

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

SUBMISSION DEADLINE
12:00 PM CST, 09/18/2024

RFP TITLE: SOY EXCELLENCE CENTER COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT

RFP CONTACT:

CONTACT: Liz Vargas, LVargas@ussec.org

PROPOSAL DEADLINE: September 18, 2024

INTRODUCTION:

U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC), Inc. formally requests proposals for a SEC Communications Contractor for the Soy Excellence Centers programs. 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 open 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 SEC Communications Contractor for the development and execution of strategic communications plans for Soy Excellence Centers program. The chosen contractor will serve as the responsible person in the worldwide comms teams to counsel, refine, and align regional communication campaigns led by Regional Comms Leads to overall USSEC communications agenda and standards.

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. The SEC training readies the participating enterprises to be for increase in protein demand in their markets.

The SEC vision is to 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. As of March, 2024 the global SEC program has seen over 26,700 trainees that have participated in the SEC programs. The SECs currently operate out of regional centers in the Americas, Asia, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), India and Nigeria.

Beyond the formal curriculum, the U.S. soy industry has invested in the development of the SEC virtual professional development community focused on continuing professional development through on-demand continuing education content, access to industry experts, and a global community of industry peers. Through this community, the SEC program increases awareness and affinity for U.S. soy.

The SEC program has foundational funding from U.S. soy stakeholders. Effective communication is vital in aligning the public, governing stakeholders, and foundational funding members, ensuring that each group is well-informed and engaged. For the public, clear communication builds awareness and trust, encouraging active participation in the program. With other stakeholders, including the global advisory panel and regional advisory council, communication fosters collaboration and alignment. For foundational funding members, transparent and consistent communication reinforces their investment, demonstrating the program's impact and the responsible use of resources, thereby securing ongoing support.

The SEC communications role involves developing and executing public communication strategies to effectively promote the community-based educational program. This position also focuses on engaging with stakeholders within the SEC program, ensuring clear and consistent messaging to build strong relationships and support for the program's initiatives. This involves managing public information, engaging stakeholders, supporting internal updates, and maintaining the SEC's reputation, all while ensuring compliance with USSEC standards.

The contractor selected by USSEC will take direction from the Worldwide Communications Director and Global SEC Focus Area Advisor. They will support both global and regional SEC teams.

SCOPE (SERVICES) OF WORK:

Essential Functions, Duties, and Responsibilities:

The SEC communications role will develop and execute the communication strategy through a multifaceted approach. Partner with SEC's FAA and regional executive leadership team to plan and respond to evolving communication needs, both internally and externally, when relevant. Additionally, partner with SEC Digital Community Manager to drive consistent brand experience via training programs and community engagement.

Work will be directed by the SEC Focus Area Advisor and USSEC Communications Director to ensure that the program's messages are clear, accurate, and aligned with overall USSEC goals.

Key responsibilities include:

- **Overall SEC Communication Strategy Participation:** Under the direction of Focus Area Advisor (FAA) and USSEC Worldwide (WW) Communications Director, develop SEC communications strategy and platform and execute targeted marketing and communications.
 - Work closely with leadership and the broader SEC stakeholders as needed (e.g., Regional Center and Communication Leads, Strategic Partners such as Nigeria ITF.)

- Refresh (as needed) and drive consistent adoption of SEC brand guidelines, branding, and messaging.
- **Public and Stakeholder Communication:** The role involves crafting and distributing content that raises awareness of the program, its goals, and its impact. This includes managing social media, press releases, newsletters, and public events to engage the broader community and highlight program successes. Examples include:
 - Media interactions, SEC participant testimonials, other opportunities to generate content, presentation alignment
 - In collaboration with SEC leadership, working with a creative agency to develop the SEC annual report to support stakeholder awareness
 - Develop an annual editorial calendar of articles and social media posts, with a focus on USSEC LinkedIn, to promote and elevate awareness and reputation of SECs worldwide
 - Partner closely with the regional SEC leads team to proactively identify and prepare for relevant media opportunities, conferences, and interviews as part of the overall communications strategy.
- **Stakeholder Engagement Support:** The role ensures consistent and transparent communication with governance stakeholders, such as the global advisory panel and regional advisory council, as well as foundational funding members. This includes:
 - Developing reports, presentations, messaging and talking points that keep these stakeholders informed and aligned with the program's progress and needs.
 - Develop a wide variety of executive communications such as speeches, presentations, conference materials, briefings, and leadership talking points
 - Coordination with USSEC WW and Regional Comms staff
 - Counsel Regional Comms Leads on elevating the SEC narrative by supporting messaging, approach and planning with advisement on campaign ideas, promotions and local activations
- **Communications Materials and Media Development:** The role supports the creation of public-facing and investor-facing communications materials including fact sheets, monthly internal newsletter, web content and informational/testimonial videos.
 - Coordination of website improvements and content
 - Gathering video testimonials and multimedia content from the different regions
 - Writing and messaging development for press releases, talking points
 - Marketing materials including owned content in support of thought leadership, and strategic business communications (e.g. supplement CEO's presentations, marketing campaigns).

- Create marketing assets, often in partnership with vendors and external agencies within budget and time (e.g. Templates, Pull-up Banners, Brochures etc.)
- Develop a wide variety of broad communications such as presentations, conference materials, infographics, and others.

Domestic and international travel as needed to support communications requirements on the ground for specific high-value events.

Please provide rate per hour and estimated hours required per month to accomplish the above tasks and below deliverables.

DELIVERABLES:

Completion Date	Description of Deliverables
On or before October 31, 2024	Submission of an overall plan for delivery of SEC communication needs, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual report • Website refresh support • Proposed ideas for materials refresh
Weekly	Participate in WW Communications meeting
Bi-weekly	Lead SEC Global communications meetings
Monthly	Provide written summary of all key workstreams and progress; serve as a review with FAA Develop and distribute newsletter Participate in regional communications meetings – 1 per region/6 regions
Last day of each month	Monthly report detailing progress made
Ad hoc	Participation in meetings and preparation of reports as directed by the SEC leadership Preparation of communications on SEC progress as directed by SEC leadership

PROJECT TIMELINE:

October 01, 2024- September 30, 2025

RFP TIMELINE:

- RFP Distribution: September 3, 2024
- Last Day to Submit Questions: September 13, 2024
- Project Proposals Due: September 18, 2024
- Selections Made By: September 27, 2024
- Prospective Contractors Notified By: September 27, 2024

INSTRUCTIONS:

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

1. Please email the proposal to RFP@USSEC.ORG and LVargas@ussec.org by September 18, 2024, 12:00 PM CST
2. A description of Prospective Contractor's capabilities, resources and experience. Emphasis should be placed on experience related to this RFP.
3. A thorough proposal outlining Prospective Contractors 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 agrees 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.