

Request for Qualifications (RFQ)
RIA Public Drinking Water and Wastewater Utility Board Training Manual and Presentation

SECTION 1: GENERAL SCOPE

Overview:

The SC Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA) is seeking proposals for a firm to prepare a Board Training manual and presentation to provide Board members and elected public officials of public drinking water and wastewater utilities with the managerial, financial and technical knowledge and skills needed to successfully administer a utility. The project should be completed within 12 months of the date of the Notice to Proceed.

It is recognized that Board members and elected public officials responsible for public utilities have a wide range of experience and knowledge related to the administration and operation of drinking water and wastewater utilities. Board members and elected public officials of small utilities (service population less than 10,000) that struggle to be viable often have the least experience and knowledge in this area and often have limited time available to acquire the information they need. The Board Training manual and presentation will be organized, and the information presented in a manner that will benefit Board members and elected public officials with different levels of experience and knowledge in the administration and operations of a public drinking water and wastewater utilities, especially Board members and elected public officials of small utilities with limited resources and time and that struggle to be viable.

The project will involve generating a list of the managerial, financial, and technical topics and skills that Board members and elected public officials should be familiar with, and in some cases master, to effectively administer a public drinking water or wastewater utility. Board Training topics and skills will be organized in a logical and progressive manner and used to prepare a Board Training manual and presentation. The Board Training manual and presentation will describe the significance of the topic or skill, Board member and elected public official roles and responsibilities related to the topic or skill and provide illustrative examples to support the information being presented. The Board Training will be easily accessible. The Board Training will cover both drinking water and wastewater utilities and be meaningful and relevant to Board members and elected public officials in different organizational structures (for example, a municipal utility overseen by elected public officials versus members of a Special Purpose District Board). The manual and presentation will be organized in a progressive manner with the topics and skills deemed most essential presented first.

The presentation will be divided into separate modules (e.g., Modules 1, 2, 3...) that can be viewed in sequence or individually. The first module will present an overview of essential topics and skills and should be meaningful and beneficial to inexperienced, non-technical Board members and elected public officials. Subsequent modules will provide more detailed information about the essential topics and skills and introduce more advanced topics and skills that will be more informative to experienced Board members and elected public officials. Separate modules will be prepared to present information specific to the technical operations and regulatory governance of drinking water and wastewater utilities. Some Board members and elected public officials are responsible for a drinking water utility or a wastewater utility, but not both.

The Board Training manual and presentation will be available to the public and will be used by government agencies and non-governmental organizations to train utility Board members and elected public officials.

The goal is to provide Board members and elected public officials of public drinking water and wastewater utilities in South Carolina with the knowledge and skills they need to successfully administer a financially viable utility that meets customer needs and complies with regulatory requirements.

Background:

RIA receives state appropriations to provide grants for financing drinking water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure projects statewide. RIA co-administers the State Revolving Fund (SRF) Program with SCDES to provide low-cost loans for similar infrastructure projects. SCDES handles the federal program requirements and technical aspects of the SRF program while RIA manages the financial requirements including credit analyses, loan agreements and repayments. Cumulatively, since these programs began at RIA, 770 grants have been awarded totaling \$1.7 billion and another \$1 billion in affordable loan financing has been provided for 140 projects.

Annually the agency is responsible for over \$100 million in infrastructure financing – including grants and loans. RIA programs are designed to address one or more of the following objectives:

- Increase community sustainability by helping to maintain reliable and affordable infrastructure;
- Improve the quality of life by addressing public health, environmental and regulatory concerns; and
- Create opportunities for economic impact by building the infrastructure capacity to support economic development.

RIA also receives state appropriations to support planning and technical assistance activities for South Carolina communities with drinking water, wastewater and/or stormwater utilities, especially small utilities that struggle to be viable. These funds are

used to provide grants to support a wide range of managerial, financial, and technical planning projects to support viability such as obtaining much needed information about the utility (e.g., GIS mapping) or identifying and prioritizing critical utility needs including capital projects. These funds also support the utility viability enhancement strategies presented in the RIA-funded South Carolina Water Utility Assessment & Viability Strategy (February 2022). The aforementioned document included a recommendation to create a SC Viability Assistance Network (SC VAN). The SC VAN has been established and is comprised of government agencies and non-profit organizations that provide technical assistance to public drinking water and wastewater utilities to better assist utility leaders with accessing much needed technical assistance resources.

The SC VAN reviews and considers technical assistance needs related to attaining and maintaining a viable utility. The SC VAN determined that readily accessible, high-quality Board Training on the proper administration and operation of public drinking water and wastewater utilities is essential for having a financially viable utility that meets customer needs and complies with regulatory standards. Board members and elected public officials must be knowledgeable of the managerial, financial, and technical aspects of a utility to effectively administer the utility. The Board Training that is the subject of this RFQ is intended to address this need.

SECTION 2: SPECIFICATIONS

Scope of Work and Deliverables:

The scope of work includes the following tasks: 1) identify and select the managerial, financial, and technical topics and skills that Board members and elected public officials should be familiar with, and in some cases master, to effectively administer a public drinking water or wastewater utility; 2) document and describe the selected topics and skills in an easy to follow and understand Board Training manual; and, 3) create a presentation that describes the topic and skills included in the manual in an easy to follow and understand format. EPA publications and a recently completed Board Training presentation prepared by the South Carolina Rural Water Association (copyright pending) will be the primary resources used to identify Board Training topics and skills and for the design and content of the Board Training manual and presentation. These, however, should not be the only resources consulted to accomplish the required tasks.

RIA anticipates a project budget of \$250,000 to \$500,000. Upon awarding the contract, RIA will schedule a meeting with firm management and project staff to discuss the project (see Project Meetings below). Upon completion of that meeting, the firm can submit an invoice for the first 10% of the overall contract.

1. Identify and Select Board Training Topics and Skills

This task involves identifying and then selecting the managerial, financial, and technical topics and skills that Board members and elected public officials should be familiar with, and in some cases master, to effectively administer a public drinking water or wastewater utility. A topic refers to information that a Board Member or elected public official should be aware of but requires no direct action from them, such as the regulatory standards that govern the technical operations of a drinking water or wastewater treatment plant. A skill is an activity that Board members and elected public officials need to fully understand and possibly prepare and/or approve, such as operating budgets and setting rates.

The identification and selection of Board Training topics and skills should include the following:

- compile a comprehensive list of topics and skills that Board members and elected public officials of a public drinking water or wastewater utility should have knowledge of and/or should know how to implement.
- the comprehensive list of topics and skills should be arranged in an outline form that includes main topics/skills along with related subtopics/skills. Topics/skills will cover a wide range of issues including, but not limited to, Board roles and responsibilities, financial management, personnel staffing and management, viability assessment, key regulations, utility operations, long-term planning, security, communications, and so forth. A topic/skill such as financial management will have multiple subtopics/skills such as budget preparation, rate setting, annual audits, internal controls and so forth.
- the draft outline of Board Training topics and skills along with subtopics/skills will be submitted to RIA for review and comment.
- based on the review comments, the selected firm will work with RIA to finalize the topics/skills outline which will involve the selection of the topics/skills and subtopic/skills that will be included in the Board Training manual and presentation (see Project Meetings below). This step will also involve identifying the order that the topics/skills should be presented in the Board Training manual and presentation.

2. Prepare Board Training Manual

The final outline and order of Board Training topics and skills will be used to guide the preparation of a Board Training manual.

The Board Training manual will describe the significance of a topic or skill and Board member and elected public official roles and responsibilities related to the topic or skill. The manual should be concise and made user friendly by reducing long narratives, where possible, and instead, using lists, graphs, tables, calculations, photographs and other visual aids to illustrate key concepts and points. Skills that Board members and elected public officials may need to directly perform and/or approve may require more explanation than topics that are included for information purposes only. Where appropriate, the manual should include dialogue and visual aids that can be used by trainers.

The draft Board Training manual will be submitted to RIA for review and comment. Based on the review comments, the selected firm will work with RIA to finalize the manual which will serve as the guide for preparing the presentation (see Project Meetings below).

3. Prepare Board Training Presentation

The presentation is a key deliverable for this project and will be the main training tool used to educate Board members and elected public officials. It will be a PowerPoint™ presentation. The Board Training manual will be used to guide the preparation and use of the presentation.

The presentation will be divided into separate modules (e.g., Modules 1, 2, 3...) to better meet the needs, knowledge level and time constraints of Board members and elected public officials, especially Board members and elected public officials of small utilities with limited resources and time, and that struggle to be viable. The modules will be designed so that they can be viewed in sequence or individually. The first module will present an overview of essential topics and skills identified in the Board Training manual and should be meaningful and beneficial to inexperienced, non-technical Board members and elected public officials. Subsequent modules will provide more detailed information about the essential topics and skills and introduce more advanced topics and skills that will be more meaningful to experienced Board members and elected public officials. Separate modules will be prepared to present information specific to the technical operations and regulatory governance of drinking water and wastewater utilities. Some Board members and elected public officials are responsible for a drinking water utility or a wastewater utility, but not both. Lists, graphs, tables, calculations, photographs, videos, and/or other visual aids should be included in the presentation to illustrate points and improve the viewability of the presentation. The presentation will have a companion narrative that can be used by trainers.

If funding and the project schedule allows, the selected firm may be utilized to prepare a video of the Board Training presentation with accompanying narrative that can be made available via the internet to train Board members and elected public officials.

The selected firm will work closely with RIA on the preparation of the presentation (see Project Meetings below). The draft Board Training presentation will be submitted to RIA for review and comment. Based on the review comments, the selected firm will work with RIA to finalize the presentation.

2. Project Meetings

An estimate of the number and type of project meetings needed by the selected firm and RIA staff to complete the project is listed below. The number and types of meetings listed below emphasize the importance of close coordination between the selected firm and RIA staff during the preparation of the Board Training topics and skills, manual and presentation. Routine emails and telephone communications also will be needed to keep the project moving forward in a productive manner.

a. Project Kickoff

One in-person meeting (two hours)

b. Identify and Select Board Training Topics and Skills

Two online meetings (two hours each) – Microsoft Teams

c. Prepare Board Training Manual

Two online meetings (two hours each) – Microsoft Teams

One in-person meeting (three hours)

d. Prepare Board Training Presentation

Two online meetings (two hours each) – Microsoft Teams

Two in-person meetings (three hours each)

Two in-person meetings (six hours each)

Progress Updates

Provide a monthly progress update via email, phone, video conference, or in person to RIA for the duration of the contract.

3. Project Schedule

The project should be completed within 12 months of the date of the Notice to Proceed. A generalized timeline for the completion of the project is provided below. Each task listed below includes meetings and discussions with RIA staff. It is possible that some tasks such as the preparation of the Board Training manual and presentation can be performed concurrently. For example, visual aids to use in the presentation can be identified and prepared while the manual is being prepared.

<u>Task</u>	<u>Duration</u>
Project Kickoff Meeting	Within 2 weeks of receiving Notice to Proceed
Prepare/finalize list of Board Training topics and skills	2 months
Prepare/finalize Board Training manual	4 months
Prepare/finalize Board Training presentations	5 months
Project Closeout	Within 12 months of receiving Notice to Proceed

SECTION 3: SUBMITTAL INFORMATION

Submittal shall include, at a minimum, information required in the solicitation, responses to all selection criteria required by the SC Consolidated Procurement Code (found in Chapter 4 of the OSE Manual) and the following:

1. Firm’s staffing proposal for this project, including a list of all subcontractors to be used at any stage of the project with a description of their responsibilities.
2. Documentation of technical and engineering qualifications related to drinking water and wastewater utilities within the firm or planned subcontractor(s).
3. Documentation of qualifications including knowledge of sound business, financial and management practices for drinking water and wastewater utilities within the firm or planned subcontractor(s).
4. Firm’s plan to address each component of the scope of work and proposed timeline.
5. List of projects completed by the firm in the past five (5) years that involve working with drinking water and/or wastewater utility boards and elected public officials to improve the financial, managerial and/or technical operations of the utility including any with a statewide or regional focus. Include the Executive Summary of each project and staff involved in each.
6. List of references for any similar projects completed by the firm in the past five (5) years.

SECTION 4: PRE-SUBMITTAL CONFERENCE

The State will conduct a Non-Mandatory Pre-Submittal conference as part of this process to provide additional project information and expound upon potential questions. This conference will be held on Thursday, November 7, 2024 at 2:00 p.m. via video conference. Although attendance is not mandatory, all interested firms are strongly encouraged to attend. Firms interested must contact the Agency Coordinator, Clarissa Belton at cbelton@sccommerce.com to receive an invitation to the meeting.

Any questions regarding this project must be submitted in writing (email) no later than 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, October 31, 2024. Questions should be emailed to the Agency Coordinator, Clarissa Belton, at cbelton@sccommerce.com. All submitted questions will be addressed at the Pre-Submittal conference.