Solicitation for Marketing Consultant

The Maryland Small Business Retirement Savings Program (“Maryland$aves” or the “Program”) seeks a consultant to help develop and execute a go-to-market communications strategy for the Program in coordination with its staff and its other service providers.

Why We Need Better Workplace Savings

Retirement Savings

For many Americans, a secure retirement may seem out of reach. Fewer than half of all workers in the U.S. (approximately 81 million) have access to a retirement savings plan through their employer at any given time — the primary method that Americans use to accumulate savings — and even fewer participate.

In Maryland, approximately 1.2 million private-sector employees work for an employer that does not offer a workplace-based, payroll-deduction retirement program. Workers in Maryland businesses with fewer than 100 employees are much less likely to have access to a plan (67 percent) than workers in larger businesses (35 percent). Studies have shown that employees are 15 times more likely to save for retirement if they have the option of payroll deduction at their place of employment.

Many smaller companies and nonprofits choose not to offer retirement savings to their employees for multiple reasons, including cost, complexity, and the risk of legal liability. The costs of setting up a 401k plan can be prohibitive for small employers, especially if such a plan includes an employer match. Also, an employer takes on fiduciary responsibilities when setting up a 401k plan for their employees.

Emergency Savings

Many Maryland workers live in a state of financial insecurity and struggle to cover their basic needs, let alone save for a better future. In 2018, 40% of working Marylanders would not be able to cover a $400 emergency expense without borrowing or selling something. That number certainly has risen since the COVID-19 pandemic. To combat this reality, our program will feature a built-in emergency savings plan. Once a participant is enrolled, the first $1,000 of their...
contributions will be placed in their personal emergency savings account. They will have access to this money and can withdraw their contributions to that account at any time without a penalty.

**Universal Savings**

Having two very different types of savings accounts (emergency and retirement) allows workers to establish a separate “mental accounting” for short-term versus long-term funds in their plan. This is the beginning of creating a universal savings plan for Americans.

The goal of Maryland$aves is to provide a simple, flexible yet competitive universal savings plan for small business owners and their employees to prepare for and enjoy their retirement years. The Program will give small business owners the opportunity to offer their employees a highly-competitive and employee-friendly individual retirement account (IRA) option while not imposing any additional administrative fees or legal responsibilities on the employer.

**About Maryland$aves**

To address this challenge, Maryland$aves is being established to create a new savings option for employees of small businesses that do not offer a work-based retirement plan. Analysis done by Maryland$aves and its consultants suggests the Program could hold total savings of approximately $10 billion on behalf of approximately 400,000 participants within a decade, not counting the potential of the Program to expand to other states.

Under the Program, Maryland small businesses that do not offer a retirement savings program to their employees will automatically enroll their employees in the Program. (Note: while this a mandatory State program, there are no penalties for non-compliance or non-participation in the Program. Instead, an incentive in the form of waiving the annual $300/yr business filing fee is offered.) Contributions from employees will be deposited into IRAs and invested in one of several investment options managed by private investment managers chosen by the Board. The Board has selected several investment options, including a target-date fund as a default investment for employees who do not specify a particular option, a passively-managed fixed income fund and an actively-managed equity growth fund. As stated earlier, our program design also includes a provision that the first $1,000 of a participant’s contributions will be held in an emergency savings account. The emergency savings funds will be invested in a stable value fund that guarantees a 1% annual return, which is significantly higher than interest rates currently available in money market funds or savings accounts with commercial banks. Program participants can change their investment options or opt out of the Program at any time.

Our goal is to launch a pilot program by the end of Q2 2021 and officially launch the program by the end of Q3 2021.

Maryland is at the forefront of a national movement to deliver a state-sponsored small business retirement savings program. The success of this Program rollout is well-positioned for national recognition as an example of how easy it is for small business owners to offer a savings option to their employees. Currently there are three states operating state-sponsored auto-IRA programs...
(Oregon, Illinois, and California). While similar, our Program has some new features built into its program design that will be new to this market.

More information about Maryland$aves can be found on our website, MarylandSaves.org.

**Maryland$aves Team Members**

In addition to its staff and consultants, the Program will be working with a group of national firms to provide specific services to deliver the Maryland$aves model. These partners include a recordkeeper to administer the Program, along with various investment managers that will offer investment options for participants. The Board will be officially announcing these team members in late January 2021.

Marketing resources will be provided by several team members to assist in the promotion and launch of the Program. This solicitation is intended to establish a partnership with an experienced marketing firm that will lead the staff and this team in developing a go-to-market communications strategy for Maryland$aves and will supplement the marketing assets already in place from Maryland$aves staff and its team members.

**Scope of Services**

Maryland$aves seeks to engage a marketing firm to provide the services detailed below. We anticipate that the described Services will be provided from approximately February 2021 through December 2021.5

1. Work with staff and team members to finalize the program’s value proposition to both Maryland employers and Maryland workers that do not currently have an employer-sponsored retirement plan.

2. Working within our go-to-market budget of up to $200,000, lead Maryland$aves staff/team members in preparing a comprehensive marketing & communications plan and assist in execution. The plan should include:

   - Program branding (finalizing the program’s name, logo and graphic identity). NOTE-Maryland$aves has been used as a placeholder name and may or may not be the final Program name.

   - Selecting and prioritizing the appropriate digital media channels, as well as creating a digital media strategy, including the development of a paid and unpaid social media strategy.

   - Establishing SEO program guidelines and creating a direct mail campaign(s).
• Negotiating rates and placing paid media advertising as needed. Please note that
digital advertising, SEO, direct mail and out-of-home advertising are higher priority
items than paid media advertising, but we are receptive to all recommendations.

• The main goal of all communications is to direct employers and potential program
participants to a new website that will be built and maintained by our recordkeeper.
This site will host employer and participant portals with content specific to each
audience. It will also provide an easy enrollment section for employers, and links to
various customer service options and financial literacy tools.

• Work with Maryland$aves staff to create a new website to replace
marylandsaves.org. This site will NOT be the primary public-facing site of our program
but continue to be used as a communications tool for the Program’s Staff and Board
members. It will contain information about the Program, board meeting minutes,
procurement activities, news items etc., similar to the current content. This should
be considered a site redesign project and the new site must be created in a content
management system that is easy for Maryland$aves staff to edit and update.

3. Assist in the creation, management and execution of a state-wide outreach campaign to
the various business organizations throughout the state (Maryland Association of CPAs,
Maryland Restaurant Association, Chambers of Commerce, etc.) as well as coordinating
attendance and speaking opportunities at business events hosted by various state
agencies and business organizations.

4. The selected marketing firm will work collaboratively with Maryland$aves staff and its
team members to create and execute a comprehensive digital marketing campaign.

5. Meet regularly with Maryland$aves staff and team members to review tactics as feedback
and data from marketing efforts becomes available and adjust strategies as needed to
reach program goals.

6. Proposers agree to participate in interviews with Maryland$aves staff as needed as part
of the final selection process. Interviews are expected to take place in January 2021. The
final decision will be made by the Maryland$aves Executive Director.

Your Proposal

If you are interested in working with the Program to provide the specified Scope of Services,
please send your response via email to Glenn Simmons, Maryland$aves Deputy/Marketing
Director (glenn.simmons@marylandsaves.org), no later than 4pm Eastern Time on Friday,
February 12, 2021. Please include the following, to the extent appropriate:

1. Your firm’s relevant experience. This may include work advising organizations about
developing go-to-market strategies and/or creating and executing marketing plans for
investment products. Experience marketing to small businesses and marketing financial
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services to both small firms and low-wage employees should be highlighted. Also include experience working with other state-administered or private retirement programs or other non-profit agencies. Please share with us some of your successful campaigns that you envision would be similar to Maryland$aves.

2. Please list your key considerations and challenges, including messaging and channels, in developing communications options for a program like Maryland$aves, which depends on the cooperation of small businesses and must serve the needs of small business employees. (Note: while this a mandatory program, there are no penalties for non-compliance or non-participation in the Program. Instead, an incentive in the form of waiving the annual $300/yr business filing fee is offered.)

3. The professionals from your firm who will be assigned to this engagement, their time commitment to this project, and their backgrounds and experience.

4. Please describe the steps you would take to roll out a marketing program for Maryland$aves. What is your timeline to prepare for and implement the Maryland$aves marketing program, assuming that we are prepared to pilot test on July 1 and offer participation generally in September?

5. Any other information that you think would be important to your engagement.

6. Please provide your proposed cost for the specified Scope of Services. If your proposal is not a fixed-dollar cost, then please provide a table indicating the hourly rates applicable to each of the professionals included in your response to Question 3 above.

7. Please identify or specify any other costs that could arise during your engagement.

8. Please provide three references, from marketing to small businesses or on behalf of financial institutions, for which you or your firm has served as marketing/communications advisor.

The solicitation is open to individuals, a firm, or a consortium of firms. Maryland$aves does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

The Program may, in its discretion, choose to modify this solicitation and/or extend the deadline for submission of responses.

Confidentiality and Other

Maryland$aves is not a government agency, but a nonprofit corporation created under Maryland state law. While Maryland$aves’ procurements are not governed by State of Maryland procurement regulations or practices, the Program will be guided by prudent procurement practices.
The Program has the right to terminate the solicitation or otherwise determine not to enter into a contract at any time for any reason. Proposers will not be entitled to any payment for expenses or costs incurred in preparing or submitting proposals.

The Program may proceed to negotiate an agreement with any potential consultant it chooses, or none.

The Program is subject to the Maryland Public Information Act. Documents of and incidental to a proposed contractual arrangement may be exempt from disclosure at the discretion of the Board. The exemption, however, expires once a contract is finalized. While the Program respects the confidentiality of proprietary information and asks that any such information that may be contained in a response be specifically marked, state law may require disclosure. The final contract is a public document.

All questions regarding this solicitation should be sent via email to Glenn Simmons (glenn.simmons@marylandsaves.org).

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2 Workplace Retirement Plans Will Help Workers Build Economic Security, David John and Gary Koenig, AARP Public Policy Institute, August 2015.


5 Maryland$aves may issue a future solicitation for on-going marketing services after the launch of Maryland$aves in 2021. Maryland$aves may, at its discretion, allow the marketing firm selected under this solicitation to be considered to provide ongoing services without a new solicitation.