

Vermont State Colleges
Request for Proposals
Financial Aid Electronic Verification/Communications Solution
02/10/2020

Proposals due:
Friday, 03/06/2020
5 p.m. EST

1.0 Organizational History

1.1 General Information

The Vermont State Colleges (VSC) is Vermont's system of public higher education. The colleges are located throughout Vermont and include four institutions:

- Castleton University
- Community College of Vermont
- Northern Vermont University
- Vermont Technical College

Together the colleges enroll more than 12,000 students of all ages and backgrounds; students come from Vermont, the U.S., and around the world. The colleges offer more than 125 academic programs at the associate, baccalaureate, and master levels. All offer small classes and individualized attention for students.

As a system, The VSC receives more than 13,500 valid FAFSAs per year while completing verification on 2,600 students.

All VSC institutions share one instance of Ellucian Colleague as our enterprise SIS. We also share Hyland's Perceptive Content as our enterprise ECM. Financial Aid utilizes Colleague Web Advisor for prospective students and enrolled students use Ellucian Financial Aid Self-Service. The VSC also uses Fischer Identity as our IAM vendor.

1.2 Mission Statement

For the benefit of Vermont, the Vermont State Colleges system provides affordable, high quality, student-centered and accessible education, fully integrating professional, liberal, and career study.

This integrated education, in conjunction with applied learning experiences, assures that graduates of VSC programs will:

1. Demonstrate competence in communication, research and critical thinking;
2. Practice creative problem-solving both individually and collaboratively;
3. Be engaged, effective, and responsible citizens;
4. Bring to the workplace appropriate skills and an appreciation of work quality and ethics;
5. Embrace the necessity and joy of lifelong learning.

The Vermont State Colleges system provides continuing educational opportunities for individuals to meet their specific goals.

2.0 Introduction

This Request for Proposals (RFP) is intended to understand the availability of CRM-like solutions that can provide the communication and completion electronically of financial aid documents for the VSC in preparation for a possible procurement. This solution would bring the financial aid office to each student 24/7 on the device of their choosing, thereby increasing the speed and rate of our completions while freeing up needed resources for financial aid staff. The cloud-based solution will automate verification, professional judgements, SAP appeals, C code resolution, and other financial aid forms to improve efficiencies. In order to provide the best student experience, the solution must have ED-compliant e-sign capabilities, ISIR data logic, mobile optimization, and configurable text message communications. The Vermont State Colleges, herein referred to as the VSC or the System, is requesting information from vendors who are interested in developing a partnership with a multi-institution public higher education system in Vermont. The VSC desires a solution that is scalable and can easily accommodate and seamlessly integrate future financial aid needs. **The VSC is not looking to completely outsource verification (i.e. vendors making phone calls) but instead looking at tools that will enhance our current in-house verification efforts.**

3.0 Requirements

The following is a listing of the key functional requirements for the Financial Aid Electronic Verification/Communications Solution. VSC will measure individual submissions against these.

3.1 General requirements

- 3.1.1 Solution must be SaaS, meeting all of the hosting requirements in section 3.2.
- 3.1.2 Solution must have integration with Ellucian Colleague. Please describe the process and setup involved in this integration.
- 3.1.3 Solution must integrate with Hyland's Perceptive Content/ImageNow. Please describe the process for integration and what setup is involved.
- 3.1.4 Solution must provide unlimited system and administrative users.
- 3.1.5 Solution must provide a mobile friendly experience for parents and students.
- 3.1.6 Solution must be in and maintain compliance with all esignature regulations.

3.2 Hosting requirements - The data center must:

- 3.2.1 Be a state-of-the-art data center offering secure, redundant facilities;
- 3.2.2 Have direct access to multiple tier 1 providers;
- 3.2.3 Have documented high availability uptime;
- 3.2.4 Have redundant core network, including firewall and load balancers;
- 3.2.5 Have on-site engineers to provide premier support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year;
- 3.2.6 Use secure facilities with redundant utilities and electronic security system restricting access and providing high level physical security.
- 3.2.7 Have a scalable infrastructure; customer pays according to resources required/used.

- 3.2.8 Offer the flexibility to customize data, storage and access to client requirements based on Customer needs.
- 3.2.9 Include active monitoring and application support.
- 3.2.10 Employ industry standard data protection measures.
- 3.2.11 Be compliant with information technology audit requirements, SAS 70 Type II certification.
- 3.2.12 Have scheduled backup operations conforming to customer needs and frequencies;
- 3.2.13 Provide customer-required data retention and access;
- 3.2.14 Have data storage capacity to grow as Customer's data and storage needs expand;
- 3.2.15 Provide service and support 24x7x365 available to via telephone, email, fax, remote access.
- 3.2.16 Guarantee problem resolution response and follow-up time thresholds must be in agreement with Customer response needs, to be determined after award.

4.0 Scope of Work

Please include in your response an outline of your proposed statement of work and provide an example of a detailed project work plan from a project of similar size and complexity completed by your company. Identify any VSC resources that you will require to perform tasks (project management, staff support, etc.).

You must respond to all of the questions listed below, along with detailing how your proposal will meet the requirements of §3. If you are submitting answers electronically in a separate file, please reference the specific numerical section of this list in your answer.

4.1 General

- 4.1.1 Please provide a brief statement demonstrating your understanding of the work to be performed as part of this RFP, and identify the contact person responsible for communicating on your behalf and who will have authority to execute the contract that will result from the RFP.
- 4.1.2 Please provide general company background including financial stability, number of employees, number and location of sites (domestic and international), years in business and number of clients.
- 4.1.3 Please detail your qualifications – why is your company qualified to provide us with this service or product? (in 100 words or less)
- 4.1.4 Does your company have a specialty within your industry? (in 50 words or less)
- 4.1.5 Does your company provide other products or services in addition to the proposed solution?
- 4.1.6 Please discuss your experience working with multiple institutions sharing the same SIS and ECM resources.

4.2 Solution Components

- 4.2.1 What components are required for your solution? Please provide a complete and detailed technical and functional description of the services proposed. Include in this section a general description of the product architecture and a detailed explanation of the product as designed and configured for the VSC.

- 4.2.2 Please provide a diagram of the product that identifies and illustrates each component to be installed and a complete listing of components.
- 4.2.3 Please highlight any third party or subcontractor services.

4.3 Implementation

- 4.3.1 Please provide the resume of the proposed Project Manager and implementation consultant, including references. Implementation consultants should be experienced in higher education application processing. (See note about Project Management below.)
- 4.3.2 Please provide an implementation task list and timeline including time estimates for your proposed implementation.
- 4.3.3 Please provide a summary of all implementation services available. What additional implementation services are available with the purchase of your solution?
- 4.3.4 If the VSC purchases your product, what is the earliest date we could begin testing the implementation?
- 4.3.5 Please outline the support you will be offering during the cutover or transition process.

4.4 Training

- 4.4.1 Please provide a summary of training services available, including costs.
- 4.4.2 What training services are available with the purchase of your solution? Does the vendor offer on-site training both before “go-live” and ongoing during the length of use? Is there web-based training available?

4.5 Maintenance and Support Services

- 4.5.1 Please include details on how you will maintain the product, including number and location of staff.
- 4.5.2 Please outline how you will provide product performance monitoring.
- 4.5.3 Please outline how you will provide real-time and historical reporting functions that demonstrate conformance to Service Level Agreements that will be negotiated.
- 4.5.4 Please outline how you will provide alerting capabilities to notify technical staff and others of outages.
- 4.5.5 What support services are included in your maintenance agreement?
- 4.5.6 Please provide a summary of optional support services, including costs, for your solution.
- 4.5.7 Please include a copy of your Service Level Agreements (SLA).
- 4.5.8 Please include a copy of your support and escalation policies.

4.6 Compliance

- 4.6.1 The VSC require that all purchases be compliant with Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended.
- 4.6.2 Please describe how you will ensure that all interfaces (both for administrators and end users) are fully-accessible and compliant with Section 508 and/or WCAG 2.0 AA.
- 4.6.3 Please describe how you will comply with the VSC Data Security Requirements for Third Parties, see <https://www.vsc.edu/third-party-data-security>.

4.7 Features

- 4.7.1 Please describe how yearly regulatory updates are facilitated in your solution.
- 4.7.2 Does your solution allow staff a paperless review process for all documents and files?
- 4.7.3 Please describe in detail how the student and parent experience your product. Describe in detail how a student or parent “moves” through the system. You may include screenshots if helpful.
- 4.7.4 Please describe the skip logic the system utilizes when working with students and parents. Describe how the system guides students toward a “correct” answer.
- 4.7.5 Please describe how the system handles the secure upload of tax documentation.
- 4.7.6 Please describe how your solution enables C-code resolution and document review?
- 4.7.7 Please describe the esignature process from the lens of the student and parent, and your solution’s compliance with all applicable esignature regulations.
- 4.7.8 Please describe the auto notification process for students. Are students notified just when documentation is missing or does it provide confirmation that documents have been uploaded and provides clear guidance on where a student is in the process?
- 4.7.9 Please discuss email and/or texting functionality with your solution. Please discuss customization of these messages to students, and how/if students can respond to these messages.
- 4.7.10 Please describe the staff/administrator experience. Describe how a College administrator/staff member interacts with the system. You may include screenshots if helpful.
- 4.7.11 Please describe how the solution supports the automation of other financial aid forms online, including user-defined workflows, custom triggers, and student/parent e-signature capabilities.
- 4.7.12 Please describe how staff can communicate with students within the system.
- 4.7.13 Please describe efficiencies your product provides during the file review process.
- 4.7.14 Please discuss customizability for follow-up reminders within your solution’s workflow.
- 4.7.15 Please describe how your solution handles FAFSA corrections.
- 4.7.16 Does your product have a Student View so staff can see exactly what the student sees? Describe how this process works.
- 4.7.17 Please describe in detail how ISIR information is loaded into your solution. Please describe what configuration would need to change on the school’s part with this process.
- 4.7.18 Please describe how the solution can capture ISIR corrections from the file review process and automatically generate a correction file for upload to the SAIG mailbox?
- 4.7.19 Please provide what details on an ISIR would flag a student for verification documents, including all comment codes, verification tracks or C-codes used to determine what documentation is needed. Please describe how those are presented to the student.
- 4.7.20 Please describe what customized branding is available for your customers.
- 4.7.21 Does your solution support a paperless review and decision delivery process for professional judgment?
- 4.7.22 Does your solution support a paperless review and decision delivery process for SAP appeals?
- 4.7.23 Does the solution provide a mobile device app? If so, for which platforms and devices is the app available? If no there is no mobile app, does the solution support full mobile functionality through a browser? If mobile provides any limited functionality as compared to a desktop, please provide those limits. Please provide screenshots of how this experience looks on a phone to parents and students.

- 4.7.24 Does the solution provide flexibility to present information in various languages? If so, how does this occur and what languages are supported? How does the documentation get reconverted for review to English?
- 4.7.25 Does your solution provide the ability to make custom forms tailored to institutional needs? Please describe here or within the proposal any additional cost required of these custom forms and how they are created.
- 4.7.26 Does your solution provide any export features to Excel that may assist with processing?
- 4.7.27 Using appendix 7.1, please discuss how your solution can meet the needs of the common documents asks for within the VSC.

5.0 Qualifications, References and Pricing

5.1 Qualifications and References

Provide a description of the qualifications and experience of your company. Include responses to the specific required items listed below:

Bidder Profile and Qualifications

- Name, mailing address, email address and telephone numbers of company.
- Federal tax identification number.
- Number of years in business. The company must have a minimum of five years of experience in providing the proposed solution.
- Number of employees in Vermont and nationally.
- Number of colleges and universities in which the product is installed and maintained by the bidder, identifying those institutions of similar size and complexity to the VSC.
- Location of your data center.
- Number of technicians at the data center trained and certified to maintain/install the proposed components.
- List all certifications you hold for the proposed solution.
- Copy of your most recent audited financial statement, annual report, bank references, and all other relevant documentation used by your company to indicate financial stability.
- Describe any functions that you currently outsource as part of your solution delivery and the length of the relationship, including any related-party relationship. The related-party relationship is defined as you (or your principals or officers) having a direct or indirect ownership interest of greater than or equal to three percent of the related party organization.
- Briefly describe your customer service operations including number of customer call instances handled daily, monthly and annually, the average resolution time, average call pick-up time, and any other relevant data that would be helpful in our evaluation of your customer service.

Bidder References

You must demonstrate experience and capability in installation and maintenance of the proposed solution by providing evidence of successfully completing projects of similar size and scope. Please provide a list of customer references, with the following information:

- Customer name and location

- Contact person(s): name, title and telephone number
- Your project manager for the engagement
- Product installation date
- Number of years you have maintained the system
- Any special features or functionality implemented or proposed

You shall provide at least three such references. By submitting your proposal, you understand and agree that the VSC may make any investigations it deems necessary to determine your ability to perform the work, and you agree to furnish the VSC all such additional information and data for this purpose as the VSC may request. Of particular interest will be references utilizing Ellucian Colleague for your SIS and/or Perceptive Content as their ECM.

Project Management and Installation Team

In your proposal, you must identify and appoint a competent and experienced Project Manager to act as representative, and to supervise your employees and partners/subcontractors/third party providers during the installation, cutover, and final testing of the product. You are fully responsible for project management, timely delivery and communication with the VSC of any subcontractors engaged to deliver your solution. The VSC requires that the Project Manager be on site or available on a regular basis to manage the installation of the solution. You must submit the resume of the proposed Project Manager, including references, with the proposal. You may not replace the designated Project Manager identified in your proposal without the VSC's prior written approval.

You must also identify additional key personnel who shall support the designated Project Manager, and be available to the VSC in the absence of the designated Project Manager. You must clearly describe escalation procedures available to the VSC and provide 24/7/365 contact information for all members of the escalation chain, including corporate officers residing outside of Vermont. Once the key project team members have been assigned and accepted, the VSC will reserve the right to approve any proposed substitutions.

Your proposal cannot rely on any VSC staff for support in excess of normal project participation. At most, VSC staff participation is expected to include providing access to facilities as appropriate, providing documentation, attendance at project meetings, and coordination among the VSC departments and colleges. Your proposal must clearly identify any VSC resources required.

The VSC values project management and installation teams with demonstrated experience in all aspects of project management – requirements gathering, system design and configuration, training, testing, quality control, risk assessment, and completing projects on budget and on schedule – in large multi-site, multi-service installations with complex business requirements.

5.2 Pricing

Your proposal should include all of the charges, and it should clearly state the pricing structure along with the types of products and/or services accompanying each price. The VSC expects fully bundled pricing for each service offered and any tiered pricing or volume purchasing discounts/rebates that maybe available due to purchasing loads.

Please provide all pricing noting any non-reoccurring (NRC) or initial costs, as well as Monthly Reoccurring Costs (MRC). Please break down any components of the NRC or MRC in addition to summarizing them.

5.3 Taxes/Fees

- 5.3.1 Please note any and all proposed taxes, fees, or charges.
- 5.3.2 The VSC is exempt from sales and use taxes. Submitted proposals shall not include these taxes. The College’s tax exempt number will be provided to the selected bidder. Please clearly note these exemptions in your proposal.

5.4 Terms

- 5.4.1 Please provide 12, 36, and 60 month term options on all pricing, unless otherwise noted.
- 5.4.2 Your proposal—and any resulting agreement—must include VSC’s absolute right to cancel specific services after 60 days written notice without payment of cancellation or termination charges.
- 5.4.3 Your proposal—and any resulting agreement—must include VSC’s right to add additional locations under existing contract rates without penalties.

6.0 RFP Instructions, Requirements and Information

This section provides information on how to contact the VSC for questions, deadlines, the selection process, legal and insurance requirements, and other general business matters.

6.1 Questions about this RFP

Please submit your questions to the VSC on or before Monday, February 24, 2020, at 12:00 noon Eastern Time. All questions will be posted on the VSC website, www.vsc.edu, and made available to all bidders. The contact information for questions:

<i>Name</i>	Ryan Dulude
<i>Title</i>	Director of Financial Aid, Community College of Vermont
<i>E-mail address</i>	finaidrfp@vsc.edu

6.2 Deadline and Delivery

The deadline for submitting responses is 5:00 pm Eastern Time, Friday, March 6, 2020. Provide an electronic copy **only, via email**, to:

<i>Name</i>	Ryan Dulude
<i>Title</i>	Director of Financial Aid, Community College of Vermont
<i>E-mail address</i>	finaidrfp@vsc.edu

6.3 Selection Process

Method of Award

VSC will base the evaluation of each proposal to this RFP will be based on its demonstrated competence, compliance, format, cost, and enterprise applicability. This includes, but is not limited to, product availability, quality, prices, service availability, timing and delivery. The purpose of this RFP is to identify those vendors having the interest, capability, and financial strength to supply the VSC with an Integrated Library System. If the VSC does not identify a suitable bidder within the RFP process, the VSC is not obligated to award the project to any bidder.

The VSC, in its best interests, reserves the option to accept or reject any or all proposals, to accept or reject any item or combination of items therein, to waive any irregularities or informalities in any proposal or items therein, and/or to negotiate with particular bidders following the evaluation of proposals without right of recourse by other bidders. A top proposal would be that assessed in the judgment of VSC as best complying with all considerations set forth in this RFP. When VSC has tentatively selected a successful proposal, VSC may engage in discussions with the bidder to formulate plans in greater detail, to clarify unclear items for either party, and to otherwise complete negotiations prior to formal selection.

Evaluation Criteria (no weighting is implied by order of listing):

1. The extent to which the bidder's solution matches the requirements of the VSC.
2. Engagement methodology.
3. Bidder's qualifications and references.
4. Cost and length of contract.

6.4 Bid Process

Date	Milestone
02/10/2020	RFP issue date
02/24/2020	Questions due
03/06/2020	Bidder written proposal due date
03/20/2020	Finalists notified
Week of March 30	Finalist presentations to VSC
04/17/2020	Bidder(s) selected

** The VSC will make its best effort to meet these dates but will take the time necessary to make a well-informed decision and negotiate a good contract. Bidders participating in this RFP should expect this date to change. The VSC will be under no obligation to inform bidders of a change in this date. The VSC will inform bidders of a change in all other dates that are part of the bid process.

6.5 Intent to Respond

VSC intends to respond to all candidates submitting an RFP response either by phone or e-mail. A response, whether positive or negative, will be given for each bidder as the selection process eliminates candidates in each round.

6.6 Confidentiality

The Vermont State Colleges comply with the Vermont Public Records Act, 1 VSA § 315 *et seq.* which requires public agencies to allow any person to inspect or copy any public record upon request. Accordingly, bidders are hereby advised that any communications, data or other information received by the Vermont State Colleges during the RFP process could be subject to a public records request. However, certain public records are exempt from public inspection and copying, as set forth in 1 VSA § 317(c), including, for example, those portions of a record which meet the statutory definition of a trade secret. Accordingly, bidders should submit a second copy of their proposal, from which any portion of the proposal that the bidder reasonably believes to be exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Act has been redacted.

By submitting a proposal, you indicate that you understand the requirements of this subsection (6.6) and the potential applicability of Vermont's Public Records Act to your proposal.

6.7 Indemnification

The bidder shall indemnify and hold VSC, its officers, agents and employees free and harmless from any and all claims, liabilities, losses, actions, proceedings, suits, damages and expenses, including out-of-pocket litigation costs and reasonable legal fees, arising from or relating to the bidder's performance in response to this RFP and under any contract entered into with the successful bidder.

By submitting a proposal, and in exchange for VSC's consideration of same, you agree on behalf of yourself, your shareholders and your officers to be bound by the indemnification provisions of this subsection (6.7).

6.8 Rights of the VSC

VSC reserves the right, at its discretion, to pursue actions that include but are not limited to the following:

- Request additional information
- Request clarification of any sections or questions in the bidder's response to this RFP
- Reject, for any reason, any or all of the proposals submitted to VSC
- Issue subsequent RFP or RFP invitations to bid as a result of changes and/or refinements to the proposed project

This RFP does not obligate the VSC to accept any proposal, negotiate with any bidder, award a contract or proceed with the project as it is outlined in this RFP.

6.9 Assignment

The bidder may not assign or transfer its rights or obligations under this RFP without the prior written consent of VSC, which consent shall not be unreasonably withheld. Any assignment of the RFP agreement by the bidder without the prior written consent of VSC shall void the RFP response from the bidder.

6.10 Insurance

You shall provide with your proposal, proof of insurance as stated below. In the event you do not carry the maximums requested, you must provide written proof that you will be able to provide the maximums if awarded the contract. You shall secure, pay for and maintain in effect the following insurance during the contract period:

- Commercial General Liability Insurance: Including Bodily Injury and Property Damage Liability, Independent Contractor's Liability, Contractual Liability, Product Liability and Completed Operations Liability in an amount not less than \$1,000,000 combined single limit, per occurrence, and \$3,000,000 annual aggregate.
- Workers Compensation and Employers Liability Insurance: For any bidders with employees, standard workers' compensation as required by Vermont State statute and employer's liability insurance in an amount not less than \$100,000 per accident, \$500,000 annual aggregate.
- Automobile Liability: For bidders who will drive on VSC's premises, Automobile Liability in an amount not less than \$1,000,000 per occurrence for bodily injury and property damage, including owned, hired, and non-owned vehicle coverage.
- Professional Liability: \$1,000,000 each claim, when applicable.

If selected as the successful bidder, you agree to name the VSC as additional insured on your liability policies and shall provide a 30-day notice of cancellation or non-renewal of coverage to the VSC. The VSC does not need to be named as an additional insured on the workers compensation policy.

If selected as the successful bidder, you agree to submit a copy of the Certificate of Insurance verifying the above coverage levels to the VSC twenty (20) days prior to selling or distributing products and services at VSC or otherwise performing under the contract. Any liability coverage on a "claims made" basis shall be designated as such on the certificate.

Failure of the bidder to take out and/or maintain any required insurance shall not relieve the bidder from any liability under the contract, nor shall the insurance requirements be construed to conflict with or otherwise limit the obligation of the bidder concerning indemnification. The bidder's policies shall be considered primary insurance and exclusive of any insurance carried by VSC.

6.11 Intent to Bid

The undersigned ("You") agrees to all provisions required in the VSC Financial Aid Electronic Verification/Communications Solution RFP dated 02/10/2020 and all applicable addenda, with the exception of those listed below. Any exemptions listed may affect the viability of your proposal.

In addition, the undersigned ("You") agrees to provide all equipment, material and personnel associated with these services as described in the VSC Financial Aid Electronic Verification/Communications Solution RFP dated 02/10/2020, and all applicable addenda.

Exceptions:

Section Reference Number	Reason for exception

Company Name

Signature of Authorized Representative

Print Name of Authorized Representative

Print Title of Authorized Representative

7.0 Appendices

Appendix A – Third Party Data Security Requirements

7.1 Common resolution requests shared by the system in Colleague

Active Bankruptcy
Citizenship Status
NSLDS Loan Default
Dependent Household Size
Disability Discharge
Drug Question Blank
Drug Conviction
HS or GED Completion
Grant Overpayment
Homeland Security Match
Excess Loan Limit Flags
NSLDS Mismatch
Parent FAFSA Signature missing
Parent SSN Mismatch
Parent 2017 Tax Transcript
FAFSA Rejection
Selective Service
Independent Household Size
Student FAFSA Signature missing
Student SSN Mismatch
Student 2017 Tax Transcript
Veteran Status Match
Excess Pell Limits
Enrollment History Flag
Statement of Educational Purpose
Parent(s) 2017 W-2's
Student's 2017 W-2's
2019-2020 400-401 Code
Student Amended Return
Parent Amended Return
Student Non-Filer Form
Parent Non-Filer Form
Homeless Documentation