

SmartZone RFP Questions & Answers

**Q&A is now closed and the blackout period has begun.
The deadline for submitting proposals to econdevshrd@grcity.us is
Friday, April 16, 2021 at 5:00 PM EST.**

Q: On page 13, it states that “respondent may attach up to 3 letters of support from investors, funders, and community partners.” Does that mean 3 from each category of investors, funders, and community partners, or 3 letters total?

A: You may include 3 letters of support from all 3 categories for a total of 9 letters of support.

Q: Will there be one organization awarded the grant or will multiple organizations receive funding?

A: From page 20 of the RFP:

“The SmartZone LDFA reserves the right to award to any proposer, or multiple proposers, for these services as it deems in its own best interests to do so. The SmartZone LDFA reserves the right to award in total, to reject any and all responses in whole or in part, and to waive any informality or technical defects, if, in the LDFA’s sole judgment, the best interests of the SmartZone LDFA will be served. The solicitation file shall contain the basis on which the award is made. The award of this RFP and any subsequent contract shall be at the sole discretion of the SmartZone LDFA.”

Q: Could you clarify the difference between a "qualified recipient" and a "collaborator"?

A: A “qualified recipient” is the same as a “lead respondent” as defined on page 5 of the RFP.

“The lead respondent may be a non-profit organization, industry group, academic or research institution, co-working space, private company, venture capitalist, real-estate developer, or facility manager, so long as it meets the requirements of Act 57.”

A “collaborator” is defined as a supporter of the lead respondent and shall be identified as such in the proposal.

Q: Would a proposal for technical training and high-wage employment, such as a tech apprenticeship program, focused on under-represented groups, be eligible?

A: These activities are eligible to be included under a proposal submitted by an eligible lead respondent.

Q: Can funds be used to provide scholarships, grants or to subsidize training?

A: A determination will be made on a case-by-case basis in accordance with Act 57.

Q: There is a maximum of up to 3 letters of support from investors, funders, and community partners. Does this only apply to the lead applicant, or is each collaborating organization limited in the number of letters of support they can provide as well?

A: Each RFP response is limited to 9 letters of support in total for that submission. Letters of support from investors, funders, and community partners include letters from collaborating organizations to the lead applicant, from other organizations to the lead applicant, and from any organization to collaborating organizations.

Q: Are there any limits to the number of Co-Applicants on a given proposal?

A: No. However, lead respondents and collaborating organizations should keep in mind that the strongest applications will show a strategic coordination of services.

Q: Are there different proposal requirements for Co-applicants, and how should their contributions to the Proposal be received?

A: Co-applicant/collaborating organization contributions will be included in the proposal submitted by the lead applicant they are collaborating with.

Q: Should a Co-Applicant's contribution(s) be included and integrated into the lead applicant's proposal?

A: Yes.

Q: Should co-applicant proposals be attached as appendices to the lead applicant's proposal?

A: Collaborating partner programs and services should be incorporated into the lead applicant's proposal holistically. All this information shall be submitted within the overall application page limits.

Q: Should co-applicants provide their proposal using the same proposal elements and evaluation criteria as a lead applicant?

A: Collaborating partner(s) should not submit an application separate from that of the lead respondent.

Q: Should a co-applicant's proposal receive the contract, would the co-applicant's contract be with the SmartZone LDFA directly, or would they operate more like a "subcontractor" to the lead applicant?

A: The SmartZone LDFA intends to contract with the lead respondent.

However, from page 20 of the RFP:

“The SmartZone LDFA reserves the right to award to any proposer, or multiple proposers, for these services as it deems in its own best interests to do so. The SmartZone LDFA reserves the right to award in total, to reject any and all responses in whole or in part, and to waive any informality or technical defects, if, in the LDFA’s sole judgment, the best interests of the SmartZone LDFA will be served. The solicitation file shall contain the basis on which the award is made. The award of this RFP and any subsequent contract shall be at the sole discretion of the SmartZone LDFA.”

Q: For organizations that do not fit the respondent profile of a lead applicant but are able/willing to collaborate and contribute to this RFP in one or more of the strategic priorities will there be a list of lead applicants who are seeking opportunities to collaborate with other organizations for this RFP?

A: No. The SmartZone LDFA is not compiling a list of lead applicants.

Q: Is there a way for organizations to identify themselves as potential collaborators who are willing to co-respond to this RFP?

A: We encourage organizations who would like to collaborate on a response to this RFP to reach out to qualified lead applicants in order to identify potential partnerships.

Q: We understand how challenging it is to intentionally design and implement robust, inclusive programs that support economic development in the underrepresented communities in Grand Rapids. How did you leverage the stakeholders’ experiences such as businesses operating in the smart zone owned and/or managed by women and people of color who have worked within the tech and incubator fields? Have stakeholders from these communities been involved in the development of this RFP?

A: Based on an ecosystem assessment supported by the WK Kellogg Foundation and published in December 2020 (linked below), entrepreneurs, including underrepresented communities, would like to be familiar with requirements of buyer organizations, large local companies and institutions. The ecosystem assessment also revealed a desire for individually-tailored advisory support and coaching to help diverse founders acquire the things they need to excel: peer support, culturally competent mentors, access to flexible capital and connections within corporate organizations. The ESOs serving these communities of interest shared their insights on the financial, structural, programmatic, and cultural barriers faced by their clients. These inputs were all factored into the development of the RFP and evaluation criteria.

Q: In the “Project Goals and Objectives” Section of the RFP you specifically ask for “Implementing targeted programs and initiatives ... in historically marginalized communities and populations that are underrepresented in the high-technology industry, “as well as to attract and facilitate ...opportunities ... specifically in underrepresented communities...” We support the project goals and are asking you to elaborate on the qualitative and quantitative social impact metrics you have considered in either drafting the RFP or plan on including to evaluate the outcome of this incubator investment?

A: The RFP is not prescriptive and requires the Applicant to propose both social and economic impact metrics. The Project Timeline and Milestones on page 12 of the RFP requires applicants to, “Provide a

detailed description of the performance metrics that will be used to quantify success, both quantitative and qualitative and how the metrics were developed. Examples include: Increased skills and knowledge and awareness of accessing business resources, increased capacity to build and maintain social capital, borrowers will have increased access to growth capital, jobs created and retained, capital raised, rentable private office spaces, flexible shared office space, etc. “

The Proposed Incubator Program, Impacts, Business Model Criteria on page 14 of the RFP requires the Applicant to provide a, “Level of potential economic impact to the immediate community such as the number, type and quality of jobs the Incubator will produce, and economic impact dollars to be created.”

Moreover, the evaluation of the incubator investment will be based on outcomes for the businesses and individuals served, with those outcomes disaggregated by gender, race, and ethnicity and when needed as a proxy, by geography (Census tracts, Wards, etc.) in alignment with the City’s Strategic Plan.

Q: What businesses are eligible to participate in the incubator program and what is the selection criteria? We believe addressing all stakeholders in the community is critical to the success and long-term sustainability and usability of the incubator as a whole. Defining eligibility criteria will help all applicants understand the scope of services, perspectives, and expertise necessary to adequately serve the community of potential incubated businesses. For example, must an incubated business be incorporated, or could they be an individual with a business concept?

A: The SmartZone is limited by law to funding services for high-tech, high-growth companies in Grand Rapids. Specifically, supporting “high-technology activity” as defined under Section 3 of the Michigan Economic Growth and Authority Act that is detailed in footnotes on pages 3 & 4 of the RFP. There is a focus to cluster life science, advanced manufacturing, and information technology sector companies, research, and programming into a connected community. While that focus does not mean the incubator should exclude other high-technology companies, a strong proposal would clearly identify how it will provide a competitive advantage to businesses and individuals in the target cluster, as well as any metrics that would be utilized to show evidence of success within that cluster.

A business does not need to be incorporated to participate. An individual with a business concept meeting the “high-technology activity” definition detailed in footnotes on pages 3 & 4 of the RFP may receive services, in which case, one service offered by the incubator might be validation of concept, and ultimately assistance with business incorporation.

Q: Page 6 lists the SmartZone strategic priority of talent with a desired outcome as “Lead and facilitate strategies ... for K through Career... located in Grand Rapids.” Can you specify what target group of the proposed incubator program this is supposed to serve?

A: Talent strategies should be integrated across all target groups of the proposed incubator program because it is a strategic priority. Budgets and outcomes should be organized around all strategic priority areas that includes talent. There are reasonable expectations that activities will contribute to multiple strategic priorities. For example, an activity that is mostly associated with the talent strategic priority may contribute to outcomes in the connections and awareness strategic priority.

As such, proposers should undertake their best efforts to allocate budgets and describe outcomes in a way that is clear and understandable to reviewers, and which represents the totality of the proposal across all strategic priorities.

Q: On page 4 you state “The SmartZone LDFA is inviting proposals from qualified respondents ... to partner with the SmartZone LDFA in the operation of our Incubator.” In the RFP terms and conditions section you reserve the right to, “award to any proposer, or multiple proposers, for these services as it deems in its own best interests to do so.” Could you clarify on potential reasons for awarding multiple applicants compared to a single applicant?

A: The SmartZone LDFA may consider funding more than one applicant if the case is made that the proposal is novel and not duplicative of any services currently provided and proposed by a qualified RFP respondent. The Proposal Elements on Page 11 of the RFP provides that the applicant must “Discuss how the proposed project is not duplicative of, but additive to, other efforts to support incubation of high-tech, high-growth companies in the Smart Zone and Grand Rapids and West Michigan area.”

SmartZone RFP Additional Resources

[Interactive GIS map of the SmartZone Certified Technology Part boundaries](#)

[PDF map of the SmartZone Certified Technology Part boundaries](#)

[The Grand Rapids SmartZone LDFA Tax Increment Financing Plan and Development Plan](#)

[Michigan Public Act 57 of 2018](#)

[Equitable Economic Development and Mobility Strategic Plan](#)

[City of Grand Rapids Strategic Plan](#)

[Grand Rapids Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Assessment](#)