**STATE OF MAINE**

**Department of Education**

*School Finance and Operations Team*

 

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION**

**RFI# 202111168**

**School Financial Data Collection and Reporting System**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RFI Coordinator**  | *All communication regarding this RFI must be made through the RFI Coordinator identified below*. **Name:** Tyler Backus  **Title:** School Finance & Fiscal Compliance Coordinator **Contact Information:** tyler.backus@maine.gov  |
| **Informational Meeting**  | **Date:** 11/18/2021 **Time:** 1:00 – 2:00 PM EST **Location:** Zoom<https://mainestate.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUvfuuorj8iEtB-E1fzYn0NFp7QNmCYwhaf>  |
| **Submitted Questions Due**  | *All questions must be submitted to the RFI Coordinator identified above by:* **Date:** 11/29/2021, no later than 5:00 PM EST  |
| **Response Submission**  | **Submission Deadline:** 1/24/2022, no later than 5:00 PM EST **Submit to:**tyler.backus@maine.gov  |

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# **PUBLIC NOTICE**

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**State of Maine**

**Department of Education**

**RFI# 202111168**

**School Financial Data Collection and Reporting System**

The State of Maine, Department of Education, is seeking information on a school financial data collection and reporting system solution.

A copy of the RFI, as well as the Question & Answer Summary and all other related documents to this RFI, can be obtained at the following website: <http://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/rfis>

An Informational Meeting will be held on 11/18/2021 at 1300-1400 EST at the following location: <https://mainestate.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUvfuuorj8iEtB-E1fzYn0NFp7QNmCYwhaf>

Responses must be submitted to: tyler.backus@maine.gov and be submitted by 5:00 PM EST, on 1/24/2022.

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**RFI DEFINITIONS/ACRONYMS**

The following terms and acronyms shall have the meaning indicated below as referenced in this Request for Information:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Term/Acronym** | **Definition** |
| **Department** | Department of Education |
| **ED279** | Essential Programs and Services report |
| **EPS** | Essential Programs and Services – Maine’s public schools funding formula |
| **Federal** | U.S. Department of Education |
| **Interoperable** | The ability of systems to readily connect and exchange information with one another |
| **RFI** | Request for Information |
| **RFP** | Request for Proposal |
| **Respondent** | Any individual or organization submitting a response to this RFI |
| **SAUs/LEAs** | School Administrative Units or Local Educational Agency |
| **SFO** | School Finance and Operations |
| **State** | State of Maine |
| **SQL** | Structured Query Language |
| **System** | A set of interoperable components that are designed to work together to fulfill the required functions. |

**State of Maine - Department of Education**

**RFI# 202111168**

**School Financial Data Collection and Reporting System**

# **PART I INTRODUCTION**

## **Purpose and Background**

This Request for Information (RFI) is an information gathering and market research tool, not a formal solicitation of a specific requirement (such as in a “Request for Proposals” document). The State of Maine Department of Education, School Finance and Operations Team (Department) is seeking information regarding a School Financial Data Collection and Reporting System from interested parties as defined in this RFI document. This is an opportunity for interested parties to help the Department better understand the marketplace and/or a specific subject matter.

The Department is responsible for multiple reports, calculations, and the distribution of funds to Maine SAUs/LEAs. This work, comprised of multiple processes which are currently housed in multiple systems or performed manually, includes: retrieving and validating educational financial data, performing complex calculations, verifying calculations are correct, and tracking annual audits from subrecipients of state and local funds. The Department is interested in a comprehensive user-friendly system that can consolidate processes into one system that is reliable, secure, and accurate while also being interoperable with multiple internal and external systems.

The Department would like to learn more about system solutions that would:

* Allow for data collection from external sources via digital means and storage for multiple years of data;
* Allow experimental calculations to be run in a sandbox environment, allow for final calculations to be run and reports produced from those calculations;
* Develop a digital audit tracking component capable of handling different fiscal years, originate stored review forms and provide automated and on demand communications to external organizations;
* Maintain reliability and transparency with error handling and correction and provide the ability to add features in the future.

## **Current Conditions**

The Department has been using multiple systems in tandem to receive financial data from, provide reports to, and issue monthly payments to Maine’s SAU/LEAs. The current method utilizes isolated web-based data collection, validation, multiple finance systems, and spreadsheets in conjunction with email for transferring data and communication between systems. Currently, most major functions performed have automated and manual components, except one component which is completely manual, and there is little interoperability between digital systems. Calculations, data validation, verification, and storage are completed through Excel, while feedback and communications are performed primarily through email. This method is time consuming, inefficient, highly susceptible to error, and poorly understood by internal and external users.

Listed below are the three primary process systems and functions the Department presently uses for state funding and accountability; unification under one system solution is desirable.

1. School and Municipal Audit Collection and Tracking (Manual Process)
	* Annual financial audit collection: Annual audit collection from subrecipients is currently completed through email submissions.
	* Annual financial audit tracking: Annual audit tracking and reporting from sub-recipients is currently completed in an Excel workbook.
	* Annual financial audit communication: Audit communication is currently completed through email.
	* Annual financial audit finding tracking: Annual audit findings for each sub-recipient, and any corrective action required by the subrecipient to resolve those findings, is completed through Excel.
	* Financial Report storage: Multiple years of school and municipal audits are currently stored in network drives.
	* Sub-recipient risk assessment: Annual sub-recipient risk assessments are calculated for each federal program in Excel.
	* Annual financial audit status: Status reports on audits collected, and those overdue, are reported through email to inform potential withholding of monthly subsidy payments under the Essential Programs & Services (EPS) funding formula.
2. School District Financial Data Collection (Automated & Manual Processes)
	* User login: Currently, login to the financial data collection system is integrated within a state developed and maintained system. Origin system is provided by an independent vendor.
	* Data collection: Financial data collection is currently achieved through uploaded .txt files or manual entry from SAU/LEAs to the state financial data collection system.
	* Automated data validation: Financial data is currently validated by the system for multiple criteria, including coding combinations and valid period of submission.
	* Manual data validation: Financial data is currently validated by human intervention for items predetermined by the SFO staff.
	* Data errors: Communication regarding data errors is sent automatically to SAU/LEAs with preprogrammed error messages. Data errors discovered via manual review may be communicated via manual error message entry within the system or via email.
	* Data storage: The system currently stores multiple years of data for both operational and longitudinal data as part of the system.
	* Data Reporting: The system currently provides canned reports; ad hoc reports may be created via Microsoft SQL services.
	* Data analysis: Data analysis is currently done through extraction of data into Excel through Microsoft SQL services.
	* Business rules: Financial data code combination business rules, based on Maine’s accounting handbook, are both programmed and dynamic, updated by the state in real-time.
	* User/Role management: User/role management is administered by the Department (SFO Team).
	* Administrative Reports: Several administrative reports are available to assess and track timely data collection.
	* EPS formula components: Data analysis of specific financial data is exported & calculated in Excel and manually shared to be included in the EPS funding calculation in a separate state developed and maintained system.
3. Essential Program & Services (ED 279s) (Automated & Manual Processes)
	* Data exchange/transfer: Data needed to perform the state subsidy calculation and populate the ED 279 report is currently collected from multiple systems within the Department and other agencies/sources automatically and manually through Excel spreadsheets.
	* Data processing: Multi-step data calculations are currently processed through an automated state developed and maintained system.
	* Data storage: The state developed and maintained system currently stores multiple years of data for both operational and longitudinal data as part of the system.
	* Data reporting: Data calculations, and output, are displayed on both publicly viewable and internal reports.
	* Payments: Data for monthly state subsidy payments are transmitted, through automated means, to the State accounting system (Advantage Me). Data from the payments is fed back into the report for tracking and accountability of state funds.
	* Report element/calculation modifications: Reports are flexible, and modifications to the calculations are made regularly due to legislative changes.
	* Report data modification: Values in reports change on a variable basis, which impact values in other parts of the report.
4. **Challenge Statement**

What type of system solution would best incorporate and organize SFO’s three current processes and result in improved data quality and enhanced workflow?

## **D. General Provisions**

1. All contact with the State regarding this RFI must be made through the aforementioned RFI Coordinator. No other person/State employee is empowered to make binding statements regarding this RFI.
2. This is a non-binding Request for Information. Therefore, no award shall be made as a result of the RFI process.
3. Issuance of this RFI does not commit the Department to pay any expenses incurred by a Respondent in the preparation of their response to this RFI. This includes attendance at personal interviews or other meetings and software or system demonstrations, where applicable.
4. Issuance of this RFI in no way constitutes a commitment by the State of Maine to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP).
5. All responses should adhere to the instructions and format requests outlined in this RFI and all written supplements and amendments, such as the Summary of Questions and Answers, issued by the Department.
6. All submissions in response to this RFI will be considered public records available for public inspection pursuant to the State of Maine Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) (1 M.R.S. §§ 401 et seq.).

<http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/1/title1sec401.html>

1. All applicable laws, whether or not herein contained, shall be included by this reference. It shall be Proposer’s/Vendor’s responsibility to determine the applicability and requirements of any such laws and to abide by them.

# **PART II** **INFORMATION SOUGHT**

The Department seeks information regarding a Financial Management System and welcomes responses to this RFI and creative suggestions and feedback to enhance and expedite the various processes supported by the system while providing an efficient, reliable, and high-quality system. Respondents are not required to submit responses pertaining to every question, but the Department encourages interested parties to respond to any or all relevant aspects of the RFI.

The Department seeks detailed yet sufficient responses that demonstrate the Respondent’s experience and familiarity with the subject matter. **As this is not a competitive RFP process,** **Respondents must not provide any specific cost or customized pricing documentation in their response.**

1. **General Information**
	1. Provide a brief overview of your organization, if applicable.
	2. Please identify yourself and any organization you represent in this RFI.
		1. Name of respondent
		2. Organization and affiliation
		3. Address (organizational, if responding on behalf of an entity)
		4. Contact information (phone number(s) and email address)
	3. Please identify your experiences in providing financial management systems.
2. **Feedback Requested**

The Department would like information on services or a solution that improves on the Current Conditions and the following needs. Respondents are not required to submit responses pertaining to every question, but the Department encourages interested parties to respond to any or all relevant aspects of the RFI.

1. **What are some key components/elements that should be included in an interoperable system RFP that would be pertinent and important for bidders to know when drafting a proposal?**

Please identify key needs and wants within an interoperable system including:

* 1. the capacity to receive and retrieve data and documents from multiple external systems
	2. validate data
	3. store data and documents
	4. run multi-step processes
	5. create reports for both internal and external consumption
	6. exchange data through secure means
	7. is flexible and highly adaptable
	8. includes business intelligence
	9. and includes an environment where multiple iterations of multi-step interdependent reports can be run easily
	10. Incorporates a scenario planning in a parallel environment independent of production business processes
1. **Describe an approach/es that a solution may have that addresses interoperability and the ability to exist as an external/stand-alone service.**

The Department utilizes many different sources of data to complete financial tasks. A system would need to be able to connect with multiple inputs and outputs seamlessly.

1. **Describe a method/s a solution could employ to meet applicable security and compliance requirements.**

The data the Department works with are bound by multiple federal and state laws, regulations, policies, and standards. Vendor partners must demonstrate compliance with all applicable requirements. The Solution also must satisfy all requirements for being auditable as established by all governing entities on the State of Maine website: <https://www.maine.gov/oit/policies-standards>.

1. **Describe possible strategies within a solution for addressing each of these components.**

The Department understands long-term effectiveness to have several components: technical, documentation, and training.

* 1. *Technical* includes the specific rules and the technologies in use.
	2. *Documentation* includes capturing how the Solution works.
	3. *Training* includes ensuring staff understand the technologies and how to use and maintain the Solution.
1. **What information would you recommend be included in an interoperable system RFP regarding 24/7 technical support to the stated users?**

The solution must be accessible by both department users, school districts users, and other reporting entities.

**Infrastructure**

1. **Identify potential challenges and/or impediments related to the development and implementation of a system(s) that meets the requirements under the current conditions.**

Include challenges in retrieving, or accepting data, from multiple data sources, meeting timelines for changes to reports, operating within multiple funding cycles, data migration, and compatibility of multiple systems.

1. **What are some possible mechanisms for integrating a secure electronic communication interface system that tracks and archives all users’ electronic communications for the purposes of Audit Trails, Transaction Logs, and Date Stamping?**

Please identify existing mechanisms, their integration with migrating systems, and the availability of communication to be conducted in real-time.

1. **Describe how a solution could enable automation of existing manually executed communication tasks, automate error handling, and trigger an automatic process, while allowing management of messages by the department.**

Currently, many tasks are executed manually by staff using spreadsheets or types of manual communication such as emailing confirmations or requests for changes. The Department would like these communications to be executed on-demand, on a schedule (i.e. daily, weekly, annually, etc.), or at a specific processing event such as the point of collection for specific data. The results of these rules need to be communicated to the relevant system users.

1. **What are some possible solutions to provide data validation?**

Please identify existing or possible mechanisms to provide both automated and manual data validation.

1. **What are some possible solutions to provide an environment to modify multi-step interdependent reports that do not affect reports in the production environment?**
2. **What are possible solutions to provide analysis and visualization?**
3. **Describe possible solutions for a protected environment where calculations could be run without affecting the current status of payments or current reports.**

In some cases, test calculations may need to be run to predict and prepare for specific outcomes. The Department would like the ability to take real-time data, and perform calculations utilizing it in a protected environment to help prepare for future needs.

1. **Describe ways in which a solution could allow access by users on multiple types of operating systems and browsers.**

Users will access the system on multiple platforms; these include, but are not limited to Windows OS, Apple iOS, Android, and other operating systems as determined by tablet and mobile device manufacturers. Users will also access the system utilizing multiple web browsers that operate on the aforementioned operating systems.

1. **Describe possible tactics within a solution for ensuring data accepted by the system, and reports created by the system, are of high quality, integrity, validity, and reliability.**

The data, and reports within the system, are utilized for state funding, federal reporting, research, legislative reporting, and for other purposes.

1. **What can the Department expect for solutions that are configurable (i.e. low or no coding flexibility to adapt system to changes)?**
2. **What can the Department expect for services, as part of the solution(s), that are modular?**
3. Describe what services could be deployed in a phased implementation.
4. Describe what services in the solution(s) could be provided separate from other services in the solution(s).
5. **What can the Department expect for solutions that are scalable (i.e. accommodate current and future needs)?**

**Financial Implications**

1. **Can you provide, in round figures, the total investment made for other projects you have completed of similar scope?**

Any estimates would help reviewers understand fixed baseline costs associated with such a system.

1. **What are contributing factors that would influence the cost of such a system solution?**

Any estimates would help reviewers understand fixed baseline costs associated with such a system and the varying additional costs associated with enhancements and upgrades.

# **PART III KEY RFI PROCESSES AND EVENTS**

1. **Informational Meeting**

The Department will sponsor an Informational Meeting concerning this RFI beginning at the date, time and location shown on the RFI cover page. The purpose of the Informational Meeting is to provide interested parties with additional information related to this RFI, field questions, and clarify any questions as to this RFI request.

## **Questions**

**1. General Instructions**

1. It is the responsibility of each interested party to examine the entire RFI and to seek clarification, in writing, if they do not understand any information or instructions.
2. Interested parties should use **Appendix B** – Submitted Questions Form – for submission of questions.
3. The Submitted Questions Form must be submitted by e-mail and received by the RFI Coordinator, identified on the cover page of this RFI, as soon as possible but no later than the date and time specified on the RFI cover page.
4. Submitted Questions must include the RFI Number and Title in the subject line of the e-mail. The Department assumes no liability for assuring accurate/complete/on time e-mail transmission and receipt.

**2. Question & Answer Summary**

Responses to all questions will be compiled in writing and posted on the following website: http://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/vendors/rfis. It is the responsibility of all interested parties to go to this website to obtain a copy of the Question & Answer Summary. Only those answers issued in writing on this website will be considered binding.

## **Submitting the Response**

1. **Responses Due**

Responses must be received no later than the date and time listed in the timeline above.

1. **Delivery Instructions**

Responses must be submitted to the RFI Coordinator, via e-mail, listed on the cover page of this RFI document.

1. **Response Format**

Responses to this RFI may be developed in a manner that suits the respondent. A list of key questions is included within the RFI and all submissions, regardless of format will be reviewed. Respondents are asked to be brief and to respond to as many questions as possible within the RFI. Number each response to correspond to the relevant question or instruction of the RFI to allow comparison and clarity.

# **PART IV** **REVIEW OF RESPONSES RECEIVED**

# **General Information**

1. The Department will review responses received for the purpose of gathering information and market research only. The Department will not score or rate responses received.
2. The Department reserves the right to communicate and/or schedule interviews/presentations with Respondents, if needed, to obtain clarification of information contained in the responses received and/or additional information to enhance marketing research efforts.

**APPENDIX A**

**STATE OF MAINE**

**Department of Education**

## **RESPONSE COVER PAGE**

**RFI# 202111168**

**School Financial Data Collection and Reporting System**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Lead Point of Contact - Name/Title:** |  |
| **Organization Name (if applicable):** |  |
| **Tel:** |  | **Fax:** |  |
| **E-Mail:** |  | **Website:** |  |
| **Street Address:** |  |
| **City/State/Zip:** |  |

**APPENDIX B**

**STATE OF MAINE**

**Department of Education**

## **SUBMITTED QUESTIONS FORM**

**RFI# 202111168**

**School Financial Data Collection and Reporting System**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Organization/Responder’s Name:** |  |

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| **RFI Section & Page Number** | **Question** |
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*\* If a question is not related to any section of the RFI, state “N/A” under “RFI Section & Page Number”.*

*\*\* Add additional rows, if necessary.*