



**STATE OF LOUISIANA
LOUISIANA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
Louisiana Innovation Office (LA.IO)**

**REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS (“RFQ”):
TECH-ENABLED BUSINESS TOOLKIT
PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT**

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Issue Date: October 8, 2025

Submission Deadline: November 5, 2025, 4 p.m. (CST)

Issuing Organization: Louisiana Economic Development

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I. PURPOSE

This Request for Qualifications (RFQ), issued by Louisiana Economic Development (LED), an Agency of the State of Louisiana, is to obtain competitive Statements of Qualification from qualified, experienced technology vendors to develop and implement an AI-powered, tech-enabled toolkit that assists Louisiana small businesses in their startup journey. The toolkit will serve as a virtual resource on or accessible through the LED website, providing instant, accurate, and reliable information to users. The primary goal of this toolkit is to help small business owners and entrepreneurs in Louisiana effectively start up and scale their businesses, providing navigation and guidance informed by state laws and regulations and other relevant public policies or best practices for Louisiana businesses.

LED ensures that in its selection process no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin as provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance. LED further ensures the prohibition of discrimination in all of its programs and activities, whether those programs and activities are federally funded or not, as provided by The Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (inclusive of additional Title VI Authorities and citations).

II. PROJECT BACKGROUND

LED has prioritized growth and innovation as one of its five pillars of prosperity in its recently launched comprehensive statewide strategic plan, [Positioning Louisiana to Win](#). Key to the success of this pillar is [Louisiana Innovation](#) (LA.IO), a division of LED focused on startups, advanced R&D, and commercialization across Louisiana. Most recently, LED announced its [9x90 work plan](#), which highlights nine bold, high-impact initiatives from its statewide strategy set for completion by the end of 2026.

One of the key initiatives in this work plan involves the deployment of a technology-enabled toolkit to a critical mass of Louisiana small businesses. LA.IO is spearheading this initiative on behalf of LED as it seeks a product developer and technology platform that integrates artificial intelligence (AI) and streamlines access to information needed to start and ultimately scale a business in Louisiana.

III. SCOPE OF SERVICES

The selected vendor will be responsible for the full-cycle development of the toolkit, including:

- **Discovery and Planning:** Defining user stories, identifying high-leverage features, co-developing the product roadmap with LED, and engineering the assistant's persona, tone and guardrails. Design and develop conversational flows, error and fallback behaviors, and human-handoff paths.
- **Application Development:** Developing the toolkit using a robust and scalable AI framework incorporating generative AI technologies.
- **Knowledge Base Integration:** Integrating authoritative state and municipal resources, including existing content documentation, libraries, FAQs, and articles, as the primary context

via robust retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) pipelines. Maintain a source registry and enable addition of new resources without code updates.

- **Context Engineering and Refinement:** Configuring prompts, policies, and retrieval to maximize accuracy and mitigate hallucinations. Work with LED to design and develop data inclusion criteria, response evaluations, and hallucination SLAs for the initial phase. Implement an administrative feedback loop where LED and designated partners can review responses, label issues, propose edits.
- **Deployment:** Integrating the toolkit as a web application into the LED website (or a subdomain), using modern, scalable cloud infrastructure (including containerized services, CDN, WAF, monitoring, and logging), providing CI/CD, infrastructure-as-code, and environment parity. Conducting cross-browser and multi-device testing, WCAG 2.2 AA accessibility checks, and performance and load testing.
- **Post-Launch Support:** Providing ongoing maintenance, performance monitoring, hotfix and security patching, periodic model, prompt, and content updates, and support for a defined period. Include a support plan with response times and escalation paths.

IV. FUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The development of this business support toolkit is driven by a dual mission: to simplify the process of starting a business in Louisiana and to empower small-to-medium-sized businesses with tools that support sustainable growth and efficient operations. As such, the development of this product should follow a multi-phased approach.

The initial phase will be primarily focused on streamlining the experience of starting a business in Louisiana. This phase will include the consolidation of essential information, forms, and resources from relevant state and municipal agencies, offering a centralized, user-friendly platform for entrepreneurs that reduces friction, enhances satisfaction, and supports throughput of entrepreneurs from concept design to formal business formation. This toolkit should answer common questions related to regulations, licensing, business registration, permits, business plans, and incentives and funding options. It should direct users to relevant resources and state, local, and federal websites and organizations as needed. Recommendations and guidance should be personalized based on user queries and interaction history. This platform will be hosted on its own domain, but the solution should be easily adaptable for future expansion to other platforms, like social media or messaging apps.

The initial phase of this platform is expected to be launched by March 31, 2025, and should include the base functionality described above. The product roadmap for subsequent phases will be co-designed with the selected vendor to ensure alignment with user needs and technical feasibility. LED is currently engaging with small business owners and entrepreneurs across the state to gather ideas, feedback, and concerns from the toolkit's intended audience. Findings from these discussions will be shared with the selected vendor to support the ongoing development of this resource. The following phases may include functions that simply support administrative processes (e.g., license renewal reminders and assistance) as well as the generation of custom assets (e.g., completed forms; comprehensive marketing plans aligned to business type, revenue, and customer markets; customized business coaching and support, etc.).

V. NONFUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The toolkit must be able to meet the following requirements:

- **Adheres to a consistent design system:** Visual elements, typography, and color palette must be uniform across the entire interface and incorporate branding of LED and/or government agencies/entities as necessary.
- **Uses clear and accessible language:** User-facing text should be written with simplicity and consistency so that it is easily understood by a broad audience.

- **Provides immediate and intuitive feedback:** The system must offer clear visual or auditory confirmation for all user actions and prevent or clearly explain errors.
- **Maintains an aesthetic that is modern and minimalist:** The user interface should not feel cluttered or disorganized and should integrate well with current LED branding.

VI. TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- **Platform:** The toolkit should be deployable as a web application on its own domain. A modern, cloud-native architecture (including containerized services, CDN, WAF, monitoring, and logging) is preferred. Respondents should specify their preferred technology stack and managed cloud services, describing scalability, reliability, and cost controls. Detail your cost projection model as services scale, and provide explicit estimates for expected low, medium, and high usage scenarios. Describe the cost-control and monitoring approaches you would employ for the proposed architecture.
- **Security Privacy, and Compliance:** The solution must be secure and comply with all applicable data security and privacy standards, including least-privilege access, encryption in transit and at rest, secure secrets management, and SSO/SAML integration where appropriate. In the initial phase, operational metadata necessary for analytics and cost accounting must be captured. U.S. data processing and storage are required. By no later than phase-2, privacy posture will require persistent conversations. Respondents should provide documentation of their security protocols and articulate a path to a SOC2 readiness by no later than Phase-2.
- **Safety, Guardrails, and Content Controls:** The solution must include a configurable safety layer, including policy rules, prompt-injection defenses, and mechanisms to block inappropriate, irrelevant, or risky responses. The solution must provide authoritative source citations where applicable and implement fallback and/or refusal capabilities when confidence is low or content is out of scope.
- **Application Programming Interface (API) Capabilities:** The solution should expose well-documented REST APIs and webhooks for integrations, including LED's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The solution should support API versioning, rate limiting, idempotency, and service-to-service authentication (OAuth 2.0 client credentials or signed requests).
- **Observability, Analytics and Reporting:** The solution should instrument application, model, and retrieval layers with metrics, logs, and traces (OpenTelemetry compatibility preferred). The system must provide an administrative dashboard with analytics on usage, performance metrics, costs, accuracy, safety events, and user satisfaction. The solution should support an evaluation harness (evals) to measure accuracy, citation fidelity, hallucination rate, and safety compliance against curated test sets. Evals should be run on each phase with regression reporting. Respondents should describe their evaluation methodology and work with LED to establish test datasets, and target thresholds for Phase-1.
- **Performance, Reliability and Accessibility:** The solution should be designed for high availability with autoscaling and zero-downtime deploys (blue/green or canary). Respondents should state target availability and recovery objectives. The system should meet WCAG 2.2 AA accessibility and Section 508 requirements and support modern browsers and responsive layouts across desktop and mobile. Respondents should propose latency targets and describe load-testing methodology.
- **Customer Service:** The solution must include a plan to establish effective customer service capabilities that enable responsive technical and user support, with responses to inquiries provided within 24 hours upon submission or next business day for weekend and holiday inquiries. The approach should also include a post-launch stabilization plan (e.g., 30–90 days) with prioritized bug-fix windows and scheduled optimization reviews.

VII. REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS – GENERAL

Respondents should provide a brief description of their organization, type (LLC, S-Corp, nonprofit, or other organization structure); whether the organization has been registered with the Louisiana Secretary of State's Office and has been authorized to do business in this state; its history; its business locations or offices; and number of years in business. The organization must have an annual report that is updated with the Louisiana Secretary of State's Office, be in good standing with that office, and must comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

VIII. REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS – SPECIFIC

Respondents must demonstrate that they are qualified and experienced in product and technical development services consistent with the type of services referenced in this RFQ. The organization should describe its qualifications and experiences relevant to the project, including how or in what manner they were obtained (e.g., competitive RFP or RFQ process, sustained long-term client engagement, etc.). The respondent must demonstrate that it is adequately staffed and performing at capacity, and that they possess any applicable professional licenses, training, or certifications. Respondents should provide their total number of full-time employees and their qualifications, experiences, responsibilities, and achievements. The respondent should also provide brief case studies or summaries description 3 to 5 relevant projects and/or services and their results.

IX. INDEPENDENCE

Conflicts of interest checks will be required. The organization may contract with LED for other general services, but will be expected to perform a conflicts checks prior to acceptance of any requested assignment and report the results of the conflicts checks to LED. LED may not select an organization to perform these services or other general services if the organization has any conflict or appearance of any conflict of interest with regard to any project.

X. RFQ INFORMATION/SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Respondents must include the following information in order to be considered:

- **Company Information:** Interested parties should submit: physical and mailing address, telephone number, email address, and website. Indicate whether your firm is local, regional, or national, how many people are employed, and in how many states you provide services. Provide Will you use a subcontractor for any of the services provided under this Contract? If yes, please provide the same information requested for your company and the role any third parties are expected to perform if selected.
- **Executive Summary/Statement of Qualifications:** Respondents should provide a summary of their qualifications and general approach utilized in developing similar products, including potential differentiators regarding their in-depth knowledge and experience in full-cycle development for AI frameworks. Respondents should also include a brief statement of why the organization feels it should be considered for this. The Statement of Qualifications must include a list of the LED-sponsored initiatives or programs in which the organization has participated or supported, if any, prior to this RFQ.
- **Project Staff:** Respondents should include sufficient information to satisfy evaluators that the organization has the appropriate qualifications, experience, and knowledge to perform the "technical assistance" services as described herein. The response to this RFQ must identify the Project Manager who will be the point of contact for day to day operations associated with the engagement, provide resumes of key personnel who will participate in performing the scope of work, and indicate their necessary skills, experience, qualifications, primary working location, and any certifications or awards of the organization or its staff, and the availability of the staff to handle

these engagements. Respondents should include education and recent experience details of key personnel, with particular reference to their ability to handle these services.

- **Project/Work Plan:** Provide a work plan describing your proposed approach to addressing LED's needs and objectives with this project that include all elements in this RFQ's Scope of Work, along with a general approach or methodology for the project. Include a suggested project work schedule with tasks, development, testing for the initial phase, and an overview of your approach for subsequent deployment phases.
- **Technical Proposal:** A description of your proposed technical solution, including the AI platform, integrations, and security measures, that incorporates this RFQ's functional and nonfunctional requirements.
- **Project References:** Three or more examples of projects respondents have completed relevant to work outlined in the RFQ, including client references or contact information. For each project reference, include dates, a description of work done, and links to tools/platforms, if public.
- **Billing and Payment:** Response must include an overview of the organization's hourly rates. Rates must be inclusive of all work performed for services and related costs, including all overhead, costs of doing business, use of company equipment, and in-house resources. No organization charges above the hourly rates or any statutory maximum fee per service rendered will be accepted. Expenses must be pre-approved and may be reimbursed at cost, subject to LED policies. Supporting documentation will be expected to include, at minimum, a description and documentation of services rendered during the invoice period. Once LED has reviewed all responses to this RFQ and selected a vendor, LED will enter into a master services agreement or contract with the selected vendor utilizing these rates and subsequently develop an initial task order and not-to-exceed cost for the initial phase of the product.

XI. EVALUATION AND SELECTION CRITERIA

All responses received by the stated submission date in this RFQ shall be evaluated by a Selection Committee, assisted by technical personnel as deemed appropriate, for the purpose of selecting a vendor or vendors with which a contract may be executed. LED reserves the right to reject responses in whole or in part if in the judgment of the Selection Committee the best interests of LED will be served. LED has engaged Emergent Method, a Louisiana-based management consulting firm, to coordinate this procurement on the agency's behalf. Respondents will be assessed using the selection criteria below, with the selected vendor determined by the highest average total scores received. LED may invite one or multiple respondents to participate in oral presentations or interviews to further clarify their approach, qualifications, and other elements of their response. Oral Presentations (if required) are another 10 points. The criteria and point allocations of consideration in making the selections are as follows:

- **Comprehension of Project Purpose and Scope of Services (20 points):** Responses must exhibit an understanding of the project purpose and goals as presented in the RFQ and demonstrate eligibility to be considered for selection. As LED's evaluation will be based on this understanding and approach, respondents should feel free to comment on and suggest specific aspects in the general scope of work as described in the RFQ for value-added, innovation purposes.
- **Method of Approach (20 points):** The technical completeness of the respondent's stated approach to the scope of work, the comprehensiveness of the proposed approach, and the methodology/techniques to be used must be clearly stated. Responses should outline an example or the type of deliverables anticipated over the course of the project.
- **Capability and Qualifications (30 points):** The vendor's track record with comparable projects, as well as the qualifications, experience, and technical expertise of the company, project managers, and team members to be assigned to the project as specified in the response, including any third parties, and shall refer to experience and technical quality on similar projects.

- **Work Experience in Louisiana (15 points):** Respondents should effectively highlight their experience working in Louisiana, whether they are a Louisiana-based company and/or maintain offices in Louisiana, and their understanding of the Louisiana economy and LED's strategic plan.
- **User Focus (15 points):** The user-centered design and track record of developing engaging products. Responses should consider the interface of this toolkit and address how it will be navigable to both technologically advanced and novice users.

XII. TIMELINE

- **RFQ Issue Date (blackout period begins):** October 8, 2025
- **Vendor Questions Deadline:** October 17, 2025
- **Submission Deadline:** November 5, 2025, 4 p.m. CST
- **Oral Presentations (If needed):** TBD (*Week of November 10*)
- **Vendor Selection Deadline:** November 19, 2025
- **Project Start Date (Anticipated):** November 31, 2025

This timeline is subject to change, any changes to the timeline will be posted to the [LED website](#). It is the responsibility of the Proposer to check the website and be aware of any updates to the timeline.

XIII. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Term of Contract

The term of any contract resulting from this RFQ is tentatively scheduled to begin Fall 2025. LED reserves the right to issue additional task orders to the selected vendor related to the continued and future buildout and management of this platform.

RFQ Coordinator

All questions regarding the RFQ process must be directed to the RFQ Coordinator by emailing ledrfq@emergentmethod.com, ATTN: Sarazen Knight. Any other official or unofficial inquiries regarding this RFQ will not be monitored or addressed by LED. Questions must reference the specific section of the RFP to which the question relates. Only those questions received by the established deadline shall be considered by LED.

Participant Inquiries

LED will consider written inquiries and requests for clarification regarding the Scope of Services and other substantive matters relating to this RFQ, submitted to the RFQ Coordinator, by 4 p.m. CST on November 5, 2025. LED reserves the right to modify the RFQ should a need for change be identified. Requests for email notification of such modifications may be made through the RFQ Coordinator.

RFQ Submission

Interested parties shall submit ONE copy of the completed Statement of Qualifications, signed by an authorized representative of the participating organization, via e-mail to the RFQ Coordinator. Submissions should clearly demonstrate your ability to meet the Scope of Services described in Section III, address all submission requirements outlined in Section X, and have the RFQ name included on all materials. If the participating organization is a corporation, please also provide a copy of the corporation's resolution with signature authority listed.

Blackout Period

During this period, no one shall contact LED personnel regarding the RFQ. The only allowable communications are from respondents to the authorized contact information listed in this RFQ before the vendor questions deadline. Any questions received after midnight on the vendor questions deadline will be ineligible and LED is not required to respond.

Error and Omissions in Statement of Qualification

LED reserves the right to seek clarification of any response to this RFQ for the purpose of identifying and eliminating minor irregularities or informalities.

Changes, Addenda, Withdrawals

The State reserves the right to change the schedule of events or revise any part of the RFQ by issuing an addendum to the RFQ at any time. Addenda, if any, will be posted at:

<https://www.opportunitylouisiana.gov/public-information/rfps-rfqs>. It shall be the responsibility of the Proposer to check the website for addenda to the RFQ and/or request updates related to this procurement from the RFQ Coordinator.

Withdrawal of Statement of Qualification

A Proposer may withdraw their response that has been submitted at any time up to the date and at the time the Statement of Qualification is due. To withdraw a Statement of Qualification, a written request signed by the authorized representative of the respondent must be submitted electronically via email to the RFQ Coordinator identified in the RFQ.

Waiver of Administrative Informalities

LED shall reserve the right, at its sole discretion, to waive minor administrative informalities contained in any Statement of Qualification.

Statement of Qualification Rejection/RFQ Cancellation

Issuance of this RFQ in no way shall constitute a commitment by LED to award a contract. LED shall reserve the right to accept or reject, in whole or part, all Statements of Qualification submitted and/or cancel this RFQ if it is determined to be in LED's best interest.

Ownership of Statement of Qualification

All materials submitted in response to this RFQ shall become the property of LED. Selection or rejection of a Statement of Qualification shall not affect this right.

Cost of Offer Preparation

The State shall not be liable for any costs incurred by respondents prior to issuance of or entering into a contract. Costs associated with developing the Statement of Qualification, preparing for oral presentations, and any other expenses incurred by the Proposer in responding to this RFQ shall be entirely the responsibility of the Proposer and shall not be reimbursed in any manner by the State.

Insurance Requirements

Respondents must comply with all minimum insurance coverage limits necessary to perform work with the State of Louisiana. Proof of coverage, in the form of a current Certificate of Insurance (COI), must be provided with the response. Respondents must be willing to name LED as an additional insured on all required policies.

Taxes

Respondents shall be responsible for payment of all applicable taxes from the funds to be received under contract awarded from this RFQ. In accordance with R.S. 39:1624(A)(10), the Louisiana Department of Revenue must determine that the prospective contractor is current in the filing of all applicable tax returns and reports and in payment of all taxes, interest, penalties, and fees owed to the state and collected by the Department of Revenue prior to the approval of the contract by LED. The prospective contractor shall attest to its current and/or prospective compliance by including a statement certifying to their compliance, submitted with its Statement of Qualification, and also agrees to provide its seven-digit LDR Account Number to the contracting agency so that the prospective contractor's tax payment compliance status may be verified. The prospective contractor further acknowledges understanding that issuance of a tax clearance certificate by the Louisiana Department of Revenue is a necessary precondition to the approval and effectiveness of the contract. LED reserves the right to withdraw its consent to the contract without penalty and proceed with alternate arrangements should the vendor fail to resolve any identified apparent outstanding tax compliance discrepancies with the Louisiana Department of Revenue within seven (7) days of such notification.

Determination of Responsibility

Determination of the Proposer's responsibility relating to this RFQ shall be made according to the standards set forth in LAC 34:V.2536. LED must find that the selected Proposer:

- Has adequate financial resources for performance, or has the ability to obtain such resources as required during performance;
- Has the necessary experience, organization, technical qualifications, skills, and facilities, or has the ability to obtain them;
- Is able to comply with the proposed or required time of delivery or performance schedule;
- Has a satisfactory record of integrity, judgment, and performance; and
- Is otherwise qualified and eligible to receive an award under applicable laws and regulations.

Proposers should ensure that their Statements of Qualification contain sufficient information for LED to make its determination by presenting acceptable evidence of the above to perform the contracted services.

Use of Subcontractors

LED shall have a single prime contractor as the result of any contract negotiation, and that prime contractor shall be responsible for all deliverables specified in the RFQ and Statement of Qualification. This general requirement notwithstanding, respondents may enter into subcontractor arrangements; however, respondents shall acknowledge in their Statement of Qualification total responsibility for the entire contract. If the respondent intends to subcontract for portions of the work, the respondent shall identify any subcontractor relationships and include specific designations of the tasks to be performed by the subcontractor. Information required of the respondent under the terms of this RFQ shall also be required for each subcontractor, if requested by LED. The prime contractor shall be the single point of contact for all subcontracted work. Unless provided for in the contract with LED, the prime contractor shall not contract with any other party for any of the services herein contracted without the express prior written approval of LED.

Written or Oral Discussions/Presentations

LED, at its sole discretion, may require all proposers reasonably susceptible of being selected for the award to provide an oral presentation of how they propose to meet the agency's program objectives. Commitments made by the respondent at the oral presentation, if any, will be considered binding and formally recorded in the final contract. If oral presentations are required, LED reserves the right to

adjust the original scores based on information received in the presentation, using the original evaluation criteria. The cost score will remain unchanged.

Acceptance of Statement of Qualification Content

All Statements of Qualification will be reviewed to determine compliance with administrative and mandatory requirements as specified in the RFQ. Statements of Qualification that are not in compliance will be rejected from further consideration.

Evaluation and Selection

The evaluation of Statement of Qualifications will be accomplished by an evaluation team, to be designated by LED, which will determine the Statement of Qualifications that is most advantageous to LED, taking into consideration evaluation factors set forth in the RFQ. The evaluation team may consult subject matter expert(s) to serve in an advisory capacity regarding the review of responses to this RFQ.

Best and Final Offers (BAFO)

LED reserves the right to conduct a BAFO with one or more respondents identified by the Selection Committee to be reasonably susceptible of being selected for an award. If conducted, respondents will receive written notification of their selection, a list of specific items to address in the BAFO, and instructions for submittal. The BAFO negotiation may be used to assist LED in clarifying the scope of work or to obtain the most cost-effective pricing available. The written invitation to participate in BAFO will not obligate LED to a commitment to enter into a contract.

Contract Award and Execution

LED reserves the right to enter into a contract based on the initial offers received without further discussion of the Statement of Qualifications submitted. LED reserves the right to contract for all or a partial list of services offered in the Statement of Qualification. The RFQ, including any addenda added, and the selected Statement of Qualification shall become part of the contract initiated by LED. A respondent shall not submit its own standard contract terms and conditions as a response to this RFQ. Respondents should submit in their Statement of Qualification any exceptions or contract deviations that its firm wishes to negotiate.