

Mississippi State University
Request for Proposals (RFP) MSU2026097
Scholarship and Financial Aid Optimization Consulting Services

ISSUE DATE: August 18, 2026

ISSUING AGENCY:

Office of Procurement Services
Mississippi State University
405 Garrard Road East
Starkville, MS 39759

Sealed Proposals, subject to the conditions made a part hereof, will be received September 22, **2026 at 2:00 PM in the MSU Office of Procurement Services, same address above**, for furnishing services and potentially, optional services as described herein.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you are physically mailing your response, indicate firm name, and RFP number on the front of each and every sealed proposal envelope or package.

All inquiries concerning this RFP should be sent via the instructions in Section 4.

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

1. UNIVERSITY OVERVIEW

Mississippi State University (MSU) is a comprehensive land grant university. The main campus is located adjacent to the community of Starkville in northeast Mississippi, with a remote campus located in Meridian. Additionally, the university operates several remote agricultural experiment stations and has an Extension office located in each of the eighty-two Mississippi counties.

Additional information about MSU can be found at our website www.msstate.edu.

2. INVITATION TO SUBMIT PROPOSAL ON RFP

Mississippi State University is seeking a qualified and experienced partner to provide enrollment management analytic and consulting services, focusing on strategic scholarship and aid leveraging to maximize undergraduate enrollment and increase net tuition revenue.

3. SCOPE OF SERVICES REQUIRED

The University desires a partnership with a strong consultative approach, including a team of professionals who have worked as enrollment managers as well as experts to institutions similar in size and scope to Mississippi State. Respondent's approach to the requirements below should integrate current trends in enrollment management and national best practices research. The selected partner will be expected to collaborate closely with the MSU team to design, implement, and manage a comprehensive scholarship/aid program to optimize scholarship packages, grow undergraduate enrollment, and maximize net tuition revenue for incoming first-year and transfer students on all campuses.

The scope of services includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Needs Assessment: Conduct an in-depth analysis of the university's current scholarship and financial aid offerings, policies, and procedures. Identify the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities related to scholarships and financial aid within the university.
- Strategy Development: Work in collaboration with university stakeholders to develop a strategic plan for scholarships and financial aid that aligns with the university's mission, goals, and values. Define clear objectives, key performance indicators (KPIs), and a timeline for implementation.
- Program Design: Design a holistic scholarship and financial aid program that encompasses various types of scholarships, grants, and loans. Develop a multiple year financial aid strategy that supports enrollment, determines if MSU is meeting discount rates and net revenue targets, and may include the use of admissions-based merit scholarships and need based awards. The ideal model will be holistic and consider multiple variables, including behavioral, to best understand student price sensitivity and

optimize the aid strategy based on variables above and beyond the student’s academic and financial profile. The ability for the consultant or platform to easily perform various “what-if” scenarios to aid in decision-making would also be helpful.

- **Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:** Establish mechanisms for ongoing program evaluation and assessment. Be available for on-campus visits, conference calls, email correspondence, webinars and general assistance with goals assigned to the relevant team members. Recommend adjustments and improvements based on data and feedback.

4. INQUIRIES ABOUT RFP

Prospective respondents may make written inquiries concerning this request for proposal to obtain clarification of requirements. **Questions should be submitted either via a Word document or plainly typed in the email itself.** Responses to these inquiries may be made by addendum to the Request for Proposal (RFP). Please send your inquiries to Jay Rester via email at jrester@procurement.msstate.edu. **All inquiries must be in writing no matter how minor they seem.**

All inquiries should be marked “URGENT INQUIRY. MSU RFP MSU2026097”

5. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

a) Issuing Office

This RFP is issued by the following office:

Office of Procurement Services
Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, MS 39762

b) Schedule of Critical Dates

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.

RFP Posted	August 18, 2026
Questions from Vendors Due	August 31, 2026
MSU Q&A Response Due	September 8, 2026
Proposal Submission Deadline – 2:00 p.m.	September 22, 2026
Award Date (Estimated)	November 9, 2026

6. PROPOSAL CONTENTS

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

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

- 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 3 pages in length.)
- Proposed Personnel
 - The proposer shall identify the specific individual(s) proposed to provide services under this contract. The proposal must include:
 - The name and title of each proposed team member.
 - A description of the role and responsibilities each individual will perform.
 - A description of the individual’s experience providing comparable services to universities of similar size, complexity, and scope.
 - The percentage of time or level of effort each individual is expected to dedicate to the University’s account.
 - The university seeks to evaluate the qualifications of the actual personnel who would be assigned to the engagement. The University reserves the right to interview any proposed personnel prior to contract award. Interviews may be used to assess qualifications, relevant experience, communication skills, and overall fit for the University’s needs. Any substitution of key personnel after proposal submission must be approved by the University in advance, and replacement personnel must possess qualifications and experience that are equal to or greater than those presented in the proposal
- Operations and Ability to Perform
 - Define the services to be provided, detailed information as to the timing of scheduled work, and the approach used to provide these services to MSU.

- Describe the unique strengths or benefits of your modeling and consulting process.
- References
 - Please provide 3 references from other current higher education institutions using your services. Include the name, address, and telephone number of the contact who can speak knowledgeably about the quality, timeliness, and cost of your solution.

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

- Please provide complete pricing for the total proposed solution according to the information provided in this request for proposal.
- Offerors must provide detailed pricing for their proposals, making certain to itemize/detail the costs for each proposed product and/or service. While Mississippi State University may elect to purchase all products and/or services offered by the Offeror, we reserve the right to purchase only a portion of the products and/or services offered.
- All prices and rates should be guaranteed firm for the first year. Please indicate pricing and/or discount percentage commitments for subsequent years (i.e., specific prices/discounts for years two and three; percentage increase maximums, or other defined methods). Mississippi State University reserves the right to exercise the option to extend or close any awarded contract at the expiration of year one.

7. DISCUSSIONS/EVALUATION CRITERIA/AWARD PROCESS

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.

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.

The evaluation factors set forth in this section are described as follows:

- The Vendor's ability to deliver an application meeting the overall objective and functions described in the RFP
- Best value, cost, and benefit to Mississippi State University

- Vendor’s background and experience with similar flagship public institutions
- Quality of proposal documentation and/or presentation
- The committee may invite finalists for interviews and/or presentations

Failure to attend a requested interview presentation before the committee may result in a proposal not being considered.

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.

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

- Corporate Structure/Proposed Personnel’s Experience/References – 35 pts
- Operation Plan/Ease of Use/Services Offered – 40 pts
- Fees – 25 pts.

8. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Responses Submitted Electronically in Bully Buy:

If you did not receive an invitation to reply in Bully Buy, contact the person on page one and request an invite.

Technical Proposal: Proposal must be submitted in PDF format and state “Technical Proposal” in the title of the document. This document must be separate from the cost proposal or the response may be considered non-responsive.

Cost Proposal: Cost proposal must be submitted in PDF format and state “Cost Proposal” in the title of the document. This document must be separate from the technical proposal or the response may be considered non-responsive.

Responses Submitted Physically:

Proposals shall be submitted in two packages (envelopes or boxes) as set forth in Section 7. Please make sure that the RFP number is clearly visible on the outside of the package.

Technical Proposal – One (1) original and one (1) electronic copy (of the complete technical proposal in one pdf file on a flash drive) of parts 7(b)(i) (Cover Letter), 7(b)(ii) (Corporate Structure and Credentials), and 7(b)(iii) (Operations and Ability to Perform) should be sealed in a package with “Technical Proposal” in the lower left-hand corner. Each submitted package should be a complete copy.

Cost Proposal – One (1) original and one (1) electronic copy (of the complete cost proposal in one pdf file on a flash drive). Should be sealed in a package with “Cost Proposal” in the lower left-hand corner. Each submitted package should be a complete copy.

The proposal package must be received on or before the date/time listed on Page 1. It is the responsibility of the respondent to ensure that the proposal package arrives at Mississippi State University on time. The proposal package should be delivered or sent by mail to the address listed on Page 1.

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 can be electronic.

MSU reserves the right to reject any or 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.

Proposals received after the stated due date and time will be returned unopened. RFP submissions via facsimile or email are not acceptable. Responses will only be valid if mailed and received by the due date/time or if submitted through an approved electronic system.

9. 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.

- **Option 1** – Integrate with MSU’s existing third-party solution (NelNet Business Solutions – Commerce Manager), because all hardware, software and back-end processing have been vetted and credit/debit card payments are automatically posted to Banner.
- **Option 2** – Use alternative third-party solution. Use a different MSU Merchant ID but same bank account.
 - Work with members of MSU’s PCI Council and third-party PCI Compliance consultant to review business needs and proposed solution.
 - Ensure card transactions processed by university personnel are performed using a PCI-validated point to point encrypted (P2PE) solution. The solution must be listed on the PCI council’s website (<https://www.pcisecuritystandards.org>), must not be expired, and devices to be used with the solution must have a PIN transaction security (PTS) expiration date at least 3 years past the date of installation.

- Obtain the following solution information
 - Attestation of compliance (AoC) from all parties involved in handling or that affect the security of cardholder data.
 - Verify that all devices have a current PTS certification and have an expiration date at least 3 years past the installation date of the solution.
 - Obtain a data flow diagram showing where payment card data will be introduced to the proposed solution and all steps/hops it will take until payment information is delivered to the merchant processing bank. This will determine all the service providers that must provide an AoC.
 - Require specific reporting requirements and interfaces to support Banner integration and automatic posting of credit/debit card payments to the ERP. The exact file layout will be provided upon request.
- **Option 3** – Use alternative third-party solution. Use vendor’s Merchant ID.
 - Work with members of MSU’s PCI Council and third-party PCI Compliance consultant to review the solution.
 - Ensure card transactions processed by university personnel are performed using a PCI-validated point to point encrypted (P2PE) solution. The solution must be listed on the PCI council’s website (<https://www.pcisecuritystandards.org>), must not be expired, and devices to be used with the solution must have a PIN transaction security (PTS) expiration date at least 3 years past the date of installation.
 - Obtain the following solution information
 - Attestation of compliance (AoC) from all parties involved in handling or that affect the security of cardholder data.
 - Verify that all devices have a current PTS certification and have an expiration date at least 3 years past the installation date of the solution.
 - Obtain a data flow diagram showing where payment card data will be introduced to the proposed solution and all steps/hops it will take until payment information is delivered to the merchant processing bank. This will determine all the service providers that must provide an AoC.
 - Payments due MSU will be remitted on a predetermined basis, net of all applicable fees and merchant discounts. Banner integration not required.

10. TWO-PHASE, BEST AND FINAL OFFER

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 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 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.

11. TERM OF CONTRACT

It is MSU's intention to enter into a three (3) year contract, estimated to begin January 1, 2027, with the option to renew for an additional two (2) one (1) year periods.

MSU reserves the right to terminate this agreement with thirty (30) days-notice, by the Director of Contract Administration 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.

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 performance of the contractor.

Termination of contract by contractor without cause can only occur with at least one-hundred and twenty (120) days-notice prior to the proposed termination of the contract.

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.

12. ACCEPTANCE TIME

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

13. RFP CANCELLATION

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 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.

14. INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR CLAUSE

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.

15. DISCLOSURE OF PROPOSAL CONTENTS

Proposals will be kept confidential until evaluations and award are completed by MSU. At that time, all proposals and documents pertaining to the proposals will be open to the public, except for material that is clearly marked proprietary or confidential.

IMPORTANT! The offeror/proposer should mark any and all pages of the proposal considered to be proprietary information which may remain confidential in accordance with Mississippi Code Annotated 25-61-9 and 79-23 1 (1972, as amended). Each page of the proposal that the proposer considers trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information should be on a different color paper than non-confidential pages and be marked in the upper right-hand corner with the word “CONFIDENTIAL.”

Failure to clearly identify trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information will result in that information being released subject to a public records request.

16. OTHER CONTRACT REQUIREMENTS

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.

Standard Contract: The awarded contractor(s) will be expected to enter into a contract that is in substantial compliance with MSU’s standard contract. The technical proposal should include any desired changes to the standard contract. It should also be noted that there are many clauses which the MSU cannot change (see Standard Addendum). Significant changes to the standard contract may be cause for rejection of a proposal. Both documents can be found here: <https://www.contracts.msstate.edu/resources/standard-forms>.

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.

- Request for Proposals (RFP) is issued to prospective suppliers.
- A deadline for written questions is set.

- Proposals will be received as set forth in Section 8.
- Unsigned proposals will not be considered.
- All proposals must be received by MSU no later than the date and time specified on the cover sheet of this RFP.
- 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.
- Proposal evaluation: The University will review each proposal.
- 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
- 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.
- The proposals will be evaluated according to the criteria set forth in Section 7.

APPENDIX A: SIGNATURE PAGE

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

Name of Firm: _____

Complete Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Authorized Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Title: _____