

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**  
**SUBMISSION DEADLINE**  
**5:00 PM CST, OCTOBER 9, 2023**

**RFP TITLE: FOCUS AREA ADVISOR – SOY EXCELLENCE CENTERS**

**RFP CONTACT:**

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**PROPOSAL DEADLINE: OCTOBER 9, 2023, by 5:00 PM CST**

**INTRODUCTION:**

U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC), Inc. formally requests proposals for a Focus Area Director or Advisor for the Soy Excellence Centers programs. The position is open for U.S. or non-U.S. based candidates who will work remotely. Employment arrangements will be finalized once final candidate is selected. The Soy Excellence Centers (SECs) provide protein enterprises with work force training and capacity building programs to enhance productivity in the protein value chain of emerging markets. SECs target entry to mid-level professionals seeking career advancement in the protein industry. Increased workforce preparedness leads to more efficient production of protein, impacting the entire value chain.

Through a global network of international offices and strong support in the U.S., USSEC helps build a preference for U.S. soybeans and soybean products, advocates for the use of soy in livestock and aquaculture feed and human consumption, promotes the benefits of soy use through education and connects industry leaders through a robust membership program.

**PURPOSE OF RFP:**

USSEC's standard practice is to RFP every 3 years in an openly and competitive manner. This type of cost analysis will assist in determining the fair market value for the work to be performed and allows USSEC the opportunity to evaluate various proposals and select the best contractor for the job based on experience, availability, expertise, approach, and cost.

The purpose of this RFP is to seek proposals for engaging a Focus Area Advisor (FAA) to provide implementation support services for USSEC's initiatives, projects, and activities of the Soy Excellent Center programs and initiatives. The FAA is responsible for helping the team by providing oversight, strong marketing skills and critical strategic direction to USSEC to achieve the SEC program goals and objectives. Overall, the SEC Focus Area Advisor will provide strategic advice and implementation of programs and initiatives, operational support, as well as expert representation on behalf of USSEC.

**BACKGROUND & PURPOSE OF PROJECT:**

The Soy Excellence Center program builds professional capacity in emerging market protein value chains. Our curriculum is built and administered by international experts and offered to aspiring agribusiness professionals where access to training is scarce. SEC training programs

are organized into sector-specific track-based curriculum. Focus area curriculums are developed with input from local industry partners and global experts.

Beyond the formal curriculum, the U.S. soy industry has invested in the development of the SEC digital platform. This platform is a virtual professional development community providing on-demand continuing education content, access to industry experts, and a global community of industry peers. In turn, this platform collectively supports continuing innovation and the sustainability of program results.

Our vision is that the SECs will provide world-class training for individuals employed in industries that utilize soy to produce livestock, feed or food which better prepares them to be the leaders of tomorrow and helps them understand how to value various types of soy and ultimately builds an affinity to the U.S. Soy Industry.

The SEC Focus Area Advisor will report to the USSEC's Senior Director of Strategic Programs. This person will also work very closely with the Executive Director of the Soy Excellence Centers and the respective Regional Directors where SECs are located. The purpose of the role is to assist in providing global structure and leadership to the USSEC SEC program.

### **SCOPE (SERVICES) OF WORK:**

Essential Functions, Duties, and Responsibilities:

- Support key work groups including Budget & Sustainability, Measurement & Evaluation and Vision 26
- Prepare materials and participate in planning and working sessions
- Support SEC leadership and teams by providing oversight for defining roles and responsibilities across program; get alignment within global support as well as engage regions as appropriate.
- Support SEC and USSEC leadership by providing oversight for the collection of global and regional forecasting costs to help anticipate and adjust program to align with investment.
- Lead and support the development of quarterly forecast and update dashboard; work with SEC Project Manager (PM) on refinements to improve/ transition collection.
- Work closely with global SEC team members and SEC PM to ensure solutions and actions align with most efficient means
- Work closely with Industry Relations team and SEC funding sources to provide data and 'what if' analysis as alternative funding sources are sought.
- Leverage work done in FY23 with QSSBs and Vision 26 workgroup to advance a view based on metrics/KPIs that aligns with inputs from key stakeholders including USSEC leadership and input from investors such as QSSBs and USDA.
- Work closely with SEC global and regional teams as well as USSEC M&E manager.
- Develop unified process to support data collection, measurement & reporting capabilities.
- Identify roles & responsibilities of data collection and ownership.
- Develop efficient means of organizing the data (reference example of FY23 content calendar refresh).
- Expand dashboard reporting and explore dynamic front end to provide information visibility on an on-demand basis (ex. Power BI front end).
- Work with SEC team and marketing to ensure awareness of progress.

- Maintain alignment to ensure data collection can be adapted to communicate internal learning as well as external case studies and success stories.
- Work closely with communications to develop processes that feeds metrics/KPIs into communication channels
- Helps ensures activities are implemented effectively, achieving the project's deliverables, objectives, and investment goals while ensuring the global strategies are core focus of the SEC programs.
- Works with domestic and international team members to recommend regional strategies consistent with global objectives, shares knowledge of shifting market conditions, and assures experts' alignment with the proper goals for their area of expertise to ensure adherence to funding source requirements.
- Leverages subject matter experts to gain regional trust and builds a successful network to access insight into new and innovative ideas to advance the preference for U.S. Soy.
- Collaborates and supports project managers to provide oversight on situational issues and ensures project budgetary compliance is maintained.
- Supports strong relationships with critical industry members, importing and exporting customers, trade contacts, decision makers, key funding sources representatives, and other influential industry participants via collaboration and communication to ensure USSEC has complete knowledge of all program focus areas.
- Attends USSEC events and programs to serve as a subject matter expert by providing a high-level overview of program and market developments.

#### Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- Strong skills in excel and budget tracking and forecasting.
- Experience with measurement and evaluation, and metric development and tracking is desired.
- Assemble and manage discussions among experts in curriculum development and training professionalism without being an expert themselves.
- Strong team management and organization needed.
- Understand global soy trade dynamics, but not necessarily be a specialist in soy trade.
- Comfortably interact with a variety of stakeholders in both one-on-one and large group settings and lead domestic and international teams with timely and effective implementation of projects through teamwork, collaboration, and open communication.
- Speak publicly with confidence and authority.
- Willing to take positions on complicated or potentially sensitive topics and be able to support their position with funded knowledge and experience. Also be willing to change their position as new or more compelling information comes forward.
- Able to facilitate meetings, synthesize discussions, and manage action items and associated follow-up.
- Understand, manage, and leverage the skill sets of a team of contractors, consultants, and staff with diverse backgrounds, disciplines, and cultural sensitivities.

#### **PROJECT TIMELINE:**

Our expectation is for this role to start in late October/early November 2023. The vision is this role would be close to full time. We are asking that the Project Proposal include details about what the proposed timeline and scope would look like.

## RFP TIMELINE:

- RFP Distribution: September 25, 2023
- Last Day to Submit Questions: October 2, 2023, 5:00 PM Central Time
- Project Proposals Due: October 9, 2023, 5:00 PM Central Time
- Prospective Contractors Notified By: October 23, 2023

## INSTRUCTIONS:

Proposals must contain at a minimum the specific criteria listed below:

1. Please email the proposal to [RFP@USSEC.ORG](mailto:RFP@USSEC.ORG) by **5:00PM Central Time** on **October 9, 2023**
2. A description of the Prospective Contractor's capabilities, resources and experience. Emphasis should be placed on experience related to this RFP.
3. A thorough proposal outlining Prospective Contractor planned work, deliverables and timeline to complete the work.
3. Resumes for each of the Prospective Contractor's personnel assigned to work directly on the implementation of the contract.
4. Provide a minimum of two names and contact information for other similarly sized clients for reference purposes.
5. Detailed Budget
  - All bids for services must provide a breakout of how the fee was derived, including, but not limited to a breakdown of hourly rate and the amount of effort they anticipate to do the work.
6. Proposals should be no longer than **10 pages** (8 ½" x 11").

## NOTES:

- Prospective Contractors are hereby notified that proposals will be duplicated for internal review only. Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality of all information presented. The appropriate representatives from staff and legal counsel will review proposals. Proposals will not be returned.
- USSEC reserves the right to retain all proposals submitted. Submission of a proposal indicates acceptance by the submitter of the conditions contained in the request for proposal, unless clearly and specifically noted in the proposal submitted and confirmed in the contract between USSEC and the contractor selected.
- Confidentiality - Without USSEC's prior written consent, Prospective Contractors and its officers, employees, agents, representatives, affiliates, and subcontractors shall not disclose to any third party any documents, materials or information that the Prospective Contractors learns from or is provided in relation to the RFP request.
- During the evaluation process, USSEC reserves the right to request additional information or clarifications from proposers, or to allow corrections of errors and omissions.

- USSEC reserves the right to reject any proposal that is in any way inconsistent or irregular. USSEC also reserves the right to waive proposal defects or deficiencies, to request additional information, and/or to negotiate with the Prospective Contractor regarding the proposal.
- Prospective Contractor agrees that Fees are in lieu of any and all other benefits, including, but not limited to, repayment of any and all taxes related to contractor service fees, health and life insurance, administrative costs and vacation.
- Prospective Contractor agrees that any income taxes, value added taxes or any other form of direct or indirect taxes on compensation paid under the contract shall be paid by Contractor and not by USSEC or Funding Sources.
  - Prior to any payment to a Contractor, a contractor must provide a W-9, W-8, or W-8BEN upon agreement signature.
- Non-Competition. Contractor shall not act as agent or representative for any product or service directly or indirectly competitive with U.S. soybeans or soybean products for the length of the contract.
- USSEC and Prospective Contractor agree to comply with the provisions of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO). USSEC provides EEO to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, marital status, amnesty, or status as a covered veteran in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws.

## SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION AND BACKGROUND

### *BUILDING A PREFERENCE FOR U.S. SOY*

**USSEC's strategy** can be found here: <https://ussec.org/about-ussec/>

**USB's Long Range Strategic Plan** can be found here:

<https://www.unitedsoybean.org/strategic-plan/>

We are a dynamic partnership of key stakeholders representing soybean producers, commodity shippers, merchandisers, allied agribusiness and agricultural organizations.

Through a global network of international offices and strong support in the U.S., we help build a preference for U.S. soybeans and soybean products, advocate for the use of soy in feed, aquaculture and human consumption, promote the benefits of soy use through education and connect industry leaders through a robust membership program.

Our 15-member board of directors is comprised of four members from the American Soybean Association (ASA), four members from the United Soybean Board (USB), and seven members representing trade, allied industry, and state organizations.

New board members are seated annually. We are receiving funding from a variety of sources including soy producer checkoff dollars invested by the USB and various state soybean councils; cooperating industry; and the American Soybean Association's investment of cost-share funding provided by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agriculture Service.

The United Soybean Board, created by the 1990 Farm Bill to manage and direct the National Soybean Checkoff, is dedicated to marketing and research for the soybean industry. USB is comprised of 73 volunteer soybean farmers representing the interests of fellow growers

nationwide. Each board member is nominated by Qualified State Soybean Boards (QSSBs) and appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

Because of the limitations on administrative and salary costs established in the Act, USB outsources the majority of its program management responsibilities to USB's three primary contractors:

- SmithBucklin-St. Louis for domestic marketing, new uses, production research and Board initiative activities;
- Osborn & Barr Communications for communications/public relations activities and;
- U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC), Inc. for international marketing and global opportunities activities.

As one of these three primary contractors USSEC may also undertake initiative activities on behalf of USB. USB considers primary contractor staff (approximately 60 people) as core USB staff. These three primary contractors use a number of subcontractors and, together, these entities carry out approximately 450 projects each year for USB. USB also manages approximately 10 subcontractors.

## **Non-Discrimination Statement**

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) [email:program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

## **Civil Rights Clause**

Contractor agrees that during the performance of this Agreement it will not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or family status, parental status or protected genetic information. Contractor further agrees that it will fully comply with any and all applicable Federal, State and local equal employment opportunity statutes, ordinances and regulations, including, without limitation, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, and the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Nothing in this section shall require Contractor to comply with or become liable under any law, ordinance, regulation or rule that does not otherwise apply to Contractor.