

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE
5:00 PM CST, 08/06/2024**



RFP TITLE: EVENT PLANNER FOR USSEC'S SOYCONNEX

RFP CONTACT:

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PROPOSAL DEADLINE: 07/23/2024

USSEC's standard practice is to RFP every three years openly and competitively. 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.

INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE OF RFP:

The U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) is a dynamic partnership of key stakeholders representing soybean producers, commodity shippers, merchandisers, allied agribusinesses, and agricultural organizations. 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, 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. Its mission is to optimize the utilization and value of U.S. soy in international markets by meeting the needs of our stakeholders and global customers.

This is an RFP for a qualified, experienced special events consultant ("Contractor") to produce the 2026 Soy Connex Conference. USSEC produces the premier global event for international buyers to connect with the U.S. soy and soy product value chain. This event is supported by a core team of USSEC professionals to work with the contractor.

The scope of services under the proposed agreement includes responsibility for related tasks including venue selections, budgeting and planning, online registration including credit card services, room block management and event management functions such as on-site-registration, banqueting, audiovisual, trade show, sponsorship, and subcontracted services such as signage and transportation. The contractor will manage and execute the event, as well as bringing innovation, creativity, and an entrepreneurial approach to it.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF PROJECT:

This event brings together foreign buyers of U.S. soy from over 60 countries to meet the U.S.

soy supply chain. The primary mission of the event is to increase foreign purchases of U.S. soy and educate foreign buyers and the U.S. soy industry about the global innovations needed to continue the U.S. tradition of high quality, sustainable crops for sale in international markets. The event runs for 2.5 days and has now has approximately 800 attendees. The main elements of the conference are an educational/learning day made up of general and breakout sessions, a trade show exhibition, and networking events such as a reception, breakfasts, and lunches. The conference attracts full media. Extensive additional meeting rooms are needed for the press, trade presentations, private meetings, and board meetings.

TARGET AUDIENCE:

The conference audience is diverse and consists of:

- U.S. grain and oilseed industry exporters and agribusiness officials
- International buyers and traders of the best premium food and commodity soybeans, grains, and other commodities.
- Ocean, rail, trucking transportation, shipping and logistics industry company representatives and officials
- Grain elevator managers and directors
- Farmer producers and state and national agricultural organization leaders
- State and federal transportation and agriculture agency government officials
- University and agriculture research institution representatives
- Anyone interested in international agriculture trade and the latest food industry trends

SCOPE (SERVICES) OF WORK:

The Contractor will be expected to provide all services necessary and appropriate to manage and execute the Soyconnext, including but not limited to the services (“Services”) detailed herein.

The Services outlined herein are not intended to be exhaustive. The selected Contractor will be expected to have, among other needed skills: organized, detailed oriented, flexible, an effective verbal and written communicator; calm under pressure; and a negotiator in the best interest of the event. There are significant logistics and a need for the contractor to be able to react quickly to changes in travel schedules from abroad and the U.S. visitors. Strong financial management with realistic budgets and fast clearance of payments and invoices will be required of the contractor. Any data generated by the Contractor will belong to USSEC.

Site Selection and Contracting

- Develop and send for site selection for the 2027 event. To aid this process we have drawn up a list of locations.
- Review responses and recommend suitable hotels and venues for event.
- Provide guidance on decisions that will benefit the development of a quality look and professional appearance of the conference.

- Negotiate venue contract including room blocks and attrition, hotel amenities, and discounts.
- Support site visits of the joint conference partners for site selection.

Prepare and Update Project Budgets

- Prepare detailed budget for projected revenue, then costs for services, venues, and subcontractors, and/or vendors. Historical data can be advised as a starting point.
- Provide updates on budgeted versus actual revenues and cost, adhering to set budget goals. The conference receives revenue from sponsors, exhibitors, and registrants. Example costs include hotel meeting spaces, meals included in the conference, evening receptions, audio-visual, signage, trade show decoration and construction, trade show amenities for exhibitors. Receipt and shipment home of associations and exhibitor's materials.

Registration

- Develop and build an online registration platform to manage information from attendees, sponsors, and exhibitors. Registration system must be able to:
 - a. Offer discounts and/or complementary registrations to select guests.
 - b. Take payment online and be able to give the registrant the option to receive an invoice and let them send in a check.

For money collected via card payment cardholder information and Service Provider shall at all times remain in compliance with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (“PCI DSS”) requirements, including remaining aware at all times of changes to the PCI DSS and promptly implementing all procedures and practices as may be necessary to remain in compliance with the PCI DSS.

- c. Provide bulk registration for those that register as groups.

The following additional features would also be useful if available:

 - d. Ability to integrate hotel room block with hotel, so inventory is always current
 - e. Group invoicing available for those that register in bulk
- Able to provide quick reporting including audited results.
- Provide push notifications to registered exhibitors or sponsors
- Provide onsite registration for ‘walk in’ attendees.
- Produce reports on trends during registration

Vendor Management

- Provide constant communication between clients and venues.
- Select food and beverage menus.
- Monitor rooming needs through hotel blocks with selected hotels, managing attrition rates and contract nights with the joint conference partners. Up-to-date reports on room blocks should be able to be pulled easily.
- Facilitate audio visual and trade show arrangement.

- Facilitate all exhibitor requirements with venue and manage exhibit from beginning to end.
- Communicate trade show arrangements between staff, venue, and contractors.
- Make arrangements for adequate physical and cyber security at the chosen venues and with online registrations.

Event Management

As the selected Contractor, you will serve as lead for all event management in close conjunction with the conference association partners, with a focus on forethought, excellent communication, anticipation of next steps and excellent initiative is necessary.

- Facilitate weekly contact with the joint conference partners, providing seamless client support.
- Draft, manage, and finalize the Soy Connex project plans, budgets, timelines, and deployment schedule; and oversee execution of all related tasks with the event partners.
- Onsite the Contractor will manage the event production including ensuring proper set up of rooms, proper positioning of signage, confirm meals and refreshments, direct audio-visual based on the days' plans, verify exhibitor setup and tear down, respond to services requests, and provide avenues for shipment arrival and shipping. The contractor will provide staff and meaningful support to work with venues and subcontractors at the show site.
- Draft, manage and distribute the onsite schedule
- Participate in weekly meetings for 30 minutes with USSEC.
- Open and manage external conference bank account.

Account reconciliation, audit, and verification

- Contractor back office should reconcile hotel and vendor accounts and any revenues within 30-60 days after the show's conclusion. Note that USSEC's Financial Year ends on September 30 and any of USSEC's relating to USSEC must be complete by that date.
- Quickly verify and audit all credit card payments with any established refund or cancellation. Transfer any final paid invoices and receipts to USSEC. Be prepared to provide verification of transactions and receipts. Speed and accuracy are prized. Entrepreneurship on how to quickly account for, and close out the Soy Connex.
- Submit a post-event report with recommendations for the future. Report to also include feedback on subcontractors and vendors.

Trade Team Invitational Meetings

Services Provided for TTI (Trade Team Invitational) Pre-event

1. Facilitate design and implementation of how people register/online Registration
2. Develop a Registration Database designed to manage information requested for in-person Trade Team Appointments
3. Manipulate registration data in order to produce schedule for in-person Trade Team Invitational Event
4. Develop and produce any other periodic reports as requested by USSEC
5. Adding of other relevant event information for USSEC
6. Conduct regular conference calls with TTI planning team, as requested by USSEC
7. Assist in management of Food and Beverage, AV needs, room layouts
8. Create meetings schedule for attendees as directed by USSEC staff
9. Schedule, organize & attend pre-convention meeting with hotel
10. Select Food & Beverage menus for approval to venue in coordination with the USSEC Event Planning Team

Trade Team Invitational In-Person Event Support

1. Provide any guidance on how it will run on day - maximizing function space
2. Man Waiting Room/Welcome Reception, if applicable
3. Support working with USSEC Industry Relations Manager
4. Management of TTI master schedule
5. Manage additional meetings that are hosted in TTI rooms
6. Manage day of hotel needs with hotel staff – AV, F&B, room layouts

Trade Team Invitational *Post Event Support*

1. Post conference reporting

DELIVERABLES:

| Completion Date | Description of Deliverables |
|------------------------|---|
| September 2025 | Kick-off meeting with USSEC (for 2026) |
| October 2025 | Develop RFP for circulating to Locations (for 2027) |
| October 2025 | Send RFP to locations (for 2027) |
| November 2025 | Work on drawing up budget (for 2026) |

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| November 2025 | Select location/venue, do site visit (for 2027) |
| December 2025 | Sign Location/Venue contract (for 2027) |
| January 2026 (Ongoing) | Planning Meetings Begin (for 2026) |
| March 2026 | Work on developing online registration site (for 2026) |
| May 2026 | Launch online registration (for 2026) |
| On-going | Vendor management and confirmation of more details such as AV, transportation (if any) F&B requirements etc. |
| 1 week before event | Draft and Distribute event production schedule |
| Late Aug./early Sept. 2026 | Event takes place |
| Maximum 60 days post event | Submit post-event report with recommendations |
| Maximum 60 days post event | Submit final expense report for budget reconciliation |

PROJECT TIMELINE:

*Our expectation is for **Soy Connex** to be put on (subject to venue availability) either the 3rd or 4th week in August or 1st week in September. We are asking that the Project Proposal include details about what the proposed timeline and scope would look like.*

RFP TIMELINE:

- **RFP Distribution:** July 8, 2024
- **Last Day to Submit Questions:** July 29, 2024
- **Project Proposals Due:** August 6, 2024
- **Selections Made By:** August 12, 2024
- **Prospective Contractors Notified By:** August 16, 2024

INSTRUCTIONS:

The selected Contractor must have a proven track record of major event production, including budget oversight. Please highlight any international experience if relevant. The contractor will have the resources to commit full-time to this project with regular monitoring to assess successes and challenges. The contractor will be easily accessible via phone, text, email or in person at all times during business hours.

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

1. Please email the proposal to RFP@USSEC.ORG and CC LVargas@ussec.Org by **5:00 PM Central Time** on **Tuesday, August 6, 2024**.
2. A description of Prospective Contractor’s capabilities, resources, and experience. Emphasis should be placed on experience related to this RFP.
3. Please note proposed event registration software’s name and/or if personnel are training on multiple platforms as well as % of credit card fee and how often payment would be deposited to conference account.

4. A thorough proposal outlining Prospective Contractors' planned work, deliverables, and timeline to complete the work.
5. Resumes for each of the Prospective Contractor's personnel assigned to work directly on the implementation of the contract.
6. Provide a minimum of two names and contact information for other similarly sized clients for reference purposes.
7. Detailed Budget
 - All bids for services must provide a breakout of how the fee was derived including but not limited to a breakdown of an hourly rate and the amount of effort they anticipate to do the work.
8. The Contractor will have adequate commercial insurances and furnish a certificate of insurance with their proposal.
9. Proposals should be no longer than **ten pages** (8 ½" x 11").

NOTES:

- Prospective Contractors' proposals will be duplicated for internal review only. Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of all the 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 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 learn from or is provided about 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.
- The 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 the Contractor and not 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. The contractor shall not act as an 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.

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.

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.