in? Or would they get the alert when they log into the application? | Both email and chat feature would be used. In terms of alerts from a chat feature, users could opt-in for push notifications. Regardless of opting for push notifications, users would be altered to any new or pending messages upon logging in. |
| 10 | Estimate anticipated wait times (provided to MWBE applicants) throughout the fourphase application process based on prior analysis of application review speeds and complexity of individual applicant and enabled by data analysis and machine learning. Over time, the system should also leverage the same features to drive predictive analysis to determine potential issues with individual MWBE applications and denote (for internal review) probability of application success Question: Is this in scope for the initial project? Or is this something that could be added in a later phase? | Platform should have the capability to do this, but the functionality can be utilized in a later phase. The platform should be able to track when an application is uploaded, track the application as it moves through review phases through to completion, and then aggregate that information across reviews to determine average wait-times based on inputs. |

1 1	Application and certification audit capabilities Question: Please elaborate on what this means.	The system must have the capability to verify that the required documents are uploaded with all new certification and recertification applications. Additionally, the system should be able to verify that submitted documents satisfy specific application requirements. During the recertification and profile update processes the system must allow for comparison and analysis of the exiting certification record against the new recertification or profile update applications.
1 2	Docket management, document management and administration (e.g., electronic communications, notifications, calendar, document intake, etc.) capabilities for the MWBE administrative appeals process. Question: Please elaborate on what this means.	The system should, for example, permit applicants who have filed administrative appeals to upload legal documents (such as notices of appeal or appeal briefs) to the system, which automatically tracks and determines whether such documents are timely filed. The system should also enable the Division to send notifications to the applicant regarding the scheduling of hearing dates. Documents that form the administrative appeal record should be saved on the system.
1 3	Database or directory of certified firms that can be updated, searched or filtered based on various parameters including company name, NAICS code, business description, etc. Question: Is this something you'd like to build inside the application itself? Or would this be integrating with some other system that you currently use to keep track of certified firms?	Integrated but a separate user-friendly interface for end users.

1 4	Enable retrieval, tracking, processing, and recording of inter-Agency review and authorization requests relating to spending and purchasing controls Question: Is this an integration with a 3rd party system? If so, what is it and is there an API?	Currently 3rd party systems. These include the New York Statewide Financial System (SFS), various off the shelf systems (Peoplesoft, etc.), and custom internally developed systems
1 5	Purchasing or procurement card management Question: Is this an integration with a 3rd party system? If so, what is it and is there an API?	Current State procurement card vendor provides files for upload into system for data population.
1 6	Audit capabilities Question:Is this an integration with a 3rd party system? If so, what is it and is there an API?	Built into the existing system. Ability to verify against outside systems such as Open book NY, etc.
1 7	Payment tracking functionality. Question: Is this an integration with a 3rd party system? If so, what is it and is there an API?	Currently 3rd party systems. These include the New York Statewide Financial System (SFS), various off the shelf systems (Peoplesoft, etc.), and custom internally developed systems. Must allow for manual payment entry by Au/Ag, Prime-contractors, and subcontractors. As of this moment, there is no API for payment tracking and we are seeking proposals on solutions and best practices.

1 8	Monitor, manage and report on MWBE programmatic elements on various types of procurements and State contracting, including but not limited to Blended contracts (Federal and state funding); commodities; construction projects; discretionary purchases, exclusions, exemptions, federal spend, grants, HBITS contracting, Human Services spend, in-year exclusions, not-for-profit, OGS centralized contracts, p-cards, preferred sources, purchase orders, sole source, zero goal and requirements contracts Question: This sounds like you want to be able to monitor, and report on, various types of contracts? Will reporting be internal to the app, or does it need to export to an external tool (e.g. Tableau)?	Reporting should be internal with ability to export into various file types as needed. We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.	
1 9	Enable document intake from State Au/Ag and contractors, storage, retrieval, analysis and visualization to monitor State contracts for MWBE utilization and compliance, including for example, submission of utilization reports, quarterly reporting, waiver requests, etc. Question: What kind of analysis/visualization are you looking for? Are you looking for this to be built into/within the application, itself, or are you looking to integrate with an external tool (e.g. Tableau)?	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.	

| 2 0 | Ensure that any automated state contract MWBE goal setting feature within the system alerts the Ag/Au that such automated goal is only a recommendation, and that the Ag/Au must confirm the parameters of the search as being sufficient and appropriate for the type of procurement under implementation. As well as keep sufficient enough documented good faith effort of the parameters of the MWBE vendor search Question: Regarding the second part "As well as keep sufficient documented good faith effort of the parameters of the MWBE vendor search"... please clarify what this means | Documented good faith effort includes the search criteria used in the search of the certified directory, the search results, and outreach communications to certified vendors. Ag/Au and vendors should be able to search the certified directory and save and share the search criteria and results internally within the relevant utilization plan and/or state contract as well as upload external communication documents. |
| 2 1 | Monitor, manage, audit and report on MWBE program compliance, including tracking of payments made to MWBE vendors updated through the SFS interface and other interfaces as necessary, reporting on payments to subcontractors, intake and searchable repository of utilization plans by internal and external stakeholders, etc. Question: Please elaborate on what systems would need to be integrated in order to accomplish this. | Currently 3rd party systems. These include the New York Statewide Financial System (SFS), various off the shelf systems (Peoplesoft, etc.), and custom internally developed systems. Must allow for manual payment entry by Au/Ag, Prime-contractors, and subcontractors. |

2 2	Oversight of relevant procurement and purchasing activity conducted by Agencies and Authorities across the platform. Question: Would we be integrating with an external/3rd party system to pull procurement and purchasing activity data?	Currently 3rd party systems. These include the New York Statewide Financial System (SFS), various off the shelf systems (Peoplesoft, etc.), and custom internally developed systems. Must allow for manual payment entry by Au/Ag, Prime-contractors, and subcontractors.
2 3	GIS Mapping to enable agencies and authorities to search by geographic location for certified MWBE firms to participate in their contracts, and allowing transparency to vendors and certified firms to see contracting opportunities in their regions Question: Do you already have a GIS system in place and/or a preferred GIS system (e.g. Google maps)?	NYS has a license to a GIS system.
2 4	Facilitation of MWBE business development through site-based trainings (i.e. how to conduct business with XYZ Agency), webinars, outreach notifications and virtual Town Halls Question: Would we be integrating with an external/3rd party system to pull this training content? Also, are you looking to have a video conferencing feature built into the application to host virtual Town Halls? Or would this be connecting with an external/3rd party system?	NYS currently uses Zoom and Webex for training purposes.

2 5	Manage Agency Services interactions with Agencies/Authorities/Vendors, through support tickets, email, CRM system, trainings, etc. Question: Are these external/3rd party integrations that we would be utilizing to track support tickets, link with CRM system, etc.? Or is this something you're looking to be built into the application?	Currently using Microsoft Dynamic as a CRM tool.
2 6	Two-way and mass communication capabilities including outreach notifications, alerts, and event tracking. Question: Are these communications via email? Or chat? Please elaborate on what you mean by "mass communication."	We need the ability to send two-way communication. Ag/Au should be able to send email and/or internal communications and push notifications to targeted vendors within the certified directory.
2 7	Responsive customer service interface that leverages AI and machine learning to respond to user questions and requests via a chatbot feature Question: Is this separate/different from the requirement above?	Yes.
2 8	Self-assessment tools for educational and informational use. Question: Please elaborate on what this means.	Please see self-assessment tool: https://esd.ny.gov/doing-business-ny/mwbe/mwbe-certification-assessment

2 9	Android/IOS/Windows based application that provides status updates, contracting opportunities, push notifications, etc. Question: You mentioned earlier in the document that you were looking for a Web application, however here it seems you're looking for a mobile application. Are you looking for both? For example, a customer could use the Web app to fill out the application, attach documentation, etc. Employee uses the Web application to conduct the initial review. And then the mobile application will be used to send out push notifications with status updates. Is that what you're thinking?	The RFP outlines both a web-based application as well as a native mobile application. Notifications should not be limited to the mobile application; features should be available on both web-based and mobile applications.
3 0	Contains features useful to certified and prospective MWBEs such as digital wallet certification, application status updates, pending action items on application, etc. Question: What would the digital wallet certification be used for? Will there be payments processed through this application?	Digital wallet would be used to display certification status and assigned NAICS codes. Please refer to NYS Excelsior Pass Wallet as an example. Payments will not be processed through the application.

3 1	To leverage AI, all systems must connect and share data with each other to add value across touchpoints. This will enable AI systems to accelerate innovation and define the future of MWBE certification processing. The system should be able to learn from the MWBE vendor decisions and resulting utilization made by the various Ag/Au within the same industries. That should then allow it to make recommendations to the Ag/Au as to optimal goal setting as well as how to reduce the need for waivers. The final decision should still be human based documented good faith effort goal setting, but such recommendation would be helpful. Question: Do you have any diagrams that show the flow of data across all the systems that you are alluding to?	No. We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.
3 2	The software should use machine learning and data from applicants, queries, etc. to provide auto-generated information or assessments to users. For example: Determine appropriate timeframes for application processing through each decentralized phase; Question: Is this in scope for the initial project? Or is this something that could be added in a later phase?	Platform should have the capability to do this, but the functionality can be utilized in a later phase. The platform should be able to track when an application is uploaded, track the application as it moves through review phases through to completion, and then aggregate that information across reviews to determine average wait-times based on inputs.

| 3 3 | The software must be optimized for mobile applications, which can provide duplicative features as those found on the web-based application for IOS and Android. The cross-platform application must serve as a user-friendly communication platform that can provide smart notifications, either through user-driven search or one way push notifications, on certification application status (e.g. when an application enters a different phase in the decentralized process), alert the user when action is required (e.g. if a certification submits a request for additional information relating to an open application), provide opt-in notices for available contracting opportunities (dependent on user profile such as location and industry). Question: So will the Mobile application be identical to the Web application? Or is the Mobile application only using limited features (e.g. push notifications, status updates, messaging)? Will customers be able to fill out the application and upload documentation onto the Mobile application and the Web application? Will there be analytics/dashboards on the Mobile application and the Web application? | The native mobile applications will have limited features in relation to the web-based application. The certification applications process would only be managed via the web-based application, and the native mobile application would provide status updates and push notifications in relation to the process. Both the web-based and native mobile application will have dashboards and analytics. |

3 4	The software must be able to accept GIS data from a variety of sources to create a NYS State Map with certified vendor-specific work descriptions, as well as a feed that shows current contracting opportunities with Agencies and Authorities in NYS. It must include a search function for several parameters, such as industry codes, zip codes, latitude/longitude, counties, contract type (advertising, construction, etc.). Question: Please elaborate on what sources you are referring to.	NYS Contract Reporter and the Certified Firm database.
3 5	Please provide the following forms: i. State Finance Law §§139-j and 139-k forms, and v. Encouraging the Use of NYS Businesses in Contract Performance Form	Form can be found below: https://cdn.esd.ny.gov/CorporateInformation/Data/RFPs/RequiredForms/SF_Law139_JK.pdf https://cdn.esd.ny.gov/CorporateInformation/Data/ENCOURAGINGUSEOFNEWYORKSTATEBUSINESSESINCONTRACTPERFORMANCE.pdf
3 6	Many of the requirements in this RFP are already performed by the NYS Contracts System (https://ny.newnycontracts.com/Default.asp). Is it ESD's intent to replace the NYS Contracts System with the solution called for in this RFP? If not, how does this project relate to the NYS Contracts System?	Please refer to RFP.

3 7	Can you provide some additional information / clarification on the use of AI and Machine Learning called for in the RFP? It seems many of the requirements called for on pg 9, Section B.i and B.ii can be accomplished without the use of AI / Machine Learning.	Please refer to RFP.
3 8	Could you provide some more clarification on ESD's need for utilizing a low-code framework called for on pg 9, section B.iii of the RFP. Is its ESD expectation that the application be built utilizing a low code framework? If so, does ESD have a particular low-code framework in mind for this project?	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.
3 9	Can the due date be pushed out?	Due date set forth in RFP.
4 0	Are there MBE/WBE goals for this RFP?	Please refer to RFP.
4 1	User Authentication – For internal users of this system is it expected that user authentication will be against the NYS Active Directory?	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.
4 2	Is an SSO capability required or is the desire to have this system manage user authentication and RBAC from within the new system?	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.
4 3	Are OCR capabilities for uploaded documents required?	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question, but anticipate that OCR functionality would be helpful.

4 4	Pg 7, A. Product Requirements, section ii of RFP: Biz Dev – Does the system need to have a calendering capability for event scheduling?	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.
4 5	Pg 7, A. Product Requirements, section ii of RFP: Biz Dev – Does the system need to have a survey capability?	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.
4 6	Pg 8. iv Management of compliance efforts by State Agencies and authorities section d of RFP: Please confirm: The scope of this newly developed systems will need to include a payment module and a purchasing and procurement card management module.	The system will need to include a payment module that can track and report contract payments from Ag/Au to prime contractors and from prime contractors to subs. System must be able to track and report on procurement card transactions. Current State procurement card vendor provides files for upload into system for data population.
4 7	Pg 9 ix User Interface, section d: For the mobile application requirement, is there a vision as to what features will be on the mobile app vs what the web browser features?	We are looking for both a reactive/responsive web application and a native mobile application. The native mobile app would have less functionality than a desktop app, but it would have key features that will be identified during the discovery process.
4 8	Pg 9 ix User Interface, section d: Is there a preferred public cloud platform for deploying the SaaS or can the vendor choose?	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.
4 9	Pg. 10 section iii Low-Code: The low code requirement is unclear. Since the provider will be developing and maintaining the software can the provider choose the software development tools? Would you	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.

	consider .NET Core a low code development tool.	
5 0	Pg 10, B. Mandatory Operational Requirements System Integration Section x. Are there existing data feeds for all of the external data needed for this system or do new data feeds need to be developed. Are the REST APIs for any of these data input needs?	Currently 3rd party systems. These include the New York Statewide Financial System (SFS), various off the shelf systems (Peoplesoft, etc.), and custom internally developed systems. Must allow for manual payment entry by Au/Ag, Prime-contractors, and subcontractors
5 1	Pg 10, B. Mandatory Operational Requirements System Integration Section x. Please confirm: The provider will have to supply personnel to answer human assisted calls in the event AI assisted chat features do not provide the end user with their answer.	The Division will task our internal Customer Care Unit to manage questions that require live support.
5 2	In the ESD IT Project Deliverable Criteria document In n. Deliverable Web Project -Google Analytics: ESD Google Analytics, Tag Manager and Webmasters Tools account should be used for the analytics reporting aspect of any web project. It is unclear why the requirement is there for Google Analytics. Can you elaborate on why this is a requirement?	The Google Analytics is an optional requirement. It would be used if it is determined that the Division wants to tag specific pages inside the application and track metrics.

5 3	Attached is a document of the functional and technical system requirements from the 2018 RFP for the ESD MWBE system. Please advise if these requirements are required as part of the "New System" described in this RFP as detailed in section IV "Scope of Work" (page 6 of the RFP). If not all requirements are included, please identify the sections or items that are applicable.	Please refer to RFP.
5 4	In section IV C, the RFP alludes to the Division's current platform. Please detail the current platform	Refer to NYS Contracting System.
5 5	How and what is ESD using or doing today to address the elements in the Scope of Work, not otherwise addressed with the Division's current platform? We are referring to Section IV A (Product Requirements) - Please indicate the types of technologies in place today. If there are technical solutions in place today, would you wish to preserve any of these?	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.
5 6	Has ESD considered leveraging existing NY State systems, for example, the New York State Contract System? Why wouldn't this approach be feasible or beneficial?	Please refer to RFP.
5 7	What might be considered unacceptable technologies, frameworks, environments, or	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.

	platforms for the new system?	
5 8	Can the due date for the response be extended by week?	No.
5 9	Is there an approved budget for this project?	We are seeking proposals for best solutions and practices to this question.
6 0	Reference RFP Page 11 Section D. ESD IT Project Deliverable Criteria" The RFP states "The Designated Provider's software must comply with the ESD IT Project Deliverable Criteria, attached as Appendix A: ESD IT Project Deliverables." If bidder does not meet IT deliverable standards as of proposal submission date, will it be acceptable if we meet stated standards by contract award date?	Yes that is acceptable. The vendor will need to put forth a plan to meet the standards by the award date.
6 1	How many State users and how many contractors would be expected to be on the platform?	We estimate up to 15,000 users by deployment date.