

Request for Proposal (RFP): Modernization and Automation of WEConnect International’s WBE Certification and Discovery

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1. Introduction and Background

WEConnect International (hereinafter “WEConnect”) is a global network dedicated to helping women-owned businesses (WOBs) succeed in global value chains. Through this Request for Proposal, WEConnect seeks a strategic technology partner to transform its current certification processes into a modernized, automated, and AI-driven ecosystem.

The selected partner will be expected to improve connections between enterprise buyers and WOBs, especially a subsegment of Certified Women’s Business Enterprises (WBEs), through advanced platform development, application of next-generation technology where appropriate, and secure data management. Emphasis will be given to proposals that create defensible “technology moats” which advance the mission and purpose of the organization.

2. Project Goals and Vision

Respondents shall address the following strategic objectives in their proposals:

- **Modernize the Registration and Certification Process:** Implement an AI-native, frictionless system for onboarding, registering and certifying WBEs that ensures global integrity, transparency, robust data sovereignty, accuracy, and data protection.
- **Intelligent Connection Platform:** Develop a matching engine that utilizes artificial intelligence to facilitate high-value connections between WBEs and corporate buyers.
- **Data Insights and Growth:** Leverage robust analytics to monitor network dynamics and proactively identify growth opportunities for women entrepreneurs.
- **Operational Independence and Intellectual Property:** Deliver an architecture under which WEConnect maintains IP ownership of methodology, process, and content, and retains the autonomy to operate the system independently or with alternative third-party support post-launch.
- **Global-First Experience:** Ensure a mobile-first, multilingual (10+ languages) experience capable of deployment across 135+ countries.
- **Phased Approach:** Utilize a phased delivery model beginning with a Proof of Concept (POC) to validate velocity, cost, and business value prior to full-scale deployment.
- **Ongoing Maintenance and Support:** The production system shall be maintainable by the WEConnect Certification Team, with fee-for-service support available for technical assistance and future enhancements.

3. Scope of Work — Modules

The following modules define the functional scope of the engagement. Modules are sequenced in order of operational priority. Respondents should address each module and indicate dependencies, estimated timelines, and resource requirements.

Module 1 —Business Registration

The Business Registration module establishes the initial point of entry for all women-owned businesses into the WEConnect ecosystem. This module must provide a seamless, low-friction onboarding experience optimized for diverse global markets.

- **Frictionless Registration Portal:** Replace legacy portals with a mobile-first registration process optimized for diverse regional needs (e.g., WhatsApp and SMS-based onboarding for users in low bandwidth locations).
- **Automated Identity Verification:** Implement logic for immediate basic approval and AI-driven screening of the business against global sanctions lists, watchlists, and adverse-media databases.
- **Tiered Fee Collection:** Fully integrated payment processing (e.g., Stripe) supporting multicurrency fee collection based on country of origin and business revenue tier capable of issuing an itemized receipt. with optional integration with our accounting system.
- **Ownership and Individual Identity Verification:** The owner or representative who submits the business registration must be verified for authentic representation of said business.
- **Self-Service Account Management:** Enable registrants to manage their profiles, upload documentation, sign up for new opportunities and allow for notifications; and track the status of their application through a secure, self-service interface.

Module 2 — Business Certification and Assessor Workflow

This module combines the end-to-end business certification lifecycle with the assessor review workflow. The intent is to deliver a unified, auditable pipeline from application intake through certification issuance, including all human-in-the-loop controls.

Certification Lifecycle

- **AI-Assisted Document Review:** Automate initial document classification, completeness checks, and risk scoring using AI models to reduce manual effort and accelerate time-to-certify.
- **Secure Data Sovereignty:** Provide a document management system ensuring data is stored in accordance with applicable local laws (GDPR, LGPD, etc.) and that data owners retain control over sharing permissions.
- **Certificate Issuance and Self-Service:** Enable certified WBEs to download, share, and verify certificates for trust generation, and to perform required updates or changes that may trigger re-verification.
- **Automated Lifecycle Management:** System-generated certificates with automated renewal and expiration alerts at 30-, 60-, and 90-day intervals.
- **Extensibility:** The system should support integration with third-party systems including immutable blockchains, digital wallets, and fintech platforms.

Assessor Workspace and Human-in-the-Loop Controls

- **Assessor Portal:** A dedicated workspace for 30+ global assessors to review high-stakes documentation, with role-based access controls and audit trails.
- **Human-in-the-Loop (HITL) Review:** Maintain a mandatory human review layer for WEConnect leadership, ensuring that all AI recommendations can be audited, overridden, or escalated. Every override action shall be logged for compliance purposes.
- **Quality Assurance and Calibration:** Provide mechanisms for periodic assessor calibration and inter-rater reliability analysis to ensure consistency across global review teams.

Module 3 — Buyer Connection Platform and RFx Automation

This module addresses the demand side of the platform, enabling enterprise buyers to discover, evaluate, and engage WOBs .

- **AI Discovery Engine:** An intuitive search and recommendation engine using NAICS and UNSPSC classifications and geography to match buyers with qualified WOBs .
- **Supplier Scrubbing and Opportunity Posting:** Provide tools enabling buyers to upload master supplier lists for automated WOB identification, and automated mechanisms to post procurement opportunities into the portal.
- **API-First Architecture:** All platform functions shall be accessible via documented, versioned APIs (e.g., REST/GraphQL) to facilitate third-party integrations and future extensibility.
- **Member Onboarding:** Provide an online mechanism for buyers to complete a membership application, sign an agreement, request an invoice, and make a payment, with invoice to cash integration into WEConnect's accounting system.
- **Integration:** The module must be integrated to WEConnect's internal systems for seamless workflow optimization, and avoid redundancy.

Module 4 — Actionable Analytics and Insights

This module provides the data intelligence layer that supports decision-making for all platform stakeholders.

- **Embedded Reporting:** Replace manual PowerBI configurations with actionable analytics embedded directly within the platform workflow for all user roles.
- **Self-Service Dashboards:** Deliver configurable dashboards with clear delineation between “owned data” and community-level data, governed by strict permissions and data classification rules.
- **Mission-Driven Insights:** Provide analytics that form defensible data moats and deliver insights specific to WEConnect 's value-creation objectives.

4. Phased Delivery, Pilot, and Cutover

WEConnect requires a phased delivery model that progressively transitions operations from current systems to the new platform with minimum to no disruption to active certification workflows, assessor operations, buyer engagement, or WOB services. The cutover from current systems is time sensitive, and therefore due consideration will be given to leveraging 'time to market' first principles in prioritization and cutover project management. Respondents shall describe their approach to each of the following phases, including timelines, entry and exit criteria, risk mitigation, and escalation protocols.

4.1 Phase 1 — Proof of Concept (POC)

The POC phase is intended to validate technical feasibility, AI model accuracy, and business value prior to committing to full-scale implementation. Respondents shall address:

- **Scope Definition:** Identify a bounded subset of functionality (e.g., a single module or a single region) to be delivered during the POC. State the rationale for scope selection and expected duration.
- **Success Criteria:** Define measurable success criteria for the POC, including performance benchmarks, accuracy thresholds, and user-acceptance metrics that must be met before proceeding to the Pilot phase.

- **AI Model Validation:** Demonstrate the viability of AI-driven components (e.g., document classification, identity verification, buyer matching) using representative WEConnect data. Include the evaluation methodology and benchmark datasets.
- **Stakeholder Review Gate:** Describe the formal review process at the conclusion of the POC, including the decision framework for proceeding, iterating, or terminating the engagement.

4.2 Phase 2 — Pilot Deployment

Following a successful POC, the Pilot phase extends the solution to a controlled production environment to validate operational readiness under real-world conditions. The overriding requirement is zero disruption to ongoing WEConnect operations during this phase.

- **Pilot Scope and Geography:** Define the pilot cohort (e.g., specific regions; a subset of WOBs, WBEs, and buyers; or selected modules). The pilot must be representative of the diversity of WEConnect's global operations and user types.
- **Dual-System Operation:** During the Pilot, the new platform shall operate alongside legacy systems. Describe how data synchronization will be maintained between the pilot environment and current production systems to prevent data loss, duplication, or inconsistency.
- **User Onboarding and Training:** Provide a training plan for pilot participants—including WOBs, WBEs, assessors, internal staff, and corporate buyers—covering new workflows, self-service capabilities, and escalation procedures.
- **Training Materials:** Develop training materials for WEConnect employees and for external users
- **Monitoring and Feedback Loops:** Describe the real-time monitoring, issue-tracking, and structured feedback mechanisms that will be in place during the Pilot to identify and resolve defects rapidly.
- **Pilot Exit Criteria:** Define the quantitative and qualitative criteria that must be satisfied before advancing to full cutover, including system stability thresholds, user satisfaction benchmarks, and data-integrity validations.

4.3 Phase 3 — Cutover and Migration

The Cutover phase transitions all remaining users, data, and workflows from legacy systems to the new platform. This phase must be planned and executed to ensure minimum to no disruption to WEConnect's operations, certification timelines, or buyer-facing services.

Data Migration and Hygiene

- **Schema Mapping and Transformation:** Describe the process for mapping legacy data structures (SAP SLP/BTP, Excel, Microsoft Planner) to the new data model, including handling of data-type mismatches, orphaned records, and deprecated fields.
- **Data Cleansing and Deduplication:** Detail the automated and manual processes for identifying and resolving duplicate records, incomplete entries, and data-quality anomalies prior to migration.
- **Incremental Migration:** Describe whether the migration will be executed as a single cutover event or as an incremental, rolling migration. If incremental, describe the synchronization strategy to keep legacy and new systems consistent during the transition window.

- **Data Validation and Reconciliation:** Provide the methodology for post-migration data validation, including record counts, checksums, and business-rule verification to confirm that all data has been migrated accurately and completely.

Global User Acceptance Testing (UAT)

- **Phased UAT Strategy:** Outline the UAT approach, including the number of testing waves, geographic representation, user-role coverage (WOB, WBEs, assessors, buyers, administrators), test-case development methodology, and provide user test scripts.
- **Defect Management:** Describe the defect triage, prioritization, and resolution workflow during UAT, including severity classifications and maximum resolution timelines for critical and high-severity issues.
- **Sign-Off Process:** Define the formal sign-off process required from WEConnect stakeholders before the system is declared production-ready, including what is required from WEConnect to approve the official transition from pilot to full rollout and go live.

Parallel Run, Rollback, and Business Continuity

- **Parallel Run Period:** Define the duration and scope of the parallel-run period during which both legacy and new systems operate simultaneously. Specify how transactions, certifications, and buyer interactions will be handled during this window to avoid duplication or gaps.
- **Rollback Plan:** Provide a detailed rollback protocol in the event of a critical failure during cutover, including the maximum acceptable rollback window, data-recovery procedures, and communication plan for affected stakeholders.
- **Business Continuity Assurance:** Describe the safeguards ensuring that no active certification applications, pending assessor reviews, or in-progress buyer engagements are lost, delayed, or corrupted during the transition.
- **Communication and Change Management:** Outline the stakeholder communication plan for each phase of the cutover, including advance notifications, go-live announcements, and post-cutover support channels.

4.4 Phase 4 — Post-Migration Stabilization and Hypercare

Following the production cutover, a defined stabilization period shall ensure the platform operates reliably before the engagement transitions to steady-state support.

- **Hypercare Period:** Define the duration and scope of the post-migration hypercare period, including on-call support levels, response-time SLAs, and dedicated staffing commitments.
- **Issue Resolution:** Describe the escalation and resolution framework for production issues identified during the stabilization period, including severity-based response targets.
- **Legacy System Decommission:** Provide the criteria and timeline for decommissioning legacy systems (SAP SLP/BTP, Excel workflows, Microsoft Planner) once the new platform has been validated as fully operational. Include data-archival procedures for legacy records.
- **Knowledge Transfer and Handover:** Describe the process for transferring operational knowledge, documentation, and administrative credentials to the WEConnect Certification Team at the conclusion of the hypercare period.

5. Extensibility and Ecosystem Integration

WEConnect's platform must serve as a connective hub within a broader ecosystem of corporate procurement systems, development-finance institutions, and WOB enablement partners. This section defines the extensibility requirements that ensure the platform can grow beyond its core certification and discovery functions to deliver lasting economic impact for women-owned businesses worldwide.

Respondents shall describe the extensibility architecture of their proposed solution, and shall provide a menu of Extensibility Service Options (see Section 5.4) that WEConnect may elect to engage on a modular, fee-for-service, or roadmap basis.

5.1 Third-Party Buyer System Integration

Enterprise buyers operate diverse procurement and supplier-management ecosystems. The platform must integrate with these systems to reduce friction in the buyer-to-WOB connection and to maximize the visibility of WOBs within corporate supply-chain workflows.

- **ERP and Procurement Platform Connectors:** Describe pre-built or configurable connectors for major enterprise procurement systems, including but not limited to SAP Ariba, Coupa, Jaggaer, Oracle Procurement Cloud, and Workday Strategic Sourcing. Specify whether connectors are real-time, batch, or event-driven.
- **Supplier Diversity Management Systems:** Detail integration capabilities with corporate supplier-diversity platforms and reporting tools (e.g., Supplier.io, TealBook, Dun & Bradstreet Supplier Diversity) to enable automated WOB and WBE status verification and spend reporting.
- **Buyer Data Exchange Protocols:** Describe support for standardized data-exchange formats and protocols (e.g., cXML, EDI, Open Contracting Data Standard) to facilitate seamless interoperability with buyer systems across industries and geographies.
- **Single Sign-On and Identity Federation:** Describe support for enterprise SSO and identity federation standards (SAML 2.0, OpenID Connect) to enable corporate buyers to access the platform through their existing identity infrastructure.
- **Webhook and Event Architecture:** Detail the platform's webhook and event-notification capabilities, enabling buyer systems to subscribe to real-time events such as new WBE certifications, profile updates, or opportunity-match notifications.

5.2 WOB Enablement, Empowerment, and Inclusion

Beyond certification and discovery, the platform must support the broader enablement and economic empowerment of WOBs. Respondents shall describe how the platform architecture accommodates integration with or delivery of the following capabilities:

- **Capacity-Building and Training Platforms:** Describe integration points with learning management systems (LMS), mentorship platforms, and digital skills-training providers to deliver curated enablement content to WOBs **directly** within or alongside the platform experience.
- **Community and Peer-Network Features:** Describe support for WOB-to-WOB networking, peer mentoring, and community forums—either natively within the platform or through integration with third-party community tools—to foster knowledge sharing and collective empowerment.
- **Impact Measurement and SDG Alignment:** Describe how the platform can capture and report data aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), to support WEConnect’s impact reporting to donors, partners, and stakeholders.

- **Accessibility and Inclusion by Design:** Ensure accessibility for WOBs with disabilities, low-literacy users, and users with limited internet connectivity, including compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA standards and progressive web-app (PWA) or offline-capable capabilities.

5.3 Open Architecture and API Governance

The platform’s extensibility must be underpinned by a robust API governance framework that enables third-party integration while protecting data integrity and security.

- **API-First Design:** Confirm that all core platform functions (registration, certification, discovery, analytics) are exposed through documented, versioned RESTful or GraphQL APIs with comprehensive developer documentation.
- **Developer Portal and Sandbox:** Describe plans for a developer portal with sandbox environments, API keys, rate-limit management, and usage analytics to enable third-party developers and partners to build integrations.
- **API Governance and Versioning:** Describe the API lifecycle-management approach, including versioning strategy, deprecation policy, backward-compatibility commitments, and change-notification procedures for integrated partners.

5.4 Extensibility Service Options

In addition to the core platform deliverables, Respondents shall provide a menu of optional Extensibility Services that WEConnect may elect to engage. For each service option offered, Respondents shall provide:

- **Service Description:** A clear description of the service, its intended audience (WOBs, buyers, administrators, or partners), and the business problem it addresses.
- **Delivery Model:** Whether the service is delivered as a pre-built connector, a configurable module, a custom-development engagement, or a managed service.
- **Pricing Structure:** Indicate whether the service is included in the core platform fee, available as a one-time add-on, offered on a subscription basis, or priced on a per-integration or per-transaction model.
- **Timeline and Dependencies:** Estimated time to deploy the service and any dependencies on core platform milestones or third-party partner onboarding.
- **Support and SLA:** The support model for each extensibility service, including service-level commitments, escalation paths, and ongoing maintenance responsibilities.

Examples of Extensibility Service Options may include, but are not limited to:

- Pre-built connectors for specific ERP or procurement platforms (e.g., SAP Ariba, Coupa).
- Custom API integration development for buyer-specific systems.
- LMS or training-platform integration packages.
- Impact-measurement and SDG-reporting modules.
- Digital-credential and verifiable-certificate issuance services.
- Localization and regional-deployment services for new markets.
- Accessibility audit and remediation services.

WEConnect reserves the right to engage none, some, or all of the Extensibility Service Options proposed. Pricing for these services shall be presented separately from the core platform budget to allow for modular decision-making.

6. Measures of Success (KPIs)

The selected Respondent shall be measured against the following performance benchmarks. Proposals should include baseline assumptions and target values for each metric:

- **Reduction in Time-to-Certify (TTC):** Targeted percentage reduction in the manual review cycle from application receipt to certification issuance including application and local documentation review and assessment of the core WBE Certification criteria:
 - Ownership (51% minimum): One or more women must own at least 51% of the business. This ownership must be "real and substantial," meaning the women owners share in all risks and profits commensurate with their stake.
 - Management: Women must be responsible for the day-to-day management and have the ability to control basic business functions (e.g., signing payroll, negotiating contracts).
 - Control: Women must hold the highest officer position and have the power to make strategic decisions and direct company policy. There can be no legal or governing restrictions that prevent women from exercising this authority.
 - Independence: The business must be able to operate its core specialty without "substantial reliance" on the resources or finances of men or non-women-owned enterprises.
- **Registration Completion Rate:** Measurable improvement in the conversion rate from registration initiation to completed application, reducing drop-off.
- **Self-Service Rate:** Reduction in support tickets related to basic account management, document uploads, and certificate retrieval.
- **Matching Efficacy:** Quantitative metrics demonstrating the accuracy and commercial value of AI-generated buyer-to-WOB matches.

7. Architecture and Technology Stack

Respondents shall address each of the following architectural requirements. Where AI capabilities are proposed as an augmentation of an existing or legacy platform (rather than as an AI-native build), the Respondent must provide a clear technology roadmap that identifies:

- Which components are net-new AI-native services.
- Which components are legacy or pre-existing systems being retained.
- The integration approach (APIs, middleware, data pipelines) connecting legacy and AI layers.
- A timeline and dependency map for progressive modernization of legacy components.

7.1 Architectural Recommendation

Propose a scalable, "headless" architecture (e.g., decoupled frontend and backend) that ensures high performance across 135+ countries while maintaining WEConnect's ownership of the underlying code and methodology. The recommendation must explicitly address how the

system will accommodate diverse regional connectivity requirements, including mobile-first experiences in low bandwidth locations.

7.2 Data Sovereignty and Global Resilience

Describe how the proposed architecture ensures localized data-residency compliance (e.g., GDPR, LGPD) across 135+ countries without requiring separate, high-cost cloud instances. Detail the approach to ring-fencing WEConnect's proprietary data to prevent its use in training general-purpose third-party AI models.

7.3 Legacy Migration and Operational Parity

Provide a detailed methodology for migrating complex data and workflows from SAP SLP and SAP BTP into the recommended technology stack. Describe how automated tooling will be used to ensure data integrity and achieve Operational Parity—matching or exceeding current SAP functionality. If the proposed solution layers AI capabilities atop any retained SAP components, clearly delineate the boundary between legacy and new services, and provide a roadmap for eventual full migration.

8. AI Governance, Trust, and Regulatory Alignment

WEConnect requires that all AI components deployed within the platform adhere to recognized international standards for trustworthy artificial intelligence. Respondents must demonstrate alignment with the following regulatory frameworks and guidelines, and must complete the AI Ethics, Governance, and Data Sovereignty Questionnaire provided in the Appendix.

8.1 Applicable Regulatory Frameworks

Respondents shall demonstrate compliance with, or alignment to, the following standards and guidelines as applicable to the proposed solution:

- **NIST AI Risk Management Framework (AI RMF 1.0):** The National Institute of Standards and Technology's AI RMF provides a voluntary, risk-based framework for managing AI risks throughout the AI lifecycle. Respondents shall describe how their solution maps to the four core functions: Govern, Map, Measure, and Manage.
- **OECD AI Principles (2019, updated 2024):** The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's AI Principles establish values-based guidance adopted by 46+ countries. Respondents shall demonstrate adherence to the principles of inclusive growth, human-centered values, transparency, robustness, and accountability.
- **EU AI Act (Regulation 2024/1689):** Where the platform processes data of EU-resident WOBs or is deployed within EU jurisdictions, Respondents shall classify the AI components under the EU AI Act's risk categories and describe applicable compliance obligations.
- **ISO/IEC 42001 — AI Management System:** Respondents are encouraged to indicate whether their organization holds or is pursuing ISO/IEC 42001 certification, or follows its principles for systematic AI management.
- **UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021):** Given WEConnect's global scope across 135+ countries—including developing economies—Respondents should describe alignment with UNESCO's guidance on proportionality, fairness, and do-no-harm principles.

- **Regional and Sectoral Regulations:** Respondents shall identify any additional regional AI regulations applicable to their proposed deployment (e.g., Brazil’s LGPD AI provisions, India’s Digital Personal Data Protection Act, Singapore’s AI Verify framework, or the African Union’s AI Continental Strategy).

8.2 AI-Native vs. AI-Augmented Disclosure

To ensure transparency and appropriate risk assessment, Respondents must clearly disclose the AI deployment model of their proposed solution:

- **AI-Native Systems:** Systems designed and built from the ground up with AI at the core of their architecture. For these systems, describe the model training pipelines, data governance, and continuous monitoring mechanisms.
- **AI-Augmented / Legacy-Integrated Systems:** Systems in which AI capabilities are layered atop existing legacy platforms (e.g., SAP, Salesforce, or custom applications). For these systems, Respondents must provide:
 - A component-level inventory identifying which functions are AI-driven and which rely on legacy logic.
 - The integration architecture (APIs, middleware, event buses) connecting AI services to legacy systems.
 - A phased modernization roadmap with milestones for progressively replacing legacy components.
 - Risk mitigation strategies for operating in a hybrid state, including failover and degraded-mode operations.

8.3 Core AI Governance Requirements

- **Bias Mitigation:** Describe methodologies for detecting and mitigating algorithmic bias across global demographics, including audit frequency and remediation protocols.
- **Explainable AI (XAI):** Demonstrate the ability for AI components to provide plain-language reasoning for certification decisions, risk flags, and buyer-to-WOB matches.
- **Data Lineage:** Ensure every piece of WOB and WBE data has a verifiable provenance trail from its source of origin (SAP, manual entry, third-party feed) to its current AI-verified state.
- **Security:** Describe protections against AI-specific threats including prompt injection, data poisoning, model inversion, and third-party model-provider outages.
- **IP and Platform Evolution:** Confirm WEConnect’s ownership of all intellectual property generated and the platform’s ability to integrate new AI models or technologies without requiring a total system rebuild.
- **Knowledge Transfer:** All backend code, model artifacts, and operational documentation shall be provided to WEConnect for independent storage and operation.

9. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated using the weighted criteria below. WEConnect may request clarifications or conduct follow-up discussions as needed to validate the information provided.

| Evaluation Criterion | Weight |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| Technical approach and timeliness | 50% |
| Change management approach | 25% |

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Cost | 15% |
| Team skills | 10% |

10. Proposal Submission Requirements

Each proposal submitted in response to this RFP shall include the following components:

- **Information Security and AI Governance Statement:** Documentation of the Respondent’s ethics policies, bias mitigation practices, and data privacy standards.
 - **Implementation Plan:** A proposed timeline including key milestones and a phased approach to remediate immediate reporting needs.
 - **Budget:** Detailed pricing, including:
 - Total cost of ownership over five years and payment plans if available
 - Tiered certification-fee logic
 - Ongoing operational costs
- Note: Special consideration will be given to cost transparency across build and scale phases, and to approaches that provide rapid initial build-and-deploy options to meet the switchover timeframe from current systems (e.g., use of a pre-built platform).

11. Bidder Qualifications

- Reference and outline relevant work experience in the sections above.
- 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 and onboarding and provide regular status updates.
- Include clear pricing and budget information.
- Have adequate staffing capacity to support the project.

12. Proposal Guidelines

- Include a clear price proposal for the work.
- Submit the application no later than April 15th 2026.
- Provide the requirements outlined in the sections above.

13. Project Timelines

13.1 Request for Proposal Timeline

- Questions may be submitted until April 6th 2026.
- Proposals in response to this RFP are due by April 22nd 2026.

14. Costs

The respondent must state fees in USD with a detailed cost breakdown. All applicable taxes, as required by government policy, must be included and paid directly by the Contractor. WEConnect International, as a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization, is not responsible for collecting or remitting any national or local taxes.

15. RFP Terms & Conditions

- **Right to Reject:** WEConnect International reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals, to waive informalities and minor irregularities in proposals received, and to accept any portion of a proposal or all items proposed if deemed in the best interest of WEConnect.
- **No Obligation to Award:** Issuance of this RFP does not commit WEConnect to award a contract, pay any costs incurred in the preparation of a response, or procure or contract for services.
- **Clarifications and Discussions:** WEConnect may request additional information, conduct interviews, request demonstrations, or seek clarification from any bidder to support the evaluation process.
- **Confidentiality:** Bidders should clearly mark any proprietary or confidential information included in their proposal. WEConnect will use reasonable efforts to maintain confidentiality, subject to any applicable legal or regulatory obligations.
- **Proposal Validity:** Proposals must remain valid for at least 90 days from the submission deadline, unless otherwise agreed in writing.
- **Contract Negotiation:** Final scope, deliverables, and pricing are subject to negotiation and written agreement. WEConnect anticipates entering into a written agreement with the selected bidder(s).
- **Subcontracting:** Any use of subcontractors must be disclosed in the proposal. The prime contractor remains responsible for all subcontractor performance.

Appendix: AI Ethics, Governance, and Data Sovereignty Questionnaire

Instructions to Respondents: Provide detailed, evidence-based responses to each of the following questions. “Yes/No” answers are insufficient. Include descriptions of methodologies, architectural diagrams, or references to formal policy documents where appropriate.

A.1 AI Governance and Accountability

- **A.1.1 Governance Framework:** Does your organization follow a recognized AI management framework (e.g., ISO/IEC 42001, NIST AI RMF, OECD AI Principles, or EU AI Act guidelines)? Describe your internal AI oversight structure and its reporting lines.
- **A.1.2 Accountability:** Identify the individual or body within your organization responsible for AI governance and ethical decision-making. Describe the escalation process when an AI model produces unexpected or biased results.
- **A.1.3 Human-in-the-Loop (HITL):** Describe how your solution facilitates human intervention for high-stakes decisions (e.g., certification denial). Confirm whether a human auditor can override an AI recommendation, and whether such actions are logged in an immutable audit trail.

A.2 Data Sovereignty and Secure Storage

- **A.2.1 Data Residency:** For a global organization supporting buyers and WOBs in 135+ countries, how does your architecture ensure compliance with local data-sovereignty laws (e.g., GDPR in the EU, LGPD in Brazil, India’s DPDP Act)?
- **A.2.2 Data Isolation:** How is WEConnect’s data ring-fenced from other clients? Provide evidence of logical or physical data-isolation protocols.
- **A.2.3 Training Data Usage:** Will any data provided by WEConnect (WOB financials, certificates, etc.) be used to train your general AI models or shared with third-party AI providers? If so, under what terms and with what safeguards?
- **A.2.4 Immutability and Deletion:** Describe how you ensure the immutability of certified records. What is your process for permanent data deletion (“Right to be Forgotten”) upon request, in compliance with GDPR Article 17 and equivalent regulations?

A.3 Bias Mitigation and Fairness

- **A.3.1 Bias Auditing:** Describe your methodology for detecting and mitigating algorithmic bias, particularly regarding the diverse global demographics of WOBs. How often are bias audits performed, and by whom?
- **A.3.2 Representative Data:** How do you ensure the datasets used to train matching or vetting models are representative of the 135+ countries WEConnect serves today?
- **A.3.3 Transparency and Explainability:** Can your AI provide plain-language rationale for a specific match or risk flag? Describe the Explainable AI (XAI) capabilities of your solution, including alignment with NIST AI RMF’s “Map” function and the OECD transparency principle.

A.4 Security and Resilience

- **A.4.1 Adversarial Defense:** How do you protect the system against AI-specific threats such as prompt injection (to bypass registration questions), data poisoning, and model inversion attacks?
- **A.4.2 Dependency Management:** If your platform relies on third-party Large Language Models (LLMs), describe your contingency plan in the event of provider outage, service discontinuation, or material change to terms of service.
- **A.4.3 Audit Trails:** Does the system maintain a tamper-proof log of all AI-generated actions and subsequent human approvals for regulatory audit purposes? Describe the log architecture and retention policy.

A.5 Deployment and Sustainability

- **A.5.1 Phased Implementation:** Describe your approach to the Proof of Concept (POC). How will you demonstrate the business value of your AI model evaluation and governance controls before full-scale deployment?
- **A.5.2 IP and Autonomy:** Confirm how your architecture supports WEConnect's ownership of the resulting intellectual property. Can the system be operated independently of your organization after the initial engagement?
- **A.5.3 Evolution and Costs:** How does your architecture accommodate the integration of new AI models or technologies without requiring a total system rebuild? Provide cost projections for ongoing model maintenance and platform evolution.