Request for Proposals (RFP)

for Evaluation and Technical Assistance Services

Tennessee Technology Workforce Collaborative

Due October 7, 2022 (Revised 9-20-2022)

PERSEVERE

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REVISED on September 20, 2022

Submission Deadline: October 7, 2022 ~~September 26, 2022~~**, by 5:00 pm CDT**

1 INVITATION

Persevere is seeking proposals for the independent evaluation of a grant-funded workforce development program to be implemented at multiple locations throughout Tennessee. This RFP also includes a request for technical assistance services related to data collection.

Questions about this RFP can be submitted to Veronica Robbins at vrobbins@perseverenow.org. All questions and answers will be posted at https://www.perseverenow.org/tech-alliance/.

Final proposals are to be submitted via email to vrobbins@perseverenow.org **no later than 5:00 pm Central time on** ~~September 26, 2022~~ **October 7, 2022.**

While not required, we request that applicants send an email indicating their intent to apply to the email address noted above.

2 BACKGROUND

Persevere is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering justice-impacted and at-risk individuals through innovative technology-focused workforce development and career preparation support services that give real access to quality employment in the technology industry. Specifically, Persevere provides technology training, career readiness instruction and support, wraparound case management, individualized job-based mentoring, and job placement services for justice-impacted individuals and people who are at risk for justice-involvement.

Founded by and for people with lived experience with criminal justice, corrections, poverty, and marginalized populations, Persevere is committed to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and incarceration, ending mass incarceration, and forging new pathways for access to economic opportunity for those who have traditionally been denied that access. These include:

- Justice-impacted individuals (incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, on probation/parole)
- Children of incarcerated parents
- Youth aging out of the foster care system
- Opportunity Youth (youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither employed nor enrolled in school)
- Youth currently or formerly involved in the juvenile justice system

- Other system-involved individuals (TANF, SNAP, WIC recipients)

Persevere currently provides services in Tennessee, Arizona, Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia, and plans are underway for the expansion to several other states in the coming year. Services are provided in both correctional and community settings and are designed to take place over a 24 month period. While the core program design remains the same from location to location, service details, resources, and the types of individuals served (adults, youth, families) may vary.

In January 2022, Persevere convened a collaborative of over 72 employers, state agencies, advocacy organizations, trainees, and service recipients to develop a comprehensive plan for technology-focused workforce development and career placement for justice-impacted individuals and families living in poverty in Tennessee. The collaborative partners participated in an intensive planning process over the next three months and applied for funding from several sources, including the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) through the Good Jobs Challenge Program, as the Tennessee Technology Workforce Alliance (hereinafter referred to as the "Tech Alliance").

In August 2022, Persevere was notified that the Tech Alliance proposal was one of 32 applications selected for funding, out of 509 applications submitted nationwide. The three year funding period began on September 1, 2022, and is divided into two phases – the Design Phase (approximately 6 months) and the Implementation Phase (30 months). One of the key activities of the Design Phase is to prepare for the launch of an independent evaluation designed to document the effectiveness of the project. The selection of a qualified evaluator (organization, individual or group of individuals) is the first step toward completing that activity.

Please review the following information for more details on the Good Jobs Challenge Program and Persevere's application:

Good Jobs Challenge Fact Sheet

https://eda.gov/files/arpa/good-jobs-challenge/Good-Jobs-Challenge-Announcement-Awardee-Fact-Sheet.pdf

Summary of Persevere's Proposal and Link to the Full Application Narrative

https://eda.gov/arpa/good-jobs-challenge/awardees/Persevere.htm

Tennessee Technology Workforce Alliance Scope of Work and Project Objectives – Attached (Attachment A). This is the EDA-approved scope of work, including the objectives for which Persevere will be held accountable.

Preliminary Evaluation Questions – Attached (Attachment B). This is a list of common evaluation questions that cover anticipated topics. The evaluation proposal should include the evaluator's recommendations that may include some of the questions from this list, as well as others that are not.

3 TIMELINE

Date	Event
September 9, 2022	RFP Released
~~September 16, 2022~~ September 26, 2022	Deadline for Questions
~~September 20, 2022~~ September 30, 2022	Posting of Questions and Answers
~~September 26, 2022~~ October 7, 2022 (by 5:00 pm CDT)	Proposals Due
~~October 3-6, 2022~~ October 11-13, 2022	Applicant Interviews
~~October 7, 2022~~ October 17, 2022 (estimated)	Notification of Award
November 1, 2022 (estimated)	Start Date for Services

The applicant is responsible for monitoring the Persevere website to monitor responses to applicant questions and any RFP addenda that may be added before the proposal due date.

4 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Institutions of Higher Education (public and private), for-profit or non-profit organizations, and individuals with experience conducting evaluation research and providing other evaluation-related services. Preference will be given to applicants based in the State of Tennessee. All applicants must hold any applicable licenses, permits, or credentials required to do business in Tennessee.

The term "evaluator" in this RFP refers to an individual or organization responding to the RFP. It should not be construed as a preference for an individual over an organization.

5 DESCRIPTION OF NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

5.1 SCOPE

Two distinct needs are addressed by this RFP: 1) Independent evaluation and 2) Technical assistance for data collection and continuous improvement process. Selecting a qualified independent evaluator is the primary purpose of the RFP, but technical assistance is needed to

support Persevere and ensure that data is collected in a manner that best supports the evaluation effort and Persevere's continuous improvement process.

We believe these two services can be provided in a way that meets the goals of the both sets of services (evaluation and technical assistance for data collection) *and* maintains the integrity of evaluation. It is up to the evaluator to include in their proposal how this will be done.

5.1.1 Independent Evaluation

Persevere seeks an independent evaluation of the Tech Alliance program to validate the effectiveness of the program and provide information for ongoing improvement. The evaluation must:

- Include both quantitative and qualitative sources of data

- Yield information to support Persevere in meeting EDA reporting requirements

- Yield information to support the Tech Alliance Leadership Team's continuous improvement efforts

- Be conducted according to generally accepted standards in evaluation

- Be based on a robust evaluation design sufficient to withstand peer review and meet requirements to determine if the Tech Alliance program meets relevant requirements to be designated as an effective program in evidence-based registries and clearinghouses.

The evaluator must collaborate with Persevere and key Tech Alliance partners on the development of the final Evaluation Plan to ensure that the plan meets the needs of the partners, that Persevere and the partners have sufficient staff and other resources to support the plan, and that it is feasible to complete within the established timeline.

Key evaluation activities:

1. Develop a detailed evaluation plan

2. Conduct evaluation activities as described in the plan

3. Maintain regular and ongoing communication with Persevere's Tech Alliance Project Director and Program Manager regarding the status of the evaluation

4. Coordinate with the individual(s) providing technical assistance services (below), as needed during the first year of the project.

5.1.2 Technical Assistance for Data Collection and Continuous Improvement Process

The goals of the technical assistance component are to 1) assist Persevere with the establishment of appropriate data collection procedures to support the evaluation, federal performance reporting, and continuous program improvement; and 2) to build Persevere's capacity to effectively manage its data collection systems in the future without further technical assistance. With those goals in mind, **it is expected that these technical assistance activities will be limited to the first 9-12 months of the funding period**.

There are two main reasons why Persevere is requesting technical assistance in this area. First, Persevere has data collection tools and procedures in place for the documentation of its identified outcomes. However, the Tech Alliance project represents a significant expansion of services in Tennessee, in terms of the number of service recipients, staff, and service locations.

Second, the effectiveness of the evaluation is dependent on timely and accurate data collection. Persevere is a relatively new organization (founded in 2014) and staff experience with data collection for formal evaluation purposes is limited. Current informal data collection processes are insufficient to provide the quality of data needed for a high quality evaluation and the internal capacity to transition to a more robust process is limited. Support is needed to ensure that appropriate data collection procedures are established and monitored.

Key technical assistance activities:

1. Assess the current status of Persevere's data collection processes and resources and data collection needs.

2. Develop a technical assistance plan.

3. Collaborate with the evaluator and key Persevere personnel to determine the specific data needs for evaluation and ongoing program improvement purposes.

4. Assist Persevere with the development of participant, employer, and collaborative partner satisfaction surveys and the development of protocol for administering and analyzing these surveys. We would like to administer participant surveys at 6, 12, 18, and 24 months from intake. We would like to administer employer and partner surveys annually. However, the frequency will be determined in collaboration with the evaluator and Persevere staff. It is expected that surveys will also be included in the evaluation plan.

5. Develop procedures to guide data collection processes, including both qualitative and quantitative data, that can be integrated within Persevere program workflows. These must include, at a minimum, procedures to support the collection of data needed for the independent evaluation.

6. Assist with training staff on those processes and related tools, as needed, with a focus on building capacity within Persevere to implement and monitor data collection processes effectively in the future without the need for ongoing technical assistance.

7. Document all procedures and processes in writing to support ongoing data collection efforts.

The contractor will not be required to prepare or submit any federal performance reports.

5.2   DELIVERABLES (COMBINED FOR BOTH COMPONENTS)

- A detailed plan for the independent evaluation of the project

- A detailed plan for technical assistance services

- Brief (2-3 pages) quarterly update reports (for both evaluation and technical assistance services)

- Written data collection procedures to guide online program data collection activities, including recommendations for next steps for system development and staff training (This serves as the final report for the technical assistance component)

- A mid-term evaluation progress report

- A final comprehensive evaluation report

5.3   PRELIMINARY PROJECT TIMELINE

The table below outlines the timeline for project deliverables. Please plan for sufficient staff and other resources to ensure that your organization has the capacity to meet these deadlines. Please note that the *drafts* of the evaluation plan and the technical assistance plan are due in mid-December, approximately 6 weeks from the anticipated start date for services of the selected evaluator, and that final plans are due in January. These are critical deadlines because the project cannot progress to full implementation until the evaluation is in place. All other project components will be in place and ready to launch by early to mid-January.

Date	Deliverable
December 15, 2022	Evaluation Plan Draft
December 15, 2022	Technical Assistance Plan Draft
January 30, 2023 (earlier is preferred)	Final Evaluation Plan and Final Technical Assistance Plan
The 15th of April, July, October, and January 2023, 2024 and April, July 2025	Brief quarterly update report for the quarter preceding each deadline
December 15, 2023	Written data collection procedures (technical assistance deliverable)
July 30, 2024	Mid-term evaluation report
December 31, 2025	Final evaluation report

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6 AVAILABLE FUNDING

The maximum amount available for services under this RFP over the three-year funding period is $518,000. Do not submit a proposal that exceeds that amount.

7 APPLICANT RESPONSIBILITIES

It is the responsibility of each applicant to thoroughly review the information in this RFP, any addenda, and the responses to applicant questions posted on the website prior to submitting a proposal.

The proposal is considered the applicant's offer for services. If the applicant is suggesting additional service options with costs beyond those included in the formal offer, those services must be clearly identified as services that are not included in the proposed budget. If they are optional services that are offered at no cost to Persevere, please note that, as well.

The applicant is responsible for ensuring that their proposal is submitted and received before the RFP deadline.

8 PROPOSAL CONTENT AND FORMAT

1. Cover Sheet
2. Project Narrative
3. References
4. Resumes/CV
5. Proposed Budget
6. Optional Attachments

1. Cover Sheet

The proposal cover sheet should include at least the following information, in any order:

a. The title of the RFP to which the applicant is responding
b. Name of the organization responding to the RFP
c. Physical and mailing addresses of the responding organization
d. Contact person name, phone number, and email address
e. Date the proposal is submitted

2. *Proposal Narrative*

The proposal narrative must include the proposer's plan for providing independent evaluation services and technical assistance services for data collection, as described above. The narrative should be typewritten in a standard 12 point font.

There is no page limitation, but please be as succinct as possible. Also keep in mind that no more than two of the reviewers will be trained evaluators with recent experience in the field.

Please organize the narrative under the following main headings, **in this order**:

Executive Summary

Qualifications and Experience

Evaluation Design and Services

Technical Assistance Services

Timeline

Potential Challenges and Remedies

Staffing Plan

The following pages outline what needs to be included within each section, but the order in which the items are addressed within each section is up to you.

Executive Summary

Brief 2-3 page summary of the application, including project approach, experience, and qualifications. The Executive Summary should be prepared as a stand-alone summary of your proposal that will be reviewed by the Selection Committee and may also be provided to funders and Tech Alliance partners.

Qualifications and Experience

Please provide a brief description of the applicant organization, including capacity, qualifications and relevant experience. Highlight specific experience providing the services identified in this RFP (program evaluation and technical assistance with data collection, etc,), as well as work with non-profit organizations, experience with federally-funded grant programs, and experience with the particular populations Persevere serves. Please explain why your organization is particularly well-suited to provide evaluation and technical assistance services to Persevere and the Tennessee Tech Alliance.

Evaluation Design and Services

Evaluation Design - Describe your proposed evaluation design, including a discussion of your reasons for selecting that design.

Data Collection - Describe a plan for the collection of data to document the achievement of project objectives. What are the qualitative and quantitative sources of data you propose to collect and include in the evaluation? Why? Specify the data collection responsibilities for evaluation staff and the data collection responsibilities for Persevere/Tech Alliance staff.

Data Analysis - What techniques will you use to analyze and interpret the data? How will you ensure your analysis is rigorous and viewed as trustworthy by project community partners and representatives of the federal funding source? Who will do the analysis?

Human Subjects Protection – What steps will you take to ensure the protection of human subjects?

Other Services - What, if any, technical assistance services will be provided throughout the life of the project (beyond those included in the Technical Assistance Services section below) as part of the evaluation component of the project? Are there any other services that your organization proposes to provide that are not mentioned in the RFP?

This section of the narrative must also include an affirmation that the evaluator will cooperate with the Good Jobs Challenge federal evaluation.

Technical Assistance Services

Provide a plan to complete the technical assistance activities described above (pages 5-7).

Timeline

Provide a detailed and combined timeline of the proposed evaluation and technical assistance activities, using November 1, 2022 as the contract start date.

Potential Challenges and Remedies

Please identify potential challenges to the evaluation or barriers to success. What are your suggestions for addressing these challenges?

What are your plans to ensure the integrity of the evaluation while also providing the technical assistance services described above.

Staffing Plan

Please describe your proposed staffing plan for both evaluation services and the technical assistance services. Please identify key positions, the qualifications for those positions, and brief 1-2 paragraph bios of the individuals identified for each position highlighting their qualifications. Include technical qualifications, but also include any experience, training, or personal qualities that make an individual particularly qualified for assisting Persevere with the Tech Alliance project, in particular.

Be sure the Principal Investigator is clearly identified.

Attach a CV/resume for each identified key team member.

3. *References*

Please provide three (3) references for similarly contracted services within the last (10) ten years including:

   a. Organization name

   b. Organization address

   c. Contact name

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d.   Contact phone number

e.   Contact email address

f.   Scope of services provided and length of service

At least two of these references must be for services provided within Tennessee.

Letters of reference are not required.

4. Resumes/CV

Please attach resumes/CV for the proposed Principal Investigator and all other key personnel.

5. Proposed Budget

The Budget must include both a *Budget Request* and a section called *Additional Budget Information*.

Applicants are not required to make any contribution, cash or in-kind, but if any such contribution is planned, please identify it here. Examples might include the donation of student worker time to assist with part of the project (when they are not compensated through the project) or access to an applicant organization's annual meeting or resource library. It is expected that these would be resources that would be available to any non-profit organization. It is not necessary to quantify the dollar value of any contributions in this section.

Budget Request

Please provide a proposed budget with a clear explanation of costs in each of the following categories:

Personnel (including fringe benefits) - Provide a breakdown of costs by position, including the amount of time (FTE or number of service hours) to be provided. Provide a brief explanation of the role each funded position. Separate fringe benefits from salary/wages.

Travel - Explain any travel costs, why they are needed for the work to be completed, and how they were calculated.

Professional Services - Provide detail for any contracts or other paid agreements for professional services.

Supplies - Identify supplies to be included in the budget.

Other - Identify and explain any other costs, including indirect costs. If you are requesting indirect costs, please explain how you arrived at the amount you are requesting.

Total Request - Provide a total of all expenses included above.

Planning/Design Phase (start date through January 31, 2023) - Identify the dollar amount allocated for planning activities (development of the evaluation plan, the technical assistance plan, and other services necessary prior to the launch of official evaluation and technical assistance services)

Implementation Phase (approximately Feb 1, 2023 - August 30, 2025) - Identify the dollar amount allocated for implementation activities (activities taking place after the approval of the evaluation plan and the technical assistance plan).

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If you are requesting indirect costs, they should be divided proportionally by phase. For example, if the Planning/Design Phase budget represents 20% of the overall budget, then 20% of indirect costs should be allocated to that phase. Please limit indirect costs to 15% of the proposed direct costs.

Additional Budget Information

Cost Effectiveness - Please explain the cost effectiveness of your proposal and any specific budgetary decisions made specifically to make the project affordable.

Other Information - Please add any other information that you believe is relevant to the consideration of your budget proposal. If you do not have any additional information, simply reply that this section is not applicable.

6. **Other Information**

While not required, please feel free to attach any other information (work product, promotional materials, etc.) that might help the selection committee gain a better understanding of your qualifications.

9 SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCESS

The selection process will include the following steps:

1. A panel of readers will read and score the proposals, using the criteria identified below. The scores will be averaged and then ranked. The three applicants with the highest scores will be invited to participate in an interview to provide more information.

2. Considering both the scores for the written proposal, the information provided during the interviews, and the references provided by the applicants, the selection committee will rank the final applicants.

3. A preliminary award will be offered to the most highly ranked applicant. The preliminary offer will be made final when an agreement is reached and the contract is executed.

4. If an agreement cannot be reached, the applicant ranked second by the selection committee will be invited to negotiate a contract.

5. The final determination of contract award will be made by the Persevere Board of Directors, informed by the recommendation of the Selection Committee. The decision of the Board is final.

Persevere is bound by the Procurement Standards of the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards at 2 C.F.R. §§ 200.317 - 200.327 and Persevere's own Procurement Policy that require the selection of the contractor that best meets the needs of Persevere and the federal program supporting the contract.

Selection Criteria for Written Proposal	Maximum Point Allocation
Qualifications, Experience and Staffing Qualifications and experience of the entity, including capability and experience of key personnel and experience with other public or private agencies to provide these services and meet any required timelines and other requirements; Adequate staff and resources to perform the specified tasks required to meet the services as outlined within the specified timeline; Demonstrated expertise in both qualitative and quantitative data analysis of similar projects	25
Evaluation Plan and Services Proposed approach, including demonstrated understanding of work to be performed and a realistic timeline; Data collection and analysis plans; plans for human subjects protection; plan for communication with staff	30
Technical Assistance for Data Collection Plan Proposed approach, including demonstrated understanding of work to be performed and a realistic timeline	20
Approach to Overcoming Challenges Understanding of potential challenges or barriers to success, and the approach/plan for overcoming those challenges	5
Budget Reasonability of pricing for the services described by this RFP and the proposer's response; Extent to which budgeted resources are clearly sufficient to complete the scope of work described	20
Total Possible Base Score	**100**
Bonus - Located in Tennessee 10 points - The applicant is based in Tennessee and provides services in Tennessee. 5 points - The applicant is based outside of Tennessee but has a presence in Tennessee and provides a significant amount of service in Tennessee. 0 points - The applicant is not based in Tennessee and currently provides no, or very limited, services in Tennessee. (The readers may assign between 0 and 5 points for organizations based outside Tennessee, based on the level of their services currently provided within Tennessee.)	10
Total Possible Written Application Score	**110**

The selection committee will include several Persevere directors/coordinators, one or two Tech Alliance partner representatives, and one or two professional evaluators.

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Interviews

The three applicants with the highest application scores will be invited to participate in a virtual interview hosted through *Google Meet*. Each interview will be 30 - 45 minutes in length and will include a 10 -15 minute presentation by the applicant followed by a 15 -30 minute question and answer period.

All members of the interview panel will have read and scored the proposals. However, it is possible that not all of the individuals who read/scored applications will be on the interview panels.

10 SUBMITTAL INSTRUCTIONS

Email your completed application to vrobbins@perseverenow.org no later than 5:00 pm CDT on October 7, 2022. A response will be sent to indicate that your email was received.

If you need to submit your application in multiple files, please ensure that all files are appropriately labeled with the organization's name and the application component in the file (proposal narrative, budget, other information, etc.).

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ATTACHMENT A: TENNESSEE TECHNOLOGY WORKFORCE ALLIANCE SCOPE OF WORK AND PROJECT OBJECTIVES

![PERSEVERE — REAL HOPE. VALUABLE SKILLS. MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITY.]

Scope of Work
Tennessee Technology Workforce Alliance

Summary

Persevere and the Tennessee Technology Training Workforce Alliance will serve improving access to technology-focused training and employment opportunities in rural areas and for traditionally underrepresented populations, including justice-impacted individuals, individuals and families living in poverty, disconnected youth, and youth aging out of the foster care system. The Alliance will train a minimum of 1,763 individuals, placing a minimum of 1,234 of them in good jobs in high demand occupations in the technology field.

The Alliance's collaboratively-developed system includes: 1) A training model that includes both skills training and multiple work-and-learn models (registered apprenticeships and on-the job training) leading to industry- and employer-recognized skills certifications; 2) Engagement of and training for employers and service providers; 3) Recruitment, enrollment, and retention strategies designed for the target populations; and 4) Expansion of the Alliance throughout the state.

Services will be provided through a network of Career Success Centers and satellite centers across the state, including centers supported directly by the project (four) and others provided through collaboration with Alliance partners (4-6).

Project Objectives

1.0 – Design Phase

1.1 Design Phase — Project partners will participate in a collaborative planning process during the first six months of the project resulting in the. Benchmarks: Completion of a detailed operational plan for project implementation by the end of month 6.

2.0 - Implementation Phase

2.1 Enrollment — The project will serve a minimum of 1,763 individuals during the project period, as measured by project enrollment records. Benchmarks: 1,763 by end of project (end of month 36).

2.2 Enrollment of Justice-impacted Individuals — At least 85% (n=1,410) of project participants will be justice-impacted individuals (justice-involved, immediate family members of a justice-involved person, or individual at-risk for justice-involvement).

2.3 Core Services — Each participant will receive a range of directly provided reentry services, including technology training, employment support and placement, and case management services. Benchmark: Final assessment for the achievement of the objective will take place at month 12 for each participant.

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2.4 Access to and Use of Community Resources – At least 80% of participants will demonstrate increased access to and use of community resources, as measured by the *Arizona Self-Sufficiency Matrix*. Benchmarks: Final assessment for the achievement of the objective will take place at month 12 for each participant.

2.5 Mental health and substance abuse services – All participants identified with substance abuse or mental health needs by assessments administered at intake and within 30 days of intake will be referred for appropriate services and provided support services for access. Benchmark: Quarterly review of referrals

2.6 Employer Engagement – The project will demonstrate a high level of employer engagement through 1) ongoing employer engagement activities; 2) job commitments made by employers sufficient to meet job placement requirements by end of month 36); and 3) job placements (Benchmark: See Objective 3.3, below).

3.0 - Outcomes

3.1 Recidivism — The recidivism rate among justice-involved participants under Tennessee Department of Correction supervision will not exceed 20% (less than half that state's current rate of 42%). Benchmark: Assessed every 6 months, beginning with month 12; Final assessment for objective achievement at the end of month 36.

3.2 Completion of Career Training — At least 80% (n=1,410) of participants enrolled in the coding/technology training program for at least 2 months will complete the program and achieve certification.

3.3 Employment Placement — At least 87% (n=1,234) of participants completing the coding program will be placed in employment.

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