

**Mississippi State University
Request for Proposals 20-77
Financial Planning Tool**

**Questions and Answers
August 6, 2020**

Please see the following questions received and the corresponding answers. Use the information here to respond accordingly

1. We understand that the users will be limited to the central office financial administrators and managers. Do you have plans to include department users in the future so they may enter and maintain their budgets?
 - We anticipate this tool will only be used by Controller's Office staff initially, but then possibly broadened to include the chief financial officers of each division. We do not anticipate making it available the business staff in every department.
2. Do you prefer or require Ethos integration with Banner?
 - We do not currently use Ethos but in the process of standing it up. If there are benefits to utilizing Ethos, we would consider them, but we do not have a preference for an Ethos integration.
3. Please elaborate on your needs to compute and predict the impact to credit rating.
 - We would like to be able to create scenarios which would indicate the impact to our credit rating given certain parameters relative to management of cash, investments and debt.
4. Will you supply the financial health of peer institutions? Or is that something you want the vendor to supply?
 - Ideally, we will provide our peer group and the vendor would provide the vendor financial information.
5. Please elaborate on comparing capital financing struct options and effects on financial ratio?
 - We would utilize the tool to provide outcomes given certain parameters concerning bond issues vs. other funding options for capital projects and the associated impact on our financial ratios.

6. Do you need the ability to amend the budget after it is finalized? Do you need workflow (approval process) for amendments? Will you initiate amendments through Banner or through the financial planning tool?
 - We do not anticipate loading budget numbers. We will be using this tool strictly to create scenarios leveraging actual financial transaction data.
7. Regardless of where amendments are initiated, do you need to integrate amendments with Banner?
 - We will not need amendments to budget to be integrated, since we do not anticipate loading budget data. We will, however, need the ability to update financial data as of a certain point in time.
8. Who are your view only users?
 - We anticipate each area will have one or two super users. Those will be chosen by the division. The view only users will most likely be administrators such as the vice presidents of each division.
9. In light of COVID-19, would you consider an email delivery of the RFP response, which eliminates trips and contact for your staff and ours, some of whom may be working remotely full- or part-time.
 - No, our state law does not allow for electronic proposals for this type of request. A hard copy will be required.
10. Do you prefer or require a single tenant architecture?
 - If it is not a single tenant architecture, it must have security to separate the multiple tenants (data and users).
11. What are your current financial planning process and tools (e.g., Excel)?
 - We currently exclusively use Excel to run these types of scenarios.
12. What prompted you to evaluate new financial planning and modeling tools? What are the biggest issues that you're hoping to resolve and the biggest opportunities that you're hoping to achieve with a new tool?
 - Our governing board was requiring enhanced scenario and ratio analysis even before the COVID-19 event. We began the process of searching for a tool in order to comply with their requests with more high-quality analysis. Given the circumstances due to the pandemic, we are under even more scrutiny to provide detailed, dynamic and trustworthy outcomes.

13. How many read/write licenses do you need?
 - Initially, 3 to 4 with the ability to expand to 12 to 14.
14. Do you prefer or require a single vendor to supply the software and the implementation services?
 - Yes, we do prefer to have a single vendor provide all services; however, we are open to working with a vendor and an integrator.
15. Have you received demonstrations of financial planning and modeling tools? If so, which ones?
 - Yes, we have had demonstrations of Anaplan, Synario and Axiom.
16. Will Mississippi State University (MSU) consider accepting responses in electronic format in lieu of hard copy given logistical circumstances resulting from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?
 - See Question 9
17. Does MSU have an estimated number of users that will be leveraging the system? Furthermore, does MSU have an estimated breakdown of those users that will require read/write access vs. read-only?
 - Initially, 3-4 read/write users and 2-3 read only. Would like capability to expand to up to 12-14 read/write users and around 20 read-only.
18. Does MSU ITS have a preference in terms of the integration methodology with Ellucian? For example, delimited flat file exchange, direct read views, and/or via Ethos?
 - We prefer flat file exchange or web service calls. We have not done any integrations via Ethos but are in the process of standing that up. We will not grant 3rd party direct access to our Banner database.
19. Are there any known desired go-live dates to consider? If so, are there any potential conflicts for either MSU ITS or the MSU central office financial administrators and managers in terms of consistent availability throughout the implementation and meeting those go-live dates?
 - There should be no date constraints since fiscal year-end activity should be complete during the implementation timeframe.
20. Will MSU have a dedicated project manager to support the implementation?
 - No, but we will have a single point of contact to facilitate progress.

21. Related to the request to provide a day-long interactive demonstration session, is that intended to be for the selected vendor-of-choice, post-award or during the finalist stage, pre-award? Could MSU elaborate on what the expectation is for how the time will be used?
- We expect a comprehensive demonstration of core requirements during the finalist stage, pre-award.
22. Does MSU currently have a long-range plan? If so, is it on a GAAP or Budget basis?
- No
23. Does MSU require a solution to support the creation of the University's annual budget?
- No
24. Will MSU be able to provide technical resources to support the integration with Banner?
- Yes
25. Is it MSU's desire to use this solution for management reporting by campus users? Does this include drill to transaction capabilities?
- Yes, this solution will be utilized by management for reporting and analysis. Drill down would be a useful tool but is not necessarily required.
26. How does MSU define "commitment planning"? Please provide examples of common commitments.
- The "commitments" referred to in the RFP are the commitments for funding for departments and projects across campus by our Vice President for Finance and Administration (e.g. matching funds for a particular project). He must keep a database of all of these commitments and the status of each.
27. How does MSU define "academic program performance"? Does it involved allocating central revenues/expenses to the Academic Depts to support margin analysis?
- At this time, we do not engage in department level financial analysis and do not have set goals or parameters related to academic program performance. However, we are interested in a tool that will provide that capability.
28. Does the cash flow analysis include capital expenditures and debt service? Are these items currently budgeted by MSU?
- Yes, cash flow analysis does include these. Capital expense and debt service are budgeted within the framework of each capital project.

29. How many users will require model-building functionality?
- See question 13.
30. Does MSU prefer a train the trainer approach, or have the selected vendor provided all user training?
- We would most likely use the train the trainer approach after initial implementation training.
31. What is MSU's primary objective for modeling: Projecting/forecasting GAAP based financial statements, or projecting/forecasting the operating budget?
- Projecting GASB financial statements and specific elements within.
32. The RFP is asking for a sealed proposal with blue ink to be sent to the office of procurement and contracts. Considering the current environment (COVID-19, working from home, etc.) will an electronic response be acceptable?
- See question 9
33. How many vendors have been invited to the RFP?
- We have notified three separate vendors.
34. Will a demonstration take place post-response?
- Yes.
35. Would the University be interested in accelerating the start date if procurement timelines allow?
- We are not able to dedicate time to implement before October 1.
36. Estimated number of "Power Users" (super users) and estimated number of "Strategic Users (view only)?"
- See question 17.
37. System Maintenance and Support – Can the University confirm the requirement that training should be on-site and include, at minimum, a one-day session for super users and a 4-hour session for view-only users or can this be completed remote/virtually due to Covid-19?
- Our preference is on-site, but allowances will be made for Covid-19 related risks as long as the training is easily facilitated and effective.

38. Proposal Submission – Can an exception be made regarding hard copy and USB proposal submission and have the entire proposal submission be done electronically and submitted to the procurement officer or an online portal due to Covid-19?
- See question 9
39. Proposal Submission – Can an exception be made regarding a “wet”, blue ink signature, can we submit a scanned or electronic signature and can these documents be submitted electronically to the procurement officer or an online portal due to Covid-19?
- The signature can be electronic or scanned. It does not have to be an original.
40. Question: How many ‘Super users’ and how many ‘Read only users’ will be needed?
- See question 17.
41. The RFP states that the system will be limited to the central office financial administrators and managers. How many users are expected to use the system? Of them, how many would be system administrators (builders) vs. view-only vs. data input users?
- See question 17.
42. Is MSU open to using a “train-the-trainer” approach?
- See question 30.
43. Section 3.e states that training must be on-site. Are online alternatives an option due to the COVID pandemic?
- See question 37.