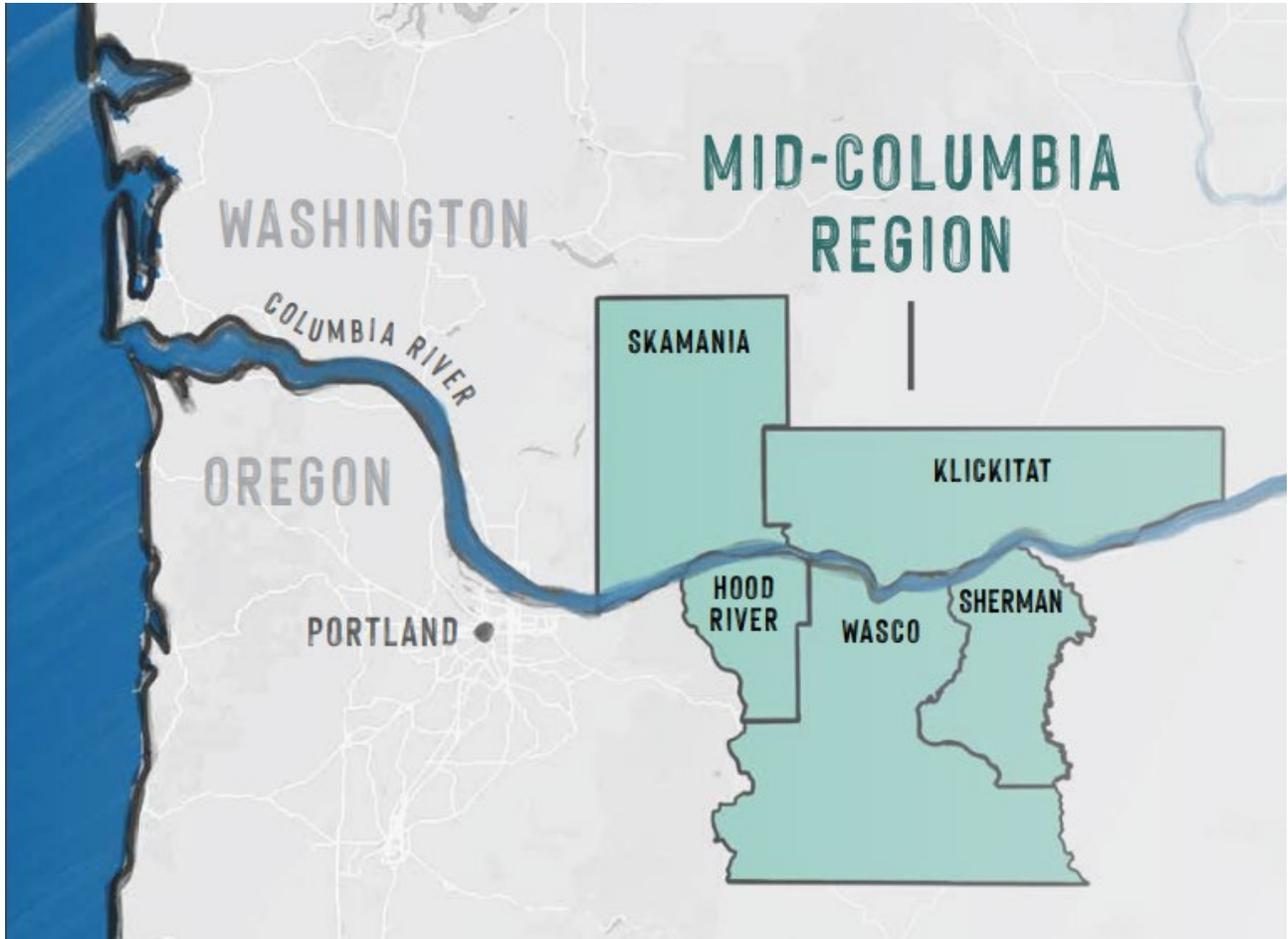


# MID-COLUMBIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

802 Chenoweth Loop Road – The Dalles, OR 97058



**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL:**

**MID-COLUMBIA REGIONAL INNOVATION HUB PLAN CONSULTANT SERVICES**

**ISSUE DATE: August 5, 2022**

**SUBMITTAL DEADLINE: September 6, 2022, 9:00 a.m.**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

With this Request for Proposal (RFP), Mid-Columbia Economic District (MCEDD) seeks to acquire the services of a qualified lead consultant or consulting firm to develop an actionable plan and strategy for developing a “Regional Innovation Hub” that will increase opportunities for innovative entrepreneurs in key traded sector industries to start and grow businesses in the region through developing a robust, connected support ecosystem.

## **MCEDD OVERVIEW**

MCEDD is a bi-state regional economic development entity that has been supporting the Columbia Gorge region of Oregon and Washington since its formation in 1969. MCEDD’s mission focuses on promoting the creation of family-wage jobs, the diversification of the economic base, and the growth, development and retention of business and industry within a five-county district, including Hood River, Wasco and Sherman Counties in Oregon, and Klickitat and Skamania Counties in Washington. Through working collaboratively with local communities, organizations, and businesses, the District has been able to support a growing economy, sector diversification, and a strong foundation of local services in this highly rural area.

MCEDD conducts this work by engaging with industry, providing business finance, and supporting partners across the region as they seek to provide a positive business climate with the necessary infrastructure for innovation and growth. MCEDD also provides leadership around regional coordination and planning on key issues impacting the area identified through our [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\)](#).

While the proposed initiative would focus on our Oregon counties, strong cross-border workforce, transportation, and community ties support regional economic vitality. These ties build on incredible diversity in geography and natural, cultural, and recreational resources to support a variety of industries, crops, and jobs.

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

The Mid-Columbia’s rural region has focused on economic diversification since reductions in the timber and aluminum industries caused significant unemployment in the 1980s and 1990s. The region is known nationally as a hub for innovation in unmanned aerial systems, significant agricultural production and value-added products like beer, wine, and cider, diverse renewable energy generation, robust natural resources with a continued forestry presence, as well as significant healthcare and arts, culture and tourism sectors.

The 2022-2027 Mid-Columbia CEDS includes a goal to focus on supporting strong businesses through actions to “enhance business innovation, retention and expansion, and entrepreneurship through equitable access to support services and capital” among other key focus areas.

Innovation work is a foundation of the regional approach to economic development. Partners like Columbia Gorge Community College (CGCC) have sought to capitalize on the connection between our strong technology and agricultural industries with new training programs. Innovation planning work in Wasco County started in 2021 as a cohort of local partners worked through the

Center on Rural Innovation (CORI)'s Digital Economy Ecosystem Assessment and Strategy Development process for the County. MCEDD successfully sought a Rural Opportunity Initiatives (ROI) grant to refine this assessment and strategy in 2022 and form the Wasco County Innovation Initiative (WII).

These efforts would be expanded upon with additional exploration in Wasco County and grow to include Hood River and Sherman Counties. Additionally, the five-county region continues to diversify demographically, with almost 20% of the total population identifying as Latino/a or Hispanic and a sizeable Native American community. While the overall poverty rate in the region has declined over the last decade, it continues to be over 15% in Hood River, Wasco and Sherman Counties. Current innovation-based entrepreneurship in the region does not match our demographics, an equity concern that must be addressed to support a healthy regional economy and robust access to opportunity.

## PROJECT PURPOSE

This planning effort will develop a shared vision and action plan for our innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem building on existing efforts. This will:

- Grow this collaborative system sustainably to support services identified by both regional partners and Business Oregon's [10 Year Innovation Plan](#) and definition for [regional innovation hubs](#)
- Identify ways to address gaps in this ecosystem that are needed to support ideation, scaling, and retention of innovative businesses in the region
- Support a robust, diverse innovation economy in our region
- Increase equal access to opportunities in this space for all diverse residents and underserved entrepreneurs

## SCOPE OF WORK

### Project Activity 1: Visioning, Structure, and Governance

- Conduct outreach and engagement efforts with partners that serve Hood River and Sherman Counties and underserved entrepreneurs to further develop the vision to encompass the full region's interests around entrepreneurship-based innovation strategies. While some prior work will inherently scale to a regional context because of the ecosystem partners, there is foundational work and additional strategy development that needs to be completed at the regional level including added focus on key industry clusters in Hood River and Sherman Counties to ensure the broader ecosystem is meeting all traded-sector innovation-based business needs.
- Expand the Wasco County-focused steering committee to include representation from geographic communities across the region, key industries, and underserved entrepreneurs. The leadership team governance model will be clearly established and agreed upon by all partners.

*Deliverables:*

1. *Shared Vision for the Innovation in the region developed.*
2. *Steering Committee formed and meeting on a regular schedule to provide input on the*

*other deliverables.*

3. *Governance structure developed and approved by the Steering Committee.*

## **Project Activity 2: Current Services and Service Gaps**

- Broaden the WII work focused on identifying current entrepreneurial services and gaps in Wasco County to include Hood River and Sherman Counties
- Engage partners that provide culturally specific business support in this region to ensure that issues facing historically underserved communities, including Native American, Latino/a/Hispanic, women, and highly rural entrepreneurs, are included in the regional gap assessment.

*Deliverables:*

1. *Ecosystem Assessment expanded to include Hood River and Sherman Counties. Note that this will build on existing work for Wasco County with ROI funding and may include deeper research into regional resources.*

## **Project Activity 3: Building the Innovation Pipeline**

The currently funded work is developing a foundation of mapping the entrepreneurial ecosystem and starting to build an entrepreneurial culture, but there are areas where a deeper dive with a broader regional context will further support helping move ideas from startups to growth companies.

- **Ideation:** There are strong traditional support systems for small businesses once they have a firm idea to discuss with an Small Business Development Center (SBDC) business counselor or informal peer network, but there is little programming focused on ideation and concept development with a focus on innovative solutions. This planning process will seek to identify or develop a programming pipeline that helps potential entrepreneurs further explore and develop an idea into a business model based on innovation and meets potential entrepreneurs at various points in the business development process. This will also consider accessibility for diverse populations and demographics in our community and could include strategies like intensive startup weekends, business incubator type programming, more traditional class type structures, or other self-paced strategies that leverage coming together as a network regularly.
- **Commercial Viability: R&D, Commercialization, and Deployment.** The region will seek to better define needs and opportunities related to research and development for key existing sectors noted above. This access can build on CGCC's investment into a basic fabrication and prototyping lab that can serve as a local foundation and resource in the process. However, these investments are likely just a starting point to meeting needs in the region. With additional research and planning, the Mid-Columbia can develop clear pathways and support services for local entrepreneurs and researchers to access resources at statewide institutions and centers of excellence for prototyping and market testing, to connect state entities to expertise and opportunities in the Mid-Columbia, and to determine needs for investment locally in systems and infrastructure that help companies determine commercial viability after the ideation phase.
- **Market Entry, Growth and Scalability: Risk Capital Access:** The CORI Strategy development, MCEDD's COVID-19 Needs Assessment and CEDS all acknowledge a lack of access to diverse types of capital in the region. Additional planning work will build on the information gathered through the ROI ecosystem assessment and interviews to determine the best strategies for our regional needs, from seed to growth capital. Strategies could include

exploring connections with venture or angel funds already serving Oregon, community-based investment, developing a local pipeline of pitch competitions to prepare local companies for the larger venture capital community, and identifying best practices to support entrepreneurs with accessing risk capital and more traditional financing.

*Deliverables:*

1. *Detailed strategies for each of these key ecosystem areas that clearly identify actionable steps such as programming, infrastructure, investments, and capital resource strategies along with key partners at the regional, State, and Federal levels. These strategies should consider our rural context and industry mix as well as barriers to accessing these resources.*

#### **Project Activity 4: Mentorship and Peer-to-Peer Learning Network Seeded**

Peer learning, mentorship, managerial talent, networking, and connection are critical to building a strong ecosystem, customer identification and acquisition, and engaging our underserved populations meaningfully in a culturally appropriate fashion. Developing these networks will be ongoing work of the Mid-Columbia Regional Innovation Hub, and this planning process will help create a robust strategy for growing this network, identifying the appropriate platform for tracking this network, and growing its participant base.

*Deliverables:*

1. *Begin developing a database of mentors, identify appropriate database platform for implementation partners to utilize.*
2. *Create a detailed action plan for growing and using the network most effectively.*

#### **Project Activity 5: Talent Pipeline and Workforce Assessment**

The ROI scope is focused on small business development and entrepreneurial culture. Some talent needs will likely be identified through that work and this planning grant will allow us to dive further into the workforce needs of our existing traded sector base and project areas for growth moving forward. This planning work will be critical to understanding how to build both a traditional workforce talent pipeline starting with our students as well as a pipeline for entrepreneurs, innovators and managerial talent needed to scale traded sector businesses in the Mid-Columbia region. It should acknowledge and build on the larger East Cascades Works Workforce Investment Board strategies, work at CGCC, the local STEM Hub's efforts, and other existing activities to create targeted strategies for technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship in our current and future workforce to ensure our companies have talent needed to grow.

*Deliverables:*

1. *Review of existing conditions with workforce partners to determine existing resources and gaps in our region.*
2. *Identify common skills and talent needs in key sectors along with potential resources or strategies for addressing these needs.*

MCEDD staff anticipate the following rough timeline for project implementation:

- Project Activity 1: The Visioning, Structure and Governance work will be completed

within six weeks of contract execution.

- Project Activity 2: Current Services and Services Gap information completed within three months of contract execution.
- Project Activities 3-5: Developing the programming described above will take the remainder of the time available.

## **COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERSHIP TEAM**

MCEDD will work closely with the following collaborating organizations on this project, who have all submitted letters of support and expressed willingness to participate on a steering committee. A smaller group drawn from these parties will serve as a leadership team for the project along with MCEDD staff.

- Columbia Gorge Community College (CGCC)
- Small Business Development Center at CGCC
- The Ports of The Dalles, Hood River, and Cascade Locks
- Sherman County Economic Development
- Wasco County Economic Development Commission
- The City of The Dalles
- Wasco County Board of Commissioners
- North Wasco County School District #21
- North Wasco County People’s Utility District
- Wy’East Resource Conservation and Development Council
- Gorge Technology Alliance
- The Next Door, Inc
- Cardinal IG Hood River
- Full Sail Brewing Co.
- Sightline Applications

## **PROJECT FUNDING AND BUDGET**

This project is funded through Business Oregon’s [Regional Innovation Hub Planning Grant](#). MCEDD has received notice of award, however hiring a consultant is dependent upon successful execution of a contract between Business Oregon and MCEDD. Firms must comply with all required State clauses and provisions in the contract and additional requirements may be incorporated to ensure alignment after receipt of this contract.

The total project budget for this project is \$115,000, to include all expenses for the primary consultants and any culturally relevant consultants required to support the project. MCEDD staff encourages proposers to explore opportunities to work with community-based organizations in our five-county area to connect with underserved populations as part of the planning process.

An event expense budget of \$1500 will be managed by MCEDD staff to support activities required to complete the scope of work above.

### **Pricing**

Pricing should reflect the provided Scope of Work and should include consultation, travel and

material costs inclusive of the proposed elements associated with the tasks proposed.

In addition, on a separate sheet the contractor should provide a rate sheet (fully loaded hourly rates) for each of the staff and any subconsultants that will work on the project.

Pricing should be based on the Scope for the nine-month period (October 2022 – June 2023).

## RFP TIMELINE

Request for Proposal Issued	August 5, 2022
Overview of Q&A Provided	August 26, 2022
Proposal Due	September 6, 2022, 9am
Interviews (if necessary)	September 8 – September 9, 2022
Selection	September 9, 2022
Contract Finalized	September 30, 2022
Contract Begins (on/around)	October 3, 2022
Contract Ends	June 30, 2023

## PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

### Submission Requirements

To be considered for the award, respondents must submit the following items in a timely manner and in proper form. Each submittal must include at a minimum:

1. Cover Letter
2. Qualifications of Firm & Individual Team Members
3. Detailed proposed approach to completing the Scope of Work
4. Project Budget and Pricing (please follow the pricing format outlined above)
5. Names, phone numbers and contacts for three organizations to be contacted as references
6. Samples of Work
7. Location of principal office and branch(es)

Please note the following:

- Maximum length for the proposal (not including Cover letter, work samples, and resumes) should not exceed seven pages.
- Cover letter is limited to one page.
- Contractors are encouraged to provide their RFP response by email to: [lauren@mcedd.org](mailto:lauren@mcedd.org) prior to the deadline. A hard copy proposal will be accepted if it arrives at the MCEDD Office (802 Chenoweth Loop Rd, The Dalles, OR 97058) but must include an electronic

copy in PDF format on a USB storage device.

- Proposals lacking required information will not be considered.

### **Liability for Proposal Expenses**

The Proposer is solely liable for all proposal expenses. MCEDD will not be liable for any pre-contractual expenses incurred by Proposer in the preparation of its proposal or otherwise. Proposer shall not include any such expenses as part of its proposal.

### **Reserved Rights**

MCEDD reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to reject any or all Proposals for any reason. MCEDD shall not be required to award or accept any Proposal and may, in its sole discretion, and at any time, choose to cancel the Request for Proposals. MCEDD reserves the right to waive any issues of non-compliance that it deems, in its sole discretion, to be non-material. MCEDD may accept the Proposal as submitted or may negotiate modifications with one or more Proposers before making a final selection. MCEDD has the right, in its sole discretion, to accept the proposal it considers most favorable to MCEDD's interest and the right to waive minor irregularities in procedure.

### **Project Management and Review**

The project will be managed by MCEDD. Work over the course of this contract will involve coordination and communication with a project management team (PMT) on day-to-day decisions regarding the project, proposed strategies, engagement and outreach, assessment, development, etc. The PMT will use a collaborative decision-making process to address work scope issues and to ensure fair stakeholder participation and representation. This PMT will consist of:

- The Contractor responsible for carrying out the scope of the work
- MCEDD Executive Director and/or Deputy Director of Economic Development
- MCEDD primary project staff
- Other agency partners may be invited by MCEDD to participate as appropriate and if desired.

Formal review of all projects, tasks, and progress reports will be done on a frequency agreed upon at the time of assignment and as outlined in the scope of work.

### **QUESTIONS**

All questions regarding this RFP should be provided in writing to [kristyn@mcedd.org](mailto:kristyn@mcedd.org). Answers will be provided in writing to all submitted questions no later than 3 business days after they are received, and a full overview of all questions & responses will be posted to the MCEDD website as an addendum to this RFP by August 26, 2022.

### **SELECTION CRITERIA**

This is a competitive selection process. Price will be reviewed, but it will not be the reason for selection. Criteria that will be used to rank the proposals include: Creative Approach (40%); Qualifications and Expertise (30%); Availability (20%); Experience in the Region (10%).

## **Interview**

Once proposals are ranked, the selection committee may hold interviews. The number of interviews conducted will be up to the selection committee and will be based on the proposal ranking. Interviews are expected to be held the week of September 6, 2022.