



Request for Proposals (RFP) Economic Empowerment Center (EEC) Project Management Firm or Independent Contractor

Purpose

Think Big is seeking proposals from qualified firms or independent contractors to provide Project Management Services for the Think Big Economic Empowerment Center (EEC) initiatives funded through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO).

The EEC Project Management Firm or Independent Contractor will lead, coordinate, and manage Think Big's educational, entrepreneurship, and workforce development activities under the EEC grant, ensuring that all project objectives, deliverables, and reporting requirements are met on schedule and within scope.

Overview

The Think Big Economic Empowerment Center (EEC) is a strategic initiative designed to advance entrepreneurship, business development, and workforce participation among minority, women, and veteran populations in the Rockford region. Funded through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), the EEC supports equitable access to business education, financial literacy, and small business resources that promote sustainable economic growth.

The EEC serves as a centralized hub for entrepreneurial training and empowerment through Think Big's comprehensive programming, which includes the School of Business, School of Business 2.0, Business Workshops, Financial Empowerment Sessions, and Networking Events. These programs equip emerging and established entrepreneurs with the knowledge, tools, and connections necessary to formalize, grow, and sustain their businesses.

Through its educational and ecosystem-building efforts, the EEC strengthens the local business community, fosters collaboration between public and private partners, and supports job creation and business scalability. The Project Management Firm or Independent Contractor will play a critical role in coordinating and executing these initiatives to ensure all program objectives and deliverables are achieved in alignment with DCEO guidelines and Think Big's mission to empower communities through entrepreneurship.

Scope of Work

A Project Management Firm or Independent Contractor is a qualified professional or organization responsible for planning, coordinating, and executing the EEC grant-funded initiatives to achieve defined outcomes. The selected firm or contractor will manage:

Program Management and Coordination

- Oversee Think Big School of Business and School of Business 2.0 cohorts.
- Manage all Business Workshops and Financial Empowerment Sessions, ensuring alignment with Think Big's entrepreneurship and economic mobility goals.
- Coordinate scheduling, logistics, materials, facilitators, and community partner participation.

Networking and Event Coordination

- Plan and implement Networking Events and Market Hub activities designed to strengthen community and business connections.
- Oversee logistics, including vendor communication and venue preparation.
- Collaborate with Think Big staff and partners to ensure high-quality execution.

Grant Reporting and Documentation

- Track and report all performance metrics, participant data, and deliverables as required by DCEO and Think Big.
- Maintain accurate files and documentation for program compliance and reimbursement.
- Submit monthly progress and expenditure reports to Think Big Chief Executive Officer.

Stakeholder and Partner Engagement

- Serve as the liaison between Think Big, facilitators, community partners, and grant stakeholders.
- Maintain consistent communication and coordination to ensure program milestones are achieved.
- Support marketing and outreach efforts to recruit participants and promote Think Big's initiatives.

Financial and Administrative Support

- Assist in budget tracking, invoicing, and expense documentation for all EEC-related programming.
- Ensure expenditures align with the approved grant budget and deliverables.

Performance Monitoring and Compliance

- Evaluate program effectiveness and identify opportunities for improvement.
- Ensure compliance with DCEO and Think Big reporting requirements and quality standards.

Performance Requirements

The selected Project Management Firm or Independent Contractor will be required to perform at a level that ensures all project deliverables, timelines, and reporting obligations are met in accordance with the Economic Empowerment Center (EEC) grant and Think Big's standards. The contractor will be responsible for completing all program planning, coordination, and execution tasks outlined in the Scope of Work within established timelines, maintaining up-to-date project plans, schedules, and status reports for all ongoing activities.

The contractor must ensure that each Think Big School of Business and School of Business 2.0 cohort operates efficiently, with proper documentation of participant attendance and engagement. During the six-month contract term, the contractor will facilitate or coordinate a minimum of two (2) Business Workshops and support at least two (2) Networking Events or Market Hub activations that enhance business visibility and community collaboration.

The contractor will be expected to maintain accurate and complete documentation for all EEC-related programs, including attendance records, vendor agreements, invoices, and reporting materials. Monthly progress and financial reports must be submitted to Think Big's Chief Executive Officer for review, along with adherence to all compliance and reporting requirements set forth by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO).

Finally, the contractor must participate in regular meetings, virtual or in person, with Think Big's leadership to provide status updates, identify potential risks, and recommend solutions. Strong and consistent communication with partners, facilitators, and stakeholders is required to ensure programming milestones are met, and the contractor must respond promptly to all requests for information and documentation from Think Big.

Qualifications

Qualified firms or independent contractors must demonstrate:

- Experience in program or project management within entrepreneurship, small business development, or workforce training.
- Strong organizational, time management, and leadership skills.
- Experience with grant-funded program implementation and reporting.
- Proficiency in coordinating multiple projects, timelines, and stakeholder relationships.
- Experience in event planning or business education is preferred.

Contract Term

- Type: Independent Contractor or Firm Agreement.
- Term: Six (6) months, renewable based on performance and funding availability.
- Compensation: Negotiable based on experience and scope of services.
- Reports To: Think Big Chief Executive Officer.
- Location: Rockford, Illinois (Hybrid on-site and remote as needed).

Submission Instructions and Timeline

Please submit proposals electronically to sheila@thinkbig815.org with the subject line:

Think Big Economic Empowerment Center (EEC) Program RFP Submission. Provide the information and attachments requested as outlined above in the Bid Submission Requirements Section. Submit all required documents by the deadline: November 30, 2025 (by 5:00 PM CDT)

RFP Schedule

RFP Release: November 1, 2025

Questions: All questions must be submitted in writing to the contact person listed above by November 14, 2025. Responses to all questions will be posted publicly by November 25, 2025.

Anticipated Start Date: January 2, 2025

Think Big is a minority and women led entrepreneurial incubator and business accelerator located at 1311 North Main Street, Rockford, Illinois. We serve as a catalyst for economic empowerment, innovation, and collaboration by equipping small business owners with education, coaching, and capital access.

Think Big is committed to engaging vendors that reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. Our Diverse Vendor Program provides equitable access for underrepresented business owners and ensures that everyone, without exception, has the opportunity to participate in economic growth.