



**SOUTH TEXAS DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
Ryan White Administrative Agency
1216 Santa Maria Ave.
Laredo, Texas 78040**

**COMPETITIVE REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
FOR
HIV CARE AND SERVICES**

**Brownsville / Corpus Christi / Laredo
HIV Service Delivery Area (HSDA)**

**Fiscal Year 2025
South Texas
Request for Proposal (RFP) No. 25-01.02.03.**

**Ryan White Part B (Ryan White)
[April 1, 2025 through March 31, 2026]**

**HIV State Services (State Services)
[April 1, 2025 through August 31, 2026]**

**Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA)
[April 1, 2025 through August 31, 2026]**

Proposals Due: January 3, 2025, at 4:00 PM CST

**SOUTH TEXAS DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

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PROPOSAL INFORMATION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Summary

The South Texas Development Council (STDC) is hereby requesting proposals for South Texas RFP No. 25-01.02.03. from eligible entities in the South Texas HIV Service Delivery Areas who are qualified providers and experienced to:

- 1) Provide comprehensive outpatient health and support services to eligible persons living with HIV (PLWH); and
- 2) Assist eligible persons living with HIV and their households establish or maintain affordable and stable housing, reduce their risk of homelessness, and improve their access to health care and supportive services.

1.2. Background

The South Texas Development Council (STDC) was organized in 1956 to serve local governments in its four-county region (Webb, Jim Hogg, Starr and Zapata) also known as State Planning Region 19. STDC is the regional planning commission organized under Chapter 391, Local Government Code, and is one of the 24 regional planning commissions with the State of Texas. STDC is a multi-purpose, regional planning commission and political subdivision of, by and for local governments in the four-county region that covers an area of about 6,799 square miles. STDC was formed by the reorganization of the South Texas Council of Governments and the South Texas Regional Economic Development District. STDC was established to encourage and permit governmental units within the planning region to join and cooperate with one another in regional planning for the purpose of improving the health, safety and general welfare of their citizens. Pursuant to Chapter 391 of the Texas Local Government Code, the STDC is a Political Subdivision of the State of Texas.

2. REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

2.1. Proposal Purpose

STDC announces the projected availability of Ryan White Part B, State Services and HOPWA grant funding to provide services within three HIV Service Delivery Areas (HSDAs) in South Texas, as follows: Brownsville, Corpus Christi and Laredo.

The South Texas area covers and services a total of nineteen counties as follows:

- Brownsville HSDA: Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy.
- Corpus Christi HSDA: Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Duval, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, Live Oak, McMullen, Nueces, Refugio, and San Patricio.
- Laredo HSDA: Jim Hogg, Webb, Starr and Zapata Counties.

A. Ryan White Part B and State Services

The purpose of the Ryan White Service Delivery and State Services Programs is to improve the quality, availability, and organization of health care and support services for individuals and families living with or affected by HIV. Eligible services to be provided include comprehensive outpatient health and support services for individuals living with HIV.

B. Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS

The HOPWA Program is to help eligible PLWH and their households establish or maintain affordable housing, reduce the risk of homelessness, and improve their access to health care and supportive services. Stable housing helps PLWH access comprehensive healthcare, adhere to HIV treatment, and achieve viral suppression.

The purpose of this RFP is to select contractors to serve as HIV Service Providers to assist STDC in the delivery of quality, efficient, and effective HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) Health Care and Support Services through funds available for South Texas HIV Service Delivery Areas (HSDAs). Through responses to this RFP, STDC in partnership with an external review committee will assess respondents' eligibility, ability to implement and deliver services.

2.2. Proposal Administration

This solicitation is being performed as a Request for Proposal (RFP) is being performed to obtain competitive sealed proposals.

2.3. Open Competition

This RFP is not meant to restrict competition, but rather is intended to facilitate open, fair and unrestricted competition.

2.4. Eligible Applicants

Eligible respondents include public or private nonprofit organizations within the State of Texas. A Subcontractor may be a local or county health department, a community foundation, a public trust, a community-based organization, a services organization, an incorporated nonprofit agency, or other governmental unit. Agencies that have had state or federal contracts terminated within the last 24 months for deficiencies in fiscal or programmatic performance are not eligible to apply. To be eligible, an agency must fulfill all of the following requirements:

1. Respondent shall be established as an appropriate legal entity, as described above, under state statutes and must have the authority and be in good standing to do business in Texas.

2. Respondent must have a physical address within the applying HSDA in Texas. A post office box may be used when the proposal is submitted, but the respondent must conduct business at a physical location within the applying HSDA in Texas before the contract is awarded.
3. Respondent must be in good standing with the IRS.
4. Respondent must not have exclusions with the System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://sam.gov/> and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Office of Inspector General, List of Excluded Individuals/Entities (LEIE) at <https://exclusions.oig.hhs.gov/Default.aspx>.
5. Respondents currently debarred, suspended, or otherwise excluded or ineligible for participation in Federal or State assistance programs, are ineligible to apply for funds under this RFP.
6. Respondents, if incorporated, must be incorporated for a minimum of three years prior to the submission of a proposal and they must not be delinquent in all or any federal, state, and local obligations.
7. All respondent organizations are required to have a Unique Entity Identification (UEI) Number in order to apply for funds. The UEI number is a unique twelve-character, alphanumeric value provided by System for Award Management (SAM). There is no charge to obtain a UEI number. Information about obtaining a UEI number can be found at <https://sam.gov/> or call 1-866-606-8220. Please include the UEI number on the Face Page.
8. Not-for-profit and governmental agencies receiving federal funding assistance in the aggregate amount of \$750,000.00 or more within their fiscal year must have an audit conducted in accordance with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular 2 CFR 200. An agency with a single-source budget of less than \$750,000 shall submit a Financial Statement in lieu of the Single Audit Report. Respondent may be ineligible for contract award if audit reports or financial statement identify ongoing concern issues, material non-compliance or material weaknesses that are not satisfactorily addressed.
9. All respondents that apply for these grant funds must ensure that their agency is compliant with applicable cost principles, audit requirements, and administrative requirements including applicable provisions under Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Office of Management and Budget Circular 2 CFR 200 General Provisions for Contracts, 2 CFR Part 200, 45 CFR 75, Uniform Grant and Contract Standards set forth in Title 34, Part 1, Chapter 20, Subchapter E, Division 4 of the Texas Administrative Code, Texas Grant Management Standards (TxGMS) and related policies. Respondents must read and understand funding regulations, requirements, and standards.
10. An organization is not considered eligible to apply unless the organization meets the eligibility conditions on the due date for proposals and continues to meet these conditions throughout the selection and funding process. STDC expressly reserves the right to review and analyze the documentation submitted, and to request additional documentation, and determine the respondent's eligibility to compete for the contract award.
11. Chief Executive Officers, Executive Directors, including staff members shall not serve as voting members on their employer's governing board.

12. All respondents that are awarded funds must comply with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) HIV/AIDS Bureau (HAB) Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program (RWHAP) Part B Manual which is an informational resource for RWHAP Part B recipients and its subrecipients and is accessible at <https://ryanwhite.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/ryanwhite/resources/part-b-program-manual.pdf>. Respondents are strongly encouraged to review this document.
13. All respondents that are awarded funds must comply with Standards of Care for the HIV Medical and Support Service Categories found at <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/hivstd/taxonomy> which are fundable through Ryan White Program Part B, State Services and HOPWA. The service categories are subject to revision as new information and guidance is received from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the Texas Department of State Health Services. Respondents are strongly encouraged to review these standards. See Appendix B.

2.5. Contract Term

It is expected that the Ryan White Part B, State Services, and the HOPWA contracts will begin on or about April 1, 2025. The Ryan White contract will have a one-year term, while the State Services and HOPWA contracts will have a term of five months the initial year. After the first year, all contracts will carry a term of one (1) year with renewal possible (but not guaranteed) for an additional four (4) years.

Successful awards based on this RFP and any anticipated contract renewals are contingent upon the continued availability of funding. STDC reserves the right to alter, amend or withdraw this RFP at any time prior to the execution of a contract if funds become unavailable through lack of appropriations, budget cuts, transfer of funds between programs or agencies, amendment of the appropriations act, Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) consolidations, or any other disruption of current appropriations. If a contract has been fully executed and these circumstances arise, the provisions of the Termination Article in the contract General Provisions shall apply.

Continued funding of the project in future years is contingent upon the availability of funds and the satisfactory performance of the contractor during the prior budget period. Funding may vary and is subject to change within or during each budget period.

2.6. Source and Use of Funds

Grant Program:	Ryan White Service Delivery
Initial Year:	April 1, 2025 through March 31, 2026
Grant Cycle:	April 1 through March 31
Grant Description:	Funds to provide direct comprehensive outpatient and support services to meet the needs of persons living with HIV in the IV Service Delivery Areas.

Grant Program: State Services
Initial Year: April 1, 2025 through August 31, 2025
Grant Cycle: September 1 through August 31
Grant Description: Funds to provide direct comprehensive outpatient and support services to meet the needs of persons living with HIV in the HIV Service Delivery Areas.

Grant Program: Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA)
Initial Year: April 1, 2025 through August 31, 2025
Grant Cycle: September 1 through August 31
Grant Description: Funds to address the housing needs of low-income persons living with HIV and their households to establish or maintain affordable and stable housing, reduce their risk of homelessness, and improve their access to health care and supportive services.

The South Texas funding available for Brownsville, Corpus Christi and Laredo HIV Service Delivery Areas under RFP No. 25-01.02.03. is for Ryan White Part B, State Services and HOPWA are shown in the table below.

HIV SERVICE DELIVERY AREA	COUNTIES TO BE SERVED BY HSDA	GRANT PROGRAM	FUNDING AVAILABLE
Brownsville	Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy.	Ryan White	\$1,952,185
Corpus Christi	Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Duval, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, Live Oak, McMullen, Nueces, Refugio and San Patricio.		
Laredo	Jim Hogg, Starr, Webb and Zapata.		
Brownsville	Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy.	State Services	\$735,362
Corpus Christi	Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Duval, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, Live Oak, McMullen, Nueces, Refugio and San Patricio.		
Laredo	Jim Hogg, Starr, Webb and Zapata.		
Brownsville	Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy.	HOPWA	\$647,463
Corpus Christi	Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Duval, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, Live Oak, McMullen, Nueces, Refugio and San Patricio.		
Laredo	Jim Hogg, Starr, Webb and Zapata.		
			\$3,335,010

The above amounts are from a previous grant cycle and are approximate. Actual award amounts may be more or less. The funding awards are subject to increase or decrease based on actual funding from Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Please review the available funds. See Appendix A for the funds available in the HSDA.

Funds are awarded for the purpose specifically defined in this RFP and shall not be used for any other purpose. The specific dollar amount awarded to each successful respondent depends upon the detail and scope of the proposal, as evaluated by STDC.

2.7. Contact Information

The sole Point of Contact (POC) for the purpose of submitting questions relating to this RFP is:

Maribel Rodriguez, Program Manager
South Texas Development Council
Ryan White Administrative Agency
1216 Santa Maria Ave.
Laredo, Texas 78040
Phone: (956) 722-3995 Ext. 117
Email: mrodriguez@stdc.cog.tx.us
RE: South Texas RFP No. 25-01.02.03.

All communications must be addressed in writing or by email. Written inquiries or questions relating to this RFP must be received no later than **4:00 PM, C.S.T. on December 5, 2024**. Questions submitted after this date and time will not be accepted and will not be answered.

All Questions and Answers (Q&A) will be posted on the STDC Website at <https://stdc.cog.tx.us/rwhap/> no later than **5:00 PM (CST) on December 13, 2024**. The Q&A will also be made available to all respondents by email.

Contact with any other STDC employee or official is prohibited. Upon issuance of this RFP, other employees and representatives of STDC are not permitted to answer questions or otherwise discuss the contents of the RFP with any potential respondents or their representatives. Failure to observe this requirement may be grounds for disqualification and rejection of the proposal. This restriction does not preclude discussions between affected parties for the purpose of conducting business unrelated to this RFP.

2.8. Letter of Intent (LOI)

Respondents planning to submit a proposal to RFP must submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) no later than **5:00 PM (CST) on December 13, 2024**. The LOI shall be on the Respondent's business letterhead using the template provided in the appendices of this RFP. See Appendix I.

The letter must be received on or before the deadline by email, mail or hand-delivery to:

By email to: mrodriguez@stdc.cog.tx.us

➤ Mark "South Texas RFP No. 25-01.02.03." on the subject line.

By hand-delivery or mail:

Maribel Rodriguez, Program Manager
South Texas Development Council
Ryan White Administrative Agency
1216 Santa Maria Ave.
Laredo, TX 78040

➤ Mark "South Texas RFP No. 25-01.02.03." on the envelope.

If a responder does not comply with this requirement, any proposal that is subsequently submitted will not be considered or evaluated.

Note: The submission of a Letter of Intent does not obligate the Respondent to submit a proposal.

It is understood that if only one agency submits a LOI and a viable proposal for the designated service area, STDC reserves the right to contract with that agency if the agency meets the required standards required of a service provider and, if deemed necessary, has a favorable pre-selection site review.

2.9. Proposal Due Date

The respondent's proposal must be received on or before the following date and time: **4:00 PM (CST) on January 3, 2025**.

2.10. Proposal Submission

STDC requires the submission of the proposal as shown below.

- One (1) original (clearly marked "Original")
 - Three (3) copies (clearly marked "Copy")
 - One (1) USB flash drive (electronic copy of proposal)
- All proposal documents must be in its original format (i.e., Word and Excel)

The original proposal, three (3) copies, and an electronic copy on a flash drive must be submitted on or before the due date to the RFP point of contact at the address specified in Section 2.7. Contact Information.

If a proposal is sent by overnight mail or hand-delivered to the STDC address above, the respondent should request a receipt at the time of delivery to verify that the proposal was received on or before the proposal due date and time. Hand-delivered proposals must be delivered to the address and person indicated in Section 2.7. Contact Information.

If a proposal is mailed, it is considered as meeting the deadline if it is received on or before the due date and time. STDC will not accept proposals by facsimile or e-mail.

Respondents sending proposals by the United States Postal Service or commercial delivery services must ensure that the carrier will be able to guarantee delivery of the proposal by the due date and time. STDC may make exceptions only for natural disasters or catastrophes in the affected area as determined by STDC. The respondent must submit to STDC proper documentation that reflects the above exceptions before STDC can consider the proposal as having been received by the deadline. It is the respondent's responsibility to ensure timely delivery of the proposal as required by this RFP. Proposals that do not meet the above criteria will not be eligible for competition or considered.

2.11. Schedule of Events Timeline

The STDC RFP schedule of events for South Texas.

RFP Release Date	November 21, 2024
Question Submission Deadline	December 5, 2024, 4:00 PM (CST)
RFP Conference Meeting or Webinar Join the meeting now Meeting ID: 270 715 706 587 Passcode: AA3D9DW2	Dial in by phone +1 323-488-2216, 361547557# U.S. Phone conference ID: 361 547 557#
Letter of Intent	December 13, 2024, 5:00 PM (CST)
Question Response Deadline	December 13, 2024, 5:00 PM (CST)
Proposal Submission Deadline	January 3, 2025, 4:00 PM (CST)
Proposal Opening Date	January 3, 2025

STDC reserves the right to change the dates in the schedule of events.

3. PROPOSAL EVALUATION

This section defines the evaluation of proposals. Proposals will be reviewed according to the criteria below. To maximize fairness for all proposals during review, STDC staff may only confirm receipt of a proposal and are not permitted to discuss the proposal or its review during the evaluation process. All proposals remain with STDC and are not returned to the respondent.

3.1. Screening Process

Proposals are initially screened for eligibility and completeness. The preliminary screening requirements include:

1. The Letter of Intent (LOI), in the prescribed format, received on or before the due date and time.
2. Respondent has fulfilled requirements on Section 2.4 Eligible Applicants.
3. Respondent followed the instructions outlined in the RFP.
4. Proposal received on or before the proposal due date and time.
5. The original proposal bears an original signature of the authorized official of the respondent organization on the Face Page.

In conducting the pre-screen evaluation, STDC reserves the right to waive irregularities which STDC in its sole discretion determines to be minor. If such irregularities are waived, similar irregularities in all proposals will be waived.

PROPOSALS THAT DO NOT MEET THESE REQUIREMENTS WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED FOR REVIEW.

3.2. Evaluation Process

An independent panel (External Review Committee) selected by STDC, or its consultant will engage external reviewers who have no conflict of interest to assure the confidentiality and integrity of the RFP process. Each proposal will be reviewed by a minimum of three (3) reviewers using a standardized scoring tool, if so required where more than one respondent for a given HSDA is being considered. The reviewer scores for each proposal will be averaged for a final score. Awards will be made to the respondents scoring the highest for each HIV Service Delivery Area, except in the case of a tied score, STDC may choose from that final group at its sole discretion. STDC reserves the right to negotiate provisions of awarding and contracting with selected services providers.

In circumstances when an item of non-compliance is found in a significant number of proposals, suggesting a possible lack of clarity in the RFP, STDC at its sole discretion may give respondents an opportunity to correct the identified areas of noncompliance within a specified period of time. In such an instance, if no new information is received by the stated deadline, the proposal will be evaluated as is. Information submitted after the deadline will not be part of the evaluation.

3.3. Evaluation Criteria

The External Review Committee (ERC) will evaluate proposals received based on the criteria and point system detailed below. The following conditions apply:

- a) It is understood that STDC, through its management or consultant, may use all means at their collective disposal to evaluate the proposals received based on the stated criteria, and the final decision as to the best overall value, both as to price and to suitability of the products and services offered to fit the needs of STDC.
- b) STDC has the right to award to multiple entities supplying comparable products or items, also known as a multiple award, but reserves the right to make a single award to the highest ranked Respondent.
- c) By submission of a response, Respondent indicates acceptance of the evaluation process.
- d) In evaluating the proposals, STDC has no obligation to consider additional information outside the Respondent's proposal.
- e) A Respondent's past performance under previously awarded contracts is relevant in evaluating a Respondent's current response. Past performance includes the Respondent's record of conforming to published specifications and to standard good workmanship. Incumbency as an awarded Vendor does not, by itself, merit positive consideration for a future contract award.

The sections as required in the Proposal will be weighted as follows:

No.	Evaluation Criteria	Scoring Method	Weight (Points)
1	Organizational Capacity	Points Based	20 (20% of Total)
2	Performance Measures	Points Based	20 (20% of Total)
3	Work Plan	Points Based	40 (40% of Total)
4	Budget	Points Based	20 (20% of Total)
			100 Points

See Appendix J – RFP Review and Score Tool

3.4. Selection and Negotiation

STDC reserves the right to make selection decisions and determine funding levels needed to provide HIV services across the South Texas HIV Service Delivery Areas. Not all proposals may be funded as the amount of total requested funds may exceed the total funding available in this RFP.

Once award decisions are made, STDC is responsible for negotiating contracts to obtain the needed HIV Core and Support Services within the framework of the goals of the HIV/STD Comprehensive Services Plan and available funds. As funds are never unlimited, it is expected that the respondent(s) selected for contract awards may be asked to revise the budgets, as well as the goals and objectives of their proposals in order to achieve the goals within available funding limits. This process is commonly referred to as contract negotiation. Respondent must submit written revisions reflecting negotiated changes. Once the contract negotiation process is complete the South Texas Development Council will initiate the development of a contract.

4. STDC ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

4.1. Rejection of Proposals

1. STDC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and is not liable for any cost incurred by the respondents in the development or submission of the proposal.
2. Any attempt by an employee, officer, or agent or the respondent to influence the outcome of the funding agency review through contact with any Board Member or staff member of the South Texas Development Council, Texas Department of State Health Services or other Texas Health and Human Services agency shall result in rejection of the proposal.
3. Any material misrepresentation in proposals submitted to the STDC shall result in rejection of the proposal.
4. Requirements detailed on Section 2.4. Eligible Applicants will be used in the evaluation and or rejection of any proposal.

4.2. Right to Amend or Withdraw RFP

STDC reserves the right to alter, amend or modify any provisions of this RFP or to withdraw the RFP at any time prior to the due date and prior to the execution of a contract if it is in the best interest of the STDC and DSHS. The decision of the STDC is administratively final. Amendment or withdrawal of RFP will be communicated to all respondents.

4.3. Financial and Administrative Requirements

All contractors must comply with the cost principles, audit requirements, and administrative requirements listed below:

Financial and Administrative Requirements

Applicable Cost Principles	Audit Requirements	Administrative Requirements
2 CFR Part 225 State & Local Governments	2 CFR, Part 200	2 CFR, Part 200, TxGMS
2 CFR, Part 220 Educational Institutions	2 CFR, Part 200	2 CFR, Part 200, TxGMS
2 CFR, Part 230 Non-Profit Organizations	2 CFR, Part 200	2 CFR, Part 200, TxGMS
	Program audit conducted by an independent certified public accountant shall be in accordance with Governmental Auditing Standards.	

The links relevant to CFRs is <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2> and OMB Circulars is <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars>. Additional requirements on basic accounting and financial management systems requirements are available in Texas Grants Management Standards. Copies of the manual is available at <https://comptroller.texas.gov/purchasing/grant-management/>.

All STDC contractors are required to maintain a financial management system that will identify the receipt and expenditure of funds separately for each contract and/or program attachment and will record expenditures by the budget cost categories in the approved budget. This requires establishing within the chart of accounts and general ledger, a separate set of accounts for each program attachment. In order to ensure the fiscal integrity of accounting records, the contractor must utilize an accounting system that does not permit overwrite or erasure of transactions posted to the general ledger.

4.4. Contracting with Subcontractors and Vendors

The primary role of the selected respondents is to receive funds for the provision and delivery of direct client services. Respondent may not subcontract with another provider for services that they are projecting to deliver under this RFP. There are exceptions to Sub of Subcontracting. For all applicable service categories: if a contract cannot be established directly with a provider or there are other extenuating circumstances, STDC may request a waiver so that a provider may subcontract for limited services with another provider.

An annual waiver request with justification must be submitted and approved by DSHS prior to establishing subcontracts. The waiver must describe why respondent cannot directly contract with the provider and the need to establish a subcontract. The waiver must include the proposed contract between the provider and another provider. Request for waiver must be submitted no later than forty-five (45) days prior to beginning of the contract year. Respondent will receive a response to a waiver request within ten business days. If approved, the subcontractor is subject to all federal, state and local guidelines applicable to this RFP.

STDC will monitor all contracts and subcontracts for quality assurance by annually reviewing client records/documents outlined by DSHS upon approval of the waiver. Service Standards of Care and monitoring requirements are located at <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/hivstd/taxonomy>.

4.5. Contract Information

The final funding amount and the provisions of the contract will be determined through negotiations between STDC and the successful respondent(s). All contract funding levels are subject to availability of funds through DSHS.

STDC will monitor contractors' expenditures on a quarterly basis. A contractor's budget may be subject to a decrease for the remainder of the budget period if expenditures are below the amount projected. Vacant positions existing after ninety (90) days may result in a decrease in funds. STDC reserves the right to adjust the funding allocation to contractors pursuant to the terms of the contract.

4.6. Contract Award Protest Policy

To avoid service disruption and assure client services continuation in each HIV Service Delivery Area STDC's RWAA Policy Chapter IV: Program Service Provider Administration, Section A. Request for Proposal (RFP) and Service Provider Selection Process, Policy 1, Procedure N is under revision and will not allow protests by respondents to this RFP.

There is no recourse for protest; all decisions made by STDC are final.