

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS  
FOR THE  
Selection of a Consultant to Develop  
Virtual MEWS+ Entrepreneurial Programming**

**Introduction**

The Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) is seeking a consultant to develop and host a series of virtual entrepreneurial meetups, educational programming and/or other virtual functions that bring together new and existing businesses, with an emphasis on minority and women-owned businesses. The focus will be on businesses in the member municipalities of the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG), with particular focus on businesses in federally designated opportunity zones. Since programming will be online, attendance would be open to interested entrepreneurs and business owners across the state.

**Project Description**

The Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce developed The MEWS+ program to provide an environment for entrepreneurs, startups, and small business owners to collaborate and turn ideas into business; to encourage communication between public, private, and institutional organizations; and to develop relationships between entrepreneurs and professional resources to bolster economic growth in in the region.

The MEWS+ coworking space is located on the second floor of the Chamber's offices on Main Street in Middletown and has been closed since the pandemic began in March of 2020. COVID-19 shifted the focus of the MEWS+ from a coworking facility to an online space which has supported entrepreneurs, startups, and home-based businesses through the difficult pandemic period.

RiverCOG is seeking a contractor to create a robust schedule of online programming so that the benefits of the MEWS+ program can be shared beyond the Chamber's headquarters. Virtual capacity will open the programming to new and small businesses located in other regions.

The role of the consultant will be:

- To identify and engage with new and existing minority, and women-owned businesses in the region, particularly in designated opportunity zones;
- To host discussions around responding to the current economic environment and identifying opportunities to provide additional resources and programming around changing business needs;
- To organize speakers/presenters to provide educational webinars on e-commerce, loan assistance programs, etc.; and,
- To offer guidance to businesses on building resiliency, capacity, marketing ideas, and the sharing of best practices.

### *Project Tasks / Deliverables*

To further the organizational mission of creating an innovation ecosystem within the municipalities of the Lower Connecticut River Valley, the RiverCOG seeks to engage a consultant/firm to coordinate with the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce and deliver the following programming between the initiation of the contract and August 31, 2023:

- A wide range of virtual and hybrid offerings via The MEWS+ program for entrepreneurs, startups, and small businesses, including, but not limited to:
  - A business incubator program for startups who need help with business planning, marketing, access to financing, and other resources
  - Quarterly Community Startup Nights to provide pitching and community support opportunities for entrepreneurs and new businesses
  - Facilitate a partnership with The Hive in Chester to offer coworking, meeting, and event space to home-based business owners
  - Organize a mentorship and professional Office Hours Program
  - Programming directed to Wesleyan University students, high school students, and young entrepreneurs
  - Maintain The MEWS+ Hive Community – an online membership portal for solo business owners, entrepreneurs, and startups offering member-to-member networking and support, business book club discussions, business development opportunities generation, and educational/informational opportunities; additional in-person networking and workshops available to local members
- An expansion of services for a larger footprint and audience via:
  - Virtual programming to reach a broader geographic region outside Middlesex County
  - In person and hybrid programming held in the 17 municipalities in the Lower Connecticut River Valley
  - Focused outreach to and increased engagement with the BIPOC, women and veteran-owned business community, and specific programming opportunities for these audiences
- The development and execution of a marketing strategy to reach the diverse audiences and larger geographic region, including the management of The MEWS+ website, email and social media channels, and analytics tracking
- Regular outreach to and coordination with community partners including those with a similar mission of serving the startup and small business community, other coworking spaces in Connecticut, educational institutions, and local municipalities, as well as CTDECD and AdvanceCT
- Facilitate the creation of a MEWS+ Advisory Board to guide the programmatic focus, and provide resources to The MEWS+ and its members

### *Program Outcomes*

Outcomes include the successful expansion of virtual MEWS+ programming and services to a larger geographic footprint and more diverse audience and demonstrated increase in the

number of program participants, as well as surveyed impact data on the effect on business growth and sustainability.

### *Program Sustainability*

Program sustainability will be achieved through on-going online access to the virtual event recordings and materials after the end of the grant period, including links from the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce and RiverCOG. This US Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant funding serves as a start-up grant that will attract new private and public support for The MEWS+ virtual programming, and support for the larger entrepreneurial community. With partner support, the expansion of the MEWS+ virtual programming will be successful and will grow into a permanent component of the innovation ecosystem in the region and the state.

### **Response Requirements**

The following information must be submitted with the proposal. Any additional information should be contained in a clearly marked appendix.

1. Qualifications of the organization or individual proposing to deliver on the scope specified herein. Name, team, size, and team organizational structure under which the firm(s) or personnel will conduct the planning and execution of the MEWS+ programming. Relevant experience working with entrepreneurs and small businesses, and in educational program development, event planning, marketing, and analytics should be presented. Any proposed sub-consultants should be identified, along with their roles in the project and relevant experience. The location of the primary office to be used in the project should be included.
2. Qualifications (resumes) of key personnel to be assigned to the project and a description of their responsibilities in conducting the project tasks must be included.
3. Description of other similar or related experiences completed with the last few years with reference and contact information for each.
4. A draft Scope of Work for the project, including a description of the project approach, and a detailed work plan set out by task.
5. A timeline detailing the order and duration of listed tasks and the project as a whole, as well as which tasks will be completed by the lead, subcontractors (if any), RiverCOG, and The Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce. All work under this project shall be completed by August 31, 2023.
6. A detailed budget set out by task.
7. A list of current projects / contractual commitments, with end dates for each.
8. Proof of appropriate insurance (general liability, auto, workers compensation, and/or professional liability coverage) for the firm and its subcontractors.
9. Statement of compliance with all federal and state laws and ordinances.
10. Submittals: An electronic submittal is required and must be received by 4:00 p.m. on Friday, September 9, 2022. Digital storage media may be mailed to RiverCOG, 145 Dennison Road, Essex, Connecticut, 06426, or emailed to Eliza LoPresti at [elopresti@rivercog.org](mailto:elopresti@rivercog.org).

After the submittal period has closed, RiverCOG will conduct interviews of select firms, based on a review of proposals, prior to making a final decision.

**Rejection Rights**

RiverCOG retains the right to reject all proposals and to re-solicit if deemed to be in their best interest to do so.

**Cost of Proposal Preparation**

No reimbursement will be made for any costs incurred for the preparation of a proposal or during the selection process.

**Proposals to Be in Effect**

Each proposal shall state that it is valid for a period of not less than 120 days from the date of receipt.

Selection is also dependent upon the negotiation of a mutually acceptable contract with the chosen firm.

**Inquiries**

Questions may only be submitted in writing and sent to Eliza LoPresti at [elopresti@rivercog.org](mailto:elopresti@rivercog.org)

All questions submitted and responses will be made publicly available at <http://rivercog.org/publicnotes>

The identity of persons submitting questions will not be posted.

**Late Responses**

RFP responses arriving late or not meeting these minimum requirements may be disqualified.

**Funding**

Funding for this project is from a grant administered by CT Department of Economic and Community Development from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and 4-CT.

Small and/or minority businesses are encouraged to apply. The chosen firm must meet affirmative action and equal opportunity employment practices.