

# Request for Information (RFI)

Bid Number: 678PUR-EdSavingsAccountRFI

## Addendum 1 - Responses to Inquiries

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1. In the "Business Model for Contracting of Services" section, can you please clarify what is meant by "approach to a contract" and what information should be included to thoroughly respond to this part of the question?

**Response:** Relevant to "Approach to Contract" in the context of the format response required, Respondent should reference how it will administer the contract services, document the progress of services to be provided under the contract, and detail the process for obtaining approval of cost expenditures and billing procedures. Respondents are encouraged to provide any other information which it deems relevant including manner of resolution of unforeseen issues that may come up during program administration. The response should explain if the payment terms for account management services are based on a fee/account, quantity of accounts, or other terms.

2. Are Respondents required to disclose any previous canceled contracts or litigation from former clients? If not required, would the Louisiana Department of Education prefer that Respondents disclose that information?

**Response:** RFI does ask for respondents to provide information related to prior experience in providing services like the services described in the RFI. Therefore, providing information related to other contracts, past or present, that a respondent has, or has had, with other clients for providing services like the services described in the RFI would be information relevant to the RFI.

3. Are Respondents required to disclose any time or cost deviations in program implementations? If not required, would the Louisiana Department of Education prefer that Respondents disclose that information?

**Response:** Respondents should provide a complete and accurate description of cost structure, including any time or cost deviations from the respondent's standard billing rates with explanation thereof.

4. Are Respondents required to disclose details on customer service including whether it is provided to each of the following groups: parents, schools, vendors and the state agency staff? If not required, would the Louisiana Department of Education prefer that Respondents disclose that information?

**Response:** In RFI Scope of Services Section 2.0, respondents are requested to describe their approach to their design, development and implementation of the program described. In Section 1.0, Respondents are encouraged to provide detail and invited to suggest and comment on any related issues not specifically outlined in the Scope of Services section. Respondents are encouraged to fully address and describe all services which they envision for successfully executing this program.

5. *Scope of Services (Section 3) on page 10 of the RFI states "Dashboards (e.g. fund balances, applications) that are customizable by the user (e.g., LDOE administrators, education service providers, families)". Does the State mean that the chosen vendor should customize each dashboard view to the specific user (e.g., family vs LDOE admin) to ensure they are receiving relevant information?*
  - a. If this is not the intent, what does the State mean instead? Please expand and provide an example for context on the technical needs of the State.

**Response:** The State does mean that the chosen vendor should customize each dashboard view to the specific user. That would include, for example, participating families, LDOE administrators, and other relevant parties that could potentially include ESA service providers.

6. Regarding *Scope of Services 3. Prioritizing Program Usability "What languages are required?"* on page 10, What are the state population needs?

**Response:** The most commonly spoken languages among students in public schools are English, Spanish (52,381 students), Arabic (2,341 students), and Vietnamese (1,948 students).

7. Can the State provide a brief explanation of how the Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program, which is being replaced by this ESA, is being administered? (i.e., how are funds transferred? Do students apply and get approved?)

**Response:** The financial administration of the Student Scholarships for Education Excellence Program is conducted as follows:

1. Yearly Legislative appropriation to LDOE designated fund (July)
2. All scholarship students are GEO Coded
3. Established tuition amount is paid by the LDOE Finance team to each school quarterly based on confirmed enrolled students (NPSID unique identifier) (September, December, February, May)
4. Enrollment Exception Requests reviewed by LDOE within 30 days of each quarterly enrollment window and if approved, adjusted on next quarterly payment
5. Annual audit performed (external vendor) to verify appropriate students for which payments released and allowability of use of funds

The programmatic administration of the Student Scholarships for Education Excellence Program is conducted as follows:

1. Schools inform LDOE the number of award seats offered for school year (October-November)
  2. Parents submit application and initial required verifications online to LDOE. This includes up to five school choices. (December-January)
  3. LDOE performs prior school checks for eligibility (December-April)
  4. LDOE runs lottery (external vendor) to place students at requested schools (March-April)
  5. Award notifications sent to parents (April)
  6. LDOE provides each participating school a roster of students requesting that school (April)
  7. Parents go to the first school of choice to verify residency, income level, DOB, etc. (April)
  8. School confirms students on roster will be accepted (May)
  9. Transfer requests, declined awards, name/address changes, etc. handled by LDOE in coordination with schools. Data is stored in the SSEEP application at LDOE. (May-July)
  10. Quarterly awarded student enrollment reports submitted by each school to LDOE during assigned timeframe (September, December, February, May)
  11. Tuition rate verified and total payment by school sent directly to each school (September, December, February, May)
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8. In *Scope of Services 2.0* on page 9, it is noted that the contracted program administrator may be responsible for determining education service provider eligibility. Will the State develop the minimum qualifications that must be met?
    - a. If not, will the program administrator be responsible for defining the qualifications in addition to enforcing them?

**Response:** [Act 1 \(2024\)](#) requires the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to adopt rules providing for determination of the eligibility of students, participating schools, and service providers. LDOE anticipates a BESE decision regarding the rules on August 21, 2024, with final adoption in winter 2024-2025.

9. If a vendor does not respond to this RFI, would it be ineligible from later responding to an RFP to support the state as it relates to ESAs in Louisiana?

**Response:** The RFI was issued for purposes of identifying vendors with experience and capability in providing technology and services needed for the development, implementation and management of the Educational Savings Account Program Management System to be considered for contract negotiation with the Louisiana Department of Education. Pursuant to [Act 1 \(2024\)](#), this contract is exempt from the Louisiana Procurement Code process. The contract negotiated with the LDOE will be subject to the approval of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget after it is negotiated. LDOE contract negotiation with a vendor will be based upon scoring of responses to the RFI so an RFI must be submitted for contract negotiation consideration.

10. The RFI makes reference to “an Education Savings Account Program Management System,” but does not specify the program name. Can you verify how the program will be referred to and if the alligator will continue to be used with the logo?

**Response:** The program will be referred to as the “Louisiana Giving All True Opportunity to Rise (LA GATOR) Scholarship Program” as it is cited in [Act 1 \(2024\)](#). The State is unable to verify the continued use of the alligator as the logo at this time.

11. If our organization is actively pursuing a SOC 2 Type 2 report and has completed the Readiness Assessment and Type 1 report, can we provide our Type 1 report in lieu of the complete Third-Party Information Security Questionnaire? Or possibly our Type 1 report with the policies and documents requested in the Questionnaire, such as the System Diagram, Incident Response Plan, and Business Continuity Plan?

- In the SOC 2 process, the Type 1 report describes the design and implementation of our security controls and speaks to all the controls that are currently in place prior to the SOC 2 Type 2 which is focused on the design and effectiveness over a period.
- The questionnaire asks for a lot of the information contained within the SOC 2 Type 1, which was prepared by our auditors and therefore we believe would provide more assurance into the status of our security controls.
- We can provide the engagement agreement with our auditor for the SOC 2 Type 2 audit.

**Response:** (1a & b) Your organization can submit its Type 1 report along with the policies and documents requested in the Questionnaire, such as the System Diagram, Incident Response Plan, and Business Continuity Plan. No need to duplicate answers. You can also answer "see Type 1 report" in the answer section of the questionnaire to ensure you have included all elements. (c) It is not required but is helpful if you provide the engagement agreement with our auditor for the SOC 2 Type 2 audit so that we are aware that the SOC 2 Type 2 audit is in progress as LDOE reviews responses.

12. Are we able to submit redacted versions of our response or the Third-Party Information Security Questionnaire?

**Response:** You may submit a redacted version of all security information relative to the respondent’s systems. The redacted version will be provided in the event of a public record request to the extent allowed by Louisiana’s Public Records Law. LA R.S. 44:1 et. seq.

13. What program administration staff does the Department of Education have or plan to have for the ESA program? Is there an FTE cap you are not looking to exceed?

**Response:** [Act 1 \(2024\)](#) included a request for two (2) Full-Time Employees supporting the program with each focusing on either the general program administration or program financial administration. Other LDOE employees will likely support program implementation in a limited capacity.

14. Is the State looking for a technology provider only, or program administration as well?

**Response:** The State is seeking respondents that meet items throughout the RFI that include both technological and program administration elements.

15. On a scale from 1-10, what appetite does the State have for additional services to support the program's success such as boots-on-the-ground events, grassroots awareness campaigns, and paid marketing services to increase parent engagement and adoption, etc? If the State does want this service, do they have a preference for whether or not that function is supplied by the platform vendor or handled separately by the State by contracting with an agency or allowing nonprofits to work in that role?

**Response:** As included in “2.0 Program Management System Design, Development, and Implementation,” responsibilities of the contracted program manager may include “marketing the program” and other items included in that section. Respondents should describe their approach to offering services related to these items.

16. Outside of any one-time implementation fees, does the State have a preference on how the platform is priced? Direct or indirect?
- Direct- The State pays for the platform/services directly to the vendor such as a subscription or per-student fee?
  - Indirect - The platform is paid for through a transaction fee assessed only to education service providers, never to families. Both models are prevalent in ESAs and vary on a state-to-state basis.

**Response:** The LDOE would intend to pay the base cost of the platform/services directly to the vendor based on subscription or per-student fee. Additionally, there would be a transaction fee only to education service providers. Families would likely not have a reduction to account balances based on transactions.

17. Some platform vendors in this space have or seem to plan to have non-transparent commission agreements with suppliers/vendors in their marketplace that are not openly published. Would this be allowed in this program, or do all vendors need to disclose any commission structures they might have during this RFI process? This obviously impacts the pricing strategy as a vendor could come in very low to the State because they are making it up on the backend.

**Response:** Respondents need to disclose any commission structures they might have during this RFI process.

18. It is our understanding that the fund will fund both school level tuition & fees, as well as services and products.
- Are service and product expenses allowable after tuition or fees, or are their program expectations regarding the prioritization of expense types?
  - Will the State agency have a role in setting quality metrics for appropriate service providers and products?
  - Will the State agency approve purchases of services or products at a provider or line item level?

**Response:** (a) Program rules have not yet been approved in this area. Statutes governing the program can be found in [Act 1 \(2024\)](#), but BESE has not yet promulgated administrative rules for the program as provided for in the statutes.

(b) The State will have a role in determining participation criteria for service providers and products.

(c) Program rules have not yet been approved in this area. Statutes governing the program can be found in [Act 1 \(2024\)](#), but BESE has not yet promulgated administrative rules for the program as provided for in the statutes.

**19.** What reporting/verification requirements will grantees or education/training providers have through the platform to the State?

**Response:** Program rules have not yet been approved in this area. Statutes governing the program can be found in [Act 1 \(2024\)](#), but BESE has not yet promulgated administrative rules for the program as provided for in the statutes.

**20.** Will the chosen vendor have a role in managing the application or approval process for education or training providers?

**Response:** As included in the Request for Information (Scope of Services, 2.0 Program Management System Design, Development, and Implementation), the contracted program manager may be responsible for managing the application or approval process for education or training providers.

**21.** Will any state agency be responsible for providing data for or verifying family income, or other eligibility?

- a. Recommendation: Data partnership with state agencies to smoothly approve/deny families will be useful in shortening the timeline for families to leverage available funds and to support targeted marketing and engagement efforts to families who most need the available resources. We've seen this work well when the State is willing to leverage existing verification mechanisms and data so that the chosen vendor can lower the lift for families applying by building backend verification processes leveraging existing income and eligibility data.

**Response:** Program rules have not yet been approved in this area. Statutes governing the program can be found in [Act 1 \(2024\)](#), but BESE has not yet promulgated administrative rules for the program as provided for in the statutes.

**22.** If the State wants the vendor to include marketing, does the State require approval of all marketing materials for the scholarship program, and what does that process look like?

**Response:** Vendor will be advised of the approval process upon adoption by LDOE prior to contract negotiation. The program manager will have a standing TBD meeting schedule with the LDOE Deputy Chief of Communications to share marketing items.

**23.** Does LDOE or BESE anticipate hiring staff for the purpose of administering the marketing/comms and family/school/vendor & service provider components of the program?



**Response:** [Act 1 \(2024\)](#) included a request for two (2) Full-Time Employees supporting the program with each focusing on either the general program administration or program financial administration. Other LDOE employees will likely support program implementation in a limited capacity.

**24.** What are the desired communication channels for scholarship participants, and what contact information will be collected for participants?

**Response:** Program rules have not yet been approved in this area. Statutes governing the program can be found in [Act 1 \(2024\)](#), but BESE has not yet promulgated administrative rules for the program as provided for in the statutes.

**25.** What methods of verifying residency will the scholarship program accept?

**Response:** Program rules have not yet been approved in this area. Statutes governing the program can be found in [Act 1 \(2024\)](#), but BESE has not yet promulgated administrative rules for the program as provided for in the statutes.

**26.** Will parent driver's licenses, state ID's, or SSNs be required?

**Response:** Program rules have not yet been approved in this area. Statutes governing the program can be found in [Act 1 \(2024\)](#), but BESE has not yet promulgated administrative rules for the program as provided for in the statutes.

**27.** Will the chosen vendor be responsible for building and maintaining the main scholarship website and website content?

**Response:** The responsibilities of the contracted program manager may include "Implementing an online Education Savings Account platform that is fully operational to begin enrollments on March 1, 2025." This may include building and maintaining the primary program website.

**28.** What is the desired timeline for eligible applicants to receive award notifications?

**Response:** Program rules have not yet been approved in this area. Statutes governing the program can be found in [Act 1 \(2024\)](#), but BESE has not yet promulgated administrative rules for the program as provided for in the statutes.

**29.** What are the operational oversight expectations for the scholarship program?

- a. Will the State have operational control and direction for all program activities in production or will the selected program administrator provide day to day operational control of the program with the LDOE providing ultimate operational oversight, guidance, monitoring and final decision authority?

**Response:** Program rules have not yet been approved in this area. Statutes governing the program can be found in [Act 1 \(2024\)](#), but BESE has not yet promulgated administrative rules for the program as provided for in the statutes.

**30.** How many students are projected to participate in the scholarship program in years 1, 2, and 3?

**Response:** Refer to the Fiscal Note for [Act 1 \(2024\)](#) for projections relevant to this program.

**31.** On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being of highest importance, how would LDOE rate the goal of increasing the size and scope of the scholarship program, over time?

**Response:** This item is within the purview of the Louisiana Legislature and the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).