



- Research
- Analysis
- Strategy
- Implementation

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May 25, 2022

Felicia Strong-Whitaker
Mario Avery
Department of Purchasing & Contract Compliance
Fulton County
Atlanta GA

Re: SBE Program Evaluation

Dear Felicia and Mario:

As requested, Keen Independent Research (Keen Independent) prepared a proposal to assist the County in evaluating its Small Business Enterprise (SBE) Program prior to the December 31, 2022, sunset of the program. This assessment will help the County determine whether it should (a) reauthorize the program as is, (b) refine the ordinance that authorizes the program, or (c) allow the program to expire.

Keen Independent conducted the 2016 Small Business Study that led the County to adopt the SBE Program ordinance in 2016. With Holland & Knight, Keen Independent assisted in drafting the original ordinance.

It is opportune to examine strengths and weaknesses of the program. Also, the County has added targeted assistance to minority- and woman-owned firms since adoption of the SBE Program. The review can examine how well the two programs work together to assist small minority- and woman-owned firms.

As described in the attached document, Keen Independent proposes to evaluate the SBE Program and recommend future actions concerning the program. We will deliver a draft report in September, assuming a June start date. That schedule allows time for the County to consider results and any proposed changes to the ordinance well in advance of program expiration. Our contract could extend through the end of 2022 to be able to answer any questions that might arise. The fixed-priced budget is \$54,500. The team includes Holland & Knight to assist with any proposed changes in language of the ordinance and Dr. Debra King of DEBLAR & Associates, Inc. to interview a sample of program participants. (DEBLAR is a local small, minority, woman-owned business.)

We are Principals of Keen Independent and will be leading this project. Additional information and team member bios can be found at www.keenindependent.com. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Keen".

David J. Keen
Principal

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "A. Humm Keen".

Annette Humm Keen
Principal

Proposal to Evaluate the Fulton County SBE Program

Background

The SBE Program includes a provision (Sec. 102-449.14) calling for periodic review and analysis of the program to determine if adjustments need to be made prior to its sunset. The proposed evaluation will perform such a review and analysis, to be completed in fall 2022. It will help the County determine whether it should (a) reauthorize the program as is, (b) refine the ordinance that authorizes the program, or (c) allow the program to expire.

Scope of Work

1. Project management and communications. Keen Independent will collaborate with the County project manager throughout the study to ensure effective communication and project management.

- **Task 1-a. Project initiation.** Keen Independent will hold a virtual project kick-off meeting with the County project manager and other key County staff. Keen Independent staff (the “study team”) will provide an overview of the project, including proposed timelines and deliverables.

Keen Independent assumes a late June 2022 start date but can adjust the timeframe to suit the County’s needs.

- **Task 1-b. Monthly project management.** Once a month, the study team will meet with the County project manager (virtually) to discuss study progress and coordination. Keen Independent will also submit a monthly written progress report, which reports completion of each study task by percentage, narrative explanation and notation of any issues or challenges.

2. Review of existing reports and other documentation of program operation. Keen Independent will review current SBE utilization reports and other documents pertaining to program operation. The study team will examine how SBE contract goals are set, whether the SBE reserve program has been used, how SBE firms are recruited into the program, and acceptance of certifications demonstrating SBE status.

Task 2 will examine:

- Small business assistance efforts the County has delivered under the program (including those under Sec. 102-449 and Sec. 102-449.10 of the ordinance);
- Contract goal-setting processes and methods to assess whether a bidder has made a good faith effort to meet a contract goal (under Sec. 102-449.2, Sec. 102-449.7 and Sec. 102-449.8 of the ordinance);
- Whether the County maintains an SBE directory (under Sec. 102-449.6 of the ordinance);
- How other elements of the program have been implemented; and
- How operation of the SBE Program is coordinated with the County’s MFBE program and its operation of the Federal DBE Program.

This task will include review of existing documents and meetings with staff responsible for the above activities. Keen Independent will also examine the participation of SBEs by race, ethnicity and gender.

3. Obtaining external perspectives of program strengths and weaknesses and needs to assist small businesses. In Task 3, Keen Independent will compile and analyze qualitative information regarding needs for small business assistance in the Atlanta marketplace and any insights from businesses and others about the County's implementation of the program and need for the program.

This assessment will help Keen Independent review whether the need for the program identified in 2016 continues today.

- Keen Independent will begin by compiling and summarizing information from disparity studies in the Atlanta area since 2016 that have examined small business assistance needs. We plan to review the County's recent Griffin & Strong disparity study as part of this work.
- The study team will develop an email survey or virtual workshop where interested businesses can provide input on County contracting and procurement, including comments about whether an SBE program continues to be needed.
- Dr. King from DEBLAR & Associates will interview a sample of contractors, consultants and other vendors in the Atlanta metro area (small businesses and other businesses) that may have knowledge or experience with the program or have perspectives concerning barriers for small businesses, including minority- and woman-owned companies. We propose 8 to 10 such interviews.
- Keen Independent will compile and analyze other information concerning small businesses in the Atlanta marketplace that may be pertinent to this study.
- The study team will also review the operation of other SBE programs in the Atlanta metro area, and if successful, key reasons for that success.

4. Development of conclusions and recommendations. Keen Independent and Holland & Knight will synthesize results from the above tasks to develop overall conclusions. The study team will then recommend actions for improving or potentially discontinuing the current SBE program.

Any recommendations for improvements will identify specific portions of the ordinance that might be refined or expanded. We will draft specific changes in ordinance language, as necessary.

5. Reports and presentations. Keen Independent will prepare a report and presentation summarizing study methods, results and recommendations.

We have budgeted for a virtual presentation of study results to County leadership. (If needed, we can make an in-person presentation to be compensated on a time and materials basis.)

Project Management

David Keen, Principal and Annette Humm Keen, Principal, will manage this project. Keith Wiener from Holland & Knight and Dr. Debra King of DEBLAR & Associates will participate as subconsultants to Keen Independent.

Schedule

We propose about three-month schedule to deliver a draft report (delivery by Sept. 15, 2022, assuming a start date around June 7), but are flexible in this timing.

Based on a two-week review by the County, we can deliver a final report by October 7, 2022. We propose that the contract extend through Dec. 31, 2022, so that the study team is available to answer any questions as they arise.

Budget

Keen Independent proposes a fixed-price budget of \$54,500 to perform this work. We would bill each month on a percentage complete basis.

Task	Budget total
1. Project management and communication	\$ 12,150
2. Review of existing reports and other documentation of program operation	13,200
3. Obtaining external perspectives of program strengths and weaknesses and needs to assist small businesses	9,640
4. Development of conclusions and recommendations	11,290
5. Reports and presentations	8,220
Total	\$ 54,500

Any additional work in 2022 can be provided at the following hourly rates.

	Hourly rate
Keen Independent Research LLC (prime consultant)	
David Keen, Principal	\$ 350
Annette Humm Keen, Principal	220
Keen Independent Senior Consultants	165
Keen Independent Consultants	140
Keen Independent Project Assistants and Research Assistants	100
Holland & Knight LLP	
Keith Wiener, Partner	\$ 600
DEBLAR & Associates, Inc.	
Deborah King, Principal	\$ 225