



S H E N A N D O A H COMMUNITY CAPITAL FUND

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

AI-ENABLED PLATFORM FOR GATHERING RELEVANT AND UP-TO-DATE ECOSYSTEM INFORMATION FOR ENTREPRENEURS

JANUARY 10, 2022

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REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

I. Overview

The Shenandoah Community Capital Fund (SCCF), a 501(c)3 non-profit who serves as a lead convener for the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Shenandoah Valley, is requesting proposals from AI companies with the necessary qualifications, capacity and expertise to develop an AI-enabled platform capable of cost-effectively capturing and disseminating up-to-date relevant ecosystem information for a range of Shenandoah Valley entrepreneurs.

A PDF copy of your proposal, accompanied by the Bid Form attached hereto as Exhibit A, should be sent via email to:

- hello@sccfva.org
- In the 'Subject' line include: AI-Enabled Entrepreneur Platform Search

Your proposal must conform to this RFP and both it and your completed Bid Form must arrive at the above addresses no later than **4:00 p.m. on Friday, February 4, 2022**. Proposals will be considered non-responsive if received after this time and date.

Please direct any questions, via email, no later than **4:00 p.m. on Monday, January 24, 2022** to hello@sccfva.org or john@sccfva.org. Answers to all questions will be posted on SCCF's website on the RFP page.

Minority business enterprises are encouraged to respond to this RFP.

II. SCCF Overview

Vision

A Shenandoah Valley where every person has access to the resources, knowledge, and support needed to start, grow, and sustain a business.

Mission

Helping to build a more accessible and equitable ecosystem for entrepreneurs and small business owners in the Shenandoah Valley

This will be accomplished by administering an integrated platform of success-based programs that support the growing entrepreneurial and digital ecosystem in the Shenandoah Valley.

We will collaborate with best-in-class partners and be inclusive of minorities, women and veterans throughout the region. We will establish and maintain an investment philosophy that supports both economic development goals and meaningful returns for our stakeholders, and we will help build great Shenandoah Valley-based companies that grow and last.

SCCF's Background

The Shenandoah Community Capital Fund (SCCF), formerly known as the Staunton Creative Community Fund, is an entrepreneurial support organization serving the entire Shenandoah Valley. Over the past 14 years the organization has expanded and innovated alongside the region's entrepreneurs to become one of the lead conveners in the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem. SCCF's ability to nimbly move throughout the region gives the organization a unique advantage in serving entrepreneurs and connecting resource providers.

Since 2019, SCCF has responded to a gradual transition in the region's entrepreneurial landscape. This shift sparked a new focus within SCCF, and the organization embraced an entrepreneurial ecosystem-building approach to economic and community development.

Although SCCF's mission has broadened, the organization has retained an emphasis on equity and accessibility and creating pathways to entrepreneurship for all communities in the Shenandoah Valley. As a result, SCCF, along with 17 partner organizations, created the first region-wide ecosystem collaboration in the Valley. Through the support of a GO Virginia grant, SCCF launched the Startup Shenandoah Valley (S2V) program and continues to support entrepreneurs and business owners of all backgrounds in the Shenandoah Valley.

SCCFR understands that starting or expanding a business is challenging. SCCF can help entrepreneurs navigate the pitfalls, detours, highs, and lows of starting or expanding a small business. In a world of cold calculations and high-interest loans, SCCF is a safe place for dreamers and schemers to imagine the possibilities, ask questions, and get the funding they need in order to succeed.

While based in Staunton, we've continued to grow and now serve the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.

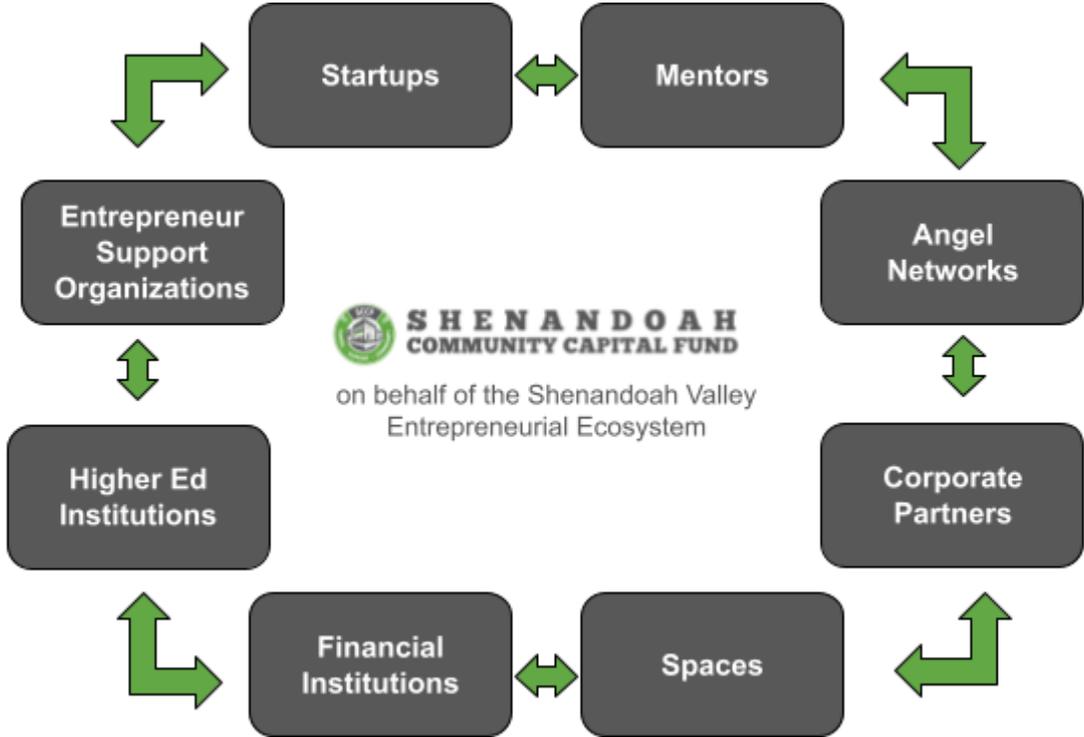
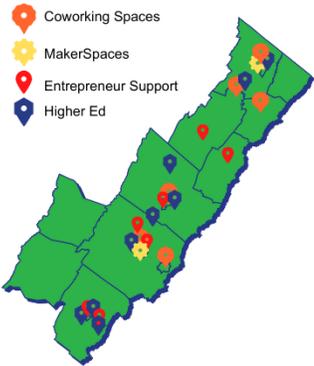
Through the amazing support of our staff, board members, volunteers, and donors, SCCF is able to provide programs and services that reach entrepreneurs all over the Shenandoah Valley. Each individual that works with SCCF is passionate and committed to helping entrepreneurs turn their dreams into reality.

SCCF manages multiple microloan funds and programs and has recently been awarded \$1.75 million in federal awards through the Build to Scale program and Community Navigator program. SCCF is funded largely by the Commonwealth, localities, federal funds, grants and corporate partnerships and has an active and diverse staff of 14 employees and contractors.

III. SCCF’s Audience

SCCF works with a growing network of higher education institutions, entrepreneurs, start-ups, early stage companies, business incubators, private investors, angel networks, economic development offices, and legislators interested in fostering innovative economic development in our region.

The Valley has 11 higher education institutions, numerous coworking and maker spaces, and heavily engaged entrepreneur support organizations and financial institutions, but we need to more effectively bring these support networks together.



IV. Services Required

Context

The Shenandoah Valley's entrepreneur ecosystem includes a myriad of organizations, incubators, accelerators, events, and other entities providing resources designed to assist entrepreneurs growing a business. These resources can be difficult to locate and typically are focused on specific industry sectors, locations, or the stage of a business. As a result, entrepreneurs waste valuable time searching for up-to-date resources that meet their specific needs. Without timely access to these resources, entrepreneurs miss out on valuable information that can help expand or support their business.

SCCF and other local ecosystem leaders want to create a new tool to ignite the growing entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Shenandoah Valley. The goal of this project is to provide clear, reliable, up-to-date information and resources for entrepreneurs, investors, government entities and any entity that is hoping to build and grow the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Those tools might include: educational content, information on incubators, accelerators, grant opportunities, funding opportunities, event calendars, office hours, and more.

To accomplish this goal, SCCF is seeking to procure the services of a company with the necessary qualifications, capacity, and expertise to develop an AI-enabled, web-based platform capable of automatically gathering and updating resource data by skimming and extracting web based information from existing and new resources and organizations located in the Shenandoah Valley or serviShenandoah Valley entrepreneurs.

Scope of Services

The company submitting the selected proposal will work with representatives from SCCF and other local organizations on this project. A strong understanding of the region's entrepreneur ecosystem and the range of organizations, incubators, accelerators, and events within the Valley is a key requirement. The services required by the company include the ability to:

1. Work with ecosystem leaders to gain consensus on the platforms content, UI/UX, and other elements;
2. Quickly and cost-effectively map an ecosystem's resources onto a single user-friendly platform; (The system shall house extracted data under one platform
3. Use an update or extraction algorithm that utilizes natural language processing (NLP) and is capable of extracting and continually updating content from thousands of websites to ensure information is never out-of-date; The system shall extract and update content from thousands of websites in real time utilizing natural language processing.
4. Incorporate natural language processing (NLP) that has been or is being trained to recognize entrepreneurship terminology to assist with accurate data updating and extraction;
5. Organize information onto a platform in a manner that reflects the needs of area entrepreneurs;
6. Make the platform accessible via both computers and mobile devices; and 7. Bring to bear experience working with other local ecosystems to develop entrepreneur resource solutions.

High Level Functionality

This is not a comprehensive list of functionality that the platform will have, the focus here is to give a representative idea of things we are looking to do.

- We would like to build a platform that extracts data from multiple data points, so entrepreneurs can search and retrieve information according to their specific needs.
- We would like to build a web presence that provides accurate & update information from new resources and organizations zoned in the Shenandoah Valley and/or serviShenandoah Valley entrepreneurs.
- We would like the platform to take into consideration the needs of area entrepreneurs.

V. RFP & Schedule Details

Please direct any questions, via email, no later than **4:00 p.m. on Monday, January 24, 2022** to hello@sccfva.org. Answers to all questions will be posted on SCCF's website on the RFP page.

In order to be considered for selection, respondents must submit a complete response to the RFP by **4:00 p.m. on Friday, February 4, 2022**. A PDF copy of your proposal should be sent to:

- hello@sccfva.org
- In the 'Subject' line include: AI-Enabled Entrepreneur Platform Search

Should you be selected as a finalist, you will be contacted by **Friday, February 11, 2022 (projected)**.

This RFP should not be construed by any respondent as a commitment by SCCF to procure any services from any specific entity, nor to procure such services in any case. Any and all expenses and costs of any kind incurred by a respondent in connection with responding to this RFP are the sole responsibility of the respondent.

SCCF reserves the right to:

- Withdraw this solicitation at any time with no financial or other responsibility to any respondent or prospective respondent;
- Conduct discussions and negotiations, at its sole discretion, with any respondent or respondents, without notification to any excluded respondents; and
- Accept or reject, at its sole discretion, any or all bids.

VI. Evaluation Factors

The following criteria will be used by the Review Committee in evaluating proposals for final selection, and shall include but not be limited to:

- Qualifications and past performance in developing similar platforms for entrepreneurs in other similar ecosystems;

- Professional staff background and AI expertise;
- Ability to launch platform in a short period of time;
- Familiarity with the entrepreneurial communities; and
- Overall fees for development of platform and maintenance.

SCCF will use reasonable efforts to ensure that small, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses have an equal opportunity to be considered for SCCF's procurement opportunities. Further, SCCF will make reasonable efforts to procure from Virginia-based businesses.

SCCF reserves the right to conduct discussions with Respondents for the purpose of obtaining "best and final offers" as follows:

- Enter pre-selection negotiations;
- Schedule oral presentations; or
- Request revised proposals.

The Review Committee will limit any discussions to those Respondents whose proposal has the potential for selection. The Review Committee will award to the responsible Respondent whose proposal, conforming to the solicitation, will be the most advantageous to SCCF.

VII. Respondent's Conditions, Representations and Authorizations

By submitting its proposal, each Respondent understands, represents and acknowledges that:

- A Respondent and his/her authorized representative may withdraw or modify his/her proposal by written notice received prior to the exact hour and date specified for proposal receipt.
- All of Respondent's information and representations in the proposal are material and important, and SCCF may rely upon the contents of the proposal in negotiations, contractual obligations, and awarding the contract(s). Respondent agrees that the proposal will remain firm for a period of one hundred twenty (120) calendar days after the date specified for receipt of proposal or until a SCCF Procurement Contract agreement is fully executed.
- Respondents are expected to fully inform themselves of all conditions, requirements and specifications before submitting a proposal. After the proposal submission deadline,
- Respondents may not change their proposal or obtain relief in case of errors or omissions in the submitted proposal.
- SCCF may waive minor informalities or errors in proposals if it determines that the error does not undermine the overall integrity of the proposal.

Continued on Next Page

EXHIBIT A
Company Bid Form

Name of Respondent: _____

Date Submitted: _____

Bid price in effect for 120 days from date of submission.

Maximum Bid Price

(Written Price)

\$ _____
(Figures)

Your proposal must conform to this RFP and both a PDF of the proposal and a completed copy of this page must arrive, via email, no later than **4:00 p.m. on Friday, February 4, 2022**. Proposals will be considered non-responsive if received after this time and date.