



Request for Qualifications for Outreach and Engagement Services to Support Digital Equity Statewide Plans

RFQ No. 2023-MBI-09

Massachusetts Technology Collaborative
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<http://www.masstech.org>

Procurement Team Leader: Joshua Eichen

RFQ Issued:	June 12, 2023
Bidders' Conference:	June 22, 2023
Questions Due:	June 30, 2023
Answers to Questions Posted:	July 15, 2023 by 5PM
Responses Accepted Through:	August 31, 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (“Mass Tech Collaborative” or “MassTech”), on behalf of the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (“MBI”) is issuing this Request for Qualifications for Outreach and Engagement Services to Support Digital Equity Statewide Plans (RFQ No.2023-MBI-09) (the “RFQ”) to solicit responses from qualified organizations (“Respondents”) interested in receiving funding to provide services to support MBI’s stakeholder engagement process for Digital Equity Act (“DEA”) and Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (“BEAD”) statewide planning efforts as well as future implementation activities under these programs. Massachusetts-based organizations serving any of the “target populations” listed in Section 2 are eligible to apply. Respondents will be competing against each other for selection to provide the services set forth herein (the “Services”). The submissions of all Respondents shall be compared and evaluated pursuant to the evaluation criteria set forth in this RFQ, and multiple Respondents may be selected.

Mass Tech Collaborative will be the contracting entity on behalf of MBI for the purposes of this RFQ, and (except where the specific context warrants otherwise), MBI and Mass Tech Collaborative are collectively referred to as Mass Tech Collaborative or MassTech. Mass Tech Collaborative will enter into a [Services Agreement \(Federally Funded\)](#) with selected Respondents containing certain standard provisions (the “Agreement”).

1.2 Mass Tech Collaborative and MBI

Mass Tech Collaborative is an independent public instrumentality of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts chartered by the Commonwealth to serve as a catalyst for growing its innovation economy. Mass Tech Collaborative brings together leaders from industry, academia, and government to advance technology-focused solutions that lead to economic growth, job creation, and public benefits in Massachusetts. For additional information about Mass Tech Collaborative and its programs and initiatives, please visit our website at www.masstech.org.

MBI is the central broadband program for the Commonwealth. The primary mission of MBI is to extend affordable, robust, high-speed Internet access to all homes, businesses, schools, libraries, medical facilities, government offices and other public places across Massachusetts, with a focus on the hard-to-serve areas of western and central Massachusetts. For more information about MBI and its programs and activities generally, please visit the web site at www.massbroadband.org.

2. SERVICES REQUIRED

2.1 Overview

The Digital Equity Act (“DEA”) and Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (“BEAD”) programs, funded by The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (“NTIA”) through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, aim to ensure that all people and communities have access to high-speed internet, as well as the technology, education and skills needed to fully engage in our increasingly digital society. The DEA and BEAD programs require all states to develop a unified Statewide Digital Equity Plan (“SDEP”), a BEAD Five-Year Action Plan and related proposals (“BEAD Plan and Proposals”) that identify the following populations as priority groups to focus outreach towards as part of the planning process (hereinafter referred to collectively as the “Target Populations”):

- Low-income households

- Aging individuals
- Incarcerated individuals
- Veterans
- Persons of Color
- Indigenous and Native American persons
- Members of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities
- Individuals with disabilities
- People with language barriers, including low levels of literacy
- Women
- LGBTQI+ persons
- Rural inhabitants
- Persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality, including but not limited to: disconnected youth, individuals in recovery, individuals with past criminal records

The purpose of this RFQ is to prequalify entities that have established trust and that work directly with one or more of the Target Populations to support MBI's stakeholder outreach and engagement activities to gather information directly from impacted communities disproportionately impacted by the digital divide and inform the SDEP and BEAD Plan and Proposals and future implementation activities.

Any community-based organization directly serving or representing one or more of the Target Populations listed above may submit an online application to apply for funds to perform the Services under this RFQ. MBI's desired scope of services is described in more detail in the following section.

MBI expects to make \$250,000 in awards under this RFQ. Contract amounts to organizations selected to provide services under this RFQ will be made up to \$15,000 for Category of Services 1, below. Organizations representing networks of partners that propose to subcontract within those networks may apply for up to \$40,000 in funding.

Through this RFQ, MBI is seeking to enter into agreements for services to support outreach and engagement activities in the development of the SDEP and the BEAD program materials as outlined in the Category of Services 1, below and also seeks to prequalify organizations, that it may award funds to on an as needed basis, to support ongoing engagement activities throughout the lifecycle of the DEA and BEAD programs as set forth in Category of Services 2, below.

2.2 Scope of Services

Category of Services 1: Digital Equity Outreach and Engagement

MBI seeks eligible organizations with close and trusted relationships to one or more of the Target Populations to provide services for one or more of the following activities:

Activity #1 - Stakeholder Engagement to Support Regional Listening Sessions

MBI seeks community-based organizations to undertake stakeholder engagement activities to recruit individuals within the Target Populations to participate in the statewide planning processes regional listening sessions that MBI will facilitate. Specific activities under this scope of service category could include targeted e-mails, phone calls, facilitated discussions in public meetings, direct mailing, social media engagement, translation/interpretation as needed, or other activities that would make members of the Target Populations aware of the statewide planning efforts and drive participation in the regional listening sessions that will take place July – December of 2023.

Activity #2 - Event or Focus Group Execution

MBI seeks organizations to plan and execute small scale events or focus groups with members of one or more of the Target Populations for the purpose of gathering key information, input, and lived experiences from those populations. Specific activities under this scope of service category could include event

planning, outreach and promotion, augmentation or edits to provided materials reflective of community context, translation/interpretation, meeting facilitation and relevant engagement activities, and other activities directed at capturing the lived experiences of the Target Populations as related to the digital divide and informing elements of the SDEP and BEAD Plan and Proposals. Respondents may apply to conduct one or a series of events ranging in size and demographics to ensure we reach different ages and groups with unique circumstances within the Target Populations.

Activity #3 - Surveying of Covered Populations

MBI seeks organizations to support the distribution of MBI's statewide Digital Equity Survey. Specific activities under this scope of services could include hosting a in person or online group survey session, translation/interpretation as needed, phone banking, live surveying at events, or other activities that would increase the response rate among Target Populations to MBI's survey.

Eligible entities may respond to one or more of the above Service Categories¹ Activities and may combine Activities where appropriate (Ex. Conducting surveys at or after a focus group or event).

MBI will support selected Respondents with specific content and technical assistance as related to the services described above. Materials provided by MBI will include:

- Predeveloped survey translated into appropriate languages
- Community Meeting Script and Facilitation Guide
- Notetaking Form
- Eventbrite Setup and Language for Registration
- Focus Group Outreach List Template
- Video and Photo Release
- Sample Social Media Outreach Language
- Agenda and Run of Show Template
- Tech & Logistics Guide for Hybrid Sessions

Category of Services 2: Anticipated follow on Community Engagement

Activity #1: Ongoing Community Engagement

MBI seeks to prequalify eligible organizations with close and trusted relationships to one or more of the Target Populations to engage with members of those Target Populations across the Commonwealth to provide feedback through ongoing community engagement support services related to the DEA and BEAD programs throughout the planning and implementation stage. MBI seeks to ensure that the final recommendations as related to the DEA SDEP as well as the BEAD Initial Application & BEAD Final Application reflect the needs and perspectives of those population groups the programs intend to serve. MBI also seeks to engage with community members at strategic points in the DEA and BEAD process, as specific requirements are determined needed, to ensure programmatic success and impact. Specific activities under this anticipated Category of Services could include hosting group information/feedback sessions on the DEA/BEAD programs, facilitating 1:1 interviews, online / asynchronous review and collaboration, translation/interpretation as needed, and other activities that would yield community driven input on MBI's ongoing activities.

2.3 Anticipated Deliverables

MBI would request the deliverables of proposed activities:

- Final agenda, attendance lists, and number of attendees for each event or session
- Description of outreach activities and number of people reached through these activities
- Documentation of executed surveys
- Written feedback on DEA and BEAD Program plans and documents
- Report of activities executed and lessons learned

2.4 Eligible Expenses

Funds awarded through this RFQ may be applied to eligible outreach and material expenses, including but not limited to:

- Staff time to engage in outreach and engagement activities to increase participation in the planning efforts by covered populations.
- Staff time to execute any planned outreach activities, including events, focus groups, or surveying.
- Direct costs related to outreach and engagement (print materials, paid social media posting, translation of content, etc.).
- Direct costs related to event facilitation (space rental, food/refreshments, A/V equipment, childcare, transportation, etc.).
- Staff time or hiring of subcontractors to provide translation and interpretation services.
- Material incentives such as gift cards, raffle items, etc., not to exceed a total of 15% of any proposed budget, or \$30/participant, whichever is less and should only be proposed when deemed necessary to achieve the expected outcomes proposed.
- Indirect costs (not to exceed 10% of the proposed budget or Respondent's federally approved rate whichever is less)
- Subcontracting of funds to partner organizations.

Period of Performance

MassTech expects to make a selection of one or more organizations under Category of Services 1 based upon the proposal and budget submitted in response to this RFQ. MassTech requires that the Category of Service 1: Digital Equity Outreach and Engagement activities be completed no later than November 30, 2023, but Respondents that can complete all work by September 30, 2023 shall be evaluated more favorably.

MassTech will prequalify organizations under Category of Services 2: Ongoing Community Engagement and may select one or more organizations at strategic program points throughout the DEA and BEAD planning and implementation activities based upon qualifications and proposed rates. Examples of these strategic points include but are not limited to:

- Public comment period for the SDEP (Approximate Dates Nov '23 – Feb '24)
- Public comment period for the BEAD Initial Application (Approximate Dates Nov '23 – Dec '23)
- Pre- grant program launch for DEA and BEAD implementation (Approximate Dates March '24 – June '24)
- Mid program evaluation (Approximate Dates June '24 – June '25)
- End of program evaluation (Approximate Dates June '25 – June '26)

MassTech will notify prequalified entities of these strategic program points and will request a budget for services based on the organization's proposed rates that they submit as part of this RFQ and in alignment with the needs associated with the strategic program point.

3. APPLICATION PROCESS

3.1 Application and Submission Instructions

Respondents are cautioned to read this RFQ carefully and to conform to its requirements. Failure to comply with the requirements of this RFQ may serve as grounds for rejection of an Application.

- a. All Applications must be submitted [HERE](#). This online Application must be used to apply for Category of Services 1 and/or 2.
- b. Applications shall include:

- A description of the entity responding to the RFQ including:
 - i. Summary overview of organization
 - ii. List of Target Population(s) served, as outlined in section 2.1
 - iii. Organization type
 - iv. Year established
 - v. Services provided to Target Population(s) in the ordinary course of business and examples of similar services to those requested in this RFQ
 - vi. Geographic area(s) covered within Massachusetts
 - vii. Size of entity (number of employees)
 - A detailed description of the proposed approach for each Category of Service and Target Population for which the Respondent is seeking funding, including:
 - i. Overall approach to delivering the services, including the type and frequency of activities, efforts and events
 - ii. Anticipated number of individuals reached.
 - iii. Timeline for execution of the proposed approach for Category of Services 1, including a description of pre-event outreach strategies.
 - Completed Budget Template with a proposed budget for Category of Services 1 activities proposed and rates upon which Category of Services 2 would be based as requested by MassTech.
 - If the Respondent intends to use subcontractors, a list of identified partners and a short description of each partner’s qualifications to support this work.
 - Exceptions to the [Services Agreement \(Federally Funded\)](#), located at the bottom of Mass Tech’s procurement page.
- c. Any and all responses, Applications, data, materials, information and documentation submitted to Mass Tech Collaborative in response to this RFQ shall become Mass Tech Collaborative’s property and shall be subject to public disclosure. As a public entity, the Mass Tech Collaborative is subject to the Massachusetts Public Records Law (set forth at Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 66). There are very limited and narrow exceptions to disclosure under the Public Records Law. If a Respondent wishes to have the Mass Tech Collaborative treat certain information or documentation as confidential, the Respondent must submit a written request to the Mass Tech Collaborative’s General Counsel’s office no later than 5:00 p.m. fourteen (14) business days prior to the required date of Application submission set forth in Section 4.2 below. The request must precisely identify the information and/or documentation that is the subject of the request and provide a detailed explanation supporting the application of the statutory exemption(s) from the public records cited by the Respondent. The General Counsel will issue a written determination within ten (10) business days of receipt of the written request. If the General Counsel approves the request, the Respondent shall clearly label the relevant information and/or documentation as **“CONFIDENTIAL”** in the Application and **shall only include the confidential material in the hard copy of the Application**. Any statements in an Application reserving any confidentiality or privacy rights that is inconsistent with these requirements and procedures will be disregarded.

3.2 Application Timeframe

The application process will proceed according to the following schedule. The target dates are subject to change. Therefore, Respondents are encouraged to check Mass Tech Collaborative’s website frequently for updates to the schedule.

Task	Date:
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RFQ Released	June 12, 2023
Bidders' Conference	June 22, 2023 @ 3pm EST
Questions Due	June 30, 2023 @ 11:59 PM EST
Question and Answer File Posted	July 15, 2023 @ 5 PM EST
Applications Due on a Rolling Basis through	August 31, 2023 @ 11:59 PM EST
Notification of Award	On a rolling basis

3.3 Questions

Questions regarding this RFQ must be submitted by using [this online form](#). All questions must be received by 11:59 p.m. EST on June 30, 2023. Responses to all questions received will be posted on or before 5:00 p.m. on July 15, 2023 to Mass Tech Collaborative and COMMBUYS website(s).

3.4 Bidders' Teleconference/Webinar

A bidders' teleconference will be held on June 22, 2023 at 3pm. All potential Respondents interested in participating in the bidders' teleconference must register with Mass Tech Collaborative by using [this online registration form](#). Mass Tech Collaborative will post summary responses to procedural questions and issues addressed at the bidders' teleconference on the Mass Tech Collaborative's and the COMMBUYS websites.

4. EVALUATION PROCESS AND CRITERIA

4.1 Process

The Mass Tech Collaborative shall evaluate each Application that is properly submitted in batches on a rolling basis. As part of the selection process, Mass Tech Collaborative may invite Respondents to answer questions regarding their Application in person or in writing. In its sole discretion, Mass Tech Collaborative may also choose to enter into a negotiation period with one or more finalist Respondent(s) and then ask the Respondent(s) to submit a best and final offer.

4.2 Criteria

Respondents shall be awarded funding as set forth within this RFQ based on their ability to perform the services set forth in 2.2 for which the Respondent seeks funding. Additional criteria that MassTech will evaluate may include, but not be limited to:

- Reasonableness of budget.
- Reasonableness of schedule and ability to complete stated work by September 30, 2023.
- Organization's demonstrated ability to work with Target Populations as outlined in section 2.1 of this RFQ.
- Organization's demonstrated ability to implement outreach activities and produce deliverables as outlined in sections 2.2 and 2.3 of this RFQ within the stated period of performance.

Lack of debarment status by either the state or federal government is also required.

The order of these factors does not generally denote relative importance. The goal of this RFQ is to select and enter into an Agreement with the Respondents that will provide the best value for the

Services to achieve MassTech Collaborative's goals and reach all Target Populations. Mass Tech Collaborative reserves the right to consider such other relevant factors as it deems appropriate in order to obtain the "best value".

5. GENERAL CONDITIONS

5.1 General Information

- a) If an Application fails to meet any material terms, conditions, requirements or procedures, it may be deemed unresponsive and disqualified. The Mass Tech Collaborative reserves the right to waive omissions or irregularities that it determines to be not material.
- b) This RFQ, as may be amended from time to time by Mass Tech Collaborative, does not commit Mass Tech Collaborative to select any firm(s), award any contracts for services pursuant to this RFQ, or pay any costs incurred in responding to this RFQ. Mass Tech Collaborative reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to withdraw the RFQ, to engage in preliminary discussions with prospective Respondents, to accept or reject any or all Applications received, to request supplemental or clarifying information, to negotiate with any or all qualified Respondents, and to request modifications to Applications in accordance with negotiations, all to the same extent as if this were a Request for Information.
- c) On matters related solely to this RFQ that arise prior to an award decision by the Mass Tech Collaborative, Respondents shall limit communications with the Mass Tech Collaborative to the Procurement Team Leader and such other individuals as the Mass Tech Collaborative may designate from time to time. No other Mass Tech Collaborative employee or representative is authorized to provide any information or respond to any questions or inquiries concerning this RFQ. Respondents may contact the Procurement Team Leader for this RFQ in the event this RFQ is incomplete.
- d) The Mass Tech Collaborative may provide reasonable accommodations, including the provision of materials in an alternative format, for Respondents with disabilities or other hardships. Respondents requiring accommodations shall submit requests in writing, with supporting documentation justifying the accommodations, to the Procurement Team Leader. The Mass Tech Collaborative reserves the right to grant or reject any request for accommodations.
- e) Respondent's Application shall be treated by the Mass Tech Collaborative as an accurate statement of Respondent's capabilities and experience. Should any statement asserted by Respondent prove to be inaccurate or inconsistent with the foregoing, such inaccuracy or inconsistency shall constitute sufficient cause for Mass Tech Collaborative in its sole discretion to reject the Application and/or terminate of any resulting Agreement.
- f) Costs that are not specifically identified in the Respondent's response and/or not specifically accepted by Mass Tech Collaborative as part of the Agreement will not be compensated under any contract awarded pursuant to this RFQ.
- g) Mass Tech Collaborative's prior approval is required for any subcontracted services under any Agreement entered into as a result of this RFQ. The selected Respondent will take all appropriate steps to assure that minority firms, women's business enterprises, and labor surplus area firms are used when possible. The selected Respondent is responsible for the satisfactory performance and adequate oversight of its subcontractors. Subcontractors are required to meet the same requirements and are held to the same reimbursable cost standards as the selected Respondent.
- h) Submitted responses must be valid in all respects for a minimum period of sixty (60) days after

the deadline for submission.

- i) Mass Tech Collaborative reserves the right to amend the Agreement at any time prior to execution. Respondents should review the Agreement as they are required to specify any exceptions to the Agreement and to make any suggested counterproposal in their Application. A failure to specify exceptions and/or counterproposals will be deemed an acceptance of the Agreement's general terms and conditions, and no subsequent negotiation of such provisions shall be permitted.
- j) The MassTech Collaborative's prior approval is required for any subcontracted services under any Agreement entered into as a result of this RFQ. The selected Respondent will take all appropriate steps to assure that minority firms, women's business enterprises, and labor surplus area firms are used when possible. The selected Respondent is responsible for the satisfactory performance and adequate oversight of its subcontractors. Subcontractors are required to meet the same requirements and are held to the same reimbursable cost standards as the selected Respondent.
- k) The MassTech Collaborative embraces a workplace where the values of diversity and inclusion support varying perspectives and backgrounds to produce a richer environment. MassTech expects Respondents as well as all our consultants, contractors and vendors, to demonstrate a similar commitment and, pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 200.321(a), take all necessary affirmative steps to assure that minority businesses, women's business enterprises, and labor surplus area firms are used when possible. If Respondent will be subcontracting under this RFP, affirmative steps must include at least the following six steps: 1. Placing qualified small and minority businesses and women's business enterprises on solicitation lists; 2. Assuring that small and minority businesses and women's business enterprises are solicited whenever they are potential sources; 3. Dividing total requirements, when economically feasible, into smaller tasks or quantities to permit maximum participation by small and minority businesses, and women's business enterprises; 4. Establishing delivery schedules, where the requirement permits, which encourage participation by small and minority businesses, and women's business enterprises; 5. Using the services and assistance, as appropriate, of such organizations as the Small Business Administration and the Minority Business Development Agency of the Department of Commerce; and 6. Requiring all subcontractors to take the same affirmative steps as listed in numbers 1 through 5.
- l) Respondent shall not discriminate against any qualified employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, national origin, ancestry, age, sex, religion, physical or mental handicap, or sexual orientation. Respondents shall comply with all applicable Federal and State statutes, rules and regulations prohibiting discrimination in employment including but not limited to: the Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. §§ 12101 et seq.), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. § 794), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended (42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d et seq.), the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended (42 U.S.C. §§ 6101 et seq.), M.G.L. c. 151B, M.G.L. c. 272 §§ 92A, 98, and 98A, M.G.L. c. 111 § 199A, 42 U.S.C. 9918 (c) and 45 C.F.R. 80.
- m) Byrd Anti-Lobbying Amendment (31 U.S.C. 1352) – Respondent's that are awarded an amount exceeding \$100,000 must file the required certification. Each tier certifies to the tier above that it will not and has not used Federal appropriated funds to pay any person or organization for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a member of Congress, officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a member of Congress in connection with obtaining any Federal contract, grant or any other award covered by 31 U.S.C. 1352. Each tier must also disclose any lobbying with non-Federal funds that takes place in connection with obtaining any Federal award. Such disclosures are forwarded from tier to tier up to the non-Federal award.

- n) Debarment and Suspension- (Executive Orders 12549 and 12689) – Respondents understand that a contract award may not be made to parties listed on the government-wide exclusions in the System for Award Management (SAM).
- o) Respondent's must be able to comply with all applicable standards, orders or regulations issued pursuant to the Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C. 7401-7671q) and the Federal Water Pollution Control Act as amended (33 U.S.C. 1251-1387). Violations must be reported to the Federal awarding agency and the Regional Office of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- p) As appropriate and to the extent consistent with law, Respondents should, to the greatest extent practicable, provide a preference for the purchase, acquisition, or use of goods, products, or materials produced in the United States. The requirements of this section must be included in all contracts and sub awards awarded hereunder.
- q) Respondent understands and agrees that the Executive Office of Economic Development ("EOED") staff and authorized representatives may evaluate any subcontractors with whom Mass Tech Collaborative executes a contract or other form of legal agreement in order to complete the activities funded under this RFQ, through ongoing monitoring. As deemed appropriate by EOED, EOED's staff and authorized representatives may also conduct further reviews and site-visits during the contract term, which may include fiscal reviews. EOED staff shall use interviews, inspection of files, site visits and direct observation to identify program areas of concern so that contractors can improve their productivity, efficiency, quality, and management capacity.
- r) The awarded Respondent shall maintain and utilize systems and procedures to prevent, detect, and correct fraud, waste, and abuse in activities funded under this RFQ.
- s) Pursuant to 2 C.F.R. § 200.303, the awarded Respondent shall establish effective control over, and accountability for, all funds, property, and other assets funded under this RFQ and assure that they are used solely for authorized purposes.
- t) The awarded Respondent shall maintain an accounting system and supporting fiscal records adequate to audit and otherwise verify that assistance payments and administrative costs meet Federal and State requirements.
- u) The Awarded Respondent shall use its best efforts to ensure that it will not knowingly use contract funds to purchase, or enter into contracts to purchase, any equipment, services, or systems that use prohibited telecommunications equipment or services as a substantial or essential component of a system subject to 2 CFR § 200.216.

5.2 Posting of Modifications/Addenda to RFQ

This RFQ has been distributed electronically using the Mass Tech Collaborative and COMMBUYS websites. If the Mass Tech Collaborative determines that it is necessary to revise any part of this RFQ, or if additional data is necessary to clarify any of its provisions, an addendum will be posted to the websites. It is the responsibility of each potential Respondent to check the Mass Tech Collaborative, MBI and COMMBUYS websites for any addenda or modifications to the RFQ. The Mass Tech Collaborative accepts no liability and will provide no accommodation to Respondents who submit a response based on an out-of-date RFQ.