



INSTRUCTIONS FOR RESPONSE TO
REQUEST FOR BEST VALUE PROPOSALS (RFP) #852R011

Issue Date: November 15, 2023
Title: Research into Youth Tobacco/Nicotine Use Prevention
Issuing Agency: Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY)

Period of Contract: From July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2027.

Anticipated amount of individual grant awards: Not to exceed \$450,000 in a three-year period. Per year, the award amount requested shall not exceed \$150,000. VFHY anticipates awarding up to \$900,000 per year. Offerors may apply for a project period between 1-3 years.

This is an online proposal process. No hard copy proposals will be accepted.

Online proposals are due and must be uploaded by 5:00p.m., Eastern Standard Time, February 15, 2024. To be considered, all proposals must be submitted on or before the date and hour stipulated. Proposals uploaded after the date and hour designated are automatically disqualified and will not be considered. Offerors are encouraged to submit online proposals prior to the deadline to avoid any delays due to busy servers or other internet failures. No late proposals will be accepted, under any circumstances, regardless of the reason(s). VFHY is not responsible if the proposal is not submitted by the appointed time. The official time used in the receipt of responses is the electronic time stamp recorded by the server's clock.

All inquiries for information should be directed to Lisa Brown, Regional and Research Grants Administrator at (703) 501-3042 or lbrown@vfhy.org. Investigators new to the issue of tobacco/nicotine use prevention are strongly encouraged to contact staff to review project concepts and/or to connect to an established researcher or mentor. VFHY technical assistance will be available during regular business hours only.

Note: This Public Body does not discriminate against faith-based organizations in accordance with the *Code of Virginia*, Section 2.2-4343.1 or against an Offeror because of race, religion, color, sex, national origin, age, disability, or any other basis prohibited by state law relating to discrimination in employment.

Late proposals will not be accepted. Proposals will be accepted until 5:00p.m. Eastern Time, February 15, 2024.

All data, materials, and documentation originating and prepared for the VFHY pursuant to the RFP shall belong exclusively to the VFHY and such data, materials and documents shall be

subject to public inspection and disclosure in accordance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act. Trade secrets or proprietary information submitted by an Offeror shall not be subject to public disclosure under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; however, the Offeror must invoke the protection of Section 2.2-4342 (F) of the *Code of Virginia* (<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title2.2/chapter43/section2.2-4342/>), in writing, either before or at the time the data is submitted. The written notice must specifically identify the data or materials to be protected and state the reasons why protection is necessary. The proprietary or trade secret material submitted must be identified by some distinct method such as highlighting or underlining and must indicate only the specific words, figures or paragraphs that constitute trade secrets or proprietary information. The classification of the entire proposal document, line item prices and/or total proposal prices as proprietary or trade secrets is not acceptable and will result in rejection and return of the proposal.

Applicants who are NOT considered a nonprofit, charitable, Virginia government entity or a Virginia state-funded university must also register with Virginia's electronic procurement portal at www.eva.virginia.gov.

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I. PURPOSE: The purpose of the Request for Best Value Proposals (RFP) is to solicit proposals to establish a contract through competitive negotiations for the purchase of collaborative research related to tobacco/nicotine use prevention for youth by the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY). Tobacco/nicotine use includes all tobacco, e-cigarette (vaping), and alternative nicotine products. This solicitation is using Best Value procurement procedures.

II. BACKGROUND: In 1999, the Virginia General Assembly created the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth to distribute monies from the Virginia Tobacco Settlement Fund for the purpose of restricting the use of tobacco products by minors through such means as educational and awareness programs on the health effects of tobacco/nicotine use on minors, and enforcement of laws restricting the distribution of tobacco products to minors. The VFHY began a comprehensive movement to help prevent the youth of Virginia from using tobacco/nicotine products. Its comprehensive plan includes funding local tobacco/nicotine use prevention programs, a statewide multi-media marketing campaign, surveillance and evaluation, and research to identify factors influencing youth tobacco/nicotine use. Since its inception, VFHY's mission has expanded to include substance use and obesity prevention.

The VFHY research goals include building a statewide program of research on causes and prevention of youth tobacco/nicotine use; funding collaborative projects to avoid duplication of efforts; funding multi-disciplinary and multi-partner research in order to utilize expertise and resources efficiently; promoting collaboration and research-sharing within the scientific community; generating new investigators' interest in tobacco/nicotine use prevention research; and using VFHY funding as base for attracting additional outside funding for youth tobacco/nicotine use research in Virginia.

The purpose of this announcement is to stimulate new research into the causes and prevention of youth tobacco use and nicotine dependence. It is anticipated that awardees will often use grant funds to support pilot studies that will lead to larger grant applications to federal, state, and foundation sources. This funding is not intended to extend a currently funded VFHY project with the same aims, rather VFHY is looking for novel projects.

The VFHY is highly committed to funding only collaborative research projects for several reasons: to best utilize the expertise and resources of research entities, to avoid the duplication of research conducted with VFHY funds and to establish a unique system that may result in the leveraging of research funds to gain additional funds from other research sponsors.

III. STATEMENT OF NEEDS: VFHY seeks to fund projects that demonstrate applicability to VFHY's mission and goals related to youth tobacco/nicotine use prevention. Research projects must address tobacco/nicotine use prevention among youth under the age of 18. Examples of potential research topics include:

- The knowledge, perceptions and/or impact of new and/or alternative tobacco/nicotine products including flavored products on youth in Virginia
- Methods to discourage experimentation/initiation of use of alternative tobacco/nicotine products

- The effect of the retail environment on youth initiation, prevalence and/or poly-use
- Tobacco control policy/regulation, including the effects of pricing, tobacco outlet registration/licensing, and law enforcement on youth tobacco use
- The effect of active use of social media and tobacco/nicotine related messages on the attitudes and behaviors about tobacco/nicotine use among youth
- Disparities among differing groups of youth based on social determinants of health
- Cultural factors that influence the age of initiation and prevalence of tobacco/nicotine use among youth
- Research on the types of interventions that work with various demographics of youth
- The impact of other tobacco/nicotine products on the trajectory of use, transition to cigarette/cigar/cannabis use and poly-use among youth
- Developing innovative interventions that target tobacco/nicotine users at the point of initiation and while at low levels of use to prevent ongoing use
- The factors that relate to the progression of experimentation with tobacco/nicotine products to addiction by youth
- Research into tobacco/nicotine use cessation specifically for youth
- Secondary data analysis of existing data sets such as the Virginia Youth Survey

The VFHY will consider projects that demonstrate collaboration with at least one (1) other organization and/or institution (herein referred to as partners). This collaboration can be demonstrated with a thorough description of how collaborating partners will be identified and secured or with letters of support from partners that have agreed to collaborate and/or serve as subcontractors for the proposal. The lead applicant must be a Virginia-based organization. Collaborating partners may be based in Virginia or elsewhere.

The VFHY requires that entities that receive funds also participate in two-day meetings of a statewide coalition, typically held once annually in Richmond, Virginia. The VFHY also requires institutions to participate in a two-day research conference in Richmond, Virginia that will occur once during the funding cycle. This will help promote and ensure collaboration and resource sharing between research entities as well as an integrated statewide effort on all research initiatives. Applicants should budget travel funds for these events. If these events occur virtually, VFHY will work with awardees to modify their budgets during the grant cycle.

The VFHY requires full and complete adherence by the Offeror with the laws governing research with human subjects, Chapter 5.1 (§32.1-162.16 *et seq.*) of the *Code of Virginia*, hereafter

referred to as the Virginia Human Research Act, and any succeeding provisions as may be enacted by the Virginia General Assembly.

IV. REPORTING: Contractors will be required to submit annual progress reports to the VFHY staff and/or VFHY research committee or board on the progress and results of their research. Contractors will also be required to submit financial reports with their invoices to the VFHY. Finally, Contractors will be encouraged to share information, methodologies and results at scientific exchanges hosted by VFHY or other entities in the United States and may budget for up to two people per year to travel to such events.

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ONLINE PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

Read the entire online RFP components, VFHY Terms and Conditions, and Proposal Instructions before completing a proposal.

Offerors must complete each required section of the online proposal, upload budget and budget narrative documents.

Offerors must read and attest to the VFHY's "Terms and Conditions" document available on the VFHY website <https://www.vfhy.org/research-grants/> VFHY staff can email you the documents upon request.

Appendix items must be submitted electronically (uploaded) as part of the online proposals. Uploaded files must be in either Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel or PDF formats. No zip files will be accepted. Directions for file uploading including document conversion and Fax to File, can be found on page 12.

All requirements must be addressed to ensure a complete proposal. Non-responsive proposals may not be forwarded for review.

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

Project Information:

The following sections will be in the online application portal:

Specific Aims

- List the broad, long-term objectives and what the specific research proposed in this application is intended to accomplish. State the hypotheses to be tested.

Background and Significance

- Critically evaluate existing knowledge and identify the gaps which the project is intended to fill.
- State concisely the importance and relevance of the proposed research to the field of youth tobacco/nicotine use prevention.
- Relate the specific aims to the broad, long-term objectives.

Research Methods and Project Implementation Plan

(This section will be uploaded as a document in the online application proposal and may not exceed 35 pages, single-spaced, 12 point font)

- Research design and procedures
- A description of the research setting or context of the project, particularly note any relationship to existing VFHY initiatives

- Operational definition of the subject population, access to subjects, the number of subjects, sampling design, etc.
- Description of the project tasks that covers the entire duration of the project, including:
 - A description of each task and how it will be accomplished
 - Timelines for accomplishing each task
 - Potential obstacles or problems that may occur and how these would be addressed

Proposed Data Analysis Strategy

- What types of analyses will be conducted to evaluate if specific aims are reached.
- How the analyses will answer the research questions.
- A description of the potential impact on public health if the Specific Aims are met.

Staffing/Management Plan

- A description of the role of all key project staff.
- Management plan that identifies the organizational location for the project, lines and mechanisms of authority and responsibility, and how the project will be managed.

Future Research and Capacity Building

- How the project will enhance the capacity of the institution/PI to conduct research on the causes and prevention of youth tobacco/nicotine use, particularly as it is related to new investigator, senior investigators new to the field of youth tobacco use, and/or students.
- What steps will be taken to extend this line of research upon completion of the grant and, in particular, what sources of funding will be sought.
- How the results of the research will be disseminated and, in particular, what publications, grant applications and/or other products are anticipated as a direct result of the research. Specifically identify one or more journals to which you will submit your work for publication and one or more grant programs/announcements to which you will respond.

Collaboration

- A description of plans for collaboration with at least one (1) other entity. Describe the role of each collaborating partner and the resources and expertise each will bring.
- Describe the relationship, whether it is advisory or a subcontracting relationship, and the methods that will be used for reporting between entities. The description does not have to include specific names of partners, however, if it does not, the plan for collaboration must outline how you will identify and enlist others as collaborating partner(s). It should also include a clear description of the resources/expertise that will be sought.
- Written agreements/letters of commitment for other participating organizations should be included in an appendix. Written agreements/letters should specify the roles and responsibilities of each party. These documents do not count toward the page limit.

Budget:

- Budget Attachment (uploaded separately from the Project Information).
- Budget Narrative Attachment (uploaded separately from the Project Information).

Directions for completing these attachments can be found below on page 11.

Appendix:

- Written memorandum of agreement/letters of commitment with partners (uploaded separately from the Project Information)
- Biosketches for Key Personnel (uploaded separately from the Project Information)

EVALUATION AND AWARD CRITERIA

All areas described in “*Specific Requirements*” of the VFHY Proposals Instructions will be reviewed for level of completeness and accuracy.

All proposals will be reviewed and evaluated by a Peer Review Panel. “Best Value” concepts will be used for the evaluation and award. “Best Value” means the overall combination of quality, price, and various elements of required services that in total are optimal relative to a public body’s needs. VFHY will consider awards to other than the highest technically acceptable proposal. The Peer Review Panel will recommend to the VFHY Board of Trustees those proposals which most closely meet the requirements of VFHY and are considered to be “best value.”

A. Evaluation Criteria: Proposals will be evaluated by VFHY using the following adjectival rating method:

Acceptable:

Offeror’s proposal demonstrates an acceptable understanding of goals and objectives of the procurement. There may be strengths and weaknesses, however strengths outweigh the weaknesses.

Marginal:

Offeror’s proposal demonstrates a fair understanding of the goals and objectives of the procurement. Weaknesses have been found that may outweigh strengths that exist. Weaknesses may be difficult to correct.

Unacceptable:

Offeror’s proposal fails to demonstrate an understanding of the goals and objectives of the procurement. The proposal has one or more significant weaknesses that will be very difficult to correct or are not correctable.

The following areas of the proposal will be evaluated by reviewers for completeness, clarity and understanding:

1. Project Information

- a. Clarity of specific aims, objectives, and hypothesis
- b. Importance and relevance of the proposed research to the field of youth tobacco/nicotine use prevention
- c. Clarity of research design and procedures. Description of ability to engage human subjects in research if applicable
- d. Adequacy of analysis plan and relation to public health impact
- e. Reasonableness of proposed timeline and ability to overcome barriers
- f. Reasonable staffing plan to accomplish project aims.

- g. Efforts to build internal research capacity, identify future funding, and disseminate findings
- h. Documentation of commitment of partners/collaborators

2. Proposed budget

- a. Reasonable budget amounts listed by line item
- b. Adequate narrative justification of proposed budget

Award Criteria: Selection will be made of Offerors deemed to be fully qualified and best suited among those submitting proposals on the following: the adjectival ratings from the reviewers' individual evaluation, the group consensus rating at the team review, the Best Value requirements and the amount of funding available. Negotiations will be conducted with the Offerors so selected. Price will be considered but need not be the sole determining factor. After negotiations have been conducted with each Offeror so selected, the agency will select the Offeror(s) that, in its opinion, has made the best proposal(s), and will award the contract(s) to those Offeror(s). The VFHY may cancel this Request for Best Value Proposals or reject proposals at any time prior to an award, and is not required to furnish a statement of the reason why a particular proposal was not deemed to be the most advantageous. (See Section, 2.2-4359 D of the *Code of Virginia*.) Awards are contingent on availability of funds through the Master Settlement Agreement and/or appropriations made by the General Assembly, and/or as budgeted and approved by the VFHY Board of Trustees.

Oral Presentation: Offerors who submit a proposal in response to this RFP may be required to give an oral presentation of their proposal to the VFHY. This provides an opportunity for the Offeror to clarify or elaborate on the proposal. This is a fact finding and explanation session only and does not include negotiation. The issuing agency will schedule the time and location of these presentations. Oral presentations are an option of the purchasing agency and may or may not be conducted.

Reporting Requirements: Contractors will be required to submit annual progress reports to a VFHY Regional Grants Administrator within 15 days after the end of the fiscal year (i.e. July 15 each year). A Final Report is also required at the end of the contract period. Each report must be submitted in a report format provided by VFHY. Reports must be submitted electronically through VFHY's online grants portal. Contractors will also be required to submit monthly reimbursement invoices that include a YTD budget vs. expenditure report to the VFHY Regional Grants Administrator.

Appendix – Memorandums of Agreement (MOA's), Biosketches, Required Statements

Memorandums of Agreement: Memorandums of Agreement with each partner must be included. These must be *Memorandums of Agreement* rather than letters of support. They must have a current date and specifically outline the commitment of each partner. *Only one file can be uploaded per field. For MOA's, offerors should include all MOA's in one file to upload.*

Terms and Conditions/Required Statements: Offerors must enter the name of the organization's Authorized Representative to acknowledge agreement to the Terms and Conditions, including the VFHY Required Statements.

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Directions for Completing the Budget and Budget Narrative

Separate budgets must be completed for each year of funding for which you are applying. These individual annual budgets should be combined into one document and uploaded.

As you prepare the first-year budget, carefully consider the time required for IRB approval if needed (often 2-3 months at most institutions) and only budget for faculty/staff involved in the submission of an IRB application for the first few months of the first year. For example, the principal investigator and/or project manager may be involved in this process and may require funding for the full year. Other faculty/staff may only be involved in the project upon IRB approval and should be included in the budget only for the time after IRB approval (e.g., for 2/3 of Year 1). VFHY does not anticipate fully funding the entire project team in the first year unless the project does not require IRB approval or it is a one-year application.

Upload a budget narrative justification document. Explain how each budget line item was calculated and include formulas used to determine costs. Ensure that all line items are reasonable and are adequately justified. All equipment purchases requested must be thoroughly justified.

Fringe benefits must be listed separately from personnel salaries. No individual salary may exceed \$197,300. If an individual's salary exceeds this amount, include only \$197,300 when calculating the percentage of time for that individual working on the project.

Include travel expenses for each annual research coalition meeting and one research conference in year 3 (if applicant is applying for a 3-year project). Offerors should estimate travel for all events to be held in Richmond, VA. When determining mileage, Offerors should use the rate allowable through their organization. However, VFHY will only reimburse up to the prevailing government mileage rate (see www.gsa.gov).

Indirect costs are defined as general operating expenses required for the program. They are allowable but cannot exceed *10% of the personnel costs requested from VFHY*. Indirect costs are those costs that cannot be assigned to a particular category but are necessary to the operation of the organization for the implementation of the grant program. Examples could include administrative staff, insurance, general office supplies, office equipment and maintenance, general purpose software and computer supplies, peripheral administrative costs. Indirect costs cannot be included anywhere else in the budget.

Supplanting of current funding is not allowed. Supplanting is defined by VFHY as replacing funds already available in your organization to implement a research project.

There is no match required for the grant. However, if an Offeror does expect to provide other funds or in-kind services for the grant, these should be reflected in the overall budget information provided.

Directions for File Conversion, Fax to File and Document Uploading

Several documents must be uploaded with each online proposal. These include the Proposal, budget documents, Memorandums of Agreement and Biosketches.

Normal document files that are formatted in Microsoft Word or Microsoft Excel can be uploaded as electronic documents by selecting the document from its location and uploading it where requested in the online proposal.

Only one file can be uploaded per field. For MOA's, offerors should include all MOA's in one file to upload. Further, all biosketches should be in one file to upload.

Documents with original signatures or those only available in hard copy format must be scanned and then uploaded to the online proposal. These files can also be converted into PDF documents. This simple conversion process will reduce the size of the file and protect the content. Free PDF document converter downloads are available online.

The VFHY online proposals site also offers the "Fax to File" option for those unable to scan or convert their documents to a digital format. This process will enable offerors to fax documents to an external site which will then convert them into electronic PDF files. Offerors will then be able to download to a computer and upload to the online proposals where required. To use this tool, click on the Fax to File tab on the VFHY online proposals page and follow the directions.