Virginia Transportation Research Council
Contract Research Needs Program
Participation Requirements and Policies

Eligibility

Only Commonwealth of Virginia public universities are eligible to respond to the Virginia Transportation Research Council (VTRC) Research Needs Statements (RNSs) as the prime contractor. Public universities from other states, private universities, and consultants are not eligible to respond as the prime contractor.

How to Participate

VTRC has a compiled a list of e-mails for known potential prime contractors for the RNS announcements based on our knowledge of university faculty that (1) we have worked with in the past or (2) have been following VTRC's program through participation in our Research Advisory Committees. If you are interested in receiving announcements of our RNS postings simply send an email to Bill.Kelsh@VDOT.Virginia.gov to be added to the email list. If you are receiving RNS announcement emails and no longer wish to get them, simply REPLY TO any announcement email with the word "UNSUBSCRIBE" in the subject line.

Research Needs Statements (RNS)

VTRC will issue RNSs on a rolling, as-needed basis throughout the year. When new RNSs are posted to the VTRC website, an announcement will be sent out to all recipients in our prime contractor database via email. Due dates and VTRC contact information will be noted in each problem statement. Failure to meet submission deadline dates will result in disqualification of the Expression of Interest (EOI) submission.

Each RNS issued by VDOT will contain the following information:

1. A description of the problem or need, project scope, and minimum desired deliverables;
2. An estimated maximum budget;
3. A desired project start, task, and completion timeline.

VTRC reserves the right to cancel and remove any RNS from consideration at any time prior to formalizing the research agreement with the selected university (see Formalizing Agreement) should budget limitations, changes in programmatic strategic direction, personnel changes, or any other impediments arise. In the event of such an occurrence all participants in the program will be notified by email.

Submission deadlines for any RNS may be extended at VTRC's discretion.

Format of Expression of Interest (EOI) Documents

The body of the EOI submission is limited to 7 pages maximum, with 1-inch margins and 12-point font. EOIs should be submitted in electronic format (as an email or attachment thereto) and sent to the VTRC contact identified at the head of the RNS of interest. Cover sheets, budget documentation, references/bibliographies, lists of project commitments, and any resumes or vitae included as appendices do not count towards this page limit. The content of the EOI submission should include:

1. A discussion of the proposed technical approach to address the problem described in the RNS. This should include a discussion of research objectives, scope, relevant past research, and proposed methodology to address the problem.
2. A discussion of how the researchers anticipate the findings could be implemented within the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT).
3. A statement of qualifications to perform the work, including a proposed staffing plan and description of the qualifications of the research team
4. A listing of other time commitments by project by major members of the research team. The EOI should clearly show that there is sufficient time of those members to participate in the project at the level indicated by the budget.
5. A budget and timeline for the proposed work. A detailed budget should be constructed using the budget template (see *EOI Budget Template* file). A project timeline should be created using the schedule template (see *EOI Schedule Template* file). It should indicate the months in which each task will be undertaken as well as the number of hours each member of the project team will devote to each task.

Failure to include any of these items will result in disqualification of the EOI submission.

EOI Submission Review and Scoring

VTRC will establish a Technical Review Panel (TRP) for each RNS composed of VDOT and VTRC staff. The TRP will review and score each EOI submission based on the following criteria:

Factor	Weight	Description
Technical Approach	50%	Does the EOI submission demonstrate a clear understanding of the problem? Is the technical approach methodologically sound and is it likely to result in useful results?
Implementation Prospects	15%	Does the EOI submission include an effective plan on how to ensure research implementation? How will research results be disseminated to the field, and are the methods likely to encourage widespread adoption?
Staffing Plan & Past Performance	25%	Does the staffing plan include senior faculty and staff with demonstrated expertise in the area under study? To what degree are those senior faculty and staff performing work versus junior staff or graduate students? Are sufficient personnel allocated to perform the proposed work? For principal investigators that have done work for the relevant VTRC team, have projects been completed on time and on

		budget? Have past projects resulted in useful findings and implementable results?
Budget and Timeline	5%	Are the project budget and timeline reasonable for the amount of effort proposed? It is expected that all submissions will be within the predefined budget and timeline expectations in the RNS, but preference will be given to EOI submissions with lower budgets or shorter timelines that still fulfill the technical requirements of the RNS.
Participation by Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)	5%	Additional points will be awarded for substantive participation in the project by HBCUs. HBCU points can be awarded based on HBCU participation as the prime contractor or as a subcontractor. Points will be awarded as follows:

Points	% of Project Budget Provided to HBCU
5	≥ 50%
4	40 to 49 %
3	30 to 39%
2	20 to 29%
1	10 to 19%

Each factor will be rated on a scale of 1 to 10, multiplied by the weight, and summed to obtain an overall EOI submission score. A single score in each category will be determined collaboratively through a group discussion by the TRP. The EOI submission with the highest score will move on to the next step (see Acceptance of EOIs.)

In the event two or more EOI submissions receive the same top score, the TRP, in consultation with the VTRC Director of Research, will make a judgment to break the tie.

If a university's EOI submission is not selected, the score and TRP comments for the EOI submission will be provided to the university upon request.

Acceptance of EOI Submissions

Following EOI submission scoring, the top scoring candidate university will meet with the TRP to discuss any comments on the particulars of their submission. This may result in additional revisions and expansion to the original submission to address TRP comments.

In the event that the submitters of the highest scoring EOI submission are unable or unwilling to address TRP comments in an adequate and timely fashion, then the next highest scoring EOI submission will be considered via this process and so on.

Formalizing Agreement

After the TRP is satisfied with the content of the successful EOI submission, the submitter must engage their university's Office of Sponsored Programs to assemble and submit a formal contract package to VTRC for review, negotiation, and authorizing signatures. VTRC has certain contractor requirements (such as progress reporting, retainage, billing, and final report formatting and professional editing documentation) that will be appended to all contract packages.

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding EOI Submissions

Q: Is there a minimum requirement for how much of the budget has to be expended by the prime university contractor?

A: It is expected that the Virginia public university selected as the prime contractor directly spend at least 51% of the project budget on direct university costs (personnel, supplies, equipment, etc.). In other words, no more than 49% of a project budget can be subcontracts to outside entities.

Q: Can private universities, non-Virginia public universities, or consultants participate as subcontractors?

A: Yes, but a Virginia public institution must be the prime contractor.

Q: How should collaborations between multiple Virginia public universities be handled?

A: One university should be designated as the prime university contractor, and the other(s) would be subcontractors to the prime university. The prime university contractor would have ultimate responsibility for project management and delivery of final products. VTRC will not produce multiple contracts for a single project.

Appendix. For University Faculty Who Have Not Worked with VTRC in the Past

 In addition to the EOI process described above, an alternative method is to work collaboratively with VTRC staff to respond to a high-priority research need. In a collaborative project, the university faculty member works hand-in-hand with a VTRC researcher to conduct the project as co-PIs. The University and VTRC have clearly defined responsibilities, and both contribute significantly to the overall research project.

Universities collaborate with VTRC staff to respond to a VDOT-driven research need that has been prioritized highly by the appropriate RAC. The most effective way for universities to potentially take part in this collaborative process is by attending RAC meetings where they can gain a deeper understanding of the needs of VDOT and partner agencies.