

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA Department of Health and Human Services Division of Services for the Blind	REQUEST FOR INFORMATION NO. 30-25301-DSB
Refer <u>ALL</u> Inquiries to: Eve Hens Contract Specialist (585)297-4954 Eve.hens@dhhs.nc.gov	Due Date: 4/8/25 Issue Date: 3/12/25 Commodity: 801615-Management Support Services Using Agency Name: NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Services for the Blind

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Request for Information (RFI) is to survey the market for information and recommendations from the management services vendor community regarding the functionality and *estimated* cost of procuring management services for the Division of Services for the Blind’s Randolph-Sheppard – Business Enterprises Program. See Executive Summary below for additional details.

QUESTIONS

Submit written questions to eve.hens@dhhs.nc.gov until **March 21, 2025**. See Section 2.2 for complete instructions for submitting clarification questions.

DELIVERY INSTRUCTIONS: Submit **one (1) signed, original** Request for Information (RFI) via the Ariba Sourcing Module or via email to eve.hens@dhhs.nc.gov. If confidential and proprietary information is contained in your RFI response, submit **one (1) signed, redacted copy** and label the attached file **“RFI-Vendor Name – REDACTED”**. The RFI response must be submitted prior to the RFI due date provided above. It is the responsibility of the vendor to have their RFI response in this office by the specified date and time. See Section 2.4 for complete response instructions.

NOTICE TO VENDOR:

Submission of a response does not create an offer, and no contract award will result by submitting a response. The State of North Carolina shall not be liable for any costs incurred by respondents in developing or submitting a response to this RFI.

EXECUTION

VENDOR NAME:	E-MAIL:	
STREET ADDRESS:	P.O. BOX:	ZIP:
CITY & STATE:	TELEPHONE NUMBER:	TOLL FREE TEL. NO:
TYPE OR PRINT NAME & TITLE OF PERSON SIGNING:	FAX NUMBER:	
AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE:	DATE:	

Contents

- 1.0 Executive Summary 2**
- 2.0 RFI Procedures..... 3**
 - 2.1 Schedule3
 - 2.2 Clarification Questions3
 - 2.3 Question Responses3
 - 2.4 RFI Responses3
 - 2.4.1 Content and Format3
 - 2.4.2 Instructions for Submitting Responses4
 - 2.4.3 Multiple Responses4
 - 2.4.4 Confidentiality.....4
 - 2.4.5 Rights and Obligations5
- 3.0 RFI for a Business Enterprises Program Solution 6**
 - 3.1 Background.....6
 - 3.2 Requirements.....8
 - 3.2.1 Management Services.....8
 - 3.2.2 Budget and Finance8
 - 3.2.3 Collection of Fees/Commissions from Existing Business Enterprises Locations and Unassigned Machines8
 - 3.2.4 Vending Facility Data9
 - 3.2.5 Equipment.....9
 - 3.2.6 Reporting9
 - 3.2.7 Responsibility for Acquiring Permits9
 - 3.2.8 Training Services9
- 4.0 Questions for RFI Respondents 10**
 - 4.1 Company Overview10
 - 4.2 Implementation Approach10
 - 4.3 Pricing11

1.0 Executive Summary

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS), Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) has a need for a qualified non-profit vendor, referred to as the “Nominee” to provide day-to-day management services for the agency’s Randolph-Sheppard – Business Enterprises Program (BEP). This RFI is intended to collect information and recommendations from the management services vendor community to address this need and plan a path forward.

The BEP provides legally blind participants training and licensure to operate their own food service, vending and other related entrepreneurship activities on federal, state, and other property. This program was developed due to the opportunities created in the Randolph-Sheppard Act and its amendments, a federal law which was originally passed in 1936, and Chapter 111 of the North Carolina General Statutes. For additional information on the BEP and how it operates, refer to the North Carolina Administrative Code, 10A Subchapter 63C, Business Enterprises Program.

The State requests detailed point-by-point responses showing how your organization would address the items in Section 4.0 “Questions for RFI Respondents” of this RFI.

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2.0 RFI Procedures

2.1 Schedule

Respondents will have approximately four (4) weeks to prepare their submissions to this RFI. Responses must be received by the date and time specified on the cover sheet of this RFI.

2.2 Clarification Questions

Written questions will be received until March 21, 2025 at 5:00PM Eastern Time. They should be emailed to eve.hens@dhhs.nc.gov or submitted via the Ariba Sourcing Tool by the date and time specified above. Vendors should enter "RFI # 30-25301-DSB: Questions" as the subject for the email. Question submittals should include a reference to the applicable RFI section and be submitted in the format shown below:

Item	RFI Section/Page Reference	Respondent's Question
1.	Example: Section XX, Page XX)	
2.		

2.3 Question Responses

The Department intends to prepare responses to written questions submitted by the specified deadline and post an addendum on the NC Electronic Vendor Portal (eVP) with the Department's responses by March 28, 2025.

2.4 RFI Responses

The State recognizes that considerable effort will be required in preparing a response to this RFI. **However, please note this is a request for information only, and not a request for services.** The Vendor shall bear all costs for preparing this RFI.

2.4.1 Content and Format

The State expects concise, detailed, point-by-point responses to each of the RFI response items identified in Section 4.0 of this RFI. The State is not interested in brochures or "boilerplate" responses. Instead, responses should clearly define how the vendor's proposed solution(s) would meet the State's functional, reporting and technical requirements. Any issues or exceptions to the State's requirements should also be identified and explained.

The response should define all services that would be required by the proposed solution. The response should also include:

- The vendor's understanding of the project and services by addressing the State's business requirements
- An estimated total cost

2.4.2 Instructions for Submitting Responses

Due Date: April 8, 2025

Time: 2:00PM Eastern Time

Responses, subject to the conditions made a part hereof, will be received until 2:00pm Eastern Time on the day of opening and then opened.

- a) Submit **one (1) signed, original electronic offer** through the Ariba Sourcing Module or via email to eve.hens@dhhs.nc.gov.
- b) The Ariba Sourcing Module document number is: **Doc1495733848**
- c) All File names should start with the Vendor name first, in order to easily determine all the files to be included as part of the vendor's response. For example, files should be named as follows: Vendor Name-your file name.
- d) File contents **SHALL NOT** be password protected, the file formats must be in .PDF, .JPEG, .DOC or .XLS format, and shall be capable of being copied to other sources.
- e) If the vendor's response contains any confidential information, then the vendor must provide one (1) signed, original electronic response and one (1) redacted electronic copy.

For Vendor training on how to use the Ariba Sourcing Tool to view solicitations, submit questions, develop responses, upload documents, and submit responses to the State, Vendors should go to the following site: <https://eprourement.nc.gov/training/vendor-training>

Questions or issues related to using the Ariba Sourcing Tool itself can be directed to the North Carolina eProcurement Help Desk at 888-211-7440, Option 2. Help Desk representatives are available Monday through Friday from 7:30 AM EST to 5:00 PM EST

When submitting a response, include all pages of the RFI, with the EXECUTION section on the cover page of this RFI completed and signed and responses added to questions in Section 4.0.

2.4.3 Multiple Responses

Multiple responses will be accepted from a single vendor provided that each response meets all of the state's requirements and is truly unique. Submit multiple responses **separately** and label the file with Response #1, Response #2, etc. after "Vendor Name" as applicable.

2.4.4 Confidentiality

As provided for in the North Carolina Administrative code (NCAC), including but not limited to 01 NCAC 05B .0210, 09 NCAC 06B .0103 and 09 NCAC 06B .0302, all information and documentation relative to the development of a contractual document for a proposed procurement or contract shall be deemed confidential in nature, except as deemed necessary to develop a complete contractual document. In accordance with these and other applicable rules and statutes, such material shall remain confidential until the award of a contract or until the need for the procurement no longer exists. Any proprietary or confidential information, which conforms to exclusions from public records as provided by NCGS Chapter 132, must be clearly redacted in

the redacted copy of the RFI response. If multiple responses are submitted, submit a **separate** redacted copy for each unique response.

By submitting a redacted copy, the Respondent warrants that it has formed a good faith opinion, having received such necessary or proper review by counsel and other knowledgeable advisors that the portions marked confidential meet the requirements of NCGS Chapter 132. The Respondent must identify the legal grounds for asserting that the information is confidential, including the citation to state law.

Except as provided in Section 2.4.4 of this RFI, pursuant to NCGS §132-1, et seq., information or documents provided to the Department in response to this RFI are Public Record and subject to inspection, copy and release to the public unless exempt from disclosure by statute, including, but not limited to, NCGS §132-1.2. Redacted copies provided by Respondents to the Department may be released in response to public record requests without notification to the Respondent.

2.4.5 Rights and Obligations

2.4.5.1 *Rights to Submitted Materials*

All responses, inquiries or correspondence relating to or in reference to this RFI, and all documentation submitted by the various Respondents shall become the property of the Department when received. Ideas, approaches, and options (but not proprietary material) presented by Respondents may be used in whole or in part by the State in developing a future solicitation should the Department decide to proceed with a solicitation. Further, combinations of ideas from various Respondents may also become part of a solicitation, based on consideration of various RFI submissions and the needs of the Department, which may differ from any respondent's experience in other places.

2.4.5.2 *Obligations of the State*

The Department may choose to issue a solicitation for the procurement of a DSB Business Enterprises Program solution. However, this RFI is not a guarantee that a solicitation will be issued for any or all of the functionality referenced herein, about which ideas and approaches are being sought. Unless included in the redacted version, information sent in by Respondents for this RFI will remain confidential until after the award of any solicitation or until the State makes a decision not to issue a solicitation.

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3.0 RFI for a Business Enterprises Program Solution

3.1 Background

The Division of Services the Blind (DSB) is a state agency within the NC Department of Health and Human Services. DSB's mission is to render services and support to enable individuals who are blind, or have low vision, or who are deafblind to achieve their goals of independence and employment. Our vocational rehabilitation program is designed to help eligible individuals obtain, maintain, regain, or advance in employment. The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) is one of the vocational options within our vocational rehabilitation program. This program was created as a result of the Randolph-Sheppard Act and its amendments, a federal law which was originally passed in 1935, and chapter 111 of the North Carolina General Statutes. Legally blind, U.S. citizens, participants of the DSB vocational rehabilitation program interested in pursuing a career in the vending and food service industry can be referred to the Business Enterprises Program.

In 1955, DSB applied to and was approved by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to become a State Licensing Agency (SLA) for the Randolph-Sheppard program - BEP. The BEP provides legally blind participants the opportunity to operate their own food service and/or vending facility, and other related entrepreneurship activities. This program provides initial training for potential licensees and ongoing counseling and management services to established operators. Food service and vending facilities can be in federal and state buildings, military bases, rest areas and welcome centers, and other locations.

As the SLA, the Division is responsible for the administration, guidance, growth, and overall direction of the Business Enterprises Program. Since the inception of the program, these responsibilities have been carried out by Business Enterprises staff including a program chief, business officer, contract vending officer, trainer, office assistant, warehouse manager, warehouse assistant, and business consultants.

The Randolph-Sheppard Act permits state entities responsible for this program to develop and work with a "Nominee" who provides the state entity support and assistance in working with the Business Enterprises on daily management matters. The Code of Federal Regulations 34 CFR Part 395.1 defines "Nominee" as a nonprofit agency or organization ~~designed~~ designated by the State Licensing Agency through a written agreement to act as an agent in the provision of services to blind operators and licensees under the state's vending facility program (Business Enterprises Program or "BEP"). DSB is seeking information from the vendor management services community regarding their capacity to provide the range of services listed below.

The following definitions, acronyms, and abbreviations are also relevant to this RFI.

Definitions: The following terms, whenever used in this article, shall have the meanings respectively set forth unless a different meaning is clearly required by the content:

1. "BE operator" or "operator" means a legally blind person who has been trained and licensed to serve and is currently working as an independent manager/operator in the food service and/or vending machine trade.

2. "Blind licensee" or "licensee" means a blind person licensed by the Division to operate a Business Enterprises facility on federal, State, or other property.
3. "Blind person" or "legally blind" means a person who meets the criteria defined in 34 CFR 395.1(c) and N.C.G.S. 111-11.
4. "Business Enterprises" refers to North Carolina's Randolph-Sheppard program.
5. Business Enterprises facility" "or facility" means any vending and food service facility operated by the North Carolina Business Enterprises Program as defined in 34 CFR 395.1.
6. "Business Enterprises Program (BEP)" or "Business Enterprises" (BE) means a program that provides training and the opportunity for blind individuals to achieve self-employment through the operation of vending and food service facilities on federal, State, and other properties.
7. "Division" or "DSB" means Division of Services for the Blind.
8. "Elected Committee of Blind Vendors" or "ECBV" means a committee as defined in 34 C.F.R. 395.14 whose members are elected by the BE operators.
9. "License" means a written instrument issued by the state licensing agency to a blind person, authorizing such person to operate a vending facility on federal, state, or other property.
10. "Management services" means supervision, inspection, quality control, consultation, accounting, regulating service training and other related services provided on a systematic basis to support and improve vending facilities operated by blind vendors.
11. "Net proceeds" means the amount remaining from the sale of articles or services of vending facilities and any vending machine or other income accruing to blind vendors after deducting the cost of such sale and other expenses (excluding set-aside charges required to be paid by such blind vendors).
12. "Nominee" means a nonprofit agency or organization designated by the state licensing agency through a written agreement to act as its agent in the provision of services to blind operators and licensees under the state's Business Enterprises program.
13. "Permit" means the official approval given by a state licensing agency by a department, agency, or instrumentality in control of the maintenance, operation, and protection of federal property, or person in control of other property, whereby the state licensing agency is authorized to establish a vending facility.
14. "Set-aside funds" means funds which accrue to a state licensing agency from an assessment against the net proceeds of each vending facility in the state's Business Enterprises program and any income from vending machines on federal property which accrues to the state licensing agency.
15. "State licensing agency" or "SLA" means the state agency designated by the Secretary under this part to issue licenses to blind persons for the operation of vending facilities on federal, state, and other property.

16. "Vending machine" for the purpose of assigning vending machine income under this part, means a coin or currency operated machine which dispenses articles or services, except that those machines operated by the United States Postal Service for the sale of postage stamps or other postal products and services, machines providing services of a recreational nature, and telephones shall not be considered to be vending machines.

3.2 Requirements

NC DHHS desires that its Business Enterprises management services solution have the following capabilities:

3.2.1 Management Services

- A. Provide all management services as defined at 34 CFR 395.1(j).
- B. Employ sufficiently qualified staff to ensure the effective statewide oversight and supervision of all vending facilities managed by blind operators.

3.2.2 Budget and Finance

- A. Prepare an annual budget proposal for the SLA projecting revenue and expenditures.
- B. Submit an annual independent financial audit to be conducted by a certified public accountant.
- C. Submit quarterly financial reports that compare budgeted revenues, by designated uses, to actual expenditures.
- D. Account for all cash flowing through the Nominee.
- E. Disburse grant funds only as directed by the SLA and in accordance with the approved budget.
- F. Provide oversight of the operators' monthly financial reports and report irregularities and mismanagement of operator financials to the SLA.

3.2.3 Collection of Fees/Commissions from Existing Business Enterprises Locations and Unassigned Machines

- A. Collect and set aside sufficient funds from the net proceeds of authorized operations to provide the following:
 - 1. Maintenance, repair, and replacement of equipment;
 - 2. Purchase of new equipment;
 - 3. Management services;
 - 4. Other expenditures allowed by 34 C.F.R. 395.9 as directed by DSB.
- B. Collect and account for all commissions from vending machines located on federal and other property and disbursing funds only in accordance with the approved budget and direction from the SLA.

3.2.4 Vending Facility Data

- A. Maintain updated files on all blind operators and licensees and vending Facilities.
- B. Process monthly reports filed by each blind operator or licensee and maintain all records of sales, purchases, other expenses and profits for each vending facility as well as cumulatively for all facilities.

3.2.5 Equipment

- A. Implement and maintain a purchasing system for all goods and services.
- B. Implement a system for tracking all equipment assigned to the program.
- C. Develop and maintain a fixed asset accounting system for all equipment valued at \$500 or more.
- D. Develop and implement a system for operators and licensees to request repair needs and to track all repairs.

3.2.6 Reporting

- A. Prepare quarterly statements of operators' and licensees' financial reports for the SLA.
- B. Prepare ad hoc reports at the request of the SLA.
- C. Perform audits or financial reviews of vending facility operations when accounting irregularities are noted.
- D. Prepare quarterly and requested financial reports to the SLA and NC ECBV.
- E. Prepare a draft annual Vending Facility Program Report (RSA 15) for submittal to the Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration for the SLA.

3.2.7 Responsibility for Acquiring Permits

- A. Identify potential new facility locations and conduct surveys to determine the feasibility of establishing a facility for the BE program.
- B. Prepare an application for a permit and submit it to property management for approval through the SLA. Only the SLA can sign the permit.
- C. Coordinate and participate in the selection process as determined by program policy.
- D. Once an operator is selected, oversee the placement of that operator in the vending facility and coordinate all activities thereto in accordance with program policy.

3.2.8 Training Services

- A. Provide entry-level training for all prospective blind licensees and coordinate a program of on-the-job training for each trainee.
- B. Provide/coordinate upward mobility training for operators.

4.0 Questions for RFI Respondents

Respondents are requested to respond to the questions in the following sections in the gray-shaded boxes below each question. A word version of this RFI is provided in the Ariba Sourcing Tool for use in the Vendor responses.

4.1 Company Overview

1. Please provide an overview of your company's history, scope of products and services offered, and locations of operation.

2. Describe your company's experience in providing management services as defined in this RFI. Please include Customer Name, Contract Start and End Date, Description of Scope of Work, and Implementation Duration.

3. Please provide lessons learned from working with other states to implement and operate services as defined in this RFI.

4. In addition to the DSB BE requirements previously described, please discuss any related capabilities and services that your company may offer.

5. Please provide the name, title, email address, and phone number for the best person in your organization for the Department to contact if any additional information is needed regarding your response to this RFI.

4.2 Implementation Approach

6. Describe your approach to implementing these services in North Carolina. Based on the BEP functionality described in Section 3.0 of this RFI, provide your estimated timeline to implement support for each business capability and include any major assumptions behind estimated timelines.

7. Describe your staffing resources that would be needed for this project.

4.3 Pricing

NC DHHS requests that Respondents create a suggested pricing template and use this template to submit their price estimates. Please include all suggested cost categories, unit type for each category, suggested quantities, and estimated total cost.

DHHS understands that vendor estimates related to this RFI are based on limited information and will not be considered contractually binding.

Pricing should be estimates for informational purposes only.