

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL ON BEHALF OF THE SOUTH EAST LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP

COVID-19 Business Support Fund Framework

SPECIFICATION

Issued 6 January 2021

Procurement Project CO0044

1. **South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP)**
   1. SELEP is a partnership for growth between business, government and education, working with central government and its key agencies to pursue and attract major investment into the South East to deliver significant economic growth. The SELEP region includes East Sussex, Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend and Thurrock with Essex County Council acting as Accountable Body for SELEP.
   2. A key strand of SELEP’s remit is to support businesses in the South East to start, operate and grow. The region has an annual economic output of around £90 billion and a business base of circa 170,000 made up overwhelmingly of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with 90% of these being micro businesses. This business base is key to economic stability and growth.
   3. SELEP’s South East Business Hub and its component local Growth Hubs (Business East Sussex, Business Essex, Thurrock and Southend, and the Kent & Medway Growth Hub) provide free and impartial information and advice to all businesses looking to succeed, helping them to navigate the national, regional and local business support landscape.
   4. Further information can be found on the [South East Business Hub website](https://southeastbusiness.org.uk/essex-southend-thurrock/).
2. **SELEP COVID-19 Business Support Funding**
   1. SELEP’s Strategic Board has agreed to redeploy existing funding in 2020 for the purposes of COVID-19 recovery. Further information on this can be found in [SELEP’s COVID-19 Economic Response Statement.](https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2020/08/SELEP_Economic_Response_statement-_PDF_EC2.pdf)
   2. This fund is in response to the profound impact that the pandemic has had on SMEs and their ability to operate following the introduction of national measures to protect public health. The aim of the funding is to provide business support interventions that provide relevant additionality to the current business support landscape.
   3. Supporting businesses to safeguard themselves and their staff during the pandemic is central to a COVID-19 recovery approach. They need to innovate and be agile in order to navigate the uncertainties that are compromising their survival, so that they can continue or resume trading.
   4. To help address these needs, the SELEP Strategic Board has agreed to the procurement and delivery of three targeted SELEP-wide support programmes to support pre-starts and start-ups, business digitisation, and support for the Visitor Economy.
   5. Businesses identify support schemes that are suitable and relevant to their individual needs, often with the help of the [Growth Hub](https://southeastbusiness.org.uk/) service providing a front door to what is often seen as a complicated landscape, and helping them navigate all of the financial and non-financial support available.
   6. These new programmes will take their place in this landscape and need to be tailored to address current requirements and demand. Each scheme will act as a potential steppingstone to business on their customer journey to recovery and success, providing catalysts for operational and behavioural change.
   7. Each programme will support a minimum number of SMEs and contribute to the safeguarding of both businesses and related jobs. Each will also award a minimum number of small business grants. It is anticipated that programme beneficiaries will implement one or more changes to the way that they operate, in response to customer needs and behaviours relating to COVID-19. An evaluation of business and behavioural change is a required programme outcome.
3. **Introduction to the tender**
   1. The aim of this tender is to ensure high quality, effective and efficient delivery of three individual business support programmes responding directly to the impacts of COVID-19.
   2. The tender is divided into three Lots, further details can be found in Section 4 of this specification:

* Lot 1: Supporting pre-starts and start ups
* Lot 2: Digitising Business, supporting e-commerce and retail
* Lot 3: Supporting the Visitor Economy
  1. Essex County Council is managing this procurement on behalf of SELEP and is looking for Service Providers to deliver each programme, which will include the administration of small business grant funding and provision of specialist support.
  2. Bids can be from a single organisation, a consortium or a lead entity with sub-contracting; this will be at the bidder’s discretion. Bidders will be required to identify which Lot(s) they are applying for within the online tender documentation.
  3. Bidders may bid for a maximum of two Lots. It is envisaged that a single preferred bidder will be identified for each Lot.
  4. All approaches must demonstrate their ability to deliver proportionately across the SELEP geography (see 1.1) and relevant knowledge, experience and skills required to deliver the Lot(s) of interest.
  5. This fund is responding directly to the urgent needs of the business community in light of COVID-19, and it is expected that each programme will deliver within a 12-month period. The contract will cover a period of 24 months to allow for stepped commencement dates of the three programmes in line with anticipated business needs if required, a post-programme evaluation exercise, as well as providing contingency time to accommodate any delays to delivery resulting from new COVID-19 impacts or restrictions e.g. further lockdowns.
  6. Bidders should note that the three Lots have been designed to run separately and will be contracted and managed accordingly. Bids that are submitted based on merging of Lots or shared delivery models across Lots will not be considered.
  7. A Tender Evaluation Panel will evaluate all bids received under this framework. Panels will include but may not be limited to representatives from the SELEP Secretariat, Local Authorities and the South East Business Hub, where there are no conflicts of interest and will be conducted in accordance with Essex County Council procurement rules.

1. **Scope of the individual Lots** 
   1. Lot 1 – Supporting pre-starts and start-ups

Activity:

* + 1. The programme must provide structured and set-hour 1-2-1 and 1-2-many support to cohorts of pre-starts and start-ups that have the potential to operate during and/or beyond a COVID-19 climate.
    2. The programme shall include provision of learning, advice and mentoring to an audience that includes those made redundant or unemployed as a result of COVID-19.
    3. The programme must include a small 100% grant scheme with a grant range of £500 - £2,000, available to businesses accessing sufficient learning, advice and mentoring through the programme.
    4. The programme should look to apply learning from similar programmes, such as target audience, key sectors and up-take demographics.

Outcomes:

* + 1. Minimum of 100 businesses created or safeguarded
    2. Evaluation of the programme to measure impact and identify changes to ways of working and behaviours brought about by the process of adapting to the impacts of COVID-19.

Skills and experience:

* + 1. Bidders will need to demonstrate through their bids that they have the skills and experience required to run the programme competently and successfully.
    2. Experience of working with and the ability to provide support to start-up businesses and new enterprises is important, and bidders should demonstrate their skills and experience in doing this.
    3. Bidders will need to show that they understand the challenges that many new businesses face, particularly in the current climate, and what support they need. This should include details of the proposed delivery model and how it will address these needs and challenges.
  1. Lot 2 – Digitising Business, supporting e-commerce and retail

Activity:

* + 1. The programme must provide a programme of webinars, 1-2-1 and 1-2-many advice and diagnostics to businesses looking to adapt and innovate through digitisation in order to remain viable during and/or beyond a COVID-19 climate.
    2. The programme will help businesses to build online presence and competitiveness/ marketing, rebuild supply chains, improve productivity, implement flexible working and/or new/hybrid business models, and employ tools to aid mental wellbeing.
    3. The programme must include a small 100% grant scheme with a grant range of £500 - £2,000 for the purchase of new IT hardware/software identified or recommended and that will enable the adoption of new to business technology and approaches, available to businesses accessing sufficient advice and guidance through the programme.

Outcomes:

* + 1. Minimum of 100 businesses safeguarded.
    2. Minimum of 100 grants awarded to assist safeguarding of businesses and jobs, and to bring about operational/ behavioural change.
    3. Evaluation of the programme to measure impact and identify changes to ways of working and behaviours brought about by the process of adapting to the impacts of COVID-19.

Skills and experience:

* + 1. Bidders will need to demonstrate through their bids that they have the skills and experience required to run the programme competently and successfully.
    2. Experience of working with and the ability to provide support to businesses is important, and bidders should demonstrate their skills and experience in doing this.
    3. Bidders will need to show their skills and experience in undertaking relevant diagnostics with businesses, identifying their business needs and how the business can digitise to meet them.
  1. Lot 3 – Supporting the Visitor Economy

Visitor Economy Support Element 1 - Visitor Economy Grant Scheme:

* + 1. Provision of a 100% grant scheme with a grant range of £1,000 - £3,000 for visitor economy businesses for the purchasing of tools, equipment and trading approaches needed to adapt or innovate, and facilitating a COVID-19 secure environment.
    2. Grants shall be awarded to businesses who have already accessed recognised support/advice on how to innovate and/or remodel. For example, though the Growth Hubs, South East Business Boost, the South East Business COVID Recovery (SEBCOR), the Sector Support Fund Project Rebuilding Confidence and Demand in the Visitor Economy
    3. Consideration will be given to the use of the Grant Scheme for the purchase of specialist support/ advice to enable businesses to adapt or innovate, if demand and/or a marketplace gap can be demonstrated at time of tender. Such proposals must align with complementary/ similar live schemes.

Visitor Economy Support Element 2 - Rebooting the Visitor Economy in 2021:

* + 1. Provision of a programme of support and training that will bring together and facilitate multiple businesses and organisations to curate a place-based offer, in order to increase visitor confidence, footfall and spend and regenerate the area.
    2. The approach will provide a holistic and innovative approach to supporting visitor economy industries including creative, cultural, hospitality, leisure and accommodation, as they acclimatise to new trends and ways of working resulting from COVID-19.
    3. The campaigns and curation of place-based offers will align with other live place-specific initiatives, such as the SELEP Sector Support Fund Rebuilding Confidence and Demand in the Visitor Economy project, and Future High Street Fund projects.

Outcomes:

* + 1. Minimum of 150 grants awarded to enable businesses to adapt and innovate, with potential for a minimum of 150 businesses and jobs to be safeguarded.
    2. Places supported to recover and regenerate through the curation of placed-based offers and associated campaigns, driven by business needs to increase visitor confidence, footfall and spend.
    3. Business needs will be identified and curated through the bringing together of a specified number (or numeric range) of relevant businesses and organisations, representative of the visitor economy, to generate a specified number of place-based offers that will shape the reboot campaigns.
    4. Evaluation of the programme to measure impact and identify changes to ways of working and behaviours brought about by the process of adapting to the impacts of COVID-19.

Skills and experience:

* + 1. Bidders will need to demonstrate through their bids that they have the skills and experience required to run the programme competently and successfully.
    2. Experience of working with and the ability to provide support to relevant businesses is important, and bidders should demonstrate their skills and experience in doing this.
    3. Bidders will need to demonstrate a good understanding of the particular challenges and issues faced by the visitor economy and show both their skills and experience in working with key visitor economy industries or sectors, and facilitating collaborative place-based activities.

1. **Delivery and eligibility criteria**
   1. All programmes must respond directly to the impacts of COVID-19 on the operations of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs, EU definition).
   2. All programmes must be free to their beneficiaries.
   3. All programmes must be delivered across the whole SELEP geography, demonstrating proportionate benefits to the three Federated Areas.
   4. Bidders must illustrate a good understanding of the current business support landscape and ensure that the programme(s) does not duplicate live or known to be forthcoming local and national business support schemes.
   5. All programmes must align with the South East Business Hub and Area Growth Hub services to facilitate business customer journeys and cross-referrals between business support programmes where relevant and appropriate to business needs.
   6. Bidders should demonstrate how they will encourage programme beneficiaries to contribute to the zero-carbon agenda.
   7. Service providers are not required to provide match funding, but bidders should illustrate where they can bring added or increased value, whether financial or in-kind. Management and administration costs for delivery can be included in programme design and must not compromise demonstrable value for money; bidders should show whether these can support or subsidise SELEP Growth Hub service resource.
   8. Service providers must undertake an evaluation at key stages through the programme, to identify changes (e.g. behavioural, operational) that have been brought about by the support provided and the process of adapting to/ accommodating the impacts of COVID-19. See Section 4 – Scope of Individual Lots. Evaluations must be undertaken against criteria to be agreed at the start of the programme to enable comparison between programmes.
   9. Service providers must also undertake a post-programme impact evaluation exercise with programme beneficiaries at two intervals following programme end, to report on programme outcomes. See Section 6 – Key dates.
2. **Key dates**
   1. Contract start date - March 2021
   2. Programme start date – March 2021 onwards
   3. Programme end date – 12 months from the programme start date, excluding (i) a post-programme impact evaluation exercise with programme beneficiaries to report on programme outcomes and (ii) contingency time to accommodate any delays to delivery resulting from new or unforeseen COVID-19 impacts or restrictions
   4. Contract end date – February 2023
3. **Statement of general requirements**
   1. Activities, outcomes, and skills and experience required for each of the three programmes are set out in section 4. The indicative requirement is that bidders will be able to assess, design, deliver and evaluate the necessary interventions and associated administration activities required to deliver the programme(s) being bid for and to meet the required outcomes.
   2. There is an expectation that bidders will clearly articulate their skills, competencies and experience of the required delivery techniques, use of best practice, fit for purpose methodologies, bring innovation and incorporate technology to demonstrate their suitability as well as to quote affordable rates to maximise the return on investment.
   3. Successful bidders will be required to produce a detailed delivery plan specifying programme plan and timeline, aims and objectives, and outcome profiles.
   4. There is an expectation that bidders will demonstrate their commitment to deliver improvements to the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of a relevant area.
   5. There is an expectation that bidders will demonstrate their commitment and ability to operate in a carbon responsible way, to contribute to the UK’s statutory 2050 net-zero target.
   6. Continuous improvement – it is the expectation that bidders will build on any gaps in service as identified during the initial implementation phase.
   7. Performance, targets, monitoring and evaluation arrangements – approaches and metrics will be agreed for each programme and will be built into each contract along with milestones and deliverables.
   8. SELEP and the successful bidders will agree an implementation and mobilisation plan following award of contract.
   9. Successful bidders are to ensure that all marketing, references and delivery of the programme(s) include clear acknowledgement of this being funded by the South East LEP, including use of the SELEP brand. SELEP is required to discharge its responsibilities for these services in line with its [Assurance Framework](https://www.southeastlep.com/app/uploads/2020/10/Assurance-Framework-October-2020.pdf) and as such the successful bidders will be expected to comply accordingly. Bidders should also declare any relationships with SELEP [Strategic Board members](https://www.southeastlep.com/good-governance/our-boards/strategic-board/) or [the Secretariat](https://www.southeastlep.com/about-us/secretariat/).
   10. Successful bidders may be required to provide a business continuity plan following award of contract.
4. **Authorities policies**
   1. **Council’s Information Policy Requirements** - <http://www.essex.gov.uk/Business-Partners/Supplying-Council/Documents/ECC_information_policy_requirements_for_contractors.pdf>
5. **Insurance and warranties**
   1. Employer’s liability insurance - £5 million.
   2. Public liability insurance - £10 million.
   3. Professional indemnity insurance - £2 million.
6. **E-Procurement Requirements**
   1. Essex County Council has implemented a fully automated Purchase to Pay system. Purchase to Pay enables the full purchasing and payment process to be carried out on-line, from order creation and authorisation to receipting and invoice matching. It is easier, faster and more efficient than conventional purchasing processes.
   2. Marketplace is a Proactis Solution. It is a web-based system used by Essex County Council to submit purchase orders electronically and receive and process e-invoices and e-credits.
   3. The Marketplace supplier interface is both simple and secure. All the successful bidders will need to access Marketplace is an Internet browser. Marketplace supports the latest release of web browser technologies, for example, Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari etc.
   4. Electronic Ordering
      1. A record on Marketplace will be created for the successful bidder and a user ID and password will be issued via e-mail.
      2. The user ID and password will allow the successful bidder to:

* View their purchase orders online
* Update their status
* Notify delivery
* Submit and monitor the status of electronic invoices and credits, once they have been submitted.
  + 1. Purchase orders will be sent electronically to the successful bidder’s central e-mail address
  1. Emailed Purchase Orders
     1. Orders will be sent electronically, via Marketplace, to the successful bidder’s preferred central e-mail address from the contract start date. To ensure continuity of service, the successful bidder will be responsible for ensuring that orders are processed quickly and efficiently. It is therefore not advisable to provide individual e-mail addresses unless appropriate access is available, to ensure that orders are still processed if the main contact is unavailable. There is no transaction charge for e-mail orders which are sent to a preferred central e-mail address, via Marketplace.
  2. Electronic Invoicing
     1. The successful bidder will be expected to submit electronic invoices and credit notes via Marketplace by utilising the PO Flip method from the contract start date. On approval of the electronic invoice an automatic payment will be made via BACS, direct to the successful bidder’s bank account, in line with Essex County Council’s contracted payment terms. In addition to the above, the successful bidder will be able to view the status of their invoices, via the Marketplace system.
  3. Purchase Order Flip (PO Flip)
     1. The successful bidder will be able to gain access to the Marketplace system via a web browser, to view their Purchase Orders and turn any outstanding Purchase Orders into electronic invoices, by choosing the PO Flip method. There is no charge for this method.
     2. Further information about all of the above can be found on ECC’s website: <http://www.essex.gov.uk/Business-Partners/Supplying-Council/Pages/IDeA-Marketplace.aspx>
  4. Please be aware, the successful bidder will also be registered onto ECC’s Finance system, Oracle. They will in turn receive a registration email to activate their iSupplier portal account. This account is used to:
* View the status of invoice payments
* Amend your supplier details e.g. address, contact details, bank details
* Create additional user accounts
  1. E-Procurement Terms of Trading
     1. A preferred central e-mail address, (where orders will be sent electronically via Marketplace) must be provided. It is the responsibility of the successful bidder to ensure that they can provide a central e-mail address for orders sent electronically via Marketplace from the contract start date. The successful bidder will be asked to submit this e-mail address. It is also the successful bidder’s responsibility to ensure that continuity of service is maintained at all times and that orders are processed promptly.
     2. All invoices and credit notes must be submitted electronically by the successful bidder to Essex County Council and as a minimum must be raised using the PO Flip method via Marketplace from the contract start date.
     3. Goods/Services should only be provided/carried out on receipt of an Official Purchase Order which has been issued via Marketplace by the Authority.
     4. The successful bidder assumes full responsibility for ensuring that programs or other data downloaded uploaded or in any way transmitted electronically to the Authority are free from viruses, or any other items of a destructive nature whatsoever. The Authority makes every effort to virus check information made available for download from Marketplace. The Authority cannot accept any responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system which may occur whilst using material derived from Marketplace. The Authority recommends that users recheck all downloaded material with their own virus check software.

1. **Agreement term**
   1. The term for this Agreement will be 24 months.
   2. Each individual call-off contract will identify the term of that individual programme.
2. **Payment** 
   1. SELEP will pay any invoice issued by the service provider within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice following the delivery of the good(s) and/or service(s). On the thirtieth day the payment will leave the account of SELEP.
   2. The rates/prices stated on the invoice must be those specified under this Agreement. Invoices and payments for each programme will use the following payment model, which includes an up-front payment to enable programme set-up, with further payments made in arrears and linked to the achievement of agreed targets for the programme:
      1. Lot 1

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 20% | Paid at beginning of programme (pump-priming) |
| 65% | Paid in equal instalments throughout the period of the programme, as agreed between SELEP and the successful bidder |
| 10% | Held until delivery of programme outcomes |
| 5% | Held until delivery of follow-up exercise to report on programme outcomes |

* + 1. Lot 2

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 20% | Paid at beginning of programme (pump-priming) |
| 65% | Paid in equal instalments throughout the period of the programme, as agreed between SELEP and the successful bidder |
| 10% | Held until delivery of programme outcomes |
| 5% | Held until delivery of follow-up exercise to report on programme outcomes |

* + 1. Lot 3

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 20% | Paid at beginning of programme (pump-priming) |
| 65% | Paid in equal instalments throughout the period of the programme, as agreed between SELEP and the successful bidder |
| 10% | Held until delivery of programme outcomes |
| 5% | Held until delivery of follow-up exercise to report on programme outcomes |

1. **Commercial Response**
   1. Bidders are to complete the commercial response detailed within the E-sourcing portal.