



**Solicitation Information**  
**November 29, 2018**

**RFI# 7597642**

**TITLE: Statewide Student Transportation Services for the State of Rhode Island  
Department of Education (RIDE)**

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE: January 3, 2019 at 2:00 PM (ET)**

Questions concerning this solicitation must be received by the Division of Purchases at [gail.walsh@purchasing.ri.gov](mailto:gail.walsh@purchasing.ri.gov) no later than **Thursday, December 13, 2018 at 5:00 PM (ET)** 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 Division of Purchases' website as an addendum to this solicitation. It is the responsibility of all interested parties to download this information.

**Gail Walsh**  
**Chief Buyer**

Applicants must register on-line at the State Purchasing Website at [www.purchasing.ri.gov](http://www.purchasing.ri.gov)

**Note to Applicants:**

Responses received without a completed RIVIP Bidder Certification Cover Form attached may result in disqualification.

**THIS PAGE IS NOT A BIDDER CERTIFICATION COVER FORM**

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## **SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION**

The Rhode Island Department of Administration/Division of Purchases, on behalf of the RI Department of Education (RIDE), is soliciting informational responses from qualified firms to provide information and feedback on statewide student transportation services, in accordance with the terms of this Request for Information and the State's General Conditions of Purchase, which may be obtained at the Rhode Island Division of Purchases' website at [www.purchasing.ri.gov](http://www.purchasing.ri.gov).

### **Instructions and Notifications to Offerors:**

1. Potential vendors are advised to review all sections of this RFI carefully and to follow instructions completely, as failure to make a complete submission as described elsewhere herein may result in rejection of the response.
2. The State invites comments, suggestions and recommendations from potential vendors and other interested parties on any questions or issues raised in this RFI. Please note it is not a requirement to answer all questions.
3. Alternative approaches and/or methodologies to accomplish the desired or intended results of this RFI are solicited.
4. This is a Request for Information ("RFI"), and as such no award will be made as a result of this solicitation.
5. All costs associated with attending the pre-solicitation conference and/or developing or submitting responses to this RFI, or providing oral or written clarification of the content of a response shall be borne by vendors. The State assumes no responsibility for any costs.
6. Responses misdirected to other locations, or which are otherwise not present in the Division of Purchases at the above stated date/time of opening for any cause will be determined to be late and shall not be considered. For the purposes of this requirement, the official time and date shall be that of the time clock in the reception area of the Division of Purchases.
7. Vendors are advised that all materials submitted to the State for consideration in response to this RFI shall not be considered to be public records as defined in Title 38, Chapter 2 of the General Laws of Rhode Island unless and until there is a contract award through a subsequent, related procurement.
8. Interested parties are instructed to monitor the Division of Purchases website on a regular basis, as additional information relating to this solicitation may be released as addenda.

## **SECTION 2. REQUEST FOR INFORMATION**

This RFI outlines the type of information being solicited and response structure requested from potential respondents.

## **A. Background**

The State is considering issuance of a Request for Proposals (“RFP”) from qualified vendors to procure statewide transportation service. Some of the goals of the upcoming RFP will be to:

Rhode Island seeks to provide safe, streamlined, and cost efficient transportation services to school age children in Rhode Island. Rhode Island’s school districts continue to face challenges in meeting student’s transportation needs with no anticipated increase in state funding to meet increased demands on the existing system. Specifically, districts look to the state for statewide solutions to issues not easily handled on a district by district basis. A top priority for both school districts and the state has been the implementation of a single statewide transportation system for special education, non-public (i.e., private, parochial) and public students (i.e., includes charter, career / vocational technology students) who must go out of their school district for their educational needs. DCYF placement of foster care and homeless students represent an important subset of the existing student population who have increased demand for services yet are underserved by the current system. An all-inclusive, customized approach to transportation must address each population’s specific need.

The Rhode Island General Assembly initiated the creation of a statewide transportation system for out-of-district special education and non-public school students under an amendment to Sections [16-21.1-7](#) and [16-21.1-8](#) of the General Laws in Chapter 16-21.12 entitled "[Transportation of School Pupils Beyond City and Town Limits](#).” Ultimately, a statewide transportation system for all students that will encompass both within district and out-of-district transportation is envisioned.

The existing transportation program’s structure relies on three interrelated entities, each with a distinct role to ensure the success of the program:

- RIDE is the responsible state agency and provides all governance and [transportation program](#) direction. This work is managed through the RIDE Office of Statewide Efficiencies.
- A management contractor serves as the System Manager. Reporting to RIDE, the System Manager is responsible for all planning, program oversight, fiscal accountability, and reporting functions. In this role, the System Manager performs route planning as well as logistical and demographic data management activities; provides contract oversight and performance management activities for the bus operator contract; performs customer service activities for end users of the system; and provides fiscal management activities for the overall program. The essence of any student transportation program is to ensure that students are transported to and from school safely and on time such that they arrive at school ready to learn. The

primary obligation of the System Manager and the bus operations contractor(s) is to ensure that these objectives are achieved efficiently and responsibly.

- The bus operations contractor focuses on the direct provision of transportation services and all associated operational activities, as outlined within this RFI.

Statistically, the statewide transportation program has matured to encompass Rhode Island's 35 regular and regional school districts as well as 23 Charter and out of state Local Education Agencies (LEAs). Specific to school data, approximately 45 private and charter, 67 special education out placements and 203 public and career / vocational school programs are serviced daily. During the 2018-2019 school year, vehicle data was reported for 302 buses transporting 2,877 private and public school students. There are approximately 190 days of service across the System, plus a limited amount of summer school service [i.e., Extended School Year (ESY)]. Presently, no extracurricular / field trip service is being performed. Note that there are currently four (4) school districts that have district owned / operated transportation systems: Narragansett, New Shoreham, North Kingstown and Westerly. At any point during the term of this agreement any or all of these districts may choose to outsource their transportation services at which time the requirements of the statewide system would apply.

### **Questions to the Field:**

1. How can the existing transportation system be better organized to provide more efficient / improved [transportation services](#):
  - Should the existing [transportation regions](#) be better defined in order to be both more cost effective and provide better transportation services to students (e.g., shorter ride times)?
    - What risks are associated with reconfiguring these regions?
    - What should be considered if regions are reconfigured?
  - Besides regions, are there any other reorganization recommendations / suggestions?
2. Are there alternate methods of bus transportation (e.g., on demand car service, taxi, public transportation) that are more cost effective / efficient in meeting the demands of all student populations (i.e., regular, special education, [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#), [McKinney-Vento](#))?
3. How can RIDE best address the following transportation scenarios which incur additional expense on the existing transportation system?
  - Bus transportation allowing students to attend school of choice throughout the state
  - Career & Technical Education student bus transportation in and out of region
  - Bus transportation to CCRI and other high-value dual enrollment and career preparation course experiences

- Bus transportation to support student internships and the [PrepareRI](#) internship program
  - Regional parochial student school bus transportation
  - Bus transportation for students in foster care (i.e., ESSA)
  - Bus transportation for homeless students (i.e. McKinney-Vento)
4. What are best practices for rolling registration during the school startup period? Students must have access to transportation despite missing formal registration windows.
  5. How can all entities (i.e., RIDE, contracted Systems Manager, Bus Vendor, LEAS, DCYF) work together to address parent transportation complaints more effectively?
  6. What are best practices for using technology to communicate with parents / guardians around bus transportation (e.g., mobile app, text capabilities, email, internet, mail)?
  7. RIDE cannot determine in advance the exact number and location of students to be transported pursuant to any contract since school enrollment and placements fluctuate from year to year. How can the state plan for such fluctuations?
  8. The state's overarching goal for standard morning / afternoon regular route service is to minimize cost without subjecting students to one-way rides of more than one hour (i.e., 90 minutes is the statutory limit). How should the state instruct respondents to price these services so as to achieve this goal?
  9. How should the state instruct respondents to price other services, such as special needs transportation, summer school, non-state funded alternative programs (e.g., magnet or charter), activity buses, etc.?
  10. Similar contracts issued by other public-sector entities have contained reserve requirements obligating contractors to have additional buses available at all times; often this factor is set at ten percent of the number of buses that the contractor requires in order to fulfill its daily route service obligations under the contract. Is this an appropriate means for the state to assure that service will be provided, and if not, what alternate mechanism would you propose?
  11. How can performance indicators be used as part of the overall operator compensation strategy, in order to create incentives to reduce costs and/or deliver outstanding service?

What elements of an operator's compensation can / should be placed at-risk?

12. What performance measures and other standards of service would you propose for incorporation into the contract? How can these contracts be structured and / or administered in order to promote continuous quality improvement?
13. Can current legislation be amended to provide better [transportation services](#)?
14. What statutory, regulatory, and / or administrative changes would stimulate competition in the market for providing student transportation services? What changes to these rules would promote efforts to improve performance and / or control costs?
15. Below is a list of the criteria the Board expects a contractor to meet in fulfilling this agreement:
  - a. To get the school aged children of the community to school safely and on time. RIDE has high expectations for student transportation services. The highest priority of the contractor and its drivers is the safety of the individual(s) being transported;
  - b. To provide highly skilled and courteous drivers;
  - c. To work continuously to maintain and improve an enviable safety record;
  - d. To keep vehicles in excellent mechanical condition;
  - e. To work with the school administration to improve service but not necessarily increase cost;
  - f. To work with school administration to maintain the best possible parent / community relations;
  - g. To understand the relationship between the quality of service and its interdependency with parent relations;
  - h. To work in an effective, efficient and professional manner

Given the above listed criteria (i.e., a to h) what evidence should be provided to demonstrate that can a contractor address each piece in a proposal for work?

16. Based on the following parameters:
  - a. No student may arrive at school earlier than thirty (30) minutes before the time shown on the route schedule;
  - b. No student may be required to board any vehicle more than sixty (60) minutes before the arrival time as specified for school attended; and
  - c. No student may be required to wait more than thirty (30) minutes after the specified dismissal time before boarding his/her vehicle.

What programmatic characteristics must be identified to meet these criteria?

The State is issuing this RFI to gather comments, ideas, recommendations, conceptual frameworks, and indications of interest from potential vendors. Respondents may submit a single response or can collaborate with other vendors in offering joint ideas and recommendations.

### 1. **Summary**

The response should include a brief narrative with the highlights, key attributes and distinguishing points of the respondent's proposed approach. The narrative should also explain how the response aligns with the specific goals and objectives stated in the Background section, above, and in the documents linked therein.

### 2. **Information About Respondent**

The response should include background information about the respondent(s), including the following details for each company or organization represented in the response: company, district, or organization name, company address, company web page, description of products and services, professional strengths and abilities; identification of a lead company or organization if more than one is represented in the response; and contact information for the company or groups primary contact. Please advise how you are connected to statewide transportation (e.g., system user, funder, vendor)

### 3. **Additional Recommendations**

Respondents with experience in or ideas about Statewide Transportation should include additional cost control and administrative recommendations for the State to consider. The State welcomes additional recommendations from respondents on best practices and potential revisions to its current regulations, statutes, and related guidance documents.

## B. **RFI Response**

The following outline is intended to standardize and structure responses for ease of analysis. *Do NOT include a cost proposal with the RFI response as cost shall not be considered with this RFI.*

- Response to the requirements outlined in Section 2.A.

## **SECTION 3. QUESTIONS**

Questions concerning this solicitation must be e-mailed to the Division of Purchases at [gail.walsh@purchasing.ri.gov](mailto:gail.walsh@purchasing.ri.gov) no later than the date and time indicated on page one of this solicitation. No other contact with State parties is permitted. Please reference **RFI# 7597642** on all correspondence. Questions should be submitted in writing in a Microsoft Word attachment in a narrative format with no tables. Answers to questions received, if any, shall be posted on the Division of Purchases' website as an addendum to this solicitation. It is the responsibility of all interested parties to monitor the Division of Purchases website for any procurement related postings such as addenda. If technical assistance is required, call the Help Desk at (401) 574-8100.



## SECTION 4. RESPONSE CONTENTS

A. Responses shall include the following:

1. One completed and signed RIVIP Bidder Certification Cover Form (included in the original copy only) downloaded from the Division of Purchases website at [www.purchasing.ri.gov](http://www.purchasing.ri.gov). *Do not include any copies in the response.*
2. Response - describing the requirements and concept for this potential project, and all information described earlier in this solicitation. The response is limited to ten (10) pages.
  - a. One (1) Electronic copy on a CD-R, marked "Response - Original".
  - b. One (1) printed paper copy, marked "Response -Original" and signed.
  - c. Four (4) printed paper copies

B. Formatting of proposal response contents shall be as follows:

1. Formatting of CD-Rs – Separate CD-Rs are required for the technical proposal and cost proposal. All CD-Rs submitted must be labeled with:
  - a. Vendor's name
  - b. RFI #
  - c. RFI Title
  - d. If file sizes require more than one CD-R, multiple CD-Rs are acceptable. Each CD-R must include the above labeling and additional labeling of how many CD-Rs should be accounted for (e.g., 3 CD-Rs are submitted for a technical proposal and each CD-R should have additional label of '1 of 3' on first CD-R, '2 of 3' on second CD-R, '3 of 3' on third CD-R).

Vendors are responsible for testing their CD-Rs before submission as the Division of Purchase's inability to open or read a CD-R may be grounds for rejection of a Vendor's proposal. All files must be readable and readily accessible on the CD-Rs submitted with no instructions to download files from any external resource(s). If a file is partial, corrupt or unreadable, the Division of Purchases may consider it "non-responsive". USB drives or other forms of electronic media shall not be accepted. Please note that vendor CD-Rs shall not be returned.

2. Formatting of written documents and printed copies:
  - a. For clarity, the response shall be typed. These documents shall be single-spaced with 1" margins on white 8.5"x 11" paper using a font of 12 point Calibri or 12 point Times New Roman.
  - b. All pages on the response are to be sequentially numbered in the footer, starting with number 1 on the first page of the narrative (this does not include the cover page or table of contents) through to the end, including all forms and attachments. The Vendor's name should appear on every page, including attachments. Each

attachment should be referenced appropriately within the response section and the attachment title should reference the response section it is applicable to.

- c. Printed copies are to be only bound with removable binder clips.

## **SECTION 5. RESPONSE SUBMISSION**

Interested vendors must submit responses to provide information covered by this RFI on or before the date and time listed on the cover page of this solicitation. Responses received after this date and time, as registered by the official time clock in the reception area of the Division of Purchases, shall not be accepted.

Responses should be mailed or hand-delivered in a sealed envelope marked “**RFI# 7597642 Statewide Student Transportation Services**” to:

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

## **SECTION 6. DISCLAIMER**

This Request for Information is solely for information and planning purposes and does not constitute a request for proposal or an invitation to bid. All information received in response to the RFI and marked as “Proprietary” shall be deemed to be confidential but may still be subject to disclosure pursuant to the Rhode Island “Access to Public Records Act, R. I. Gen. Laws § 38-2-1, *et seq.* . Responses to the RFI will not be returned.

**END**