



## REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

### New Jersey Water Workforce Development Initiative

**Deadline: February 10, 2023**

#### **PURPOSE**

New Jersey Future, on behalf of the [Jersey Water Works \(JWW\)](#) collaborative, seeks qualifications from a consultant team or qualified firm(s) with experience in creation of workforce development programs. Selected consultants will assist New Jersey Future in meeting specific objectives as part of a 24-month project called ***New Jersey Water Workforce Development Initiative***. This request for qualifications (RFQ) is step one of a multi-phase process.

#### **ABOUT US**

At New Jersey Future (NJF), we believe that great places help build great lives. To help create and preserve our great places, we promote sensible and equitable planning, redevelopment, and infrastructure investments that foster vibrant cities and towns; protect natural lands and waterways; enhance transportation choices; support a strong economy; and provide access to safe, affordable, and aging-friendly neighborhoods for everyone. We do this through original research, innovative policy development, coalition-building, advocacy, and hands-on strategic assistance. NJF is located in downtown Trenton, NJ. For more information, visit [www.njfuture.org](http://www.njfuture.org).

#### **ABOUT JERSEY WATER WORKS**

NJF is the “backbone” organization supporting Jersey Water Works (JWW). JWW is a collaborative effort of many diverse organizations and individuals who embrace the common purpose of transforming New Jersey’s inadequate water infrastructure by investing in sustainable, cost-effective solutions that provide communities with clean water and waterways; healthier, safer neighborhoods; local jobs; flood and climate resilience; and economic growth. Through a collaborative approach, JWW engages the unique perspective and expertise of its member organizations to solve complex problems. The collaborative consists of 145 committee members, 661 supporting members, and over 4,000 network members. JWW seeks equitable, just outcomes as it works collectively to transform water systems for everyone. For more information, visit [www.jerseywaterworks.org](http://www.jerseywaterworks.org).

#### **VISION**

The JWW Water Workforce Task Force is on a mission to bolster education and outreach to make water a career of choice. JWW Task Force’s vision is to create a framework for a statewide water workforce program designed to increase the diversity of community members who can participate and succeed in the water workforce sector.

#### **THE PROBLEM**

We rely on water for our survival, and we rely on the drinking water and wastewater utilities in every community to ensure that our water is managed appropriately. Furthermore, water utilities are a vital asset to communities as they impact our local economy, health, and the environment.

New Jersey has over 500 municipal and private water utilities providing both drinking water and wastewater management. These systems don't function without the frontline people working day in and day out. These essential services require dedicated staff and provide well-paying, career-oriented opportunities.

And yet, utilities face a dual challenge to meet this labor need. The first of the two challenges is that a significant portion of water sector staff are eligible for retirement in upcoming years. Approximately a third of water and wastewater operators in the U.S. are eligible for retirement within the next decade,<sup>1</sup> and all retirements within a utility can result in staffing vacancies of up to 50%.<sup>2</sup> Compounding the issue of an aging workforce, the water sector is struggling to recruit and retain skilled, qualified workers.

The second challenge for utilities is to diversify their workforce by age, gender, and race and provide employment opportunities to individuals within their service area. One study has found that "water workers tend to be older and lack gender and racial diversity in certain occupations, pointing to the need for younger, more diverse talent."<sup>3</sup> At the same time, some individuals in low-income communities of color, many of whom have been historically and systematically excluded from accessing stable jobs with lifelong career pathways, need access to water sector jobs that provide such opportunities. New Jersey, averaging a high number of water utilities compared to the rest of the nation, especially needs to grapple with these issues.

## **THE SOLUTION**

New Jersey Future is creating a ***New Jersey Water Workforce Development Initiative*** with guidance from the JWW Water Workforce Task Force composed of individuals from diverse backgrounds working to transform NJ's water infrastructure. NJF will partner and co-create two initiatives: a water workforce pathway with aligned curriculum through the NJ Pathways to Career Opportunities initiative led by the NJ Council of County Colleges; and a pilot water workforce program to attract, identify, and train water system operators and other water professionals by providing classroom and field training. At least 20 students will be recruited, enrolled in the classes, and connect with participating utilities.

## **SCOPE OF WORK**

New Jersey Future seeks an experienced consultant, firm, or workforce development organization/community college to develop a pilot water workforce program to attract, identify, and train water system operators and other water professionals by providing classroom and field training.

The selected consultant/firm will be responsible for the following, hereinafter referred to as the "Work:"

1. Work closely with New Jersey Future staff and the JWW Water Workforce committee members, who will provide the technical expertise to guide the work.
2. Meet with the Water Workforce Task Force to identify key frameworks to design a water workforce pilot program. This includes working with the Council of Community Colleges as they set up a water workforce pathway.
3. Set up customized training programs including identifying a curriculum, securing training facilitators, and space for meaningful employment for adults to include job preparedness, training, skill building, career counseling, and internship placement. Original plans include

a 10-week program (hours, frequency to be determined). The program itself is to be co-created and is open to exploration. Budget considerations should include items listed above. Note: Industry leaders may be available to provide some instructions.

4. Work with at least two water/wastewater utilities to set up internship opportunities, site visits, and/or other experiential activities.
5. Recruit participants (20–30) in designated locations (Hudson/Passaic Counties). Participants are to reflect the full diversity of the communities the partner utility serves. Consulting/firms must have a culture that values inclusive and welcoming practices.
6. Possibly manage stipends (depends on program framework and partner agreements).

## **SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

Interested consultants/firms shall respond to this RFQ via email to Paula Figueroa-Vega, Jersey Water Works Collaborative and Organizational Development Director, at [pfigueroa@njfuture.org](mailto:pfigueroa@njfuture.org).

Proposing consultants/firms should include the following information at a minimum in their proposals, and should organize their proposals in the same order as the items listed below.

### Each proposal should include:

1. **A dated proposal letter** to be completed and executed by a principal of the firm or by a representative of the firm fully authorized to act on the firm's behalf, indicating that the firm agrees to be bound by the proposal, without modifications unless mutually agreed to by the firm and New Jersey Future. The proposal letter should also include the name, title, street address, email address, and telephone number of an individual with the authority to bind the firm during the period in which proposals are being evaluated. The letter should specify any applicable expiration date for the proposal, before which the proposal cannot be withdrawn.
2. **A list of the firm's staff and qualifications**, including at minimum:
  - a. Information regarding the firm's previous experience with similar or related projects, including a brief description of the project's work and staffing. Information demonstrating the firm and staff capabilities to perform all aspects of the Scope of Work.
  - b. Information regarding the expertise and experience of specific staff members to be assigned to the Work.
  - c. At least two client references, including the name, telephone and email address of a contact person; the client project's start and end date; and a description of the project. References should be for similar or related projects on which proposed key staff members have worked.
  - d. Assurances that all staff at both the proposing firm and any subcontracting firms have the time available during the submitted timeline to execute all listed items in the Scope of Work.
3. **Technical Approach:** Proposals shall include a response to each Scope of Work item.
4. **Management plan and schedule:** The management plan should demonstrate how the firm will manage its responsibilities, schedule its work to be performed, and work with New Jersey Future staff and Initiative members. A timeline for the selection process is below. Please use the dates below in developing a timeline for the water workforce project to be included in all submitted proposals.
  - a. Convene partners, create roadmap for a utility pilot project March 31, 2023
  - b. Find instructors, secure location, secure partners April–July 2023

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| c. Finalize curriculum/plans for educational program     | July 21, 2023     |
| d. Begin recruitment                                     | July–August 2023  |
| e. Finalize recruiting participants                      | August 18, 2023   |
| f. Facilitate utility workforce pilot project (10 weeks) | Sept. - Nov. 2023 |
| g. Create summary report                                 | December 2023     |
| h. Create work plan for year 2                           | December 2023     |

5. **Proposed Budget:** The proposed budget should present a separate cost for each item of the numbered items listed in the Scope of Work, as well as for each of any items proposed under Additional Services, above. All proposed annual budgets under \$30,000 will be considered and should include consultant fees, facilitator’s fee for the courses, and site fee consideration.

**EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR QUALIFICATIONS**

All qualifications will be evaluated in accordance with the below criteria:

- Quality of response: this should directly align with the Scope of Work and requirements.
- Capacity: respondents should clearly demonstrate structural capacity and deep experience in the creation of workforce development programs.
- Staff qualification: respondents should clearly show staff/team proposed to do work have sufficient qualifications and experience to provide service.

Any qualifications that do not demonstrate these minimum requirements will not be evaluated for further consideration.

**PROPOSED SCHEDULE**

1. Request for qualifications released: January 18, 2023
2. Deadline for receipt of qualifications: February 10, 2023
3. Respondent notification if selected to proceed: February 15, 2023
4. Consultant interviews completed: February 24, 2023
5. Consultant selection completed by: February 28, 2023

**TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

All work products shall become the property of New Jersey Future. Digital source files of all work products shall be provided to New Jersey Future upon completion.

**AWARD AND CONTRACT INFORMATION**

The proposing firm agrees that, should it be awarded this contract it will not discriminate against any person who performs work under the terms of the contract because of age, race, creed, color, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion or disability. The successful firm shall comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

All proposing firms shall expressly warrant to New Jersey Future that they have the ability and expertise to perform the proposed Work and in doing so shall adhere to the highest professional standards.

The successful consultant will be required to enter into and sign a formal contract with New Jersey Future. This RFQ and the response of the successful firm—with reasonable adjustments

acceptable to New Jersey Future—will become part of the contract, and will be in effect for the duration of the contract period.

#### **TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

1. New Jersey Future reserves the right to amend this request for proposals at any time.
2. Written requests via email for clarification of intent or content of this RFQ may be sent to Paula Figueroa-Vega at [pfigueroa@njfuture.org](mailto:pfigueroa@njfuture.org) no later than February 9, 2023.
3. The successful firm shall defend, indemnify, and hold harmless New Jersey Future and its officers, agents and employees from any and all claims, demands, damages, costs, expenses, judgments, or liability arising out of this contract or attempted performance of the provisions thereof.
4. New Jersey Future reserves the right to:
  - a. Reject any or all of the proposals, at its discretion.
  - b. Remedy errors in the RFQ.
  - c. Cancel the entire RFQ.
  - d. Issue subsequent RFQ(s).
  - e. Approve or disapprove the use of particular subcontractors or suppliers.
  - f. Negotiate with any, all or none of the proposing firms.
  - g. Accept other than the lowest-priced proposal.
  - h. Waive any informalities or irregularities in any proposal, to the extent permitted by law.

This RFQ does not commit New Jersey Future to enter into a contract.