



New Jersey Economic Development Authority

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION ("RFI") 2020-RFI-OET-Covid19-PPE-107

for

Facilitating PPE Readiness for New Jersey Small Businesses and Non-Profit Organizations

June 15, 2020

1. INTENT/SUMMARY OF SCOPE

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority ("NJEDA" or the "Authority"), an independent Authority of the State of New Jersey, in conjunction with its state agency partners and the Office of the Governor, is seeking information and ideas from qualified entities with perspectives on how to ensure that the state's small businesses¹ have affordable and equitable access to the appropriate personal protective equipment ("PPE") and safeguarding tools that they will need to reopen and operate safely in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Qualified entities that could respond include but are not limited to: PPE manufacturers and suppliers, technology companies, medical or office equipment retailers or wholesalers, firms specializing in distribution, existing or new buying cooperatives or consortia, non-profit organizations, industry or trade groups, and post-secondary educational institutions. Qualified entities may include organizations that could offer ideas that would be full solutions to the sourcing and distribution of PPE, as well as entities whose expertise covers merely one aspect of the need, e.g., technology providers or small business experts.

The purpose of this RFI is to collect facts, information, and ideas that will help the Authority better understand potential solutions to ensure New Jersey's smaller economic participants have sufficient access to affordable PPE to allow for safe and efficient reopening and continued operations as the state continues to recover from the health and safety effects and economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The information gathered in this RFI may subsequently be used to help the Authority, its partner agencies, and other concerned entities develop strategies, programs, or other initiatives to help accomplish this goal.

THIS RFI IS NOT A REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL and may not result in a subsequent RFP.

¹ To simplify the language in this RFI, the word "businesses" is used to refer collectively to a wide variety of organizations, including for-profit companies, not-for-profit organizations and social service providers.

2. BACKGROUND

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority serves as the State's principal agency for driving economic growth. The Authority is committed to making New Jersey a national model for inclusive and sustainable economic development by focusing on key strategies to help build strong and dynamic communities, create good jobs for New Jersey residents and provide pathways to a stronger and fairer economy. Through partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders, the Authority creates and implements initiatives to enhance the economic vitality and quality of life in the State and strengthen New Jersey's long-term economic competitiveness.

In May 2020, the Governor established the Restart and Recovery Advisory Commission, with a related Advisory Council consisting of nine sector-based committees to explore issues surrounding the restarting of New Jersey's economy. Several consistent findings have emerged during these committees' initial meetings. One of the most universal (and pressing) concerns is the need for the state's small businesses and not-for-profit organizations to obtain the PPE necessary to protect their employees as they continue to reopen and operate in a post-COVID-19 environment.

During March and April, the State (and the country) saw an unprecedented spike in the demand for PPE. With much of the economy shut down, market supply for PPE was scarce, but over time began to meet the narrow needs of health care and emergency service workers.

However, as smaller organizations restart operations, the required demand for PPE needed to protect employees and customers is surging again and shortages may return. **The inability to meet this demand for PPE could put workers, customers and other business stakeholders at risk and may potentially hinder economic recovery.**

More than one third of NJ workers are employed by organizations of 100 employees or less. Many of these companies may not have the reach or the resources to obtain goods outside of their normal retail buying channels, particularly in times of significant demand spikes or supply/demand imbalances. **PPE falls squarely into the category of a good that was not essential to many of these organizations before the COVID-19 outbreak but is critical today.**

Under normal conditions changes in a business marketplace are met with changes on the part of the supply chain; a new demand will stimulate new sources of supply. We expect that over time normalcy will return to the PPE marketplace. But many businesses, employees, and customers cannot wait for that rebalancing to occur, rather, they need potentially large amounts of PPE in the immediate-to-medium term.

To that end, the NJEDA seeks information, ideas and innovative solutions to this immediate and expected widespread demand for PPE. **We are interested in all forms of potential approaches that might enable the State to ensure that it can support economic revitalization across New Jersey.** The Authority and the State are especially interested in ensuring that that recovery and revitalization reaches equitably into organizations run by and for women, minorities and people of color, veterans, and other historically disadvantaged communities.

3. ASSERTIONS AND PROBLEM SUMMARY

Several key assertions are helpful for understanding and framing the context of the problem described above:

- a. Smaller for-profit and not-for-profit organizations are integral to the New Jersey economy. However, many of them may have their reopening potential constrained by lack of access to and the risk of overpaying for PPE. Aware that these thousands of enterprises can't wait for the normal rebalancing of supply and demand, NJEDA and the State believe that there may be an opportunity for the State to help accelerate the market's responses, perhaps even facilitating collaborations to address the problem. Note: options that include the State solely fulfilling a market role are not within scope for this RFI.
- b. While the open market normally sets fair "clearing" prices for all sizes of customers, in times of supply/demand imbalances there is a material potential that small businesses or organizations may be forced into overpaying for goods at the very time that they face unusual financial stresses. A solution that consolidates demand should give these groups greater collective buying power and hence reduce the cost of essential PPE.
- c. Small businesses or organizations in underserved communities or those run by historically disadvantaged owners are particularly vulnerable to being crowded out of essential goods when tight market conditions occur. The State's commitment to building a stronger and fairer New Jersey makes attention to the needs of this community and in this setting all the more pressing.
- d. Many New Jersey manufacturers have since the beginning of the pandemic invested the time and capital to pivot to making PPE. Supporting these businesses by directing to them some portion of the New Jersey small business demand for PPE could be a powerful economic lever and mutually beneficial. To that end, a PPE buying program that could source locally and was willing to work with the State or other parties to use vouchers or rebates or similar pricing tools to support purchases from NJ manufacturers could be beneficial.

Problem Summary

Based on those assertions, the solution for which the NJEDA and the State seeks information, concepts, and ideas should have the following key objectives:

- Ensure that the State's small businesses and organizations have ready access to supplies and services that may be essential to creating a safe workplace, including but not limited to:
 - Face masks and face shields, gloves, sanitizing gels and other forms of PPE
 - Testing/monitoring devices, e.g., touchless thermometers
 - Workplace safeguarding equipment, e.g., plexiglass panels and dividers
 - Disinfecting services and supplies
 - Signage, marking devices and other safety/information tools
- Ensure that the prices paid for that equipment are reasonable and affordable
- Ensure that the goods supplied will meet the advertised descriptions and specifications

- Ensure that the State’s small businesses and organizations have a ready and reliable resource to help them understand what forms of PPE and safeguarding equipment they might need and in the quantities that are appropriate for their business
- Ensure that the equipment is available equitably to all small businesses and organizations with a special concern that it be available to organizations run by and for women, minorities and people of color, veterans, and other historically disadvantaged communities
- Ensure that the process by which small businesses or organizations order, pay for and receive PPE is as simple and efficient as possible
- If possible, assure that some sourcing of needed equipment comes from New Jersey manufacturers

4. RFI RESPONSE QUESTIONS

NJEDA and the State believe that a wide variety of possible approaches – from buying cooperatives to newly established non-profit consortia to for-profit enterprises seeking an opportunity to access and serve an expanded market – could be solutions² to the challenge that we seek to address.

We welcome all respondents’ views on the most efficient and effective format for addressing the problem summarized above, including other structures or approaches. We have asked a range of questions so that the State might gather in the best and most imaginative potential solutions. Please do not be put off by the number; it is not necessary that respondents address every single one. Use them as guidelines to provide us with ideas and suggestions and to outline how you might solve this problem.

In addition, if a respondent has a particular area of expertise, e.g., B2C procurement, marketplace IT, he or she should feel free to focus on those areas alone. Answers to all questions are understood to be preliminary and non-binding.

Respondents are free to structure responses as necessary to increase clarity and efficiency of responses.

Proposed solutions, concepts and Ideas

- 1) What form or structure (organizational, legal or otherwise) of the PPE procurement agent do you think would result in the most efficient, effective and timely solution to the problem summarized above?
- 2) What do you see as the shortest possible time to full initial commercial launch for your recommended solution? What do you see as the complexities or hurdles that would stand in the way of developing a rapid-response solution to the problem?
- 3) What safeguards should be put in place to ensure that the PPE procurement agent is offering goods at the lowest possible price and providing effective and reliable products or services?
- 4) What steps should the State take to ensure that the PPE procurement agent equitably serves the needs of historically disadvantaged organizations and communities?
- 5) What approaches would you recommend to incentivize procurement from New Jersey manufacturers?

² In order to avoid emphasizing any one specific form or approach, we refer to the potential solution throughout this RFI as the “PPE procurement agent” and to its customers as “member/users.”

- 6) How would you suggest that the PPE procurement agent prepare for potential future spikes in demand arising from a resurgence of COVID-19? How should the agent handle a potential future ramp-down in demand?
- 7) What other channels or partners might you suggest engaging with to build a successful solution, e.g., foundations, local banks, or corporations?
- 8) What else would you suggest the State do or consider in order to have the greatest possible impact on the PPE problem in the shortest possible time, all within the bounds of its social objectives and the extensive demands on its financial resources at this time?

Respondent Information

- 1) Describe your organization, its structure, ownership, focus and products/services. Please also describe your customers and any suppliers that might be relevant to your background and expertise. Describe any experience you've had with the sourcing and distribution of consumer products.
- 2) Were NJEDA to seek proposals to solve the problem via a future RFP, solicitation, or program, would you be interested in responding to it? What potential partners or subcontractors might you involve in your solution and what value would they bring? If you have the capability to provide only one piece of a larger solution, would you be open to NJEDA suggesting partners to you ahead of any RFP, solicitation, or program?
- 3) What types of State support, e.g., grants, loans, technical assistance, other, would you see as essential to get the PPE procurement agent solution launched successfully?

5. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (From Respondents to the EDA)

All questions concerning this RFI must be submitted in writing no later than 11:59 PM EDT, on Tuesday, June 23rd, 2020 via e-mail to: SmallBusinessPPE@njeda.com

The subject line of the email should state: **"QUESTIONS-2020 RFI-OET-Covid19-PPE-107"**.

Answers to questions submitted will be publicly posted on the Authority's website on or about Wednesday, June 24th, 2020 at <https://www.njeda.com/Bidding-Opportunities-General/Economic-Transformation-RFIs> as Addendum.

IT IS THE RESPONDENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO CHECK THIS URL REGULARLY FOR UPDATES.

6. RESPONSE DETAILS (Info Provided to Respondents Regarding Document Submission)

All RFI responses must be submitted in writing no later than 11:59 PM EDT, on Friday, June 26th, 2020 via e-mail to: SmallBusinessPPE@njeda.com

The subject line of the e-mail should state: **"RFI Response-2020-RFI-OET-Covid19-PPE-107"**.

7. FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS (from EDA) / ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Respondents may be asked to provide additional information to allow the Authority to better understand the responses or services available.

8. PROPRIETARY AND/OR CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

The Authority reserves the right to copy any information provided by the Respondents. The Authority reserves the right to use ideas that are provided by Respondents, applicants, stakeholders, or vendors. By submitting a Response, the submitter represents that such copying or use of information will not violate any copyrights, licenses, or other agreements with respect to information submitted or product solutions demonstrated, if applicable. Responses must clearly be marked for any information the Respondent deems Proprietary and/or Confidential.

9. DISCLAIMER / NO OBLIGATION

This RFI is not a request for qualification/proposal. It may or may not result in further action.

This RFI is issued solely as a means of gathering information regarding perspectives on how to ensure that the state's small businesses have affordable and equitable access to the appropriate personal protective equipment ("PPE") and safeguarding tools that they will need to reopen and operate safely. Interested parties responding to this RFI do so at their own expense. There will be no monetary compensation from the Authority for the time and effort spent in preparing the response to this RFI. All expenses incurred are the sole responsibility of the Respondent.

Should the Authority decide to move forward and issue an RFQ/P or announce a program/product related to this RFI, Respondents need not have submitted a response to this RFI in order to be eligible to respond to the RFP. Should an RFQ/P be issued, responding to this RFI will not affect scoring or consideration for that process.

The Authority is under no obligation to contact Respondents to this RFI.

10. NEW JERSEY OPEN PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

Respondents should be aware that responses to this RFI are subject to the "New Jersey Open Public Records Act" (N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1 et seq.), as amended and including all applicable regulations and policies and applicable case law, including the New Jersey Right-to-Know law. All information submitted in response to the RFI is considered public information, notwithstanding any disclaimers to the contrary, except as may be exempted from public disclosure by OPRA and the common law.

Any proprietary and/or confidential information submitted in response to this RFI will be redacted by the Authority. A person or entity submitting a response to this RFI may designate specific information as not subject to disclosure pursuant to the exceptions to OPRA found at N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1.1, when such person or entity has a good faith legal and/or factual basis for such assertion (i.e. information that may be included in another ongoing public procurement or solicitation). The Authority reserves the right to make the determination as to what is proprietary or confidential and will advise the person or entity accordingly. The Authority will not honor any attempt to designate the entirety of a submission as proprietary, confidential and/or to claim copyright protection for the entire proposal. In the event of any challenge to the Respondent's assertion of confidentiality with which the Authority does not concur, the Respondent shall be solely responsible for defending its designation.