

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

**FOR**

**On-Line Financial Literacy and Default Prevention  
Interactive Web Platform**

***Rhode Island  
Student Loan Authority***

560 Jefferson Blvd.  
Warwick, RI 02886  
401.468.1700

June 28, 2011

The following dates are set forth for informational and planning purposes; however, the Authority reserves the right to change the dates.

RFP Issued	<b>June 28, 2011</b>
Due Date for Written Questions	<b>4:00 PM - July 6, 2011</b>
Due Date for Receipt of Proposals	<b>4:00 PM - July 13, 2011</b>
Anticipated Decision Date	<b>July 20, 2011</b>

***RHODE ISLAND STUDENT LOAN AUTHORITY***

***On-Line Financial Literacy and Default Prevention Interactive Web  
Platform***

***Request For Proposals***

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Section 1 – Introduction**

**Section 2 - Response Format / Requirements**

**Section 3 - Administrative Information**

**Section 4 - Evaluation of Proposals**

**Section 5 – Non Discrimination**

**Section 6 - State Code of Ethics**

## **Section 1 - Introduction**

This Request for Proposals ("RFP") is issued by the Rhode Island Student Authority (the "Authority") for the purpose of soliciting proposals from qualified firms capable of producing and supporting a centralized, financial literacy and default prevention interactive web-based education and administrative reporting solution to be used by Rhode Island high school and college students, instructors and administrators.

The primary anticipated services to be performed by the vendor include but are not limited to:

- 1) Provide an interactive financial literacy program for high school students, educators, administrators and parents, capable of supporting approximately eighty (80) public, charter and private high schools in the State of Rhode Island (hereinafter the "State" or "Rhode Island").
- 2) Provide an interactive default prevention system for post secondary users, educators and administrators, capable of supporting approximately twelve (12) post secondary schools in the State.
- 3) Provide a system which includes scalability, data confidentiality and security, and user friendly administrative and reporting tools.
- 4) Provide a fully operational, fully vendor supported "turn-key" system to minimize the need for Authority technical resources support.

Additional details are in the body of this RFP.

Vendors that the Authority believes may meet the requirements will be sent correspondence alerting them of the issuance of this RFP. However, any vendor that meets the minimum requirements of this RFP may submit a proposal.

### **Term and Conditions**

The initial engagement shall be for a period of three (3) years from the awarding of the contract with possible three (3) one year extensions. However, the Authority shall reserve the right to terminate the services of the Firm without cause with sixty (60) days written notice.

### **Background Information**

The Authority is a public corporation and governmental agency of the State whose purpose is to assist qualified students to obtain a post secondary education. The Authority fulfills this mission by providing college planning, financial aid, financial literacy, default prevention services and offering low cost education loans for college students.

The Authority does not receive any funding from the State and the Authority's debt obligations are not backed by the State or any of its political subdivisions.

The Authority is governed by a six member board of directors. Five of the members of the board are appointed by the Governor of the State and the sixth member is the General Treasurer of the State.

The Authority may coordinate with the Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority ("RIHEAA") in administering the systems covered by the RFP. The members of the board of the Authority are also on the board of RIHEAA.

## **Section 2 - Response Format / Requirements**

**Please provide detailed answers to the following questions for the proposed financial literacy system and the proposed default prevention system. Please indicate if the same answer applies to both systems. Answers must be fully responsive and provide specific evidence of how the requirement will be satisfied.**

### **General**

1. Is the proposed system available for immediate implementation?
2. What is the total project timeline, from start to go-live and to begin system implementation at Rhode Island schools?
3. Does the system have the capability to present information which is specific to Rhode Island?
4. Will the proposed system be able to provide administrative reporting to the Authority, as well as individual school administrators? Please provide sample reports.
5. Does the system provide learning paths in languages other than English?
6. Are any schools in Rhode Island currently using the firm's products?
7. Has the product received any industry awards?
8. Does the system meet or exceed all federal financial literacy goals and guidelines?
9. Is user support a free service? What hours will it be available by phone and e-mail? What is the average response time to a user inquiry?

### **Technical / Data**

1. What amount of technical staff support must be provided by the Authority during implementation? On an on-going basis?
2. How does the proposed system ensure confidentiality of all data provided by the user?

3. Does the firm agree not to provide, sell or otherwise transfer to a third party any personal user information acquired by the system? What rights does the Authority have to this data? Schools? End users?
4. Does the system provide the capability for hyperlinks?
5. Please describe the customization capability of the system.
6. Does the system have any messaging capability?
7. How is user access controlled?
8. Is the system Flash-based? If so, how will the system be made compatible with ipads?
9. Where is the system hosted?
10. What are the minimum computer requirements for schools / end users?
11. Can student data be down loaded for pre and post test results analysis?
12. Please describe your disaster recovery and business continuity plan.

#### Financial Literacy

1. Does the system have different learning paths and cover relevant topics for users, dependent on the stage (high school, college, grad-student, post college, parents, adult learner, etc.)?
2. Does the system allow users to make notes as they progress, bookmark a location, stop use and then return at a later time?
3. Will the system provide individual performance assessment tools and student progress tracking, including: pre course knowledge testing, individual course module testing, post course knowledge testing?
4. Does the system incorporate the use of multimedia, interactive exercises and game like scenarios?
5. Please provide a list of all topics covered by the system
6. Please list and describe tools which are a part of the system, such as calculators.
7. Does every user receive a successful completion certificate?

#### Default Prevention

1. How does the system help post secondary schools manage student retention and default rates?
2. How does the system help the post secondary user manage their finances, debt burden and student loan repayment?
3. How does the system assist post secondary schools to identify and assist at risk students?
4. Does the system provide an Entrance and Exit Counseling module which meets federal specifications?
5. Are personal finance recommendations made to a user specific to that individual and based on the data accumulated in the system for that user?
6. Describe how the system is appropriate for non-traditional students.

#### Training

1. Does the firm provide a user guide?

2. Will the firm provide training to specified employees?
3. Will the firm partner with Authority staff to jointly train Rhode Island users, both, school instructors, administrators and end users?
4. If requested by the Authority, will the firm provide two state wide high school instructor / administrator training workshops and two state wide post secondary instructor / administrator training workshops?

### Marketing

1. What type and to what extent does the vendor provide marketing support?
2. What outreach / marketing materials will be supplied?
3. Can the system be branded with the Authority name and logo?
4. Can the system be branded with the Authority name and logo and co-branded with a school?

### Cost

The vendor must provide detailed, all inclusive cost information for each year of the contract and all products or services proposed. All prices provided shall be firm and fixed.

Please provide cost details, including:

1. What is the set up cost?
2. What is the total annual cost?
3. Pricing model, ie. flat fee, fee per school, fee per user?
4. What is included in the quoted price?
5. Is there anything excluded in the quoted price which would be necessary for a successful program?
6. Are there any additional costs to the Authority?
7. Are there any additional services or work which would be provided by the firm for which the Authority would pay a fee? If so, what is the cost?

## **Section 3 - Administrative Information**

### **3.1 Issuing Officer**

The individual identified below ("Issuing Officer") is the sole point of contact regarding this RFP from the date of issuance until selection of the successful firm.

Mr. William D. Bianchi - Manager [wbianchi@risla.com](mailto:wbianchi@risla.com)

### **3.2 Restriction on Communication**

From the issue date of this RFP until announcement of the successful Firm, responders to this RFP may contact only the individual listed above regarding the RFP. Questions related to the interpretation of this RFP must be submitted by e-mail to the Issuing Officer by 4:00 p.m., July 6, 2011. Firms may be disqualified if they contact any State official or employee, or any employee or member of the

board of directors of the Authority (other than the Issuing Officer) regarding this RFP prior to the award of a contract.

### 3.3 Downloading the RFP from the Internet

The RFP will be available in word format on the Authority's website at [www.risla.com](http://www.risla.com). It is the responder's responsibility to get updates on RFP changes and status by periodically checking the Authority website.

### 3.4 Timetable

The following dates are set forth for informational and planning purposes; however, the Authority reserves the right to change the dates.

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### 3.5 Questions, Requests for Clarification, and Suggested Changes.

Firms are invited to submit questions and requests for clarifications to the Issuing Officer regarding the RFP via e-mail. Firms may also submit suggestions for changes to the requirements of this RFP via e-mail. The questions, requests for clarifications, or suggestions must be received by the Issuing Officer before 4:00 p.m. on July 6, 2011. If the questions, requests for clarifications, or suggestions pertain to a specific section of the RFP, the page and section number(s) must be referenced. Written responses to questions and requests for clarification will be sent by the Issuing Officer to the firm in a timely manner. If the Authority decides to adopt a suggestion, it will issue a written amendment to the RFP. The Authority assumes no responsibility for oral representations made by its officers or employees.

### 3.6 Amendment to the RFP and Proposal and Withdrawal of Proposal.

The Authority reserves the right to amend the RFP at any time. The Firm shall acknowledge in its proposal the receipt of an amendment. If the amendment occurs after the closing date for receipt of proposals, the Authority may, in its sole discretion, allow firms to amend their proposals in response to the Authority's amendment.

The Firm may amend its proposal. The amendment must be in writing, signed by the firm and received by the Authority by the date and time set for the receipt of proposals. Firms which submit proposals in advance of the deadline may withdraw, modify, and resubmit proposals at any time prior to the deadline for submitting proposals. Firms must notify the Issuing Officer in writing if they wish to withdraw their proposals. Proposals must be signed by a duly authorized officer of the Firm who shall represent in the Firm's response that he/she is authorized to bind the Firm to the contents of the proposal.

### 3.7 Submission of Proposals

**The Authority must receive ten (10) copies of the Firm's proposal at 560 Jefferson Blvd., Warwick, RI 02886 on or before 4:00 p.m. EST on July 14, 2011. This is a mandatory requirement and will not be waived. Any proposal received after this deadline will be automatically rejected.** Firms mailing proposals must allow ample mail delivery time to ensure timely receipt of their proposals. It is the Firm's responsibility to ensure that the proposal is received prior to the deadline. Postmarking by the due date will not substitute for actual receipt of the proposal.

Proposals shall be submitted to:  
William Bianchi  
Rhode Island Student Loan Authority  
560 Jefferson Blvd  
Suite 200  
Warwick, RI 02886

**Electronic mail and faxed proposals will not be accepted.** Firms must furnish all information necessary to evaluate the proposal. Oral information provided by the Firm shall not be considered part of the Firm's proposal. Proposals will remain confidential until the Authority has reviewed all of the proposals properly submitted in response to this RFP and announced its intent to award a contract.

### 3.8 Costs of Preparing the Proposal

The costs of preparation and delivery of the proposal are solely the responsibility of the Firm.

### 3.9 Rejection of Proposals

The Authority reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, in whole and in part, received in response to this RFP at any time prior to the execution of a written contract. Issuance of this RFP in no way constitutes a commitment by the Authority to award a contract. This RFP is designed to provide firms with the information necessary to prepare a competitive proposal. This RFP process is for the Authority's benefit and is intended to provide the Authority with competitive information to assist in the selection of a firm to provide services. It is not intended to be comprehensive and each firm is responsible for determining all factors necessary for submission of a comprehensive proposal.

### 3.10 Disqualification

The Authority may reject outright and not evaluate a proposal for any one of the following reasons:

3.10.1 The Firm fails to deliver the proposal by the due date and time.

3.10.2 The Firm states that a service requirement cannot be met.

3.10.3 The Firm's response materially changes a service requirement.

3.10.4 The Firm's response limits the rights of the Authority or the Board.

3.10.5 The Firm fails to respond to the Authority's request for information, documents, or references.



3.10.6 The Firm fails to include any signature, certification, authorization, stipulation, disclosure or guarantee requested in this RFP.

3.10.7 The Firm presents the information requested by this RFP in a format inconsistent with the instructions of the RFP.

3.10.8 The Firm initiates unauthorized contact regarding the RFP with any State employee, State official, or employee or member of the board of directors of the Authority (other than the Issuing Officer.)

3.10.9 The Firm provides misleading or inaccurate responses.

### 3.11 Nonmaterial and Material Variances

The Authority reserves the right to waive or permit cure of nonmaterial variances in a Firm's proposal if, in the judgment of the Authority, it is in its best interest to do so. Nonmaterial variances include minor informalities that do not affect responsiveness; that are merely a matter of form or format; that do not change the relative standing or otherwise prejudice other firms; that do not change the meaning or scope of the RFP; or that do not reflect a material change in the services. In the event the Authority waives or permits cure of nonmaterial variances, such waiver or cure will not modify the RFP requirements or excuse the Firm from full compliance with RFP specifications or other contract requirements if the Firm is awarded the contract. The determination of materiality is in the sole discretion of the Authority.

### 3.12 Reference Checks

Provide three (3) references from current clients.

The Authority reserves the right to contact any reference to assist in the evaluation of the proposal, to verify information contained in the proposal, and to discuss the Firm's qualifications with any reference. By submitting its response to this RFP the Firm consents to such types of contact with references.

### 3.13 Information From Other Sources

The Authority reserves the right to obtain and consider information from other sources concerning a Firm, such as the Firm's capability and performance under other contracts. By submitting its response to this RFP the Firm consents to such types of contact with other such sources.

### 3.14 Proposal Clarification

The Authority reserves the right to contact a Firm after the submission of its proposal for the purpose of obtaining written clarification of a proposal to ensure mutual understanding. This contact may include written or verbal questions, interviews, and/or site visits. The Authority will not consider information received if the information materially alters the content of the proposal or alters the type of services the Firm is offering. An individual authorized to legally bind the Firm shall sign responses to any Authority request for clarification. Responses shall be submitted to the Authority within the time specified in the request. Failure to comply with requests for additional information may result in rejection of the Firm's proposal as non-compliant.

### **3.15 Disposition of Proposals**

All proposals become the property of the Authority and shall not be returned to the Firm. At the conclusion of the selection process, the contents of all proposals will be in the public domain and be open to inspection by interested parties subject to exceptions as provided by applicable law.

### **3.16 Access To Public Records Act.**

The Authority may treat all information submitted by a Firm as public information following the conclusion of the selection process unless the Authority deems such information as non-public information within the meaning of the State's Access To Public Records Act.

### **3.17 Copyrights.**

By submitting a proposal, the Firm agrees that the Authority may copy the proposal for purposes of facilitating the evaluation of the proposal or to respond to requests for public records. By submitting a proposal the Firm consents to such copying and warrants that such copying will not violate the rights of any third party. The Authority shall have the right to use ideas or adaptations of ideas that are presented in the proposals.

### **3.18 Release of Claims.**

By submitting a proposal, the Firm agrees that it will not bring any claim or action against the Authority based on any misunderstanding concerning the information provided herein or concerning the failure, negligent or otherwise, to provide the Firm with pertinent information as intended by this RFP.

### **3.19 Presentations**

Firms may be required to make a presentation of their proposal to the Authority. The presentation may occur at the Authority's offices or at some other mutually agreeable location. The determination as to need for presentations, the location, order, and schedule of the presentations is at the sole discretion of the Authority. The presentation shall not materially change the information contained in the proposal. All expenses incurred by the Firm in connection with any such presentations shall be the sole responsibility of the Firm.

### **3.20 Evaluation of Proposals Submitted.**

Proposals that are timely submitted and are not subject to disqualification will be reviewed in accordance with Section 4 of the RFP.

### **3.21 Award Notice and Acceptance Period.**

The Authority will notify all firms submitting a timely proposal of its intent to award a contract, contingent upon satisfactory negotiation thereof. Negotiation and execution of the contract shall be completed in a reasonable period of time, as determined by the Authority. If the selected Firm fails to negotiate and deliver an executed contract in said time period, the Authority may cancel the award and award the contract to another firm.

### 3.22 Choice of Law and Forum

This RFP and the resulting contract are to be governed by the laws of the State of Rhode Island. Changes in applicable laws and rules may affect the award process or the resulting contract. Firms are responsible for ascertaining pertinent legal requirements and restrictions. Any and all litigation or actions commenced in connection with this RFP shall be brought in an appropriate forum located within the State.

### 3.23 Restrictions on Gifts and Activities

State law restricts gifts which may be given or received by Authority employees and directors and requires certain individuals to disclose information concerning their activities with State government. Firms are responsible to determine the applicability of these laws to their activities and to comply with the requirements. In addition, it is a felony offense to bribe or attempt to bribe a public official.

## **Section 4 - Evaluation of Proposals**

### 4.1 Introduction

This section describes the evaluation process that will be used to determine which proposal best meets the needs of and provides the greatest value to the Authority. While costs are very important, the evaluation process is designed to award the contract not necessarily to the firm with the lowest cost proposal, but rather to the responsive proposal which offers the best combination of attributes resulting in the best value.

### 4.2 Evaluation and Selection Process

The evaluation and selection process shall consist of the following:

4.2.1 The Authority's support staff and attorney shall review proposals to assess compliance with minimum requirements.

4.2.2 The Authority's support staff will meet to discuss the proposals and compile a list of any follow-up questions or clarifications, if any, which it requires. The Issuing Officer will submit the clarification questions to the respective firms in writing and will receive written responses that will be distributed to each member of the Authority support staff reviewing the proposals.

### 4.2.3 Recommendation/Selection

A recommendation shall be presented to the Authority's Board of Directors for consideration. This recommendation may include, but is not limited to, the name of one or more firms recommended for selection or a recommendation that no firm be selected.

### 4.2.4 Final Decision

The Authority's board of directors will make the final determination of which if any of the proposals to accept.

#### 4.2.5 Contract.

The approval of any one or more of the proposals shall be a contingent on the execution of a contract between the selected firm or firms and the Authority.

### **Section 5. Non-Discrimination**

The Authority shall consider all proposals on the basis of their merit in accordance with the criteria specified herein and shall not exclude any person, firm, or other entity, from consideration on the grounds of sex, race, color, or national origin. Likewise, the Authority requires that all offerors have established non-discrimination policies, including policies which prohibit discrimination in the selection of subcontractors. The Firm shall represent and warrant in its response to this RFP that it does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, or national origin, including but not limited to its selection of subcontractors.

### **Section 6. State Code of Ethics.**

The Authority and its board of directors and staff are committed to maintaining the highest standard of ethics in the awarding of contracts. In accordance therewith the Authority requires that the Chief Executive Officer of the Firm certify the following:

**“Neither the Offeror nor any officer, employee, agent, representative or affiliate of the Offeror has given or offered or shall give or offer to any board member, employee, or representative of the Authority or to any family member of the foregoing, or to any business by which any of the foregoing persons are employed, or to any official of the State of Rhode Island who is subject to the State Code of Ethics, any gift, loan, political contribution, reward, or promise of future employment based on any understanding or expectation that the vote, official action, or judgment of the person would be influenced thereby, and, that no officer, employee, agent, representative, or affiliate of the Offeror shall have any direct or indirect nonincidental contact with any State officer or employee or with any member of the board of directors of the Authority during any period of time prior to the Authority’s award of a contract, except at a public meeting of the board of directors of the Authority or at a meeting of a subcommittee of the board of directors.” Any violation of this Section 6 shall result in immediate disqualification of the Firm’s proposal.**