

**NYS Department of State  
Office for New Americans  
Mobile English RFA**

**RFA #23-ONA-16 Questions & Answers**

*The responses to questions included herein are official responses by the State to questions submitted by potential applicants and are hereby incorporated into RFA # 23-ONA-16 issued on August 14, 2025. In the event of any conflict between the RFA and these responses, the requirements or information contained in these responses will prevail.*

**The last sentence of Section I, Introduction is hereby amended to read:**

This RFA seeks a qualified provider to offer ESOL lessons through mobile devices with access to on demand coaching and the ability to train and develop outreach materials to promote the program.

**The first sentence of Section III, Applicant Eligibility, Subcontracting is hereby amended to read:**

For applicants engaging subcontractors under this grant, the lead applicant is required to provide the majority of required activities, or more than 50 percent.

**Section VI, Required Activities is hereby amended to add the following:**

The Contractor must ensure that all State Data related to this Contract is stored within the Continental United States (CONUS), in a controlled access environment to ensure data security and integrity. All access to State Data, physical or virtual, must be conducted within CONUS and have adequate security systems in place to protect against the unauthorized access to the facilities and data stored therein. The Contractor shall not send or permit to be sent to any location outside of the CONUS, any State Data related to this Contract. Contractor will provide the State a list of the physical locations where the Data is stored at any given time and will update that list if the physical location changes. Access into and within the facilities must be restricted through an access control system that requires positive identification as well as maintains a log of all accesses (e.g., date and time of the event, type of event, user identity, component of the information system, outcome of the event). The Contractor shall have a formal procedure in place for granting computer system access to the data and to track access. Access for projects outside of those approved by the State is prohibited.

**Section VI, Required Activities is hereby amended to read:**

Development of a Mobile English platform must comply with....

**Section VI, Required Activities, 3. Licenses is hereby amended to add the following:**

It is expected that the Contractor will maintain the capacity to provide 5,000 licenses at any given time. Priority should be given to clients utilizing services and programs within the ONA network. ONA will provide the Contractor with a list of affiliated providers, and it would be the Contractor's responsibility to verify if a new user is working with any of those providers.

**Questions and Answers**

**Q1. I'm interested to know more about the grant for the Mobil English App. In particular, I'm interested in knowing about what would be my end in hours of work. For example, it appears that it's incumbent on the grant winner to supply translation. Would this be funded by the award. Is there a more simplified overview of duties I would incur?**

A1. The Contractor is expected to deliver all required activities as detailed in **Section VI, Required Activities** in the RFA. The Contractor may subcontract, including subcontracting for translation. However, for applicants engaging subcontractors to work under this grant, the lead applicant must provide the majority of required activities, or more than 50 percent. Please refer to **Section III, Applicant Eligibility, Subcontracting** for additional information.

**Q2. Are out-of-state and non-U.S. entities eligible to apply as prime applicants for this grant/NOFA opportunity?**

A2. As stated in **Section III, Applicant Eligibility** of the RFA, "Applicants may be a for profit or not-for-profit organization with the ability to do business in New York State." Out-of-state and non-U.S. entities may be eligible so long as the minimum requirements are met; however the Contractor must ensure that all State data related to this Contract is stored within the Continental United States (CONUS), in a controlled access environment to ensure data security. Please refer to **Section VI, Required Activities** of the RFA for additional information.

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**Q3. Are there any mandatory pre-bid conferences or Q&A deadlines we should note? If so, could you share dates and access details?**

A3. There are no mandatory pre-bid conferences. The deadline for submitting questions was August 28, 2025.

**Q4. Are there registration prerequisites (e.g., SAM.gov, NYS Vendor ID, MWBE certification steps) required at submission vs. prior to award?**

A4. As stated in **Section III Applicant Eligibility** of the RFA, “Not-for-profit applicants must be pre-qualified through the Statewide Financial System (<https://grantsmanagement.ny.gov/register-your-organization-sfs>) as of the application due date listed on the cover of this RFA.”

There are no registration prerequisites for eligible for-profit businesses due at submission.

**Q5. The RFA notes ESOL lessons via mobile devices with access to “live coaching,” plus developing outreach materials. Could you confirm whether synchronous live instruction is required (and minimum hours/ratios), or if on-demand coaching/chat support models are acceptable?**

A5. On-demand coaching/chat support models are acceptable. Synchronous live instruction is not required.

**Q6. Are there minimum functionality requirements for the mobile solution (offline capability, device compatibility, accessibility standards, language of UI)?**

A6. All functionality requirements are listed in the RFA. Applicants should review **Section VI, Required Activities** of the RFA thoroughly for functionality requirements.

**Q7. Is integration with ONA/provider systems (data exchange, SSO) expected?**

A7. No.

**Q8. Do you have estimated learner volumes, priority regions, and proficiency bands (e.g., true beginner vs. intermediate), and any expected enrollment ramp per quarter?**

A8. It is expected that the Contractor will maintain the capacity to provide 5,000 licenses at any given time. Priority should be given to clients utilizing services and programs within the ONA network. ONA will provide the Contractor with a list of affiliated providers, and it would be the Contractor’s responsibility to verify if a new user is working with any of those providers.

**Q9. Are specific cohorts prioritized (e.g., recently arrived migrants, work-focused ESOL, citizenship prep)?**

A9. It is expected that the platform will offer classes to meet the varied needs of all new Americans in New York State.

**Q10. What key performance indicators (participation, retention, proficiency gains, employment outcomes) will be used for evaluation?**

A10. For the purposes of evaluation for making awards, the evaluation criteria are listed in Section **IX. Evaluating the Application** of the RFA.

If awarded, ONA expects that the Contractor will be able to make all required activities outlined in the RFA available during the duration of the contract. ONA will measure performance based on the ability to provide the required activities listed in the contract workplan.

**Q11. What data reporting cadence/format is expected, and what privacy/security standards must vendors meet?**

**A11.** The Contractor must develop and maintain a system to generate on-demand user reports which should be made available to interested ONA network providers to track the progress of their users. Additionally, the Contractor must also be able to produce quarterly reports for ONA.

Contractors must adhere to NY Information Technology Services (ITS) Security Policies and Standards referenced in **Section VI Required Activities** of the RFA, including accessibility of information communication technology for individuals with disabilities.

**Q12. Could you share the anticipated funding range per awardee and the payment structure (milestones, deliverables, cost-reimbursement vs. fixed fee)?**

A12. Since this is a competitive procurement that includes an evaluation of cost, we cannot provide the anticipated funding. Payment will be made quarterly using the cost reimbursement from the cost proposal included in the application which is a combination of rate-based items (licenses and training hours provided) and deliverables (training presentation and translation of promotional materials).

**Q13. The notice references a one-year term with two optional one-year renewals—are renewal decisions tied to performance thresholds or funding availability?**

A13. Renewal decisions are tied to both performance and funding availability.

**Q14. Please confirm how the MWBE (15%/15%) and SDVOB (6%) participation goals apply to this grant opportunity and whether waivers are possible if justified by the scope.**

A14. The final contract sent to the awarded grantee will include specific MWBE goals assigned based on the specific items included in the budget. An overall goal of 30% will apply to the contract, however, if it is determined that this goal cannot be met through available subcontracting opportunities, a waiver may be sought prior to contract execution. If, during the course of the contract, the grantee determines that they will be unable to meet the goal assigned at contract execution, a waiver may be sought at that time. Grantees will be expected to demonstrate their Good Faith Efforts to meet their assigned goal. Please refer to **Section XVII** for additional information.

There will be no SDVOB goal assigned to this contract, however grantees are encouraged to make every effort to engage certified SDVOBs in the purchasing of commodities, services and technology in the performance of this contract.

**Q15. The RFA references both “development of a mobile application” and “ongoing maintenance of a mobile English platform.” Can you clarify whether ONA expects a dedicated iOS/Android app, a mobile-friendly web platform accessible through standard browsers, or both? We raise this because a standalone app cannot be used on non-smartphones, and basic (non-smart) phones also cannot typically access web browsers. This creates a potential contradiction with the requirement that the platform be accessible to non-smartphone users.**

A15. ONA expects that courses offered by the mobile English platform and coaching can be accessed either by a smart phone or a non-smart phone. A dedicated app is not required.

**Q16. The RFA requires that the platform be accessible via non-smart mobile phones. Can you clarify whether ONA intends for full lesson and coaching functionality to be delivered through SMS/IVR, or only limited functions such as registration, reminders, and connecting to coaching? We note that delivering full ESOL lesson content through SMS/IVR would be technically complex and resource-intensive, and may not provide the same instructional value as a smartphone/web platform. We want to confirm ONA’s expectations so we can design an appropriate solution.**

A16. ONA expects that courses offered by the mobile English platform and coaching can be accessed either by a smart phone or a non-smart phone.

**Q17. For the 5,000 anticipated licenses, does “license” refer only to unique logins to the mobile app/platform?**

A17. License would be unique users to the mobile English platform.

**Q18. The RFA states that “all lessons should be able to be translated into all the 16 ONA specified languages.” Can you clarify if this requirement means: a complete translation of all instructional content into each of the 16 languages, or translation of key navigational elements, directions, user manuals, and supplemental supports, while instructional content remains primarily in English to support ESOL learning?**

A18. This is translation of all instructional content into each of the 16 languages as well as key navigational elements, directions, user manuals, and supplemental supports

**Q19. The RFA requires the dictionary function (or transcript access) to be implemented within nine months if not already available. Does ONA expect this function to be available in all 16 languages simultaneously by that timeline, or can it be phased in?**

A19. That can be phased in, however it is expected that by the end of the first nine months of the contract, all 16 languages will be included in the dictionary function.

**Q20. The RFA notes that coaching must be available to users but does not specify typical usage levels. Can ONA provide any past program data on the average or typical number of coaching hours used per license/user within a given time period (e.g., monthly or annually)?**

A20. ONA does not have past program data on the average number of coaching hours per license.

**Q21. Does ONA expect a defined number of coaching hours to be bundled into each license/user, or should coaching simply be made available on demand with usage varying by learner? If there is no set expectation, may applicants propose a model where the license cost covers platform access and a baseline of coaching availability, and additional coaching hours can be quoted and billed separately?**

A21. ONA expects that coaching will be made available on demand with usage varying by learner. In the cost proposal, all coaching costs should be included in the license cost.

**Q22. The RFA specifies a 30% MWBE participation goal, with the exact MBE/WBE breakdown to be set post-award. Can you clarify whether this 30% goal will apply to the total contract value or only to subcontracted portions of the work?**

A22. Once an award is made, a final budget will be developed by ONA and the tentative awardee. MWBE goals specific to the items included in that budget will be listed on the contract when it is sent to the grantee for signature. The 30% goal will apply to MWBE applicable items which may or may not equal the total contract value.

**Q23. Is my business qualified for the procurement of the ONA Mobile English Program?**

A23. Any organization meeting the minimum criteria as outlined in the RFA may apply.

**Q24. What exactly is a cost proposal? Is there a sample or template available to help us determine appropriate costs? Are there any budgetary limits or required cost categories we should be aware of?**

A24. The cost proposal is found in Attachment B of the RFA and should be submitted as Attachment 2. The cost proposal should reflect the cost of running the program. While there are no budget limitations, the lowest bidder will receive the maximum number of points awarded for the cost component section of the evaluation.

**Q25. What are the qualifications or criteria for an organization to be approved for this grant?**

A25. All Contractors must meet the minimum qualifications listed in the RFA.

**Q26. Could you provide a breakdown of how the Mobile English Program is expected to operate? Are grantees expected to design their own curriculum, or will a standardized curriculum be provided?**

A26. The Contractor is expected to design their own curriculum.

**Q27. What is the intended duration of the program?**

A27. The grant will be for one year with two optional one-year renewals at the same funding level as Year One. Funding in the subsequent years is contingent upon funds being appropriated in the State budget, performance, and the organization's ability to meet the program requirements as stipulated in this RFA.

**Q28. Are there any reporting requirements or performance metrics we should prepare for?**

A28. The Contractor will prepare data reports on usage as described in Section IV. (Required Activities, Section 7. Data and Reporting) of the RFA .

**Q29. Will there be technical assistance or training offered to grantees?**

A29. ONA can provide technical assistance regarding clarification on workplan activities and on the reimbursement process to the Contractor upon award.

**Q30. Does the contractor design the platform, or do they contract a platform that meets the requirements noted in the RFA (pgs 3-8)**

A30. The contractor would contract with ONA to provide the platform that meets the requirements noted in the RFA. Contractors may subcontract, including subcontracting for platform, however, for applicants engaging subcontractors to work under this grant, the lead applicant must provide the majority of required activities, or more than 50 percent. Please refer to **Section III, Applicant Eligibility, Subcontracting** of the RFA for additional information.

**Q31. Could you please explain or provide more details on the term used "Non-smart mobile phone question."?**

A31. This term refers to a mobile phone designed primarily for calls and texts.

**Q32. What is the required timeframe after contract award for the mobile English platform to be fully compliant with all 16 ONA specified languages, including translation of instructions, course content, user manuals, and the dictionary function?**

A32. The dictionary function is expected to be implemented within nine months of the contract start date. Licenses should be offered no later than one (1) month after the start of the contract and coaching should be offered by the end of the first quarter of the contract.

**Q33. Could you please clarify how the mobile English platform interface should handle preferences for the 16 ONA specified languages? Specifically, should the entire user interface including written directions, instructions, icons, registration information, course description and user manuals be fully translated between these languages at the user's selection?**

A33. The content of the lessons as well as written directions, instructions, icons, registration information, course description, and user manuals should be fully translated into the 16 languages at the user's selection.

**Q34. Could you please clarify whether the use of AI is permitted to assist with the translation of materials and content into the 16 ONA specified languages, including users native language, within the mobile English program?**

A34. Contractors that propose use of AI to assist with translation would have that specific AI tool subjected to review by NYS-ITS and must follow the ITS Acceptable Use Policy for AI located here: [nys-p24-001-acceptable-use-of-artificial-intelligence-technologies.pdf](#)

Additionally, the Contractor is responsible for ensuring translations are correct and accurate.

**Q35. How do "courses for preliterate" differ from beginner-level courses in the context of Mobile English program described in the RFA??**

A35. "Preliterate" courses are designed for individuals lacking any experience with written language in any language, whereas "beginning" refers to individuals in the early stages of English language acquisition.

**Q36. Is the list of life skills courses provided, such as civics, digital literacy, health and well-being, financial literacy, parenting, school a required set of courses that much be included in the mobile english program? Is it intended as an example of possible topics that may be offered?**

Q36. This was intended as an example of possible topics that may be offered. It is expected the program has a wide range of courses to meet the needs of the new American community across the state.

**Q37. Could you please confirm whether alternative recognized certifications and evidence of robust security practices may be acceptable or considered in lieu of direct compliance with the ISO/IEC 20000-1, NIST SP 800-163 Revision 1, NIST SP 800-53 Revision 5?**

A37. No, alternative certifications will not be accepted or considered as meeting the security requirements of the RFA.

**Q38. Could you please confirm whether this solicitation represents a new contract opportunity?**

A38. A current contract is in place for similar services, however, this solicitation represents a new contract opportunity.

**Q39. If there is currently an incumbent provider holding this contract, could you please provide us the company name?**

**A39.** ONA holds a contract with Cell-Ed Inc for similar services.