

## Request for Proposals: Research Employee Training Best Practices and Regional Needs Seven Lakes Small Business Alliance

*Disclaimer:* This case study for business research methods courses is a fictional request for proposals inspired by real small business non-profit organizations and actual past requests for proposals from similar organizations.

**Background:** The mission of the Seven Lakes Small Business Alliance (7LSBA) is to create a collaborate environment for leaders of small and medium sized businesses in the Seven Lakes region. We create events and offer services to help businesses engage in best practices and offer opportunities for professional development. Our members include regionally-owned businesses with 50 or fewer employees.

**Objective:** One service our organization provides is training consulting for our business members. Many small businesses are light on resources and diversity of expertise that are helpful for training their employees. The types of training needs are diverse and include, but are not limited to, software and computer technology, legal issues such as sexual harassment training and confidentiality, cultural and diversity training, and finance and accounting competence. We organize seminars on best practices for employee training, and we connect local employers with resources, consulting firms, or technology that can aid them in their employee training needs.

**Research projects:** We seek research on better understanding best practices of employee training among small and medium sized businesses in the region. Among our interests is understanding what medium do employers use for training (computer based, face-to-face seminars, etc.), what types of training do employers currently provide, and whether employers currently conduct training in house or hire outside consultants. We are also interested in the level of satisfaction among business leaders concerning the costs and effectiveness of their current training practices. We are interested in how these training needs may be related to industry type and employee demographics. Finally, we are interested in how we may better serve the businesses in the Seven Lakes region in terms of training consulting.

**Awards:** 7LSBA has a budget of \$75,000 to split among several research project applicants. Awards for individual projects will be in the range of \$1,000 to \$10,000. Higher valued awards are expected to have a greater impact.

**Format:** Research proposals should be 2-4 pages, single-spaced with blocked paragraphs (i.e. space in between paragraphs), and should include section headings, tables, bulleted lists, and/or other writing devices to make the proposal easy to scan and read.

Proposals should clearly communicate the following issues:

- *Objective:* As concisely and specifically as possible, state the objective of your proposed research project.
- *Background and/or literature:* What is already known in the field of your research project, and how does your research project fit into existing knowledge?
- *Methodology:* What methods and/or tools will you use to achieve your objective? Include what information, variables, or characteristics you will collect; what population you will draw information from; and what type of analysis will you conduct.
- *Impact:* Answer the following: What knowledge will you create upon completing your research project? What individuals or businesses in the Seven Lakes region will this benefit? How will they benefit? Be specific.

- *Deliverables:* What will you create as a result of the research project? This may include, but not necessarily be limited to, a report, presentation, database, list of recommendations, etc.
- *Budget:* Provide a detailed budget of expenses. If asking for reimbursement for labor time, include estimates of time commitments and appropriate hourly or salary compensation.

**Criteria:** Awards will be selected based on the following criteria, given in no particular order:

- *Mission:* The degree to which the project contributes to the mission and current needs of the 7LSBA.
- *Focus:* How specific is the objective and the description of the impact? More focus helps the 7LSBA better understand the nature and value of your contribution. Too narrow a focus may imply lesser value of the project.
- *Value to local businesses and economy:* Does the objective and impact describe specific benefits to the business community?
- *Consistency:* Does the impact match the objective? Does the methodology match objective?
- *Marginal contribution:* How does the impact fit within and make extensions to existing knowledge?
- *Feasibility and reliability:* How likely are the researchers able to conduct what is described in the methodology and how likely are the researchers able to produce the deliverables they describe? More specific description of the methodology is likely to convince the VCCVB that the researchers have thought through feasible methods and are knowledgeable of the tools to conduct these methods.
- *Budget:* Is the budget specific and feasible, and how does the total cost compare to the value of the project?

**About Us:** We are a member-financed non-profit organization that is also supported by government and private grants whose missions are to support and grow the economy through small and medium-sized businesses. We offer our members monthly seminars on best business practices for organizations of their size. Many of our seminars provide regional employers new knowledge for managing employees and managing finances. We are also a major sponsor of the Seven Lakes Region Economic Trends quarterly breakfast where government leaders and economic experts present data on current regional economic conditions and forecasts.

Finally, we provide expanded and customized consulting services to individual member businesses for additional fees. Small teams of knowledgeable business leaders from the region will visit a business, learn their strengths and specific needs, and make customized recommendations.

**Proposal Submission:** Submit your research proposal by November 3, 2017 to James Murray, Director of the Seven Lakes Small Business Alliance.