

**Illinois Department of Public Health  
COVID-19 Vaccine Appointment Call Center  
Request for Proposal**

**DUE:  
February 19, 2021 5:00 p.m. CST**

**Background**

The State of Illinois seeks a private sector vendor whose headquarters and operational units are based within the United States, preferably within Illinois, to operate a call center (“Hotline”) that assists the general public in securing appointments for their COVID-19 vaccinations and provide callers basic information about the various vaccines available. The strategy for immunization of Illinois residents requires dispensing a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine, as quickly as possible, to the priority groups within phases, (e.g. 1a, 1b, 1c, etc.) to reduce COVID-19 related illness, hospitalizations, and deaths to help restore Illinois communities.

The State will evaluate the proposals and make one award for the entire State of Illinois for all-inclusive hotline services. An award will be made to a vendor that can fulfill all the services requested. Partial awards will not be considered. However, the vendor may engage subcontractors to perform part or all of the services. If subcontractors will be engaged, the vendor must include a complete list of all subcontractors intended to be used, their addresses, and a description of the work each subcontractor will be performing in the proposal. Only vendors and subcontractors, whose headquarters and operational units (i.e., phone banks, calling staff locations, etc.) are located within the United States, preferably in Illinois, will be considered.

At the direction of the State, the vendor selected will stand up and operate a Hotline that is scalable in both number of calls and types of calls. The vendor will make appointments for callers at any of the Local Health Department (LHD) clinics, hospitals, state-supported sites, and federally engaged vaccination pharmacies or other federally funded sites, throughout the State of Illinois, but excluding the City of Chicago, that are administering vaccines.

The hours of operation for the Hotline will be 6:00 a.m. – 11:59 p.m. CST, seven days per week, for the term of the contract. The vendor selected will be expected to utilize the most current Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines on the various vaccines available, and collaborate with IDPH throughout the contract period, in accordance with the terms of the contract. The vendor should have the capacity to receive between 16,000 – 30,000 calls per day, answering questions about COVID-19 vaccination as well as acting as a scheduling agent assisting those who cannot schedule their own vaccination appointment. The vendor shall be able to answer and complete in excess of 8,000 calls per day at contract execution and maintain a capacity for 16,000 calls per day within 20 calendar days of contract execution.

The Hotline agent will obtain relevant information from the caller, schedule appointments when available, and if an appointment is not available, use the caller contact information to call the caller back with a subsequent appointment available, or when appropriate, forward the caller contact information to other vaccine providers to follow up with the caller and schedule the appointment.

Hotline staff will be required to register individuals for vaccine administration clinics through the State’s website, <https://coronavirus.illinois.gov/s/vaccination-location> and any other web-based scheduling application required by the Department, as well as respond to public questions about vaccination registration, vaccine administration and/or the State’s response to the pandemic, through both in-bound and out-bound calling (see

Attachment A for Frequently Asked Questions), and provide information to the general public, healthcare providers, and other stakeholders, 6:00 a.m. – 11:59 p.m., seven days per week. The vendor selected will be expected to provide these services for the term of the contract, which is anticipated to be six months from contract execution. The contract may be extended at the State’s discretion.

The State will provide a State issued toll-free number (“Hotline Number”) to the vendor’s designated direct inward/direct outward dialing (DID/DOD) number. The State will provide ongoing IDPH and CDC guidance information to adequately respond to inquiries regarding COVID-19 vaccinations to the extent available on its website, <http://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19/vaccine-faq>. The State will provide a minimum of one IDPH staff available for consultation with the vendor, the vendor’s staff, and the vendor’s subcontractors on the COVID-19 guidance information provided. The State will disconnect the Hotline Number from the vendor’s DID number upon expiration or termination of the contract.

The vendor will ensure sufficient staffing levels to meet the following needs:

- 500 concurrent Hotline agents available to respond during hours of operation to meet peak call demand, and the ability to scale up to address higher call-volume periods should the estimated call volume increase and/or decrease as determined by DPH.
- A minimum number of total available agents necessary to meet peak demand— “available” meaning trained, connected to the telephony platform and ready to accept in-bound calls and make out-bound callbacks.
- Provide maximum flexibility on staffing levels to meet the State’s variable needs, minimizing total agents during periods of slower anticipated call volume.

The vendor’s Hotline staff must:

- Work effectively with telephonic interpretation services to assist callers and ensure delivery of services in a culturally competent manner to all callers, including English Language Learners and those with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- Have training and comfort working with a TTY communication and relay system.
- Communicate effectively with all State teams involved in the vaccination and registration process, including forwarding issues in a timely manner to the appropriate team.
- Troubleshoot system-wide technical issues quickly and communicate such issues to relevant State teams.
- Follow all standards for data security and confidentiality.

The State will use a “train-the-trainer” program to on-board initial Hotline staff and enable vendor to train subsequent new staff, with the vendor ensuring training quality standards and updating training and materials of agents at the State’s direction.

Vendor will provide adequate supervision to ensure required staffing levels and adequate supervision of all Hotline agents.

The vendor must employ at least one physician, physician assistant, advanced practice nurse, or registered nurse licensed to provide direct patient care in Illinois who will be available during operational hours to provide guidance to Hotline staff. The vendor must provide scalable staffing to handle a surge of calls to the Hotline Number. Hotline staff should have a minimum of one year of prior experience in a call center of similar scope, capacity and focus. IDPH reserves the right to review the backgrounds and approve the staff assigned to make

and answer calls and questions for the Hotline.

The vendor must schedule Hotline staff (with 25% percentage Spanish-language bilingual and incorporation of a language service into operations for top languages spoken in Illinois beyond English, including but not limited to Polish, Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese and other Chinese languages), Italian, Tagalog, Arabic, Hindi, Korean, German and Urdu) to answer calls from 6:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m., seven days a week. Hotline staff, under continuous and direct supervision of the vendor, will respond to Hotline Number calls and inquiries using only information, documentation, training, and directions provided by IDPH in accordance with current CDC guidelines and guidance information related to COVID-19. The vendor will utilize Interactive Voice Response (IVR), and the vendor staff and/or subcontractor staff will answer questions not addressed by IVR at the caller's option.

The vendor must have sufficient staffing to ensure calls are answered within 3 minutes, on average. The vendor should have the ability to provide an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) that will hold a caller's 'place in line' if they choose not to wait on hold to speak to a representative. The IVR will also provide the caller with an initial estimated wait time until reaching a representative for assistance. If the caller does not wish to wait for the estimated period, the IVR will confirm the caller's return number and notify them that they will receive a call back from a representative in a specified period of time. The State shall have the option to request a custom recording containing specific information (such as the State website) to be offered as a menu option for callers seeking information and/or to play as they are waiting for an operator.

The vendor will submit daily reports, which reflect daily call volume and the number of appointments made, weekly reports on number of calls and types of calls, and monthly reports of trending data on number of calls and types of calls.

Vendor will track and report such metrics to the State on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. These measures will include at least:

- Minimum average and maximum wait time/hold time.
- Minimum number of dropped or unanswered calls.
- Minimum error-rate on appointment scheduling and account registration.
- Number of initial dosage appointments made.
- Number of secondary dosage appointments made.
- Sufficient staff available to accept in-bound calls at the start of operating hours each day.
- Sufficient staff available to make out-bound calls at the start of operating hours each day.

The vendor must provide all equipment (e.g., phones, computers, routers, etc.) required for Hotline staff in anticipation of, or in response to, call volume at vendor's expense. Any equipment acquired by the vendor for use under the contract will remain property of the vendor.

The proposal must also include the vendor's current insurance coverage plan applicable to the proposed operations and continuing operational management of all proposed deliverables for this contract during the contract period. The insurance coverage must meet the State's standard contract terms shown in Attachment B.

The proposal must provide for the employment of, or contract with, a supervising physician, physician assistant, advanced practice nurse, or registered nurse licensed to provide direct patient care in Illinois. Staff engaged in the performance of this contract, including subcontractors, will be supervised and employed by the vendor, and are not under any circumstances considered employees of the State.

Any vendor requiring clarification of any section of this RFP or wishing to comment on any requirement of the RFP must submit specific questions in writing no later than the deadline for questions indicated in the “Key Dates” section of this RFP. Questions may be emailed to the point of contact for this RFP and listed below. Questions or comments not raised in writing on or before the deadline to submit questions are thereafter waived. At the close of the question period a copy of all questions or comments and the State's responses will be posted on the State’s web site shown below. Every effort will be made to post this information as soon as possible after the question period ends, contingent on the number and complexity of the questions.

### Key Dates

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| February 11, 2021             | RFP released  |
| February 16, 2021             | All questions from prospective vendors due via email to <a href="mailto:Vicki.Wilson@illinois.gov">Vicki.Wilson@illinois.gov</a>  |
| February 17, 2021             | Answers to questions from prospective vendors released via IDPH COVID-19 website link below:<br><a href="http://www.dph.illinois.gov/rfp/vaccine-appt-hotline">http://www.dph.illinois.gov/rfp/vaccine-appt-hotline</a> |
| February 19, 2021             | Submissions due via email to <a href="mailto:Vicki.Wilson@illinois.gov">Vicki.Wilson@illinois.gov</a> not later than 5:00 p.m. CST  |
| February 23, 2021 (estimated) | Contract award  |
| February 25, 2021 (estimated) | Start date  |

### Directions

The State is seeking proposals from interested vendors whose headquarters and operational units are located in the United States, preferably in Illinois, to operate a call center (“Hotline”) that assists the general public in securing appointments for their COVID-19 vaccinations and provide callers basic information about the various vaccines available.

The proposals must be submitted as two separate documents. The first document will include the vendor’s response as to how it will deliver the services required and cannot include any pricing information. The pricing information must be presented on the attached budget template (see Attachment C). Each document will be evaluated separately. Proposals should include:

- Name of vendor, vendor’s address and contact person, including work phone, cell phone, and e-mail address.
- Operational plan (not to exceed ten pages total) that describes the vendor’s proposal for each of the functions described in the Scope of Work stated below to be performed.
- Timeline (not to exceed two pages) that includes being fully operational by February 25, 2021.
- Plan for data collection, tracking, and daily submission of a call log and daily call volume report to the State. All data must be exportable to Excel or otherwise transferrable to the State in an agreed-upon format.
- Plan for hiring and training vendor’s staff on the rapidly evolving COVID-19 information as it becomes available.
- Plan for provision of language access services including TTY communication and relay system.
- References, which shall include the company names and company representative’s contact information (name, title, email and phone number) for three entities for whom the vendor has provided the same or similar services described in this RFP and of equal or greater call volumes.
- Proposed pricing (submitted separately on the attached budget template).

Proposals must be submitted via email no later than 5:00 p.m. CST on Friday, February 19, 2021 to:

Vicki Wilson  
Illinois Department of Public Health  
[Vicki.Wilson@illinois.gov](mailto:Vicki.Wilson@illinois.gov)

The State reserves the right to award to the vendor that has the best overall proposal within the State's timelines and to issue supplemental solicitations as warranted.

### **Scope of Work**

The State seeks to award one contract for a single, state-wide COVID-19 Hotline to answer calls within 3 minutes, schedule vaccination appointments and provide callers basic information about the various vaccines available. The vendor will make appointments for callers at any of the Local Health Department (LHD) clinics, hospitals, state-supported sites, and federally engaged vaccination pharmacies throughout the State of Illinois, but excluding the City of Chicago, that are administering vaccines. The State seeks proposals that include all of the following Hotline operations:

- 1) Utilization of Interactive Voice Response (IVR).
  - a. The IVR will address frequently asked questions (FAQs) in both English and Spanish, which will be updated as directed by the State.
  - b. The IVR system will be able to transfer calls to other State agencies or health care providers as dictated by IDPH.
- 2) Provision of sufficient staff to answer questions not addressed by IVR and at the caller's option:
  - a. Vendor will develop a Hotline staffing plan, including provisions for increasing Hotline staff, as necessary.
  - b. Vendor will provide all equipment necessary for Hotline staff activities.
  - c. Vendor will demonstrate capacity to receive 16,000 to 30,000 calls per day beginning with 8,000 calls per day at contact execution and in excess of 16,000 calls per day within 20 calendar days of execution.
  - d. Vendor will provide adequate training in response to frequently updated scripts and guidance information.
- 3) Staffing at least one physician, physician assistant, advanced practice nurse, or registered nurse licensed to provide direct patient care in Illinois, available during operational hours, to provide the following:
  - a. Support for Hotline staff either onsite or remotely at all times when the current script does not address callers' questions.
  - b. Act as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) to work jointly with IDPH to develop updated scripts and training.
- 4) Tracking all inquiries and providing a daily written report to IDPH by 7:00 a.m. CST for the prior day's activity, which includes the following information:
  - a. Case number;
  - b. Date and time of call;
  - c. Caller zip code and county;
  - d. Caller's reason for calling including the questions the caller posed;
  - e. Information provided to the caller by vendor's staff, specifically who the appointment was scheduled with, the appointment date, and whether this was the first or second dose appointment;
  - f. Healthcare provider's institution, employer, or business affiliation, if applicable;
  - g. For IVR calls, reports must include the number of callers and which prompt was selected and which message each caller received;
  - h. Minimum average and maximum wait time/hold time;
  - i. Number of dropped or unanswered calls; and

- j. Sufficient staff available to accept in-bound calls and make out-bound call at the start of operating hours each day.
- 5) Providing weekly reports reflecting daily Hotline call information and volumes, time spent on revisions to the FAQ, and the purpose of the revisions.

**Additional Requirements**

- 1) There is a Business Enterprise Program (BEP) target of 4% for this solicitation. Vendor submissions should include all BEP target information through a Utilization Plan (see Attachment D). Failure to submit a Utilization Plan may render the offer non-responsive. Businesses included in Utilization Plans as meeting BEP requirements as prime vendors or subcontractors must be certified by the Department of Central Management Services as BEP vendors. Vendors may visit. <https://cms.diversitycompliance.com/> to search for certified BEP vendors. The NIGP codes used to calculate the Business Enterprise Goal, and a list of vendors associated with those codes, are attached to this solicitation as Attachment E. This is not an all-encompassing list of vendors that may be used as subcontractors to fulfill this goal. If the vendor has a potential subcontracting opportunity for goods or services that would be considered applicable to this contract, the vendor may use that subcontractor to fulfill the BEP goal, assuming that the subcontractor is BEP certified with the State of Illinois.
- 2) Vendor must demonstrate that they will follow best practices related to the distribution of information to healthcare providers and other callers.
- 3) Vendor understands that information disseminated will evolve over time as CDC and IDPH guidance as vaccines available is updated and new data and public options become available.
- 4) Any clinical personnel supplied by the vendor to meet the Hotline staff support and Subject Matter Expert requirement will be required to demonstrate the necessary qualifications to perform any medical services required under the contract.
  - a. Specific medical licensure requirements, regulatory statute, and administrative rules for various professions can be downloaded from <https://www.idfpr.com>
- 5) State of Illinois Prevailing Wage Rates shall apply for Illinois based companies.
- 6) Vendor’s proposed flat-fee pricing shall be inclusive of all costs.

The chart below describes the elements of responsiveness that IDPH will evaluate in the vendors’ proposals.

**Proposal Specification Checklist Table:**

Please indicate, utilizing the table below, the section and page number where the requested information is in your proposal. Respondent must complete this Proposal Specification Checklist Table provided as Attachment F to identify how their proposal meets the requirements of the solicitation.

| <u>Mandatory Criteria</u>  | <u>Vendor’s Proposal Page Reference</u> |
|--|---|
| Complete contact information of vendor to include name of vendor, vendor’s address and contact person, including work phone, cell phone, and e-mail address. | Section<br><br>Page(s)                  |
| Operational plan that addresses each of the functions described in the Scope of Work.  | Section<br><br>Page(s)                  |

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| Demonstration of prior history of operating a hotline of similar capacity and scope as described in the RFP.   | Section<br>Page(s) |
| 3 references with complete contact information.  | Section<br>Page(s) |
| Vendor is BEP certified with the State of Illinois and/or names subcontractor(s) that are BEP certified with the State of Illinois and will meet BEP goal. | Section<br>Page(s) |

| <b><u>Evaluation Criteria</u></b>   | <b><u>Vendor's Proposal Page Reference</u></b> |
|---|--|
| Timeline for becoming fully operational by February 25, 2021.   | Section<br>Page(s)                             |
| Plan for data collection, tracking, and daily submission of a call log to the State.  | Section<br>Page(s)                             |
| Plan for hiring and training vendor's staff.  | Section<br>Page(s)                             |
| Plan for provision of language access services.   | Section<br>Page(s)                             |
| Demonstration that vendor will follow best practices related to the distribution of information to healthcare providers and the general public. | Section<br>Page(s)                             |
| Reasonable Proposed Pricing (submitted separately).   | Section<br>Page(s)                             |