AMENDMENT #1
TO THE REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
FOR COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT
RFx # 3120003411

Q1: Minimum Qualification A and Qualification G refer to needs assessments, program evaluations, policy studies or comparable mixed-methods research for government agencies. Will completed housing needs assessments for local governments, and statewide or multi-jurisdiction military compatible use studies for state agencies, which combine Census and demographic analysis, surveys, stakeholder committees and public engagement, be accepted as comparable work for both requirements?

A1: Yes, if the proposal demonstrates comparable scale, complexity, mixed-methods analysis, and stakeholder engagement under Section 4.2(A). Qualification G requires three comparable references, including at least two current contracts or contracts completed within the past three years. All other minimum qualifications, including VR and disability-services knowledge, remain required.

Q2: Budget (Sections 1.9 and 4.5.2; Attachment F)
Can MDRS share the budget or funding range available for the CSNA, so that respondents can scale survey modes, in-person engagement and printing to the funds available

A2: MDRS is not publishing a budget or funding range. Submit an all-inclusive firm fixed price for the required scope using Attachment F.

Q3: Team qualifications and references (Section 4.2, Minimum Qualifications A and G; Attachment D, item 4)Team qualifications and references (Section 4.2, Minimum Qualifications A and G; Attachment D, item 4)
May a respondent meet Minimum Qualifications A and G using the experience and references of a subcontractor or teaming partner named in the proposal? Will relevant experience that proposed key personnel gained with previous employers count toward Minimum Qualification A?

A3: Yes. Identify each subcontractor or teaming partner, its relevant experience and references, and its substantive project responsibilities. Relevant experience gained by proposed key personnel with previous employers may support Qualification A but must be clearly attributed; it does not alone establish the respondent's organizational

capacity. The respondent remains responsible for meeting all minimum qualifications and contract requirements. See A1 for reference requirements.

Q4: Data and contact lists (Section 2.4.3, parts B and C)
What will MDRS provide to the Contractor at kickoff, for example the 2024 CSNA report, its survey instruments and response data, RSA-911 and case-service extracts, and contact lists for current and former customers, employers, CRPs and vendors? Will MDRS send survey invitations under its own name, or will the Contractor contact participants directly under a data-sharing agreement?

A4: MDRS will provide the 2024 CSNA and available supporting materials, instruments, and response data; relevant RSA-911 and case-service extracts; and available customer, employer, CRP, vendor, and partner contact lists. Availability and release arrangements will be established at kickoff. MDRS may distribute invitations or authorize contractor outreach. Disclosure of personal information requires a written agreement and safeguards consistent with 34 CFR § 361.38; agency-assisted distribution may be used when direct disclosure is restricted.

Q5: Survey response-rate targets (Section 2.4.3, part C; Section 2.4.1, Deliverable 3)
Are the survey response-rate targets conditions of acceptance and payment for Deliverable 3, or planning targets? If a target is not reached after the MDRS-approved outreach plan has been carried out in full, how will MDRS treat acceptance?

A5: The response rates are planning targets, not automatic acceptance or payment thresholds. If a target is missed after completion of the approved outreach plan, MDRS will consider documented outreach, participation, representativeness, limitations, and whether the results meet Deliverable 3 requirements. Payment remains subject to written acceptance; completing outreach alone does not guarantee acceptance.

Q6: **Prior CSNA.** Section 2.4.3 references MDRS's prior CSNA completed in 2024. Would MDRS please provide a copy of that assessment, including any available technical appendices, survey instruments, and methodological documentation? If publicly available, a link to these materials would be appreciated.

A6: MDRS completed its prior CSNA in 2024; it is not currently posted on the MDRS website. See A4 for available materials, including technical appendices and methodological documentation. A CSNA is required every three years under 34 CFR § 361.29(a).

Q7: **Prior Research and Agency Priorities.** Has MDRS conducted additional surveys, needs assessments, strategic planning activities, or related research since the 2024 CSNA that should inform this assessment? If so, can these materials be made available? Are there

particular issues or emerging needs that MDRS considers especially important for the upcoming CSNA?

A7: MDRS will share available, relevant monitoring findings, performance information, State Plan materials, and stakeholder input developed since 2024. Priorities include unserved and underserved populations, transition and Pre-ETS, supported employment, provider capacity, workforce coordination, and barriers to competitive integrated employment. The assessment must address the full scope in Section 2.4 and 34 CFR § 361.29.

Q8: **Alternative Response-Rate and Sampling Approaches.** Section 2.4.3(C) establishes target response rates for several populations and permits scientifically justified alternatives. Would MDRS consider proposals that establish achievable response-rate and sample-size targets while emphasizing representativeness, subgroup participation, nonresponse bias assessment, adaptive data collection, and appropriate weighting? How will such alternatives be evaluated for responsiveness and technical merit?

A8: Yes. Proposals may include justified alternative response rates and sample sizes addressing representativeness, subgroup participation, nonresponse bias, adaptive collection, and weighting where appropriate. MDRS will evaluate alternatives under the published technical criteria for rigor, feasibility, coverage, and usefulness. Alternatives must be expressly approved; other required research components remain in effect.

Q9: **Response-Rate Calculation and Performance.** Does MDRS require a particular response-rate calculation methodology, such as AAPOR standard definitions? Are the stated targets intended as contractual minimums or performance goals? Will MDRS consider alternative targets proposed and justified in the initial proposal, or must approval occur after contract award? Can MDRS provide response rates and sample sizes achieved in the previous CSNA?

A9: See A5 and A8 for targets, acceptance, and alternatives proposed before award. The RFP does not prescribe an AAPOR formula. Propose a recognized, transparent calculation defining completed and partial responses, eligibility, noncontacts, and the denominator for MDRS approval. Prior sample sizes and response rates will be provided if available in the materials identified in A4.

Q10: **Survey Populations and Sampling Frames.** Can MDRS provide approximate counts of individuals and organizations in each required survey population, including current consumers, former consumers by closure status, students receiving Pre-ETS, VR staff, employers with prior VR relationships, CRPs, vendors, and community partners? Are separate counts available for OVR and OVRB and by geographic region?

A10: For general planning, MDRS serves approximately 12,000 individuals annually and has approximately 550 employees when fully staffed. These agency-wide figures are not counts of the required survey populations. Available counts by program, case status, student status, region, and stakeholder group will be established through the kickoff data inventory; exact counts are not provided in the RFP.

Q11: **Administrative Data and Consumer Contact Information.** What administrative data and sampling information will MDRS make available to the selected contractor, including RSA-911 extracts, case-status information, demographic and disability characteristics, geographic identifiers, and consumer contact information? Will MDRS provide the necessary authorizations and secure data-transfer arrangements, and when would these data become available?

A11: See A4. Available extracts may include case status, demographic and disability characteristics, geography, and contact information needed for the approved methodology. Data fields, years, record-level or summary format, and release timing will be established in the work plan after inventory and required approvals. MDRS will coordinate secure transfer; access to all requested fields is not guaranteed.

Q12: **Survey Outreach and Recruitment Support.** What assistance will MDRS provide with survey recruitment, including introductory communications, agency endorsement, staff outreach, contact-information updates, and reminders to consumers, employers, providers, and partners? Would MDRS permit agency-assisted outreach or secure distribution of survey invitations when direct disclosure of contact information is not feasible?

A12: Yes. MDRS will coordinate introductory communications, agency endorsement, staff and partner outreach, and reminders through the approved outreach plan. Staff may assist with available contact updates, but MDRS cannot guarantee current contact information or participation. See A4 for agency-assisted distribution and direct contractor contact.

Q13: **Employers Without Prior VR Hiring Relationships.** For the required independent statewide employer sample, how does MDRS define employers that have not hired MDRS VR customers? Would employers without a documented MDRS hiring relationship qualify, subject to survey screening? Does MDRS anticipate a particular sample size or distribution by industry, employer size, geographic region, or apprenticeship sponsorship?

A13: Employers without a documented MDRS customer-hiring relationship may be included, subject to screening to confirm that status. Propose and justify the sample size and distribution across regions, industries, employer sizes, high-demand sectors, and

registered apprenticeship sponsors. The RFP establishes no fixed sample size or allocation.

Q14: **General Population and Unserved Individuals.** Does MDRS expect a separate general-population survey to identify individuals with disabilities who are not currently served by VR, or may the contractor propose an alternative combination of population data analysis, targeted outreach, stakeholder research, and other methods to assess unserved and underserved populations?

A14: A separate general-population survey is not required. A justified combination of population-data analysis, targeted outreach, stakeholder research, and other methods is acceptable if it adequately assesses unserved and underserved individuals with disabilities and meets Section 2.4 and 34 CFR § 361.29.

Q15: **OVR, OVRB, and Pre-ETS Reporting.** Does MDRS expect separate assessments or reports for OVR and OVRB, or would a single integrated CSNA with distinct program-specific analyses and recommendations meet the requirement? Are separate minimum survey samples or reporting expectations anticipated for OVRB consumers and students receiving Pre-ETS?

A15: One integrated CSNA is acceptable, with distinct OVR and OVRB analyses and recommendations and clearly identified transition and Pre-ETS findings. The RFP does not establish separate minimum sample sizes for OVRB or Pre-ETS participants. Propose adequate subgroup participation and explain limitations affecting program-specific findings.

Q16: **Regional Qualitative Activities.** For the six hybrid focus groups and three public forums, does MDRS expect all sessions to include an in-person component within the designated region? Will MDRS assist with identifying accessible facilities, outreach, scheduling, and recruitment? Does MDRS anticipate providing interpretation, accommodations, or other logistical support, or should the contractor budget for all such services?

A16: Each required focus group and public forum must include an accessible in-person component in its designated region and a remote-participation option. MDRS will assist with coordination, outreach, recruitment, and identifying potential venues. Include venues, technology, travel, interpretation, captioning, accessible materials, and other necessary accommodations in the fixed price unless MDRS expressly agrees to provide them. Identify language and accommodation assumptions; no fixed quantities or language list are established in the RFP.

Q17: **State Rehabilitation Council Engagement.** What role will MDRS and the SRC play in coordinating the required quarterly meetings, recruiting stakeholders, reviewing

emerging findings, and assessing proposed recommendations? Can the contractor expect designated agency representatives from both OVR and OVRB and a primary project liaison to support timely coordination and review?

A17: MDRS will designate a primary liaison and OVR/OVRB representatives to coordinate agency review and SRC engagement. MDRS and the SRC will assist with stakeholder connections, review findings, and provide input on priorities and recommendations. The contractor remains responsible for meeting preparation, facilitation, documentation, and incorporating or addressing feedback. The SRC is a joint partner under 34 CFR § 361.29.

Q18: **Data Collection and Deliverable Schedule.** Section 2.4.1 requires completion of primary data collection by week 28, with subsequent draft and final reporting milestones. Is MDRS open to a phased approach in which preliminary quantitative findings inform later qualitative research, provided all required deliverables and deadlines are met? What review and approval turnaround times should contractors assume for instruments, work plans, reports, and other submissions?

A18: Yes. A phased approach is acceptable if all deliverables and deadlines are met, including completion of primary data collection by week 28. Propose review periods and revision time in the work plan; the RFP does not guarantee a specific turnaround. Begin data collection only after required MDRS approvals and initial SRC input under Section 2.4.2.

Q19: **Printing and Electronic Deliverables.** Section 2.4.5 requires printed SRC updates, 50 printed final reports, and 50 printed executive summaries. Can MDRS clarify the anticipated number of quarterly SRC update packages requiring printing? Are there preferred specifications for the length or format of the executive summary booklet beyond the accessibility and printing requirements stated in the RFP?

A19: Budget for four quarterly SRC update packages during the initial term, with 50 printed copies per package (200 total), plus accessible electronic versions. Also provide 50 final reports and 50 executive summary booklets as specified in Section 2.4.5. No additional executive-summary page limit or booklet dimensions are prescribed; propose a concise, plain-language format for MDRS approval.

Q20: **Funding and Pricing Parameters.** Has MDRS established an anticipated budget or funding range for this procurement that may be shared with prospective respondents? Should proposals price only the initial contract term, or should respondents also provide information regarding possible renewal-period costs?

A20: See A2 for the budget. Price the initial contract term using Attachment F; separate renewal-period pricing is not requested. Any renewal is subject to Section 2.3, including the same prices, terms, and conditions and required approvals.

Q21: Does MDRS have a budget that it can share?

A21: See A2.

Q22: Does MDRS expect one integrated Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) for Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB) with distinct program-specific analyses and recommendations, or separate program-level reporting products?

A22: See A15.

Q23: May some or all key informant interviews be conducted by accessible videoconference or telephone, with participation accommodations as needed?

A23: Yes. Key informant interviews may be conducted by accessible videoconference or telephone, with accommodations as needed and MDRS-approved interview guides. This does not replace the required hybrid focus groups and public forums.

Q24: Has a study like this been undertaken recently?

A24: See A6.

Q25: How does MDRS envision translating the CSNA's recommendations into measurable improvements in VR service delivery, competitive integrated employment, and employment outcomes?

A25: The recommendations will inform State Plan goals, priorities, service improvements, and progress evaluation with the SRC. Provide prioritized actions, proposed measures and baselines where available, and immediate, near-term, and longer-term implementation guidance linking identified needs to improved access and employment outcomes. See Section 2.4.4 and 34 CFR § 361.29(c)–(e).

Q26: What existing MDRS datasets will be made available to the selected contractor, including RSA-911 data, case-service records, provider information, and de-identified consumer demographics, etc?

A26: See A4 and A11.

Q27: For the six hybrid focus groups and three public forums, will MDRS provide venues, recruitment assistance, technology, interpreters, captioning, or other accommodations? Which costs must the contractor include, and are there required languages or accommodation assumptions bidders should use?

A27: See A16.

Q28: What are the approximate sizes of the customer, staff, employer, and provider populations? Which current contact lists will MDRS supply, and what recruitment and follow-up support will MDRS provide? Are participant incentives permitted, and should their cost be included in the fixed price?

A28: See A10 for population sizes and A4 and A12 for contact lists and outreach. Under 2 CFR §§ 200.403–200.405, costs that are unnecessary, unreasonable, unallocable, or inadequately documented are unallowable. Entertainment and associated gifts, and prizes lacking a specific, direct programmatic purpose and inclusion in the Federal award, are unallowable under § 200.438. Unallowable costs may not be charged to the award, including through the fixed price. This response does not authorize participant incentives.

Q29: Please provide anticipated State Rehabilitation Council meeting dates and clarify when initial SRC approval/input is expected, given the four-week final work plan deadline and the initial SRC meeting listed at week 22. How many meetings and quarterly printed update packages should bidders budget for, and which presentations must be in person?

A29: Meeting dates will be coordinated at kickoff. Section 2.4.2 requires initial SRC input before implementation; the week-22 milestone does not defer that input. Incorporate early SRC consultation into the four-week work-plan process. Budget for at least quarterly engagement and the presentations in Section 2.4.1; activities may coincide when deadlines and purposes align. See A19 for printed updates. Kickoff is virtual; the RFP does not expressly require in-person SRC or leadership presentations. Propose accessible presentation arrangements for MDRS approval.

Q30: Timing of primary data collection
a. May primary data collection (surveys, interviews, focus groups) begin once MDRS approves the instruments, or must it wait until the Week 22 secondary-data deliverable is complete?
b. The RFP does not mention human subjects or IRB review. Does MDRS require IRB review for this project?
c. If review is required, is the contractor responsible for obtaining it, or does MDRS have its own review process?
d. Does MDRS have required consent procedures for participants under age 18 and their parents or guardians?

A30: (a) See A18 and A29. (b) MDRS does not impose an automatic IRB requirement. (c) The contractor must determine whether its activities constitute covered human-subjects research and obtain any required IRB review or exemption determination under 34 CFR Part 97 before beginning affected activities. MDRS review does not replace that

determination. (d) Submit accessible, voluntary consent procedures for MDRS review, including parental or guardian permission and youth assent as applicable. Education-record access must comply with FERPA; participation must not affect services.

Q31: MDRS program data

a. Which program years of MDRS case-service and RSA-911 data will the contractor receive?

b. Will the data be provided at the individual record level or in summary form?

c. About how soon after the contract starts will the data be available?

d. Will a data-sharing agreement be required?

A31: See A4 and A11.

Q32: Size of survey populations

a. To help proposers plan survey samples, can MDRS share approximate counts, or the most recent publicly reported figures, for each group below?

i. VR counselors and direct-service staff (OVR and OVRB separately)

ii. Current customers, and former customers closed within a set time period

iii. Students receiving pre-employment transition services

iv. Employers that have hired VR customers

v. CRPs, service providers, and vendors

b. What time period should count as “former customers”?

c. Does MDRS expect every member of each group to be invited, or a sample?

A32: (a) See A10. (b) The RFP does not define a fixed former-customer lookback period; propose and justify a period covering relevant closure groups for MDRS approval. (c) A census invitation is not required for every group. Propose a census or justified sample for each population consistent with Section 2.4.3(C); see A8.

Q33: Survey contact information

a. Will MDRS provide contact lists for the survey groups?

b. Does MDRS expect to send survey invitations itself, or will it share contact information with the contractor under a confidentiality agreement?

c. Are email addresses and phone numbers generally available in MDRS records for current and former customers?

A33: (a)–(b) See A4 and A12. (c) Available email addresses and telephone numbers may be used, but completeness and accuracy vary. The contractor must account for missing or outdated contact information in its outreach plan.

Q34: Response rates

a. How will MDRS calculate response rates for the targets listed (e.g., completed surveys divided by eligible people contacted)?

b. Section 2.4.3.C says MDRS may approve alternative response-rate targets. May proposers suggest alternative targets in their proposals, or only after award?
c. May the contractor offer participants incentives, such as gift cards?
d. Does MDRS plan other surveys of customers or employers during 2027 that this project should coordinate with?

A34: (a)–(b) See A9 and A8. (c) See A28. (d) The RFP does not identify a 2027 survey calendar. Coordinate with MDRS at kickoff to identify overlapping surveys and reduce participant burden.

Q35: Partner data
a. Will MDRS help the contractor obtain data from partner agencies, such as the Mississippi Department of Education (IDEA and Section 504 data) and the Mississippi Department of Employment Security?
b. Are any data-sharing agreements with these agencies already in place that the contractor could use?

A35: MDRS will assist with partner-agency coordination and data requests. Partner data remain subject to the originating agency's approval and applicable confidentiality laws, including FERPA for education records. Do not assume an existing agreement permits contractor access; any required agreement or authorization must be secured before disclosure.

Q36: Prior CSNA
a. Will MDRS provide the 2024 CSNA report, instruments, and data?
b. Does MDRS want this assessment to compare findings with the 2024 CSNA?

A36: (a) See A4 and A6. (b) Yes. Compare findings with the 2024 CSNA where data and methods permit, identify continuing and emerging needs, and explain limitations on comparisons.

Respondents shall acknowledge receipt of any amendment to the solicitation by signing and returning the amendment with the response. The acknowledgment must be received by MDRS by the submission deadline.

Company Name: _____

Signature and Date: _____

Name and Title: _____