



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

WORKFORCE CONSULTANT

**TO DEVELOP AND DESIGN A WASTEWATER SAMPLING TRAINING PROGRAM AND MAP
RELATED CAREER PATHWAYS**

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST DUE APRIL 5, 2024 AT 5:00 PM CT

PROPOSALS DUE APRIL 15, 2024 AT 5:00 PM CT



SUMMARY

In January 2024, Current was awarded \$225,000 in Congressionally Directed Spending secured through Senator Tammy Duckworth from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration **to develop and pilot an entry-level job training program centered around wastewater-based epidemiology (WBE).**

Current is seeking a qualified consultant to support the development and design of the wastewater sampling job training program and map related career pathways. The subsequent request for proposals seeks a workforce consultant to form and lead a working group to advise on the project, develop inclusive curriculum for the training program, and collaborate with partners to map career pathways for wastewater-based epidemiology. Partners for the project include Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD), Cara Collective, City Colleges of Chicago, and Discovery Partners Institute. This is a *planning phase* contract and the scope of work does not include curriculum delivery and implementation.

ABOUT CURRENT

Current is a Chicago-based nonprofit water innovation hub. Our mission is to grow an inclusive blue economy, accelerate adoption of innovative water technologies, and solve pressing water challenges. The world’s persistent water problems –such as resource recovery, agricultural run-off and contaminants in drinking water– won’t be solved by any one government, scientist, or company. And, unfortunately, people are not rallying fast enough behind new technologies and ideas to protect our health and environment. Current exists to be a collaborative catalyst for improved water quality, conservation, and management. Founded in Chicago in 2016, Current brings together leaders to develop solutions that would be too risky or even impossible for any one group to undertake alone. We want to export our home-grown solutions to help solve the world’s water challenges and bring the best ideas from around the world to solve ours.

Current serves as a conduit for both new technologies and the policy innovations that support their adoption. Our focus includes institutional and policy innovation, and shaping the underlying policies, governance structures, and market conditions that enable faster technology adoption. Current builds partnerships with individuals, government, nonprofits, businesses, and researchers who are willing to take rational risks to try out new solutions. We then help to develop and launch pilot projects that achieve environmental and economic equity. Since 2016, Current has supported 9 water pilot projects that have resulted in the commercialization of 30+ water technologies and secured over \$45 million in funding to support water technology development. Most recently, a six-state cross-sector collaborative led by Current was named one of 10 inaugural Regional Innovation Engines by the U.S. National Science Foundation and will bring up to \$160 million to the region over the next 10 years. This project, called Great Lakes ReNEW, will use inclusive, streamlined innovation, workforce development, and stakeholder engagement to drive a decarbonized circular blue economy that will transform the Great Lakes region.

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Current plays a key role connecting the economic development and environmental ecosystems as a catalyst, connector, and advocate. We support the growth of a vibrant, resilient, and inclusive blue economy by identifying and implementing specific strategies to build better workforce and education programs, entrepreneurial ecosystems, commercialization pathways, and exporting partnerships. Our vision is a stronger blue economy that positions our region to become a global center of water technology innovation, with the capacity to solve persistent water challenges.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

In 2023, with funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, Current published ***Upstream Illinois: Strategies to Boost Illinois' Blue Economy***. This report outlines high-level goals and targets for the Blue Economy—growth in jobs, exports, investment—and makes recommendations for multi-year strategies to realize them. In addition, the report identified 5 key workforce opportunities related to water: lead service line replacement, climate resilient infrastructure, water utility operations, manufacturing, and wastewater epidemiology and public health. One priority that also emerged from this inclusive blue economy strategy is the need to strengthen and diversify Illinois' water workforce by creating clear pathways to higher education and employment in water for the people who need it most.

With funding from the Congressionally Directed Spending secured through Senator Tammy Duckworth from the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, Current will lead the development and piloting of an entry-level job training program focused on wastewater surveillance. In 2024, Current and partners will create and implement a training program modeled after an existing wastewater sampling position on Current's team. Individuals in these roles collect wastewater samples from sewers and waterways that are then analyzed for potential pathogens. Wastewater sampling offers a specific opportunity for skill-building through specimen management, field work, and community engagement. These skills are also required in other water and science focused careers, including those related to water quality sampling and management, lead service line replacement, laboratory jobs, scientific field work jobs, and others. The demand for these skills is increasing as Chicago's blue economy grows.

This project has two main components: 1) developing and piloting an entry-level education and training pilot program centered on wastewater sampling and monitoring, and 2) mapping related career pathways and education programs in the region. The pilot training program will create opportunities for hands-on experience with water sampling in Chicago, helping participants to develop a deep understanding of the purpose, methods, and impact of water quality monitoring and testing. The goal is to develop a roadmap of programs and pathways related to water quality skills training –including water quality sampling and monitoring, wastewater-based epidemiology and potentially, lead service line identification and replacement– that help Illinoisans gain technical skills and practical experience to prepare for good-paying jobs and careers in water-related industries.

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The project is also designed to engage adults from historically disinvested communities and those who are underrepresented in utilities and water-related industries in Illinois. The main beneficiaries include Chicagoans who live below the Federal Poverty Line, are experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness, and/or are unemployed. An emphasis will also be placed on recruiting women and/or Black and Latinx program participants, who are frequently underrepresented in science and engineering careers.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Funding for the project was secured in January 2024 and will support it across 24 months. The training protocol for the program will be finalized by the end of June 2024. Mapping for education and career pathways will be completed by the end of December 2025. The overall project time is listed below, with tasks related to this contract in bold:

- May 15, 2024 - **Project working group formed**
- May 30, 2024 - **Training protocol finalized and recruitment plan finalized**
- August 30, 2024 - Program participants recruited
- April 30, 2025 - Pilot training program completed
- October 31, 2025 - **Mapping for education and career pathways completed**
- December 31, 2025 - Program evaluation completed

SCOPE OF SERVICES

Current will serve as the project lead, but is collaborating closely with MWRD, Cara Collective, City Colleges of Chicago, and Discovery Partners Institute for this project. Current is also required to provide on-time grant reports for the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. The chosen consultant team will work with Current staff to provide supporting documentation and updates to meet reporting deadlines in a timely manner.

Current is seeking an experienced consultant to execute the following tasks over approximately 18 months with anticipated timelines:

- 1. Form and lead a working group to advise on the project**
 - a. Identify a diverse set of key community groups and organizational partners to engage in the advisory working group, building on Current's existing blue jobs workforce partners
 - b. Prepare meeting content and lead advisory group meetings with Current staff
 - c. Communicate findings and progress on curriculum development and pathway mapping with advisory group
 - d. Incorporate advisory group recommendations and input as agreed upon with Current staff
- 2. Design and build training program curriculum**
 - a. Leverage advisory group expertise and input to design a 12-week job training program for wastewater sampling that builds participants' understanding of water quality, sampling, and environmental issues, and develops their skills for the role

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- b. Collaborate with Current's staff, wastewater sampling team, and partners to gather insight to shape the training curriculum
 - c. Provide recommendations for scaling the program
- 3. Support Current and partners in developing a program recruitment plan**
- a. Research and implement best practices for creating an equitable and inclusive recruitment plan
 - b. Work with workforce partners to learn about and apply their recruitment strategies
- 4. Map education and career pathways related to water quality sampling and monitoring**
- a. Research existing education programs, training programs, and water and science careers related to wastewater-based epidemiology, water quality sampling and management, laboratory positions, scientific field work, etc.
 - b. Collaborate with training partners and educational institutions in the Chicago region to identify programs and pathways
 - c. Produce a career pathways roadmap

PROJECT FEES

The total fee for this project may not exceed \$75,000.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

IMPORTANT: Expression of Interest – Firms who intend to submit a proposal must first submit an Expression of Interest by 5:00 PM, CT on April 5, 2024 via email to Hannah Henderson.

Expression of Interest emails must include the following elements:

- Name of the firm applying
- Firm website
- Point of contact name
- Email address of the applicant

Expressions of Interest should be sent to:

Hannah Henderson
Program Manager at Current
hhenderson@currentwater.org

RFP Questions: Any questions regarding this RFP must be submitted via email to Hannah Henderson at hhenderson@currentwater.org by 11:59 PM, CT on April 10, 2024 to receive a response before the submission deadline.

Final Proposals: Completed submissions are due at 5:00 PM, CT on April 15, 2024 and must include all of the following elements in order:

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✓	Proposal Components (page limit: 8 pages?)
1	A general description of your firm, including history, staff and structure
2	A description of your firm's qualifications and technical capacities
3	A narrative of your project approach, including research methods and engagement strategies to achieve the above scope of work
4	A proposed timeline of the work schedule and deliverables
5	A brief (one page maximum) explanation of your firm's understanding of and approach to inclusive workforce development and equity
6	A summary of your firm's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEIA), including any MBE/WBE status, DEIA policies or practices, specific DEIA expertise held by team members, or other relevant information
7	A profile of the consultant team, including resumes/bios of specific team leads and members
8	Detailed budget including the total number of hours devoted to each task, staff levels and hourly fees of proposed team members
9	At least three examples of related previous work
10	At least three professional references, including at least one current or past client. Please include the contact name, organization, email address, and phone number for your references.

Please submit your final proposal by 5:00 PM, CT on April 15, 2024 in PDF form to:
Hannah Henderson
Program Manager at Current
hhenderson@currentwater.org

SELECTION PROCESS AND NOTIFICATION SCHEDULE

Current staff and partners will select a winning proposal and award a contract following the schedule below:

- March 21, 2024 - Request for proposals issued
- April 5, 2024 - Expression of interest due via email by 5:00 PM, CT
- April 10, 2024 - Last day to submit questions by 11:59 PM, CT
- April 15, 2024 - Proposals due via email by 5:00 PM, CT
- April 22, 2024 - Winning firm notified
- April 29, 2024 - Contract signed
- May 1, 2024 - Expected project start

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SELECTION CRITERIA

The winning team will be selected by its ability to meet the following criteria:

1. Overall experience and reputation of the consultant and/or consultant team
2. Technical skills and expertise in the areas of workforce development, curriculum design, program development, and career pathway mapping, with specific respect to innovation economies and inclusive growth
3. Knowledge and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility
4. Clarity of project approach with respect to project goals and scope
5. Quality and relatedness of previous work and positive references
6. Project budget clarity and value, including hourly fees and total cost