



Request for Proposals (RFP)
Think Big Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program Project Management Firm
(Independent Contractor)

Introduction

Think Big is seeking proposals from qualified Project Management firms or independent contractors to lead and manage the Think Big Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program, funded through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) under the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA).

The selected firm will be responsible for delivering a high-impact, outcome-driven program that integrates workforce development, entrepreneurship, contractor readiness, and access to capital resources, ensuring participants are prepared to enter and succeed in the clean energy and construction economy.

Program Overview

The Think Big Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program is designed to expand economic opportunities by preparing individuals and small businesses to participate in the growing clean energy and construction sectors.

The program will utilize a structured cohort model to efficiently assess participant needs and transition individuals and businesses into targeted, individualized technical assistance. Emphasis will be placed on moving participants from group-based learning into one-on-one support to achieve measurable outcomes related to certification, contractor readiness, procurement participation, and business growth.

The selected Project Management Firm must demonstrate a minimum of 5 years of experience delivering outcome-driven programs and working with public and private sector entities, including state and local agencies, transit authorities, utilities, and prime contractors within the construction, infrastructure, and clean energy sectors. The firm will design, coordinate, and execute a cohort-based program that integrates workforce readiness, entrepreneurship, and industry engagement to create pathways into employment, apprenticeship opportunities, and contractor business development.

All activities must align with CEJA priorities, including equitable access, workforce alignment, and participation in clean energy sectors.

I. Scope of Services

A. Program Design and Implementation

- Design and implement a cohort-based Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Program
- Develop structured program tracks for:
 - Workforce readiness and career exploration
 - Construction and clean energy exposure
 - Entrepreneurship and contractor development

B. Contractor and Business Support

- Coordinate and manage all program components, including workshops, training sessions, and mentorship
- Facilitate industry engagement, including employer partnerships, site visits, and networking
- Provide certification readiness support (DBE, BEP, MBE, WBE)
- Support contractor readiness, including licensing, compliance, and positioning
 - Apprenticeships and training programs
 - Industry certifications (OSHA, NCCER, etc.).
- Guide procurement navigation and bid readiness

C. Financial and Resource Access

- Deliver business development and financial readiness services
 - Facilitate access to capital resources through external partners
 - Connect participants to grants, incentives, and financing opportunities
- Support procurement, contract readiness, and contract retention, including:
 - Bid preparation and submission
 - Contract acquisition support
 - Ongoing support to sustain contracts

D. Stakeholder and Industry Engagement

- Establish partnerships with agencies, utilities, and contractors
- Coordinate events with local, state, and/or federal legislators and key stakeholders
- Facilitate networking and industry engagement
 - Implement mentorship and peer learning models

E. Program Management and Reporting

- Track participant progress and outcomes
- Submit monthly and final reports aligned with Think Big and CEJA requirements

II. Performance Requirements

- Launch and manage at least two cohort programs
- Maintain at least 85% participant completion rate
- Provide one-on-one coaching
- Conduct bi-weekly meetings with Think Big
- Maintain accurate data tracking and reporting
- Deliver a final comprehensive report

III. Deliverables & Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

A. Program Delivery Metrics

- Two cohorts completed
- 85% completion rate
- Participant tracking (registered, active, graduated)

B. Workforce Outcomes

- Preparing businesses to enter or start:
 - Apprenticeship programs
 - Training programs
 - Workforce development
 - Certifications obtained

C. Business & Procurement Outcomes

- Businesses started or formalized
- Licenses, permits, and insurance secured
- Contractor readiness achieved
 - Certification applications submitted
 - Participants registered in procurement systems
- Financial Outcomes
 - Non-debt financing secured
 - Debt financing secured
 - Total capital accessed
- Procurement and Contacts
 - Bids submitted
 - Contracts awarded
 - Contract retention and repeat opportunities
- Business Growth
 - Revenue growth or expansion
 - Increased operational capacity

D. Clean Energy Alignment & Ecosystem Building

- Participants aligned to clean energy opportunities
- Engagement with industry partners
- Stakeholder events hosted
- Legislator and partner engagement

E. Reporting & Meetings

- Monthly reports
- Bi-weekly meetings
- Final report with outcomes, impact, and recommendations

IV. Qualifications

- Experience designing and implementing cohort-based programs that integrate workforce development, small business development, and individualized technical assistance
- Demonstrated experience supporting businesses through certification processes (DBE, BEP, MBE, WBE) and understanding of applicable regulatory requirements
- Experience preparing businesses for participation in public procurement systems, including local, state, and federal contracting environments
- Demonstrated experience supporting contractor readiness, procurement navigation, and business participation in infrastructure, clean energy, and/or manufacturing sectors
- Knowledge of and experience working within clean energy ecosystems, including alignment with CEJA priorities such as equitable access, workforce pathways, and contractor participation in energy-related projects
- Experience coordinating across multi-modal transportation and infrastructure systems, including transit, roadway, rail, and related sectors
- Ability to operate across public and private sector partnerships, including engagement with government agencies, utilities, prime contractors, and community-based organizations
- Experience managing complex, multi-stakeholder programs and delivering measurable, outcome-driven results, including participant tracking and reporting
- Familiarity with grant-funded program compliance, including data tracking, reporting, and alignment with CEJA or similar funding requirements
- Demonstrated commitment to advancing participation of minority-, women-, and disadvantaged-owned businesses in clean energy and infrastructure opportunities
- to equity and participation of disadvantaged businesses

V. Proposal Submission Requirements

Proposals must include:

1. Cover Letter
2. Organizational Overview
3. Proposed Approach and Work Plan
4. Key Personnel
5. Cost Proposal
6. Three References
7. Supporting Documents (W-9, insurance, availability)

VI. Evaluation Criteria

- Experience and capacity (30%)
- Program design and approach (25%)
- Understanding of workforce and entrepreneurship integration (20%)
- Cost (15%)
- References (10%)

VII. Contract Term & Compensation

- Term: May 2026 – April 2027 (1 year)
- Estimated Hours: 25–30 hours/week
- Independent Contractor (1099)

VIII. Submission Instructions

- Submit proposals to info@thinkbig815.org by April 27, 2026.
 - Subject line: “RFP – Think Big Clean Energy Contractor Incubator Project Management Firm”
- Schedule:
 - Release: April 17, 2026
 - Questions Due: April 22, 2026
 - Deadline: April 27, 2026
 - Start Date: May 15, 2026
- Provide the information and attachments required as outlined above in the Bid Submission Requirements Section. Submit all required documents by April 27, 2026, by 5:00 PM CDT.

Late submissions will not be accepted.

IX. About Think Big

Think Big is a minority and women-led entrepreneurial incubator and business accelerator located in Rockford, Illinois, focused on advancing economic empowerment and equitable access to opportunities.