

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY  
Request for Proposals (RFP) MSU RFP 19-54

## Online Learning Management System For Informal Educational Outreach

<b>Issue Date:</b>	July 18, 2019
<b>Issuing Agency:</b>	Office of Procurement and Contracts Mississippi State University 610 McArthur Hall 245 Barr Avenue Mississippi State, MS 39762
<b>Deadline:</b>	<p>Sealed Proposals, subject to the conditions made a part hereof, will be received <b>on or before 2:00 PM on Tuesday, August 13, 2019 in MSU Office of Procurement and Contracts, same address above,</b> for furnishing services described herein.</p> <p><b>IMPORTANT NOTE:</b> Indicate vendor name and RFP number on the front of each sealed proposal envelope or package.</p> <p>It is the respondent's responsibility to assure that all addenda have been reviewed and, if applicable, signed and returned.</p>
<b>Inquiries:</b>	<p>Direct all inquiries concerning this RFP to: Jay Rester at <a href="mailto:jrester@procurement.msstate.edu">jrester@procurement.msstate.edu</a></p> <p>Questions concerning the specifications in this Request for Proposals must be submitted in writing and will be accepted until 2:00 PM on Friday, August 2, 2019. A summary of all questions and answers will be posted at <a href="http://www.procurement.msstate.edu/procurement/bids/index.php">http://www.procurement.msstate.edu/procurement/bids/index.php</a> as an addendum located under RFP 19-54. The questions, answers, and any revisions to the RFP will be posted August 6, 2019.</p>

### 1. University Overview

Through this Request for Proposal (RFP) Mississippi State University Extension Service, a sub-division of Mississippi State University (MSU) seeks to retain a software (either cloud-based or locally hosted) solution to create online learning courses and modules to be offered to its clientele. As a provision of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, MSU Extension Service has a responsibility for disseminating educational information and learning opportunities to the residents of Mississippi. In most cases, the clientele are not academically enrolled students; the education is delivered on a more informal basis than

typical academia. Clientele of MSU may range in ages from young children to senior adults. One particular focus of MSU is youth ages 8-18 through 4-H. The 4-H program reaches over 60,000 children and youth in the state of Mississippi each year. It is anticipated that after full implementation of online educational offerings by MSU, a large portion of those youth will participate in educational activities through the selected LMS.

Potential bidders should demonstrate their understanding and experience with all stated items in the services overview and requirements portion of this RFP.

In addition to responding directly to the requests in this RFP, bidders are encouraged to propose alternatives that they believe are in the best interest of both parties, which may improve MSU's ability to efficiently and effectively develop and provide online learning opportunities for its clientele.

MSU anticipates issuing a contract on or before October 1, 2019 and expects the awarded vendor to be fully operational no later than November 12, 2019.

## **2. Services Overview and Requirements**

MSU operates a multi-node virtual server environment running VMWare®. Most underlying virtual servers run CENTOS or Red Hat Linux. MSU, and Mississippi State University as a whole, primarily uses Drupal 8 as its preferred content management system. At present time, MSU Extension Service mostly utilizes MOODLE as a LMS, but a more comprehensive, better solution is needed. A system is needed that has a comprehensive API sufficient to allow integration [by MSU IT staff] into other MSU systems such as the central authentication systems (CAS) used to implement single sign-on, credit card payment gateway (NELNET), and other business systems.

Additionally, it is desired that a solution be proposed for management of videos and other multimedia that are integrated into online courses and modules that will assist with embedding interactivity into the video and that will help incorporate transcripts, closed captioning, and other accessibility enhancement tools.

The following statements describe various aspects of this RFP.

- **Requested Period for Services:** The end date for the services offered under this proposal should be June 30, 2022. MSU requests proposals that are charged annually with the annual charges made on or about July 1 of each year. The cost for the first portion of a year should be prorated such that the first partial year will end June 30, 2020.
- **Explanation of Informal Courses/Modules.** In a purely formal academic environment, an LMS course may typically engage a specific learner multiple times per week for an entire semester—totaling 40-60 hours of learner engagement. These type courses also may feature quite a bit of instructor-student interaction. By contrast, in the informal, online learning environment of Extension work, learner

engagement times for a single course are quite different. Total hours of learner engagement will more typically be around 2-3 hours and rarely be more than 15 for a given course. Additionally, there is much less direct interaction between the student and instructor. The informal learning modules will more typically be self-paced and entirely learner directed. Another important difference is that for informal courses, the learner does not typically receive a grade. The learner is self-motivated by an economic or quality of life issue that inspires the learner to participate in the informal educational course. For the informal educational courses offered by MSU, learners will be allowed to self-register for the offerings via a login to an MSU user portal that will, by single-sign-on, allow the user to connect to the LMS. A “catalog” of courses that a user can browse and select would be desirable.

- **Usage Patterns.** Offering informal educational opportunities to clientele is a somewhat new approach for MSU. Very little content is currently ready for deployment within an LMS. It is anticipated that during the first two years of implementation, MSU faculty and staff will begin development of online learning materials. The number of course offerings will start off small and build up over time. Usage patterns are very difficult to predict. A preliminary goal for MSU would be to develop and offer 5-10 courses the first year and an additional 10-15 per year during years two and three. At an average course enrollment of 1,000 participants per year per course, that would be 25,000 – 40,000 enrollments in year three. Considering that there are a substantial number of unknowns in this estimate, the estimate could vary significantly during actual implementation.
- **Branding of LMS.** MSU requires a solution that allows branding of the LMS and course “skins” with appropriate MSU colors and logos.
- **Accessibility.** MSU has adopted WCAG 2.0 AA as its standard for accessibility. An LMS that adheres to those standards and is conducive to development of materials that are compliant with that standard is desirable.
- **Integration with Existing User Base and Authentication System.** MSU allows users to authenticate with multiple identity providers for Single Sign On (SSO) services. The selected LMS should use SAML 2.0 to integrate with MSU’s SSO services. LMS account creation for existing user base will need to be automated. Self-account creation is required for MSU clientele logging in for the first time via MSU’s SSO services.
- **Course enrollment.** Course setup should be configurable such that some courses will allow self-enrollment while others will follow an automated enrollment process via the API to the LMS.
- **Integration with Payment Systems.** MSU uses NELNET as its credit card and electronic payment processor. Any online payment methods utilized by the selected LMS should either be directly compatible with NELNET or include sufficient tools that middleware can be developed by MSU to integrate the LMS with the payment processor.

- **Platform Support.** MSU requires a solution that offers a great deal of flexibility such that learners will be able to use mobile devices, desktop computers, notebook computers, tablet computers, etc. Additionally, the solution should provide as much flexibility as possible toward a solution that is not dependent upon the operating system being used by the end-user (student).
- **Preferred Cost Structure.** Many of the courses offered by MSU will be offered without a direct fee to the clientele, however, some courses will charge a fee to the clientele. Since some courses are offered for “free” to the client, a fixed-cost cost structure for the services offered to MSU under this RFP is preferred. A tiered structure is also acceptable as long as there are safeguards to prevent the potential for runaway costs. As an example, suppose the vendor wishes to charge MSU \$1.50 for every registration to any course offered. This creates a potential problem if MSU offers a free course that allows self-registration. While unlikely, theoretically, there would be no limit to the potential cost MSU could be exposed to. The selected solution for this RFP must include provisions that prevent the possibility of runaway costs to MSU as a result of offering self-registration to “free” courses. Offering a solution where MSU purchases “blocks” of registrations would be acceptable—as long as the vendor provides safeguards against a runaway cost situation.

If the proposed solution from the vendor has multiple modules from which MSU may choose various ones that best fit the needs of MSU and reject others, the RFP should clearly separate the costs such that an accurate cost to MSU can be determined based upon the set of modules that MSU determines is the best solution for its purposes.

MSU would also prefer a “grace period” or “reduced cost” period of at least 3 months at the beginning of the proposed contract in order to allow IT staff at MSU to integrate the solution into other systems such as MSU payment system and single-sign on

- **Maximum Cost.** Regardless of how costs, fees, services, and support are provided to MSU under a proposed solution to this RFP, the maximum total amount of funds paid by MSU must be guaranteed to be less than \$250,000 during the period of this agreement that will end no later than June 30, 2022.

### **3. Resources and other Items provided by MSU**

- a. MSU will provide at least one contact person authorized to make decisions related to vendor efforts.
- b. If a solution is proposed for onsite hosting, MSU will provide virtual server and storage for system provided the system runs in Linux. If the proposed and accepted solution is cloud-based, then this provision is unneeded.

## **4. Proposal Details**

### **Invitation to Submit Proposal on RFP**

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MSU invites qualified respondents to join in establishing a relationship to maintain the highest quality technology services for MSU clientele and create new opportunities providing substantial benefits for both MSU and the successful respondent.

### **Inquiries about RFP**

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Prospective respondents may make written inquiries concerning this request for proposal to obtain clarification of requirements. Responses to these inquiries may be by addendum to the Request for Proposal (RFP). The deadline for inquiries shall be 2:00 p.m. central time on Friday, August 2, 2019. Please send your inquiries to Jay Rester at

[jrester@procurement.msstate.edu](mailto:jrester@procurement.msstate.edu)

All inquiries should be marked "URGENT INQUIRY. MSU RFP 19-54"

### **Addendum OR Supplement to RFP**

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In the event that it becomes necessary to revise any part of this RFP, an addendum to this RFP will be posted at

<http://www.procurement.msstate.edu/procurement/bids/index.php>.

Respondents shall not rely on any other interpretations, changes, or corrections.

### **Administrative Information**

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This RFP is issued by the following office:

Office of Procurement and Contracts  
Mississippi State University  
610 McArthur Hall  
245 Barr Avenue Mississippi State, MS 39762

### **Schedule of Critical Dates**

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The following dates are for planning purposes only unless otherwise stated in this RFP progress towards their completion is at the sole discretion of the university.

- a. RFP Posted – July 18, 2019
- b. Prospective Respondents Written Inquiries Deadline – 2:00 p.m. August 2, 2019
- c. Responses to Inquiries posted – August 6, 2019
- d. Proposal Submission Deadline – 2:00 p.m., August 13, 2019
- e. Award Date (Estimated Target) – September 17, 2019
- f. Contract Effective Date – October 1, 2019

## **Proposal Contents**

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At a minimum, the following items should be included in the contents of the proposal:

- a. Provide details of the vendor's history, mission, organizational chart, headquarter location, and satellite locations.
- b. Provide details of the vendor's differentiating factors and how it distinguishes itself from competitors.
- c. Provide details of the vendor's approach to safeguard proprietary and confidential client materials.
- d. Provide details of the vendor's ability to perform the services listed in the requirements and details.
- e. Provide details and evidence of the vendor's previous experience and understanding of working with a land grant educational institution.
- f. If the proposed solution involves accepting online payments via credit card or e-check, evidence of PCI compliance should be included in submission packet.
- g. Vendor should provide evidence of SOC2 certification.
- h. Vendor should also submit a HECVAT response (<https://www.ren-isac.net/public-resources/hecvat.html>). The light version is sufficient, but a vendor may submit the full version if the vendor prefers to do so.
- i. Any other information the vendor wishes to include that may help MSU determine how well the vendor may fulfill the needs described within this RFP.
- j. Complete cost structure paid by MSU for the services offered.
- k. Scanned signature page from Appendix A.

## **Discussions/Evaluation Criteria/Award Process**

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- a. MSU reserves the right to conduct discussions with any or all respondents or to make an award of a contract without such discussions based only on evaluation of the written proposals. MSU reserves the right to contact and interview anyone connected with any past or present projects with which the respondent has been associated. MSU likewise reserves the right to designate a review committee to evaluate the proposals according to the criteria set forth under this section. MSU may make a written determination showing the basis upon which the award was made and such determination shall be included in the procurement file.
- b. MSU reserves the right to award this contract in whole or in part depending on what is in the best interest of MSU with MSU being the sole judge thereof.
- c. The evaluation factors set forth in this section are described as follows:
  - 1) Corporate Structure, Credentials, and Prior Experience – MSU will be attempting to determine the probability of future success of the work based upon the organizational structure, proven experience of the proposer, and proposer's plans for providing the services.
  - 2) Suitability of the proposed solution to fit the needs of MSU.
  - 3) Projected Financial Cost to MSU on an annual basis.
  - 4) Plan for protecting and safeguarding proprietary and/or confidential information and materials of MSU – This would entail data security from loss, theft,

espionage, etc., and it includes protection of confidential or proprietary information and data.

- 5) Previous experiences and knowledge of the vendor in working with a Land Grant Educational Institution – MSU will be attempting to determine any increased efficiencies for the institution.
- d. Proposals for Services will be evaluated by MSU on the following factors:
  - 1) Corporate Structure, Credentials, and Prior Experience 10%
  - 2) Suitability of the proposed solution to fit needs of MSU 60%
  - 3) Projected Financial Cost to MSU 20%
  - 4) Plan for protecting and safeguarding proprietary and/or confidential information and materials of MSU 5%
  - 5) Experience with and Knowledge of Land Grant Institution 5%
- e. Failure to attend an interview presentation before the committee, if one is requested, may result in a proposal not being considered.

### **Term of Contract**

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MSU intends to enter into in a written contract with the selected vendor. Although not an exclusive list of terms, the following terms will be included in the contract:

- a. MSU anticipates entering into a contract that will end June 30, 2022 with total expenditures not to exceed \$249,999. The vendor will be required to monitor total costs to MSU over the life of this agreement and shall notify MSU when costs equal or exceed \$200,000. MSU and the vendor will closely monitor all expenses to ensure the total amount paid under this agreement will not exceed \$249,999.
- b. The vendor shall acknowledge that an independent contractor relationship is established and that the employees of the vendor are not, nor shall they be, deemed employees of MSU and that employees of MSU are not, nor shall they be, deemed employees of the vendor.

## **Proposal Submission**

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- a. Proposals shall be submitted in one package (envelopes or boxes) marked as “RFP 19-54” in the lower, left-hand corner.
- b. Proposal – Proposals must be submitted to the address below in an electronic form on a flash drive or optical disc in a portable document format (PDF). Proposals will not be accepted by email.
- c. The proposal package must be received on or before 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 13, 2019. It is the responsibility of the respondent to ensure that the proposal package arrives in the Procurement and Contracts office on-time. The proposal package should be delivered or sent by mail to:

Office of Procurement and Contracts  
Mississippi State University  
610 McArthur Hall 245 Barr Avenue  
Mississippi State, MS 39762

## **Two-Phase, Best and Final Offer**

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If the initial proposals do not provide MSU with a clear and convincing solution, or if MSU feels it is appropriate to offer the potential providers an opportunity to submit revised proposals, MSU reserves the right to use a two-phase approach and/or invite Best and Final Offers (BAFO). Based on the information obtained through the proposal submittals (Phase-One), MSU may choose a specific business model, and potential providers may be asked to submit revised proposals based upon that specific model.

The evaluation committee will develop, for distribution to the top-ranked vendors, refined written terms with specific information on what is being requested as a result of information obtained through initial RFP submittal process. Proposers may be asked to reduce cost or provide additional clarification to specific sections of the RFP. Selected proposers are not required to submit a BAFO and may submit a written response notifying the solicitation evaluation committee that their response remains as originally submitted.

## **Acceptance Time**

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Proposal shall be valid for one-hundred and fifty (150) days following the proposal due date.

## **RFP Cancellation**

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This RFP in no manner obligates MSU to the eventual purchase of any services described, implied or which may be proposed until confirmed by a written contract. Progress toward this end is solely at the discretion of MSU and may be terminated without penalty or obligations at any time prior to the signing of a contract. MSU reserves the right to cancel this RFP at any time, for any reason, and to reject any or all proposals or any parts thereof.



## Other Contract Requirements

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- a. Award Terms: This contract shall be awarded at the discretion of MSU based on the capabilities and overall reputation of the supplier. Acceptance shall be confirmed by the issuance of a contract from MSU.
- b. Taxes: The University is exempt from state sales tax. In addition, sales tax collected on sales on campus, but outside the city limits of Starkville, MS, must be reported separately from sales inside the city limits through the Mississippi State Tax Commission, city division reporting.
- c. Payment Terms: Payment for products or services purchased by MSU will be made within 45 days after service is received, accepted, and proper invoice is submitted for payment.
- d. Standard Contract: The awarded vendor will be expected to enter into a contract that is in substantial compliance with the terms set forth in this RFP and MSU's standard contract for services which can be found at the following site:  
<http://www.procurement.msstate.edu/contracts/index.php>. Proposal should include any desired changes to the standard contract. It should be noted that there are many clauses which MSU cannot change (see MSU's Mandatory Addendum at the above site). Significant changes to the standard contract may be cause for rejection of a proposal.
- e. The Procurement Process: The following is a general description of the process by which a vendor will be selected to fulfill this Request for Proposal.
  - 1) Request for Proposals (RFP) is issued to prospective suppliers.
  - 2) A deadline for written questions is set.
  - 3) Proposals will be received as set forth in Proposal Contents and Two-Phase, Best and Final Offer.
  - 4) Unsigned proposals will not be considered.
  - 5) All proposals must be received by MSU no later than the date and time specified on the cover sheet of this RFP.
  - 6) At that date and time, the package containing the proposals from each responding vendor will be opened publicly and the name of each respondent will be announced.
  - 7) Proposal evaluation: MSU will review each proposal.
  - 8) At their option, the evaluators may request oral presentations or discussions for the purpose of clarification or to amplify the materials presented in the proposal.
  - 9) At their option, the evaluators may request a best and final offer.
  - 10) Respondents are cautioned that this is a request for offers, not a request to contract, and that MSU reserves the unqualified right to reject any and all offers when such rejection is deemed to be in the best interest of MSU.
  - 11) The proposals will be evaluated according to the criteria set forth in the Discussions/Evaluation Criteria/Award Process.

## APPENDIX A: SIGNATURE PAGE

(Should be scanned with signature and included in electronic proposal submission)

RFP 19-54

Provide information requested, affix signature and return this page with your proposal:

NAME OF Vendor: \_\_\_\_\_

COMPLETE ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

AREA CODE/NUMBER

FACSIMILE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

AREA CODE/NUMBER

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

AUTHORIZED  
SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

PRINTED NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_