



Request for Proposal

Master Contract #: _____

Vendor Contract #: _____

VISION Vendor #: _____

Release Date: **9/15/2021**

Response Due: **10/15/2021**

PROJECT DETAILS

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) seeks a contractor to build upon the work done by an internal Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accountability (IDEA) group. The contractor will be expected to develop a baseline assessment of VAAFAM's conditions and engagement around justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion, both internally to the Agency and externally with constituents and stakeholders, including identifying barriers and opportunities. From this assessment, the contractor will formalize and lead an internal engagement plan with VAAFAM staff with the aim of increasing staff engagement with this work and improving outcomes related to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion at the Agency and in the food system.

Agency/Department

Name: Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets

Contact: Abbey Willard, Agriculture Development Division Director

Address: 116 State Street

Montpelier, VT 05620

Contact Phone: **802-272-2885**

Contact E-mail: **abbey.willard@vermont.gov**

Proposals must be submitted as a single PDF document via email to the contact above. Agency of Agriculture staff are available to assist you during State of Vermont business hours, Monday–Friday, 7:45 AM to 4:30 PM. Assistance may not be available shortly before deadlines.

TIMELINE

Release Date: 9/15/2021

Responses Due: 10/15/2021 at 11:59 PM

Anticipated Contract Start Date*: **12/1/2021**

Anticipated Contract End Date*: **12/31/2022**

**To be finalized after proposals are received and negotiated*

BUDGET

Maximum budget for project: \$85,000



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PROJECT BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2020, as the country reacted to the circumstances surrounding the murder of George Floyd, some VAAFM staff recognized that many of us wanted and needed to tackle issues of inequity, bias, and discrimination at our workplace in ways that were explicit, educational, and actionable, far beyond the required trainings that come with being a state employee.

Stemming from this initial conversation, the Agriculture Development Division (AgDev) led the development of an internal Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, and Accountability (IDEA) group to discuss our role and responsibility, as individuals and state employees, and to serve as a resource to our agriculture and food community. This group developed a mission and vision for the group and received input from Agency leadership. For several months we met as a small group (~12-15 people), and in early we 2021 created an IDEA Logistics team, now comprised of six AgDev members and one member from the Water Quality Division. This core team develops meetings, topics, and agendas, and encourages an open space where people feel safe to learn, listen, and explore the impacts of and solutions to inequities in our Agency and food system.

At that point, the IDEA group expanded to include staff from the entire Agency (~145 individuals), prompting engagement via a combination of large group presentations and discussions (25-45 attendees at a time) with small group breakout sessions. These 90-minute meetings often included pre-work and/or a presentation (including Xusana Davis, SOV Executive Director of Racial Equity; VAAFM General Counsel, Steve Collier; Ellen Kahler/Sarah Danly, VT Sustainable Jobs Fund/VT Farm to Plate) on topics which included: calling in vs. calling out, group norms, racial equity in food systems planning, justice and equity in grantmaking, and our power and responsibility.

After six months of leading these meetings, the IDEA Logistics team seeks professional guidance to help the Agency move into a new phase of this work to make equity a core principle of VAAFM's work, aligning with the [Vermont Food System Plan Issue Brief: Racial Equity in the Vermont Food System](#), recommendation #2, which states: *Organizations and stakeholders across all components of the food system should prioritize racial equity and the leadership, participation, and representation of BIPOC. It is imperative that initiatives focused on BIPOC be developed with paid partnership and input from the BIPOC community. All organizations in the food system should undertake guided, systematic internal processes to make racial equity a core principle of their work.*

In the interim, the IDEA Logistics team is hosting monthly informal discussions focused on brainstorming and sharing resources around "low hanging fruit" where the Agency can make improvements, for example in Agency communication and translation of public-facing materials.



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STATEMENT OF WORK

VAAFM seeks a contractor with experience working with organizations around topics of equity, diversity, access, and representation. The contractor will work directly with the VAAFM IDEA team and Agency leadership to develop a robust baseline understanding of conditions within VAAFM and with VAAFM's stakeholders and constituents and will develop a plan to improve engagement and outcomes. **Contractor may sub-contract for certain tasks that would benefit from a subject matter expert.** The workplan below is not a prescribed timeline and some phases and/or tasks may take place concurrently.

PHASE 1: ASSESSMENT

- Task 1 – Assess VAAFM's efforts to-date and current conditions with regards to diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Agency. The assessment will be administered in advance of any training and will be used to identify gaps and opportunities to meet the needs of staff. This assessment should consider familiarity of concepts, readiness/willingness to engage, level of commitment, perceptions, and staff workplace experience as it pertains to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accountability. This assessment should also include a review of the policies, practices, and outcomes of VAAFM's current approaches to staff recruitment, hiring, retention, and engagement as well as a scan of practices that other governmental agencies/departments and agricultural organizations are doing that VAAFM would benefit from incorporating into our work.
 - Deliverable 1 – Develop an assessment report which 1) captures aggregate participant feedback, 2) illustrates current Agency outcomes of policies/practices related to staff recruitment, hiring, retention, and engagement 3) summarizes relevant replicable/customizable policies/practices from other organizations, and 4) identifies themes, gaps, and opportunities for future trainings and VAAFM workplace improvements.

- Task 2 – Assess VAAFM's engagement efforts—including identifying current conditions, desired state, and barriers/opportunities—to provide more inclusive services and outreach to diverse audiences within the Vermont farm/food system, especially marginalized groups and those facing barriers of access. This assessment should consider the current role, reach, and engagement of VAAFM outreach, services, and programs. Contractor, with VAAFM input, will develop a list of key representative stakeholders who self-identify as under-represented members/organizations of Vermont's agriculture and food system community followed by stakeholder outreach to determine current perception of VAAFM engagement and solicit suggestions for improvements. Additionally, Contractor will incorporate a scan of engagement practices that other governmental agencies/departments and agricultural organizations are doing to improve public engagement and support of marginalized groups that VAAFM would benefit from incorporating into our efforts.



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- Deliverable 2 – Develop an assessment report that 1) summarizes stakeholder feedback on VAAFM’s current effectiveness at serving historically marginalized communities, 2) summarizes relevant replicable/customizable practices from other organizations, and 3) identifies themes, gaps, and opportunities for VAAFM to improve outreach, services, and programs methods.

PHASE 2: ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

- Task 3 – Using results of from Phase 1, Contractor will produce a proposed plan for an initial set of actions that directly address diversity, equity, and inclusion at VAAFM, as it pertains to internal staff experience.
 - Deliverable 3 – Develop an Action Plan that includes, but is not limited to, recommendations for:
 - Curricula to effectively engage Agency staff in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within our workplace and with the public.
 - Changes to Agency policies and/or practices pertaining to workplace culture, recruitment, hiring, retention, and personnel, including policies, practices, and outcomes.
 - A set of metrics and methods for collecting data to assess the impacts and integration of learned knowledge and skills from the curricula and events.
- Task 4 – Using the results from Phase 1, Contractor will produce a proposed plan for delivering a set of actions that directly address diversity, equity, and inclusion as it pertains to the experience of marginalized stakeholders and constituents interactions with Agency staff.
 - Deliverable 4 – Develop an Action Plan that includes, but is not limited to, recommendations for:
 - Curricula to effectively engage Agency staff in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion with the public.
 - Changes to Agency policies and/or practices pertaining to public-facing communications, outreach, accessibility of services, including policies, practices, and outcomes.
 - A set of metrics and methods for collecting data to assess the impacts of the action plan.

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION

- Task 5 – Upon approval of the Action Plan developed in relation to internal staff in Phase 2, Contractor will facilitate implementation of initial set of events and/or workshops focused on internal staff beginning no later than April 2022.
 - Deliverable 5 – Coordinate, recruit staff participants, and lead 4-6 educational/workplace community-building events open to internal VAAFM staff, with a focus on workplace experience and engagement. Events could include but are not limited to trainings, facilitated discussions, presentations, and workshops.



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- Task 6 – Upon approval of the Action Plan developed in relation to external stakeholders in Phase 2, Contractor will facilitate implementation of initial set of events focused on improving stakeholder and constituent experience with VAAFM as it pertains to diversity, equity, and inclusion beginning no later than June 2022.
 - Deliverable 6 – Coordinate, recruit staff participants, and lead 4-6 educational/community-building events open to internal VAAFM staff, with a focus on better serving the marginalized communities in our state. Events could include but are not limited to trainings, facilitated discussions, presentations, and workshops.

PHASE 4: RECOMMENDATIONS

- Task 7 – At the end of the contract period, Contractor will review and summarize the outcomes of all work completed, incorporating previous deliverables as relevant.
 - Deliverable 7 – Produce a report that highlights the impacts and key takeaways of the project tasks and deliverables through metrics and relevant visual data and outlines recommended next steps for VAAFM’s further internal and external engagement.

TARGET AUDIENCE

This work will be directly targeted at VAAFM staff and leadership with the purpose of better supporting Agency staff and the greater agriculture and food system community in direct ways. This work will improve engagement and progress by Agency staff in practicing principles of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion within the VAAFM workplace and in our relationships with stakeholders, the public, and the working landscape. This work will increase the reach, accessibility, and impact of VAAFM’s services and resources for historically marginalized populations.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES & DELIVERABLES

The deliverable deadlines below are not prescribed and are subject to negotiation with the selected contractor.

- The Contractor will conduct a planning meeting and proposed timeline with Agency IDEA staff by **December 20, 2021**.
- Deliverable 1: Contractor will provide an internal assessment report and solicit feedback from VAAFM, incorporating up to one round of edits. Due: March 1, 2022.
- Deliverable 2: Contractor will provide an external stakeholder assessment report and solicit feedback from VAAFM, incorporating up to one round of edits. Due: May 1, 2022.



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- Deliverable 3: Contractor will provide a plan for an initial set of actions that directly address diversity, equity, and inclusion at VAAFM. Due: April 1, 2022.
- Deliverable 4: Contractor will provide a plan for an initial set of actions that directly address VAAFM's diversity, equity, and inclusion with the public. Due June 1, 2022.
- Deliverable 5: Contractor will coordinate and lead 4-6 events for VAAFM staff focused on workplace experience and engagement to start no later than April 2022. Due: December 15, 2022.
- Deliverable 6: Contractor will coordinate and lead 4-6 events for VAAFM staff focused better serving the marginalized communities in our state to start no later than June 2022. Due: December 15, 2022.
- Deliverable 7: Contractor will produce a final report and solicit feedback from VAAFM, incorporating up to two rounds of edits. Due: December 31, 2022.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Please include the following as a single PDF document as your response to this bid:

1. **Project approach, background, and experience:** Please provide a history of your organization, a list of current and/or notable clients, a description of your firm's experience with assessment of equity/inclusion/diversity, notable examples of successful outcomes, and what makes your organization the right fit for this project.
2. **Resumes of project team leader and any other team members.**
3. **Proposed work plan, proposed activities, associated deliverables, reporting measures, and timeline**
4. **Project budget:** Please submit a budget, not to exceed \$85,000 that is both realistic and reasonable to complete the scope of services. Sub-contractors may be hired for activities that a subject matter expert would be beneficial to include. Budget must tie specific activities to deliverables, with clear cost associated with each component of the proposal. If bidder feels it is appropriate to compensate external stakeholders for their time, budget should include those costs. Proposal shall include an hourly rate for services and any related expenses to be billed. Proposals should include all relevant costs to complete the work as detailed in PERFORMANCE & DELIVERABLES, should note any travel requirements, and all proposals should include necessary costs to meet requirements of Attachment C.
5. **3 samples of similar projects** (links to download are appropriate)
6. **Certificate of Insurance** which meets the criteria as outlined in [Attachment C](#).
7. A **W-9** signed within the last 6 months

This document was revised on September 29, 2021 to correct the link to Attachment C. RFP previously issued had an incorrect link. See [Addendum 1](#) that addresses this correction.