

Sole Source Justification (SSJ)
FAR 8.401 & GSAM/R 538.7104-3(b)(1)

1. Acquisition Title: START AI Assistant Expansion and INCLUDE Tracking and Reporting

Division: NIH, Office of the Director

Contracting Activity: OMAS IT Services

Author: Ajay Vatave

2. Nature and/or Description of the Action being Approved: NIH, Office of the Director requests two task orders with **Plexus Scientific Corporation**. This acquisition is conducted under the Federal Supply Schedule (FSS) Program using the ordering procedures established by the General Services Administration found in the [General Services Acquisition Manual/Regulation \(GSAM/R\) at subpart 538.71](#). The Government projects award for both task orders for September 2026 using fiscal year 2026 funds.

START AI Assistant Expansion

Contractor: Plexus Scientific Corporation				
Schedule Contract Number: 47QTCA19D00MH				
Performance Period	Dates/Duration	Unit Price/CLIN	Multiplier	Total
Base Period	12 months		1	
Estimated Total Dollar Value:				

INCLUDE Tracking and Reporting

Contractor: Plexus Scientific Corporation				
Schedule Contract Number: 47QTCA19D00MH				
Performance Period	Dates/Duration	Unit Price/CLIN	Multiplier	Total
Base Period	12 months		1	
Estimated Total Dollar Value:				

Total Value:

3. Description of Supplies and/or Services:

The NIH Office of Evaluation, Performance, and Reporting (OEPR), within the Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives, has continued to expand the functionalities of the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool (START) platform to facilitate integrated data collection, management, and reporting across NIH Institutes, Centers, and Offices (ICOs). There are two requirements for the START platform:

1. **START AI Assistant Expansion** - The National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) and the

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) now seek to jointly expand and configure START as a central knowledge management, messaging, and operational support platform. This collaborative effort reflects a shared recognition that the information management challenges facing NINR and NIAMS — fragmented data sources, inconsistent messaging, duplicative workflows, and difficulty surfacing portfolio-wide insights quickly — are common across NIH ICOs. By partnering on this expansion, NINR and NIAMS will not only solve these challenges for their own institutions, but will produce a reusable, scalable model that other ICOs can adopt with minimal additional investment.

Rather than relying on a fragmented array of NIH data platforms, documents, dashboards, and repositories, NINR and NIAMS require a unified interface through which staff and leadership can quickly find up-to-date, validated, and fit-for-purpose information and common language for describing each Institute's science and mission — and the unique contribution of their funded research to NIH, HHS, and other federal priorities.

This expansion will build upon START's existing architecture and will leverage automation, AI-generated summarization, meta-tagging, and human quality control workflows to support not only planning and reporting, but also consistent representation of each Institute in meetings, working groups, committees, conferences, data calls, grantee interactions, and responses to queries from HHS and NIH leadership, Congress, and other key stakeholders.

- 2. INCLUDE Tracking and Reporting** – The INvestigation of Co-occurring conditions across the Lifespan to Understand Down syndrome (INCLUDE) Project is an NIH-wide initiative managed by the Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives (DPCPSI) within the NIH Office of the Director. The INCLUDE Project aims to increase participation of people with Down syndrome (DS) and their families in clinical research, expand knowledge about DS and its links to other health conditions, and improve the health of individuals with DS.

The Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool (START) is a centralized digital platform that strengthens NIH's ability to collect, manage, and report on programmatic activities. The INCLUDE Project seeks to develop a dedicated INCLUDE START module to significantly enhance portfolio analysis capabilities and efficiency through automated data integration with existing NIH systems, including but not limited to eRA modules, iCITE, and the DPCPSI Co-Funding Portal. These connections will enable real-time data updates, reduce manual reporting burden, and improve the accuracy and completeness of portfolio insights. In addition, integrating START's established Evaluation module will allow INCLUDE to systematically track progress against the 2022 INCLUDE/DS Research Plan and generate data-driven insights to inform the development of the next research plan.

The objective of this requirement is to develop a dedicated INCLUDE Project module within START that supports robust program management, portfolio tracking, and performance reporting. The delivered product will include the development of new module components tailored to INCLUDE's programmatic needs, including webforms, dashboards, reporting tools, search and filter features, and NIH system integrations.

The Period of Performance for each of these requirements is 12 months.

4. Authority Cited and Rationale: Authority of the FSS Program, Title III of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 (41 U.S.C. 251, *et seq.*); Title 40 U.S.C. 501, Services for Executive Agencies, as implemented at [FAR 8.401](#) and [GSAM/R 538.7104-3\(b\)\(1\)](#).

[GSAM/R 538.7104-3\(b\)\(1\)\(ii\)](#)- Only one source is capable of providing the products, services, or solution required at the level of quality required because the products, services, or solutions are unique or highly specialized.

Plexus Scientific's Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tools (START) is a proprietary environment that has been in use by NIH since 2020. Any contractor supporting this requirement would need to have technical expertise and access to this environment. Plexus Scientific is only known contractor with full access to this platform.

5. Market Research:

The government assessed which vendors have experience and history with Plexus Scientific's START platform. The government was only able to determine that Plexus Scientific as the license holder still maintains an active ability to adapt and create new coding language in the START software programming language. Any contractor would have to demonstrate licensed access to this platform. For these reasons Plexus Scientific are best suited to meet the government's request.

Plexus Scientific is a small business.

6. Procurement history:

Plexus Scientific currently has an IDIQ contract for Knowledge Performance Management and Reporting System (75N98023D00003)

Limited Source Solicitation 7571TE26Q00202 was recently issued for a START requirement with the following contractors with previous START experience:

- [REDACTED]

Out of the four offerors, only two quotes were received, and Plexus Scientific was the only quote that was deemed technically acceptable. A key issue was the access to the proprietary software coding language. Without an active license or a partner with an active license it would not be possible for an Offerer to do the required programming language. Of the Offerers only Plexus Scientific demonstrated the privileges required to support the update to the coding the government requires.



7. Actions to Foster Competition for Future, Similar Requirements:

Due to proprietary nature of this requirement as well as a tight time frame, only Plexus Scientific will be given the opportunity to submit a quote. If any follow up requirement arises, an effort will be made to encourage competition to the maximum extent possible.

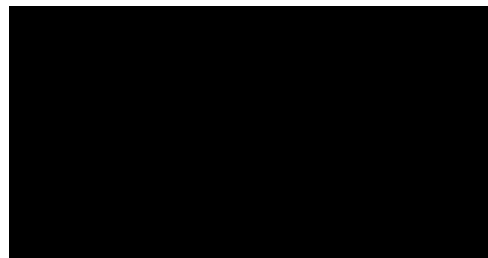
8. Additional Information or Other Facts:

N/A

9. Technical or Requirements Program Management Certification: I certify that the supporting data under my cognizance which are included in the justification are accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge and belief. [Always required.]

Ajay Vatave
Health Science Policy Analyst

Signature & Date:

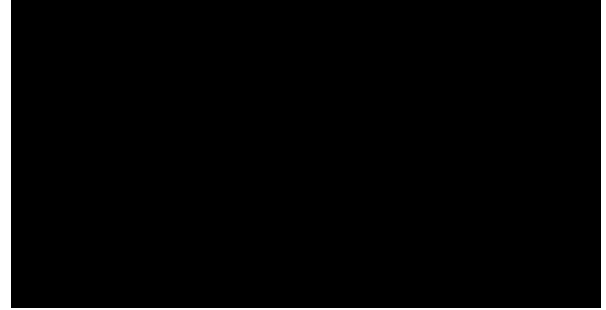


10. Best Value Determination: As the contracting officer, I hereby determine that the anticipated price to the Government for this contract action represents the best value for the Government. Only Plexus Scientific has full access to START's proprietary environment. Any effort to identify other potential will only delay the program and place delivery times at risk. Quotes received by Plexus will under the existing GSA MAS and compared against the IGCE.

11. Contracting Officer (CO) *Certification and Approval*: I hereby certify that this justification is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge.

Christopher Shih
Contracting Officer

Signature & Date:



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