November 16, 2027

Request for Proposal
Export Readiness Training 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 contractor to manage and deliver its comprehensive Export Readiness program for small and mid-sized agricultural and food businesses in SUSTA's southern U.S. region. The program is intended to meet SUSTA participants where they are and help them to develop and grow.

The three components of Export Readiness are the 12-hour Export Readiness Training (ERT) class; Export Readiness Training 2.0 (ERT 2.0); and an on-demand series of videos and content that exporters can access at any time.

The contractor should bring demonstrated expertise in international trade, with a focus on agricultural and food exports. The contractor should also have excellent communication skills to effectively teach and train agriculture businesses. Training should be practical and interactive and specifically relevant to companies that are new to exporting or in the early stages of developing international sales.

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

Specific responsibilities would include:

1. **Export Readiness Training**
   SUSTA anticipates offering ERT virtually twice annually, with up to 10 – 15 companies participating in each training cohort, consistent with the current program structure. The selected contractor will be responsible for the following:

   a. **Curriculum Development**
      Create a comprehensive ERT curriculum that guides participating companies through the development of an international marketing and export strategy. Curriculum should address practical topics such as market research, import requirements, pricing, buyer outreach, USDA/FDA certifications, logistics, payment, financing and insurance. The contractor

should update curriculum as international trade conditions and resources evolve and in response to participant feedback.

b. **Recruitment**
Prior to each training, give webinar presentation that touches on Export Readiness Training topics with the goal of recruiting companies to register for training. Participate in other recruitment efforts when training is not at capacity.

c. **Company Export Readiness Assessment**
Develop or maintain an assessment process that helps participants identify their current level of export readiness, strengths, gaps and priority areas for development. The contractor should use assessment results to help tailor training and should provide participants with clear recommendations or next steps for continuing their export development.

d. **Training Delivery**
Plan, coordinate and facilitate interactive virtual ERT sessions for participating companies. The contractor should:

- Provide experienced instructors with practical international trade experience.
- Use real-world examples, and assignments rather than relying primarily on lecture-based instruction.
- Create opportunities for participants to apply concepts directly to their own companies and products.
- Provide appropriate training materials and reference resources.
- Incorporate guest experts or partner resources when they strengthen the curriculum.
- Include SUSTA's resources and other appropriate federal and state resources into the training
- Provide reasonable follow-up guidance to help participants apply what they learned.

e. **Evaluation and Reporting**
Work with SUSTA to establish and track meaningful measures of program effectiveness. Performance measures and reporting should align with applicable USDA Foreign Agricultural Service requirements. Provide SUSTA

with timely documentation necessary to administer, evaluate and report on the program.

2. **ERT 2.0**
   ERT 2.0 is individualized counseling with companies that have graduated from the Export Readiness Training class and are signed up to take part in a SUSTA trade event (trade mission or trade show). This one-on-one attention will help them take their strategy from a concept to reality. Participants will receive coaching tailored to their product, trade show or mission and countries of interest.

   The consultant should support SUSTA to evaluate and track performance beyond participation. This should include sales data, entering a new market or any other measure of growth established by SUSTA and the consultant.

3. **On-demand Export Readiness Resources**
   Develop content for a library of on-demand Export Readiness resources that provide companies with practical assistance throughout the year, regardless of whether they participate in SUSTA's full Export Readiness Training program. Resources should be designed to help companies address specific export questions or build knowledge in targeted areas based on their individual stage of export readiness.

   The resources may include short educational videos, step-by-step guides or other practical tools. Content should be concise, easy to understand, and action-oriented, with an emphasis on helping companies understand not only what to do, but how to do it and where to find reliable information or assistance.

   The consultant will be responsible for:

   a. **Content**
      Identify and recommend a series of focused, "bite-sized" export topics appropriate for on-demand learning and develop the substantive educational content for each topic. Topics may include but are not limited to: How to determine your HS Code and what is it; How to identify target markets; Common export pricing strategies; What is a pro forma invoice.

      Consultant will also provide the information to be shared on each topic. Content should provide practical instruction and direct companies to authoritative resources and appropriate next steps when additional assistance is required.

b. **Video Content Consultation**
Collaborate with SUSTA and its video production contractor to adapt educational content into short, engaging video formats. The consultant may be asked to develop outlines, talking points, scripts or other source material; review content for technical accuracy; participate in planning discussions; and provide subject-matter guidance during the production process.

Video filming, editing, graphic design, and production are not expected to be the responsibility of the Export Readiness consultant.

c. **Development of Supporting Materials**
Identify opportunities to supplement video content with useful tools such as step-by-step guides, checklists, worksheets, templates and links to authoritative resources.

Develop the substantive content for these materials in coordination with SUSTA. Resources should be designed so that individual materials can stand alone while collectively creating a broader library that supports companies throughout the export-development process.

Activity Background:

The export readiness training will provide agribusinesses the tools to create a successful international marketing strategy.

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.