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Scientific Consulting Services Related to Heavy Metals and Kelp

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS RFP #2024-03

EDA Project Number 07-79-07904

Date of Issue: 5/22/24

Proposals Due: 7/15/24

Summary

Southeast Conference is soliciting proposals from qualified entities to advise on topics related to heavy metal levels in kelp. Specifically, this RFP will fund development of a sampling and analysis plan for kelp grown in Alaska and in the North Atlantic for production into products for purposes of evaluating the naturally occurring background levels of lead and cadmium. SEC and partners will separately fund and perform sampling and provide a dataset to the contractor to analyze the results and support a petition to California's OEHHA to develop naturally occurring exemption levels for lead and cadmium in kelp.

Background

Southeast Conference – the state and federally recognized economic development organization for Southeast Alaska – is the lead institution administering a federal grant from the United States Economic Development Administration (EDA) to grow Alaska's mariculture industry through the Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBBRC) program. The Alaska Mariculture Cluster (AMC) grant coalition includes a diverse group of stakeholders including Alaska state regulatory agencies, Alaska's university system, Economic Development Districts, trade organizations, and others. A Governance Body, composed of AMC coalition leads as well as Tribal representatives from each of the project regions, guides the work and equity metrics of the overall grant. The Alaska Mariculture Cluster has an overall equity goal of 25% of

AMC program impacts and investments going to rural underserved communities and 25% to Alaska Native entities and individuals.

The AMC grant is composed of seven component projects (listed below), which have been purposely designed to be complementary to address barriers to growth and break out of the “chicken or egg” cycle of industry development:

- Revolving Loan Fund
- Governance, Coordination and Outreach
- Workforce Development
- Research and Development
- Market Development
- Green Energy
- Equipment and Technology

The full project period for the AMC BBBRC project is October 1, 2022 – September 30th, 2026. More information on the Alaska Mariculture Cluster (AMC) is available at www.alaskamariculturecluster.org, including the Overarching Narrative, which explains how the seven components work together to grow the mariculture industry in an equitable and environmentally responsible manner.

Related AMC Projects

The AMC marketing component project – of which this research is a part – funds market research and marketing programs to support increasing demand for products made with Alaska kelp and oysters. A roughly \$300,000 market research contract is currently underway led by Food for Climate League.

The AMC grant includes over \$800,000 in seaweed tissue analysis, as part of the R&D component project. The first phase of the seaweed tissue analysis project is underway, led by the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (AFDF). AFDF advertised an [RFP for up to \\$400K in lab services](#) and is currently collecting samples. This project will include collection and analysis of data on heavy metals in Alaska kelp as part of a broader scope. Lab results from the 2024 sampling are expected to be available by the end of October 2024. Priorities and plans for use of the remaining funds for seaweed tissue analysis will be developed after analysis of 2024 results as well as the results on the Task 1 study funded in the RFP.

Scope of Work

The scope of work includes three tasks described below. Separate but related SEC-funded work is listed as well for clarity.

Contractor Task 1: Sampling Plan Design

- Design a sampling plan for kelp grown in Alaska and in the North Atlantic and intended to be sold in California for purposes of evaluating the naturally occurring background levels of lead and cadmium. Plan should consider available data and research and help prioritize future investments in seaweed tissue analysis sampling.
- **Deliverable.** Technical memorandum that outlines the assumptions and calculations used to develop the sampling plan and the proposed design including sample size calculations.
- **Schedule.** Work to be completed by February 15, 2025.

SEC Task: Sampling and Testing

- As part of other kelp sampling plans within Alaska Mariculture Cluster work, SEC and partners will, separate from this contract, fund and perform sampling guided by task 1 work products and provide data to the contractor for analysis and reporting in task 2.
- **Schedule.** Data from 2025 sampling will be available by the end of October 2025.

Contractor Task 2: Data Analysis and Report

- Contractor will analyze available data (provided by SEC and partners) and develop a report summarizing findings related to the naturally occurring background levels of lead and cadmium. The report be used to support a petition to California's OEHHA to develop naturally occurring exemption levels for these two chemicals in kelp.
- **Deliverable.** Data analysis and report.
- **Schedule.** Work will be completed by February 15, 2026.

Contractor Task 3. Consulting

- SEC anticipated a need for contractor to answer questions and provide follow up analyses related to the work completed in Task 1 and 3 and otherwise provide support for the goals described in this RFP. Subject to availability and budget, these engagements may involve email responses, providing feedback on documents drafted by AMC coalition members, participation in meetings outside the scope of Tasks 1 or 2, or other similar activities.

Funding Available

Funding is secured through the federally funded Alaska Mariculture Cluster grant, with \$75,000 to \$100,000 budgeted for this RFP though proposals outside that range will be considered. If the need for additional related services arises, additional scope and budget may be added to this contract on mutual agreement.

General Requirements

Single Point of Contact. The consultant will designate one person as the project manager and point of contact with SEC. In the case of multiple investigators/contractors, one shall be designated as the lead to serve as the project manager and point of contact. Any change of lead personnel shall be reported to SEC within 7 days.

Disbarment. Applicants must have or acquire a UEI and be registered through SAM.gov prior to award finalization. Applicants, including any subcontractors, must not be disbarred from receiving federal funds.

Public Information. All products produced under this RFP will become the property of SEC.

Proposal Contents

Proposals are expected to be no more than 6 pages in length, excluding resumes which may be attached.

Proposals should include the following components:

- **Introduction and Understanding of the Project.** Include the RFP title, discussion of project context and importance, and an overview of the project team and approach.
- **Methodology.** Discuss proposed approach to accomplishing the scope of work listed, including proposed deliverables and timeline. Consultants may include additional recommendations that would benefit the project based on their professional expertise.
- **Experience and Qualifications.** Describe relevant experience of the firm and key team members, including knowledge of chemical analysis pertinent to this project and familiarity with California's Proposition 65 regulatory compliance and petitioning.
- **Price.** Provide a list of the key individuals/subcontractors expected to work on project, the fully loaded rates charged per individual, any estimated expenses, and total estimated project cost.

Proposal Submission Process

Deadline. Submit proposals in pdf format by 7/15/2024 via email to procurement officer Alan Sorum at alan@seconference.org and project manager Dan Lesh at dan@seconference.org.

- Proposers are encouraged to verify with the procurement officer that the proposal has been received prior to the deadline.
- Additional information provided after the deadline may also be considered but only if such information can be accommodated by the review process.

Public Information: Proposals and work plans may be distributed throughout the organization for review and comment. Proprietary information should not be submitted in any proposal. SEC will not knowingly reveal the contents of a proposal that is not subsequently accepted for contract; however, SEC accepts no liability should such contents inadvertently be revealed to third parties.

Changes. Any changes or addendum will be posted on the Alaska Mariculture Cluster website and sent directly to respondents who have specifically requested notification.

Preparation Costs. SEC is not liable for any costs incurred by the proposer for proposal preparation.

Questions. Inquiries regarding this request for qualifications shall be directed to procurement officer Alan Sorum at alan@seconference.org and project manager Dan Lesh at dan@seconference.org.

Evaluation Criteria and Award Process

Criteria for evaluating proposals is as follows:

- Past experience on relevant or similar projects (40%)
- Demonstration of capacity to complete deliverables within a reasonable timeline (20%)
- The competitiveness of cost relative to other proposals (30%)

Scoring of each proposal against the criteria listed above will be conducted by an RFP review committee. SEC reserves the right to reject any and all of the proposals received. If necessary, SEC may select the proposals that, in its sole view, most nearly conform to its needs as outlined in this RFP and then negotiate directly with that proposer to refine the proposal to achieve a contract that fully satisfies SEC needs.

A notice of intent to award is expected to be announced by 7/31/2024.

About Southeast Conference

As the state and federally designated regional economic development organization for Southeast Alaska, Southeast Conference serves as the collective voice for advancing the region's economy. Southeast Conference has over 200 member organizations representing 1,200 people from 32 regional communities and 19 Tribes. The mission of Southeast Conference is to undertake and support activities that promote strong economies, healthy communities, and a quality environment in Southeast Alaska. Southeast Conference formed in 1958 with a group of people supporting the establishment of a regional transportation system in Southeast Alaska, which led to the formation of the Alaska Marine Highway System. After that success Southeast Conference stayed together through more than a half-century to focus on concerns unique to the region, including transportation, maritime, tourism, seafood, natural resources, health care, government, and overall quality of life.