



**Center of
Excellence**

8(a) Government Contracting

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Strategic Communications, Public Relations, Impact Storytelling, and Public Affairs Services Center of Excellence (COE)

Bowie Business Innovation Center (Bowie BIC)

RFP Number: COE-COMM-001

Issue Date: **October 19, 2026**

Proposal Due Date: **November 2, 2026**

Contract Type: **Professional Services Agreement**

Contract Term: **One (1) Year with Option to Renew**

October 19, 2026

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1.0 - Introduction and Purpose

1.1 Overview. The Bowie Business Innovation Center ("Bowie BIC" or "BBIC"), a Maryland nonprofit corporation, invites qualified strategic communications, public relations, public affairs, impact storytelling, brand strategy, and strategic positioning firms ("Contractor" or "Proposer") to submit proposals to provide comprehensive communications and public relations services to support the Center of Excellence (COE).

1.2 Strategic Objectives. The selected Contractor will serve as a strategic communications and public affairs partner responsible for helping Bowie BIC define, document, communicate, and amplify the story of the COE; communicate measurable program impact; highlight participant, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), small business, and partner success; strengthen stakeholder awareness and engagement; support public-facing communications; identify strategic communications and public affairs opportunities; and position the COE as an emerging national model for federal contracting technical assistance.

1.3 COE 2.0 Transition. The engagement will support the COE's transition into COE 2.0, an execution-focused model designed to move participating HBCUs and Small Business Administration (SBA) 8(a) firms from training and readiness toward strategic alignment, teaming, opportunity identification, pursuit, and measurable outcomes. Bowie BIC seeks a partner that can translate program activities, partnerships, outcomes, and opportunities into compelling stories while helping the COE strategically engage the federal, education, industry, nonprofit, business, and community stakeholders that influence its visibility, credibility, partnerships, and long-term sustainability.

1.4 Nature of Solicitation. This Request for Proposals (RFP) is an invitation to submit proposals and does not constitute an offer, commitment, or obligation by Bowie BIC to enter into a contract with any Proposer. Bowie BIC reserves all rights set forth in Section 20.0 herein.

2.0 - About Bowie Business Innovation Center

2.1 Organizational Mission. The Bowie Business Innovation Center is a nonprofit business accelerator committed to supporting entrepreneurs, small businesses, and innovation-driven organizations through technical assistance, strategic partnerships, workforce development, and access to resources. Bowie BIC works with public- and private-sector partners to strengthen businesses, encourage economic growth, and create pathways to opportunities in Maryland and beyond.

2.2 Geographic and Program Focus. Bowie BIC operates programs serving the State of Maryland and collaborates with federal agencies, educational institutions, private industry, and community organizations to advance economic development and business innovation objectives.

3.0 - About the Center of Excellence

3.1 COE Overview. The Center of Excellence is a federally supported initiative designed to expand opportunities for SBA 8(a) firms and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) seeking to participate in the federal marketplace.

3.2 Program Services. Through its programming, the COE provides the following services to participants:

- a. Federal contracting readiness support;
- b. Business capability assessments;
- c. Technical assistance;
- d. Executive coaching;
- e. Proposal development support;
- f. Capture planning assistance;
- g. Compliance guidance;
- h. Federal procurement education;
- i. HBCU engagement;
- j. Strategic partnership development;
- k. Teaming and matchmaking opportunities; and
- l. Opportunity identification and pursuit support.

3.3 Strategic Vision. The COE supports organizations in building the knowledge, relationships, and capabilities needed to compete for federal contracting opportunities. As the COE continues to expand, Bowie BIC seeks to establish the program as a nationally recognized model for supporting HBCUs, SBA 8(a) firms, small businesses, and institutions seeking greater participation in the federal marketplace.

4.0 - Scope of Services and Deliverables

4.1 General Scope. The selected Contractor is expected to deliver an integrated strategic communications, public affairs, storytelling, and positioning strategy that produces the following specific, measurable outcomes:

- a. Clearly communicates the COE mission and value, resulting in a unified mission statement and value proposition applied consistently across all COE communications;

- b. Highlights measurable program impact through data-driven impact reporting that quantifies participant, HBCU, and small business outcomes;
- c. Captures participant and partner success stories, producing a documented library of publication-ready success stories and case studies;
- d. Builds awareness among key stakeholders, resulting in increased and measurable reach and engagement across federal, HBCU, small business, and partner audiences;
- e. Strengthens the COE brand narrative through a cohesive brand and messaging framework applied consistently across all channels;
- f. Supports strategic stakeholder engagement, producing a stakeholder map and engagement plan that guides prioritized outreach;
- g. Identifies opportunities to elevate the COE's visibility and influence, resulting in a documented pipeline of speaking, media, and partnership opportunities;
- h. Supports public-facing communications and external engagement through ready-to-publish content, announcements, and media materials;
- i. Positions the COE within the broader federal contracting, HBCU, small business, and economic development ecosystems, producing positioning materials that establish the COE as a recognized national model;
- j. Supports long-term sustainability and growth, resulting in communications assets and stakeholder relationships that advance funding and partnership development; and
- k. Advances the COE 2.0 execution-focused model through messaging and materials that clearly convey the transition from readiness to measurable opportunity pursuit.

4.2 Phase I: Discovery, Narrative Development, and COE 2.0 Positioning. The Contractor will perform the following services during the initial discovery and narrative development phase:

- a. **Stakeholder Engagement.** Conduct interviews with Bowie BIC leadership, COE staff, participants, HBCUs, small businesses, partners, and other key stakeholders to understand program history, objectives, impact, and strategic priorities;
- b. **Program Review.** Review existing COE program materials, reports, presentations, participant information, and available impact data;
- c. **Story Identification.** Identify key stories, proof points, milestones, differentiators, and messaging opportunities;
- d. **Narrative Framework Development.** Develop a clear COE narrative that explains the problem the COE addresses, who it serves, how the model works, what changes for participants, and the program's future vision;

- e. **Audience-Specific Messaging.** Develop audience-specific messaging for HBCUs, SBA 8(a) firms and small businesses, federal agencies, industry partners, funders, and other stakeholders;
- f. **COE 2.0 Integration.** Incorporate the COE 2.0 strategic positioning and execution-focused model into the communications narrative;
- g. **Storytelling Standards.** Establish a consistent storytelling approach that can be used across presentations, website content, social media, reports, media outreach, public affairs activities, and stakeholder communications;
- h. **Positioning Assessment.** Assess current external positioning and identify opportunities to strengthen the COE's visibility and credibility; and
- i. **Stakeholder Mapping.** Identify key stakeholder groups and develop an initial stakeholder landscape.

4.3 Phase I Deliverables. The Contractor will deliver the following work products upon completion of Phase I:

- a. **Communications and Public Affairs Assessment.** A written baseline report documenting the COE's current communications and public affairs strengths, gaps, risks, and prioritized recommendations that will guide the engagement;
- b. **COE Storytelling Strategy.** A documented strategy defining priority story themes, target audiences, channels, and cadence that the COE can apply consistently across all communications;
- c. **COE Story and Narrative Framework.** A written core narrative articulating the problem the COE addresses, whom it serves, how the model works, what changes for participants, and the program's future vision;
- d. **Messaging Framework.** A documented set of core and audience-specific messages, proof points, and language standards ensuring consistent messaging across all channels and audiences;
- e. **COE 2.0 Strategic Positioning Framework.** A written framework articulating the COE 2.0 execution-focused model and how the COE will be positioned with federal, HBCU, small business, industry, and funder audiences;
- f. **Stakeholder Landscape/Stakeholder Map.** A documented map identifying and prioritizing key stakeholders, their interests and information needs, and recommended engagement priorities;
- g. **Initial Story Bank.** An organized, populated inventory of initial candidate stories, each with audience, key messages, status, supporting information, and recommended communications or public affairs use; and
- h. **Initial Public Affairs Opportunity Assessment.** A written assessment identifying near-term public affairs opportunities, forums, and engagements to elevate the COE's visibility and credibility.

4.4 Phase II: Impact Storytelling and Story Bank Development. The Contractor will develop compelling content that demonstrates the impact of the COE and builds a sustainable library of stories, as follows:

- a. **Participant Journey Documentation.** Identify, prioritize, and develop stories that demonstrate the participant journey: Before → COE Engagement → Action → Opportunity → Outcome → Next Step;
- b. **Story Types.** Develop the following types of stories and content:
 - Participant success stories;
 - HBCU partnership profiles;
 - Small business transformation stories;
 - Program milestones;
 - Partner spotlights;
 - Leadership profiles;
 - Case studies;
 - Teaming and partnership stories;
 - Federal contracting readiness and opportunity-pursuit stories; and
 - Stories demonstrating measurable outcomes.
- c. **Story Bank Management.** Maintain a COE Story Bank that identifies potential stories, audiences, key messages, status, supporting information, and recommended communications or public affairs use; and
- d. **Quality Standards.** Emphasize quality, authenticity, measurable impact, and strategic value rather than content volume.

Phase III: Communications, Public Affairs, and Visibility Strategy. The Contractor will develop and deliver written strategies, plans, and recommendations covering the following areas, each specifying objectives, recommended actions, responsible channels, and measures of success:

- a. Brand positioning;
- b. Strategic communications planning;
- c. Public affairs strategy;
- d. Stakeholder engagement strategy;
- e. Stakeholder mapping and prioritization;
- f. Media outreach strategy;
- g. Public-facing messaging;
- h. External positioning;
- i. Digital communications strategy;
- j. Strategic announcements;
- k. Issues and opportunity monitoring;
- l. Strategic communications planning around major COE milestones;

- m. Identification of opportunities to elevate COE visibility through relevant external forums, events, partnerships, and communications channels;
- n. Stakeholder communications;
- o. Executive communications and positioning;
- p. Development of talking points and briefing materials for priority engagements;
- q. Recommendations for strengthening relationships with priority external stakeholders; and
- r. Strategic positioning recommendations for federal agencies, HBCUs, SBA 8(a) firms, industry, higher education institutions, community organizations, funders, and other audiences relevant to the COE's mission.

4.5 Phase IV: Content Development. The Contractor will develop, in support of the approved strategic communications and public affairs strategy, professional-quality, publication-ready content of the following types, each aligned to a defined audience, message, and communications objective:

- a. Articles;
- b. Success stories;
- c. News releases;
- d. Website content;
- e. Social media content;
- f. Newsletter features;
- g. Executive messaging;
- h. Impact reports;
- i. Stakeholder communications;
- j. Public announcements;
- k. Talking points;
- l. Briefing materials;
- m. Public affairs messaging;
- n. Event and partnership communications;
- o. Media materials; and
- p. Other communications products recommended as part of the approved strategy.

4.6 Content Integration. All content development must support the broader communications and public affairs strategy rather than function solely as stand-alone content production; each content deliverable must advance a defined communications or public affairs objective and identify its target audience and intended outcome.

4.7 Minimum Annual Deliverables. The Contractor will provide, at a minimum, the following deliverables and outcomes during the one-year contract period. The quantities stated below are the minimum expected deliverables and outcomes; the Contractor will be expected to meet or

exceed them, and each may be increased where doing so advances the COE's strategic objectives:

Deliverable	Annual Expectation
Communications and Public Affairs Assessment	One (1), delivered once during the one-year term
COE Storytelling Strategy	One (1), delivered once during the one-year term
COE Story & Narrative Framework	One (1), delivered once during the one-year term
COE 2.0 Strategic Positioning Framework	One (1), delivered once during the one-year term
Messaging Framework	One (1), delivered once during the one-year term
Stakeholder Landscape/Stakeholder Map	One (1), delivered once during the one-year term
Public Affairs Strategy	One (1), delivered once during the one-year term
COE Story Bank	Ongoing — established early in the term and continuously maintained, expanded, and updated throughout the one-year term
Participant Success Stories	Six (6), minimum, over the one-year term
HBCU Partner Features	Three (3), minimum, over the one-year term
Small Business Case Studies	Three (3), minimum, over the one-year term
Leadership Profiles	Two (2), minimum, over the one-year term
Press Releases/Announcements	Four to six (4–6) over the one-year term
Public Affairs/Stakeholder Engagement Support	Ongoing — provided on a continuous, as-needed basis throughout the one-year term
Social Media Storytelling Content	Monthly, at least one (1) piece each month, for a minimum of twelve (12) over the one-year term
Monthly Communications/Public Affairs Strategy Meeting	Twelve (12), one (1) meeting per month
Quarterly Communications/Public Affairs Reports	Four (4), one (1) report per quarter
Annual COE Impact Report	One (1), delivered at the end of the one-year term

4.8 Deliverable Adjustments. The quantities set forth in the Minimum Annual Deliverables table above represent minimum expected deliverables and outcomes that the selected Contractor will be expected to meet or exceed over the one-year term. The selected Contractor may recommend increases or adjustments to the content and engagement mix based on emerging program milestones, participant outcomes, stakeholder opportunities, public affairs priorities, and communications needs, subject to Bowie BIC approval. The focus shall be on strategic quality, measurable impact, stakeholder engagement, and consistent positioning rather than high-volume content production.

5.0 - Contractor Responsibilities and Performance Expectations

5.1 Primary Responsibilities. The Contractor will be responsible for the following:

- a. Strategic Partnership. Serve as a strategic communications and public affairs partner, not solely a content production or media relations vendor;
- b. Collaboration. Work collaboratively with Bowie BIC leadership, COE staff, participants, partners, HBCUs, small businesses, federal stakeholders, industry stakeholders, and other key audiences to develop authentic and impactful communications and public affairs strategies;
- c. Story Development. Transform COE activities, participant experiences, partnerships, and measurable outcomes into meaningful stories that connect with target audiences;
- d. Stakeholder Engagement. Identify and prioritize key external stakeholders, understand stakeholder interests and information needs, strengthen relationships with strategic audiences, and identify opportunities for public engagement and visibility;
- e. Issues Monitoring. Identify emerging issues and opportunities that may affect COE visibility, positioning, partnerships, or stakeholder engagement;
- f. Consistent Messaging. Maintain consistent and credible external messaging across all communications channels and audiences;
- g. Performance Reporting. Provide quarterly reports documenting progress, outcomes, opportunities, and recommendations; and
- h. Responsiveness. Respond to Bowie BIC requests and communications within two (2) business days or such shorter period as may be required for time-sensitive matters.

5.2 Performance Standards. The Contractor will be expected to meet or exceed the following performance standards:

- a. Quality. All deliverables must be of professional quality, free from errors, consistent with the approved messaging and brand framework, and suitable for publication or distribution to external audiences without further substantive revision;
- b. Timeliness. All deliverables must be completed in accordance with agreed-upon schedules and deadlines, with on-time delivery of no less than ninety-five percent (95%) of scheduled deliverables each quarter;
- c. Strategic Alignment. All deliverables and recommendations must align with the COE's mission, strategic objectives, and COE 2.0 execution-focused model, and must support the desired outcomes and success measures set forth in Section 5.3 below;

- d. **Measurable Impact.** demonstrate measurable progress in increasing awareness, visibility, credibility, and stakeholder engagement with the COE, assessed against baseline metrics established during Phase I and reported quarterly against agreed-upon key performance indicators; and
- e. **Professionalism.** Maintain the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and ethical conduct in all interactions with Bowie BIC, COE participants, stakeholders, and third parties, as demonstrated by timely responsiveness, reliability, and the absence of substantiated stakeholder complaints throughout the contract term.

5.3 Desired Outcomes and Success Measures. The Contractor will be expected to demonstrate measurable progress in the following areas:

- a. **Storytelling Impact:**
 - Increased awareness of COE programs and outcomes, as evidenced by growth in media placements, earned coverage, and audience reach over the contract period;
 - Development of a library of participant and partner stories, maintained in the COE Story Bank, with a target of no fewer than fifteen (15) documented stories during the contract period;
 - Improved ability to communicate program impact, demonstrated through delivery of quarterly impact reporting that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative outcome data; and
 - Increased use of consistent COE messaging across all channels, measured by adherence to the approved messaging framework in published materials.
- b. **Stakeholder Engagement:**
 - Increased visibility and engagement among federal agencies, SBA partners, HBCUs, small businesses, industry partners, higher education stakeholders, community organizations, and funders, measured by the number and quality of documented engagements with each stakeholder group;
 - Development and implementation of a stakeholder engagement strategy that identifies priority audiences, engagement tactics, and measurable milestones;
 - Increased strategic stakeholder interactions, tracked and reported on a quarterly basis;
 - Identification of relevant external engagement opportunities, including speaking engagements, forums, and partnership prospects, documented as they arise;
 - Increased opportunities for COE participation in relevant forums and discussions;
 - Improved external positioning of the COE; and

- Increased awareness of COE 2.0 among priority audiences, assessed through pre- and post-engagement awareness indicators.
- c. Public Affairs and Strategic Positioning:
- timely identification of emerging communications or public affairs opportunities and risks, documented in monthly strategy updates; and
 - Development of actionable recommendations, including recommended response timelines, for responding to relevant external developments.
- d. Digital Engagement:
- Track and report, on a quarterly basis and against established baselines, measurable improvements in website engagement, social media reach and impressions, audience interaction rates, content performance, and external engagement generated through communications activities.

5.4 Key Personnel. The Contractor will designate a project manager and key personnel responsible for delivering services under this RFP. Any substitution of key personnel must be approved in writing by Bowie BIC in advance and must involve personnel with equivalent or superior qualifications and experience.

5.5 Meetings and Reporting. The Contractor will attend monthly communications and public affairs strategy meetings with Bowie BIC and provide quarterly written reports documenting progress, outcomes, opportunities, and recommendations.

6.0 - Minimum Qualifications

6.1 Required Experience. Qualified Proposers must demonstrate experience with the following:

- a. Strategic communications;
- b. Public affairs;
- c. Strategic positioning;
- d. Storytelling;
- e. Public relations;
- f. Brand development;
- g. Stakeholder engagement;
- h. Media relations;
- i. Nonprofit organizations;
- j. Government-funded initiatives;
- k. Economic development programs;
- l. Higher education institutions;
- m. Federal programs; and
- n. Public-sector or government-related initiatives.

6.2 Preferred Experience. Preference will be given to firms with demonstrated experience supporting SBA programs, federal initiatives, HBCUs, higher education institutions, public-sector organizations, or small business ecosystems.

6.3 Must-Have Capabilities. The Proposer must demonstrate strength in the following priority areas:

- a. **Impact Storytelling.** Ability to transform COE activities, participant experiences, partnerships, and measurable outcomes into meaningful stories that connect with target audiences;
- b. **Mission-Based Communications.** Experience communicating the impact of nonprofit, government-funded, education, economic development, small business, or federal programs;
- c. **Public Affairs.** Demonstrated ability to develop and execute public affairs strategies that strengthen stakeholder relationships, external positioning, visibility, and engagement, including experience identifying and prioritizing key stakeholders; developing stakeholder engagement strategies; monitoring relevant issues and external developments; identifying strategic opportunities; supporting public-sector and government-related communications; advising leadership on external positioning; developing public-facing messages; and supporting strategic external engagement;
- d. **Brand Positioning.** Ability to create messaging that clearly explains the importance and value of the COE and positions it as an emerging national model for federal contracting technical assistance;
- e. **Strategic Story Development.** Ability to develop a clear narrative that explains why the COE exists, who the COE serves, what challenges the COE addresses, how the COE supports HBCUs and SBA 8(a) firms and small businesses, how participants move from readiness to opportunity pursuit, what outcomes the COE is producing, what differentiates the COE, and where the COE is going through COE 2.0;
- f. **Audience-Specific Messaging.** Ability to tailor communications for federal agencies, SBA stakeholders, HBCUs, small businesses, industry partners, funders, community organizations, and other stakeholders;
- g. **Content Development.** Ability to develop high-quality written and digital storytelling content while maintaining consistent messaging and brand positioning; and
- h. **Stakeholder Engagement.** Ability to identify, prioritize, and engage strategic stakeholders in support of organizational visibility, partnerships, credibility, and long-term positioning.

6.4 Organizational Capacity. The Proposer must demonstrate adequate organizational capacity, staffing, and resources to perform all required services within the contract period and budget constraints.

7.0 - Proposal Submission Requirements

7.1 Required Proposal Components. Proposals must include all of the following components:

- a. **Executive Summary.** A concise overview of the Proposer's understanding of the project, proposed approach, and qualifications;
- b. **Company Background.** Information regarding the Proposer's legal entity name, organizational structure, principal place of business, years in operation, ownership, and key personnel;
- c. **Relevant Experience.** Detailed description of the Proposer's experience with strategic communications, public affairs, storytelling, brand development, stakeholder engagement, and mission-based communications, with emphasis on experience supporting nonprofit organizations, government-funded initiatives, federal programs, HBCUs, higher education institutions, public-sector organizations, or small business ecosystems;
- d. **Understanding of COE Mission.** Demonstration of the Proposer's understanding of the COE's mission, objectives, participants, stakeholders, and strategic priorities;
- e. **Proposed Storytelling Approach.** Detailed description of the Proposer's approach to impact storytelling, narrative development, and story bank management;
- f. **Strategic Communications Strategy.** Detailed description of the Proposer's approach to developing and executing a strategic communications strategy for the COE;
- g. **Public Affairs Approach.** Detailed description of the Proposer's approach to public affairs strategy, stakeholder engagement, issues monitoring, and strategic positioning;
- h. **Stakeholder Engagement Approach.** Detailed description of the Proposer's approach to identifying, prioritizing, and engaging strategic stakeholders;
- i. **COE 2.0 Positioning Approach.** Detailed description of the Proposer's approach to incorporating the COE 2.0 execution-focused model into the communications narrative and strategic positioning;
- j. **Project Timeline.** Proposed timeline for completing each phase of the project and delivering required deliverables;
- k. **Team Qualifications.** Resumes and qualifications of all key personnel who will be assigned to this project, including the project manager;
- l. **References.** Minimum of three (3) professional references from clients for whom the Proposer has provided similar services within the past five (5) years, including client name, contact person, telephone number, email address, and description of services provided;

- m. Work Samples. Representative work samples demonstrating the Proposer's capabilities in strategic communications, public affairs, storytelling, stakeholder engagement, and content development; and
- n. Cost Proposal. Detailed cost proposal as set forth in Section 8.0 herein.

7.2 Proposal Length. Proposals should not exceed fifteen (15) pages, excluding resumes, references, work samples, and appendices.

7.3 Format Requirements. Proposals must be submitted in PDF format and must include a table of contents, page numbers, and clearly labeled sections corresponding to the required proposal components set forth in Section 7.0 above.

7.4 Certification. Each proposal must include a signed certification by an authorized representative of the Proposer certifying that all information contained in the proposal is true, accurate, and complete to the best of the Proposer's knowledge and belief.

8.0 - Budget and Pricing Requirements

8.1 Anticipated Contract Value. Bowie BIC anticipates an annual contract value range of Fifty Thousand Dollars to Seventy-Five Thousand Dollars (\$50,000–\$75,000).

8.2 Required Budget Information. Proposals must include the following budget and pricing information:

- a. Proposed fee structure (e.g., fixed fee, hourly rate, retainer, or hybrid);
- b. Staffing model and allocation of personnel to project tasks;
- c. Deliverables included in the proposed fee;
- d. Project timeline and estimated level of effort;
- e. Additional costs, if applicable, including travel, materials, software, subscriptions, or other direct expenses;
- f. Identification of services or expenses not included in the proposed fee; and
- g. Payment schedule and invoicing procedures.

8.3 Budget Alignment. The proposed budget must demonstrate how the Proposer will deliver the required strategic communications, public affairs, storytelling, stakeholder engagement, strategic positioning, and content development services within the anticipated annual contract range. Bowie BIC is seeking a strategic partner, not simply a content production or media relations vendor.

8.4 Resource Prioritization. Proposals should demonstrate how available resources will be prioritized toward the following objectives:

- a. Developing the COE's overall story;

- b. Documenting measurable impact;
- c. Strengthening stakeholder awareness and engagement;
- d. Supporting public affairs objectives;
- e. Advancing COE 2.0 positioning; and
- f. Increasing the COE's visibility and strategic relationships.

8.5 Payment Terms. Payment terms will be negotiated with the selected Contractor and will be set forth in the Professional Services Agreement. Bowie BIC anticipates monthly or quarterly payments based on completed and accepted deliverables.

9.0 - Evaluation Criteria and Selection Process

9.1 Evaluation Criteria. Proposals will be evaluated and scored by an evaluation committee against the following weighted criteria. Each criterion is defined below, and its weight indicates the maximum relative contribution of that criterion to a Proposer's total score. Consistent with the COE's mission, demonstrated experience supporting federal programs, U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) programs and SBA 8(a) firms, small businesses, small business ecosystems, and HBCUs and other higher-education institutions is expressly credited under the Relevant Experience and Past Performance criterion:

Evaluation Category	Weight
Understanding of COE Mission and Communications/Public Affairs Needs. Clarity and depth of the Proposer's demonstrated understanding of the COE mission, its HBCU, SBA 8(a) firm, and small-business participants, its federal-marketplace context, and the COE's communications and public affairs needs	25%
Strategic Communications, Storytelling, and Public Affairs Approach. Quality, feasibility, and strategic soundness of the proposed strategic communications, impact storytelling, and public affairs approach	25%
Relevant Experience and Past Performance. Depth, relevance, and results of the Proposer's experience and documented past performance, expressly including demonstrated experience supporting federal programs, SBA programs and SBA 8(a) firms, small businesses, small business ecosystems, and HBCUs and other higher-education institutions	25%
Quality of Proposed Team. Qualifications, relevant expertise, and capacity of the project manager and key personnel assigned	15%
Creativity and Innovation. Originality and strategic value of the proposed ideas and approach	5%
Cost Proposal. Reasonableness and overall value of the proposed fees relative to the scope of services	5%
Total	100%

9.2 Evaluation Process. Bowie BIC will convene an evaluation committee to review and score all responsive proposals in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth above. The evaluation committee may request clarifications, additional information, or oral presentations from one or more Proposers during the evaluation process. Scoring will be conducted as follows: each member of the evaluation committee will independently review and score every responsive proposal against each evaluation category set forth in Section 9.0 using a zero-to-one hundred (0–100) point scale, applying the Scoring Rubric set forth immediately below. For each proposal, each member's raw category score will be multiplied by the percentage weight assigned to that category to produce a weighted category score, and that member's weighted category scores will be summed to yield the member's total score (out of 100) for the proposal. The individual members' total scores will then be averaged to produce a single composite total score for each proposal, and proposals will be ranked from highest to lowest composite total score for purposes of the best value determination described in Section 9.5.

9.3 Scoring Rubric. The following self-contained scoring rubric will be used by each evaluation committee member to score each candidate response against each evaluation category. Raw scores are assigned on the 0–100-point scale defined below and are then weighted and combined as described in Section 9.2 above.

Evaluation Category (Weight)	Scoring Guidance and 0–100 Point Rating Scale
Rating Scale. Applies to every category below	Excellent (90–100): comprehensive, fully responsive, and exceptional. Good (75–89): strong and responsive with only minor gaps. Fair (60–74): adequate but with notable gaps or limited detail. Poor (0–59): weak, incomplete, or non-responsive.
Understanding of COE Mission and Communications/Public Affairs Needs (25%)	Score how clearly and accurately the Proposer demonstrates understanding of the COE mission, its HBCU, SBA 8(a) firm, and small-business participants, its federal-marketplace context, and the COE's communications and public affairs needs.
Strategic Communications, Storytelling, and Public Affairs Approach (25%)	Score the quality, feasibility, and strategic soundness of the proposed strategic communications, impact storytelling, and public affairs methodology, including how well it advances the COE 2.0 model.
Relevant Experience and Past Performance (25%)	Score the depth, relevance, and demonstrated results of the Proposer's prior work and past performance. Award the highest scores to

	Proposers showing substantial, verifiable experience supporting federal programs, SBA programs and SBA 8(a) firms, small businesses and small business ecosystems, and HBCUs and other higher-education institutions. Proposals showing little or no such experience should score in the Fair or Poor range for this category.
Quality of Proposed Team (15%)	Score the qualifications, relevant expertise, and capacity of the project manager and key personnel assigned to the engagement.
Creativity and Innovation (5%)	Score the originality and strategic value of the proposed ideas and approach.
Cost Proposal (5%)	Score the reasonableness and overall value of the proposed fees relative to the scope of services.

9.4 Interviews. Bowie BIC reserves the right to conduct interviews with one or more Proposers as part of the evaluation and selection process. Proposers may be required to present their proposed approach and respond to questions from the evaluation committee.

9.5 Best Value Determination. Bowie BIC will select the Proposer that offers the best value to Bowie BIC, considering all evaluation criteria. The lowest-cost proposal will not necessarily be selected.

9.6 Reference Checks. Bowie BIC reserves the right to contact references provided by Proposers and to conduct independent reference checks and background investigations.

10.0 - Procurement Timeline

10.1 Key Dates. The anticipated procurement timeline is as follows:

Activity	Date
RFP Release	October 19, 2026
Questions Due	October 23, 2026
Responses Issued	October 27, 2026
Proposal Due	November 2, 2026
Proposal Review	November 3-6, 2026
Interviews (if needed)	November 9-10, 2026
Award Notification	November 12, 2026

Contract Execution	November 13-17, 2026
Project Kickoff	November 23, 2026

- 10.2 Modifications.** Bowie BIC reserves the right to modify the procurement timeline at any time by posting an amendment to this RFP or by written notice to all Proposers.

11.0 - Contract Term and Renewal Options

- 11.1 Initial Term.** The initial contract term will be one (1) year from the effective date of the Professional Services Agreement.
- 11.2 Renewal Options.** Bowie BIC reserves the option to renew the contract for up to TWO (2) additional one-year periods, subject to satisfactory performance by the Contractor, availability of funding, and mutual agreement of the parties.
- 11.3 Renewal Process.** Bowie BIC will provide written notice to the Contractor no later than SIXTY (60) days prior to the expiration of the then-current term if Bowie BIC intends to exercise a renewal option. The parties will negotiate any adjustments to scope, deliverables, or pricing for the renewal term.
- 11.4 No Guarantee of Renewal.** Nothing in this RFP or any resulting contract will obligate Bowie BIC to exercise any renewal option. The decision to renew will be at Bowie BIC's sole discretion.

12.0 - Legal Terms and Conditions

- 12.1 Contract Formation.** The selected Contractor will enter into a Professional Services Agreement with Bowie BIC outlining the scope of work, deliverables, payment terms, reporting requirements, confidentiality obligations, intellectual property rights, and other terms and conditions.
- 12.2 Independent Contractor Relationship.** The Contractor will perform all services as an independent contractor and not as an employee, agent, partner, or joint venturer of Bowie BIC. The Contractor will be solely responsible for all taxes, withholdings, insurance, and other obligations arising from the Contractor's performance under the contract.
- 12.3 Compliance with Professional Standards.** The Contractor will perform all services in accordance with the highest professional standards applicable to the communications, public relations, and public affairs industries.

- 12.4 Subcontracting.** The Contractor may not subcontract any portion of the services without Bowie BIC's prior written consent. Any approved subcontractor will be bound by the same terms and conditions applicable to the Contractor.
- 12.5 Entire Agreement.** The Professional Services Agreement, together with this RFP and the selected Contractor's proposal, will constitute the entire agreement between the parties and will supersede all prior negotiations, representations, and agreements, whether written or oral.
- 12.6 Amendments.** The Professional Services Agreement may be amended only by a written instrument signed by authorized representatives of both parties.
- 12.7 Waiver.** No waiver of any provision of the Professional Services Agreement will be effective unless in writing and signed by the party against whom the waiver is sought to be enforced. No waiver of any breach or default will constitute a waiver of any subsequent breach or default.
- 12.8 Severability.** If any provision of the Professional Services Agreement is held to be invalid, illegal, or unenforceable under applicable law, such provision will be deemed modified to the minimum extent necessary to make it valid and enforceable, or if such modification is not possible, the provision will be severed from the agreement, and the remaining provisions will remain in full force and effect.
- 12.9 Force Majeure.** Neither party will be liable for any failure or delay in performance due to causes beyond its reasonable control, including but not limited to acts of God, war, terrorism, civil unrest, labor disputes, fire, flood, pandemic, epidemic, government action, or failure of public utilities or common carriers, provided that the affected party promptly notifies the other party of the force majeure event and uses commercially reasonable efforts to resume performance as soon as practicable.
- 12.10 Notices.** All notices required or permitted under the Professional Services Agreement must be in writing and delivered by hand, courier, certified mail (return receipt requested), or electronic mail to the addresses set forth in the agreement. Notices will be deemed given upon receipt or, if by electronic mail, upon transmission with confirmation of delivery.
- 12.11 Survival.** The provisions of the Professional Services Agreement relating to confidentiality, intellectual property, indemnification, limitation of liability, governing law, and dispute resolution will survive the expiration or termination of the agreement.

13.0 - Confidentiality and Protection of Information

13.1 Definition of Confidential Information. "Confidential Information" means all non-public information disclosed by Bowie BIC to the Contractor in connection with the RFP process or the performance of services under the resulting contract, including but not limited to information concerning the COE's programs, participants, partners, stakeholders, business strategies, financial information, technical data, proprietary methodologies, and any information identified as confidential or that reasonably should be understood to be confidential given the nature of the information and the circumstances of disclosure.

13.2 Confidentiality Obligations. The Contractor will:

- a. Hold all Confidential Information in strict confidence;
- b. Use Confidential Information solely for the purpose of performing services under the Professional Services Agreement;
- c. Not disclose Confidential Information to any third party without Bowie BIC's prior written consent, except to the Contractor's employees, subcontractors, or professional advisors who have a legitimate need to know and who are bound by confidentiality obligations at least as protective as those set forth herein;
- d. Protect Confidential Information using the same degree of care the Contractor uses to protect its own confidential information, but in no event less than reasonable care;
- e. Promptly notify Bowie BIC of any unauthorized use or disclosure of Confidential Information; and
- f. Cooperate with Bowie BIC in any effort to prevent or remedy any unauthorized use or disclosure of Confidential Information.

13.3 Exceptions. Confidential Information does not include information that:

- a. Was publicly available at the time of disclosure or thereafter becomes publicly available through no breach of this RFP or the Professional Services Agreement by the Contractor;
- b. Was rightfully in the Contractor's possession without confidentiality restrictions prior to disclosure by Bowie BIC;
- c. Is rightfully received by the Contractor from a third party without confidentiality restrictions and without breach of any obligation to Bowie BIC; or
- d. Is independently developed by the Contractor without use of or reference to Bowie BIC's Confidential Information.

13.4 Required Disclosures. If the Contractor is required by law, regulation, court order, or other legal process to disclose any Confidential Information, the Contractor will:

- a. Promptly notify Bowie BIC of such requirement prior to disclosure, unless prohibited by law;

- b. Cooperate with Bowie BIC in seeking a protective order or other appropriate remedy; and
- c. Disclose only the minimum amount of Confidential Information required by law, regulation, or legal process.

13.5 Return or Destruction of Confidential Information. Upon the expiration or termination of the Professional Services Agreement, or upon Bowie BIC's written request at any time, the Contractor will promptly:

- a. Return to Bowie BIC all Confidential Information in the Contractor's possession or control, including all copies, extracts, and derivatives thereof; or
- b. At Bowie BIC's election, destroy all Confidential Information and certify such destruction in writing to Bowie BIC.

13.6 Protection of Participant Information. The Contractor acknowledges that Confidential Information may include personal, proprietary, or sensitive information concerning COE participants, including small businesses, SBA 8(a) firms, and HBCUs. The Contractor will implement appropriate administrative, technical, and physical safeguards to protect such information from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure.

13.7 Duration of Confidentiality Obligations. The Contractor's confidentiality obligations will survive the expiration or termination of the Professional Services Agreement and will continue for a period of FIVE (5) years from the date of disclosure of the applicable Confidential Information, or for such longer period as may be required by law or the nature of the information.

13.8 Equitable Relief. The Contractor acknowledges that any breach or threatened breach of this Section 13.0 may cause irreparable harm to Bowie BIC for which monetary damages would be an inadequate remedy. Accordingly, Bowie BIC will be entitled to seek equitable relief, including injunctive relief and specific performance, in addition to any other remedies available at law or in equity.

14.0 - Intellectual Property and Ownership of Work Products

14.1 Definitions.

- a. "Work Products" means all materials, deliverables, content, documentation, reports, strategies, frameworks, messaging, stories, articles, press releases, social media content, presentations, graphics, photographs, videos, data, analyses, and other tangible or intangible work product created, developed, or prepared by the Contractor specifically for the COE or Bowie BIC in the course of performing

services under the Professional Services Agreement, including all Phase I, Phase II, Phase III, and Phase IV deliverables set forth in Section 4.0 herein.

- b. "Pre-Existing Materials" means materials, methodologies, processes, tools, templates, or other intellectual property owned by or licensed to the Contractor prior to the effective date of the Professional Services Agreement or developed by the Contractor independently of the services performed under the agreement.
- 14.2 Ownership of Work Products.** All Work Products will be the sole and exclusive property of Bowie BIC. The Contractor hereby assigns, transfers, and conveys to Bowie BIC all right, title, and interest in and to the Work Products, including all copyrights, trademark rights, and other intellectual property rights therein.
- 14.3 Work Made for Hire.** To the extent permitted by law, all Work Products will be deemed "works made for hire" as that term is defined in the United States Copyright Act, 17 U.S.C. § 101. To the extent any Work Products do not qualify as works made for hire, the Contractor hereby irrevocably assigns to Bowie BIC all right, title, and interest in and to such Work Products, including all intellectual property rights therein.
- 14.4 Moral Rights Waiver.** The Contractor irrevocably waives any "moral rights" or similar rights in the Work Products to the extent permitted by applicable law, including any right to attribution, integrity, or to prevent modification or destruction of the Work Products.
- 14.5 Pre-Existing Materials.** Pre-Existing Materials will remain the property of the Contractor or the Contractor's licensors. To the extent any Pre-Existing Materials are incorporated into or used to create Work Products, the Contractor hereby grants to Bowie BIC a perpetual, irrevocable, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license to use, reproduce, modify, distribute, display, and create derivative works from such Pre-Existing Materials solely in connection with Bowie BIC's use of the Work Products.
- 14.6 Third-Party Materials.** The Contractor will not incorporate any third-party materials into the Work Products without Bowie BIC's prior written consent. If third-party materials are incorporated with Bowie BIC's consent, the Contractor will obtain all necessary licenses, permissions, and releases to permit Bowie BIC to use such materials in connection with the Work Products.
- 14.7 Permitted Use by Contractor.** The Contractor may use general knowledge, skills, experience, and methodologies gained in the course of performing services under the Professional Services Agreement for other clients, provided that such use does not involve disclosure of Bowie BIC's Confidential Information or use of Work Products owned by Bowie BIC. The Contractor may include a general description of the engagement in the

Contractor's client list and marketing materials (e.g., "strategic communications services for a federally supported nonprofit program"), subject to Bowie BIC's prior written approval, but may not disclose specific Confidential Information or proprietary details without Bowie BIC's written consent.

- 14.8 Cooperation.** The Contractor will execute any documents and take any further actions reasonably requested by Bowie BIC to evidence, perfect, or enforce Bowie BIC's ownership rights in the Work Products.

15.0 - Conflict of Interest Requirements

- 15.1 Disclosure Obligation.** The Proposer must disclose in its proposal any actual, potential, or apparent conflicts of interest that may arise from the Proposer's performance of services under this RFP, including but not limited to:

- a. Current or prior representation of entities or individuals whose interests may conflict with those of Bowie BIC or the COE;
- b. Current or prior representation of competitors, adversaries, or entities with interests adverse to Bowie BIC, the COE, COE participants, or key stakeholders;
- c. Financial interests in entities that may benefit from or be affected by the Contractor's work for Bowie BIC or the COE;
- d. Personal or business relationships with COE participants, stakeholders, competitors, or other parties that may create a conflict of interest or the appearance thereof; and
- e. Any other circumstance that may compromise the Contractor's independence, objectivity, or loyalty to Bowie BIC.

- 15.2 Prohibition on Conflicting Engagements.** During the term of the Professional Services Agreement, the Contractor will not accept or perform services for any client or entity whose interests conflict with or are adverse to those of Bowie BIC or the COE without Bowie BIC's prior written consent.

- 15.3 Continuing Disclosure.** The Contractor will promptly notify Bowie BIC in writing if any actual, potential, or apparent conflict of interest arises during the term of the Professional Services Agreement.

- 15.4 Mitigation and Remediation.** If a conflict of interest is disclosed or discovered, Bowie BIC may, in its sole discretion:

- a. Require the Contractor to implement measures to mitigate or eliminate the conflict;
- b. Require the Contractor to recuse itself from certain tasks or decisions;
- c. Require the Contractor to terminate the conflicting engagement or relationship; or

- d. Terminate the Professional Services Agreement in accordance with Section 18.0 herein.

15.5 Representation. By submitting a proposal, the Proposer represents and warrants that it has conducted a diligent inquiry into potential conflicts of interest and has disclosed all material conflicts in its proposal.

16.0 - Compliance with Laws and Regulations

16.1 General Compliance Obligation. The Contractor will comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, ordinances, and requirements in performing services under the Professional Services Agreement, including but not limited to:

- a. Federal and Maryland employment, labor, wage and hour, and workplace safety laws;
- b. Federal and Maryland tax laws and withholding requirements;
- c. Federal and Maryland anti-discrimination and civil rights laws;
- d. Federal and Maryland data privacy and security laws;
- e. Federal laws governing nonprofit organizations and charitable solicitations;
- f. Federal procurement regulations applicable to federally funded programs;
- g. Intellectual property laws, including copyright, trademark, and patent laws;
- h. Advertising, endorsement, and consumer protection laws; and
- i. All other applicable laws and regulations governing the Contractor's business operations and the provision of communications, public relations, and public affairs services.

16.2 Maryland Business Registration. If required by law, the Contractor will be registered to do business in the State of Maryland and will maintain such registration in good standing throughout the term of the Professional Services Agreement.

16.3 Lobbying Restrictions. If the Contractor engages in lobbying activities on behalf of Bowie BIC or the COE, the Contractor will comply with all applicable federal and Maryland lobbying registration, disclosure, and reporting requirements, including the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995, 2 U.S.C. §§ 1601 et seq., and Maryland lobbying laws. As a flow-down requirement of the SBA Federal Assistance Award, no appropriated federal funds, including Project Funds, may be used directly or indirectly to influence or attempt to influence a Member of Congress or any government official regarding any legislation, policy, or appropriation in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1913, and the Contractor will comply with the restrictions, certification, and disclosure requirements of 31 U.S.C. § 1352.

- 16.4 Federal Funding Compliance.** The Contractor acknowledges that the COE is a federally supported initiative and that services performed under the Professional Services Agreement may be subject to federal funding restrictions, requirements, and oversight. The Contractor will comply with all applicable federal grant and funding requirements, including:
- a. Restrictions on the use of federal funds for lobbying or political activities;
 - b. Requirements for financial and programmatic reporting;
 - c. Auditing and record-retention requirements;
 - d. Debarment and suspension requirements; and
 - e. Any other requirements imposed by the federal funding source.
- 16.5 Debarment Certification.** The Contractor certifies that it is not presently debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, declared ineligible, or voluntarily excluded from participation in federal or state contracts or assistance programs. The Contractor will immediately notify Bowie BIC if it becomes debarred, suspended, or otherwise ineligible during the term of the Professional Services Agreement.
- 16.6 Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination.** The Contractor will comply with all applicable federal and Maryland equal opportunity and nondiscrimination laws and will not discriminate against any employee, applicant, participant, or other person on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by law.
- 16.7 Data Privacy.** The Contractor will comply with all applicable data privacy and security laws in collecting, using, storing, and disclosing personal information, including the Maryland Personal Information Protection Act, Md. Code Ann., Com. Law §§ 14-3501 et seq., and any other applicable federal or state privacy laws.
- 16.8 Compliance Reporting.** The Contractor will promptly notify Bowie BIC in writing of any violation of applicable laws or regulations, any government investigation or enforcement action, or any other compliance matter that may affect the Contractor's performance under the Professional Services Agreement.
- 16.9 Mandatory Disclosures.** As a subrecipient of federal financial assistance flowing through Bowie BIC under the SBA Federal Assistance Award, the Contractor must disclose in a timely manner, in writing, to Bowie BIC (as the prime/pass-through entity) and to the SBA Office of Inspector General all information related to violations of federal criminal law involving fraud, bribery, or gratuity violations potentially affecting the federal award. Disclosures to the SBA must be sent to: U.S. Small Business Administration, Attention: Office of Grants Management, 409 3rd Street SW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20416; and U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Inspector General, 409 3rd Street SW, 5th

Floor, Washington, DC 20416. Failure to make required disclosures can result in any of the remedies for noncompliance, including suspension or debarment.

- 16.10 Drug-Free Workplace.** The Contractor will maintain a drug-free workplace in compliance with the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988 (41 U.S.C. § 701 et seq.) and the government-wide implementing regulations at 2 CFR part 182, as adopted by the SBA at 2 CFR part 382, Subpart B (or Subpart C if the Contractor is an individual). Failure to comply with these requirements may be cause for suspension or debarment.
- 16.11 Trafficking Victims Protection.** In accordance with Section 106(g) of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, as amended (22 U.S.C. 7104(g)), and 2 C.F.R. Part 175, the Contractor, its employees, any subrecipients, and their employees may not, during the term of the award: (a) engage in severe forms of trafficking in persons; (b) procure a commercial sex act; or (c) use forced labor in the performance of the award or any subaward. Bowie BIC and the SBA may unilaterally terminate this engagement, without penalty, for any violation of these prohibitions. The Contractor must inform Bowie BIC immediately of any information it receives from any source alleging such a violation, and the Contractor must include the requirements of this paragraph in any subaward it makes to a private entity.
- 16.12 Salary and Compensation Limitation.** Consistent with the Consolidated Appropriations Act and applicable SBA award terms, award funds may not be used to pay the direct salary of any individual at a rate in excess of Executive Level II of the Federal Executive Pay scale (as adjusted from time to time by Executive Order), exclusive of fringe benefits and any income earned outside the individual's duties to the organization. This salary limitation applies to subawards and subcontracts under the SBA grant, including this engagement.
- 16.13 Recipient Integrity and Performance Reporting.** In accordance with Appendix XII to 2 CFR Part 200, the Contractor will report information about any civil, criminal, or administrative proceeding connected with the award or performance of a federal grant, cooperative agreement, or procurement contract that reached its final disposition during the most recent five-year period and that resulted in: a criminal conviction; a civil finding of fault and liability with payment of a monetary fine, penalty, reimbursement, restitution, or damages of \$5,000 or more; or an administrative finding of fault and liability resulting in a monetary fine or penalty of \$5,000 or more or reimbursement, restitution, or damages in excess of \$100,000.
- 16.14 Whistleblower Protection.** The Contractor will comply with, and will inform its employees of, the whistleblower protections afforded to employees of grantees, contractors, and subcontractors who report suspected fraud, waste, or abuse in SBA

programs or operations. Federal law prohibits reprisal against an employee who discloses such information to the SBA Office of Inspector General. Suspected fraud may be reported to the SBA OIG Hotline at 1-800-767-0385 or OIGHotline@sba.gov.

- 16.15 Civil Rights and Accessibility.** In administering services supported with Project Funds, the Contractor will comply with all applicable federal civil rights laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.), and § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794), and will ensure equal access without regard to race, color, national origin, disability, age, and, in certain circumstances, sex and religion. The Contractor will take reasonable steps to provide meaningful access to persons with limited English proficiency and to persons with disabilities, consistent with Executive Order 13985 on advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities. All facilities used to provide services to the public in connection with this project must be accessible to persons with disabilities.
- 16.16 Acknowledgement of SBA Support.** All materials produced in whole or in part with Project Funds must include the acknowledgment of support statement: “Funded [in part] through a Grant with the U.S. Small Business Administration.” For materials featuring editorial content, the Contractor must use the alternate statement: “Funded in part through a Grant with the U.S. Small Business Administration. All opinions, conclusions, and/or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the SBA.” The acknowledgment statement must appear verbatim and may not be altered. Any use of the SBA logo must comply with SBA's Graphic Standards; the logo and acknowledgment statement may not be used on stationery or business cards or in connection with fundraising, lobbying, or any endorsement of any goods, service, entity, or individual.
- 16.17 Non-Transferability.** Neither this engagement nor the underlying SBA award may be transferred or assigned, in whole or in part, without prior written approval from the SBA. No interest in the award may be conferred upon a third party, and the award may not be pledged as collateral or security. This requirement is in addition to, and does not limit, the subcontracting restrictions set forth in Section 12.0.
- 16.18 Access to Records and Audit.** The Contractor will maintain complete and accurate records and supporting documentation in sufficient detail to facilitate a thorough financial, programmatic, and legal compliance audit or examination of the project, and will make such records available to the SBA, its agents, the SBA Office of Inspector General, and federal investigators on demand, providing unrestricted access to review and make copies of all products, materials, and data, including those prepared or stored electronically. The

Contractor will cooperate with all programmatic and financial examinations conducted by the SBA, its agents, or contractors.

16.19 American-Manufactured Goods. As a flow-down requirement of the SBA Federal Assistance Award, when using Project Funds to procure supplies and/or equipment, the Contractor will purchase American-manufactured goods to the maximum extent practicable. An American-manufactured good (also known as a domestic end product) is a product for which the cost of its component parts that were mined, produced, or manufactured in the United States exceeds fifty percent (50%) of the total cost of all its components. For further guidance regarding what constitutes an American-manufactured good, see 48 C.F.R. Part 25.

16.20 Governing Authority and Order of Precedence. The SBA Federal Assistance Award, and any Project Funds flowed down under it, are subject to the following requirements and representations, whether stated explicitly or incorporated by reference, in the following order of precedence: (a) the statutes, regulations, and policy documents cited in the Notice of Award and any other relevant, subsequently enacted laws; (b) the SBA award terms and conditions; and (c) the accepted application for the Award, including all forms and assurances and any subsequently approved additions or modifications. In the event of a conflict among these requirements, the order of precedence set forth above will determine which prevails. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, all deadlines will be measured in calendar days.

16.21 Non-federal Entity Responsibilities; Data Collection and Performance Measurement. As a flow-down requirement of the SBA Federal Assistance Award, the Contractor will be responsive to SBA requests for information and communication; promptly report any changes to key personnel or contact information; cooperate with all programmatic and financial examinations and promptly address any findings; and participate in SBA surveys and studies regarding the effectiveness and outcomes of the program. In addition, consistent with the Government Performance and Results (GPRA) Modernization Act of 2010, the Contractor will collect and report evaluation data sufficient to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the program and will comply with the applicable performance goals, milestones, and expected outcomes.

17.0 - Insurance and Indemnification

17.1 Insurance Requirements. The Contractor will obtain and maintain, at its sole cost and expense, the following minimum insurance coverage throughout the term of the Professional Services Agreement:

- a. **Commercial General Liability Insurance** with minimum limits of \$1,000,000 per occurrence and \$2,000,000 general aggregate, covering bodily injury, property damage, and personal and advertising injury;
- b. **Professional Liability Insurance (Errors and Omissions)** with minimum limits of \$1,000,000 per claim and \$2,000,000 aggregate, covering claims arising from the Contractor's professional services, acts, errors, or omissions;
- c. **Workers' Compensation Insurance** as required by Maryland law, and Employers' Liability Insurance with minimum limits of \$500,000 per accident, \$500,000 per employee for disease, and \$500,000 policy limit for disease; and
- d. **Cyber Liability Insurance** with minimum limits of \$1,000,000 per claim and \$1,000,000 aggregate, covering data breaches, privacy violations, network security failures, and related claims, if the Contractor will have access to or custody of personally identifiable information, Confidential Information, or sensitive data.

17.2 Certificate of Insurance. Prior to commencing services, the Contractor will provide Bowie BIC with certificates of insurance evidencing the required coverage. The certificates will name Bowie BIC as an additional insured on the Commercial General Liability policy and will provide that coverage may not be canceled, non-renewed, or materially changed without at least THIRTY (30) days' prior written notice to Bowie BIC.

17.3 Indemnification by Contractor. The Contractor will defend, indemnify, and hold harmless Bowie BIC, its officers, directors, employees, agents, and representatives (collectively, the "Indemnified Parties") from and against any and all claims, demands, actions, suits, proceedings, losses, damages, liabilities, costs, and expenses (including reasonable attorneys' fees) arising out of or resulting from:

- a. The Contractor's negligence, willful misconduct, or breach of the Professional Services Agreement;
- b. Any bodily injury, death, or property damage caused by the Contractor or its employees, agents, or subcontractors;
- c. Any infringement or alleged infringement of any intellectual property rights arising from the Contractor's Work Products or services;
- d. Any violation of applicable laws or regulations by the Contractor;
- e. Any breach of the Contractor's confidentiality obligations under Section 13.0; or
- f. Any claims by the Contractor's employees, subcontractors, or agents arising out of their engagement by the Contractor.

17.4 Defense and Settlement. Bowie BIC will promptly notify the Contractor of any claim subject to indemnification under this Section 17.0. The Contractor will have the right to control the defense and settlement of any such claim, provided that the Contractor may not settle any claim in a manner that imposes any obligation or liability on Bowie BIC or

requires any admission of liability by Bowie BIC without Bowie BIC's prior written consent. Bowie BIC will have the right to participate in the defense of any claim at its own expense.

18.0- Limitation of Liability.

18.1 EXCLUSION OF INDIRECT DAMAGES. EXCEPT AS OTHERWISE PROVIDED IN SECTION 18.3, IN NO EVENT WILL EITHER PARTY BE LIABLE UNDER THIS AGREEMENT, INCLUDING ANY STATEMENT OF WORK, FOR ANY CONSEQUENTIAL, INCIDENTAL, INDIRECT, EXEMPLARY, SPECIAL, OR PUNITIVE DAMAGES WHETHER ARISING OUT OF BREACH OF CONTRACT, TORT (INCLUDING NEGLIGENCE), OR OTHERWISE, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER SUCH DAMAGE WAS FORESEEABLE AND WHETHER EITHER PARTY HAS BEEN ADVISED OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGES.

18.2 Cap on monetary liability. Except as otherwise provided in Section 18, in no event will either party's liability under this agreement/any statement of work exceed seventy-five thousand dollars, the aggregate fees and amounts already paid and amounts that have accrued but not yet been paid.

18.3 Exceptions. The exclusions and limitations in Section 18.1 and Section 18.2 shall not apply to:

- a. Losses arising out of or relating to a party's failure to comply with its obligations under Section 13 (Confidentiality) or Section 14 (Intellectual Property Rights);
- b. a party's indemnification obligations under Section 17 (Indemnification);
- c. Losses arising out of or relating to a party's gross negligence, willful misconduct, or intentional acts;
- d. Losses for death, bodily injury, or damage to real or tangible individual property arising out of or relating to a party's negligent or more culpable acts or omissions;
- e. Losses to the extent covered by a party's insurance or
- f. a party's obligation to pay attorneys' fees and court costs.

18.4 Survival. The insurance and indemnification obligations set forth in this Section 18.0 will survive the expiration or termination of the Professional Services Agreement.

19.0 - Termination Provisions

19.1 Termination for Convenience. Bowie BIC may terminate the Professional Services Agreement at any time, with or without cause, upon THIRTY (30) days' prior written notice to the Contractor.

19.2 Termination for Cause. Either party may terminate the Professional Services Agreement immediately upon written notice to the other party if the other party:

- a. Materially breaches any provision of the agreement and fails to cure such breach within FIFTEEN (15) days after receiving written notice specifying the breach;
- b. Becomes insolvent, makes an assignment for the benefit of creditors, files or has filed against it a petition in bankruptcy or similar proceeding, or has a receiver or trustee appointed for its property; or
- c. Ceases to do business in the ordinary course.

19.3 Termination for non-appropriation. If the Professional Services Agreement is dependent upon the availability of federal, state, or other funding, Bowie BIC may terminate the agreement immediately upon written notice to the Contractor if such funding is not appropriated, is withdrawn, is reduced, or otherwise becomes unavailable for any reason.

19.4 Effect of Termination. Upon any termination of the Professional Services Agreement:

- a. The Contractor will immediately cease performing services, except as Bowie BIC may direct in writing to facilitate an orderly transition;
- b. The Contractor will deliver to Bowie BIC all Work Products, Confidential Information, and other materials in the Contractor's possession or control;
- c. Bowie BIC will pay the Contractor for all services satisfactorily performed and accepted prior to the effective date of termination, less any amounts owed by the Contractor to Bowie BIC;
- d. The Contractor will refund to Bowie BIC any payments received for services not yet performed; and
- e. All obligations under Section 13.0 (Confidentiality), Section 14.0 (Intellectual Property), Section 16.0 (Compliance), and Section 18.0 (Indemnification) will survive termination.

19.5 Transition Assistance. Upon termination for any reason, the Contractor will cooperate with Bowie BIC and provide reasonable transition assistance to facilitate the transfer of services to Bowie BIC or a successor contractor, including providing access to Work Products, files, documentation, and other materials necessary to ensure continuity of services.

19.6 No Penalty for Early Termination. Bowie BIC will not be liable for any penalty, early termination fee, or other charge solely by reason of exercising its termination rights under Section 19.0.

20.0 - Representations, Certifications, and Disclosures

20.1 Authority and Capacity. By submitting a proposal, the Proposer represents and warrants that:

- a. The Proposer is duly organized, validly existing, and in good standing under the laws of its jurisdiction of organization;
- b. The Proposer has full power and authority to submit the proposal and to enter into and perform the Professional Services Agreement;
- c. The execution and performance of the Professional Services Agreement will not violate any law, regulation, court order, or contractual obligation binding on the Proposer; and
- d. All information provided in the proposal is true, accurate, and complete.

20.2 Qualifications and Experience. The Proposer represents and warrants that:

- a. It possesses the necessary qualifications, experience, expertise, personnel, and resources to perform all services required by this RFP;
- b. All personnel assigned to perform services will be qualified and competent to perform their assigned tasks; and
- c. All work samples, references, and other materials submitted with the proposal accurately represent the Proposer's capabilities and past performance.

20.3 Financial Capacity. The Proposer represents and warrants that it is financially solvent and has the financial capacity to perform all services required by this RFP without reliance on payments from Bowie BIC to meet current operating obligations.

20.4 No Debarment or Suspension. The Proposer certifies that it is not presently debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, declared ineligible, or voluntarily excluded from participation in federal or state contracts, grants, or assistance programs, and that no principal, officer, director, or key employee of the Proposer is so debarred or suspended.

20.5 Conflicts of Interest. The Proposer certifies that it has disclosed all actual, potential, or apparent conflicts of interest in accordance with Section 15.0 herein.

20.6 Compliance with Laws. The Proposer certifies that it is in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations and that it has all necessary licenses, permits, and registrations to perform the services described in this RFP.

20.7 No Collusion. The Proposer certifies that its proposal has been prepared independently without collusion, consultation, communication, or agreement with any other proposer or potential proposer for the purpose of restricting competition.

20.8 Litigation and Investigations. The Proposer must disclose in its proposal any pending or threatened litigation, government investigation, or administrative proceeding that may materially affect the Proposer's ability to perform services under this RFP.

20.9 Ownership and Affiliation. The Proposer must disclose in its proposal:

- a. The names and addresses of all owners, partners, members, or shareholders holding a TEN PERCENT (10%) or greater ownership interest in the Proposer;
- b. Any parent, subsidiary, or affiliated entities; and
- c. Any business relationships or affiliations with current or former Bowie BIC employees, directors, or officers.

20.10 Continuing Obligation. All representations, certifications, and disclosures made by the Proposer in connection with this RFP will be deemed continuing and will remain true and accurate throughout the term of the Professional Services Agreement. The Contractor will promptly notify Bowie BIC in writing if any representation, certification, or disclosure becomes untrue or inaccurate.

21.0 - Rights Reserved by Bowie BIC

21.1 General Reservation of Rights. Bowie BIC reserves the right to exercise any or all of the following rights in its sole discretion:

- a. Reject any or all proposals;
- b. Accept or reject any proposal in whole or in part;
- c. Waive minor irregularities, informalities, or deficiencies in any proposal;
- d. Request clarification, additional information, or revised proposals from any or all Proposers;
- e. Negotiate the terms, scope, deliverables, or pricing with one or more Proposers;
- f. Modify the scope of work, deliverables, or contract terms;
- g. Cancel, suspend, or postpone this RFP process at any time;
- h. Reissue this RFP or issue a new RFP for the same or similar services;
- i. Award a contract to other than the lowest-cost Proposer;
- j. Award separate contracts for different components or phases of the scope of work;
- k. Conduct site visits, interviews, or presentations with one or more Proposers;
- l. Verify any information provided by Proposers, including through reference checks, background investigations, or independent inquiries;
- m. Reject any proposal that is incomplete, conditional, obscure, or that contains irregularities of any kind; and
- n. Exercise any other rights or prerogatives available under applicable law or procurement best practices.

21.2 No Obligation. This RFP does not commit Bowie BIC to award a contract, to pay any costs incurred in the preparation or submission of proposals, or to procure or contract for services.

21.3 Proposal Costs. All costs associated with preparing and submitting a proposal in response to this RFP will be borne solely by the Proposer. Bowie BIC will not reimburse any Proposer for any costs incurred in connection with responding to this RFP.

21.4 Ownership of Proposals. All proposals submitted in response to this RFP will become the property of Bowie BIC and will not be returned to Proposers.

21.5 Public Disclosure. Proposals may be subject to public disclosure under applicable Maryland public information laws. Proposers that submit proprietary or confidential information should clearly identify such information and provide justification for non-disclosure. Bowie BIC will make reasonable efforts to protect such information to the extent permitted by law but makes no guarantee that any information will be withheld from disclosure if required by law.

21.6 Modification or Withdrawal of Proposals. Proposers may modify or withdraw submitted proposals at any time prior to the proposal due date by submitting written notice to the contact person identified in Section 23.0. Modifications or withdrawals received after the proposal due date will not be considered.

22.0 - Submission Instructions

22.1 Submission Deadline. Proposals must be submitted electronically in PDF format no later than November 2, 2026, at 5:00 pm Eastern Standard Time.

22.2 Submission Method. Proposals must be submitted via electronic mail to the address specified in Section 23.0 herein.

22.3 Subject Line. The subject line of the submission email must read: "RFP COE-COMM-001 Submission – [Firm Name]."

22.4 Late Proposals. Proposals received after the submission deadline will not be considered.

22.5 Questions and Inquiries. All questions concerning this RFP must be submitted in writing via electronic mail to the contact person identified in Section 23.0, no later than 5:00 pm on October 23, 2026. Bowie BIC will issue written responses to all questions by October 27, 2026. Responses will be distributed to all known Proposers.

22.6 Prohibited Communications. From the date of issuance of this RFP until award of a contract, Proposers may not communicate with any Bowie BIC employee, officer, director, or representative concerning this RFP except through the designated contact person

identified in Section 23.0. Violation of this provision may result in disqualification of the Proposer.

23.0 - Contact Information

23.1 Designated Contact Person. All questions, inquiries, and proposal submissions must be directed to:

Rhenodda Moton
Program Manager
Center of Excellence
Bowie Business Innovation Center
Email: Rhenodda.moton@bowiebic.com
Phone: 443-570-3069

23.2 Bowie BIC Address

14000 Jericho Park Road,
ELLC A-131 Bowie, MD 20715

24.0 - Appendices

24.1 Optional Supporting Materials. Bowie BIC may provide the following supporting materials as appendices to this RFP or make them available upon request:

- a. COE overview;
- b. Program statistics;
- c. Success stories;
- d. Partner information;
- e. Previous reports;
- f. COE 2.0 overview; and
- g. Other relevant program materials.

24.2 Additional Information. Proposers may request additional information or supporting materials by contacting the designated contact person in Section 23.0.