



SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA  
**LEGAL SERVICES**  
Free Legal Aid for Low-Income People

Baton Rouge • Covington • Hammond • Harvey • Houma • New Orleans

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## **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION CONSULTANT**

### **Brief Overview**

Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS) seeks the services of an independent diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) consultant to assist it in implementing diversity, inclusion to increase employee engagement, and growth and cultural competency to better serve our clients.

### **Introduction to SLLS**

SLLS provides free legal assistance to indigent and other vulnerable people who cannot afford to hire a lawyer. We protect their livelihoods, health, housing and families. Through legal representation, we are able to assure fairness for our clients as they navigate through the civil justice system. SLLS works to combat the inequities and disproportionate impacts faced by marginalized communities of color.

SLLS is the largest nonprofit civil legal services provider in Louisiana serving 50% of the state's poverty population in twenty-two parishes across southeast Louisiana. Pre-pandemic, Louisiana had the third highest poverty rate in the United States, the second highest rate of women killed by their intimate partner, the highest rate of mass incarceration in the world disproportionately impacting marginalized communities, was consistently noted as one of the unhealthiest states, and had the second highest rate of food insecure seniors. We have been struck by ten presidentially declared natural disasters since 2005's catastrophic Hurricane Katrina, the BP Oil Spill, and the people we serve have been particularly hard-hit by the impact of COVID-19 due to our economic reliance on the hospitality and oil and gas industries and Hurricane Ida.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and in the wake of Ida, SLLS has fought for the rights of vulnerable people who lost their jobs due to the pandemic, provided safeguards to domestic violence survivors, protected the livelihood of disaster victims and assisted renters who were facing eviction. SLLS has won significant appellate cases protecting thousands of vulnerable people through eviction defense and child in need of care work, and engaging in successful policy advocacy with government agencies administering housing assistance, child protection programs, and unemployment benefits. Our 2021 case work for individual households resulted in over 30,000 people being helped through free legal aid to protect their lives, homes, and families with a direct economic impact to them through our work of over \$28.5 million.

Pre-pandemic, SLLS has about 100 team members on staff. Since COVID, we have grown to have almost 175 employees, seven offices, staff embedded onsite with other partners such as hospitals, medical clinics, homeless shelters, domestic violence victim service centers, community colleges, and robust pro bono partnerships. We have almost 100 different funding sources though LSC funding is about 45% of our budget with another almost 30% from the Louisiana Bar Foundation. In response to the effects of COVID-19 on housing, we have hired 14 additional attorneys to represent people who are facing evictions. We have also hired 15 new staff to represent vulnerable populations that are affected by disasters.

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

### Purpose of RFP

SLLS seeks a consultant to assist it in creating a culture of inclusion and promote diversity within the organization. SLLS understands the importance of diversity and inclusion in an organization that provides legal services to vulnerable communities. Our goal is to develop staff who are culturally competent and will practice empathy when interacting with underrepresented and underserved clients.

### Deliverables

SLLS seeks a consultant to assist it in advancing practices that will attract, engage and retain diverse employees. We are seeking a consultant who will conduct quantitative and qualitative research, and immersive observation to discover any potential barriers to diversity and equality. We also are seeking assistance in providing training that includes interactive group training and diversity discussions which promote honesty about diversity and inclusion. We are seeking training that fosters inclusion and behavioral change. SLLS seeks to have a diversity consultant provide training and implement strategies to address and avoid unconscious and implicit biases. We would also like the consultant to assist SLLS in fostering an environment that recognizes the importance of diversity and inclusion within a legal aid organization internally and externally. We further seek a consultant to assist the staff in identifying and addressing racial inequities that contribute to systemic poverty and disparate treatment. We seek a consultant to facilitate and incorporate a plan to combat the racial issues facing vulnerable communities. We anticipate that the cost of services under this proposal will not exceed \$25,000.

The SLLS Board of Directors Governance Committee will work with SLLS' Executive team to select the Diversity consultant. Input will also be sought from our SLLS DEI Committee. Once selected, SLLS will designate a staff point person(s) for the consultant who will likely be Talya Bergeron, our Directing Attorney in our Baton Rouge office who is also our DEI Officer. We will work closely with the consultant to determine which SLLS staff and partners will be involved with the DEI plan and how best to obtain their input into the process. SLLS is committed to ongoing review of the plan to track progress in meeting plan objectives. The diversity plan will implement strategies to promote diversity, recognition and respect. We have established an internal SLLS Diversity Committee to assist with these efforts.

## Inquiries/Contact Information

Questions about this RFP may be directed to Talya Bergeron, SLLS Directing Attorney/DEI Officer at [tbergeron@slls.org](mailto:tbergeron@slls.org) or (225) 448-0080 or Laura Tuggle, SLLS Executive Director at (504) 529-1000 ext. 270 or [ltuggle@slls.org](mailto:ltuggle@slls.org).

## Timeline

- **Issue RFP: 8/15/2022**
- **Proposals Due to Executive Director: 9/15/2022**
- **Award of Contract: 9/30/2022**
- **Project Implementation: 10/1/2022-9/30/2023**

## Proposal Delivery and Due Date

Proposals are due on or before 9/16/2022. Delivery of proposals should be made electronically to **Laura Tuggle** at [ltuggle@slls.org](mailto:ltuggle@slls.org) with “**SLLS Diversity Planning Proposal**” in the subject line, PDF preferred. If you have large file size items, please provide a file sharing link with instructions for accessing the proposed materials.

## Evaluation Criteria and Award of Contract

SLLS may elect to schedule a conference call with potential consultants prior to awarding a final contract. We anticipate that conference calls will be scheduled between 9/20/2022-9/28/2022. Please include contact information for scheduling purposes in the RFP.

Proposals will be evaluated upon the contractor’s responsiveness to the RFP, qualifications, demonstrated experience with similar projects, and total price quoted for all items covered by the RFP. Award of the contract resulting from the RFP will be based upon the most responsive contract that is most advantageous to SLLS in terms of cost, functionality, experience, and quality of past work.

SLLS ideally seeks a firm that understands its needs as a nonprofit and legal services organization and is invested in our missions of achieving justice and social change by fighting poverty.

SLLS reserves the right to accept or reject any and all proposals and to waive any minor discrepancies or technicalities in the proposal or specifications, when deemed to be in the best interest of SLLS. We also reserve the right to negotiate with all respondents to the RFP and reject any or all offers and discontinue this RFP process without obligation or liability to any respondent.

## Cost of Proposals

SLLS will not pay any costs associated with preparing proposals in response to this RFP.