

Specialty Food Association Request for Information for Administration of Program Funds



Issue Date:

January 2, 2025

RFI Deadline:

February 13, 2025

Primary Contact:

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I. Project Background

1) SPECIALTY FOOD ASSOCIATION OVERVIEW

The Speciality Food Associations fosters trade, commerce and interest in the \$100 billion specialty food industry. Specialty foods are broadly defined as foods or beverages commanding a premium due to quality, availability, convenience and/or target consumers. SFA is considered the premier not-for-profit trade association in its class.

SFA's membership base is composed of more than 4,000 companies. This includes domestic and foreign manufacturers, importers, distributors, brokers, and retailers. The association owns and operates the leading specialty food trade shows in the US, called Fancy Food Shows, held twice a year in NYC (summer) and the west coast (winter). There are thousands of members and international exhibitors who attend and exhibit at the Fancy Food Show, along with thousands of buyers and other industry executives who attend these shows. Fancy Food Shows account for 90% of the association's revenue by way of exhibitor booth fees and attendee access fees.

SFA has created recognition programs, education, networking and membership opportunities. The association is governed by its members and driven by their needs. SFA is tightly focused on its mission and is powered by a staff of 50 FTE together with members who volunteer their time and energy to serve on the Board of Directors, and various councils and committees.

2) PROJECT OVERVIEW

SFA's efforts are focused on new and smaller makers trying to bring new products to the market. Cash flow is an impediment for many of SFA's maker members. SFA is looking to partner with an organization to create a financing vehicle for our members who are in financial need as they grow their businesses.

Understanding our members is a critical aspect of this project. SFA's efforts have been focused on new and smaller makers trying to bring new products to the market. Some key insights include:

- 50% of our 4,000 members are manufacturing (maker) members with revenue of \$1.0 m. or less.
- These makers are in an industry where 80% of the startups fail.
- We approximate that our members will be looking for financing ranging from \$50k - \$250k; funds may be used for operating or capital expenses.

Program Requirements

1. SFA program requirements include program design for eligible participants. Examples of programs can be:
 - Loan guarantee
 - Loan with repayment schedule
 - Purchase order financing
 - Line of credit
 - Invoice financing

Note: SFA is not interested in becoming an investor in a brand, so program design should not include this type of investment.

2. SFA requires a clear process for how to access funds, the eligibility requirements necessary to access funds, and the repayment structure for those accessing the funds. The program requires a clear process to determine the worthiness of our member applicants.
3. The program requires the ability to collaborate with SFA on terms and conditions, eligibility, etc. (not for individual applicants, but for the program).
4. SFA envisions establishing a revolving fund to provide substantial funding to the program, approximately \$8 million over three (3) years.
5. The Association requires an arm's length distance from the decision-making evaluations (who gets the funds and how much) but will be integral in setting the eligibility requirements.
6. SFA requires the ability to administer the program nationally. Our members reside in nearly every state in the US, so loan origination might be in any of the 50 states.
7. SFA requires a detailed plan describing the administrator's role and accountability, including metrics.

Scope of Services

SFA is looking to partner with an organization or institution to create and administer this financial program. Responsibilities within this scope of services include:

1. Partnering with SFA to develop the program, eligibility requirements, and guidelines (for the program overall, not for individual applicants).
2. Establishing an efficient application process that is responsive to the needs of our small makers.
3. Establishing a clear process for how recipients will access funds, repay, and report on the results.
4. Partnering with SFA to announce the program to SFA members.
5. Providing excellent customer service to applicants and potential applicants.
6. Processing applications, performing all necessary analysis to determine credit worthiness of applicants, and making and communicating decisions to applicants in a timely manner.
7. Distributing funds and servicing payments over the course of the loan.
8. Performing accounting functions, providing quarterly reports to SFA on the loan portfolio, and reporting annually to SFA on the overall program.
9. Fulfilling all governmental and tax obligations.

SFA seeks a partner with:

- Experience in successfully developing and running financial programs for small businesses.
- Strong facilitation and project management skills.
- A commitment to excellent customer service.
- Experience in funds management, accounting, and reporting.
- The demonstrated ability to learn and adjust.
- Familiarity with the specialty food industry and/or small makers is desirable.

SFA seeks organizations who demonstrate understanding of small business financial challenges and experience developing solutions to those challenges. We are open to partnerships between multiple organizations that each bring a unique set of qualifications.

II. RFI Process Requirements

The SFA is seeking information early from vendors as it finalizes an upcoming Request for Proposals (RFP), expected to be issued in Spring 2025. By providing input early in the process, vendors can outline their offerings, cost structures, and teams to help guide the scope development of the RFP. Vendors who do not participate in the RFI are still welcome to participate in the RFP. However, vendors participating in the RFI process will have more time to strategize their proposals and guide the RFP's development in its final stages.

1) PROJECT TIMELINE:

Point in Process	Date*
Issue RFI	January 2nd, 2025
Deadline for RFI Questions from Vendors	January 21, 2025
Responses to RFI Questions Provided	January 28, 2025
RFIs Due	February 13, 2025
Evaluate RFIs	March 2025

**Subject to change*

2) QUESTIONS: If a respondent finds a discrepancy, error, or omission in this RFI package and/or requires any written clarification thereto, it is requested that the respondent notify the primary contact listed on the cover of this RFI so that a written Addendum may be sent to respondents. RFI questions from vendors are due on January 21, 2025. Questions received later than this date and time may not be responded to. The Bid Lab will compile all questions received from vendors and share responses to all questions with all respondents by January 28, 2025.

3) RESPONSE SUBMISSION:

- a) Responses must be submitted to the primary contact, Maurice Harary, by emailing respond@thebidlab.com by the due date and time listed on the cover of this RFI. Late responses may not be accepted or reviewed.
- b) It is preferred that one (1) PDF file be submitted.
- c) All costs incurred in preparing and presenting the responses are the respondent's sole responsibility. No pre-response costs will be reimbursed to any respondent. All documentation submitted with the response will become the property of the SFA.



4) RESPONSE CONFIDENTIALITY: If an offeror believes that any portion of a response/offer contains information that should be withheld from disclosure as confidential, then the offeror shall inform the primary contact in writing and justify to support the offeror's confidentiality claim.

An offeror shall request in writing nondisclosure of information such as designated trade secrets or other proprietary data the offeror considers confidential. Such a request for nondisclosure shall be readily separable from the response to facilitate eventual public inspection of the non-confidential portion of the response.

III. Required Response Format

1. Cover Page

A cover page should include the respondent's name, headquarters address, EIN, website, primary contact name, email address and phone number.

2. Table of Contents

The table of contents should include each section within the respondents' responses.

3. Cover Letter

The cover letter should provide a company overview, solution overview and outline why the respondent should be chosen.

4. Executive Summary

The executive summary should provide an overview of the respondent's company, client base, employees, and capabilities.

5. Company Overview

The company overview should provide the following information about the respondent company:

Company Profile Details		
Company Name		
Year Founded		
Office Location(s), including Headquarters		
Number of Employees		
Primary Contact(s) for RFI/RFP Process (including name, title, email address and phone number)	Name	
	Title	
	Email	
	Phone	

Any history of bankruptcy? If yes, please describe.	
Any history of major litigation? If yes, please describe.	
Any awards or accolades? If yes, please describe.	

6. Overview of Proposed Solution

1. Describe in detail the fund management services does your institution proposes, including, but not limited to:
 - Loan guarantee
 - Loan with repayment schedule
 - Purchase Order Financing
 - Line of credit
 - Invoice Financing
2. Do you have experience managing funds for grant programs or similar initiatives targeting small businesses?
3. Can you customize fund disbursement processes to meet our specific program requirements? The process must include the following criteria:
 - Support for members who manufacture with revenue of \$1.0 million or less.
 - Support with proactive measures for industries with a high failure rate.
 - Flexible financing solutions ranging from \$50,000 to \$250,000 (to be used for operating or capital expenses).
4. What types of tools, educational resources, and guidance programs do you have to support these members?
5. What security measures do you have in place to safeguard the funds?
6. How do you handle funds that require federal, state or local regulations?
7. Please outline how your firm explains how to access funds, the eligibility requirements necessary to access funds, and the repayment structure for those accessing the funds.
8. Please outline the process to determine the creditworthiness of our member applicants.
9. Please outline the process to determine other non-credit requirements for member applicants, including the duration of membership.
10. Please describe how your firm would meet the needs of SFA geographically across all fifty states. If unable to offer services in all fifty states, please describe the states and/or regions your firm would provide services to.



11. Please describe any partnerships or joint ventures the firm has experience with utilizing to provide services in all fifty states.

7. Funds Distribution and Management

1. How do you handle funds distribution and reporting?
2. What methods do you use to distribute funds?
3. Can your system handle disbursement schedules and milestones?

8. Account Management

1. Please provide an overview of the team the SFA will work with throughout the contract term.
2. What level of support do you provide to our organization during the program?
3. Do you offer support to fund recipients? If so, what kind of assistance?
4. How will you communicate with us about the disbursement progress or other issues?

9. Legal and Contractual

1. How do you ensure compliance with all relevant legal and regulatory requirements?
2. Do you conduct due diligence on fund recipients? If so, describe the process.
3. What cybersecurity measures are in place to protect transaction data?
4. Are your processes audited regularly, and can you provide proof of compliance certifications (e.g., SOC 2)?

10. Risk Management

1. How do you manage risks related to fraud or misuse of funds?
2. What is your process for handling disputes or errors in fund disbursements?

11. Cost Overview

1. What is your fee structure for fund management services?
2. Are there additional costs for setup, reporting, or recipient support services?
3. How do you handle unspent funds or excess funds in the account?