November 16, 2027

Request for Proposal
Export Helpline 2027
7ED70

The Organization

The Southern United States Trade Association (SUSTA) is a 501c non-profit international trade development organization, which combines federal, state and industry resources for export market development. SUSTA's member states include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

SUSTA cooperates with its member state Departments of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to carry out programs that will increase U.S. agricultural exports. SUSTA promotes U.S. agricultural products in over 30 countries by way of international trade exhibitions, trade missions, in store promotions, export seminars, and point-of-sale promotions. It also provides export assistance to small business to offset their export promotion costs.

Background

SUSTA's funding is almost entirely derived from the federal Market Access Program (MAP), which is administered by the USDA's Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS). The organization is tasked with promoting exports of high-value food and agricultural products of U.S. origin and the funds must be utilized according to federal regulations outlined by USDA.

SUSTA assists companies in promoting products internationally through two basic types of programs: The Market Access Program "Branded" program and the Market Access Program "Generic" program:

- SUSTA's 50% CostShare (Branded) program assists individual companies to carry out their own marketing activities internationally by reimbursing them for 50% of eligible promotional expenses. Companies must be small according to the Small Business Administration (SBA) guidelines and their products must be of at least

50% U.S. agricultural origin. Products promoted have been as diverse as rice, seafood, alligator hides, snack foods and hot sauce. Companies apply for funding on a fiscal year basis, with marketing and promotional activities taking place year-round.

- SUSTA's Global Events (Generic) activities are industry-wide projects managed by SUSTA staff and its member State Departments of Agriculture. Activities typically include trade missions, trade shows, in store promotions, and trade seminars. Any company or cooperative with products of 50% or more U.S. agricultural origin are welcome to participate in SUSTA's Global Events.

Scope of Work

SUSTA is seeking a qualified consultant to provide individualized export counseling and technical assistance to small and mid-sized agricultural and food companies through SUSTA's Export Helpline. The Helpline is intended to provide companies with timely, practical guidance as they navigate the complexities of exporting and developing international markets.

Companies seeking assistance may range from businesses exploring exporting for the first time to experienced exporters encountering challenges. Because export needs vary by company, product and target market, the consultant must be able to assess each company's individual situation, provide practical and customized guidance, identify appropriate resources and recommend clear next steps.

The goal of the Export Helpline is not simply to answer individual questions or address immediate export barriers, but to strengthen a company's export capabilities by helping them understand how to identify solutions and navigate available resources independently. The Helpline will also connect companies with SUSTA programs and other federal, state, and industry resources that can support their continued international business development.

The consultant will maintain regular communication with appropriate SUSTA staff regarding Helpline activity, complex or unusual inquiries, recurring exporter needs, program referrals and opportunities for improved coordination.

The contract period will be one year, with the potential for renewal in subsequent years.

The time frame for the contract will be 01/01/2027 – 12/31/2027.

Specific responsibilities would include:

1. **Individualized Export Counseling and Technical Assistance**

The consultant will respond to inquiries submitted by approved MySUSTA members and provide customized one-on-one guidance based on the company's products, export experience, target markets and specific business needs.

Areas of assistance may include, but are not limited to:

- Duties and Taxes
- Export Documents
- Export Pricing
- Export Readiness
- Finding Foreign Buyers
- Foreign Market Research
- Free Trade Agreements
- Import Regulations
- Labeling Requirements
- Shipping and Logistics
- Trade Event Prep

The consultant is not expected to provide legal, tax, customs brokerage, or other specialized professional services outside the consultant's area of expertise. When an inquiry requires specialized assistance, the consultant should connect the company with an appropriate authoritative resource or qualified service provider and provide clear guidance regarding recommended next steps.

2. **Timely and Responsive Service**

The consultant will provide professional assistance to companies utilizing the Export Helpline in a timely manner.

At a minimum, the consultant will:

- Acknowledge each inquiry within one business day.
- Provide an initial substantive response by email and/or telephone within two business days.
- Communicate anticipated next steps when an inquiry cannot be fully addressed within the initial response period.
- Provide reasonable follow-up when additional assistance is needed.

Responses should be clear, practical and appropriate for companies with varying levels of international business experience.

3. **Research and Resolution of Export Questions**

The consultant will conduct reasonable research when necessary to respond to company-specific questions that extend beyond readily available general export guidance.

Research and recommendations should rely on credible and authoritative resources, including, as appropriate, USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, State Departments of Agriculture and other appropriate trade resources.

The consultant must be able to translate complex export information into clear and actionable guidance that companies can use to move their export activities forward.

4. **Connection to SUSTA Programs and Services**

The consultant will maintain a strong working knowledge of SUSTA's programs and services and use Helpline interactions as an opportunity to connect companies with additional assistance appropriate to their stage of export development.

5. **Documentation and Reporting**

The consultant will maintain appropriate documentation of Export Helpline activity and provide quarterly reports to SUSTA.

Documentation should include, at minimum:

- Company receiving assistance
- Date of inquiry and response
- General nature or category of the inquiry
- Assistance provided
- Resources or referrals provided

Reporting should allow SUSTA to assess utilization of the Helpline, responsiveness to company inquiries, common areas of assistance, referrals to SUSTA programs and other resources and overall outcomes.

6. **Webinar Development**

The consultant will periodically identify recurring questions and themes observed through Helpline inquiries. The consultant should share relevant trends with SUSTA and, together, identify topics and curriculum for webinars.

Activity Background:

The Export Helpline will provide participants with expert guidance tailored to their company and products.

Budget:

Funding for this project is provided through the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service Market Access Program and is subject to the appropriate regulations and policies.

Sufficiency of Response

Each proposal will be scored on the following measurements:

- Description of proposed activities and relevancy
- Measurable results of previous, similar programs managed by the respondent
- Approach to managing the activity
- Cost
- References (minimum of 3)

Proposals should be concisely written to respond to this RFP. Elaborate attachments are not necessary.

Acceptance of Proposal

The successful bidder's proposal will be the basis of a contract executed with SUSTA to perform all services at the specified costs contained in the bidder's proposal. SUSTA retains the right to negotiate with the successful bidder prior to final contract execution.

Subcontractors

If any service is to be performed by someone other than the contractor's permanent staff, all subcontractors and their addresses must be included in the proposal. These will be subject to approval by SUSTA.

Deadline for Proposal

All proposals from bidders must be submitted by **December 7, 2026 at 5:00 PM (CST)**. The successful bidder will receive notification as soon as the committee has reviewed and assessed all proposals received. The planned commencement of the project will start upon written notification from SUSTA. Proposals may be emailed to the following:

Bernadette Wiltz-Lang
Executive Director
Southern United States Trade Association
701 Poydras St. Suite 3845
New Orleans, LA 70139
Tel. (504) 568-5986 Fax (504) 568-6010
Bernadette@susta.org

And

Danielle Coco
Southern United States Trade Association
Marketing & Communications Director
701 Poydras St. Suite 3845
New Orleans, LA 70139
Tel. (504) 568-5986 Fax (504) 568-6010
Danielle@susta.org

Questions

All questions in regard to this RFP should be directed to:

Danielle Coco
Marketing & Communications Director
Southern United States Trade Association
701 Poydras St. Suite 3845
New Orleans, LA 70139
Email address Danielle@susta.org

Rejection of Proposals

SUSTA retains the right to reject all proposals submitted in response to this RFP. SUSTA does not discriminate in any of its programs and activities against recipients on the basis of: age, disability, national origin or ancestry, race, color, religion, creed, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, military status, marital or familial status.