

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

Request for Proposals (RFP) #21-42

***Software as a Service (SaaS) Optimized for Federal Grant Proposal
Submissions to Grants.gov for Major Research Institution***

ISSUE DATE: May 11, 2021

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

Sealed Proposals, subject to the conditions made a part hereof, will be received **June 8, 2021, at 2:00 PM in the MSU Office of Procurement and Contracts, same address above**, for furnishing services and potentially, optional services as described herein.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Indicate firm name and RFP number on the front of each sealed proposal envelope or package.

All inquiries concerning this RFP should be directed to:

Jay Rester
Office of Procurement and Contracts
(Same address above)
jrester@procurement.msstate.edu
662-325-2550

- A. Any addendum associated with this RFP will be posted at <http://www.procurement.msstate.edu/procurement/bids/index.php> located under RFP 21-42
- B. It is the respondent's responsibility to assure that all addenda have been reviewed and if applicable, signed and returned.

1) UNIVERSITY OVERVIEW

- a) Mississippi State University (MSU) is a comprehensive land grant university of 21,500+ students and approximately 5,000 faculty and staff. The main campus is located adjacent to the community of Starkville in northeast Mississippi, with a remote campus located in Meridian with an enrollment of around 700 students. Additionally, the university operates several remote agricultural experiment stations and has an Extension office located in each of the eighty-two Mississippi counties.

b) Additional information about MSU can be found on our website www.msstate.edu.

2) **INVITATION TO SUBMIT PROPOSAL ON RFP**

Mississippi State University seeks a qualified software as a service (SaaS) firm to provide a submission system for research proposals which is responsive Grants.gov solicitations. The SaaS will support the state's largest research institution's efforts in submitting a large portion of its grant proposals to federal agencies, and reduce the administrative burden placed on research faculty and staff so that technical research can remain their top priority and largest time commitment.

For more information about MSU Research, please visit www.research.msstate.edu.

3) **SCOPE OF SERVICES REQUIRED**

The SaaS must be an interactive interface for application creation and submission. This interface should include:

1. One hundred percent support of funding opportunities available through Grants.gov
2. A high degree of reliability and success in submitting first-time applications
3. Customer service support that can address issues with submission or opportunity package availability in a timely fashion
4. Capacity to handle heavy online traffic from intra-university users during peak hours
5. Quick implementation to prevent interruption of university submissions
6. Capacity to work in conjunction with university-approved two-factor authentication through Duo Security.

a) **Functions**

- Funding opportunity application packages should be converted from Grants.gov fillable forms (federal 424 forms, among others) to an online, user-friendly fillable format
- The interface should have the ability to save user/unit/institutional information for auto-fill to relevant fields
- The interface should define various user roles, including multiple administrative roles with automatic permissions to all applications
- The interface should allow users who create a new application to extend permissions to other personnel, including working and read-only options
- The interface should allow only one user at a time to make changes to applications but provide a read-only option to other users with permissions while editing is taking place
- The interface should provide an option to route applications for approval prior to submission, including email notifications to users in the chain of approval

- The interface should provide an option to upload draft documents as well as final documents
- Users should have the option to copy, duplicate, or modify full applications for multiple submissions to the same opportunity
- The interface should be able to integrate with MSU's ERP system, Ellucian Banner to import personnel information as needed
- Users should have the option to upload personnel documents (biosketch, current and pending support, etc.) to their professional profiles
- The interface should have the capacity to handle heavy user traffic from users
- Users should have the ability to upload Word documents and PDF forms; administrative users should have the ability to upload PDF, Excel, and Word documents as needed
- The interface should allow for institutional indirect cost rates and bases to be saved for auto-fill by users and automatically calculate indirect cost and indirect cost base based on chosen rate and budget details
- The interface should provide the ability to duplicate years, escalate salaries at chosen rates, select a relevant indirect cost rate, and input additional fields for other costs, with the option to include or exclude direct costs from inclusion in the indirect cost base
- The interface should support the development of multi-year, detailed budgets as well as modular budgets as specified by NIH
 - Budget details may include inflation rates, salary escalations (that can be independently modified on each salary budget item), base salary, appointment type, effort, requested salary, fringe benefits, etc.
- The interface should provide a mechanism to capture principal investigator eligibility and/or exception information based on institutional policy

b) Submission

- The interface should provide real-time error validation based on agency and opportunity specific rule and Grants.gov errors and warnings with clear references and hyperlinks to errors or warnings and details or instructions for corrections
 - Error details should update in line with new sponsor and government regulations with no interruption in service
- The interface should involve security certificates to allow for electronic signature by the authorized organizational representative and university-approved delegates
- Upon submission, the interface should provide Grants.gov tracking information
- The interface should provide an option to print or download a PDF of individual forms or the complete application
- The interface should save records of submissions for online access

- The interface should have a high degree of success in submitting application packages to Grants.gov

c) Customer Support

- The bidder should be available, at a minimum, from 8am to 5pm CST
- The bidder should, upon request, make available any Grants.gov funding opportunity that has not been imported for application use
- The bidder should provide a system for all users to create support requests with escalating levels of priority
- The interface should have a negligible impact on the university's ITS team

d) Security and Compliance

- Provide applicable certifications such as SOC2 documentation.
- System must be secure and meet all local, state and federal data security standards.
- Provide a statement stating whether your company is compliant with FERPA, GLBA, NACH and Red Flag Regulation requirements.
- Provide a completed Higher Education Cloud Vendor Assessment Tool (HECVAT) (lite version available at: <https://www.ren-isac.net/public-resources/hecvat.html>).
- Does the system support two-factor authentication? If so, describe solution options.
- Does your system support single sign-on (CAS, Shibboleth, or SAML)?
- Provide product interfaces that are compliant with WCAG 2.0 AA and provide VPAT if available.

4) INQUIRIES ABOUT RFP

- a) Prospective respondents may make written inquiries concerning this Request for Proposal to obtain clarification of requirements. Responses to these inquiries may be made by addendum to the Request for Proposal (RFP). Please send your inquiries to Jay Rester via electronic mail at jrester@procurement.msstate.edu
- b) All inquiries should be marked “URGENT INQUIRY. MSU RFP #21-42”

5) ADDENDUM OR SUPPLEMENT TO RFP

- a) In the event it becomes necessary to revise any part of this RFP, an addendum to this RFP will be provided to each respondent who received the original RFP. Respondents shall not rely on any other interpretations, changes, or corrections.

6) **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

a) **Issuing Office**

- i) This RFP is issued by the following office:

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

b) **Schedule of Critical Dates**

- i) 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.

(1) RFP Posted	May 11, 2021
(2) Questions from Vendors Due	May 18, 2021
(3) MSU Q&A Response Due	May 25, 2021
(4) Proposal Submission Deadline – 2:00 PM.	June 8, 2021
(5) Award Date (Estimated Target)	July 8, 2021
(6) Contract Effective Date	August 9, 2021

7) **PROPOSAL CONTENTS**

- a) This is a one-step RFP process. The technical proposals and the cost proposals are to be submitted in a single sealed envelope/package. Indicate firm name, RFP#, and the word “Proposal” on the front of the sealed proposal envelope or package.

- b) At a minimum, the following items should be included in the contents of the ***Technical Proposal***:

- i) Cover letter, indicating the scope of the proposal. The letter should include an overview of the services being offered. The letter should include a statement of exceptions to any of the terms and conditions outlined in this RFP. (Cover letter should be no more than three pages in length.)
- ii) Corporate Structure and Credentials
- (1) Number of years of experience with similar projects
 - (2) Staffing levels and support proposed
 - (3) Examples of similar previous work.

- (4) Completed and signed agency W-9 (which will be used to establish a contract and set up for payments in our accounting system, if awarded).

iii) Operations and Ability to Perform

- (1) Provide operation plan. This should include, but not be limited to, acknowledgement and agreement with all requirements as well as explanations, where applicable, of the intended plan to achieve the requirements.
- (2) Describe how services will be provided to MSU.
- (3) Provide a timeline that demonstrates ability to complete all work on or before December 1, 2021.

c) At a minimum, the following items should be included in the contents of the ***Cost Proposal***:

- i) Upfront costs of SaaS including implementation
- ii) Years of service offered/structure
- iii) The estimated total cost of the project

8) DISCUSSIONS/EVALUATION CRITERIA/AWARD PROCESS

- 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 evaluations 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 outlined in this section are described as follows:
 - i) The Vendor's ability to deliver the services meeting the overall objective and functions described in the RFP
 - ii) Competitive fees and total costs
 - iii) Availability and access technical support
 - iv) Vendor's experience with similar projects
 - v) Compliance with applicable State and Federal laws and regulations
 - vi) The committee may invite finalists for interviews and/or presentations
- d) Failure to attend a requested interview presentation before the committee may result in a proposal not being considered.

e) Upon award of contract(s), successful respondent(s) will be asked to provide a transition plan and timeline and obtain MSU's input and concurrence before moving forward.

f) Proposals will be scored based on the following weights (100 points total):

Corporate Structure/Years of Experience/References – 20 pts

Operation Plan/Ease of Use/Services Offered – 30 pts

Fees – 25 pts.

Timeline for Implementation – 25 pts

9) **PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

a) Proposals shall be submitted in one sealed package (envelope or box) as outlined in Section 7a. **Please make sure that the RFP number is clearly visible on the outside of the package and that the word "Proposal" is shown in the lower left-hand corner.**

The Proposal shall include one (1) original and one (1) electronic copy* (of the complete proposal in one pdf file on a flash drive) of parts:

- 7(b)(i) (Cover Letter)
- 7(b)(ii) (Corporate Structure and Credentials)
- 7(b)(iii) (Operations and Ability to Perform)
- 7(c)(i) Upfront Costs
- 7(c)(ii) Years offered/contract structure
- 7(c)(iii) Estimated Total Cost of the Project

Each submitted package should be a complete copy. The original shall be marked on the first page "Original".

The electronic copy of all materials should be fully accessible to a screen reader user

b) The proposal package must be received on or before **2:00 PM on June 8, 2021**. 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

c) Your response must include the signature page included in this RFP (See Appendix A) and contain the signature of an authorized representative of the respondent's organization. The signature on the "Original" signature page should be in **blue** ink

- d) MSU reserves the right to reject any and all proposals and to waive informalities and minor irregularities in proposals received and to accept any portion of a proposal or all items bid if deemed in the best interest of the University to do so.
- e) **Proposals received after the stated due date and time will be returned unopened. Submission via facsimile or other electronic means will not be accepted.**

10) PCI COMPLIANCE ISSUES (IF APPLICABLE)

The vendor must provide a PCI compliant processing environment using one of the approved options below. If the vendor is unable to fully adhere to one of these options, the proposal will be removed from consideration.

- a) Option 1 – Integrate with MSU’s existing third party, PCI validated payment solution (Nelnet Business Solutions – Commerce Manager).
- b) Option 2 – Use vendor’s payment processing functionality with a different MSU Merchant ID but the same bank account. Additional requirements include:
 - i) The vendor must provide PCI compliance certification information, e.g., Attestation of Compliance (AOC) to ensure all hardware, software, and back end processing are compliant.
 - ii) The vendor must provide specific reporting requirements and interfaces to support Banner integration and automatic posting of credit/debit card payments to the ERP.
 - iii) Card transactions processed by university personnel must be performed using hardware that is PCI-approved and point-to-point encrypted (P2PE).
- c) Option 3 – Use vendor’s payment processing functionality with vendor’s Merchant ID. Additional requirements include:
 - i) Vendor must provide PCI compliance certification information, e.g., Attestation of Compliance (AOC) to ensure all hardware, software, and back end processing are compliant.
 - ii) Payments due to MSU will be remitted on a predetermined basis, net of all applicable fees and merchant discounts. Banner integration is not required.
 - iii) Card transactions processed by university personnel must be performed using hardware that is PCI-approved and point-to-point encrypted (P2PE).

11) TWO-PHASE, BEST AND FINAL OFFER

- a) 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.

- b) The evaluation committee may develop, for distribution to the top-ranked firms, refined written terms with specific information on what is being requested as a result of information obtained through the initial RFP submittal process. Proposers may be asked to reduce costs 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.

12) TERM OF CONTRACT

- a) It is MSU's intention to enter into a contract beginning August 9, 2021.
- b) MSU reserves the right to terminate this agreement with thirty (30) days notice, by the Director of Procurement and Contracts via certified mail to the address listed on the signature page of this RFP (See Appendix A) if any of the terms of the proposal and/or contract are violated.
- c) In the event the contractor fails to carry out and comply with any of the conditions and agreements to be performed under the specifications, MSU will notify the contractor, in writing, of such failure or default. In the event the necessary corrective action has not been completed within a ten (10) day period, the contractor must submit, in writing, why such corrective action has not been performed. The University reserves the right to determine whether or not such noncompliance may be construed as a failure of the performance of the contractor.
- d) Termination of contract by contractor without cause can only occur with at least one-hundred and twenty (120) days notice before the proposed termination of the contract.
- e) In the event MSU employs attorneys or incurs other expenses it considers necessary to protect or enforce its rights under this contract, the contractor agrees to pay the attorney's fees and expenses so incurred by MSU.

13) ACCEPTANCE TIME

- a) The proposal shall be valid for one-hundred and eighty (180) days following the proposal due date.

14) RFP CANCELLATION

- a) 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 towards this end is solely at the discretion of MSU and may be terminated without penalty or obligations at any time before 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.

15) INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR CLAUSE

- a) The contractor shall acknowledge that an independent contractor relationship is established and that the employees of the contractor 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 contractor.

16) OTHER CONTRACT REQUIREMENTS

- a) **Award Terms:** This contract shall be awarded at the discretion of the University based on the capabilities and overall reputation of the Supplier, as well as the cost. Acceptance shall be confirmed by the issuance of a contract from the University.
- b) **Standard Contract:** The awarded contractor(s) will be expected to enter into a contract that is in substantial compliance with MSU's standard contract http://www.procurement.msstate.edu/pdf/standard_rfp_contract.pdf. The proposal should include any desired changes to the standard contract. It should be noted that there are many clauses which MSU cannot change (see Standard Addendum <http://www.procurement.msstate.edu/contracts/standardaddendum.pdf>) Significant changes to the standard contract may be cause for rejection of a proposal.
- c) **The Procurement Process:** The following is a general description of the process by which a firm will be selected to fulfill this Request for Proposal.
 - i) Request for Proposals (RFP) is issued to prospective suppliers.
 - ii) A deadline for written questions is set.
 - iii) Proposals will be received as outlined in Section 9.
 - iv) Unsigned proposals will not be considered.
 - v) All proposals must be received by MSU no later than the date and time specified on the cover sheet of this RFP.
 - vi) At that date and time, the package containing the proposals from each responding firm will be opened publicly and the name of each respondent will be announced.
 - vii) Proposal evaluation: The University will review each proposal.

- viii) 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
- ix) Respondents are cautioned that this is a request for proposals, not a request to contract, and the MSU reserves the unqualified right to reject any and all proposals when such rejection is deemed to be in the best interest of the University.
- x) The proposals will be evaluated according to the criteria outlined in Section 8c.

APPENDIX A: SIGNATURE PAGE

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

NAME OF FIRM: _____

COMPLETE ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER: _____

AREA CODE/NUMBER

FACSIMILE NUMBER: _____

AREA CODE/NUMBER

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

AUTHORIZED

SIGNATURE: _____

PRINTED NAME: _____

TITLE: _____