



OFFICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Statement of Work for a Financial Aid Processing Software Solution (FAPSS) Responses to Vendor Questions

General Questions:

- Question:** In the Response Guidelines, under Contractor Information #4, please clarify whether 3 or 4 references are required.

 - Answer:** Three references will be acceptable.
- Question:** For the Roberta B. Willis Need-Based Scholarship Program, will the FAPSS be tracking monies awarded to individual students or just the total monies awarded to each institution? If tracking monies to individual students, do the institutions submit a file of awardees back to the FAPSS?

 - Answer:** For the Need-Based program, the money is awarded to each institution. The institution awards individual students with particular dollar amounts. At the end of the year, the institutions submit a Unit Data Report (UDR) to OHE which identifies each individual student and dollar amount (among other data). This report will need to be updated to the FAPSS.
- Question:** I. B. FAPSS Vision – page 3: “The new FAPSS software solution needs to be operational by February 15, 2020 to start the award cycle for the 2020-2021 academic year.” Since this is an aggressive timeframe for implementation, is it acceptable to OHE for only the application and ISIR load and eligibility functionality to be operational by February 14, 2020, with following phases for certification, payment, etc. to be implemented in phases following February 14, 2020?

 - Answer:** Timeframes and implementation schedule could be managed in a phased approach. However, OHE is actively seeking a solution as close to “off the shelf” as possible that is less likely (or at risk) of missing critical go-live deadlines, etc. Having documented clear module implementation timelines and targets (along with appropriate project management from the vendor) is critical.

As stated on pages 2-3 “FAPSS Vision” of the RFP, the OHE is seeking a system that is operational, commercially available and generally available (in active use by a client of the bidder). OHE is not interested in products that are in beta or testing phases of development.
- Question:** I. D. Project Overview – page 4: “In addition, a lack of integration between the databases that currently manage all the OHE programs has resulted in difficulty for the OHE to compare programs, review historical data and trends, and create relevant reports.” Questions – How many databases/data sources are there to convert? How many records are in each database? How many academic years of data need to be converted? Does ISIR data need to be converted? Are students linked in any way (like a single ID) between different data sources/systems?

- **Answer:** There are currently six (6) financial aid databases (Access databases). Each Access database corresponds to a financial aid program and contains approximately 300,000 records between active students and past awardees/applicants and ISIR records. Additionally, there is Unit Data Report information in Excel spreadsheets that will need to be converted. At a minimum, we need to convert six (6) years of academic data. ISIR data will also need to be converted (currently on a SQL server). Students are not currently linked with a single ID between different data sources (e.g. one student with multiple awards/loan types). This is an ability that OHE would like in the new system.

- 5. **Question:** III. A. Accessibility – page 14: “FAPSS will comply with the federal and state accessibility requirements as defined by the State of Connecticut IT Accessibility Standards.” Please provide the State of Connecticut IT Accessibility Standards.
 - **Answer:** Please review the following site:
<https://portal.ct.gov/en/Training/Knowledge-Base/Accessibility-Compliance>

- 6. **Question:** IV.F.1.2 – page 30: “Ability to financially reconcile grant amount on a daily, weekly, monthly basis.” Question: Please explain detail of the process needed to reconcile grant amount on a daily, monthly, weekly basis.
 - **Answer:** OHE needs the capability to enter the total grant amounts into the new system by program. These amounts are then divided/awarded to different students and institutions. The system needs to be able to reconcile individual award amounts to the total grant amounts. The system reconciliation also needs to reflect any refunds received. Reconciliation needs to be done based on date of transaction.

- 7. **Question:** IV.F.1.7 – page 30: “Ability for the system to create comment entries to be included in emails.” Question: What is meant by “comment entry”?
 - **Answer:** We do not need the ability to make specific comments on each individual student email. Currently, OHE has a number of templates to communicate with students. For example, Denial Letters and/or Award Letters. Students can be denied an award for a number of reasons (e.g. late submittal of FAFSA). OHE would like the ability to select the reason for Denial when sending the letter to the student. Currently, the standard letter does not specify the specific reason for denial. The students are organized within the current software by denial reason, we would like the new software to be able to customize or select the appropriate denial letter based upon the category of the student (e.g. late FAFSA submittal group).

Questions regarding Functions & Features Checklist:

- 8. **GEN Tab:**
 - A. **Question:** Requirement I – Standard Grant Capabilities - #7 – “Ability for the system to create comment entries to be included in emails” – are you requesting that standard emails generated by the system can include comments for specific students only? Please elaborate on this requirement and provide an example of the scenario if possible.

- **Answer:** We do not need the ability to make specific comments on each individual student email. Currently, OHE has a number of templates to communicate with students. For example, Denial Letters and/or Award Letters. Students can be denied an award for a number of reasons (e.g. late submittal of FAFSA). OHE would like the ability to select the reason for Denial when sending the letter to the student. Currently, the standard letter does not specify the specific reason for denial. The students are organized within the current software by denial reason, we would like the new software to be able to customize or select the appropriate denial letter based upon the category of the student (e.g. late FAFSA submittal group).

B. **Question:** Requirement I – Standard Grant Capabilities - #7a – “Ability to link emails to a person’s account” – is this requirement truly a sub-requirement of #7, or should all emails (standard award and denial) be linked to a person’s account? Please elaborate on this requirement.

- **Answer:** All emails (standard award and denial letters) should have the ability to be linked to an individual student’s account. We would like all emails and correspondence to be linked to a student as part of their comment record in the system. It is not a sub-requirement of 7.

C. **Question:** Requirement II – Data Import and Extraction - #7-15 – Are you asking if State users can access the database directly? Or, as we suspect, are these questions in the context of using FAPSS interfaces to access the data?

- **Answer:** We want the ability for OHE employees to be able to extract information from this application. (e.g. the ability to perform download of application information, FAFSA information, etc. into Excel or another format.) Users may need the ability to perform a read-only SQL query (using Access as an example). Users will not and should not have the ability to make any type of database updates.

D. **Question:** Requirement II – System Security - #1d – “Accounting String Segment” – please further define ‘account string segment’ – are you referring to setting security controls at individual field levels? Please elaborate on this requirement and provide an example of the scenario if possible.

- **Answer:** This requirement was included as an error. Please disregard.

E. **Question:** Requirement XII - User Interface - #19 – “Searchability of these features” – please further define the features being referred to.

- **Answer:** We are looking for the ability to search for data within school accounts and student/applicant profiles. An example would be searching by profile characteristic (e.g. School name/School profile).

9. **Report Tab:**

A. **Question:** Requirement II – General Functionality and Features - # 21-22 – Other than the standard exports to Excel, Word, PDF, etc., what additional ‘user defined formats’ are you looking to download data into? For example, what format would you download

a document into? Please elaborate on these requirements and provide an example of the scenario if possible.

- **Answer:** Comma Delimited file (CSV) would be the only additional desired export type at this time. We would like a system that is able to maintain current standard file formats and be adaptable to any new file types that may emerge in the future.

B. **Question:** Requirement II – General Functionality and Features - # 25 – “Supports individual user dashboards” – as there is a ‘Dashboard’ section in the GEN tab, please elaborate on a Dashboard in the context of ‘Reports’.

- **Answer:** We are looking for similar functionality to the dashboard on the general tab with the desire for each user (OHE staff) to be able to create their own personal dashboard. These are not necessarily required as two different dashboards (reporting vs. general). A dashboard should include the ability for users to access customized or “favorited” report types.

C. **Question:** Requirement II – General Functionality and Features - # 29 – “All data residing in external OLAs can be made available for reporting” – please define ‘OLAs’ – are you referring to other IT groups within the State with which you have Operational Level Agreements?

- **Answer:** Please disregard this requirement.

10. **Willis-Need Merit Tab:**

A. **Question:** Requirement I – System Design - #3c – “Ability to Batch submit” – I am unable to enter a value in the cell for ‘Currently Available in Software’ – please verify we can use the ‘comments’ field to answer the requirement

- **Answer:** Yes, that is fine.

11. **Question:** Section D ‘Other Services,’ #4 ‘Annual Maintenance,’ question b ‘Will you delay the beginning of the annual maintenance period until the first day of the fiscal year?’ – Can you provide this date to help us determine if we can meet this request?

- **Answer:** OHE has a fiscal year that runs July 1 – June 30.

12. **Question:** Function Features Checklist – Gen.2.9. “Allows the ability to electronically import all system master and transaction files from external source.” Question: Please explain what is needed. Is this a one-time load, a regular load, or a legacy data load?

- **Answer:** We are looking for the ability to load in legacy data from the current databases into the new system. This is likely a one-time load. There are some additional files in excel (Unit Data Reports) that we would like to load into the new software on an ongoing basis. Our expectation is that the new system will need to load FAFSA (ISIR) data (downloaded by OHE) regularly into the system. Currently, the Federal Government only allows for the OHE to download FAFSA data directly.

13. **Question:** Function Features Checklist – Gen.4.2. “Data file recovery and control record correction utilities are standard.” Question: Please clarify what is needed.

- **Answer:** We are looking for the ability for the system to have an internal validation/checking tool in which it confirms that the integrity of the

information remains correct. We need the system to self-determine if there are data integrity issues. From a data file recovery perspective, we would expect the system to be able to “roll-back” to prior valid versions of data.

14. **Question:** Function Features Checklist – Gen.4.3. “Data integrity checks occur within the system at module startup.” Question: Please clarify what is needed.
 - **Answer:** We are looking for the ability for the system to have an internal validation/checking tool in which it confirms that the integrity of the information remains correct. We need the system to self-determine if there are data integrity issues.
15. **Question:** Function Features Checklist - Willis - Need based, 1 and 1a: “1. Ability to take starting appropriation number and break out to Need-based then to Need merit., 1a. Based on business rules on an annual basis.” Question: Does the system need to automatically split up the appropriation or does the system need to just store the dollars for each appropriation amount separately? Can students get both Need-Merit and Need parts of RWSP?
 - **Answer:** OHE would like the system to automatically split up the appropriation. OHE will share this formula-based approach with the vendor selected to implement the new system. Students cannot get both need-merit and need-based parts of the loan.
16. **Question:** Function Features Checklist – ISIR.14: “Functionality for institutional users to perform "save progress" during certification process.” Question: Please provide clarification for what is needed.
 - **Answer:** We are looking for the ability to have users (institutional/school users) save and exit the program without completing the certification process all the way through with the ability to resume working where they left off.
17. **Question:** Why does the spreadsheet have more questions than the pdf?
 - **Answer:** There was an error in the Excel to PDF formatting. Please utilize/complete the Excel version of the Functions and Features Checklist.
18. **Question:** Sections II through XII under General are only on the spreadsheet – are they needed?
 - **Answer:** There was an error in the Excel to PDF formatting. Please utilize/complete the Excel version of the Functions and Features Checklist.
19. **Question:** Items 6-14 under willis need-merit are only in the spreadsheet – are they needed?
 - **Answer:** There was an error in the Excel to PDF formatting. Please utilize/complete the Excel version of the Functions and Features Checklist.
20. **Question:** Items 11-14 under MTIP are only in the spreadsheet – are they needed?
 - **Answer:** There was an error in the Excel to PDF formatting. Please utilize/complete the Excel version of the Functions and Features Checklist.
21. **Question:** Are there other differences in the content between the detailed functional requirements (i.e. which are required, or the text of the requirements)? If so, which is the correct version?

- **Answer:** There was an error in the Excel to PDF formatting. Please utilize/complete the Excel version of the Functions and Features Checklist.
22. **Question:** Function Features Checklist – RPT.18.a – “Ability to generate performance metric reports based on defined data fields, a. Performance indices can be customized.” Question: Please provide clarification and/or an example of what is needed.
- **Answer:** OHE would like the ability to generate ad-hoc reports on custom data fields created by OHE. For example, a report based on student high school, GPAs.
23. **Question:** Function Features Checklist – RPT.21 – “Ability to download reports into user defined formats.” Question: Please provide clarification of what is needed.
- **Answer:** We are looking for the ability to download reports into format types like Excel, Word, PDF, CSV. We would like a system that is able to maintain current standard file formats and be adaptable to any new file types that may emerge in the future.
24. **Question:** Function Features Checklist – RPT.25.d and e – “Ability to create custom dashboard indicators. Ability to view and monitor dashboard indicators.” Question: Please provide clarification and/or an example of what is needed.
- **Answer:** We need the ability for each system user to be able to create a custom dashboard or page where they can access desired reports, system tools, workflow requirements, key success indicators (for example percentage of students awarded by program, remaining available balance of program funds).
25. **Question:** Function Features Checklist – RPT.27 “Can import external data for reporting”. Question: Is this for the unit data report data or something else?
- **Answer:** At this point, this refers to the Unit Data Report.
26. **Question:** I.G.6.a Evaluation Criteria – page 7 and 8: “Short listed contractor(s) will be evaluated based on the additional following criteria: “The contractor’s on-site, hands-on software “Test Drive” (only selected contractors will perform the on-site “Test Drive”).” Question: Would it be acceptable for the vendor to provide the OHE with a live online demonstration via WebEx screen sharing system rather than "on-site"?
- **Answer:** Our preference is for all vendor demonstrations to be onsite.
27. **Question:** Does the OHE desire a true cloud hosting solution, or is the OHE open to a vendor hosted solution which is based on co-located servers which OHE or vendor would own, but the vendor would host and manage?
- **Answer:** Our preference would be a truly cloud-hosted solution, however, if it needs to be a vendor-hosted solution, we would need to obtain additional information regarding disaster recovery plans, business continuity plans, and security/monitoring programs. We also may require a SOC-2 audit and/or FERPA, GLB compliance confirmation for this type of solution.