



Solicitation Information

27 March 2012

RFI # 7449588

TITLE: Statewide School Food Services Program – Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Submission Deadline: 25 April 2012 @ 10:30 AM (EDT)

Questions concerning this solicitation must be received by the Division of Purchases at questions@purchasing.ri.gov, no later than **11 April 2012 @ 12:00 Noon (EDT)**. Questions should be submitted in a *Microsoft Word attachment*. Please reference the RFI# on all correspondence. Questions received, if any, will be posted on the Internet as an addendum to this solicitation. It is the responsibility of all interested parties to download this information.

SURETY REQUIRED: No

BOND REQUIRED: No

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Assistant Director for Special Projects**

Vendors must register on-line at the State Purchasing Website at www.purchasing.ri.gov

THIS PAGE IS NOT A BIDDER CERTIFICATION FORM

**Request for Information (RFI)
Statewide School Food Services Program**

The State of Rhode Island, Department of Administration / Division of Purchases on behalf of the Rhode Island Department of Education is soliciting responses from qualified entities to explore the continued operation of a statewide school food services program.

This is a Request for Information (RFI). No award will be made as a result of this solicitation. This RFI outlines the type of information being solicited from potential respondents and includes guidelines for content and format of responses.

INSTRUCTIONS AND NOTIFICATIONS TO OFFERORS:

- Potential respondents are advised to review all sections of this Request carefully and to follow instructions completely, as failure to make a complete submission as described elsewhere herein may result in rejection of the proposal.
- Alternative approaches and/or methodologies to accomplish the desired or intended results of this request are solicited. However, responses which depart from or materially alter the terms, requirements, or scope of work defined by this Request will be rejected as being non-responsive.
- All costs associated with developing or submitting a proposal in response to this Request, or to provide oral or written clarification of its content shall be borne by the offeror. The State assumes no responsibility for these costs.
- Responses are considered to be irrevocable for a period of not less than sixty (60) days following the opening date, and may not be withdrawn, except with the express written permission of the State Purchasing Agent.
- Responses misdirected to other State locations or which are otherwise not present in the Division of Purchases at the time of opening for any cause will be determined to be late and may not be considered. The “Official” time clock is in the reception area of the Division of Purchases.
- Interested parties are instructed to peruse the Division of Purchases web site on a regular basis, as additional information relating to this solicitation may be released in the form of an addendum to this RFP / LOI .

I. Introduction

In 2007, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to select a single vendor to provide a statewide school food services program that, over time, would:

- Serve all of Rhode Island's school districts, charter school and state schools, (also known as School Food Authorities – SFAs),
- Lower costs,
- Improve services and increase student participation at the SFA level,
- Generate increased efficiencies of statewide operations such as data/payment issues, purchase and distribution of commodities, staff professional development (including wellness education) and upgrade and maintenance of equipments,
- Improve the nutrition, health and well being of Rhode Island's students by allowing increased state oversight of nutrition and student health issues.

The scope of the Statewide Food Service Program (Program) contract was organized into two general categories:

- A. State food service implementation/operation activities conducted at the state level for all districts enrolled and ancillary / complementary efforts of interest to the state such as improving fiscal and other data reporting through statewide adoption of an on-line keypad (card) meal accountability system that interacts with CNP Connect (RIDE's Child Nutrition Program MIS) and district/school enrollment student count systems; and
- B. School food service program operations at the district level, including equipment maintenance and replacement; increasing parent/student involvement; food safety courses for food service workers and participation in the RI Food –Safe Schools Program; staff development; and transporting within districts.

The original intent of the RFP was that participation in the Program would become mandated through state legislation.

RIDE is now in its fourth year (of a five year maximum contract) of its Program. Although a legislative mandate did not come to fruition, fifteen SFAs have opted to join the Program. This includes thirteen (13) of the thirty-six (36) municipal school districts, one (1) of four (4) state operated schools and one (1) of fourteen (14) state charter schools. Note that a number of additional state charter schools and a state-operated school also participate in the Program; they subcontract through one of the SFAs listed above.

For those SFAs that do opt to go out to bid for school food services, RIDE has developed a prototype FSMC RFP and draft Agreement for their use.

Significant savings through reduced fees (for both participating and non-participating SFAs) have been associated and documented with the Program. Participating SFAs fees were

significantly reduced when compared to their prior fee structures. In addition, once the Program's benchmark fee structure was established, other FSMC vendors offered more competitive proposals to SFAs not participating in the Program.

II. Purpose of this Request for Information

This Request for Information (RFI) is being issued to solicit specific information from interested vendors with respect to enhancements of the current Program. RIDE will use information obtained through this RFI in conjunction with other available information to determine the solution that best serves the interests of Rhode Island.

This RFI is specifically seeking to discover technical / organizational solutions about how the current Program might be enhanced to:

- A. Lower costs,
- B. Generate increased efficiencies of statewide operations such as data/payment issues, purchase and distribution of commodities, staff professional development (including wellness education) and upgrade and maintenance of equipments,
- C. Serve all of Rhode Island's SFAs
 - a. Meet the needs of currently non-participating SFAs resulting in their joining the Program,
 - b. Better meet the needs of currently participating SFAs,
- D. Consider expanding the pool of qualified FSMC vendors that would be able to provide services through the Program,
- E. Increase early compliance with the upcoming new USDA Meal Pattern regulations,
- F. Increase SFA participation in the *Farm to School Program*,
- G. Increase student participation in the school meal programs with special focus on the school breakfast program,
- H. Ensure transparency in proposed fees and direct operating costs,
- I. Increase transparency in the costs associated with the proposed level of guarantees , ie
 - i. No budget guarantee proposed
 - ii. Limited budget guarantee proposed (limited to management fees)
 - iii. Limited to both management and general support fees proposed
 - iv. Unlimited guarantee proposed (any shortfalls from proposed budget are covered by the FSMC).
- J. Better leverage connections between the SFA student information systems and the school food service point of service (POS) system and RIDE's CNP Connect claiming component to improve accuracy and reduce duplication of processes, data and effort on the part of the SFAs.
- K. Improve the nutrition, health and well being of Rhode Island's students by allowing increased state oversight of nutrition and student health issues.

III. Vendor Requirements

All vendors interested in responding to this RFI should confirm interest no later than the date and time indicated on page one of this solicitation.

All questions regarding the RFI must be in written format, pursuant to the terms & conditions expressed on page one of this solicitation.

Respondents desiring to reply to this RFI must do so, in writing, providing one (1) original and four (4) copies by the date & time indicated on page one of this solicitation. Submit responses to this RFI, marked with the “RFP# (see cover page) – Statewide School Food Services Program (RIDE)” to:

RI Dept. of Administration
Division of Purchases, 2nd floor
One Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908-5855

Note: Responses received after the date and time listed on the cover page of this solicitation will not be considered. Responses misdirected to other State locations or which otherwise not presented in the Division of Purchases by the scheduled due date and time will be determined late and will not be considered. Responses faxed or emailed to the Division of Purchases will not be considered. The “official” time clock for this solicitation is located in the Reception Area of the Division of Purchases.

In addition to the hard copies of the proposal, respondents are requested to provide their proposal in electronic format (CD, flash drive). Microsoft Word/Excel or PDF format is preferable. Only one electronic copy is requested. This CD or flashdrive should be included in the proposal marked “Original”.

Disclaimer

This Request for Information is solely for information and planning purposes and does not constitute a Request for Proposal. All information received in response to the RFI and marked as “Proprietary” will be handled accordingly. Responses to this RFI cannot be accepted by the Government to form a binding contract. No award will be made as a result of this solicitation, and because no award will be made, proposals WILL NOT be in the public domain. Responses to the RFI will not be returned. Respondents are solely responsible for all expenses associated with replying to this RFI.

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