

# Request for Proposal WEConnect International WECommunity Solution 2025-V2

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#### Expected materials submitted in response to this RFP:

• Proposal – Should include a description of approach, methodologies, team engaged, previous experience, and a timeline.

- o Please document pertinent security and data retention policies in detail.
- o Please submit proposal to procurement@weconnectinternational.org.
- A draft budget of all costs associated with producing the expected output, including assumptions for the cost of platform, customization, use, licensing, fees, etc., for the first year and years two through five.
- Bidding vendors are encouraged to demonstrate innovation and ingenuity in their responses.
   While this document provides great detail on what we believe the system should offer, it does not mean that we have imagined all the possible functionality. WEConnect International is very interested in understanding what else bidding vendors have the capability to provide within the tool that will add value to all stakeholders. In addition, the tool should be flexible to evolve with the changing geopolitical landscape over time.

#### **Bidder Qualifications**

All bidding vendors must:

- Reference and outline relevant work experience in the submitted proposal.
- Provide a list of all personnel who will be working on the project
- Provide one project manager as a primary point of contact. This point of contact must participate in regular (weekly and ad hoc) meetings, onboarding training, and provide regular status updates.
- Include clear pricing and budget information.
- Have an adequate staffing capacity to support the project.

#### Section 1: Background & Purpose

WEConnect International is a global non-profit organization that connects women-owned businesses with qualified buyers around the world. Its mission is to drive money into the hands of women business owners by enabling them to compete in the global marketplace.

**Certification:** Certify businesses that are at least 51% owned, managed, and controlled by women. This certification provides assurance to corporate buyers that they are sourcing from legitimate women-owned businesses.

**Connection:** Connect certified women-owned businesses with large corporations, multilateral organizations, and government buyers who are committed to impact sourcing.

**Resources:** Provide training, resources, and networking opportunities to help women entrepreneurs grow their businesses and succeed in the global marketplace.

**Advocacy:** Support women's economic empowerment and ensure that corporate supply chains remain open and accessible to women-owned businesses.

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WEConnect International's members are corporations and organizations committed to strategic sourcing. They contribute to community prosperity by sourcing more from women-owned businesses worldwide.

## https://weconnectinternational.org/

WECommunity is WEConnect International's online platform that connects women-owned businesses with buyers and other women entrepreneurs around the world. It's a central hub for networking, finding opportunities, and accessing resources.

#### WECommunity uses:

- Business Directory: A passcode protected searchable database of women-owned businesses, allowing buyers to find potential suppliers, and for suppliers to connect with each other as well as with buyers.
- **Networking:** Opportunities to connect with other women entrepreneurs, share experiences, and build partnerships.
- **Connections:** Facilitate connections between buyers and suppliers, leading to potential collaborations and contracts.
- **Supplier Registration/Certification:** A tool to enable women-owned businesses to submit applications and highly confidential business documents for verification and validation by WEConnect International assessors.
- Show bid opportunities to certified women-owned businesses.

WECommunity is a valuable tool for women-owned businesses to increase their visibility, expand their network, and access the business and trade resources they need to thrive.

#### **Purpose:**

This Request for Proposal details the overall requirements for the system's development and implementation. It outlines initial security, training, capacity, and architectural needs, along with acceptance criteria and key stakeholders.

#### **Project Objectives**

PO#	Objectives
1	Expand market opportunities for women-owned businesses around the world
2	Build multilingual platform to create market linkages among more buyers and suppliers
3	Facilitate greater market access for women-owned businesses globally
4	Increase member buyer spend with women-owned businesses globally

PO #	Objectives
5	Capture new data to support studies and efforts in women's economic empowerment

## **Section 2: General System Requirements**

#### 2.1 Major System Capabilities

- System must be available on the Internet
- System must be available 24 hours per day
- System must be easily accessible by mobile devices
- System must be able to accept electronic payments

## 2.2 System Interface Needs

WEConnect has a need for (1) Application with few UI screens and respective Reporting called WECommunity.

We estimate a need for a platform that is easy to maintain and update with approximately 20 UI Screens, a few attachable forms and documents, along with payment processing ability.

We are looking at the Security layer which protects the data and login details with MFA options.

The Screens will be multilingual supporting 10-15 major world languages.

The Forms will have Radio Buttons, drop-downs and data-based dropdowns for Country, State, Categories, Commodities, membership fee's structure, etc. which will be updated by the admins as per the requirement changes.

Most of UI screens data is pulled from the Supplier and Buyer registration data.

Reporting – Data will be queried for Reports, Dashboard Graphs, UI Searches.

Reports should be able to Be Scheduled and mailed automatically, and should be configurable by the Admins, Supplier, and Buyers.

User Interface and User Experience: Ease of use, intuitiveness, and accessibility for all stakeholders.

#### 2.3 System User Characteristics

WEConnect has 6 personas

1. Suppliers

- 2. Buyer/Buying Organizations
- 3. Certification Team Members
- 4. Business Managers / Sales Team
- 5. IT / Support Team Members
- 6. Corporate Management Members

**Suppliers** – Supplier Users belong to Supplier Organization and are External Users who Register themselves with WEConnect and can apply to become Certified as Women Owned Business by providing required details, answering the questionnaires, pay fees, submit evidence, and renew the Certification periodically.

**Buyer/Buying Organizations** – Buyer Users belong to a Buying Organization and are External Users who Register themselves with WEConnect by completing certain forms, provide evidence, pay fees, and renew membership periodically as a Buyer that can collaborate with the Registered and/or Certified Suppliers for business needs.

**Certification Team Members** – WEConnect Certification team members are Internal Users who review the Suppliers' provided data, complete due diligence, and provide a Certificate with valid dates that is ideally automatically created by the system once a Certificate is approved.

Business Managers / Sales Team — WEConnect Business/Sales team members are Internal Users who review the Buyers' provided data, complete due diligence, and register a Buyer with valid dates. They also coordinate with Buyers to connect them with Registered and/or Certified Suppliers to promote their business needs.

**IT / Support Team Members** – WEConnect IT / Support team members are Internal Users who help all other personas with respect to the WECommunity Application and work with the OEM Vendors.

**Corporate Management Members** – WEConnect Management team members are internal staff with the responsibility to run monitoring reports and provide guidance.

External Users are Basic Users who need to run their own reports and search the data. Buyer Users will need to search for Suppliers on their Dashboard.

Internal Users are Basic as well as Admin Users who manage the data, run reports, search suppliers, Buyers, Users, provide access, debug/export data and access issues, create, update, modify and run reports.

## **Section 3: Business Requirements**

## 3.1 Basic Requirements:

BR - 1. The system shall be accessible via weblink.

- BR 2. The system shall be accessible via Android, iOS, and Windows Apps.
- BR 3. The system shall provide the same user experience and functionality for mobile users as for laptop/PC users.
- BR 4. The system weblink shall be accessible via all major web browsers: Netscape, Chrome, Internet Explorer, Microsoft Edge, Firefox, etc.
- BR 5. The system shall enable users to log in using a username and password created upon registration.
- BR 6. The system shall accept only email addresses as usernames with up to a limit of 100 characters.
- BR 7. The system shall enable users to have options to retrieve usernames and request password resets from the account owner if forgotten.
- BR 8. The system shall enable users to have access to the rights listed under their user types.
- BR 9. The system shall be able to assign different roles to users.
- BR 10. The system should automatically update the profiles in WECommunity to include the certificate expiration dates and certification numbers once an application is approved.
- BR 11. The system will have mass upload and editing functionality.
- BR 12. The system shall be able to accept international payment from all designated countries for certification applications and renewals.
- BR 13. The system shall be integrated with a payment engine able to process international payments from all designated countries in some electronic way: credit card, wire transfer, PayPal, Western Union.
- BR 14. The system shall be able to charge a specific price based on country and business revenue contained in a certification pricing table.
- BR 15. The system shall enable the Admin to update the certification pricing table.
- BR 16. The system shall be able to accommodate discount codes to alter the payment amount charged. The discount code will have the following options:
  - Number of times code can be used
  - Number of times code can be used per user
  - Validity period (Start Date and End Date)
  - Percentage discount
  - Value discount.

- BR 17. The system shall be able to mark an account as paid when notified by the payment engine that payment has been accepted.
- BR 18. The system shall enable the Admin to mark an account as paid.
- BR 19. The system shall be able to provide a payment receipt that is valid for tax purposes.
- BR 20. The system shall be able to provide a separate payment link to prospective certified women's business enterprises in affiliate countries.
- BR 21. The system shall be able to display the payment price in local currency, based on the country selected.
- BR 22. The system shall be able to convert the set price using this link:

  https://www.oanda.com/currency-converter/en/?from=EUR&to=USD&amount=1
- BR 23. The system shall be able to process payments in USD.
- BR 24. The system shall be able to convert local currency into USD.
- BR 1. Member Buyers are required to complete a separate membership application that will connect them directly to the WECommunity portal.

#### 3. 2 Internal WEConnect International Team Requirements:

- BR 26. The System shall grant administrative rights to include the following:
  - Create Users
  - Grant and change access to users
  - Edit Users
  - Edit Business profiles
  - Provide ability for businesses to add capability statements
  - Edit Member profiles
  - Edit Governmental Agency/Partner profiles
  - Export the full database inclusive of all fields
  - Change prices, including for membership levels
  - Edit, add or delete any field on any application
  - Assign assessments to the assessor user type
  - Change status of Business or Member profiles

- Edit automatic emails and notifications
- Determine which countries can allow for certification or self-registration
- Receive and approve assessments submitted by Assessors
- View dashboard of full database
- Run reports on full database
- Access any archived data
- Create a discount code to alter payment amount
- Ability to assign countries to user types
- BR 27. The system shall route completed business profiles to the appropriate Market Lead based on the country of business.
- BR 28. The system shall enable the Internal WEConnect International Team to assign the Certified Business profile to an Assessor for document review.
- BR 29. The system shall enable the Internal WEConnect International Team to assign the Certified Business profile to an Assessor for site visits (this is a separate assignment).
- BR 30. The system shall only allow the assignment of assessments to Assessors who have roles that match the country of the business.
- BR 31. The system shall present a drop-down of Assessors for assignment to the Internal WEConnect International Team. This list will only include the Assessors who have roles that match the country of the business.
- BR 32. The system shall allow the designated Assessor to access the business profile and documents uploaded by the business.
- BR 33. The system shall enable the designated Assessor to complete the document review form.
- BR 34. The system shall enable the designated Assessor to submit the document review form to the Internal WEConnect International Team.
- BR 35. The system shall notify the Internal WEConnect International Team when the document review form is submitted.
- BR 36. The system shall notify the designated Interview Assessor when the document review form is submitted.

- BR 37. The system shall enable the designated Interview Assessor to upload the completed interview form.
- BR 38. The system shall notify the Internal WEConnect International Team when the completed interview form is submitted.
- BR 39. The system shall enable the Internal WEConnect International Team to mark applications as approved/denied/pending.
- BR 40. The system shall be able to route the application to the Admin.
- BR 41. The system shall enable the Admin to approve or deny the applicant.
- BR 42. The system shall be able to send an approval email to the business owner if the application is approved.
- BR 43. The system shall be able to mark the application as "In Appeals" if the application is denied and if applicable.
- BR 44. The system shall enable the Admin to change the profile status.
- BR 45. The system shall be able to change the status of the business profile to "Denied" if no action is taken after 60 days.
- BR 46. The system shall require a Business that has been denied certification to wait 6 months before reapplying for certification.
- BR 47. The system shall be able to designate an expiration date, 3 years after the approval of certification, and that date should be adjustable by the Admin as needed.
- BR 48. The system shall be able to archive all data related to the application process.
- BR 49. The system shall enable the Admin to access the archive of data related to applications and export them.
- BR 50. The system shall require the Certified Business to reapply for certification 6 months after denial of renewal application.
- BR 51. The system shall be able to notify the Admin / Internal WEConnect International Team of any certification renewals submitted.
- BR 52. The system shall enable the Admin / Internal WEConnect International Team to approve or deny the application.
- BR 53. The system shall be able to update the expiration date 30 days from the original expiration date upon approval of the renewal application, and that expiration date can be updated by the Admin.

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  - BR 54. The system shall be able to notify the Certified Business owner of any status change via email.
  - BR 55. The system shall require the Certified Business to reapply for a new certification once their status has been changed to "inactive".
  - BR 56. The system shall require Certified Businesses to submit updated documents for recertification in the 4th year.
  - BR 57. The system shall require businesses to submit specific documents for re-certification (required documents will depend on ownership structure).
  - BR 58. The system shall allow for multiple user types, listed below:
    - WEConnect Admin
    - WEConnect Analyst and Report Access (View Only)
    - WEConnect Assessor
    - WEConnect Market Lead
    - WEConnect Regional Director
    - WEConnect Member Relations Manager
  - BR 59. The system shall grant Admins the rights listed below:
    - Full rights to the system, including but not limited to all features and functionalities
    - Assign Businesses to assessors
    - View all Member accounts
    - Review and approve self-registered accounts in countries
    - Edit profiles of Businesses
    - Review and approve Self-registration renewal applications
    - Review & Approve Assessor Interview & Document assessments
  - BR 60. The system shall grant the Assessor the rights listed below:
    - Access limited to assigned country or countries only
    - Access the profiles of the Businesses assigned to them

- Review profiles of business assessments assigned to them by the Admin
- Access the documents attached to the profile assigned to them
- Complete the document review application for the profile assigned to them
- Submit the document review application to the Admin
- Complete the interview application for the profile assigned to them
- Submit the Interview application to the Admin.
- BR 61. The system shall grant the Market Lead the rights listed below:
  - Access limited to assigned country or countries only
  - View all profiles of Businesses located in the countries assigned by Admin
  - View status of any profile of Businesses located in countries assigned by Admin
  - View summary dashboard of Business profiles located in countries assigned by Admin
- BR 62. The system shall grant the Regional Director the rights listed below:
  - Access limited to assigned country or countries only
  - View all profiles of Businesses located in the regions assigned to them by the admin
  - View all Member accounts
  - View status of any Businesses
  - View dashboard of Business profiles in region assigned
  - Export database limited by region assigned

## 3.3 Women-Owned Business & Certified Women's Business Enterprise Supplier Requirements:

- BR 63. The system shall allow for multiple user types. Examples are listed below, but this is not considered an exhaustive list:
  - Self-Registered Business
  - Certified Business located in countries assigned
- BR 64. The system shall grant the Self-Registered business rights listed below:
  - Create a profile

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- Complete the self-registered application
- Add Secondary User accounts
- Upload documentation during self-registration process
- Application access status (Displayed upon profile login)
- Upon approval by Admin, access to limited database searching
- Only including other self-registered businesses
- Ability to update profile
- Complete the renewal application once per year, starting (1) year after initial approval
- Can apply for certification anytime in countries where certification is available
- BR 65. The system shall grant the Certified Business rights listed below:
  - Create a profile
  - Complete the certification application
  - Add Secondary User accounts
  - Upload documentation for certification process
  - Complete payment
  - Application access status (Displayed upon profile login)
  - Upon approval by Admin, access to database of Self-Registered, Certified, and Member Buyer profiles for searching
  - Ability to update profile
  - Ability to attach capabilities statements to profile
  - Ability to upload company logo
  - Ability to download Women Owned Logo
  - System should be able to create certificates
  - System should allow suppliers to download certificate from their account
  - Ability to cancel certification and switch to Self-Registered user

View business opportunities on the WECommunity Portal

# 3.4 Member Buyer Requirements for the WECommunity Portal Only:

The system will support various user types as shown:

- Member Buyer (Corporate)
- Primary User (Corporate)
- Member Buyer (Corporate) Secondary Users
- Governmental Agency/Partner (View Only)
- BR 66. The system shall grant the Member Buyer (Corporate) user the rights below:
  - Access limited to women-owned businesses and certified women's business enterprises that are within assigned countries, or regions or global depending on membership purchased
  - Add Secondary User accounts
  - Ability to post business opportunities
- BR 67. The system shall grant the View-only User a "view only" Access as listed below:
  - View all profiles of Businesses
  - View all the Member accounts
  - View status of all Businesses
  - View dashboard of all Businesses
- BR 68. The system shall grant the Member Relations Manager access as listed below:
  - View all profiles of Businesses
  - View all the Member accounts
  - View status of all Businesses
  - View dashboard of all Businesses
  - Export database
  - Information on certified women's business enterprises including certification number and expiration date, and ideally, the ability to download the certificate.

- BR 69. The system shall be able to notify the Member Relations Manager when certain actions are taken: Submission of Member Buyer Application.
- BR 70. The system may notify Member Buyers or certified women's business enterprises when a new certified supplier joins the network, based on optional criteria such as country and industry code.

## Section 5: Al Utilization in WECommunity Solution

- New Verification Category: A new verification category will be introduced in which the AI is
  responsible for managing the application and documentation review process. The AI must
  be able to assess submissions according to WEConnect International's criteria for
  verification, without human intervention unless additional review is necessary. The AI
  system must align submissions with WEConnect International's verification criteria,
  facilitating automated approval or denial of applications.
- Automated Verification and Certification: Artificial intelligence should be utilized to systematically review and verify applications and documentation submitted by womenowned businesses. Flag any discrepancies with certification criteria before passing the application to the next reviewer.
- Intelligent Document Review & Criteria Matching: The AI must be able to review and match
  applications and documentation against predefined criteria to determine eligibility for
  verification & certification. The AI platform should support the document review process by
  thoroughly analyzing uploaded materials for completeness, accuracy, and compliance with
  specified standards, ensuring all required information is accurately provided and adheres to
  the criteria established by WEConnect International.
- Automated Communication: The AI system is expected to generate and distribute automated approval or denial notifications based on the outcome of application reviews.
   This includes informing applicants of their status and supplying comprehensive feedback regarding any issues that require resolution.
- Continuous Learning and Improvement: The AI solution must possess the capability to
  continuously learn from new data and user feedback, thereby enhancing its accuracy and
  efficiency over time to ensure ongoing relevance and effectiveness in verification and
  certification processes.
- **Exception Handling:** When the AI system encounters cases where an automated decision cannot be rendered, such applications should be escalated for human review to guarantee that complex scenarios receive appropriate attention from the certification team.
- Reporting and Analytics: The AI should be able to produce comprehensive reports and
  analytics related to the verification and certification workflow. This encompasses metrics
  such as the volume of applications processed, approval and denial rates, and prevalent
  reasons for denial, enabling WEConnect International to discern trends and identify
  opportunities for enhancement.

- Automate Data Collection and Analysis: The AI system should be designed to automatically gather and analyze data from multiple sources on the platform, ensuring accurate and efficient capture of relevant information.
- Generate Comprehensive Reports: The AI must be able to generate detailed reports based on predefined criteria and user inputs, providing insights, trends, and recommendations to support decisions.
- Customizable Reporting Templates: Customizable reporting templates must be available to address the needs of distinct user groups, such as suppliers, buyers, and internal staff.
- Real-Time Reporting and Dashboards: The AI should be able to support real-time reporting and interactive dashboards that offer current data and visualizations.
   Users have access to dashboards for monitoring metrics and performance indicators.
- Scheduled and On-Demand Reports: Both scheduled and on-demand report generation must be supported. Reports may be set to run at specified intervals or initiated as needed.
- Natural Language Processing (NLP) Capabilities: Al should leverage NLP to allow users to interact with the reporting system through natural language queries, making report generation accessible via plain language requests.
- Continuous Learning and Improvement: The AI system must incorporate continual learning from user interactions and feedback, enhancing data analysis accuracy, insight relevance, and user experience over time.
- Compliance and Security: The reporting system must adhere to applicable data security and privacy regulations, maintaining protection of sensitive information and secure report generation.
- **Enhanced User Experience:** The AI should also deliver personalized recommendations and support to users, including step-by-step guidance throughout the certification process, responding to frequently asked questions, and offering real-time assistance as needed.
- User-Friendly Application Process: Al should automatically fill application fields using data from applicants' websites, LinkedIn profiles, and official sources, minimizing manual input and ensuring accuracy.
- AI-Driven Search and Alerts: AI should improve WECommunity's database by enabling advanced company searches (by industry, location, certification) and send users notifications when relevant procurement opportunities arise.

## **Section 6: Implementation Process**

The implementation process should be carried out in several phases to ensure a smooth transition and minimal disruption to current operations.

## Phase 1: Planning and Requirements Gathering

During this initial phase, detailed planning sessions should be conducted to gather requirements from all stakeholders. This includes identifying key functionalities, integration points, user roles, and security measures. A comprehensive project plan should be developed outlining milestones, deliverables, and timelines.

## Phase 2: System Design and Development

In this phase, the system should be designed based on the gathered requirements. This includes developing the architecture, selecting appropriate technologies, and creating detailed design documents. Development should commence, focusing on building core functionalities, integrations, and user interfaces.

## Phase 3: Testing and Quality Assurance

Extensive testing should be conducted to ensure the system meets all requirements and performs as expected. This includes unit testing, integration testing, system testing, and user acceptance testing. Any issues identified should be resolved to ensure the system is robust and reliable.

## **Phase 4: Training and Documentation**

Comprehensive training sessions should be provided to all users, including suppliers, member buyers, and internal staff. Detailed documentation should be created to assist users in navigating the platform, utilizing functionalities, and troubleshooting common issues.

#### Phase 5: Deployment and Monitoring

The system should be deployed in parallel with the current production system for a specified period to ensure a smooth transition. During this time, users should be able to familiarize themselves with the new platform while still having access to the existing system. Continuous monitoring and support will be provided to address any issues that arise.

#### **Phase 6: Review and Optimization**

After the initial deployment period, a thorough review should be conducted to assess the system's performance and user feedback. Any necessary optimizations should be implemented to enhance the user experience and system efficiency.

# **Section 7: Regulation & Security Requirements**

Must comply with GDPR and all other national or regional data security regulations. The data is owned by WEConnect International. There must be a data security plan that ensures data is consistently backed up, and that robust contingency measures are in place in the event that the primary back-up location is compromised.

## **Section 8: Customer Service & Training Requirements**

The vendor must provide comprehensive training for WEConnect International users on the platform. This training should cater to different user perspectives including suppliers, member buyers, and internal staff. Training should cover functionalities such as accessing and utilizing

member discussion boards, hosting internal resources, and integrating Single Sign-On (SSO) authentication. Additionally, training sessions should focus on reporting, analytics, and Alpowered tools to enhance both the applicant and member experience. The vendor should ensure users are proficient in navigating the platform, utilizing workflows and approvals, and leveraging AI for streamlined processes.

Furthermore, the vendor must offer robust customer service support to address any issues users may encounter. This includes providing timely responses to queries, dedicated support channels, and continuous assistance to ensure a smooth user experience. The support should be available through multiple mediums, including email, phone, and live chat, to accommodate different user preferences. Regular feedback mechanisms should be established to improve the service quality continuously.

## **Section 9: System Acceptance Criteria**

- New system must run in parallel with current production system for 6 months
- 5 years of data must be in system (conversion implied) on day one

#### Section 10: Cost

Respondent will propose the fees in USD and provide cost breakdown structure based on outputs. All taxes should be included as per government policy and paid in full by the Contractor directly. WEConnect International is a 501(c)3 Tax-Exempt Organization and is not responsible for collecting or paying national or local taxes.

#### **Section 11: Project Timelines**

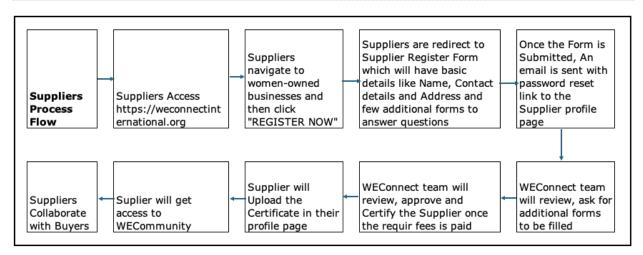
The RFP is to be issued to suppliers no later than August 29, 2025.

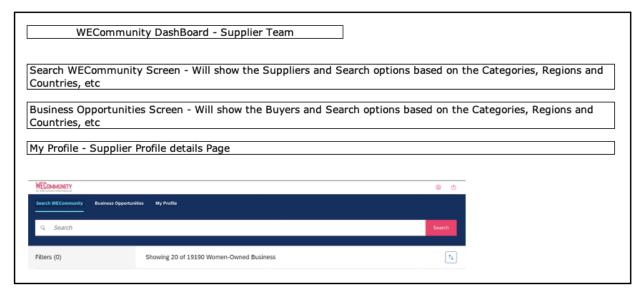
#### Request for proposal timeline

- Proposals in response to this RFP are due by January 31, 2026 to <u>procurement@weconnectinternational.org</u>. Late responses will be considered as No Response without approval.
- Questions may be submitted until October 30, 2025 (Note: Responses to questions will be shared with all candidates to ensure impartiality.)
- Proposal reviews and demos: March–May, 2026
- o Top Bidders will be notified and requested to submit "Best and Final Offer."

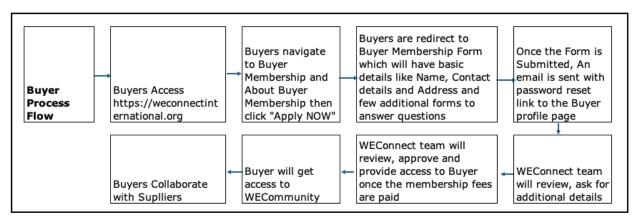
The winning proposal will be chosen no later than July 31st, 2026.

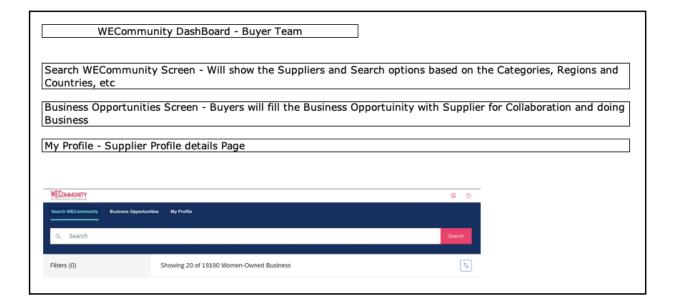
Section 12: Current System Process Flow Supplier Process Flow and Dashboard





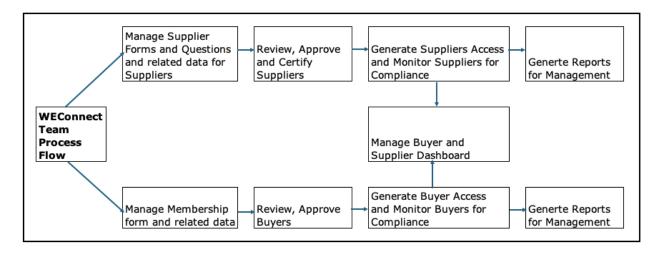
#### **Buyer Process Flow and Dashboard**





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#### **WEConnect Team Process Flow and Dashboard**





## **Section 13: Glossary**

**WECommunity:** A database portal to host Supplier data to be viewed by Member Buyers. This portal will also support assessors who manage international contracts needing access to uploaded documents from supplier applications. Assessors will use this portal to review these applications effectively.

**WOB - Women-Owned Businesses**: Businesses that are at least 51% owned, operated, and controlled by women.

**WBE - Women's Business Enterprise**: Enterprises that qualify as women-owned and are certified to have met the criteria.

**Registration:** Free limited access to the database is available to supplier users.

**Certification:** Provides full access to the database for certified users.

Member Buyer: Large buying organizations that are members of WEConnect International.